

**LAKE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
AND
LIGHTHOUSE BED AND BREAKFAST**

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**Members enjoy 20% off in museum
store now through January!**

Depot Museum & Store open Saturdays 11 AM to 4 PM.

Upcoming Second Saturdays

December 14th: Depot Holiday Open House

January 11th: Lighthouse Tours

February 8th: Saunas

The mission of Lake County Historical Society is to preserve the history of Lake County, Minnesota through the study and interpretation of artifacts, documents, and photographs that tell the story of our past and present culture.

Lake County Historical Society
PO Box 128
Two Harbors, MN 55616

The Iron Port

Fall 2019



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Museum Happenings

The museums switched over to winter hours October 21st and saw over 9,000 paid admissions, right in line with visitation in 2018. The Society continued Second Saturdays, hosting the Children's Museum program Engineering Ships on the lighthouse grounds September 15th. October 12th was Haunted Harbors with historical scavenger hunts and treat stations at our 3 historic sites. November 9th the Gales of November drew over 30 people to the Depot Museum to hear Thom Holden talk about shipwrecks on Lake Superior. The next program is December 14th, the Depot Open House. Visitors will enjoy holiday treats and free admission to the museum. Members will receive an additional 10% off in the museum gift shop.



The annual membership dinner was hosted at Emmanuel Lutheran Church on October 15th. At the dinner, collection assistants Nick Riordan and Katie Witzig presented on their work inventorying the Society's 3D Collections. The Society was awarded a Legacy Grant funded through the Minnesota Historical Society which enabled us to hire 2 contract inventory workers to photograph, digitize, and record information on all 3D artifacts housed at the Depot Museum. Presenting at the halfway mark, Katie and Nick each shared with those in attendance 3 intriguing artifacts. The artifacts will be on display through December at the Depot Museum.

In September, the Depot Building's boiler was replaced on budget at a cost of \$37,850. The Society is grateful for the County Board of Commissioners contribution of \$13,300 to help the Society to cover the cost of this important project. The Board of Directors is working on a raffle to help cover the cost of the boiler in early 2020. Details will be sent to members at a later date.

Looking forward to 2020, the Society has many projects planned including the re-launch of our endowment campaign. Started in 1999 by the Lake County Historical Society Board of Directors, the endowment campaign sought to provide a stable source of income for the Society to draw on in hard times. In 2019, the endowment board renamed the fund Agate Bay Legacy Fund as a unique name that places a degree of separation from other funds that begin with Lake County.

The Agate Bay Legacy Fund guides and aids the Lake County Historical Society in meeting our mission and to ensure its sustainability as a community resource. The goal is to raise \$1.5 Million by the end of the Society's Centennial year in 2025. The endowment board kicked off the campaign with a mailing to area businesses and will begin to mail out information to individual donors in early 2020. The fund will be managed by the Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation, a nonprofit entity that manages over 30 organizational endowments for area nonprofits.

As the 2019 season comes to a close, I would like to thank you as members for supporting the Historical Society. Members of Lake County Historical Society are active participants in the preservation of the rich heritage of our region. Funds raised through memberships not only support the preservation of the Society's 3 historic sites and collections but also helps the Society provide programs that bring history to life.

Happy Holidays and New Year from the Lake County Historical Society Board!

Postal Perils on the North Shore



00.925: Passenger Boat at Weiland Dock, Beaver Bay c. 1883

A plat for the town of Beaver Bay was filed in Saint Louis County June 24, 1856. The signing of the LaPointe Treaty opened the North Shore to white settlement. Platted by Thomas Clark who chose the site due to its natural harbor at the outlet of Beaver River, the first steamer deposited Swiss and German settlers in the new townsite.

Prior to the arrival of the steamship *Illinois* and after white settlement, the Anishinaabe would visit the area during the summer months to trap and fish along the shore of Lake Superior. The Anishinaabe knowledge of the land and traditional way of life would prove to be key to the survival of the new settlement. Traditionally farmers, the new settlers found the land to be difficult to farm due to the shortened growing season and rocky soil.

