

*Voices from the Past:
A Collection of Books Documenting the Experiences of Pioneers and Early Settlers in the
Western Upper Peninsula of Michigan*

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The culmination of my undergraduate career in geology consisted of spending three weeks studying in the western Upper Peninsula of Michigan. I was immediately fascinated by the history of the area. As soon as I returned, I scoured libraries and used bookstores for books about geology, exploration, and settlement of the Western U.P. Here was a whole new collection waiting to be started - books that relate the personal stories of the pioneers, prospectors, and early settlers of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

The U.P. was settled far earlier than it would have been had mineral wealth not been discovered. This area was far removed from the nearest settlements. Its only link to "civilization," was the Great Lakes waterway, which was completely cut off during the winter months. The isolation and mix of native and ethnic settlers created a region with a unique cultural heritage.

It is amazing that the landscape of sculptured rocks and broken ridges described by early settlers over 100 years ago are still there. The vegetation has been changed substantially in some places, but these landmarks provide a wonderful aid to visualize how wilderness looked and felt to Michigan's early pioneers. And more poignantly, to realize those places where whole towns of people lived and died are reclaimed by forests, with only overgrown cemeteries to stand as a reminder of their existence. The histories preserved in these books serve as a reminder of how short life is and reminds us from whence we came.

Since I began this collection, interest in the subject has dramatically increased as evidenced by the creation of the Michigan Iron Mining Museum in Negaunee and the Keweenaw National Park. Recently, books have been published highlighting the social aspects of the mining districts of the U.P., for example, Larry Lankton authored *Beyond the Boundaries*, a book devoted to summarizing the feel of pioneer life in the Upper Peninsula in the third quarter of the 19th century. The growing interest in preserving the Upper Peninsula's cultural heritage has affirmed my choice to search out and preserve the pioneer voice.

Because of my interest in geology, my collection begins with the period of exploration and settlement in the early 1800s and ends around 1930 when the mines were in decline. This was an interesting time. Mineral wealth was discovered. Prospectors flooded over the wilderness. Towns were formed around the mines that developed. Protestant and Catholic missionaries were anxious to convert the Native population. As towns grew, immigrants were hired from around the world to work in the mines. Strong cultural and community identities were created each with a rich history.

My collection includes travel logs, biographies and autobiographies, local histories; and, personal memoirs and reminiscences of explorers, loggers, miners, preachers, schoolteachers, and writers. I augment my collection with travel guides, Native American narratives, and ethnic social history.