

Editor's Note: Paul Petosky is a Michigan postal historian, and his machine cancel interests naturally gravitate to that state as a machine cancel collecting interest. That interest extends to the millennium inkjet cancels as well, and he is a frequent contributor to that topic of machine cancel studying.

In one of the many exchanges, he noted his study of the murals in the post offices of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. These were murals painted by artists during the Great Depression of the 1930s, and were created under the New Deal programs of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Blending that topic with machines of the period seemed like a natural extension, and here is his study of Iron Mountain, Michigan, with some added material.

IRON MOUNTAIN OF THE UPPER PENINSULA MICHIGAN ITS MURALS AND MACHINES OF THAT PERIOD

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The Iron Mountain, Michigan Post Office was originally established in Menominee County on May 17, 1880, with Renel O. Philbrook as its first postmaster. It became part of Dickinson County on October 1, 1891.

“Iron Mountain was once a mining city when the Chapin Mine was up and running. The land that the Chapin Mine was formed on was discovered in 1879. It was discovered by two men, James John Hagerman and Dr. Nelson Powell Hulst. They had leased the land from a man from Niles, Michigan, Henry Chapin, hence the name of the mine. They began to sink shafts on the slope of Millie Hill. Then on July 5, 1879, Captain John Wicks and seven other men were sent into the forest with a wagon filled with tools to search for a place to set up camp. After numerous unsuccessful shafts the company was ready to shut down operation. Hagerman and Hulst had faith in the land and tried one more shaft. The shaft was 90 feet (27 m) deep and many months later, there was a successful hit that was at the heart of the iron ore. The original land was very swampy and filled with trees. To get rid of all this water the Chapin Mine Pumping Engine was created.

“Iron Mountain is home of the largest steam-driven pumping engine in the United States. ^[8] The Chapin Mine Pumping Engine (Cornish Pump) was patterned after the ones used in Cornwall in the deep tin mines.

“Edwin Reynolds, chief engineer for the E.P. Allis Company (now the Allis-Chalmers Co.) of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, designed the steam engine in 1890. The engine’s high pressure cylinder has a 50-inch (1,300 mm) bore, and the low pressure cylinder is 100 inches (2,500 mm) in diameter. The flywheel is 40 feet (12 m) in diameter, weighs 160 tons, and had an average speed of only 10 revolutions per minute. The drive shaft to the flywheel is 24 inches (610 mm) in diameter. The engine itself rises 54 feet (16 m) above the floor of the room. The designers estimate the weight to be 725 tons over all.

“The pumping equipment utilized a reciprocating motion to a line of steel rods extending 1,500 feet (460 m) down into the mine, with eight pumps attached at intervals of 170 to 192 feet (59 m) along the rods. Each of the pumps forced the water to the next higher pump and finally out to the surface of the mine.

“As the engine was designed to run slowly, the pumps had a capacity of over 300 gallons per stroke of the pistons. At ten revolutions per minute, this meant over 3,000 gallons of water poured out through a 28-inch (710 mm) pipe every minute. A total of 5,000,000 gallons of water could be removed from the mine each day. At that time the pump’s estimated cost was nearly \$250,000.

“After only a few years of successful operation, the giant pumping facility was moved from the “D” shaft of the Chapin Mine. More than a million tons of the best grade ore

found in the entire mine was discovered directly below the pump, so it was essential that it be moved for excavation. In 1898 the pump was dismantled and stored away until 1907 when it was reassembled on the “C” shaft of the Chapin Mine. The pump operated here until 1932 when the Chapin Mine permanently closed its doors. In 1934 the pumping engine was offered to the County of Dickinson as a relic for sightseers to visit. The pump remained exposed to the elements for nearly 50 years, and in 1982 a building was constructed around the pump by the Menominee Range Historical Foundation. Today the Cornish Pumping Engine & Mining Museum exists on the site.”¹

“Iron Mountain’s abandoned Millie Hill mine is home to one of the largest bat hibernacula in the Midwest. Roughly 25,000-50,000 bats make their winter home there.”² For those interested in non-bat activities, next to the pump building is one of the largest artificial ski jumps in the world!

The Flag Cancel Encyclopedia, based by Frederick Langford on postal records indicating installation reports (and not dependent on finding and reporting examples by collectors) lists an American flag cancel machine at Iron Mountain from 1908-1923.

