



Besser Museum Historic Village

The Besser Museum Historic Village stands as a testament to the pioneering spirit of our past. This Giving Tuesday, please donate to the Besser Museum to help protect, preserve and interpret this unique collection of historic resources.

Because there is no designated special fund for providing long-term preservation or the exhibit development of these historic gems, the Besser Museum decided this year to earmark any Giving Tuesday funds received specifically for the Historic Village exhibit. These timeless treasures provide understanding into the livelihoods of the citizens who settled and developed Northeast Michigan. Keeping these buildings opened to the public fosters an appreciation for the technological advancements and convenient comforts we enjoy today. The Historic Village is a primary resource available to help teachers and students meet the Michigan Education Social Studies K-4th grade benchmark to use historical thinking to understand the past in the local community and the state.

The Besser Museum acquired these historic buildings from concerned citizens recognizing the importance of preserving a part of our community’s history. The first building arrived 48 years ago, and the last was donated 29 years ago. This collection is unique in that the historic buildings are all from the same time period and relatively the same location.

Funding was provided by different individuals and/or civic groups to cover the significant expense associated with relocating each building to the museum. It has since been the sole responsibility of the museum to continue to raise funds needed for preservation and exhibit development which provides historical interpretation and accessibility for the visiting public.

In 1971, the 1895 McKay Cabin located in Wilson Township of Alpena County, was donated to the museum by the Gilbert family. Zada Gay Dann, John McKay’s daughter financed the movement and placement of the cabin at the museum. Today, the cabin is in need of much repair to ensure its preservation.



In 1972, the 1872 Maltz Exchange Bank located in the city of Alpena was donated to the Besser Museum by Frank and Helen Gaasch, and James Gaasch. The Gaasch family arranged the movement and placement of the building in its present location. In 2012, the Founders Society began helping the museum raise funds to repair the bank. By 2016, repairs to the exterior siding, windows and large marque were repaired and repainted. Bliss Painting donated a portion of their services. Timm Construction donated a portion of their services in 2014 for the new roof .



In 1981, the 1895 Green School located in Green Township of Alpena County was donated to the Besser Museum. Mr. and Mrs. Mack Gamage of Lachine donated the one-room-schoolhouse. The Alpena Board of Realtors raised the funds to move the school eighteen miles to its present location. The original stone foundation was also brought to the museum. To ensure long-lasting stability, Pollard Builders installed concrete footings. D. R. MacNeil and Associates donated a land survey in order to complete this project. In 2012, Delta Kappa Gamma members began helping the Besser Museum raise funds to repair the school. A portion of the funds were provided by a grant from the Community Foundation for Northeast Michigan. By 2014, the exterior siding and windows were repaired and both the exterior and interior were painted. Bliss Painting donated a portion of their services. Timm Construction donated a portion of their services for the new roof.



In 1990, the 1912 Spratt Church located in Green Township of Alpena County was relocated from the Spratt Community to the museum. Partial funding for the relocation and preservation project that included hanging wallpaper and constructing 12 replica pews was provided by the generous donations of many citizens and the assistance of an “Outstate Equity Grant” received by Alpena Township. In 2012, the Spratt United Methodist congregation hired Bliss Painting to paint the exterior of the church. In 2018, several members of the congregation donated funds to the Besser Museum in honor of family members. These funds helped repair the wallpaper and fix a window. More repairs and exhibit development are needed.



The museum receives no continuing financial support from federal, state, or local governmental entities or millage, and relies on the generosity of the community to protect and preserve our precious artifacts. This unique public partnership is completely voluntary. Besser Museum does not receive annual tax-payer revenue from the State, the City of Alpena, the County of Alpena, or the Township of Alpena.

The operating budget for the entire museum is approximately \$430,000 annually. Operational support is generated through admission fees, membership dues, donations, awarded grants, and fundraising efforts. The Besser Foundation provides a portion of the annual operational support honoring Jesse Besser’s original intent for the Besser Museum to be an active center for the cultural life of the community and the schools.

Special projects, including the preservation and exhibit development for the Historic Village are not included in the museum’s annual operation budget. Funding for these projects is raised through special fundraising campaigns like Giving Tuesday, donations through legacy gifts, and donations from concerned individuals and civic groups.

If you would like a tour of the historic buildings to see how your contribution will help, please contact the museum at 989-356-2202.