

2014

# Northern Border: History and Lore of Michigan's Upper Peninsula and Beyond, In Honor of Russell Magnaghi

Kathryn Johnson

*History Department*, [kathryjo@nmu.edu](mailto:kathryjo@nmu.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [http://commons.nmu.edu/facwork\\_bookreviews](http://commons.nmu.edu/facwork_bookreviews)

---

## Recommended Citation

Johnson, Kathryn, "Northern Border: History and Lore of Michigan's Upper Peninsula and Beyond, In Honor of Russell Magnaghi" (2014). *Book Reviews*. Paper 12.

[http://commons.nmu.edu/facwork\\_bookreviews/12](http://commons.nmu.edu/facwork_bookreviews/12)

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by The Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Book Reviews by an authorized administrator of The Commons. For more information, please contact [kclumpne@nmu.edu](mailto:kclumpne@nmu.edu), [kmcdonou@nmu.edu](mailto:kmcdonou@nmu.edu), [mburgmei@nmu.edu](mailto:mburgmei@nmu.edu), [bsarjean@nmu.edu](mailto:bsarjean@nmu.edu).

***Northern Border: History and Lore of Michigan's Upper Peninsula and Beyond, In Honor of Russell Magnaghi.* Robert Archibald, ed. (Marquette, MI: Northern Michigan University Press, 2014). Pp. 1-339, acknowledgments, photographs, endnotes, selected bibliography. Paperback, \$16.95.)**

This edited *festschrift* (celebration of writing) honors the career of Dr. Russell Magnaghi, University Historian of Northern Michigan University, who devoted over four decades to uncovering, documenting, and preserving the history of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Dr. Magnaghi influenced the eighteen contributing authors as a teacher, colleague, mentor, or through his extensive interviews of the region's population. While in Dr. Magnaghi's honor, the value of this publication equally lies in the continuation of scholarship and nuanced understanding of the Upper Peninsula.

The collection consists of fifteen entries that cover an array of topics. Most center on everyday life and work of the Upper Peninsula including: labor, Native Americans, immigrant cultural traditions, the Great Depression, religion, alcohol, education, and literature. The compilation also features Dr. Magnaghi's selected bibliography and a biographical overview that demonstrates his intellectual affinity for U.P. history.

Labor and immigration often shared organizational roots in the U.P. This is highlighted in Terry Reynolds' piece that explores the role of ethnicity in the labor movement, which focuses on Michigan's three iron ranges during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He argues that the prevailing concept of Finnish immigrants leading radical labor actions holds true for the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Michigan and Minnesota's mining regions. However, this is not the case for the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. At various times, the Cornish, Irish, and Swedes influenced the mining industry's labor actions. The changes in ethnic leadership did not necessarily mirror the immigration wave patterns. For example, the Cornish were among the first immigrants to the region but among the last to

become labor leaders during the period. There were also other factors, such as national economic conditions, underground versus open-pit mining operations, and individual characteristics or marital status that influenced leadership and labor action outcomes.

Another labor entry, co-authored by Marcus Robyns, Katelyn Weber, and Laura Lipp examined Finnish immigrant radical labor activists on Marquette's iron range in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. They argue that previous scholarship attributes failed unionization to corporate paternalism and the labor activists losing their battles during strikes in the 1890s. However, the authors identified several other contributing factors. They point out the immigrants' lack of radicalizing experiences prior to leaving Finland, the conservative nature of the Suomi Synod, Republican dominated politics in the region, and the Socialist Party's lack of leadership.

Bernard Cook, examines the role of Hungarian immigrants in the Copper Country. He explains both push and pull factors that contributed to Hungarians moving to work in the mines during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. His work highlights their daily lives in the mining towns. It especially focuses on Hungarian involvement in the labor unions and how these immigrants maintained their heritage via ethnic societies. He explains how most Hungarian immigrants left the region as a result of the 1913-1914 copper strike.

Women workers are examined in Phyllis Wong's piece that focuses on Cecilia Kangas, an employee for the H. W. Gossard Company factory in Ishpeming. Wong explains how Kangas obtained her position as a teenager, details work conditions at the garment factory, the influence of unionization, and emphasizes the importance of the lifelong relationships that formed among the "Gossard Girls" even after the factory closed in 1976.

