In the spring of 1903, Adams and several Duluth financial backers started Orelands Mining Co. Their first ore samples were not good quality but, by 1904, they hit high-grade ore near Rabbit Lake, which later became the infamous Kennedy Mine. Once quality ore was found, prospectors and investors moved in. George H. Crosby, a Duluth financier and developer on the Mesabi Iron Range, had great enthusiasm for the new range. He secured options on land, part of which later became Main Street in Crosby, and designed the town site named after him. Crosby had financial dealings in a number of mines on the range, including Whitmarsh Mining Company’s ill-fated Milford. By 1908, the Kennedy became the first mine on the Cuyuna to ship ore (from Armour No. 1) to eastern steel mills. The newest Minnesota iron range had finally “come of age.” By 1912, eleven mines were operating, five were shipping ore: The Kennedy, Thompson, Armour 1 and 2 and Cuyuna-Mille Lacs. Additional mines were developing. Sixteen mines were open by 1914, including the new Croft shaft sunk by Metrmine Mining Company. Rich manganiferous ore from Cuyuna Range was found to be so valuable to American war efforts in WWI and later wars, that men who worked those mines were exempted from the draft. At the end of WWI, 40 mines were open, employing nearly 3,000 men. The Depression in the 30s closed many mines, but the beginnings of WWII again created a demand for ore from the Cuyuna Range. In the spring of 1903, Adams and several Duluth financial backers started Orelands Mining Co. Their first ore samples were not good quality but, by 1904, they hit high-grade ore near Rabbit Lake, which later became the infamous Kennedy Mine. Once quality ore was found, prospectors and investors moved in. George H. Crosby, a Duluth financier and developer on the Mesabi Iron Range, had great enthusiasm for the new range. He secured options on land, part of which later became Main Street in Crosby, and designed the town site named after him. Crosby had financial dealings in a number of mines on the range, including Whitmarsh Mining Company’s ill-fated Milford. By 1908, the Kennedy became the first mine on the Cuyuna to ship ore (from Armour No. 1) to eastern steel mills. The newest Minnesota iron range had finally “come of age.” By 1912, eleven mines were operating, five were shipping ore: The Kennedy, Thompson, Armour 1 and 2 and Cuyuna-Mille Lacs. Additional mines were developing. Sixteen mines were open by 1914, including the new Croft shaft sunk by Metrmine Mining Company. Rich manganiferous ore from Cuyuna Range was found to be so valuable to American war efforts in WWI and later wars, that men who worked those mines were exempted from the draft. At the end of WWI, 40 mines were open, employing nearly 3,000 men. The Depression in the 30s closed many mines, but the beginnings of WWII again created a demand for ore from the Cuyuna Range.

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NOW OPEN IF YOU BUILD, they will come...influx of immigrants

If you build it, they will come...influx of immigrants

According to the Cuyuna Mine Joint Powers Board: “immigrants who didn’t speak English were often given menial jobs. If they wanted to get ahead, they took ‘Americanization’ classes at night to learn English and become citizens. Improving their status gave immigrants a resolve to be successful and a thirst for education passed down to their children and grandchildren.”

These miners are drilling for iron ore in core samples using a diamond drill in the early history of the Cuyuna Range.

Russian, German or other armies...America promised new opportunity and was growing rapidly. Iron, essential for building cities, bridges, and railroads, was also needed for farming and logging equipment. Iron made the very freighters that shipped ore across the Great Lakes and the ocean-going vessels that brought more immigrants. As new mines opened on Cuyuna Range, many workers were needed. Mining companies advertised in newspapers in America and abroad, touting year-round jobs. They needed strong men willing to work for lower wages so the new range could become competitive on world markets. Tiny settlements, first called “locations,” opened close to the mines, some with mining related names like Orelands, Klondike, Steelton, Ironston and Iron Mountain. Larger boomtowns became Crosby, Cuyuna, Ironston, Manganese and Trommald, that swelled with immigrants from countries like the British Isles, Croatia, the Ukraine, Hungary and Italy, as well as Finland, Scandinavia, Austria and Germany. Some workers came under contract with travel deductions subtracted. Others pooled money or borrowed from relatives. Most immigrants could speak little, if any, English and had limited education. A lot of men came alone or with male relatives, later sending for wives and children.

First iron ore shipped from the City of Crosby. The ore came from an Armour mine.

