

# The “Locations”

## Company Communities on Minnesota’s Iron Ranges

Arnold R. Alanen



*RESIDENTS of the Leonidas Location near Eveleth collecting water from the community well house*

**“Ashes to ashes  
Dust to dust  
If Glenn didn’t get me  
Kitzville must.”<sup>1</sup>**

IN MOST MINING regions of the United States the company town has played an important and indeed often ominous role in defining settlement patterns and in determining the development and evolution of social and economic institutions. One section of the country where

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<sup>1</sup>Margaret Dahlen, Diary, July 20, 1928, in Daily Vacation Bible School (DVBS) reports, William J. Bell Papers, Minnesota Historical Society (MHS), St. Paul. Glen was a location between Hibbing and Chisholm; Kitzville was a small townsite two miles southeast of Hibbing. Dahlen misspelled the two names.

The author is indebted for research support from the Graduate School and the College of Agricultural & Life Sciences at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. He also thanks various archival and research center personnel in the Twin Cities, Duluth, and many iron range communities.

<sup>2</sup>For background information on Coleraine, Taconite, and Marble, see Donald L. Boese, *John C. Greenway and the Opening of the Western Mesabi* (Grand Rapids, Minn., 1975). For a recent overview of Minnesota’s early iron ore industry that includes data on Coleraine’s growth, see David A. Walker, *Iron Frontier: The Discovery and Early Development of Minnesota’s Three Ranges*, 234 (St. Paul, 1979). See also Arnold R. Alanen, “Morgan Park: U.S. Steel and a Planned Company Town,” in Ryck Lydecker and Lawrence J. Sommer, eds., *Duluth: Sketches of the Past*, 111–125 (Duluth, 1976). During the post-World War II period, modern versions of the company town emerged on the eastern Mesabi at Silver Bay, Hoyt Lakes, and Babbitt.

<sup>3</sup>Information on the number of locations and their characteristics was derived from various maps, reports, photographs, memoranda, newspaper accounts and personal interviews; see Arnold R. Alanen, “Documenting the Physical and Social Characteristics of Mining and Resource-Based Communities,” in Association for Preservation Technology, *Bulletin*, vol. 11, no. 4, p. 49–68 (1979). Although every effort was made to determine the name and site of each location, there may be a few early settlements that were not found in this assessment.

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the company town has not had a great impact, however, is the Lake Superior mining region that embraces the copper country of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula and the Marquette, Menominee, Gogebic, Vermilion, Mesabi, and Cuyuna iron ranges of northern Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. Only a few versions of the company town — such as Coleraine, Marble, and Taconite on the western Mesabi Range, and the steel production center of Morgan Park situated near Duluth — have been evident in the region; but several hundred examples of the “location,” another form of company-controlled community, did emerge.<sup>2</sup>

Locations were groupings of residences built proximate to mine sites, they were found throughout the Lake Superior region, but the largest number existed in Michigan’s copper country and on the Mesabi Range. The Vermilion Range, which shipped its first iron ore in 1884, had about a dozen locations, primarily in the vicinity of Ely, although Soudan, the collective name for three adjacent enclaves and the largest location in Minnesota, was situated next to the community of Tower. The Mesabi Range, where massive numbers of mining employees had to be housed and accommodated, spawned over 175 locations between 1892 and the 1920s. By the time ore shipments began from the Cuyuna Range in 1911, other townsites associated with agricultural, lumbering, and railroad activities already existed in the area; thus, it appears, given present evidence, that no more than six locations emerged on the Cuyuna.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the fact that the location was virtually a ubiquitous settlement form in the region and existed in large numbers, few published accounts have dealt directly with this version of the company community. This article traces the origins of the word “location,” defines it, determines why these settlements were built, and, especially, describes the social and institutional conditions and the physical form and layout of Minnesota’s iron range locations.

