

03.76.4

HISTORICAL ADDRESS COMMEMORATING THE ONE
HUNDRETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE TOWN OF ONTO-
NAGON MICHIGAN JULY 22 1940-

Property of
Ontonagon County
Historical Society

William Chalmers Covert

Mr Chairman and Ladies and Gentlemen;- I consider it a very great honor that you have conferred on me by permitting me to share in the opening program of this unique historical celebration. When you consider how slight has been my contact with Ontonagon in her semi-pioneer days and years since and when I tell you that a period of fifty three/ actually intervenes since my first and only contact with this community/as an immature student-preacher holding down a Presbyterian pulpit for four and a half months, you realize what I have in mind when I refer to this generous invitation from your Historical Committee and when I tell you that I consider this visit one of the most interesting experiences of my long and very active life.

While there are others who could in a more competent fashion and out

of a more intimate experience and wider ~~inext~~ knowledge of local history bring to you this opening historical message, let me assure you that you could not have found in the whole country one whose pleasure in responding to the opportunity now before me would be more keen nor one who more deeply appreciates the significance of the anniversary now being celebrated.

This celebration is not the community merely turn-festival
 ing aside from its ordinary work-a-day business for a week's/program of ~~festivals~~ ~~of~~ fun and frolic, under the guise of honoring a century of its existence. These essential features of a really complete program of historical festivities will have their place and will make their contribution to the total happiness/and good cheer/of the community. The Committee has wisely attended to this phase of the celebration. But there is something else that every dignified and worthy community on an anniversary occasion desires to achieve in its historical program whether it puts it in words or

not. A Centennial Anniversary always touches the nobler instincts of a community. It releases in ~~xix~~ hearts of all thoughtful citizens a new sense of gratitude and honest appreciation of those who have laid foundations in the face of obstacles and privations of which the present generation know nothing. Every patriotic citizen feels this gratitude. Every business man and woman is ready to respond to the proper emotion, but the routine of daily life with the ordinary program of making a living is for everyone so urgent and preoccupying that no one takes time to think much about yesterday, let alone about what happened 100 years ago. We therefore need to have prepared occasions when the whole community can pause and stock of its past and talk of what the founding fathers have done and what blessings have been handed on to us out of the hardships and perils of the past. The poet Whittier pays tribute to those who felled the forests, opened the mines, made the virgin soil to blossom as the rose and set up the

social order.

He calls them

"The moral pioneers
 Who from the future borrow;
 Who sow the wastes with dreams of grain
 And on the midnight sky of rain
 Paint the golden morrow".

These the community wish to recall and reappraise for her own good ,

O There are Voices of the past
 Links of a broken chain,
 Wings that can bear me back to times
 Which cannot come again;
 God forbid that I should lose
 The echoes that remain." Adelaide Proctor-"Voices"

If this be not the attitude of our citizens today we are a heedless and forgetful people allowing the valor and virtues of our fathers to remain un-
 honored and unsung.

But it is not enough that this
 anniversary give Ontonagon a chance merely to paint the glories of her
 past speak in joy and pride of the deeds of the past. A community
 whose memory is larger than its hope is doomed. Looking back is a privileg
 that all broad minded ^{who} men/know how to evaluate life appreciate, but no

anniversary program is worthy of the event it celebrates, if at its close it leaves its participants looking backward. Shakespeare has given us the right idea of history and how we are to view our historical anniversaries and does it in just four words, when he says in his play "The Tempest" "What's past is prologue". (Act II Sc I). Another immortal has said just as wise a thing and we should hear it. This is it, "The past is for us, but the sole terms on which it can become ours, are its subordination to the present". Accordingly, out of this well planned historical celebration this old town of Ontonagon is to see new visions, find new hopes for tomorrow and gather that moral momentum that brings dreams of better things to pass.

During the coming days young and old will hear the challenging voices of long gone, brave and self sacrificing men chanting God's praises on these ancient shores amidst a forbidding paganism and never whining. ~~xxx~~ They will ~~xxxxx~~ view again in song and pageant that long procession of hardy, adventuring men who sailed the stormy waters of our inland sea, who trailed and

trapped the wild game of these once lonely forests and who bore the burdens of unbelievable toil in this great solitude that this community might be.

