

# Gibbs City

The Atkinson-Gibbs City area began to be settled in the year 1885 when the families Ross, McColeman, LeRoy and Raymond came to the area. McColeman was the local agent and cruiser for the Portage Lake Ship Canal and Iron Company.

Around 1887, the Metropolitan Lumber Company, under the direction of J.K. Stack, an Escanaba banker, and Henry M. Atkinson, from a Green Bay farm family, secured extensive pine holdings from the Canal Company along the north and south branches of the Paint River. A large sawmill was constructed on the north bank of the river about one mile below the confluence of the two branches, under the supervision of Atkinson, who was in charge of operations.



As the mill developed, a village of some 40 to 50 structures grew rapidly on the flat near the mill, and was named Atkinson in honor of its founder.

Later the village was to boast a town hall, two hotels, a railroad depot, a church, a school, a saloon, a large general store, library and post office. It also served as the official seat of what was to become Atkinson Township. Atkinson Township, earlier referred to as Hemlock Township, was formed in 1892, being divided from the Iron River Township. However, the township did not become operative as a separate political entity until the following year.

The heart of Atkinson Township was the huge Metropolitan Mill, largest in

the area. From its offices, all township and village governmental functions were analyzed and directed. At the height of its operations, four band saws were in constant operation around the clock, giving the mill the honor of being the largest in the county, a position never surpassed. When the mill was destroyed by fire in 1900, reputedly some 40 million feet of lumber was piled for seasoning in the vast yards to the north and northeast. Miraculously, none was burned. A rapid decline came as the timber resources were nearly exhausted, and the mill was not rebuilt. In 1906 the population had diminished to the point where it was found advisable to dissolve the township government and the land area was divided among Iron River, Stambaugh and Bates township.



Gibbs City was founded on the other side of the river in 1914 when Royal F. Gibbs and his son Charles built a sawmill which was in operation from the spring of 1915 until 1922 when an explosion destroyed it. There were about twenty houses built in Gibbs City proper. Two Gibbs camps housed the men who cut timber. Through the years as woods work declined, more and more families left the area. In April 1966, Gibbs City, too, because a memory when the remaining structures, including several old homes and the general store and post office were burned to the ground to remove what had been deemed a potential hazard. A large crowd was on hand to witness the burning and the event was recorded by news and television cameras.