

The city of Bessemer was founded in 1887, as one of the first towns created in the Western Upper Peninsula, after the discovery of iron ore. The Bessemer Herald is the oldest newspaper in our area, running from 1894 all the way through 1970, when it became the Pick & Axe. The Bessemer Area Historical Society owns paper copies of the newspaper, but they are in extremely poor condition. Fortunately, they were put on microfilm, though the Historical Society does not have a reader. Portions of the paper were digitized in the Google Newspapers project, but a large part was not completed, and until this grant project was begun, we weren't aware that any of it was previously digitized. In this project, we are looking to fill in the gaps between the microfilm and Google News to create as complete a picture of our area's history as possible.

Our region's economy was based on iron mining and logging. Much of the first-hand information about these industries and their impact on the community are contained in this newspaper. Immigrants from around the world came to this area for work and their descendants can learn about many details of their lives from these newspapers. From the obituaries to the social pages to city council proceedings to the grocery store ads, these newspapers are filled with valuable information about our area throughout the decades that would be wonderful to have become accessible.

Access to this collection has been very challenging for my library and the community for several years, so having the entirety of this newspaper collection available to the public online would be an amazing asset for my library. We are often asked in my library to use this newspaper for family research and have not been able to help them. Now that we know that much of it is available to us already, we will be able to assist people in their research. Having the nearly complete run of the paper accessible would be extremely meaningful for many people here and elsewhere, since they wouldn't have to access it in person.

We are in the early stages of combining the Bessemer Area Historical Society's collections into the library and city hall spaces (the library is located inside the city hall building). An aging Historical Society board and financial difficulties in maintaining a building are making changes more apparent. There are many decisions to be made in the future as to how this will work, but the purpose of the Historical Society lives on: to promote and preserve the history of the Bessemer area. One of our biggest challenges and goals is to digitize as much of the paper collections as possible in order to save on space needs and increase the accessibility of historic artifacts. This grant project would serve this goal to a great extent. The Bessemer Herald is one of the main components of the Historical Society's collection. Having it online and publicly available is key to promoting and preserving the history of the Bessemer area.