If civic ideals and communal pride and a collective purpose after greater and better things do not stir in the hearts of the citizenship of Ontonago this program of anniversary celebration will not only have given the lie to Shakespeare whose maxim I have quoted, but we will have missed major values that always accompany historical anniversaries. So let me say that

the gratitude of every worthy citizen is due to this patriotic Committee that conceived the plan and worked out the practical details of this program. Every patriot of Michigan is indebted to Mr James K Jamison for

^{"This} his splendid story of Ontonagon Country; so full of historical data and descriptions of fine ~~judgements~~ of ~~the~~ scenic and material wealth and balanced judgements as to men and movements identified with the doings of the last hundred years in and about this romantic country. These busy men ^w have not only helped this community to honor the traditions and personalities, ~~that~~

the material influences and spiritual forces that have made Ontonogan, but they have thereby pointed the way for a better day for this community and this broken and distressed world.

Some personal recollections of my first contact with old Ontonagon may possibly serve as my credentials for admission to this platform today.

It was in the growing dusk of a gloomy April day in the Spring of 1886 that the first friendly voice of Ontonagon hospitality greeted me from a saloon doorway on the opposite side of the street from where at the time was located the home of Captain Daniel Beaser. Now occupied by the bank. I was wet, worn and ~~weary~~^{muddy} from the long buckboard ride through the unbroken forest that lay between Ontonogan and Baraga over a road laid with corduroy for much of the way. The Sturgeon river was swollen and filled with the slush ice of the spring thaw. All passengers stood upon the ~~seats~~^{the driver a} seats when ~~the~~^{the} brave little Irishman by the name of Murray urged with a most unique profanity his timid ponies through the swift waters that

thro' the slat bottom and swamped
flooded/my little trunk and soaked my Prince Albert coat and my Matthew
Henry Commentaries on the Bible. I had a letter of introduction/in my
pocket from Dr Bonar of Marquette secured for me by my Seminary mate the
late Newell Dwight Hillis who had spent the previous summer in Iron ~~Rix~~
River township. It was when I got no response from the Beaser door bell
that I heard my first official welcome to Ontonagon ~~by~~ in a voice somewhat
clouded by gin but nevertheless hearty and understandable, I was told to
90 for Capt. Beaser had moved.
~~go for Capt. Beaser had moved~~ ~~up the place to see if I ever knock at the front~~
~~door~~ ~~and~~ I came again to the side walk where I asked a passing lumber-
jack if he knew anything about the Presbyterian church here. He replied,
"They aint runnin her now . She shet down last fall" and on he hurried to t
the near by bar. The fact that I had but two dollars and twelve cents in
my pocket did not specially worry me for I had met a couple of angels on
my way through the great Nester tract of pine. One was Charles Skelton
who ~~xxxx~~ who ran the little ~~HH~~ Halfway Cabin on the Baraga road.

The other was Murray the driver of the Baraga stage. Let me tell you how I recognized them, Having had a breakfast at the Baraga boarding house that Paul Bunyan would have enjoyed and having total ~~xxxx~~ cash assets in my pocket of but \$4.12 I concluded upon our arrival at the Halfway house that I would pass up Skelton's noonday meal always ready in vast quantities for the stage passengers upon their arrival from Baraga. I'll admit that it seemed like an eternity lay between me and that 5 A.M. breakfast at Baraga. The corduroy roadway had jolted that breakfast far below ~~xxx~~ ^{my} diaphragm. But the economic situation and the uncertain future made restraint a necessary virtue, so I let the more prosperous passengers go to that log cabin table while I re-read for the third time my old Chicago InterOcean under a near by white pine. Old Skelton, later spying me came out after me with an almost violent invitation to come in and eat for I looked pretty thin. I yielded and will carry with me to heaven's gate the memory of that noonday meal in Skelton's cabin. ~~The rice pudding~~ ^{The rice pudding} with raisens stand out in the

memory of that long gone day of trial in a way to make the memory of hundreds of banquet menus of the last fifty look as sapless as sawdust.