Mining on Cuyuna Range, past brings future benefits

Part IV – Mining in the early days

Conrad Pettersen

Discovery and beginnings

If you walk over magnetite with a compass, it interferes with the compass pointing magnetic north, causing it to change direction. That’s how Cuyler Adams discovered iron in the Deerwood area while surveying property lines with his St. Bernard, Una. Cuyler Adams’ discovery back in the 1880s was the first birth pang of the Cuyuna Range. Yet it took over 20 years of toil and trouble before mines were operational. Some shafts flooded from groundwater, and many prospectors went broke and abandoned their projects. It took over a decade, into the 20th century, before ore was shipped and investors made a profit. At first Cuyler Adams was ridiculed for fanciful dreams. But his persistence to explore and continue drilling paid off. Eventually, he became a wealthy iron baron, naming his discovery “Cuyuna” from a combination of his name “Cuy” and his dog “Una.”
### Early mining working conditions

Miners, a cool 50° all year, were damp and humid. Miners developed respiratory illnesses, pneumonitis, bronchitis, and sinus infections. Cave-ins, electrocutions, falls, and other accidents maimed and killed miners. At least 200 men lost their lives in the Cuyuna Range, probably more died early from lung-related illnesses. Communities became self-reliant to help not only themselves, but also the less fortunate.

Mining equipment and clothing improved over the years. Carbide lamp hard hats replaced soft hats and candles. To stay warm and dry, underground miners wore many pounds of clothing – hats, bib overalls, nubber boots and a range slicker, gloves and a headband with a coal cap to keep from breathing in too much iron dust. It was dirty work. Men came off shift almost unrecognized. Blasting occurred twice a day, between shifts. If necessary, they would get everyone out of the mine and blast in the middle of a shift. Miners worked two concurrent 10-hour shifts. The last four hours of the mine were empty so pumps could keep ahead of ground water. Explosives were kept in a powder room, encased in wood to keep dynamic dry. If dynamite got wet, it could bleed nitroglycerine and be unsafe. Miners bought their own dynamite and tools. The mine did not provide them. A company store sold everything at a discounted price.

When they got their dynamite, miners had to put it together by taking a fuse and inserting it into the blasting cap. They used a cap-crimping tool to attach the cap onto the fuse, applying a little pressure to seal it. They had to be extremely careful not to apply too much pressure or it would explode. Many preferred to use their teeth because their hands were callused and they could not tell how much pressure to apply.

The engineer's office was the highest rank a worker could achieve. Sometimes miners began working above ground at age 14 by shoveling coal into the engine. They worked their way through every rank of a miner, an average of 20 years to go through the ranks. If a mining company thought a man might be a good engineer, they shipped him off to college and paid his schooling. One of the best colleges was the Denver School of Mining. Those in the engineer's office were multi-talented. They designed and blueprinted all buildings and mine workings, kept track of how much iron ore was produced, and paid miners based on how much they brought up in a 2-week period. The harder they worked, the more they got paid.

On April 8, 1913, there was an unexpected strike by nearby a thousand Cuyuna Range miners. Cuyuna Country, A People's History reported the strike “shocked residents, businessmen and mining company officials.” Miners demanded an eight-hour day, time and a half for overtime, abolition of contract work, the hospital fee be borne exclusively by the mine operators, plus a number of other things.

The companies and striking miners came to an agreement on April 26. This first attempt by miners gained some improvements, but not many. The companies threatened to shut down, saying they could not afford to honor all demands and keep prices competitive.

#### Historical, cultural value

Mining on the Cuyuna Range continued until competition from taconite production and rising cost factors proved too great to continue in the late 1960s. Today the area has a new wealth in unique pit mine lakes filled with game fish. Area trails are ideal for tourism and there is a rich historical and cultural heritage.

According to The Guide to the Croft Mine Historical Park, published by the Croft Mine Joint Powers Board: “The Croft exemplified the mining era at its height and because still standing structures made it ideal for restoration, the State of Minnesota purchased the property in 1978... the last underground iron mine to produce ore in Minnesota came to a rolling halt at one o’clock a.m. June 1, 1967. Last to close was Inland Steel Company’s Armour No. 2. It ended an era that arose in the early 1900s, saw millions of tons of ore funnel into the nation’s economy, employment in the thousands, and flourishing communities rise – some to die – as the industry founded... along the dimly-lit tunnel maze, ore cars bumped and rattled on steel rails past ghostlike human forms with dynamite attached, miners fed... past the last helmet, the last helmet of yesterday go on as always at the Croft Mine Historical Park where you can take a step back in time and live the colorful and unique history of the Cuyuna Iron Range.”

Next in the series on Cuyuna Range mining are upcoming features of “Miners’ Memoires.” If you have information to share about your (or a family member’s) mining experiences on the Cuyuna Range, contact the News-Hopper, 218-927-6990, or e-mail hopper@slynet.net.