

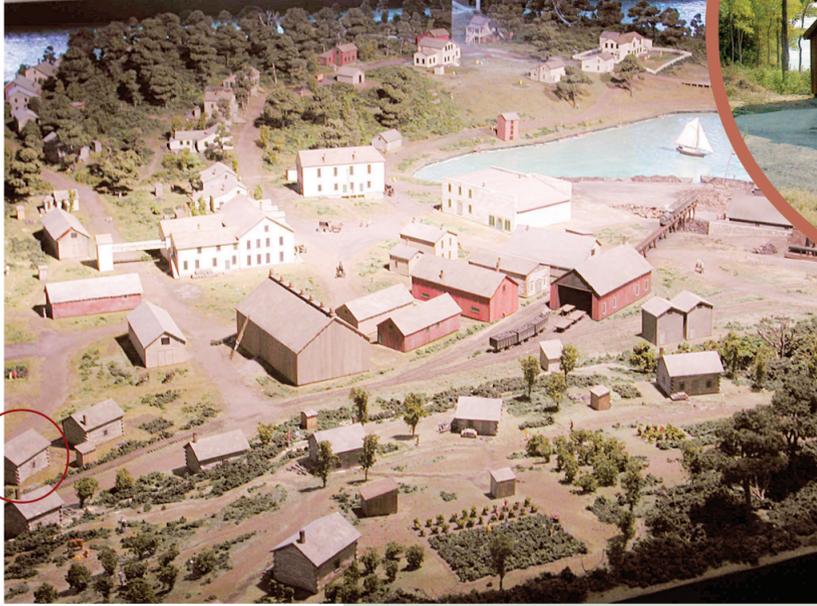
Michigan *TimeTraveler*

An educational supplement produced by Lansing Newspapers In Education, Inc. and the Michigan Historical Center

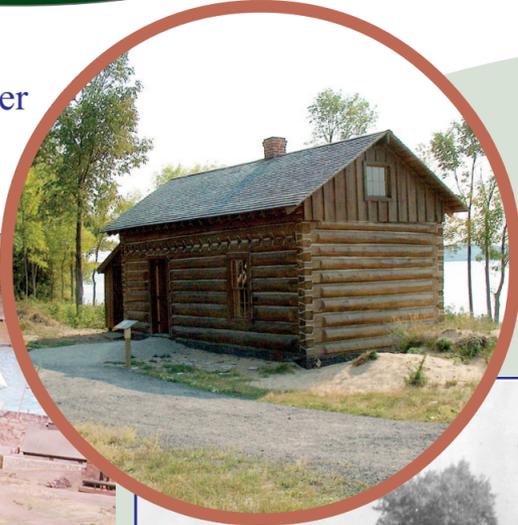
Where Working Families Lived

KID'S History

Today's Time Traveler visits Fayette in the Upper Peninsula, where a special team of people have finished reconstructing a laborer's house.



This is a model of Fayette including the laborer's house.



This is the newly reconstructed laborer's house at Fayette. It is filled with artifacts and open to the public. (Photo by Chris Dancisak)

This photo of log buildings at Fayette was used with information from the excavation to design the cabin reconstruction. (Michigan Historical Center)



Reconstructing History

Fayette was an iron-smelting town from 1867 to 1891. Today it is a historic site where many structures, including homes, furnaces, offices and a hotel, still survive. But one kind of building had disappeared from the site—the log homes of the laborers who lived in the town.

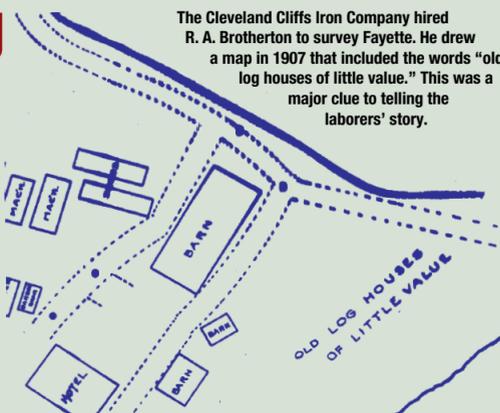
To tell the story of these important people, archaeologists, historical architects, historians and exhibit designers have reconstructed a log house.

The team used their specific expertise and perspective to examine five specific kinds of evidence to reconstruct the story and house:

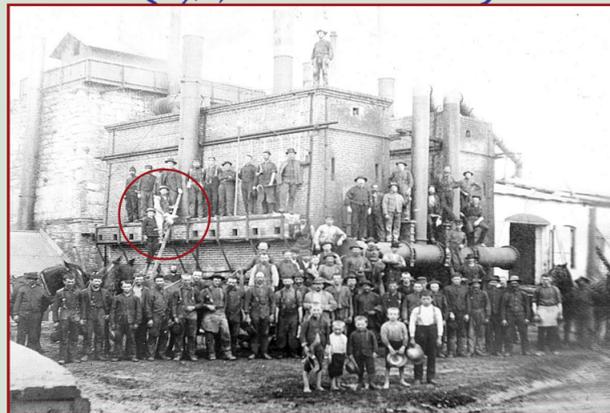
- A photograph of the laborers' houses (c1890s-1910) at Fayette
- A 1907 map of Fayette
- Oral history—stories passed down from one generation to another
- An original house that had been moved from Fayette many years ago
- Archaeological excavation of a log house site at Fayette.