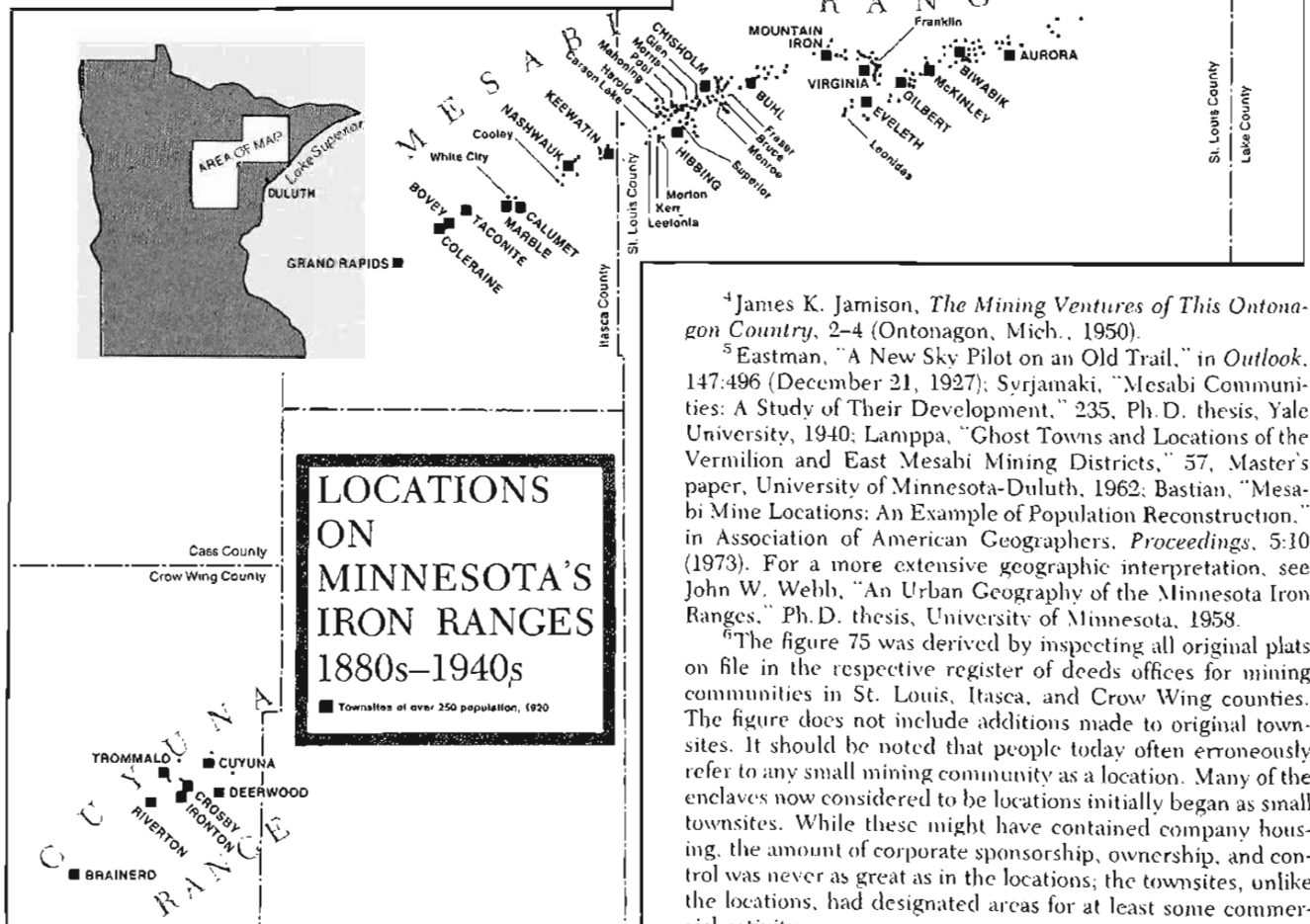
The initial use of the term, “location,” in the Lake Superior region appeared during the early 1840s in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, where mining companies were given federal permits or leases to explore for copper ore deposits. The companies, most of which had headquarters in the eastern United States, received authorization to “locate” on numbered land parcels ranging up to nine square miles in area; thus the entire land

holding was considered to be the location.<sup>4</sup> Eventually, the term also was applied to the mine shafts and any buildings constructed upon the property. By the time mining began in Minnesota during the 1880s, a location invariably referred to the residential area situated near an excavation and usually, but not always, bearing the same name as the mine.

