

*The History  
of Crystal  
Falls*





- 🌐 Platted in 1881: This marks the formal layout of the town, likely tied to the region's growth during the iron mining boom.
- 🌊 Named for a waterfall: The town's name honors a striking icy waterfall on the Paint River, reflecting the area's scenic charm.
- 📧 Post office since 1882: A sign of stable community development and connection to broader postal routes.

# The Crystal Theater – A Cultural Gem of Crystal Falls

## Historic Performing Arts Center Since 1927

- Originally opened as the EJAY Theatre in 1927
- Restored and reopened in 1991 as the Crystal Theater
- Hosts concerts, plays, and community events year-round
- Known for its exceptional acoustics and historic charm
- Operated by a dedicated local board of directors

“Preserving the past, inspiring the future”



# The "Humongous Fungus" of Crystal Falls

## A Natural Wonder Turned Local Legend

- Discovered in April 1992 near Crystal Falls (Mastodon Township)
- Identified as *Armillaria bulbosa*, a massive underground fungus
- Spans over 30 acres and weighs an estimated 100 tons
- Once believed to be among the oldest and largest living organisms on Earth
- Featured in *Nature* and *The New York Times*
- Inspired the annual Humungous Fungus Fest, celebrating local pride and science



AUGUST 23<sup>rd</sup> & 24<sup>th</sup> 2024

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## Crystal Falls Dam and Power Plant

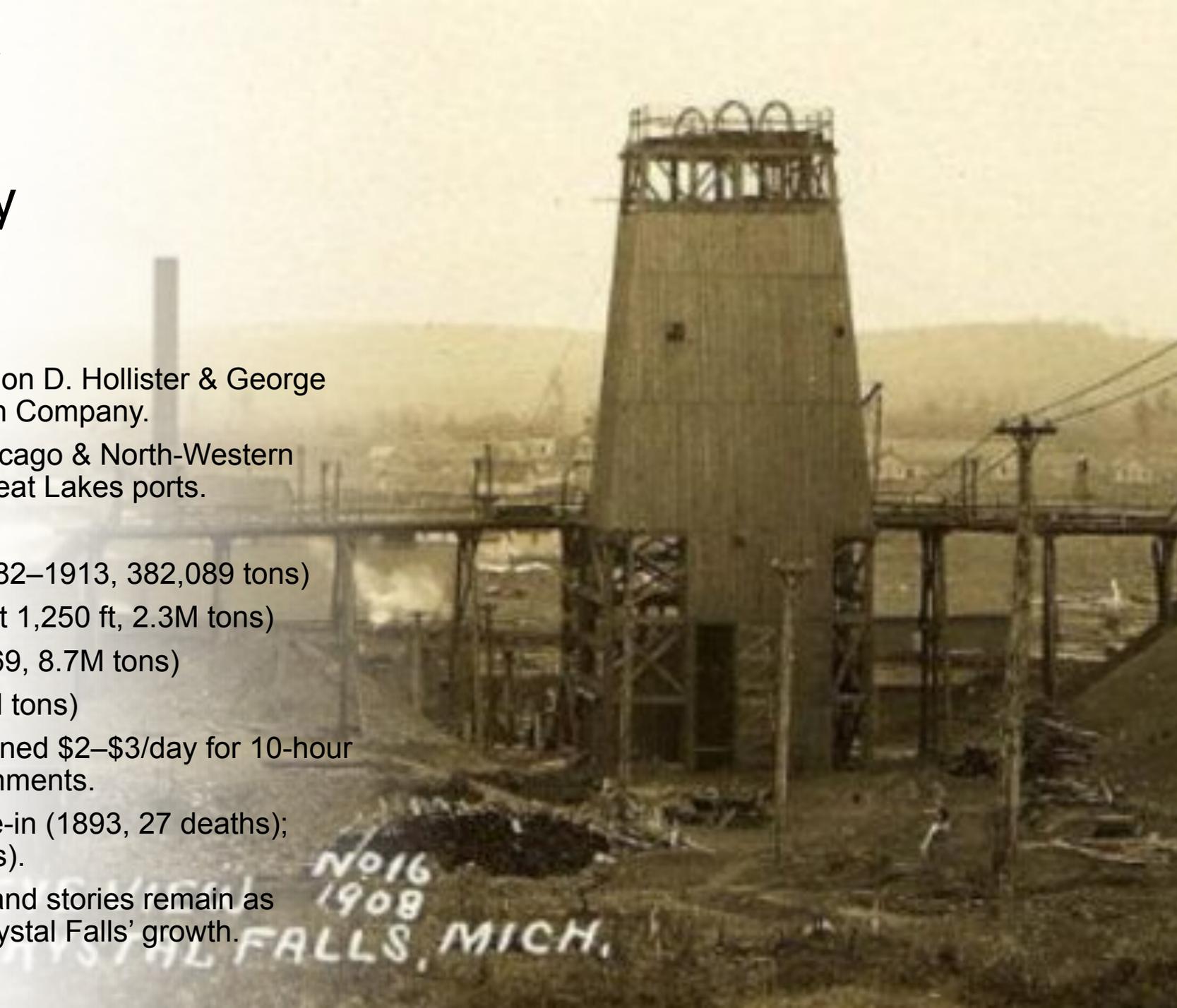
### A Historic Hydroelectric Landmark Since 1891