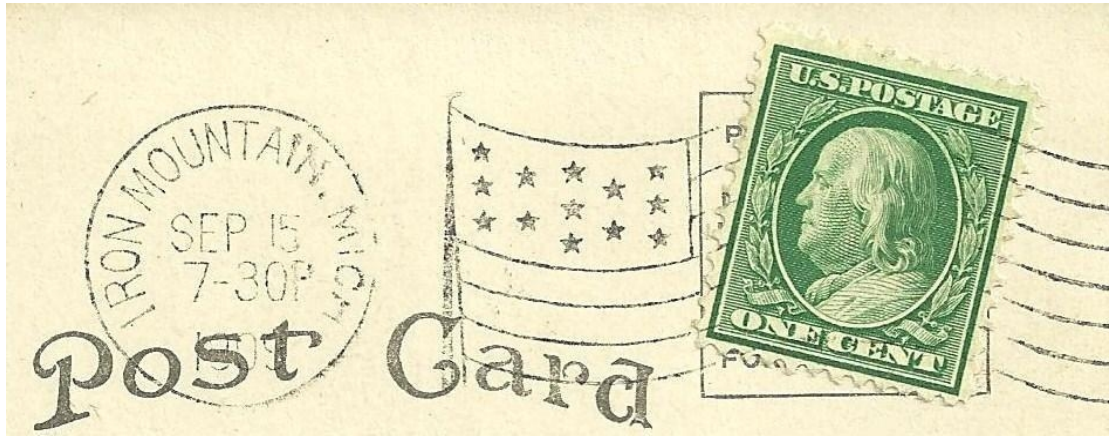


Figure 1, above: IRON MOUNTAIN, MICH / SEP 15 / 7-30P / 1909

Bob Payne’s databank made available for *Forum* use indicates that an International machine is known from actual examples reported as early as October 25, 1925, and earlier International examples are implied from the ending of the flag cancel installation in 1923.

The current post office at Iron Mountain is a one-story ‘Art Deco’ brick building, and as described by the Postmaster, ‘contains one of the most outstanding and best described examples of mural art sponsored by the federal government for a building in Michigan.’³

The information sent by the Iron Mountain postmaster is featured in Figure 2 on the next page.

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron_Mountain,_Michigan

² Ibid.

³ Reported by the Postmaster in February 2003.

IRON MOUNTAIN POST OFFICE

The one-story brick Art Deco Iron Mountain Post Office building contains one of the most outstanding and best-preserved examples of mural art sponsored by the federal government for a building in Michigan.

During the Great Depression in the 1930s, under the auspices of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal administration, the federal government commissioned artwork for many Michigan buildings. There were several projects responsible for the embellishment of public buildings with murals and sculpture, the best known being the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project (WPA/FAP). The U. S. Treasury Department also administered several projects, namely the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP), the Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP), and the Section of Fine Arts. The FAP was a program run by officials in each state that placed artwork in public buildings such as schools, hospitals, armories, and the like, whereas the Treasury Department projects provided artwork in federal buildings.

The most complete representation of New Deal art in Michigan buildings is from the Treasury Section of Fine Arts program (1934-1943). Almost all the artwork commissioned for Michigan under this section remains in the original buildings for which it was intended, mostly post offices. The Iron Mountain Post Office building is unique, as it contains artwork from TRAP and the Section of Fine Arts. The latter permitted the artist to execute five murals with the subject of pioneering and western expansion. Themes dealing with American history, especially early exploration and settlement, were important during the depression era, when people looked back to a time of strength for guidance through the then current national crisis.

Most of Michigan's post office art consists of works that deal with the individual community. In this case, however, artist Vladimir Rousseff painted scenes that pertain more generally to the western United States, in works titled Moving West, Washing and Carrying Gold, Watching an Early Train, Stage Coach, Ferry Boat, and Fight with Indians. Under the Treasury Section's program, one percent of the building construction cost was reserved for artistic embellishment, and artists were chosen competitively. Bulgarian-born Rousseff, who lived in Chicago and had a studio in a small town near Iron Mountain, was selected to do the murals based on entry sketches for a major competition for the Post Office Department Building in Washington, D.C. Although many government artists had difficulty relating their murals to the architecture of the building, Rousseff successfully overcame this problem by unifying the separate murals through a common color scheme that was harmonious with the interior tones of the building; he also linked them by an overall theme. The paintings also complemented the building through internal elements of the composition. The federal art projects were successful in that they brought original painting and sculpture to smaller towns such as Iron Mountain in buildings that everyone visited, in this case, the post office.

Received from Iron Mountain Postmaster / Feb. 2003

Figure 2, above: Response from the Iron Mountain Postmaster concerning the post office building at its murals.

