



Beechwood Historical Society  
178 Beechwood Store Road  
P.O. Box 219  
Iron River, MI 49935

(from *Articles of Incorporation*) The mission statement of the **Beechwood Historical Society is to preserve and share our Beechwood heritage with present and future generations.** This will be done by:

- (a) **Restoring and maintaining the Beechwood Hall (formerly known as the Beechwood School), its properties and buildings;**
- (b) **Maintain the identity of the community of Beechwood, MI (unincorporated) by restoring historical use of the site through education, social functions, and a meeting place for local organizations. This is the remaining public building site in the community;**
- (c) **Collecting, housing, and preserving artifacts, works of art, and archival materials relating to the history of the Beechwood community;**
- (d) **Presenting interpretive exhibitions, displays, and programs based upon the research of the Beechwood Historical Society;**
- (e) **Cooperating with other institutions – government, educational, and historical – in presenting and preserving our heritage.**

**The “Heart of the Community” of Beechwood, Michigan (within Iron River Township)**

The community of Beechwood, Michigan was established within Iron River Township of Iron County, Michigan in 1882. The Chicago-Northwestern railroad brought early Swedish and Finnish settlers to the area in 1887 and established a depot at Beechwood in 1898 and many of the residents at the time worked on the construction of the rail-line as it continued west toward Ironwood, MI. At one time, Highway US 2 passed through the heart of the community. Highway US 2 was re-routed in the mid-1930’s to “pass by” several of the smaller communities in the area such as Watersmeet, Elmwood, and Beechwood. “Old US 2” from Iron Mountain, MI to Ironwood, MI was 100 miles long and known as the Cloverland Trail. This road and the railroad were the primary means of travel to and through Beechwood, MI for many years. Most segments of the Cloverland Trail can still be found today.

Railroading, logging, mining, and farming were the primary means of employment for families in the area. At one time there was a large sawmill, landing, and gravel pit in Beechwood. The community celebrated its 100 year anniversary in 1982. Today, logging and public service agencies (including health-care) remain the biggest employers in western Iron County, MI. The community of Beechwood lies within the Ottawa National Forest. When the mines closed in the area (~1975 – 1985), the railroad tracks were pulled and the grade was converted to an off-highway vehicle trail (ATV’s, snowmobiles). Most community residents are still employed outside of the informal boundaries of the community of Beechwood, MI.

The Bethany Lutheran Church (built in 1912) and the **Beechwood School** (built in 1914 – currently known as the Beechwood Hall) are the only remaining buildings at the center of the community, other than residents’ homes. The Beechwood “community” informally encompasses a discontinuous area of 25 square miles in addition to industrial forest-lands and the Ottawa National Forest.

The **Bethany Lutheran Church** is currently in private ownership and remains basically intact as an original structure. It is not open to the public at this time. The Bethany Church is listed on the National Historic Register.

**The Beechwood Hall is currently owned by the Beechwood Historical Society. A brief history of the site includes:**

1. The earliest school within the vicinity was the “Track School” at Larsen Lake and was a log building. As the community grew (populated primarily by families of Swedish and Finish heritage), this school was replaced by the **Beechwood School** in 1914. The land was deeded to the school system by Charles & Martha Saxon on September 12, 1912, for \$1.00. This one-room, stick-built structure was used as a school from 1914 – 1933.
2. When the school closed, children were transported to the Benson School or to schools in Iron River, MI. On November 1, 1938, Iron River Township Schools leased the school and 1 acre property to Iron River Township for 99 years to be occupied for a voting precinct, recreational purposes, and as a Community Center – for \$1.00.
3. On July 29, 1957, the Public Schools of Iron River deeded the property over to the Township of Iron River, for \$1.00.
4. In mid-2008, Iron River Township closed the Beechwood Hall due to code violations resulting from a lack of maintenance over the years. The local government felt that it was cost prohibitive to maintain the building and began a campaign (the second in 10 years) to permanently close the structure and sell it.
5. The “Friends of Beechwood” formed in September, 2008, and began to petition the Township in October, 2008 to re-open the Beechwood Hall, which represented the “identity” of the once Beechwood community (which had included a store, post office, church, railroad depot, sawmill, gravel pit, school, homes and farms). The Beechwood Historical Society was formed (informally) in July, 2010, following talks with the Township Board that they were willing to donate the Beechwood Hall to a “group”. The Beechwood Historical Society formally incorporated as a non-profit corporation on October 18, 2010.
6. The Beechwood Historical Society paid Iron River Township \$1.00 on May 31, 2011, and the former schoolhouse and 1-acre site became the property of the Society. In addition to the property, the Township also gave the Society \$12,500.00 to begin the task of restoring the building. Other donations from private individuals, local community charities (such as the Golden “K”), fund-raisers, and membership fees continue to provide funding for the restoration of the site. Thousands of hours of volunteer time has stretched these cash and supplies contributions to accomplish a significant amount of work to-date.

