

HISTORIC CONTEXT: MINNESOTA'S IRON ORE INDUSTRY

1880s-1945

GEOGRAPHICAL LIMITS: see map

The iron range is perhaps the most tightly defined of the historic contexts for Minnesota because of the clearly indentifiable boundaries of the resource on which it is based. The three areas of iron -- or "ranges" -- are the Vermilion, Mesabi, and Cuyana, beginning development in 1882, 1890, and c. 1905, respectively. The level and quality of ore in the three ranges varied considerably, and the technology varied accordingly. After the turn-of-the-century, to meet the increasing demand of the iron and steel industry, mining companies began exploiting low grade ore deposits, such as those of the Cuyana Range.

Range development was undertaken through Midwestern and Eastern capitol who attracted many European immigrants to provide a labor force. The construction of rail lines linked the mines with the cities along Lake Superior, where both shipping and processing took place.

The range population was essentially urban, with townsites platted both by corporate and private interests. Many of the mine workers and their families lived in houses clustered near the mines in areas known as "locations." Fraternal, labor and ethnic halls and churches provided an important social

CONTEXT DESCRIPTION

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outlet in the communities near the mines. To facilitate their mining operations and accommodate mine workers the mining companies built offices, hospitals, club houses, shops and research facilities in company towns, non-company towns where they had sizable operations, and in mining locations throughout the range. Property taxes collected from the mining companies were often used by the Range municipalities to build impressive public buildings, schools, service facilities and streetcar lines.

EXAMPLES OF PROPERTY TYPES ASSOCIATED WITH THE
MINNESOTA IRON ORE INDUSTRY HISTORIC CONTEXT:

Properties associated with actual mining operations

- mines
- ore processing plants
- head frames

Townsite properties

- municipal buildings constructed with mining taxes
- residences -- built by individuals and by the mining companies, including boarding houses, apartment buildings, single family residences, housing in mining locations
- churches
- social halls
- mining company office and research facilities
- commercial buildings

Property structures associated with the mining railroads and the transport of ore

Property structures in shore cities

- ore docks
- tug boats
- steel plants
- light houses
- office buildings

SELECTED EXAMPLES OF NATIONAL REGISTER SITES ASSOCIATED
WITH THE MINNESOTA IRE ORE INDUSTRY HISTORIC CONTEXT

Hull-Rust Mine (Hibbing, St. Louis County)
Ironton Sintering Plant (Crosby, Crow Wing County)
Soudan Mine (Tower-Soudan, St. Louis County)
Bruce Mine Head Frame (Chisholm, St. Louis County)
Tug Boat - Edna G. (Two Harbors, Lake County)
Elevated Water Tanks of the Cuyana Range (Crow Wing County)
Eveleth Manual Training Center (Eveleth, St. Louis County)
B'Nai Abraham Synagogue (Virginia, St. Louis County)
Spina Hotel (Ironton, St. Louis County)
Oliver Iron Mining Company Boarding House (Marble, Itasca County)
Howard Street Commercial Historic District (Hibbing, St. Louis County)
Hibbing High School (Hibbing, St. Louis County)
Car Northland (Proctor, St. Louis County)
Dr. Charles Lenont House (Virginia, St. Louis County)
Valon Tuote Raittiusseura (Finnish Temperance Hall; Virginia,
St. Louis County)
Buhl Village Hall (Buhl, St. Louis County)
Morgan Park Residential Historic District (Duluth, St. Louis County)

IRON RANGE CONTEXT BIBLIOGRAPHY: Minnesota Historical Society,
Department of Historic Preservation, Field Services, and Grants.

Tim Glines

December, 1989

The bibliographical information included in this report was prepared as part of an assignment through the HPFS&G Department's planning process. It was not possible to spend a large amount of time on the project. Therefore, it should not be regarded as comprehensive. However, no bibliography can be regarded as comprehensive -- new research is being done constantly, and bibliographic information is almost immediately out of date.

It is a starting point. It might be worth updating the context bibliographies on a regular schedule as part of the Department's planning process. This could be an activity an intern could accomplish.

The material is organized by sections. Where I found a catalog number for an item in the MHS reference library, I have listed it in brackets.

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GOALS AND PRIORITIES WORKSHEET

Date: 6/14/90

HISTORIC CONTEXT:

Minnesota's Iron Ore Industry, 1880s to 1945

PROPERTY TYPE (if applicable):

Various

Ranking key:

A = High priority

0 - 2 years

B = Medium priority

3 - 5 years

C = Low priority

IDENTIFICATION

EVALUATION

REGISTRATION:

Time-table for
Completion

Priority
Ranking

- | | | |
|---|------------------------------|---|
| * Conduct surveys in Duluth and Two Harbors (these surveys would be general intensive-level surveys and be more than for just this context). [Presumably, the survey for Duluth could be done as a CLG project.] | | B |
| * Rewrite the context narrative to treat more fully the transportation links between the Iron Ranges and Lake Superior communities through the transportation network; to develop better the distinctions between the three Ranges; and to be more specific about ethnic immigrants in Range communities. | in-house | A |
| * Prepare a Multiple Property Documentation form for civic buildings on Iron Ranges. | FY91 or 92 | A |
| * Proceed with Morgan Park designation. | FY91 contract | A |
| * Do thematic study on taconite industry in preparation for the time when post-World War II properties will be eligible. | | C |
| * Conduct an intensive-level survey of the Duluth ore docks. | | B |
| * Investigate integrity of Taconite plant at Babbitt to determine what remains from the early 1920s facility and evaluate informally for possible designation. | put on staff evaluation list | A |
| * Survey of Hibbing commercial district. | | B |
| * Reevaluate decision to put 1979 nomination of Leetonia location on hold. | | A |

CONTEXT GOALS & PRIORITIES

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Minnesota's Iron Industry, 1880s to 1945 cont.

IDENTIFICATION

EVALUATION

REGISTRATION

* Conduct survey and evaluate Finnish log buildings in St. Louis County within this context	done	
* Evaluate Lake Superior shipping industry within this context in completion of LCMR historic shipwrecks project	FY90 - 93	A

TREATMENT

* Do a re-use study of Church of the Good Shepherd (Episcopal) and Coleraine Methodist Episcopal Church in Coleraine.		B
* Conduct "Time and Taste" for Hibbing HPC.		B
* CLG status for Hibbing HPC and/or establish a good HPC in Coleraine.	in-house	A
* Resolve issue about moving tugboat Edna G.	in-house	A
* Have MHS support state funds for the DNR to enable it to pump water from the Hill Annex Mine.		B
* Work with IRRRB and IRRC to develop a historic properties brochure for the Iron Ranges.		B