By 1860, 20% of Beaver Bay's population was Indian, most from the Bear Clan from Grand Portage Anishinaabe. As Beaver Bay offered the only trading post between Duluth and Grand Portage, many Indians would trade furs with the Weiland General Store. Other job opportunities were available in Beaver Bay, including work on the Weiland family schooner *Charley* and on road construction crews. All of these jobs supplemented the traditional way of life trapping, fishing, and sugarbrushing for which they moved through town and the surrounding county seasonably.

July 1856, Thomas Clark was named postmaster of Beaver Bay after a star route was established between Superior Wisconsin and Grand Portage Minnesota. Star routes were contracted through the local postmaster to the lowest bidder so long as the bidder would provide for due "Celerity, certainty, and transportation of such goods." The star route along the North Shore scheduled weekly to depart Superior 7AM Thursday and arrive at Beaver Bay

post office 7 PM Saturday with the return route starting 7AM Monday arriving back at Superior 7 PM Wednesday.

November 1856 Thomas Clark resigned as postmaster and Albert Weiland took over. The Weiland family would hold the star route contract for over 30 years, contracting sections out to various mail runners. Early on in the route, little mail was sent up the North Shore due to sparse settlement. The mail carriers would take the opportunity to trade with Indians along the route, selling or trading the furs in Superior, WI. By the mid 1870s with more homesteads along the route and establishment of the mining camp at Silver Islet in Ontario, Canada, mail carriers were handling as much as 400-700 pounds of mail each week, making the leisurely route more difficult.



00.701 John Beargrease with Sled Team c. 1890s

The terrain and unpredictable swings of Lake Superior made mail running on the North Shore a dangerous endeavor. Contracted carriers in the summer months would make their rounds in rowboats, tracing the shoreline of Lake Superior. Outfitted with sails, these small vessels would carry 2 waterproof mail sacks. One filled with letters and one filled with packages, magazines, and newspapers. Typically 2 mail carriers would staff the boat, rowing nonstop throughout the night to reach towns along the route in a timely manner. It would take the carriers about 10 to 15 days to complete the entire route from Superior to Grand Portage.

During the winter months, when the lake ice made it impossible to make the route by boat, dogsleds were used to transport the mail bags up the shore. A team of 4 dogs would pull the sled along the twisting trails on land or preferably over the lake ice on

Lake Superior. In the spring, before the ice broke up enough to launch a rowboat and the trails were too muddy for the dogs, the mail carrier would have to carry the mail in packs north.

Several Anishinaabe were employed as mail carriers in the 1850s-1860s including Chief Beargrease, John Beargrease's father, and John Morrisson who were regularly contracted to carry the mail between Superior and Grand Marais. A second pair of carriers would carry the mail from Grand Marais to Grand Portage and back.

In 1879, John Beargrease began running mail in the winter months. In his early 20s, Beargrease was one of several employed by Albert Weiland to run the weekly star route between Superior and Grand Marais. In the winter time, he would be on the trails with his dogs 4-6 days a week. At the start of the route, Beaver Bay was the only stop between Duluth and Grand Marais. By 1883, the Two Harbors Post Office opened its doors and in 1887 railroad was extended to Two Harbors.

In the 1880s, Beargrease switched to mail carrying year round. April to December Beargrease used a rowboat outfitted with a sail to deliver mail. He would put in at Burlington Bay near a natural stone archway, stopping at Castle Danger to deliver mail to the Norwegian fishing settlement and logging center. He then continued north, guided into Beaver Bay Harbor by a lantern on the cupola above the Weiland General store, the closest thing Beaver Bay proper had to a lighthouse. He would spend the night at home in Beaver Bay where he would pick up the mail the next morning, contracted



00.828: Row Boat in Burlington Bay c. 1883

Technology Changes Postal Delivery

to make the 60 mile trip to Grand Marais in 48 hours. Beargrease would typically make the last leg in a little over 24 hours if he rowed throughout the night.



2019.02.14: Supply Steamer *Crescent* on Lake Superior c. 1900

As steamship travel increased due to more settlements along the North Shore, so too did the options of mail delivery. In 1890, the Booth Packing Company won the mail carrying contract for the navigational season (Mid May through November). It proposed mail delivery aboard its steamship the *Dixon*, making mail delivery possible twice a week. Even though Beargrease maintained the winter contract, it hurt his family financially as 5 months of his job were handed over to the Booth Packing Company.