**Past Use as a Community Center:**

1. Each Memorial Day a ceremony is held at the Rose Hill Cemetery and followed by a gathering at the Beechwood Hall bringing friends and family together (up to 100 people) each year that no longer live in the community. ***This past year (2013) there were well over 100 people at the Cemetery and the follow-up social.***
2. 4-H Club meeting place for 3 clubs.
3. Youth recreation in the 1950’s & 1960’s: games, pool, table tennis, ice rink, dances, and other community parties.
4. Voting Precinct
5. Official Post of the **Beechwood AmVets Post #436** – pancake breakfasts, fish boils, steak feed, host the Memorial Day social - all to raise money for scholarships for local high school students. ***Over 175 people were counted at The Trout Tails pancake/egg breakfast held the last Saturday of each April. This event brings out most of the local Beechwood community and Veterans to a morning of fine food and visiting.***

6. Home to the **Beechwood Friendly Neighbors** which host suppers for new members to the community, annual Halloween party, luncheons for funeral and weddings. Baby showers, wedding showers, graduation parties, retirement parties, and community rummage sales are also held. ***This group once again meets twice a month at the Beechwood Hall.***

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Goals for the Beechwood Hall: **“The mission of the Beechwood Historical Society is to preserve and share Beechwood heritage with present and future generations.”** Short-term goals once the Beechwood Historical Society acquired the Beechwood Hall included:

1. Re-open to the public as a community center and museum focusing on the history of the larger area (including Beechwood, Gibbs City, Hazel, Nash, Elmwood, and Atkinson, to name a few of the communities that are now considered “ghost towns”).
2. Education & use of the Hall for other activities (examples could include quilting groups, the AmVets again meet regularly at the Hall, the Friendly Neighbors re-start activities).
3. Nominate the site for the Historic Register.

***The Site has been re-opened to the Public as a Community Center and hosts multiple scheduled and unscheduled activities (the 2014 Calendar is posted on the website [www.beechwoodhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.beechwoodhistoricalsociety.org)). [The Beechwood Historical Society now has a Facebook page!](#)***

**The Beechwood site was closed to the public while the following restoration activities were ongoing (to make the site safe for the public).** The first public event was held 10/31/2011 with the traditional Halloween Party when we passed the Code inspection. About 40 children plus 40 adults were in attendance. This was the first time the party had been held in 3 years. Prior to that, it had been held for 50+ years. Several other public events have been held at the Beechwood Hall while renovations continue. These include fund-raisers for specific projects and community get togethers such as a Chilly Feed, pot-lucks, family game nights, and a rummage sale. The BHS has also started to include programs at regular meetings such as the “History of Sylvania”, “Making Maple Syrup”, and a walk-thru of the Bethany Lutheran Church building last fall (the other remaining historic structure in the Beechwood Community).