- First Electrical/Water plant (1890 - 1903) was steam powered located at the Waterworks Pond on the West End of Urban Avenue.
- construction started in 1902–1903, expanded in 1907, with new generators added in 1914 and 1924
- Supplemented by Wisconsin Energy Corporation starting in 1929 due to rising demand
- Major upgrades: 1931 concrete dam with rollway and tainter gates, 1996 spillway resurfacing
- Still operational today, supplying ~1/3 of Crystal Falls' electricity
- Likely the oldest hydroelectric plant still in operation in Michigan's Upper Peninsula

# Iron Mining Legacy of Crystal Falls

## From Ore Discovery to Regional Powerhouse

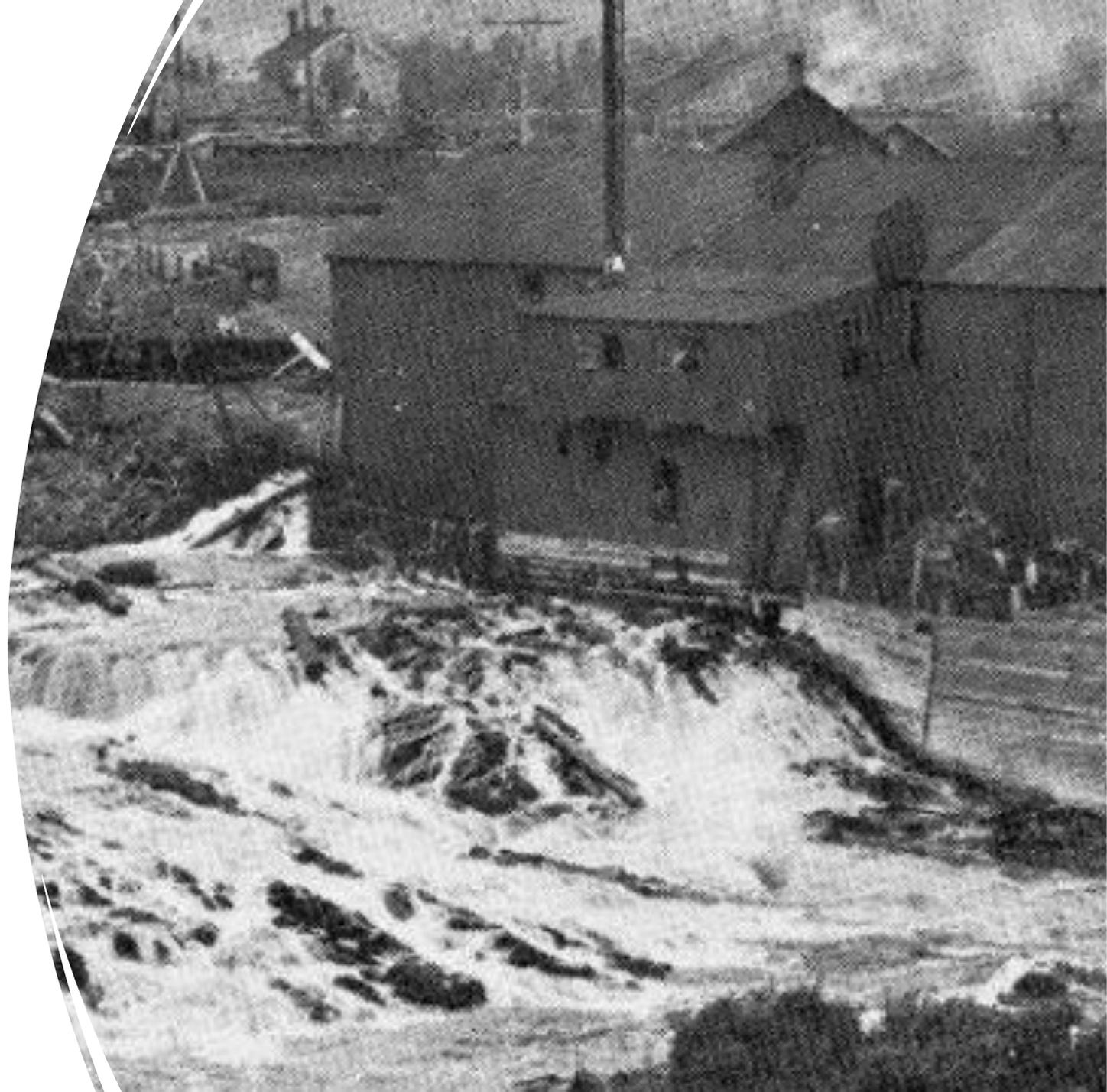
- Early Discovery (1880s): Solomon D. Hollister & George Runkel founded the Crystal Falls Iron Company.
- Railroad Expansion (1882): Chicago & North-Western Railroad enabled ore transport to Great Lakes ports.
- Major Mines:
  - Fairbanks/Paint River Mine (1882–1913, 382,089 tons)
  - Great Western Mine (deepest at 1,250 ft, 2.3M tons)
  - Bristol Mine (last to close in 1969, 8.7M tons)
  - Tobin Mine (1,783 ft deep, 4.6M tons)
- Working Conditions: Miners earned \$2–\$3/day for 10-hour shifts; dangerous and unsafe environments.
- Tragedies: Mansfield Mine cave-in (1893, 27 deaths); Porter Mine cave-in (1918, 16 deaths).
- Legacy: Open pits, stockpiles, and stories remain as reminders of the industry's role in Crystal Falls' growth.



# Logging in Crystal Falls: From Rivers to Highways

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- Logging has been part of Crystal Falls since its earliest settlement.
- Rivers like the Paint, Net, Fence, Brule, Deer, Hemlock, and Michigamme served as timber highways.
- In the early 1900s, horse-drawn sleighs hauled logs to riverbanks.
- “Log sailors” risked their lives driving logs downstream to sawmills.
- Modern trucks now transport tons of timber daily to paper and sawmills in nearby towns.



# Iron County Courthouse – Crystal Falls, Michigan

- Built in 1890, designed with castle-like architecture.
- Stands at the head of Superior Avenue, overlooking the city and valley.
- Tower balcony offers views as far as Iron Mountain (20 miles away).
- Praised in 1891 as “to the Queen’s taste” and “the finest building Northwest of Milwaukee or Detroit.”
- Added to the National Register of Historic Places in February 1975 – the first site in Iron County to receive this honor.



