THE BERG FAMILY OF BARAGA

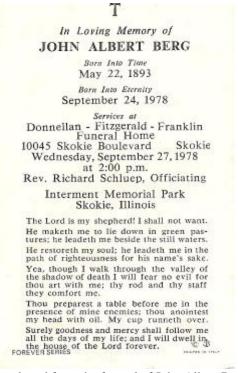


John Albert Berg

By David K. McDonnell December, 2010

<u>I</u> <u>John Albert Berg</u>

John Albert Berg was born on May 22, 1893, and died September 24, 1978.



Funeral card from the funeral of John Albert Berg.

John Albert was born in Baraga, Michigan. Family lore suggested that he or his parents changed the last name to "Berg"; that John Albert's father was a merchant in Baraga, who later moved to California; and that the family's heritage was Swedish.

I knew John Albert in the late 1960s and 1970s as the grandfather of my wife, Linda Sue Boyd McDonnell. John Albert was known as "Granding" or "Ganding" to his grandchildren. I knew a bit about his adult life in Chicago, but virtually nothing about his childhood, other than he was born in Baraga, and knew nothing about his ancestors or siblings.

In 2008 through 2010, I worked part time in the summers driving a bus for the State YMCA's Camp Arbutus Hayo-Went-Ha, dropping off and picking up kids on extended camping trips. Several of these trips were to the ferry in Copper Harbor at the tip of the Keweenaw Peninsula for campers' trips to Isle Royale, a national park in northern Lake Superior. These trips took me through Baraga. This sparked my curiosity and desire to learn more about Baraga, John Albert's life there, and his original family.

I made several trips to the Baraga County Courthouse in L'Anse. Many of the records were in the first floor register of deeds/county clerk's office. Most of the older

records, though, were located in a basement closet. The closet wasn't well lit or well organized. Looking through old records required sifting through dozens of heavy volumes, looking through indexes, and finding a lot of useless information. Once in a while an interesting discovery was made. There are still some missing pieces in the county records, but I think it would take another week or so in the courthouse basement to find them.

I also drove through Baraga several of times looking for clues about John Albert and his family. These weren't always easy, since my vehicle was the big blue Hayo-Went-Ha bus. Here is a photo of my bus, parked in front of the county courthouse in L'Anse in 2010:



In my first search, I reviewed the records of births, marriages, deaths, and other records at the Baraga County Register of Deeds. The volume of births included a record of the birth of "Albert Berg" on May 22, 1893, in Baraga. The father is listed as Martin Berg, and the mother as Mellie Berg, both from Baraga. The birthplace of the both parents is listed as Sweden. Under the column "occupation of father", the entry is "boarding house". (This may be an error, referring to his residence rather than his occupation - or, at this stage in his career, Martin may have not yet been a "merchant". Or, Martin may have owned the boarding house.)

The clerk informed me that birth lists, at that time, were kept at townships and the information periodically transferred to the county. Birth certificates were not issued. The records of births were, instead, kept in this volume of births. The clerk transcribed the information from the records unto the "copy of record of birth" shown below. The record of birth also lists his race as "white", although this is not reflected on the following copy.

	OF BAR		55.	COPY	OF RECORD OF E		
NOCOST OF DIEG		ABOUT DOLK		CHILD	now rema	aining in my offic	
Date of Birth						Sex	
Month	Date	Year		Surname and Christian Name			
Мау	22	1893	Berg, Albe		Male		
Baraga, Michigan				Local File No.	Date of i	9.00	
		Service Scot	P/	ARENTS			
Full Name of Each Martin Berg			Baraga,	Residence Michigan	Birth Place Sweden	Birth Place of Each Sweden	
Mellis	Berg		Boraga,	Michigan	Sweden	Sweden	
he 21st			day of	July	A.D. 1	20 08	
		-		Wendy J. Geodregu		Cler	
		By				Deputy Cler	

Family documents include a somewhat different certificate of birth, with the front and back shown on the next two pages. This one appears to be an attempt to correct the name on the record to "John Albert". I don't, however, have any information to confirm that this corrected birth certificate was ever filed anywhere. It does, have some interesting information.