**Restoration and improvement projects as of 5/21/2014, status include:**

1. A rear exit has been built, door installed, deck and handicap ramp (**completed Summer, 2011**) Handrails were installed on the new ramp and the front steps (**Completed September, 2011**).
2. Insulation in the roof, with additional venting; insulation on the joists in the basement (**completed Summer, 2011**)
3. Replacement of the basement windows with insulated block that allow for air flow to keep the basement & the building dry. These windows had been blocked up in the past, except for one for access to fill the furnace with fuel oil – this only had a board across the opening & allowed water to enter the basement (**completed Summer, 2011**)
4. Correction of code violations of electrical problems (**completed Fall, 2011**); added outside dawn-to-dusk light on back of building at new handicap ramp; wired up donated used 40-gallon hot water heater.
5. Removal of the asphalt parking lot (**completed Fall, 2011**)
6. Gravel the asphalt parking lot & the old ice rink for additional parking; asphalt has been pushed to the south end of the parking lot & the whole parking lot leveled, shot to grade & staked; 22A crushed road gravel was delivered 9/17/2011 and spread, compacted in the portion of the parking lot that had asphalt. Eleven loads

(~90 CY, donated by Jeff Gregg) of pit-run gravel was hauled to the site 11/3/2011 and leveled/compacted 11/5/2011 by Mark Wiegand (equipment & time in exchange for fuel oil that had been purchased for the old furnace) **(Completed Fall, 2011)** *finances will be assessed in the future to determine if we can cap this back portion of the parking lot with 22A crushed gravel.* The old asphalt was removed by Lawrence Wiegand **(completed Spring, 2012).**

7. Repair the outdoor furnace (grill) **(completed Summer, 2011)**
8. Replace fallen stones & tuck-point the foundation (outside has been repaired & landscaping with soil to shed water away from the foundation. Masonry has been treated with a sealant). **(Completed Fall, 2011)**
9. Repair the foundation inside the basement (tuck point & re-seal WALLS) **(Completed Winter 2013-2014)**  
REPAIR AND REPLACE SECTIONS OF THE BASEMENT FLOOR **(Completed Summer 2013).**
10. Repair the front door until it can be replaced historically (metal sleeve on the bottom, grind off the rust, and paint/seal the door). **(Completed TEMPORARY repairs & painted, completed Fall, 2011)**
11. Replace the front steps handrails to meet code **(Completed 9/10/2011;** concrete stairs have also been painted blue/gray with an oil-based concrete sealant **9/17/2011)**
12. Repair front side-walk at bottom of steps; install new concrete side-walk to lower parking lot; install concrete pad to outside basement door **(Completed 9/2011)**
13. Replaced old fuel-oil furnace with new propane furnace and re-conditioned 1,000 gallon tank due to problems with brick chimney – started smoking again **(Completed 10/29/2011 – just in time for the annual Halloween Party which had not been held for 3 years)**
14. Insulated curtains installed on windows in main classroom **(Completed October, 2011).**
15. **Certificate of Public Occupancy was issued by 9/30/2011 by the Iron County Code Commission.**
16. **Insurance was secured 10/25/2011.**
17. Utility pole & light was installed on northwest side of the building to provide lighting to parking lot from 5:00 – 10:00 PM. **(Completed November, 2011)**
18. Work has moved inside the Hall and sheetrock and molding in progress where new hallway was created to back entrance. **(Completed January, 2012)**
19. A Calendar Year of 2012 Events was approved by the BHS **2/20/2012.**
20. The ceilings in the Beechwood Hall were repaired and painted **(completed 1/24/2012).**
21. Shelving has been installed in the basement to store AmVets items & the BHS Supplies **(completed 1/2012).**
22. Donated used Basement fluorescent lights were installed **(completed 2/16/2012)**
23. Cabinets in the kitchen were re-arranged and painted, the refrigerator was moved to allow more room to work in the kitchen **(completed 4/2012).** *Eventually need to purchase new kitchen stove.*