# The Stealing of the Iron County Courthouse

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- Iron County formed (1885): Iron River named temporary county seat; Crystal Falls wanted the title.
- Legendary theft:
  - After a poker game at the Boyington Hotel, Frank Scadden & Bert Hughitt slipped away.
  - Treasurer Hughitt cleared the safe of county records, loaded them on a sled, and sent them by rail to Stager.
  - Records hidden—stories say in hollow pine trees or the Mastodon Mine.
  - Election of 1888: Crystal Falls won by five votes amid tales of ballot tampering and imported lumberjacks.
  - Final resolution (1889): Electors voted to keep the seat in Crystal Falls (1,142 to 1,050).
  - Courthouse built (1890–1891): Designed by J.C. Clancy in Romanesque Revival style; cost about \$40,000.
  - Tower features: Statues of Law, Mercy, and Justice; Howard Company clock with four faces; huge bell heard 4 miles away.





**Charles W,  
Kubicek, 1931-July 27<sup>th</sup>,  
1950**

**Was the first resident of Crystal Falls to become a fatality in the Korean War  
Company "I" 29<sup>th</sup> infantry Regiment  
High school graduate class of 1949**

**\*Three months after graduation he enlisted in the army**

**\* Basic training: Fort Riley Kansas he then went to Camp Carson in Colorado before returning home on furlough**

**\* After furlough he went to California where he received his overseas assignment**

**He was shipped to Okinawa and then to Korea.**

**He is buried in the Evergreen Memorial Cemetery, Crystal falls, MI**

**Block 2C lot 150**



# The Nylund–Bregger Shooting Case (1922–1924)



- **Incident (Sept. 1922):**

- Edward J. Bregger (theatre owner) shot by Alfred Nylund (baker) during quarrel over oven.
- Wound not fatal; Nylund claimed self-defense.

- **Trial (May 1923):**

- Charge: Attempted murder.
- Jury deliberated only 15 minutes → Acquittal (18–0 vote).
- Case highlighted disputes over oven ownership and prior agreements.

- **Aftermath:**

- Civil suit filed by Bregger for damages (\$10,000).
- Nylund's reputation defended by character witnesses.

- **Legacy (1924):**

- Alfred Nylund died suddenly of pneumonia at age 54.
- Remembered as long-time Crystal Falls baker, proprietor of Star Bakery.

# A.W. Graves: From Tragedy to Talent

- The Crime (1893):**

- Graves, a one-armed painter, shot saloonkeeper Frank Schobalske after a quarrel.

- Convicted of manslaughter → sentenced to 15 years at Jackson Prison.

- Artistic Talent in Prison (1894–1897):**

- Painted landscapes, including Marquette Reformatory.

- Wrote humorous letters published in *Diamond Drill*.

- Invented mechanical “moving paintings” (marine scene with waves, steamer, lighthouse).

- Public Reception:**

- Works praised as “masterpieces” combining art and invention.

- Seen as evidence of creativity despite troubled past.

- Later Troubles (1902):**

- Accused of perjury after concealing prison record during theft case testimony.

- Pardoned earlier by Gov. Pingree, but reputation remained complicated.



# August "Brownie" Zdravecky: Carnival Creator of Crystal Falls

## •Early Life & Work:

- Born 1908 in Crystal Falls, MI.
- Worked as a miner at the Book Mine until retirement in 1958.
- Married Gladys McRae in 1946.

## •The Carnival Machine (1970s):

- Built a miniature carnival with carousel, Ferris wheel, chair swing, monkeys, and horses.
- Powered by salvaged motors, worm gears, and decorated with mirrors, lights, and fabric.
- Included taped carnival music → immersive experience for visitors.
- Invested 1,000+ hours and \$500; refused offers of \$5,000.

## •Community Impact:

- Displayed year-round at his home; delighted neighborhood children.
- Donated crafts and artifacts to the Crystal Falls Museum Society.
- Known for generosity, humor, and creativity.