Archaeologists found 10,471 artifacts at the site including china, stoneware, glassware, tableware, ceramics, tools, nails, glass, screws, clothing and coins. These artifacts gave them clues about the lives of the people who lived there—what they ate, how they spent their money, what was important to them. The archaeologists found animal knuckles, necks and shanks—inexpensive cuts of meat typically used in soups and stews. They also discovered the remains of a small root cellar beneath this house site. It was lined with boards and insulated with charcoal.

Exhibit designers used some of the objects the archaeologists found, along with other, more complete, objects from the collections at the Michigan Historical Museum, to tell the laborers' story.



The Cleveland Cliffs Iron Company hired R. A. Brotherton to survey Fayette. He drew a map in 1907 that included the words "old log houses of little value." This was a major clue to telling the laborers' story.



The boys standing in front of the furnace crew were not workers. They just wanted to get into the photo. The fellow on the ladder with the trowel is Nicholas Thill. (State Archives of Michigan)

Who Were the Log House Residents?

Nearly 200 people lived in the lower-income neighborhood at Fayette in 1880. Half were adults. The other half were children aged 8 months to 16 years.

Most of the adults were immigrants from Canada, Belgium, Luxembourg and Bohemia. With the introduction of industrialization in Europe, many farmers and craftsmen in Europe found earning a living more difficult and left to find new land and jobs. A boat ticket to America offered a fresh start and the hope for a better life. Michigan's iron and copper mines, lumber camps and iron smelting towns drew people looking for work and a better future for their children.

Most of the men and older boys worked as unskilled laborers at the furnaces and charcoal kilns. Their jobs required physical strength and paid about \$1.50 a day. (At that time, you could buy a pound of beef for 11 cents.) Unskilled laborers did not always have steady work. Furnace breakdowns or a slow iron market often meant layoffs and hard times for their families.

The women were homemakers, caring for their families and boarders. Some earned extra money by taking in laundry or working as maids or cooks for wealthier families or for the company.



Archaeologists excavate a log house site at Fayette. (Photo by Tom Friggens)



Above right: Archaeologists found these doll parts at the log house site. Museum collections staff then provided a doll from the Michigan Historical Museum's collections to show what a complete object would look like. Exhibit designers placed the objects in a dresser drawer for visitors to pull out and view.

The Nicholas Thill Family

Nicholas Thill, son of John Thill, came to the United States from Luxemburg in the late 1860s. His mother had died before he left for America. He lived in Illinois for about two years. Then, he moved to Masonville, Michigan, north of Escanaba. He stayed there over one winter, working in the woods. He and others heard about jobs at Fayette. They tied themselves together with rope and walked across the frozen Little Bay de Noc. It is believed that this was early in 1870. Mr. Thill worked at Fayette as a plasterer, finishing walls and ceilings in houses, churches and the Fayette hotel.

When he had enough money he planned to go back to Luxemburg to visit relatives and to bring Julia, the woman he planned to marry, to America. He got as far as the train depot in Chicago. There he was robbed of all his money. He returned, discouraged, to Fayette.

Unknown to Nicholas, a group of his friends got together and raised the money for Julia's ticket to America. One evening they invited Nicholas to a party at a boarding house at Kate's Bay. He was introduced all around the room until he stood in front of Julia. All he said was, "Why, I believe that is my Julia." Nicholas Thill eventually moved a cabin from Fayette to his farm. The cabin still stands as a grain storage building.

The Team

- An archaeologist learns about people who lived in the past—the types of houses they built, the foods they ate, the tools they used, even the kinds of games they played—by digging up and studying artifacts people left behind.
- A historian studies documents and photographs to learn about the past.
- A historic architect specializes in the preservation, rehabilitation, restoration and reconstruction of historic structures.
- An exhibit designer takes the discoveries made by the archaeologists, historians and historic architects and presents it in ways that allow visitors to experience the past.
- Visitors put these pieces together with what they already know about the past to create their own understanding of history.

Things To Do

- Visit www.michigan.gov/fayette.
- Learn more about Fayette by reading Fayette Historic Town available from Michigan History magazine: www.michiganhistorymagazine.com/books.
- Comments or Suggestions? Write to timetraveler@michigan.gov.

At the Michigan Historical Museum

The Michigan Historical Museum, 702 W. Kalamazoo Street, is located two blocks west of the Capitol in downtown Lansing. Museum admission is free. Hours: Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; Saturday, 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.; Sunday, 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. The museum telephone hotline: (517) 373-3559. The museum is part of the Michigan Historical Center, Department of History, Arts and Libraries. Visit us at the Web at www.michiganhistory.org.



Lansing Newspapers In Education (NIE) provides *Lansing State Journal* newspapers and supplemental teaching materials for area classrooms at little or no cost to the schools. The newspaper becomes a "living textbook," providing students with timely and relevant topics for discussion in class and at home.

If you are interested in sponsoring classroom papers or using the newspaper in your classroom, please contact Patricia O'Hearn, NIE Manager at (517) 377-1242.