24. “New” tables were donated to the BHS by members Ruth & Gary Lopez (purchased from the Elks Club) **(completed 3/2012)**.
25. Plumbing in the kitchen and bathrooms updated **(Completed March, 2012)**.
26. New chairs were purchased (50) for the “classroom” **(completed 4/9/2012)**.
27. New plumbing was installed in the bathrooms & kitchen **(completed 4/16/2012)**.
28. Repaired box sills on between the foundation and the building **(Completed April, 2012)**.
29. Cleared out the brush and dead trees on the upper side of the site, sold ~5 cords of firewood from the site. Grubbed the roots, leveled and seeded portions of site **(Completed June, 2012)**.
30. Replica Schoolhouse lights were **installed 5/3/2012** in the main classroom.
31. The Siding/Painting Project for the outside of the BH **commenced 5/21/2012**. The clapboards were scraped, repaired or replaced where needed, primed, and 1<sup>st</sup> coat of paint **(completed 8/29/2012)**. *Still need 2<sup>nd</sup> coat of paint – **Scheduled Summer, 2014***.
32. The internet web design committee developed **a website** for the BHS that is “on-line” as of **6/18/12**.
33. Trees and brush were removed from the yard on the east side of the site & it was seeded & mulched **(completed 6/7/2012)**.
34. Dug up outside water pipes and moved indoors, faucet on building **(completed 7/17/2012)**.
35. Capped the old chimney to prevent any more water & degradation of the inside. **(Completed September, 2012)**
36. Rebuild/repair roof returns **(Completed September, 2012)**
37. The School Bell Tower was replicated and restored to the roof **(Completed July, 2013)**.
38. Additional electrical outlets and kitchen upgrades were made to make the classroom more available for today’s electrical needs **(Completed February, 2013)**.
39. The first set of double windows in the “classroom” were replaced with double-hung energy efficient windows to replicate the original look of the school **(Completed July, 2013)**. *There are 2 more double sets of windows to yet replace and 2 single sets of windows.*
40. The main floor was refinished **(Completed November, 2013)**.
41. Foundation Repairs (Inside): Basement Walls **(Completed Winter 2013-2014)**; Basement Floor with drain tile and new sump pump installed **(Summer, 2013)**.

**Recent Use of the Beechwood Hall as a Community Center 11/14/2011 through 1/5/2013) includes:**

- a. 1<sup>st</sup> Saturday Coffee Socials each month
- b. Chilly Feed for New Furnace – 11/14/2011
- c. Rummage Sale fund-raiser: 12/2011

- d. Program on the "History of Sylvania" held 1/16/2012, presented by Steve Kickert/US Forest Service
- e. Neighborhood Potluck – 1/28/2012
- f. 64<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary Celebration of Mr. & Mrs. Floyd Nordstrom on 2/11/2012
- g. Chili Feed/Game Night: fund-raiser held 2/18/2012
- h. Program on "Making Maple Syrup" held 2/20/2012, presented by BHS member Roger Bofinger
- i. A "Spring Fling" pizza night with games held 3/24/2012
- j. Free movie night 4/13/2012 showing "Young Frankenstein"
- k. Spaghetti dinner held 4/21/2012 to "test" the kitchen after some "updating" & cleaning and a clean bill of health from the Health Dept.
- l. The annual AmVets Pancake Breakfast returned to the Beechwood Hall during the Trout Season opening weekend on 4/28/2012.
- m. A Memorial Service was held for David Tiller (former Beechwood resident) at the BH on 5/21/2012, with 100+ attending.
- n. Memorial Day Ceremony was held once again on 5/28/2012, with 100+ attending.
- o. A Memorial Service was held for Ronnie Nordstrom (former Beechwood resident) on 6/9/2012.
  
- p. Family History Night held 6/11/2012, scanning family pictures from members for future BHS museum references
- q. Rummage Sale held 6/23/2012, continued 6/30/2012
- r. 130<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Beechwood, MI; showed the "More Than Just A Farmer, 1882 - 1982" program originally shown in 1982; held 7/21/2012.
- s. Return of the Beechwood Schoolbell, held 7/28/2012 at the Iron County Museum.
- t. Participated in the Rodeo Day Parade in Iron River, MI, 8/4/2012; 1<sup>st</sup> Place Float for organizations.
- u. Memorial for Beechwood resident Irene Doers held 8/17/2012
- v. AmVets District V meeting held at Beechwood Hall, 9/8/2012
- w. 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Apple Fest held 9/29/2012
- x. Neighborhood Potluck held 10/12/2012
- y. Iron River Township Halloween Party held 10/27/2012 (75+ children plus parents and relatives)
- z. AmVets Post #436 Pancake Hunters Breakfast held 11/10/2012 to raise funds for scholarships (154+ people attended)
- aa. BHS Hunters Chilly Feed held 11/17/2012 (to raise funds for winter propane and electric)
- bb. Holiday Arts and Crafts Show held 12/7/2012

We continue to update the 3-year business plan and budget for restoration activities. ***The Business Plan and 3-year Budget was updated during Special Meetings held in March, 2014.*** If you would like to request a copy, please send an e-mail. Priorities continue to be replacement of the windows in the Beechwood Hall.