## •Legacy:

- Passed away in 1992 at age 84.
- Remembered as kind-hearted, inventive, and deeply connected to family and community.
- Tribute from niece emphasized his joy in sharing talents and creating memories.



# Dick Mettlach Sr. Field Dedication – 2000

## •Event (Aug. 26, 2000):

- Forest Park Athletic Field renamed *Dick Mettlach Sr. Field*.
- Dedication held during Trojans' season opener vs. Wakefield Cardinals.
- New scoreboard and sign unveiled.

## •Honors & Banquet:

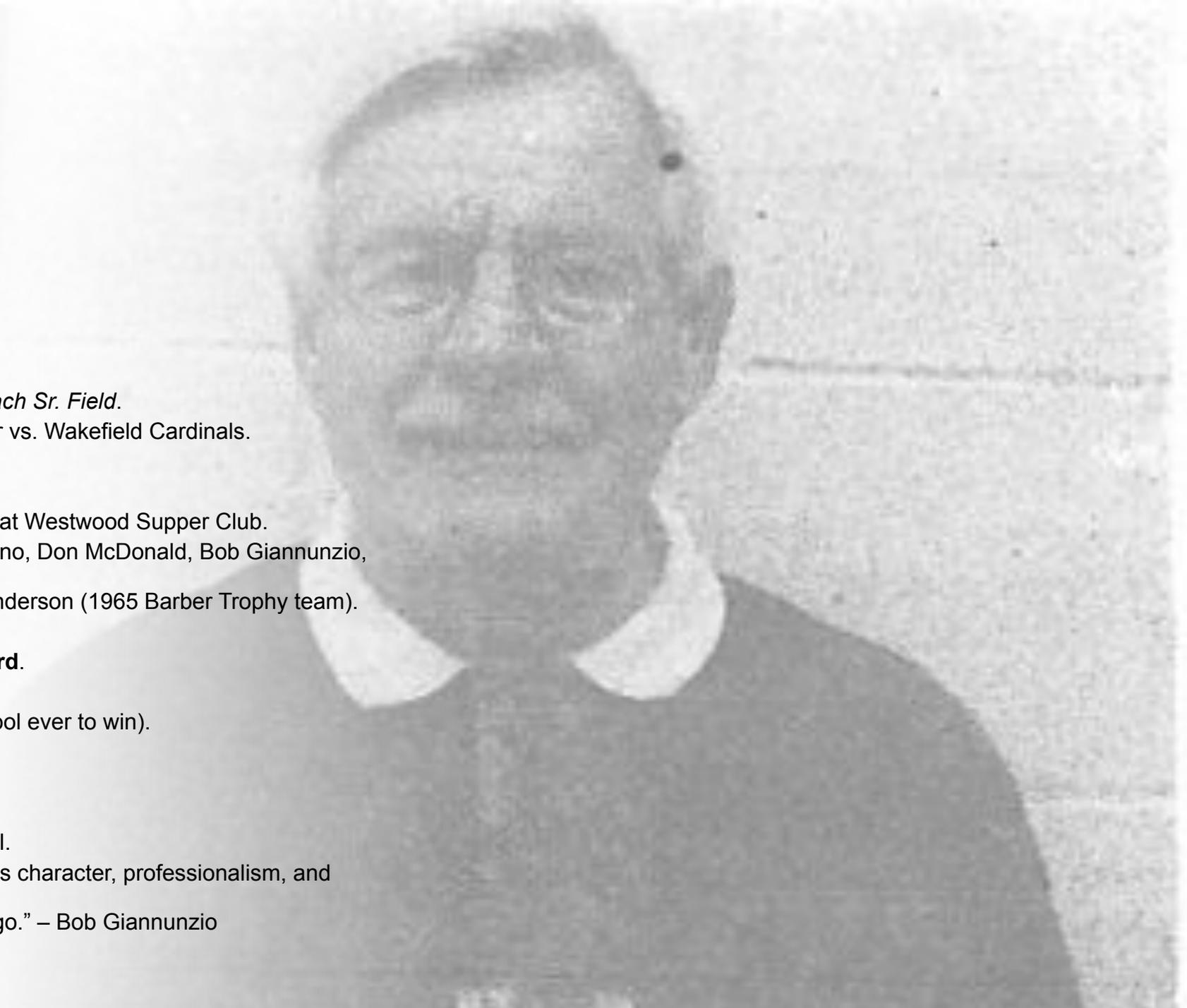
- Social mixer, halftime ceremony, and banquet at Westwood Supper Club.
- Speakers included Gildo Canale, Rudy Valesano, Don McDonald, Bob Giannunzio, Pat Gallinaugh, and former players.
- Roast conducted by Duane Williams & Alan Anderson (1965 Barber Trophy team).