While explaining to Murray as he stood at the bar with his pony bridles over his shoulder, that I would have to ask him to let me pay for my stage ride on the installment plan, Skelton ^{eavesdropping} /leaned forward twiddling my half dollar in his fingers ~~xxx~~ and without waiting for me to finish my story shoved the coin ^{across} ~~to~~ the bar shouting in tones that meant obedience "Young man you take this half dollar you need it worse than I do" And when I reluctantly reached forward to take the first offering I received, I saw the angel's features shining through the florid, bearded face of smiling old Skelton standing behind his little serving bar. It was when Murray after hearing my story of temporary financial stringency and seeing the two dollars in my hand, said, "Say you keep them two dollars till you get to Ontonagon, I'll stand good to the stage company till you are ready to settle" It was after that speech that I saw the angel's features break thro Murrays weather beaten features.

II

These were typical characters of the Ontonagon country at that period. They represented that spirit of mutual helpfulness that pervaded the lives of these men of the mines and forest in the early days of this community. It was on the foundation of this type of warm hearted, cooperative citizenship that Ontonagon was built. It was a rare group of unique men that I was permitted to know casually through that summer of 1886. I marvel that these men were willing to show such consideration for an inexperienced, young man of twenty one. I never saw Jim Paul Kirk for he died five years before I arrived. He was a pathetic victim of an ambition to do big things, without having the ability to instrument that ambition and bring things to pass. Amanda Chandler Paul, the woman who agreed to share his grim fortune in this remote and unprepossessing frontier spot, was living here during my brief residence, but the old lady meant so little to the society column of Ontonagon and to her historians, that I never saw or heard of her. But for fifty two years ~~she~~ she lived here, surviving Jim Paul by twenty years, After having lived in poverty and

obscurity she died in her little shack in 1888 1901, a kindly, unheroic but faithful pioneer woman.

I remember with pleasure the sandy bearded face of Alfred Meads. I recall his interesting and friendly conversations with their choice English vocabulary. He owned and edited the Ontonagon Miner. It was a paper born in 1855 in the exciting days of the early copper boom. Mr Meads had built a new office and installed new printing equipment but four years before and was at the time publishing one of the authoritative journals in the mining world. I specially remember Captain Captain Parker. He was sixty five years old that summer. He was one of the rugged

He was one of the rugged

After 35 years as the late

interesting talk he had.

and love of hard labor

And in those days

took advantage of my

the good holes while

ged citizens and original town builders of the place. He was born in New Hampshire in 1821 and by a strange turn of fate spent his life on Lake Superior. He began his sailing career in 1844, when he helped drag his first sailing vessel "The Fur Trader" over the long rough portage at the "Soo" and launched her in the vast and perilous waters of Lake Superior. He became her master in 1850 and with her dared every kind of wind and weather, till she went on the rocks in a terrible storm off Eagle Harbor. Another ship was portaged at the Soo "The George W Ford" and he sailed her for seven years till she too went down in a fierce storm. After 25 years on the Lake Captn Parker was at ease in his home and many an interesting talk we had. His son Alec, in spite of his picturesque profanity and love of hard liquor was my favorite companion on the trout streams hereabouts. And in those days there were real trout streams. While I felt that Alec took advantage of my ignorance and inexperience in the art to clean out the good holes while show-

ing me how it ought to be done, yet when we reached home wet and weary and had cleaned up and sat down before a platter piled high ~~with~~ layer upon layer with crisp, brown, tender, pink and white meated trout prepared by Mrs Parker and her Indian woman cook, I could do nothing but forgive and forget. But it was Bessie Parker that saved my administration that summer by her wonderful singing voice and her fine ability as a choral organizer. That first absolutely songless service, before Bessie knew I was in town has hung in my memory like a night mare. But she and her group of young women many of whom were in the angelic choirs above at this time, made the summer singing of the little white church a local sensation. Bessie was on her way then we all knew to the distinction that years later was hers as ~~xxx~~ one of the best contralto singers in Chicago.