### ***The First Historical Exhibit at the Beechwood Hall: Summer, 2012***

This summer, the BHS saw the return of the original School Bell from the Beechwood School. The Bell was at the Iron County Museum in Iron River, MI. [the following information is from an article in the Iron County Reporter ~2008) The Bell was removed by Clarence Bergstrom (a Beechwood carpenter) in the early 1940's. He installed it on a pole in his yard at 540 Smokey Lake Road. Eileen Bergstrom Bentry recalled that her brother, Randy, said he had helped remove it. When the Milton Saxon family moved to Beechwood in 1953, donor Harold Saxon (of Chippewa Falls, WI, who restored and donated the bell to the ICM) recalled seeing and hearing the bell on the Bergstrom property when attending 4-H meetings from 1953 – 1957. Milton Saxon acquired the bell from Clarence Bergstrom before Clarence died in 1958, but he did not install it on a pole on the Saxon property at Lake 17 until the mid-1970's. Harold Saxon recalls working with his dad in preparing the pole to accommodate the bell on a weekend visit with his parents. It was later set in place by Milton and his brother-in-law Ernest Sorby. The Saxon family used the bell often to communicate with members on the lake for meals, etc. Three clangs meant it was time to eat. Continuous ringing

was for emergency only. In 1987, Harold Saxon removed the bell with the help of his nephew, Kris Byczek, because of its history and for sentimentality as he sold the property to his nephew, Ted Rucinski. He then kept the bell in his possession until his donation to the museum.

The BHS received the Bell, on loan, from the ICM during a play on July 28, 2012, called “The Stealing of the Bell”. The BHS is currently in the planning stages to construct a replica of the Bell Tower, ***to be placed back on the roof of the Beechwood Hall before the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration of the Beechwood School.***

A platform near has been constructed near the ceiling in the foyer of the Beechwood Hall and the Bell sits on this “shelf”. Look up and ring the Bell the next time you come to the Beechwood Hall. It is not far from the original location where the Bell rope hung through the ceiling. We are currently working on an information display documenting the history of the Bell. ***This is the first exhibit installed for the Beechwood Historical Society museum!***

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**Our Legal Status:**

- On **01/30/2012**, the BHS received acknowledgement from the IRS that we were considered a Public Charity and were Tax-Exempt under 501(c)(3) of the Tax Code. The BHS was already registered as a Non-Profit Corporation 10/18/2010 by the State of Michigan. **The tax-exemption is effective as of 10/18/2010.**
- The Tax Assessor determined the **Beechwood Hall site is tax-exempt** based on the 501(c)(3) classification by the IRS.

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**Current List of Short-Term Projects Scheduled for 2014-2015 and beyond remaining to complete as funding becomes available: (building & site)**

1. 2<sup>nd</sup> coat of paint outside of building (**Planned for Summer, 2014**)
2. Waterseal the ramps and stair-rails (**Planned for Summer, 2014**)
3. Construct a pavilion (to cover 6 picnic tables) with landscaping and other outside activities (**as funding becomes available**)
4. Replace the bathrooms (handicap accessible)
5. Replace the basement stairs
6. Replace the kitchen
7. Update the septic system (evaluate when the site is metered with the rest of the Iron River Township water system)
8. Continue to replace the windows & front doors – **PRIORITY for fund-raising**
9. Additional 22A gravel in the parking lot (where the old ice rink used to be)
10. Develop exhibits for the Schoolbell, Bell Tower and Beechwood Post Office (**planned for 2014**)

***Come join us as we Preserve Our Past for the Future!***

*Documented by:*

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