
The Historical Society of Michigan

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Editor's Note: Photo available. Contact HSM at the phone number or e-mail address above.

Mitchell Wins Prestigious UP History Award

East Lansing MI: An Iron Mountain history activist, the late Donnell R. Mitchell, was awarded the Charles Follo History Award at the 55th Annual Upper Peninsula History Conference held June 18-20.

The Historical Society of Michigan presents the Follo Award each year to an individual who has made an outstanding contribution to the preservation and promotion of Upper Peninsula history. It was established in 1979 to honor the memory of Charles Follo, an Escanaba schoolteacher who promoted and helped advance historical understanding of Michigan's U.P.

Donnell R. Mitchell passed away on December 23, 2003 at the age of 79. He was president of the Menominee Range Historical Foundation Board of Governors at the time of his death and was a long-time proponent of area history.

Mitchell's concern for the history of the Menominee Iron Range, encompassing Dickinson, Florence and Iron Counties, began around 1960. Along with others, he became active in preservation of the range's history as its long years of producing iron ore came to an end. He helped acquire the first historical artifacts for the Menominee Range Historical Foundation Museum and played a critical role in the Foundation's establishment in 1970.

He worked closely with Bob and Albert Hoyle to transfer the historic Carnegie library in Iron Mountain to the Foundation to establish a museum. The library was subsequently listed on the Michigan register of historic sites in 1977. Andrew Carnegie visited the area several times, visiting with friends Henry Ford and Edward Kingsford and paid for the construction of Iron Mountain's library with his own \$15,000 personal check.

For nearly a year Mitchell and others worked to renovate the library, including the installation of over 100 exhibits. He also played a critical role in acquiring Iron Mountain's large Cornish Pumping Engine and raising funds to house and maintain it in a separate museum. The Pump was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980.

“The Follo Award is the highest recognition given to a leader in UP history by the Historical Society of Michigan” according to the Society’s executive director Larry Wagenaar. “Mr. Mitchell, through a lifetime of achievement, exemplifies how critical the commitment of one person can be to advancing Michigan’s history.”

The Charles Follo Award is presented each year at the Historical Society of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula History Conference. Territorial governor Lewis Cass and Henry Schoolcraft, who explored and wrote about the UP, founded the Society in 1828.

During the State History Conference, to be held in St. Joseph October 15-17, the Society will present its annual State History Awards of Merit. For more information on the Society’s awards visit www.hsmichigan.org or call (517) 324-1828.