First, the certificate uses the name "John Albert", instead of "Albert".

Second, the certificate states that the place of birth is "at home in Baraga, Mich.". So, John Albert was born in the home, although the certificate does not give an address.

Third, the certificate restates the father's name as "Martin", but states the mother's name as "Amelia". "Mellie" was likely Amelia's nickname.

Fourth, this certificate is an affidavit prepared for Martin Berg, to be signed and notarized in Oakland, Alameda County, California. Unfortunately, the certificate is not signed, dated, or notarized. But this tends to confirm the family lore that Martin moved from Baraga to California.

Fifth, Martin's address is listed as in care of "Ahmes Temple". This means that Martin was likely a Mason.

Sixth, the handwritten portions of the form were probably completed much later, and after the deaths of both Martin and Amelia. "Deceased" is written next to their names. The "birthplace" spaces on the certificate are intended for the birthplaces of the

parents, but "Baraga, Mich." is inserted (the birth place of the child, not parents). Also, the "occupation" spaces are intended for the occupations of the parents, but "salesman, Airtite Co., Chicago, Ill." is inserted (which, I suspect, was John Albert's occupation at the time). The handwritten notes do indicate that Martin was "49" at his last birthday, and Amelia was "69" (if my reading of the handwriting is correct). This might be helpful in the future for finding more information about Martin and Amelia.

Finally, the certificate notes that John was the second child of Amelia, and that Amelia had "now living" four children.

PLACE OF BIRTH County BARAGA Township BARAGA			CERTIFICATE OF BIRTH MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH Bureau of Records and Statistics State File No.				
Village B City FULL NAME OF CHILD		111110000000		La-t	i in a hospital instead of	. R.	gistered No. 35
Sex Wale	If plural bethe	Twin, triplet, or oth Number, In order of			Legiti- Y	C Date of Birth	May 22
Full Name	Marté	in Berg & ~	ceased	1	faiden	Мот	
Residence and I	ost Office A		aGA , Mi	chig	en		
Cotor Caire	-	Age at last Birthday	- 169	Caler	Canco	أبتمدها	ine at last . 69
Birthplace	سرما	ga M.	il	Birth	pineo Ba	rago	Mail
Occupation (and Industry)	Sales	man ain	tite lo	Occup (and)	ndustry)	eleen	an Oyi I
Number of shild	of this met	her including this bir			mber of childr	on, of this mot	her, now living
Therese		CERTIFICATE O	DE ATTENDI	G PHY	SICIAN OR	MIDWIFE.	× × × × × × × × × × × × × × × × × × ×
ene-pail bet con	rt solution e	attended the birth uted with one and of oliver nitrate as	of this child, (Signature).				
	island testes	for syphilis as re-	Dated		, 19		ryoician, midwife, father
If not, state r		Dute19	Addres				Transmit, mindwise, Exther
			Filed		19		
							Re

NOTE: In filling out the face of this form, the registered number (if known) the date and place of hirth of the child, and the names of the parents should be given. Aside from this information, only those items to be corrected should be filled in.

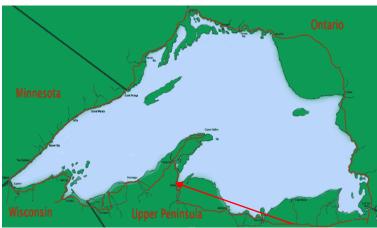
AFFIDAVIT

Martin Berg December of the hirth of the first of the hirth of the control of the hirth of the first of the f

<u>II</u> Baraga

What was Baraga like at the time of John Albert's birth, and what were his parents doing there?

Baraga is located at the foot of Lake Superior's Keweenaw Bay in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The village and county are named after Father Frederic Baraga, a priest from Slovenia who established a mission in the region in the mid-1800s.



Map of Lake Superior. Baraga is here.



Map of Michigan. Baraga is here.

The region was inhabited primarily by Native Americans and fur traders until the mid 1800s. Gradually, settlers moved into the region, lured by opportunities in mining and timber. There was little success in mining in Baraga County, but L'Anse and other communities became Lake Superior ports. Railroads linked the coastal communities by the 1870s and 1880s, including a railroad line between Houghton-Hancock and L'Anse. This railroad line ran through the town of Baraga.

