Sharing the Past = Shaping Our Future, part 3: 1970s to 1990s
By Mary M. June

The 1970s brought a changing of the Guard at CCHS. Change had started in 1968 with the election of three new Board members: John Kenn, Robert Aldrich, and Steve Malmberg. Aldrich and Malmberg were teachers and Kenn was the High School Librarian. All were great resources for the Society and its promotion of local history in the schools.

In 1970, another trio of new members joined the Board: Jean Austin, Ann Pratt, and Robert Money. During the 1970s, the presidency and vice presidency rotated between Kenn, Money, Moran, and Austin. Other long-time Board members, Reeta Freeborn (Secretary), Florence Caffey (Treasurer), James Robertson, Earl Freeborn, and Stan Pratt remained active. A few years later, James Moody joined the Board. CCHS sponsored a series of monthly speakers, arranged by John Kenn, who presented several of them himself.

The main priorities of CCHS were operating their three museums, the Johnston House, the Indian Museum (in the Kemp Coal Office building) and their building next to the Johnston where they displayed a variety of items. As the decade proceeded, the Board became more involved in researching the historical significance and restoration of the Henry Rowe Schoolcraft House (known as Elmwood) and installing historical markers for sites in the Sault.

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw the birth of a new history organization, namely Sault Historic Sites (also known as the Le Sault de Sainte Marie Historic Sites, Inc.). Led by Tom Manse, the goal was to start a maritime museum in the Sault. The star piece was the purchase of an old freighter that they could turn into a museum. Their activities impacted CCHS and its museum activities, requiring the two organizations to work together, in cooperation with the City, in how the former waterfront property once known as the Kemp Coal Dock property, was developed. The area became the permanent location for the Museum Ship Valley Camp and the potential place to relocate two significant sites, the Schoolcraft House and the Bishop Baraga House.

The Kemp Coal Dock Office had to be relocated west of its original site, so that the slip the ship would be using could be enlarged and deepened. The move enabled improvements to be made to the building. Everything had to be removed from the museum during this work and meetings were
relocated, but CCHS was soon back there with refurbished displays.

The Schoolcraft House was added to the Federal Register of Historic Sites in 1974 and State of Michigan Historical Plaques installed at both the Johnston and Schoolcraft houses in 1977. Because of the dampness of the ground where the Schoolcraft House was located, next to the Power Canal and south of the Power House, it was decided to relocate it next to the Johnston House on Water Street. Edison Electric Power Company donated the building to the City.

In October 1978, CCHS was asked to give up a garage building they operated as a museum next to the Johnston House. CCHS donated the land to the City and the building was torn down to make way for the Schoolcraft House.

The City provided the land for the home and funding for phase 1, the moving of the building and replacement of the roof, through grants coordinated by the City’s Community Development staff and fundraising by both the Chippewa County Historical Society and Sault Historic Sites. The house was finally moved on July 1979 by Keith Fegan General Contracting, who had never before been in the house moving business. Because of its size, the main portion of the house could not be moved by land. Instead, it was moved by barge up the St. Marys River to a nearby slip and hauled up the hill to its current location. Witnesses of the move still talk about it. A smaller portion of the house, the west dependency used as the Indian Agency office, was moved over the Portage Street Bridge. Phase 1 was completed in 1980 with the replacement of the roof.

The CCHS Board remained fairly intact until the mid-1980s when several people resigned due to retirement or other commitments. Money, Freeborn and Florence Caffey continued serving as officers. During this time, Professor Money was elected to the Board of the Historical Society of Michigan, remaining for many years as a strong supporter of Michigan History Day. Reeta Freeborn was awarded the Charles Follo Award in 1985 by the Historical Society of Michigan for her long service with CCHS and her dedication to the preservation of Sault history.

During the 1980s, the Society continued operating the Johnston House as a museum, offered programs for their membership, and worked with the City and Sault Historic Sites on plans for the restoration of the Schoolcraft House. Grants and private donations were sought that would allow work to continue. In the fall of 1986, work commenced on reconstructing and restoring the exterior of the house to match the original 1827 structure. This entailed fixing the siding and replacing architectural features that had been removed, building a new replacement east dependency (the kitchen wing), and attaching both dependencies with a covered porch.

The Baraga House was moved to its Water Street location in 1985 by Sault Historic Sites. It was hoped that funds would soon be found to restore it and open it as a museum.

CCHS had worked with Lake Superior State College in 1976 and 1977 to have New Fort Brady nominated and added to the National Register of Historic Sites as a Historic District. In the mid-1980s CCHS worked with the University on the wording and installation of two Michigan Historical plaques on the campus grounds.

By the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, Robert Money remained President and efforts were concentrated on opening the Johnston House every summer and his representing CCHS on the Board of the Historical Society of Michigan. Sporadic membership programs/meetings were held into the mid-1990s. In 1995 Robert Money was approached by a group of individuals interested in revitalizing the organization and organizational meetings were held. Soon a new chapter in CCHS’s history was underway. It will be shared in our next and last installment of the history of the organization, in celebration of CCHS’s 95th Anniversary.