Subsequent descriptions of and references to locations in Minnesota have clearly, albeit not always positively, defined them as residential enclaves. Almost 55 years ago educator and social worker Fred Eastman termed the Mesabi Range locations complexes of company houses and shacks. John Syrjamaki, in a major sociological study of Mesabi communities, described the locations as "dismal, forsaken groupings of residences huddled near a mining operation," while local historian and educator Marvin G. Lamppa's appraisal of the Vermilion and eastern Mesabi ranges, written some two decades later, noted that locations were built next to the mines so employees could walk to work. More recently, geographer Robert W. Bastian has defined the location as "a cluster of residential structures bearing the name of a nearby mine whose labor force and dependents it housed."<sup>5</sup>

While locations had several features in common — the most important being that all were situated on company-owned land — the present writer's assessment of several hundred locations in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota indicates three major settlement forms existed: unplatted or squatters' locations, company locations, and model locations.

ONCE the potential productivity of a mine site had been established, permanent settlements began to replace the temporary exploration camps. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries at least 75 separate townsites such as Tower, Mountain Iron, Virginia, Hibbing, and Crosby<sup>6</sup> were platted by capitalists and speculators who sought to



<sup>4</sup> James K. Jamison, *The Mining Ventures of This Ontonagon Country*, 2-4 (Ontonagon, Mich., 1950).

<sup>5</sup> Eastman, "A New Sky Pilot on an Old Trail," in *Outlook*, 147:496 (December 21, 1927); Syrjamaki, "Mesabi Communities: A Study of Their Development," 235, Ph.D. thesis, Yale University, 1940; Lamppa, "Ghost Towns and Locations of the Vermilion and East Mesabi Mining Districts," 57, Master's paper, University of Minnesota-Duluth, 1962; Bastian, "Mesabi Mine Locations: An Example of Population Reconstruction," in *Association of American Geographers, Proceedings*, 5:10 (1973). For a more extensive geographic interpretation, see John W. Webb, "An Urban Geography of the Minnesota Iron Ranges," Ph.D. thesis, University of Minnesota, 1958.

<sup>6</sup> The figure 75 was derived by inspecting all original plats on file in the respective register of deeds offices for mining communities in St. Louis, Itasca, and Crow Wing counties. The figure does not include additions made to original townsites. It should be noted that people today often erroneously refer to any small mining community as a location. Many of the enclaves now considered to be locations initially began as small townsites. While these might have contained company housing, the amount of corporate sponsorship, ownership, and control was never as great as in the locations; the townsites, unlike the locations, had designated areas for at least some commercial activity.

profit from the mining fever sweeping throughout northern Minnesota. While many of these townsites evolved into autonomous communities that were relatively free of company control, not all people associated with mining activities were able to or chose to reside in such towns.

For some of the thousands of European immigrants who flocked to Minnesota's mining region, the unplatted or squatters' location served as their first home. (The singular term, "squatters' location," was used primarily on the Mesabi, but most of the unplatted locations in Michigan, Wisconsin, and elsewhere in Minnesota had similar characteristics.) Such locations sprang up when the immigrant miners constructed shacks, hovels, tarpaper-covered dwellings, and even occasionally a more substantial house on company-owned land. Eventually the miner and his family had to acquire a squatters' license which, during the first three decades of the 20th century, cost between 50 cents and \$1.50 per month; the permit allowed one to remain on the property until the company decreed otherwise. (The companies charged these minimal rents to forestall the acquisition of squatters' rights to the land.) There were perhaps no more than a dozen squatters' locations on the Mesabi, though one authority has indicated that it was more common for individuals or small groups of squatters to construct their

houses along the fringe of a town or location, or along roadways and pathways.<sup>7</sup>

