Judge Joseph H. Steere: A Man and His Island

On Wednesday, January 20, at 7 p.m., the Chippewa County Historical Society will hold its quarterly meeting and public program at Bayliss Public Library. Library director Ken Miller and local author and historian Deidre Stevens will present a talk and Power Point presentation on Judge Steere and Steere Island.

Joseph Steere resided in Sault Ste. Marie from 1878 until his death in 1936. He was a lawyer, circuit judge, Michigan Supreme Court judge, member of the Carnegie Library’s first board, and was instrumental in the founding of the CCHS. Steere befriended many prominent citizens who built summer homes on Steere Island near Rotary Park. Steere’s cabin (below) is the only structure that remains there and is in need of preservation. Ken Miller spoke about this topic and presented a short video presentation at the January 5 meeting of the City of Sault Ste. Marie’s Historic Development Commission. His interest was originally sparked by photographs taken by local resident Brian Smith and deepened from a boat trip he made there in the summer of 2009. The HDC members shared his concern about securing the building from further deterioration, and recommended specific actions to the City Commission. Several ideas were presented for making the island accessible for development and maintenance. The City’s long-term plans for Steere Island and several other nearby islands will be discussed at a future meeting of the HDC.

Joseph Steere was interested in local history, and he amassed a large collection of books on the subject that were given to the Carnegie Library; now Bayliss Public Library; upon his death. They are housed in Bayliss Library’s Judge Joseph H. Steere Room and are available for use by researchers. Deidre Stevens has written about Joseph Steere for Evening News articles, her Faces of Chippewa County book (1999), and a forthcoming article. Dee is also the author of Sault Ste. Marie: Images of America (2008) and co-author with Bernie Arbic of Then and Now: The Changing Face of Sault Ste. Marie (2009), both available from CCHS.

“Then and Now” Open House

About 200 people attended the October 25 Open House at CCHS that showcased the photography exhibit “Then and Now: The Changing Face of Sault Ste. Marie.” The display features 56 historical photographs, paired with contemporary photographs. The Society obtained a grant from the city’s Governor Chase S. Osborn Trust Fund to assess, scan, and catalog the Walter Materna images in a searchable database, and the exhibit is the first fruit of the project, which has resulted in an archive of over 1,200 images so far out of a total of about 3,000 images.

The display will be traveling to Bayliss Public Library in January and may be viewed there at the time of Ken Miller’s and Dee Stevens’ program, on January 20.

Over 600 copies of the companion Then and Now book have sold since late September. It sells for $10.00 plus tax and may be mailed for an additional $4.00 for shipping and handling. It is available at CCHS during office hours as well as at area retailers—Das Gift Haus, the Mole Hole, Sault Printing Company, Up North Books, and Barnes & Noble at LSSU.
American Café Open House and Ribbon Cutting

Peter and Georgia Gianakaura were honored at a December Open House at CCHS to celebrate the publication of Peter’s book, An American Café — Reflections from the Grill, and the opening of CCHS’s American Café booth (above) and the new display by William Gerrish’s Homage Creative Arts (below). The display consists of copies of historic photos from the collection of the Gianakuras that were printed and mounted by Sault Realism. The objects on display were donated by the Reinkemeyers (a clock), Richard Trautwein (cake bottle), and various Campbell’s Soup eaters. Over 50 people attended the open house and reception that featured Greek pastries made by Leanne Barnes Deuman, Ginny Johnson, and Susan James. Others who donated to the reception were Marie Carter, Robert Money, Peter and Georgia Gianakaura, and Mary M. Jane, Robert Money, an SSU professor and a CCHS Board member, conducted oral histories of the Gianakuras that were filmed for CCHS’s archives.

Water Street Historic Block

Work continued at the Water Street Historic Block this fall with the focus being on the Buraga House (thanks to funds raised through the Sault History Fest, including repairs to the floor, framing two original walls, framing a window, and fixing the back door. The work was done through Ware General Contracting.

Water Street will be the focus of the City’s CSO project and a Streetscape Project next summer, and it is hoped that the Water Street Historic Block buildings can reopen in July.

Capital Campaign

Our capital campaign fundraising continues. Please consider a donation or a pledge to the campaign to help restore our 1889 building. Contributions can be sent to CCHS, P.O. Box 342, Sault Ste. Marie, MI 49783, with checks made out to CCHS. Your help is needed and greatly appreciated.