## •Coaching Legacy:

- Head coach from 1956–1990: **238–74–6 record**.
- 19-game winning streak (1957–59).
- 1965 Barber Trophy champions (smallest school ever to win).
- State titles: 1975 & 1976 (Class D).
- Runners-up: 1977, 1978, 1981, 1984.

## •Community Impact:

- Praised as a mentor, strategist, and role model.
- Former players and colleagues emphasized his character, professionalism, and ability to inspire.
- “It was Dick Mettlach Field a long, long time ago.” – Bob Giannunzio



# Crystal Falls Tourist Booth – A Moving Landmark

## •Origins (1932):

- First tourist booth: small white log cabin in front of Post Office.
- Served growing tourist trade in Crystal Falls.

## •WPA Project (1941–42):

- Cedar log structure built at Runkle Lake Park under Nick Mannisto.
- Moved to Fifth Street & Superior Avenue (Odd Fellows lot).
- Opened in 1942 with rustic furnishings and scenic photo displays.

## •Features & Additions:

- Fish pond (1954) with native brook trout, stonework by Gabriel Dallagassa.
- Large rustic directory sign (1958) listing local resorts and cabins.
- Popular attraction for visitors; managed by Chamber of Commerce.

## •Later Years:

- Tourist Booth was moved (1973) from N. Fifth Street to the property of a friend of Gloria Chervo South of the Village of Michigamme.
- Moved to Michigamme country farm property.
- Remembered as a community hub for welcoming tourists.



# Chief John Edwards & Pentoga – Ojibwa Leaders of Chicaugon Lake

- Background:**

- John Edwards, born April 1834 in Michigan.
- Leader of the Lac Vieux Desert band of the Chippewa (Ojibwa).
- Married Pentoga in 1865; she later became blind from cataracts.

- Village at Chicaugon Lake:**

- Edwards and Pentoga led the local Ojibwa community.
- Tribe traded venison, blueberries, moccasins, fish, and furs with Crystal Falls and Iron River settlers.
- Village abandoned in 1891 when Edwards sold the land.

- Pentoga Park Connection:**

- Land sold for \$200 in 1891; later became Pentoga Park.
- Park developed as a memorial to the Ojibwa and their heritage.

- Death & Legacy:**

- Edwards died in March 1914, remembered as the oldest member of the Lac Vieux Desert band.
- Both Edwards and Pentoga buried at Lac Vieux Desert.
- 1922: Indian Cemetery at Pentoga Park rededicated with ceremonies honoring Ojibwa traditions.



Chief Edwards and his wife Pentoga in 1898. Other unidentified.

# The Lonely Grave – Edmond Fitzsimmons (1886)

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## •Identity:

- Edmond Fitzsimmons, saloon owner in early Crystal Falls.
- Died young at age 29 on **Feb. 27, 1886**.
- Survived by wife, Laura Fitzsimmons.

## •The Monument:

- Elaborate sandstone carving: fence around a tree trunk.
- Decorated with squirrels, birds, and leaves.
- Inscription: *“Edmond Fitzsimmons, Husband of Laura Fitzsimmons.”*
- Considered one of the most elegant grave markers of its time.