The town of Baraga consisted of not much more than a small lumber mill until the 1880s. The Nester family purchased the mill in 1886 and expanded it to cut millions of feet of lumber annually. The Nesters also brought in shipbuilders from Saginaw, and built large 150-200 foot vessels. The mill and shipbuilding operation employed many men, and Baraga Township became the county's largest community. The steam from the mill heated most of the community as well.

John's birth in Baraga in 1893, and the Nester mill purchase in 1886, likely narrows Martin's and Amelia's arrival in Baraga – somewhere between 1886 and 1893. Once there, Martin and Amelia became entrepreneurs and parents. They owned a boarding house and grocery store in the Village of Baraga, and farmed 120 acres of land in Baraga and Houghton Counties. They had five children – four sons and a daughter who did not survive childhood. Martin left the family around 1900 and never returned to Baraga (more on this later). Amelia and the boys stayed and ran the store and the farm for nearly 20 more years.

The following are photographs taken within the Village of Baraga around the time of John Albert Berg's birth and childhood. These photos are from the Baraga County Historical Museum, and more are available.



1900s picture of Superior Avenue (Main Street) facing south. One of these buildings may be the grocery/feed store and boarding house of Martin Berg (discussed later).

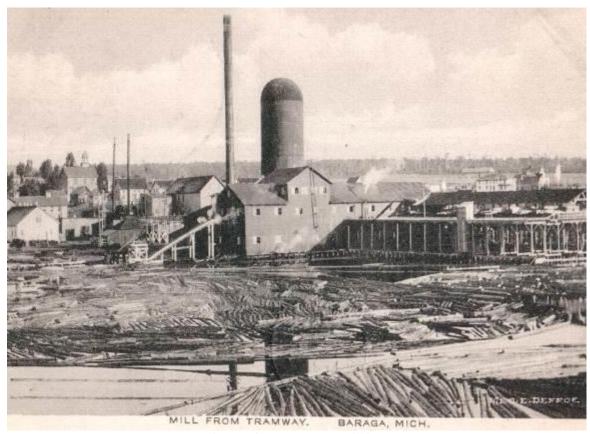


1900s Superior Avenue/Main Street facing north





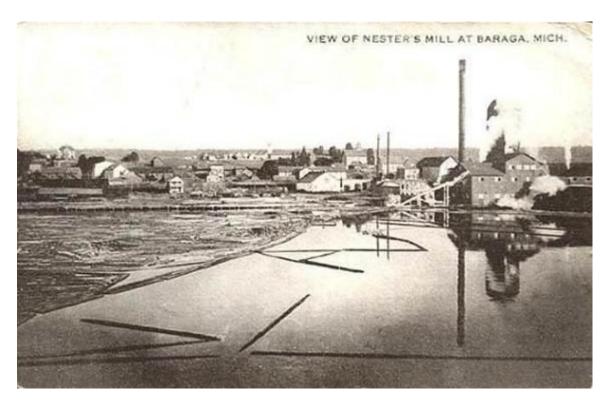
1900's picture of the Baraga waterfront with the Thomas Nester Sawmill on the right.



1900's picture of the Nester Sawmill in Baraga.



1900's picture of Nester Sawmill logs stacked along the Baraga shoreline looking south.



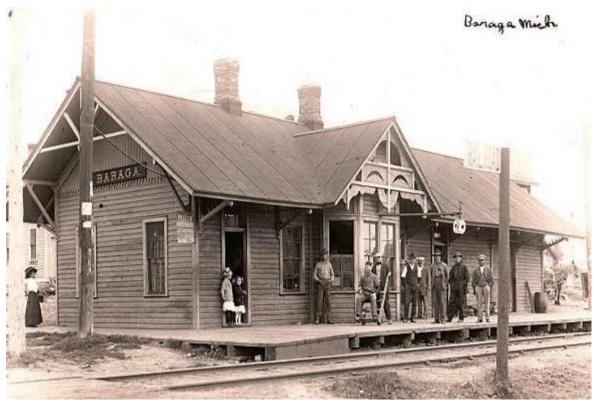
This is another view of the saw mill from a postal card.