Building Work

The project to reconstruct a stairwell and install a firewall and fire door leading to the second floor of our building will be completed this month by Arbic Construction. The kitchenette project on the main floor of the building, near the American Café booth display, will be completed in February by Ledy Cabinetry.

Adams Building

In December, volunteers from CCHS, the Friends of Baylis Library, and the Great Lakes Recovery Center, along with Baylis Library staff, removed items and equipment from the Adams Building (former Central Savings Bank building) in preparation for its development. CCHS is pleased that the 100-year-old building has been purchased and will be developed for business and residential use.

Federal Building

A silent auction of surplus equipment was held at the Federal Building on January 5 in preparation for its redevelopment and reopening in 2010 as the new Sault Ste. Marie City Hall.

The building was constructed in 1909-10 and was scheduled to contain 640,000 bricks, 2,315 cubic feet of granite, 18,000 cubic feet of Bedford cut limestone, 151 tons of structural steel, 3,550 square feet of terrazzo floors, 24,000 terracotta floor arches, and 5,650 feet of cement floors, as reported in The Evening News, October 28, 1909 (quoted in Chipewa Gen Talk — The Journal of the Chipewa County Genealogical Society, October 2009, p. 15).

Bernie Arbic, Featured Artist

The January 2010 edition of Alberta House News features an article about CCHS Board member and treasurer Bernie Arbic. He discusses how he came to write local histories. Paper copies of the newsletter may be picked up at Baylis Public Library, or you may download it at www.saultarts.org and see pp. 6-8.

EUPHC Spring Meeting

The Eastern Upper Peninsula History Consortium’s spring 2010 meeting will be held on May 1, hosted by the Rudyard Historical Society.

Membership Renewals

Another year has passed and it’s time to renew your membership. Thank you for your continued support of our organization. If you can this year, why not include an extra donation with your renewal, or upgrade your membership to the next level. We count on your support and our costs are increasing. Please see Nancy Steinhaus’s enclosed letter for additional inspiration.

Status of MCACA

EUP Regional Planning and Development (www.eup-planning.org) has announced that despite recent gloomy predictions, the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs will soon be accepting applications for 2010 grant projects. It is anticipated that there will be one round of limited funding with a February 1 application deadline for projects taking place between April and September 2010. Further information is forthcoming. MCACA’s mission is to encourage, develop, and facilitate an enriched environment of artistic, creative, and cultural activity in Michigan through their grant programs, including the mini-grant awards of up to $4,000. You may also contact Ellen Benoit at 906-635-1581 or benoitej@att.net.

River Soundings Newsletter

Thank you to Audrey Gillett for answering our plea and sponsoring this newsletter’s bulk postage. It costs $50 to mail and $175 to print our quarterly newsletters from Bill Gerrish’s professional design. Eventually, we would like to e-mail it and/or post it to our future website, much as the South Area Arts Council has done. Let us know if you are interested in receiving the newsletter through this alternative means by providing your e-mail address on your membership renewal form or by sending an e-mail to cchs@sault.com. Or let us know if you would like to sponsor a newsletter!

Gift Shop

The Gift Shop will be closed this winter until our annual meeting in April to save on heating costs. It is open by appointment and during office hours. Please do call ahead (906-635-7082) to see if we are open. We have new gift certificates available for gift giving in any denomination. Recent winners of $10 gift certificates at our various drawings include Megan Arbic, Christine Smith, Mike Vass, and Nancy Fenlon.


We are looking for volunteers to work in the gift shop in the spring and summer. Please let us know if you are interested in helping out. Thank you to all the volunteers who helped us in our shop since our last newsletter: Mike Bennett, Deidre Stevens, Norajean Wilcox, Allison Youngs, Mary Youngs, as well as Board members Bernie Arbic, Mary M. Jane, Nancy Steinhaus, and Susan James, on occasion. Our thanks to Nancy Steinhaus for doing the bookkeeping for the shop. The shop was open most Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays during December 30, and for some special events such as the Christmas Downtown Shopping Days and CCHS’s Open Houses. We do miss having our former gift shop manager Karen Sabatine helping us. We heard from her recently and she is doing well in New York with her mother and has been visiting schools there telling Ojibway stories.

Peter Gianakaura’s book is available for sale in CCHS’s Gift Shop for $15.00 plus tax. It may be mailed to you for an additional $4.00 shipping and handling. It is also available through the author and such businesses as Sault Printing Company, Book World, and Parker’s Hardware.

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