## •Cemetery Context:

- Grave located in original Crystal Falls burial grounds (Kimball Location).
- Cemetery moved in 1887 due to surveying error and desecration by grazing animals.
- Most graves relocated, but Fitzsimmons’ remained.

## •Legacy & Lore:

- Rumors claimed he ran a saloon and possibly a house of ill-repute.
- Some stories suggested employees funded the monument, but records show Laura remained faithful into the 1920s.
- Monument vandalized over time; carvings of animals destroyed by children’s slingshots.
- Still stands as a curiosity and reminder of Crystal Falls’ early days.



# Christ United Methodist Church – Crystal Falls History

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M. E. Church,  
Crystal Falls,  
Michigan.

## •Origins (1884–1887):

- Began as a Presbyterian congregation in 1884.
- Organized as Methodist Episcopal Church in 1887 under Rev. F.O. Jones.

## •First Building (1888):

- Constructed at Fifth & Marquette.
- Audience room seated 150; lecture room seated 60.
- Tower stood 40 feet high.

## •Disasters & Rebuilding:

- 1894: Fire gutted the church, only organ and chairs saved.
- 1895: New church dedicated June 30.
- 1924: Lightning struck steeple → remodeled in 1925, steeple lowered.

## •Modern Era:

- 1966: New church built caddy-corner on Mathews Lot; dedicated July 24.
- 1967: Old church demolished.
- 1980: New parsonage built by Forest Park trades class.
- 1991: Fire damaged Christ United Methodist Church; rededicated Nov. 10 after renovations.

## •Legacy:

- Known as Christ United Methodist Church since 1968 (after Methodist–Evangelical United Brethren merger).
- Continues as a monument to perseverance, faith, and community service.

# Crystal Falls Hospital: A Century of Care (1900–2000)

## •Early Beginnings (1900–1939):

- First hospital established in 1900 at top of Main Street.
- Operated by Dr. H.H. Haight until 1939.
- City voters approved \$85,000 bond in 1938 to build a new municipal hospital.

## •Crystal Falls Community Hospital (1940–1996):

- Opened Jan. 7, 1940 with 17 beds.
- Room rates: \$7 (private), \$4.50 (semi-private), \$3.50 (ward).
- Expanded in 1971 with new addition.
- Faced rising costs and financial strain over decades.

## •Consolidation & Closure (1996–2000):

- Merged with Iron County General Hospital to form ICCH in 1996.
- Crystal Falls campus closed Jan. 14, 2000 at 7 a.m.
- Services moved to Iron River; some outpatient services remained.

## •Legacy & Future Plans:

- Falls Clinic continues operations behind former hospital.
- ICCH plans to convert hospital into a nursing home and connect it to the clinic.
- Community remembers the hospital as a vital institution for 100 years.





# 325 Superior Avenue – The Eccel Building Legacy

## •Early History (Pre-1921):

- Originally the site of the Johnson Boarding House.
- Survived a major fire in 1912 that destroyed the adjacent Gress Saloon.

## •Eccel Shoe Repair Era (1921–1963):

- Operated by Tony Eccel, an Austrian immigrant who arrived in 1906.
- Served the community for over 55 years.
- Tony passed away in 1965; Tillie Eccel continued living locally until 1973.

## •Stoor Electric & Service (1946–1975):

- Lud Stoor opened appliance and electrical supply business post-WWII.
- Harold Enstrom added watch repair in 1946.
- Major renovations in 1959 expanded Stoor's display space.

## •Later Businesses (1976–2004):

- Hosted Borgesmord Gifts, Christian's Bookstore, Hogan Shop, JP Resale, Alda's Goody Shoppe.
- Magnum Video opened in 2000.
- Northwoods Photography launched in 2001, offering portraits and photo restoration.

## •Building Renovation (1990s–2000s):

- Randy Hegstrom modernized the structure with new storefront and apartments.
- Continued as a hub for small businesses and creative ventures.