1900's picture showing stacked logs at Nester's Landing near Baraga.



1900's picture of the railroad depot in Baraga.



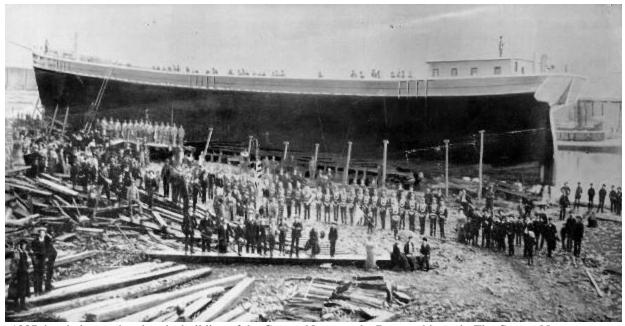
Another view of the Baraga railroad depot.



1900's picture of a store front in Baraga.



1890's picture of the Sand Point Lighthouse in Baraga being moved closer to the shore because it was built to far inland.



1887 dated picture showing the building of the George Nester at the Baraga shipyard. The George Nester sank during a Lake Superior storm on April 30, 1909 near the Huron Islands.

Today, Baraga is no longer the boom town it once was. The population of the village was 1,185 in 2008 – nearly 70% white, non-Hispanic and nearly 30% Native American, and the county wide population was 8,605 in 2009. Only nine building permits were issued in the county in 2008, suggesting little activity.

Tourism and recreation appear to be the primary economic activity in the area. Baraga State Park is located in the village, overlooking Keweenaw Bay. The Ojibwa tribal casino is also located within the village. U.S. Highway 41 traverses the city, with various roadway and tourist services along the highway. The Pettibone forklift is made in Baraga. The railroad depot no longer exists. There are still logging operations in the region, but the Nester sawmill no longer exists in town.

The following are photos taken of Baraga's main street in 2009.



Main Street, facing south.



Another view of Main Street, facing south.



Main Street, facing north.



One of the few remaining older buildings on Main Street.



Another remaining older Main Street building.



Site of the former railroad depot.

III The Bergs in Baraga

Baraga County maintains a "book of marriages", recording the various marriages within the county. Martin and Amelia Berg are not listed within the book prior to 1893. This suggests that they were married prior to entry into the county.

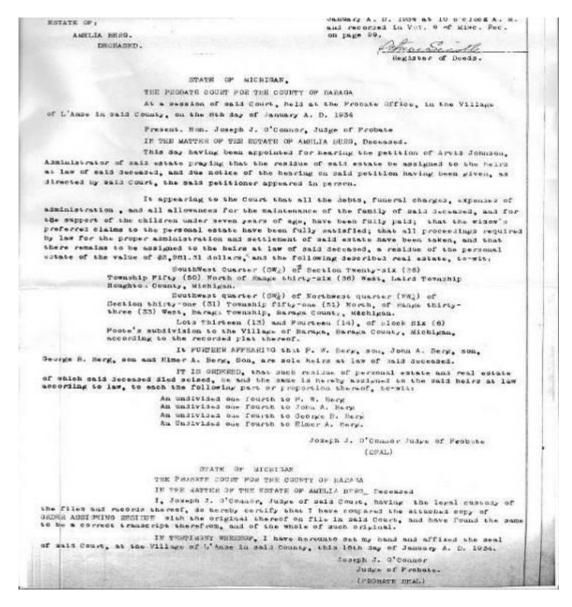
The 1900 census lists the entire Berg family in Baraga County. The household consisted of:

- 1. Martin M. Berg, head of household, born May 1866 in Sweden, age 34, married 11 years (1889), both parents born in Sweden. Occupation "grocery and feed store". The "number of years" in school box was left blank, but the "can read", "can write", and "can speak English" boxes were all checked "yes". Household was checked as "owned", free of mortgage, and non-farm. Martin immigrated to the U.S. in 1883.
- 2. Amelia Berg, wife, born October 1869 in Sweden, age 30, both parents born in Sweden. The "number of years" in school box was left blank, but the "can read", "can write", and "can speak English" boxes were all checked "yes". Amelia immigrated to the U.S. in 1886 four years after Martin.
- 3. Frederick W. Berg, son, born February 1891 in Michigan, age 9.
- 4. John A. Berg, son, born May 1893 in Michigan, age 7. Occupation (and Frederick's) listed as "at school".
- 5. George B. Berg, son, born November 1896 in Michigan, age 3.
- 6. Elmer A. Berg, son, born September 1897 in Michigan, age 2.
- 7. John Amundson, father-in-law, born February 1838, in Sweden, age 62, marital status widowed. Occupation "clerk in grocery store". (Note last name spelled either "Amudson" or "Amundson" in census.) The "number of years" in school box was left blank, but the "can read", "can write", and "can speak English" boxes were all checked "yes". John immigrated to the U.S. in 1882 four years before his daughter.
- 8. George Stecher, boarder, born September 1882 in Michigan, age 17, single. Occupation "delivery man gr. store". (Note last name was difficult to read on census record, and "Stecher" may not be accurate.)

The 1880 census is online, and it did not contain any reference to either a Berg or an Amundson. The 1890 census was destroyed by fire.

The Baraga County birth records do not list any of John Albert's three brothers, which may be a clerical omission or which may indicate that the brothers were not born in Baraga. The records do, however, note the birth of Clara Berg on November 10, 1895 – 2 ½ two years after John Albert. Clara's parents were noted as Martin and "Amanda" Berg, both born in Sweden. Martin's occupation is noted as "farmer". Everything seemed to match our Berg family except the reference to the mother as "Amanda" instead of "Amelia". This was either a clerical error or Clara belongs to a different family. Clara is not referred to in subsequent documentation, including the 1900 census, and she may not have survived childhood.

The Register of Deeds grantor/grantee index contained one relevant listing – a probate court order recorded January 16, 1934 assigning the residue of the Estate of Amelia Berg, recorded at Liber 9, Page 99. The following is a copy of the order:



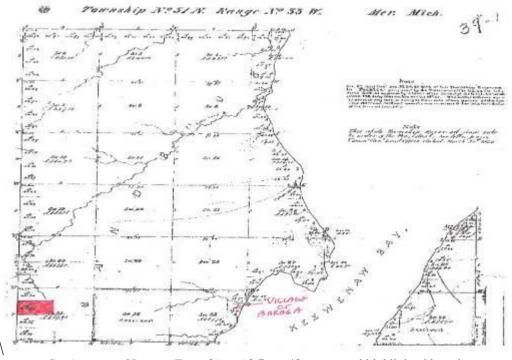
The order reveals several items of information. Amelia obviously died in or sometime prior to 1934. By the nature of the order, it is likely that she died while residing in Michigan. This doesn't appear to be an ancillary probate proceeding, which would be followed had she died owning real property in Michigan while residing out-of-state. The order also noted that she owned personal property worth \$2,981.31, and that all of her debts and obligations had been fully paid.

The order described three different parcels of real estate owned by Amelia:

- 1. The Southwest ¼ of Section 26, Laird Township, Houghton County (80 acres),
- 2. The Southwest ¼ of the Northwest ¼ of Section 31, Baraga Township, Baraga County (40 acres), and
- 3. Lots 13 and 14 of Block 6, Foote's Subdivision to the Village of Baraga, Baraga County.