The final labor piece, by Gregory Wood, details the smoking ban in Detroit's auto manufacturing plants during World War II. He posits that the fight over smoking in the

workplace widened class divides due to the vast number of labor actions instigated by workers so they could smoke in the workplace. He documents how this demand reflected a national culture that glamorized smoking servicemen fighting in World War II as patriotic. He also traces the influences of federal legislation such as the Smith-Connally Act and national unions such as the CIO and UAW on the fight for smoking in Detroit's auto manufacturing plants

An intriguing immigration study by Dan Truckey examines Canadians in the Upper Peninsula. He scrutinizes the problems defining Canadian identity. He highlights Canadian cultural exchanges with the Anishinaabeg (Odawa, Ojibwe, and Pottawatomi) who were already established in the region. He emphasizes linguistic differences between Francophones and Anglophones. Another potential problem is the porous border both in terms of geographic features and political regime changes that demarcated the line between the United States and Canada. Truckey explains the push and pull factors for immigration and supplements his arguments with specific biographies to illustrate the various ethnic groups that contribute to Canadian influences in the Upper Peninsula.

Several of the chapters are specific studies of time and place. For example "Story Maps," written by Editor Robert Archibald, situates the Upper Peninsula into the broader environmental historical context of the United States. He intertwines the observations of historical figures with his own experiences and shows how memory and the local environs are connected. He stresses the importance of preserving the natural setting that makes the Upper Peninsula unique.

Steven Brisson explains how the history of Mackinaw is reflected in St. Anne's Parish. This early Jesuit mission, established in 1670, has existed for over five centuries. It witnessed the colonial fur trade, European-Native American (Huron, Iroquois, Ottawa, Winnebago, and

Potawatomi) political negotiations, and the changing of nations from the French to the British and later the United States.

Another early outpost in the U.P. is examined by Thomas Friggens, who documents the personality conflicts and isolation that plagued Fort Wilkins in the Keweenaw. The United States established Fort Wilkins in 1844 to protect sanctioned copper mining operations and guard against outlaw miners who hoped to strike it rich. It also protected the mining operations from the Ojibway on the British side of the border who contested the Treaty of LaPoint (1842-1843) that unwillingly ceded their land.

Bernard Peters considers the impact of alcohol among Upper Great Lakes Native Americans in the context of the fur trade. This selection focuses on the “drunken frolic” a term used to describe those times when enough alcohol was present for an entire group to become intoxicated. He argues that alcohol challenged social order and influenced cultural exchanges.

Another regional phenomena is explored in Troy Henderson’s work that describes the uncertain existence of “shackers” who lived off the remnants of clear-cut logging lands. Some shackers lived in total isolation, while others raised their families in these clear cut areas. Henderson argues it is difficult to categorize shackers on account of the variability of characteristics and lack of sources. Yet his diligent research provides us a better understanding of these hermit-like people who made a home where few others would.

A final time and place piece comes from Lori Taylor-Blitz, who documented the history of Ely Township (Marquette County) during the Great Depression. By contextualizing the historical narrative, she discovered that Ely Township mirrored many national trends. For example, immigrant waves between 1880 and 1914 included new arrivals from Canada, England, Ireland, Germany, and Sweden. The available jobs in the Township’s six mines provided the

impetus for relocating to Ely. During the Great Depression, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) provided some relief for both men and women, but immigrants were increasingly cut from the relief rolls to provide assistance to citizens, especially veterans. Ely Township experienced a small but notable influx of population as individuals sought self-reliance on the land during the Great Depression. She argues that the WPA played an instrumental role in keeping people alive during this period while also building important infrastructure still used today.

Essays on education and the humanities are also included in this work. For over a century, Northern Michigan University has served the local population. Two former university presidents, John X. Jamrich and David Haynes, collaborated to trace the history of NMU when it began as a teachers' college in 1899. They chronologically list the expansion of the university through major turning points that helped NMU develop into an intellectual landmark in the Upper Peninsula.

Ted Bays demonstrates ways the Upper Peninsula is portrayed in literature. From famous novelists Hemingway and Voelker to explorer/scholar Henry Schoolcraft, Bays explains what each author found notable about the region and how the environment influenced their writings. He reminds the reader that this article is a sampling of the references to the Upper Peninsula in literature.

Michael Marsden contributes to this compilation with a view into the deer hunting blind. He includes a poem, ten photographs, and a single page essay about the meditations that may occur while an individual is awaiting the hunt in a shoot shack.

In sum this work demonstrates the extensive documentation of historical research and a wider humanities perspective of literature and poetry related to Michigan's Upper Peninsula. The

presented topics are a pleasing read that will appeal to a varied audience including those seeking scholarship or simply more insight into the region. These writings are a meaningful testament that express admiration for the significant contributions Dr. Magnaghi made to Michigan's Upper Peninsula.