"Windy" Adams who was Frederick A Adams in whose little hotel on Main Street I was quartered was friendly, affable and talkative enough to deserve his soubriquet. It was in a room in his hotel on the evening of my arrival, after a day alternating with gloom

and gladness that I found my soul lifted out of its depression and the whole
Arab story of the day forgotten, by my first whiff of the spring's loveliest
perfume sweepin toward me as I entered that tiny room, from a huge dish of
freshly picked trailing arbutus from the near by sand dunes which were cov-
ering the old Catholic church. This was a token of welcome from the young
daughter . I shall never forget the thrill I had at this my first sight of
the exquisite beauty of that arbutus and my first contact with the indescrib-
able delicacy of its wonderful perfume. I have never been the same man
since. The young lady's grand father/had known Mark Beaubien who ran the
Johnson
first hotel in Chicago and had come to Ontonagon in 1848.

I wish some one would tell me what became of a delicate feature
old man past 80 who at the time I was here ran a small dry goods store on a
leading corner of Main street. He had a face that looked like Pope Pius X.
His name was Collins . He was a true Spartan. Having no family he lived in
his store, slept on a cot under the counter, ate nuts and fruit and boasted

that he had never worn a suit of under wear nor over coat in Ontonagon. He knew Horace Greely and said that Greely told him or some one else that he considered "Ontonagon" the most beautiful word every pronounced by human tongue. I spent many a pleasant hour in the store with this rare old conversationalist, whose very small stock relieved him of the annoyance of many customers.

I wish too I might meet the stocky built smooth faced lumberjack who undertook to show me how Ontonagon men got their summer venison against which there was no law. We walked miles inland to a dry and dreary cranberry marsh set in a circle of limitless pine and some hard wood. We arrived at what he identified as his favorite station on the run way across the bog just as the long twilight faded into deep darkness and the stars broke out in a radiance I never saw except over Ontonagon. I put my midnight lunch near by, got my final instructions as to the possible approach of a buck fleeing from excitement in one forest to the cover of the other and the long lonely waiting and watching began. The spooky stillness

67

was awful and broken now and then by strange muffled animal sounds from the circling forests. A spell of buck ague set in. My teeth chattered and it was not all due to the cold damp air of the bog. Eleven o'clock came and nothing happened, then midnight and one and nothing on the run way. With a slight change in the soft breeze clouds of fiery no-see-'ems swept in. There was no escape. They burned like invisible sparks. I spread the butter of my lunch over my face for possible protection. It hardened and helped the little pests. I gave up pulled my blanket over my head stretched out on the mossy bog and was immediately asleep. My guide and friend did likewise. No sooner asleep than the earth shook with the hoof beats of a buck rushing by us and stopping to snort called us to our knees only to catch the odor and draft of the deer fleeing a shot my partner claimed to have heard. It was a stinging disgrace and we deserved the merciless jibing we got when it was reported about town that a deer had tramped on us and gotten away.

Dave Bruce was a saloon keeper who ¹⁸ always closed his place of business between 10 and 12 o'clock on Sunday mornings in order that his customers and he might go to church. There was another saloon keeper who did the same thing

The latter gentleman always wore a Prince Albert coat and black kid gloves and sang hymns with more regard to vigor than tune. In spite of my personal calls on him and others of the profession in the thirteen saloons doing business here at the time the name of my well dressed hearer and all others of his fraternity have faded from memory. The whittling bench in front of these saloons sat on the wooden sidewalk and was my best place for concentrated pastoral calling on the male population of the community and I made constant use of these seats of fellowship and gossip.

But of course all was not courtesy and friendship and helpfulness with these saloons and the dives in the near by woods. I shall never forget the sorrow and misery imposed upon some of these men in body and mind by the hard liquor drinking and excesses that ruined their bodily strength, wasted their hard earned money and ruined their souls.

It was here I first saw the horrors^{of} delirium tremens and the memory of it
sickens me yet. But never shall I forget the response of these big hearted
woodsmen to my friendly approaches. I was advised upon arrival by Cap. Beaser
to have nothing to do with this turbulent gang, that made the nights hideous
when the drives came down and payday came. An obstreperous group had stopped
a meeting a year or two before. I sought these men out in the camps and on
the drives at the Dalles and at the mills. Their hearts were always easily
reached where they saw kindness and sincerity in evidence. I have not forgot
the fact that these same men sent a purse to the boat as I was leaving for my
school and it was about as much as the little church had been able to raise
all summer long. There are many other characters that came into my life.
Dr Nitterauer was a quiet faithful doctor who was my great friend. I had close
connection with him and learned to respect his worth and unselfishness and
often accompanied him on errands here and there.