In the summer of 1891, Beargrease collaborated with Two Harbors resident George Hogobone to underbid the Booth Packing Company. The two won the contract but could not keep up with the designated steamer route, and by August 6th both mail carriers were out of a contract. The *Dixon* picked the route back up while John Koss and John Peck of Two Harbors took up Beargrease's winter contract. After a series of contracted

carriers not living up to the standard set by Beargrease, Albert Weiland requested that John Beargrease work as the contracted mail carrier again. Beargrease did not want to be contracted but rather own the contract for the star route and held out.

January 5, 1895 John Beargrease won the bid for the winter route from Two Harbors to Grand Marais at payment of \$728. He started the route November, 1896. Working for himself, he was able to increase his profit off of the mail route. In 1897, roads in Lake County were greatly improved which allowed Beargrease to utilize horses from Two Harbors to Beaver Bay. North of Beaver Bay, however, dog sleds were used on the less maintained roads. In 1898, Beargrease had the Iron Range Boiler Shop in Two Harbors make a heavy-duty steel toboggan for his horses. He planned to start a winter freight delivery service on the North Shore. Weighing 360 pounds unloaded, the piece of equipment required the right trail environment to work. The freight service did not get off the ground, and Beargrease again lost contract rights to Peter Black of Two Harbors.

Additional road improvements north of Beaver Bay created the possibility of a stagecoach and sleigh service from Two Harbors to Grand Marais twice each week. The lucrative business of postal delivery along the star route meant that the contract for services switched hands multiple times. In 1908, Beargrease's younger brother picked up the Star Route Contract and John helped out from time to time.

In 1910, John was helping out Grand Marais carrier Godfrey Montferrand. The pair were trying to land a rowboat at Tamarack Point Grand Portage. Montferrand leapt out of the boat with a rope, attempting to catch his footing on the shallow bottom asking Beargrease to stay in the boat in an effort to stabilize the vessel. The boat nearly capsized with the full load of mail, but John also leapt out to hold the back of the boat. The mail was saved, but left both mail carriers drenched in cold water. This experience caused Beargrease to contract Pneumonia and is frequently attributed to his death on August 10th, 1910.



00.1978: US Mail Delivery, Beaver Bay c. 1910

Mail continued to be delivered by various contracted carriers and steamships until the mid 1920s. With improved roads and the building of Trunk Highway 1 connecting Duluth to Port Arthur, the 1930s brought mail delivery by truck. The extraordinary journeys of early postal carriers on the North Shore star route live on in the celebration of the John Beargrease Dogsled Marathon.

Thank You to Our Treat Station Sponsors for October 14th Haunted Harbors Event!



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Engineering boats image of constructed boats being tested in pool on lawn of lighthouse. September 13, 2019. Program by Duluth Children's Museum

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Depot Museum was official rest stop on Habitat 500 Bike Ride benefit July 13th, 2019. The 500 mile bike race brought over 130 riders from across the nation.

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Society to Bring Dogsled Back on Display



Beaver Bay Information Center Closed August 2019
Image taken by Teri Cadeau 8/9/2019 for LC News Chronicle

Earlier this year, the Bay Area Historical Society closed their Beaver Bay Site. A mixture of lack of visitation, staffing concerns, and rising maintenance costs led to the closure of the public museum along Scenic 61. The Lake County Historical Society had loaned a collection of John Beargrease items including Beargrease's dog sled. These items were returned to the Depot Museum in August in light of the pending sale of the museum building.

After the busy summer and fall season, LCHS will be working during the winter to update the exhibit space to bring the sled and other Beargrease items back into public view. The updated interpretive displays are scheduled to be on view in time for the annual John Beargrease Dogsled Marathon starting January 26, 2020. The Depot Museum is open every Saturday from 11AM to 4PM.

Small changes can already be seen in the museum as staff prepare to rearrange a portion of the Depot galleries.



Beargrease's dogsled, as shown in LCHS Collections Storage, to be displayed in Depot Museum Galleries in time for Beargrease Dogsled Marathon Jan 26th 2020.



The Bay Area Historical Society still seasonably operates their Silver Bay Information Center located at 80 Outer Drive in Silver Bay. It continues its efforts to preserve the local history of Silver and Beaver Bays.

The Bay Area Historical Society and Finland Minnesota Historical Societies are affiliates of the LCHS and receive partial funding through the Lake County Board of Commissioners.