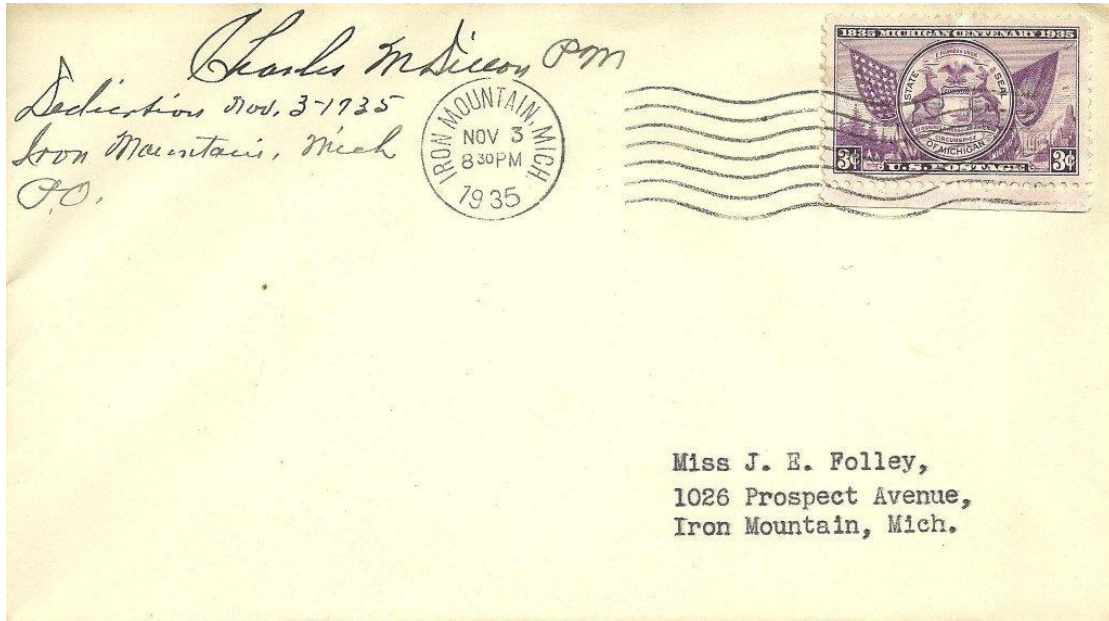


Figure 3, above: The International Flier at Iron Mountain installed in the 1920s is moved and used at the new post office building. The building was dedicated on November 3, 1934, and Postmaster Charles McDillon autographs the cover. The cancellation reads IRON MOUNTAIN, MICH / NOV 3 / 8 30 PM / 1935. The use of the 1935 Michigan centennial commemorative (issued November 1) is both timely and appropriate.

Figure 4, below: The Iron Mountain Post Office as it appeared in 1938.





Figure 5: The Iron Mountain Murals by Vladimir Rousseff:
Top: "Ferry Boat"
Middle: "Moving West"
Bottom: "Fight with Indians"

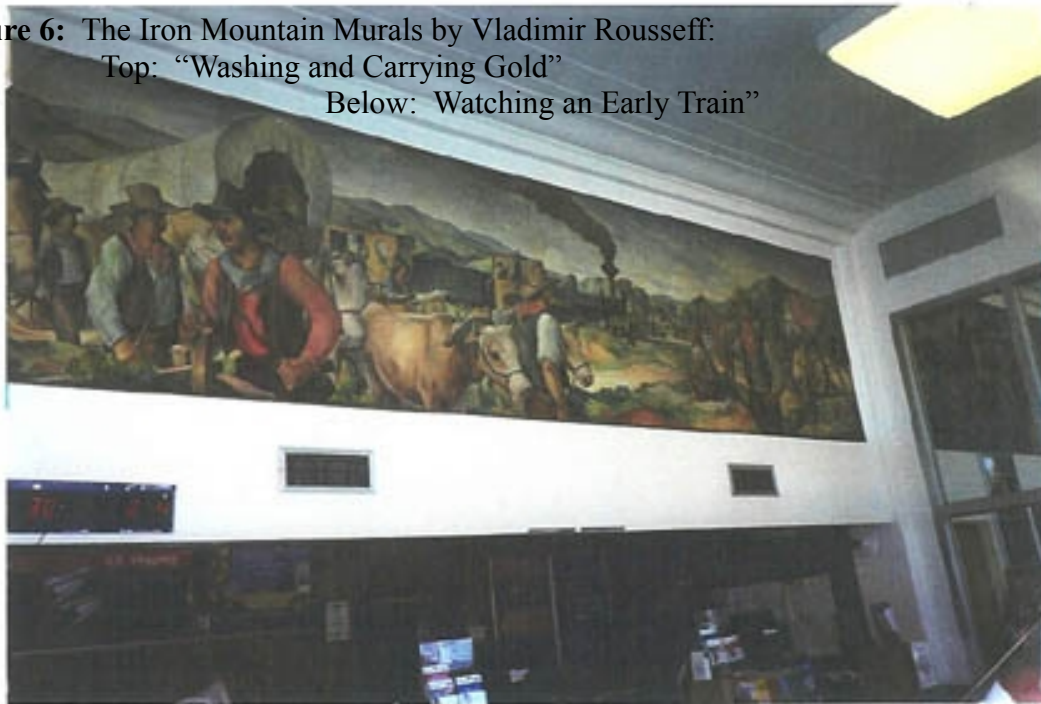
August 2002 photos.