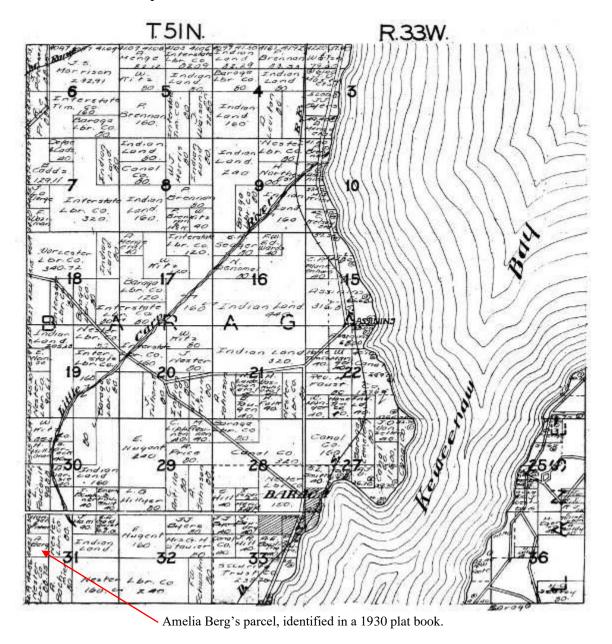
The order transferred title to the personal property and all three real estate parcels to Amelia's four surviving heirs – F.W. Berg, John A. Berg, George B. Berg, and Elmer A. Berg – in equal one-fourth shares.

The Baraga Township 40 acre parcel is located just west of the village, about 2 ½ to 3 miles west of the bay. It is virtually due west of the present location of the Baraga State Park. The exact location is shown on this old section map of the township:



Section map of Baraga Township, with Berg 40 acre parcel highlighted in red.

This is from a 1930 plat book of Baraga County, which shows "A. Berg" as the owner of the 40 acre parcel:



I drove around most of the roads in and around Baraga, looking for the 40 acre farm site. Some of these were paved, and most were not. There were several two-tract roads as well, but I didn't dare drive down any of these in my big bus. My principal clues were that the north line of Section 31 appears to be a roadway on the 1930 plat; the Little Carp River crosses the roadway just east of the Berg parcel; and the 40 acre farm is almost exactly three miles from Keweenaw Bay.

There aren't many farms in the area. Most of the land in the area is heavily wooded, and even wilderness. I did find one small ex-farm on Baraga Plains Road

(which is actually paved), just west of town. This farm is located relatively near where I believe the Berg farm was. It contains one of the few old barns I found in the immediate vicinity of the Village of Baraga:



Old barn on small farm on Baraga Plains Road. Photo taken in 2010.

I was finally successful in finding the Berg farm on my last trip to Baraga. The northern line of Sections 32 and 33 is not M-38, a paved two lane state highway. However, M-38 veers north as it reaches Section 31 (where the Berg farm was located). As a result, the farm is about a half mile south of the highway. I drove on M-38 to the first road west of the Little Carp River. The road is not named on my detailed atlas. To my surprise, the name of the road is "Oberg". I don't know where this name came from, but it is an eerie coincidence.

Oberg is a relatively wide gravel road for about a half mile from M-38, and there are two homes on the road. There is a small airstrip on the southwest corner of M-38 and Oberg. After a half mile or so, Oberg narrows to a two-track road. The east side of the road, south of the two homes, is a recently cut hay field. Here are some photos:



Oberg road sign at M-38.



Oberg road, facing south from M-38. Notice the "No outlet" sign, which convinced me not to drive down this road with the bus.



This is a sign in front of the farmhouse second farm house south of M-38, immediately north of the Berg family farm.



This is Oberg Road, facing south. The Berg farm is shown on the left of the photo.



This is the Berg family farm, facing east from Oberg Road.



This is also the Berg farm, facing east from Oberg Road. The Little Carp River runs through the trees shown in the photo background.

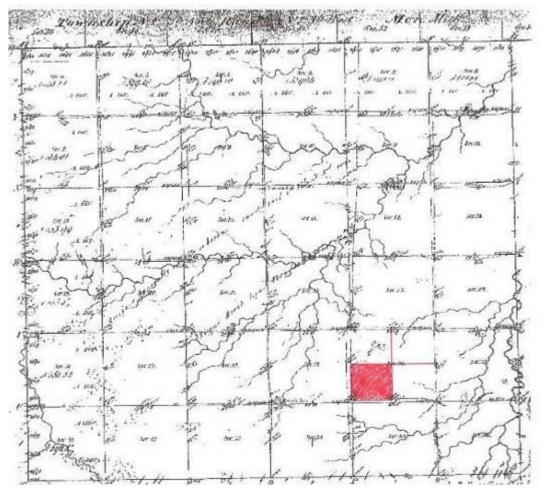


This is another view of the Berg farm.



