Sharing the Past = Shaping Our Future, Part 2: 1950s to 1960s
By Mary M. June

The 1950s and 1960s were a busy time for the CCHS. One of the most important activities of CCHS accomplished during this period was the preservation of the Johnston House. Since it was one of the only surviving early buildings in the area, built in 1823, it was considered to be of special significance. The original home was torn down in 1910, after a tree collapsed onto it. Over the years, it was used as a storage place for cables, motors, and other maritime equipment, and for a time as a chicken coop. By the late 1940s, its foundation had sunk into the ground and the lower logs had started to rot. After the City obtained ownership in 1949, CCHS helped to restore the house so that it could be used as a museum. Fred Rodiger (the secretary-treasurer from 1949-54) led the initiative. He worked with Professor Emil Lorch to create a detailed plan for the restoration. The City appropriated $4,500 and the firm of Mayer and Savoie made the basic restoration that can be seen today. The painters union of Sault Ste. Marie donated their services.

CCHS has operated the Johnston House as a museum, during the summer months, since the restoration was completed in the 1950s. Some of its unique features are: 1) beading on ceiling beams, indicate the beams were made for a gentleman’s house; 2) wainscoted ceiling; 3) “piece-on-piece” French-Canadian type of construction; 4) characteristic window shutters of that period, with 6 and 9 window panes in each sash; and 5) hand-hewn lath and riving board lath for plastering the interior.

The Society obtained the cement-sided garage next to the Johnston House for its growing collection of artifacts. It was used in the 1950s and 1960s as the Indian Museum. During the 1950s, CCHS had a group of dedicated Board members: Clifford Everett, Ray McQuarrie, James Robertson, Richard Burnet, Clarence A. Paquin, Robert Bishop, John LaRock, Alice B. Clapp, Otto McNaughton, Mrs. Jas. A. Henderson, Merl Taylor, Stewart Moran, Leo Boissineau, Myrtle Elliott, and Donald Finlayson. Fred Rodiger, who also served as curator, wrote articles for the Evening News, highlighting recent donations and items on display.

CCHS participated in the 1955 Soo Locks 100th Anniversary celebration. The Board of the CCHS held crucial positions on the committees; in particular, Robertson was president, Paquin was secretary, and Moran headed the Finance Committee. Other CCHS members who assisted were Burnet and George Osborn. The week-long celebration featured the publication of a Souvenir Program that listed events and included articles about the Sault’s history. A postage stamp was commissioned to honor the Lock Service. Queens were crowned at a pageant, and there was a beard and mustache growing contest. Dirk Gringhuis created a painting to commemorate the anniversary that was presented to the CCHS. It was used on the covers of the program and of the April 1955 issue of the Michigan Education Journal. The U.P. History Conference was held in the Sault to coincide with the celebration. River of Destiny: The Saint Marys, written by Joseph E. and Estelle L. Bayliss, in collaboration with Milo M. Quaife, was published in time for the celebration. The Baylisses were long-time CCHS members. Their book is still considered a well-researched and accurate resource on Sault history; Bernie Arbic’s City of the Rapids followed in 2003. The Carbine Power Company, owners of the Schoolcraft House at that time, loaned it to the City in 1955 for use as a museum under the CCHS’s supervision. CCHS continued to offer tours during the summers until 1968, when it was closed due to its deteriorated condition.

During the 1960s, active CCHS Board members included: Robertson, Moran, Finlayson, Osborn, Boissineau, Elliott, Reeta Freeborn, John Mackin, Mrs. T. S. Caffey, Mrs. H. R. Allott, Mrs. E. H. Webster, and Mrs. H. A. Sherman. At the end of the 1960s, John Kenn, Bob Aldrich, and Steve Malmberg joined the Board. The long-term objectives of the Society were identified at their Annual Meeting held on January 20, 1964. They were: 1) to make history live in the Sault through restorations, museums, and publicity; 2) to keep the Johnston House in good repair and plan to have the interior restored; 3) to show the Schoolcraft House and the Johnston House as museums during the tourist season and during the fall Hiawatha Festival; and 4) to promote the possibility of the City of Sault Ste. Marie’s part in establishing an agency to bring about the restoration of Fort Brady. CCHS continues to emphasize many of these objectives today.
There is always history to relate, especially involving a historical place. CCHS's emblem has its own tale to tell.

Many will remember the 1968 Sault Ste. Marie Tricentennial activities. Organizers of the events wanted a symbol that would convey a unique identification for the celebration. Henry Shackleton and Robert Stimble, Sr. approached Oliver Birge, a former commercial artist, with some ideas for a symbol. Birge created a representation of Father Marquette's Mission with a stockade and canoe. The emblem was reproduced on a souvenir coin, postage cancellations, Soo Creamery milk cartons, the cover of the 1968 Telephone Directory, and on all Tricentennial literature. The Neebish Island Women's Group fashioned their yearly quilt incorporating the emblem. By the end of 1968, it was reported that the imprint was used nearly three million times.

In 1996, the Historical Society re-formed and was granted permission from Oliver Birge to use the design. With a few modifications, our present symbol was adopted. It is a fitting reminder of our area history.