It was old Captain Beaser that became the monitor of my fate. He was the only elder of the church. It was fortunate, for there doubtless would have been difficulty/in the session with morethan the Captain . He was born in 1825 with an ambition to be a second Captain Cook. While a lad he he ran away from home and shipped out of New Bedford on a whaler and spent four years in the Arctic regions. It was in his blood and when he came to in 1848 between Ontonagon/it wasas skipper of a schooner that he operated frxm this port and Eagle River ,succeeded by ~~another~~ an old side wheeler ninety feet long that he bought in Cleveland. and sledded over the long portage at the Soo. He exploited silver properties in the Porcupine Mountains and shipped two tons of silver in 1881. He was one of the organizers of the town being the first notary and swearing in all the officers. He had his enemies and his friends and while I never got clost to the old man I was close enough to recognize him as a stalwart type of character who gave cooperation and loyalty to every good cause especially to the Presbyterian church here.

He was a man who met the rough and tumble situations of life with the rock ribbed convictions that religion is an essential factor in every community and worth all it costs. He belonged to that certain group of men which thank God we find in every community,. They are the men who where ever they go carry with them strong convictions of which they are not ashamed and which no opposition can disturb. They are convictions about right and wrong, about manners and morals, about home life, school and church life and all the institutions and movements for the higher welfare of the community without which no community can meet its social obligations to humanity or maintain a character of which its children will be proud. These are Whittie "moral pioneers". I know the data in connection with this quiet but effective leadership in this region will be hard to find. But I hope that Mr. Jamison in his next edition of "This Ontonagon Country" will add a chapter dealing in his own fine historical manner with the men and women who have stayed the morale and maintained the spiritual idealism of this community.

we generally undervalue the significance of historical periods that lie in the earlier stages of our development as a nation. We do not measure properly the meaning of the forces, the movements, the personal characters that are at work amidst the obscurity and privations of pioneer days. But when Jim Paul Kirk broke his way through the trackless forest of Wisconsin and reached the mouth of the Ontonagon river, he was giving expression to a kind of new universal restlessness that was stirring in the hearts of all of our American people. It was an hour in American life potent with undreamed of possibilities. Every body was thinking creatively how they might help to develop the resources of our great and growing country, now for the first time coming to self consciousness as a nation. Men were breaking over old geographical boundaries in all parts of the country as they never had done. Great migrations were on. People were determined to go places. Following the opening of the Erie canal in 1825 the tide started westward. A frenzy of canal building took hold of the politicians and contractors. More than

6000 miles of canals were projected ^{2,3} for which bonds were floated, tho' few of
the canals were ever constructed. The National Pike running from Washing-
ton toward the setting sun ^{being} was promoted by Henry Clark and Albert Gallatin
on which seven millions were being spent, and over which a continuous line of
stage wagons loaded with restless eager Americans were always moving. Then
after Peter Coppers locomotive ran a race with a horse in Baltimore in 1832,
it became apparent even tho' the locomotive lost ^{the race} because a belt slipped, that
the mode of transporting our restless people had now arrived. A wild
speculation this country ever saw seized our people, individually
and as commonwealths. Soon you could ride from New York City to Buffalo on
rails, but you travelled over sixteen different company systems and changed
cars 16 times. Illinois as were other states including Michigan was in a
frenzy of speculation. She voted 1300 miles of railroads costing a billion
dollars with other public improvements costing millions more, so that when the
new governor was inaugurated in 1842 there was not money enough in the

state treasury to pay the postage on invitations to the guests. Michigan spent millions on several short lines in the extreme southern portion of the state. But nothing stopped the westward movement of the people, tho'

the terrified Boards of Trade of the New England states resorted to every possible means. From 1820 to 1840 the population in the states north of the Ohio and east of the Mississippi increased 360 per cent and the tide ran still higher and stronger. Then too men were breaking over intellectual

and out of what had been a contemptible/poverty of which we were ashamed there came Emerson and Channing and Thoreau and Long fellow and John Greenleaf Whittier and other immortal Americans. Webster built his wonderful Dictionary and Worcester built another just as good. Macguffey wrote his Readers and Spellers and Horace Mann began a new day in popular education. School houses, academies and colleges rose in scores of communities. Religious bodies found a new conscience as to their obligation to America and an unparalleled missionary enthusiasm wrote a new chapter in church extension and inaugurated the greatest church building program America had seen.

