

# Quincy Mining Company Landscape in Keweenaw National Historical Park

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The 102nd Congress established Keweenaw National Historical Park, Michigan, to preserve and interpret cultural resources “that relate to the story of copper on the Keweenaw Peninsula” (P.L. 102-543). The park is comprised of two units, the Quincy and Calumet units, created around two National Historic Landmark districts. Because the National Park Service does not currently own any property in either unit, the staff work with a cadre of private and public entities to accomplish its mandates.

At the Quincy Unit of the park, the Quincy Mine Hoist Association, Inc. has led preservation and interpretation efforts since its incorporation as a non-profit organization in 1961. The association has managed not only to stabilize and restore several of the primary buildings at the mine location, but to have even developed extensive interpretation including underground tours. The Quincy Mine Hoist Association, Inc. has won the *Award for Historical Excellence* from the American Society of Mechanical Engineers and the *Award of Merit* from the American Association for State and Local History for its interpretive efforts.

Down the hill in the Quincy Unit, the Quincy Smelting Works does not have, as yet, a preservation benefactor. Although still retaining a high degree of historic integrity, the poor condition of structures on the site unmistakably reflects the need for stabilization efforts in the near future.

On Quincy Hill, the landscape of the Quincy Mine Location stands seemingly ready to recommence mining operations. The cultural landscape of industrial mining dates back to 1846, just four years after the opening up of the “copper country” by treaty to European-American settlement. No other landscape better conveys the methods and materials used to extract copper, the district’s primary resource. The largest steam hoist engine in the world, locomotives of the Quincy & Torch Lake Railroad, ore cars, man cars, and various industrial buildings are important components of a cultural landscape that has witnessed little material change since the first quarter of the 20th century.

The evolution of the landscape on Quincy Hill spans the 126 years following the company’s 1846 establishment. Also known as “Old Reliable,” the Quincy Mining Company was formed at the dawn of American copper mining in the district. The most formidable industrial structures at Quincy Mine Location date from the late-19th and early-20th centuries.

The cultural landscape of mining operations at the Pewabic Lode begins as you ascend Quincy Hill on US-41, which bisects the southern portion of the location. Substantial ruins and other archaeological remains line both sides of the highway; company houses as well as the primary administrative buildings dominate the west side of the highway. The No. 2 shaft-rockhouse stands tall atop Quincy Hill and can be seen for miles around. Together with the soaring idler stand draped with heavy steel cable, the 1894 hoist house, and the 1917 hoist house, these prominent structures comprise the most important mining-related ensemble at the location. Other massive sandstone and brick structures, including the bath house, the machine shop, and the blacksmith shop, are interspersed among 1,200 acres of lightly vegetated open spaces. These structures once bustled with around-the-clock activity at the longest lasting copper mine in the district.

The relationship of the Quincy Mine Location to the Smelting Works is especially striking because of the dramatic 600 foot descent from the location to the smelter. The counter-weighted tram that once carried supplies, ore, and men has been partially reconstructed as a cog rail tram for the purpose of transporting visitors to an underground tour. Enroute the tram provides a commanding view of the historic City of Houghton, the waterway, and the undulating Northwoods interspersed by angular fields of small farms. The ultimate destination of the tram is a historic adit, a horizontal tunnel that intersects the 1860-era diggings on the seventh level of the mine, halfway down the hill to the smelting works. The adit also drains water from the mine and is used for technical mining education purposes by Michigan Technological University.

Housing and community services at the Quincy Mining Company site have also left their mark on the landscape. Near the cooling ponds and the 1917 hoist house, a representative company-built saltbox style house for workers and their families remains in stable condition. Near-identical worker housing, which stood next to and across the street from the surviving house, are gone. On the northwest side of US-41, many early company-built houses also exist. However, many are abandoned and are at considerable risk of collapse due to snow load, vandalism, or structural failure due to water infiltration. Additional housing built by the Quincy Mining Company or by the neighboring mines, which Quincy later acquired, exist beyond view from the core industrial area.

The Quincy Mining Company Smelting Works was built on the north shore of Portage Lake, now the southernmost portion of Keweenaw National Historical Park. Begun in 1898, the industrial complex exemplifies the industrial landscape of a turn-of-the-century smelting works. Amazingly, the Quincy Mining Company Smelting Works is the last surviving 19th-century copper smelting works still standing any were in the world.

From the iridescent black slag pile, connected by rail to the tightly knit cluster of industrial buildings at second and third floors, to the canal-side courtyard with piers from which copper ingots were once shipped to market, the smelting works retain remarkable historic integrity. The elevated rails, rail cars, and slag piles in relation to the industrial buildings continue to strongly suggest the complicated interaction of operation within the smelting works complex. Even many tools have survive *in situ*; giant ladles stand ready to once again pour molten copper into ingot molds. However, this resource is at risk. At present, the structural remains have been left to deteriorate. Severely damaged windows and roofs permit rain and snow to enter undermining the structural soundness of this historically important resource.

In 1860, the Quincy Mining company contracted out smelting to the Lake Superior Smelting Company, which was also located along Portage Lake. As the Quincy Mining Company prospered and expanded, the need for their own smelter became apparent. The initial action towards fulfilling this need was consultation with James Cooper in 1892, well known for his skills in smelting operations management. Five years later, in 1897, the Quincy Smelting Works was finally contracted to be designed and built. With a smelter of its own, the Quincy Mining Company could process copper ore at a considerably lower cost.

The copper ore mined from the top of the hill, where the Quincy mine hoist and shafthouse are located, was first transported to the stamp mill located on Torch Lake at Mason. The stamp mill was located so distant from the mine and the smelting works because of the availability of water needed for the stamp milling process and the ability to dump waste sand into Torch Lake, rather than into the narrow and heavily trafficked Portage Lake, which by the smelting works is shaped and was used like a busy canal. After the material was run through the stamp mill, it was hauled by railroad to the smelting works located on Portage Lake (Keweenaw Waterway).

The placement of buildings and tools at the smelting works correlates directly to the processes that copper refining required at the turn of the century. The ore was unloaded in the mineral house, which has a ramp leading to the second story where the railroad cars could easily be unloaded into the bins located on the first story of the building. The material was then sent to the furnace, resulting in a “matte” that contained 60-62% copper. A converter process then refined the solution to 99% pure copper. During these preliminary processes, limestone was added to the molten copper as flux in order to precipitate out the impurities, which could then be skimmed off the top of the molten copper. This “blister copper” was then sent to the refining furnace where a process called “rabbling” was used. After skimming off the remaining impurities, the copper was cast into ingots.

In 1931, low copper prices lead to the closure—but not the dissolution—of the Quincy Mining Company. Reopening in 1940 for war efforts, the smelting works was closed permanently in 1972.

The Quincy Smelting Works remains as integral a part of the Quincy National Historic Landmark and Keweenaw National Historical Park as it was to the longevity and success of the Quincy Mining Company. Certainly, the Smelting Works' arrangement around port and rail, its setting at the foot of Quincy Hill and dominance along the waterway, speak of an extremely valuable cultural resource, one that deserves a concerted preservation and interpretation effort. An informal consortium of local governments, the Quincy Mine Hoist Association, Inc., interested private parties, and Keweenaw National Historical Park is currently engaged in planning for the adaptive reuse of the Quincy Smelting Works.

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*Edward Yarbrough is writing the Historic Resource Study for Keweenaw National Historical Park.*