A local historical society was first proposed in 1917 by Probate Judge Charles H. Chapman and a few others, but it wasn’t until 1919 that the Chippewa Historical Society (later Chippewa County Historical Society) was formally organized. The Society, formed to gather and read general historical papers and accounts, met at the Carnegie Library once a month for discussions.

In 1920, the Society co-hosted a history conference with the Sault Civic and Commercial Association and the Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society. The conference commemorated the centennial of the arrival of the American expedition led by Gov. Lewis Cass in 1820 and the signing of the treaty with the local Chippewa leaders giving permission and land for establishment of a fort. The conference included a Historical Pageant performed at Brady Park.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the Chippewa Historical Society erected large stones mounted with brass plaques to commemorate historical Sault locations. Two markers were placed in Brady Park to identify the locations of Fort Repentigny and of Lewis Cass’s visit. Others were placed on the grounds of the Federal Building (now City Hall); one for Fort Brady and another for the Jesuit Mission. Markers were also placed in front of the Schoolcraft and Johnston Houses.

The Society has always had a close relationship with the Sault’s public library. Judges Charles Chapman and Joseph Steere, both members of the original Carnegie Library board, assisted Miss Alice Clapp, a fellow devotee of local history, in assembling a collection of books relating to the history of the Old Northwest. She began working at the Carnegie Library in 1913 and became its director in 1920. Under her leadership, in the 1930s, an effort began to collect and display historical artifacts. The construction of a library addition provided space for their preservation and display. In 1940, Judge Chapman, as president of the Chippewa County Historical Society, made a permanent loan to the library of historical artifacts from his collection. Soon after, Miss Clapp issued an appeal in the Evening News to the community for further gifts. A room on the main floor of the library was the first location for the historical museum.

Throughout these early years, publications were created to document the history of the area. Judge Chapman and others wrote articles concerning the history of the U.P. for the Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society publications. Otto Fowle, Stanley Newton, Joseph E. and Estelle Bayliss, and other members of the Society wrote books about area history. Many of these publications can be found in Bayliss Library’s Steere Room and at CCHS.

Charles H. Chapman was born in Pontiac, Michigan. He worked on newspapers in Pontiac, Saginaw, and Cincinnati, and Detroit until July, 1882. He then came to the Sault and was associated with William Chandler, as editor and joint proprietor, in the publication of the Chippewa County News until November, 1887.

Judge Charles H. Chapman, 1855-1940

Judge Chapman has long been recognized as the founder of the Chippewa County Historical Society. He was president of the Society for many of its early years, including at the time of his death.

Charles Chapman served as president of the village of Sault Ste. Marie in 1886 and 1887—the last person to hold that office. He was elected register of deeds for Chippewa County and served during 1889. Along with William Webster and John Stradley, he purchased the Soo Herald in 1889, changing its name to Sault Ste. Marie Tribune and its politics to Republican. They published the Tribune until 1892, when it was consolidated with the Soo News and Chapman left newspaper work.

After law studies in Lansing, Charles Chapman was admitted to the bar in 1895, and returned to the Sault as a member of the law firm of McDonald and Chapman. He was elected probate judge in 1896, but resigned to enter the Spanish-American War. In 1912 he was again elected probate judge and served until his death.

Judge Chapman was an ardent collector and writer of local history. He wrote a history of the John Johnston family, a series of historical articles published in the 1930 National Republic magazine, a history of St. James Episcopal Church, among others.

Sharing the Past + Shaping Our Future:  
The Early Years, 1919 to 1940s  
(continued from page 5)

FIFTH UPPER PENINSULA PROGRAM

Joint Meeting
Sault Ste. Marie Civic and Commercial Ass’n
The Chippewa Historical Society
AND THE
Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society

Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan
June 15 and 16th
1920

Convention Headquarters: Park Hotel

Any important changes in program made necessary by weather conditions or circumstances will be posted at headquarters.

Address All Communications to
Charles W. Childs, National Secretary
Sault Ste. Marie Civic and Commercial Association

(Above) The 1920 conference included talks or reports on topics dealing with the Sault’s history.

(Left) Program for the 1920 conference commemorating the centennial of Gov. Lewis Cass’s visit to the Sault with the American expedition.

To celebrate the centennial of the expedition, the Sault schools staged an ambitious dramatization of the Sault’s history on June 15, 1920. The closing scene of the pageant featured a huge flag—111 feet long and 58 feet wide—at Brady Park made by a formation of 2,886 schoolchildren. There were 609 students in blue costumes, 1,206 in red, and 1,071 in white. This photo shows the group about to sing the “Star-Spangled Banner.”