Great theological contriversies started, new philosophers appeared and above all the moral issues of slavery made the nation a forum with Henry Ward Beecher, Richard Storrs and other clergymen in the pulpits, with Garrison, Lovejoy and old John Brown and Wendel Phillips on the platforms of the country, with Whitier, Brayant and Lowell and othe poets firing the hearts of the people.

William Henry Harrison 68 years old, the ninth president of the United State was in the White House facing one of the worst financial panics the nation had seen fpr which his predecessors Andrew Jackson and VanBuren were responsible. John Tyler vice president broke all travel records en route to Washington, coming from Williamsburgh to Washington in ~~the~~ twenty one hours! Daniel Webster was Secretary of State. Our total population was 17 million. Plainly the great American Democracy is onx the march. The nation is thrilling with a new sense of its certain destiny and was rising with confidence to face its problems economic, political and moral with stron hope. I am sure the remote little company on the south shore of Superior was not beyond these stirring influences

And finally I should like to call to the attention of this historically minded group something which no anniversary of Ontonagon's past should forget. It is something that ought to infuse the whole occasion with a serious spiritual atmosphere. There is breaking through the background of Ontonagon's history something nobler than the virtues of which I have just spoken. It adds glory to her history and a meaning to her life. That something shines through the savagery of the Huron tribes that deluged this Peninsula with blood taking terrible toll of their fellow red men the Ontonagon Chippeways whom they finally extinguished. It shines through the era of cruelty and blood that belonged to traders and trappers whose snares and spears robbed the land of its furbearing life. It shines through the story of triumphs and failures of lonely prospectors and tiny mining groups in the deep shows and isolation of this country. Yes it shines through the story of duped thousands of investors who sought to get rich quick through silver and copper stocks floated east and west and whose ultimate losses made for an era of bitterness and a depression over all the land. THE thing I am talking about is the heroic devotion and sacrificial labors of that generation of religious devotees who with the

profit motive of the trader, but with the a burning passion to bring to degraded tribes on these wild shores, the Christian message of hope, endured with amazing fortitude all the hardships and trials of pioneers traders and discoverers. It was to mitigate the savagery of the Hurons whose canoes brought down the St Lawrence to Quebec xx bales of skins and kegs of oil, that they were followed back into this mysterious country, by that long and others by scores down to line of Jesuit missionaries from Brebouf and Garnier in 1634/to Father Baraga at L'Anse. In the almost forgotten annals of this northern country no records are more replete with stories of unbelievable toil and suffering, nor more brilliant with examples of unparalleled heroism and human endurance. The permanent results of of all this devotion were tragically inadequate, pathetically fleeting and the end often martyrdom and utter extinction of the work. The brave and noble LeJeune was betrayed and murdered while Breboeuf in spite of a life of kindness was tortured at the stake with a red hot iron collar and with boiling water poured over his naked body ~~already~~ from which strips

of his flesh had been torn and eaten by frenzied savages. Amidst it all shone forth that spirituality and unselfishness that lights the background of this whole anniversary. A protestant historian (Robert McKenzie) has this to say of these early Catholic missionaries, "These missionaries were subject to hardships such as the human frame could not long endure. They were accustomed to the comfort and refinements of civilized life. They had tasted the charms of French society in its highest forms. Their associations now were with men sunk till humanity could fall no lower. They followed the tribes in their long winter wanderings in quest of food. They were in peril from hunger, cold and sudden attack of enemies and the superstitious fear of these they sought to save. They slept on the frozen ground or still worse in a crowded tent, half suffocated by smoke, deafened by noise ^{and} sickened by filth. Sacrifice more absolute than the world has never seen. A love of perishing heated souls was the impulse which animated them. A deep and solemn enthu-

Property of
Ontonagon County
Historical Society