Figure 6: The Iron Mountain Murals by Vladimir Rousseff:

Top: "Washing and Carrying Gold"

Below: "Watching an Early Train"



In 1965, a major \$400,000 remodeling and building project took place and was completed in January 1966 for a Mail Processing Center for zip codes 498/499, to expedite the distribution of mail for the Upper Peninsula.

The Mail Processing Center is currently at Kingsford just a short distance from Iron Mountain.

The Iron Mountain Post Office uses zip code 49801.

Table I
The reported use of an International Flier by Bob Payne
At Iron Mountain, Michigan.

I N	MI	IRON MOUNTAIN		D	30	1925 1009	1966 0701
I N	MI	IRON MOUNTAIN	49801	Nz	30	1966 0920	1967 0111
I N	MI	IRON MOUNTAIN	49801	Hz	30	1968 0624	1972 0121
I N	MI	IRON MOUNTAIN	00498	Hz	30	1975 1118	1976 0311

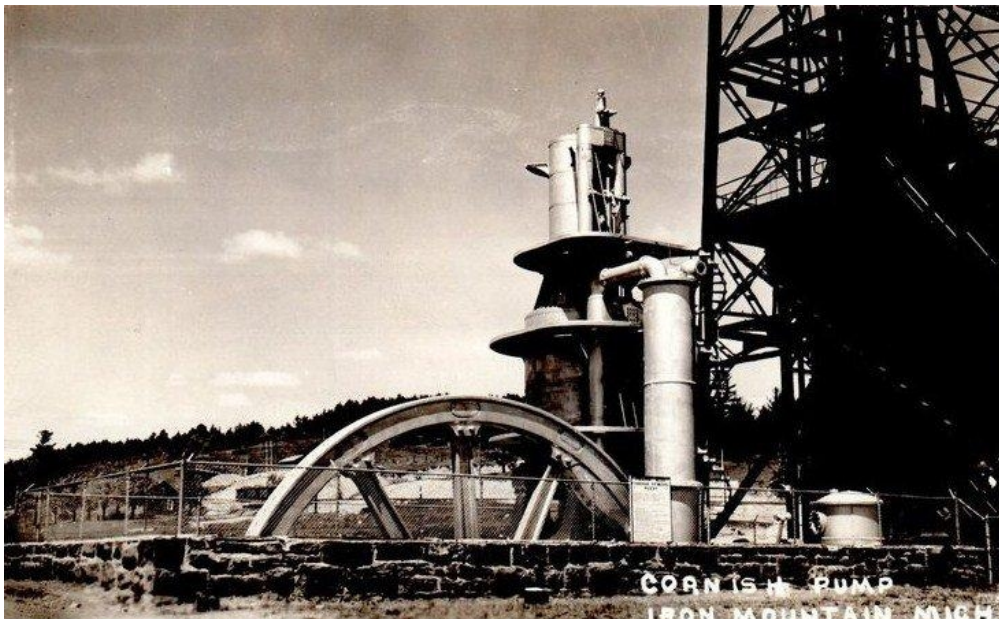
Please report additional uses to the author.

Murals by Vladimir Rousseff (installed on January 1, 1936).
Mural photographs taken by Paul T. Schroeder, Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

Photos and Information compliments of:

Paul E. Petosky, "Postmarks from the Past"
at <http://postmarks.grandmaraismichigan.com>

Postmarks from the Past is dedicated to writing about and preserving Michigan postal history, and in particular those post offices that have discontinued operation.



The
Cornish
Pump
(circa
1937)