

CHRONOLOGICAL AND STATISTICAL SUMMARY OF THE JESSE BESSER MUSEUM (DECEMBER, 1996)

In 1962, Jesse Besser, Fred Trelfa, and Dr. Russell H. Wilson formed a non-profit corporation known as the Alpena Museum Association, Inc.. This Association planned and directed the building of the present structure, which opened to the public in May, 1966. From then until 1970, the Museum was an integral part of the Alpena Community College/Alpena Public school system. In 1970, the Association and the Alpena School District drew up a formal lease agreement outlining the responsibilities concerning maintenance and care of the Museum. A new revised agreement was signed in 1978, which delineated the responsibilities of both the Museum and the District. In 1982, the Museum's Board of Directors and the newly elected Trustees of Alpena Community College met and agreed that each body accept part of the responsibility for operating the Jesse Besser Museum. Signed in June 1982, the lease between the Museum and the College outlined ownership of the land, buildings, and other exterior artifacts; maintenance; insurance responsibilities; and similar matters. Following two years of considered discussion, in September, 1992, the Alpena Community College Trustees transferred the Museum buildings and grounds to the Jesse Besser Museum. (In June 1974, the Museum Board changed its legal name from the Alpena Museum Association, Inc. to the Jesse Besser Museum).

Since the formal dedication of the Museum building in May, 1966, other structures have been added to the Museum grounds: a homesteader's line cabin from the mid-1860s (added May, 1971); the Maltz Exchange Bank of 1872 (added April, 1972); and the McKay Cabin, a log house built in the early 1890s (moved to the site in June 1973). In 1979, an outhouse was added and like all other buildings, this addition has been restored.

In 1981, with considerable assistance from numerous businesses, service organizations, and private contributors, a one room school house (built in 1895) was moved eighteen miles to the Museum. Now fully restored, the Green School is heated and used during all seasons by school classes coming to spend a day doing the assignments, singing the songs, and playing the games their great-grandparents did at the turn of the century. (A second outhouse was moved and placed near the Green School in 1983).

In September, 1990, a circa 1912 building, the Spratt Methodist Church, was moved more than twenty-two miles to the Museum grounds and is being restored. Like the other building restorations, the funds for the Spratt Church restoration are separate from Museum operating expenses. Moneys used for the Spratt Church restoration project have included funds from a "radiothon" in May, 1988; an Out State Equity Grant; memorials and generous donations; and a Mich-Con Foundation grant which provided for the employment of two vocational high school graduates to do additional restoration work on the Church interior.

Also located on the Museum grounds is a sculptured fountain by Glen Michaels. The fountain was installed in June, 1979 as a major piece for Alpena's Bicentennial Bi-path (Bicentennial Bicycle Pathway) project. The six foot tall bronze fountain was funded by grants from the Jesse Besser Fund. Inc. and the Michigan Council for the Arts as well as local businesses and individual contributions. The City of Alpena employees assist in the annual maintenance procedures for the fountain.

Located on the southwest corner of the grounds is a 50-caliber "anti-aircraft" naval deck gun. The breech mount for this type of weapon was made by the Besser Company employees during World War II. The United States Department of Navy donated the piece on October 25, 1978, for exhibit purposes.

All land leases, building contracts, and the like pertaining to the Museum are agreed to by the Board of Directors of the Jesse Besser Museum. The Museum Board of Directors is the policy-making body of the Museum. In the past thirty-five years the Museum Board membership has increased from three to a maximum of seventeen members. The current fifteen members of the Board are elected from a corporation of fifty-three, whose membership reflects the ethnic, social, political, and economic strata of northeastern Michigan. The Director of the Jesse Besser Museum is the executive administrator of the Museum. Appointed in 1966. Cliff Roberts was the Museum's first acting director: John Murphy served the next five years. From spring 1971 to spring 1974, Peter Cook was Director. The present Director, Dennis R. Bodem, began September 9, 1974.

The present staff consists of four permanent full-time employees (Executive Director, Chief of Resources, Administrative Assistant Secretary, and Maintenance Aide); seven permanent part-time employees (Bookkeeper, Planetarium Coordinator, Registrar, librarian, Receptionist/Typist, Curatorial Aide, Maintenance Chief) two Green Thumb contracted employees and two or more Alpena Job Opportunity employees. At times, there have been as many as ten additional full-time employees (32-40 hours per week) under federally funded programs such as CETA, Work Study, Green Thumb, WIN, Alpena Community College Work-study programs and Neighborhood Youth programs. Additionally, since 1984, the Museum staff has had programs providing employment each summer for up to two student employees. One intern program, the "Dr. Russell H. Wilson Intern" program, is funded privately. The second program has been funded by the Mich/Con Foundation.

This staff, augmented by contractual employees (mostly art instructors), and hundreds of volunteers from such organizations as the Founders Society of the Jesse Besser Museum, the Alpena Volunteer Center, and similar organizations work together to provide the exhibits, programs, seminars, classes and special events at the Museum. Each year approximately 29,000 visitors come to the Museum to view both the permanent as well as the continuously changing exhibits, take classes, or, in the case of school groups, learn from volunteer guides. The accredited Jesse Besser Museum exists because of the generous help and support of many.

The Besser Foundation is the major funding source for the Museum's paid staff, its maintenance, and its programs. The Museum's audited general operating expenses for the fiscal year 1996 (October 1, 1995 - September 30, 1996) were \$412,347.00* (depreciation is not included in this figure). To help meet this, the Besser Foundation, since 1979, had donated \$120,000 annually. Beginning in 1991, the Foundation has made periodic increases; and for fy 1997 is budgeted to provide \$185,642 (including \$25,142 for a paved parking lot). The remaining income budget includes fees for classes and workshops, gifts from the Founders Society of the Jesse Besser Museum, some governmental and private foundation grants, and the special gifts and donations from private businesses and individuals. Additionally, local businesses and organizations, service clubs, professional groups, and social clubs annually sponsor receptions and provide considerable cash and numerous in-kind services that are not formally entered in the budget. Such amounts are considerable.

As of December 31, 1996, the Jesse Besser Museum's permanent collections had an insured value of \$1,205,831.00 (exhibit material items are covered separately under a general policy); there is more than a \$2,500,000.00 replacement value on the Museum buildings.

At its annual meeting held on June 16, 1988, the members of the Jesse Besser Museum adopted the following revised mission statement:

The Jesse Besser Museum is a regional museum of art, history, and science offering cultural opportunities to all living in Alpena and the fifteen county area of northeast Michigan. It is a living and learning museum for the purpose of preserving, studying, teaching, and exhibiting artistic, historical, scientific and technological collections and/or objects to the public. In addition, special educational programs and events and changing exhibits are developed and presented for the educational enrichment of adults and children of all ages.

The Museum Board members and staff alike welcome the opportunity to fulfill this mission in the 1990s and into the next century.

* For the fy 1996 year, the Jesse Besser Museum had water damage expenses of \$143,343.00 which were reimbursed by insurance directly to the Jesse Besser Museum. Significant payments were also paid separately to other businesses providing services and materials.