This view, facing east and slightly north, shows the overall terrain of the area. The farm itself is gently rolling. It is located on a ridge, and the topography drops down at the Little Carp River. There is a steeper ridge between the Little Carp River and Keweenaw Bay, and you can see this ridge in the center background. You can also see the Baraga water tower in the background towards the left. Beyond the ridge in the background is the Village of Baraga and Keweenaw Bay.

Houghton County wraps around the northern and western boundary of Baraga County, and Laird Township is located immediately west of Baraga Township. The exact location of the Laird Township 80 acre parcel is shown on the following old section map:



Laird Township section map, with Berg 80 acre parcel highlighted in red.

Laird Township is even more desolate and undeveloped than Baraga Township. The Berg 80 acre parcel is now located within the Ottawa National Forest, a 1.5 million acre national forest stretching from Houghton County to the Wisconsin border. This national forest was created in 1928, and the federal government purchased additional land for the forest in the 1930s. I suspect that the Berg farm was sold by the Berg brothers to the federal government shortly after the death of Amelia Berg.

There are few roads running through the national forest within Laird Township, and I did not attempt to get close in my bus. Even if I got relatively close, this site would be extremely difficult to find today.

I reviewed the Baraga Township assessment roll for 1900. Other volumes were also available to be reviewed. The 1900 roll listed Martin as the owner of the Southwest

¹/₄ of the Northwest ¹/₄ of Section 31. This 40 acre parcel was owned by Amelia at the time of her death, and passed by probate order to her four sons. This parcel was also owned by Martin on the 1896 tax rolls, meaning he purchased the land in 1896 or earlier. This parcel had a 1900 true cash value of \$200, per the board of review. Property taxes for the year were \$5.46, allocated as follows:

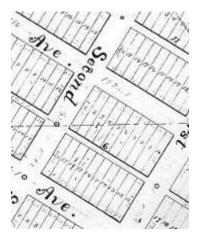
State tax	\$0.34
County tax	\$1.42
Township tax	\$0.26
Highway tax	\$1.00
School tax	\$1.85
Bridge tax	\$0.14
Bond tax	\$0.30
Other tax	\$0.12

I obtained a copy of Foote's Subdivision of the Village of Baraga on my most recent trip to Baraga. This is essentially the "downtown" area of Baraga, platted in 1891. "Superior Avenue" is Baraga's Main Street. Block 6 is the block between First and Second Streets, and Superior and Bowling Avenues. This is one block west of the railroad, and about one block southwest of the old railroad depot. Most of the lots in this subdivision, including Lots 13 and 14, are 23 feet wide and 123 feet deep. The dimensions of the two lots combined are 46 feet by 123 feet.



1891 plat of Foote's Subdivision of the Village of Baraga. Lots 13 and 14 of Block 6 are here.

This is a more focused view of Block 6:



Armed with the location of Lots 13 and 14, I went back to the village to photograph the lots. These lots are the location of Martin and Amelia's grocery store and boarding house. And, since John Albert was born "at home", this is the site John Albert's birth. The following are photographs of Lots 13 and 14, and of Superior Avenue, taken in 2010:



This photo is of Lots 13 and 14, from across Superior Avenue. The house shown faces Bowling Avenue.

The lots, as can be seen, are vacant.



This photo is also of Lots 13 and 14 from across Superior Avenue.



This shows Superior Avenue, facing south from First Street. Lots 13 and 14 are to the right.



This is another view of Superior facing south from First Street, with Lots 13 and 14 on right.



Yet another view of Superior Avenue, facing south.



This is Superior Avenue facing northwest, straight towards Lots 13 and 14.

I went back to the photographs from the Baraga County Historical Museum, to see if any of them included the Berg boarding house/grocery store. While I am not absolutely positive, it does appear that one of these photographs is of Superior Avenue, facing south from First Street. If it is, then it does include (barely) the Berg store.



1900s picture of Main Street/Superior Avenue. Berg store is here.