When mining activities at a productive site required a steady, dependable, and more highly trained work force, the companies built new locations for miners and their families. These were the company locations, the most common settlement form in the entire region. The contrast between the early, haphazardly arranged squatters' locations and those of the company with their electric lights, waterworks, and graded streets were noted by a reporter in 1913: "Years ago the mining locations were cesspools for the collection of dirt and all manner of filth, as well as hot beds [sic] for the propagation of vice and crime. Today all this has been changed."<sup>8</sup>

After constructing dwellings in company locations, the mining firms rented or leased the units to employees, although residents occasionally were permitted to purchase a house but not the land on which it was built. Such housing undoubtedly was attractive to many persons, since the rents were generally one-third to one-half less than the fees charged in most of the towns. Monthly rental fees were determined by charging \$1.00 for every \$100.00 the company had invested in the house; thus, rents during the early 20th century ranged from \$8.00 to \$20.00 and averaged \$12.50.<sup>9</sup>

The third settlement form was the model location. No more than ten of these settlements existed throughout the entire Lake Superior region, but the mining companies, perceiving them as highly visible examples of benevolent paternalism, invested rather heavily in such locations. The management of both the company and model locations was quite similar, although the latter were laid out in a more attractive manner, contained higher quality housing, and were intended primarily for supervisory personnel and highly valued employees. In

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<sup>7</sup> LeRoy Hodges, "Immigrant Life in the Ore Region of Northern Minnesota," in *Survey*, 28:708 (September 7, 1912); Ruby Hankey, "Report of Work with the Range Parish, September 1927 to February 1929," 1, in DVBS reports, Bell Papers; Syrjamaki, "Mesabi Communities," 236.

<sup>8</sup> "Living Conditions on the Lake Superior Ranges," in *Iron Trade Review*, 52:245 (January 23, 1913).

<sup>9</sup> G. O. Virtue, *The Minnesota Iron Ranges*, 357 (U.S. Bureau of Labor, Bulletin No. 84 — Washington, D.C., 1909).

### *THE KITZVILLE LOCATION east of Hibbing as it appeared about 1915*



Michigan and Wisconsin some of the model locations were designed by professional landscape architects. This does not appear to have been the case in Minnesota, except for the model villages of Coleraine and Morgan Park, which received extensive attention from landscape designers.<sup>10</sup>

Both the model and company locations built or improved after about 1908 were products of corporate-sponsored welfare programs initiated by several companies in an effort to improve the health conditions and contentment of workers on the iron ore ranges. By adopting this approach, termed "welfare capitalism" or "social welfare," mining company executives hypothesized that visiting nurses, recreational facilities, pension plans, and community beautification and sanitation projects would improve the efficiency of the work force and reduce the likelihood of strikes and labor disturbances. Welfare capitalism also reportedly gave employees greater opportunity to better their own condition, and mining company executives saw this as providing an alternative to what workers and the general public had perceived as rather heavy-handed paternalism.

There were, however, clearly stated criteria that defined the limits of these programs. Judge Elbert H. Gary, head of United States Steel from 1901 to 1927, informed officers of his firm's subsidiary operations (such as Minnesota's Oliver Iron Mining Company), that welfare work was to be used to provide workers and their families with pure water, places to rest and recreate, and facilities such as parks, schools, and churches. But, Gary added, it also was necessary to keep "treating the whole thing as a business proposition, drawing the line so that you are just and generous and yet at the same time keeping your position and permitting others to keep theirs, retaining the control and management of your affairs, [and] keeping the whole thing in your own hands."<sup>11</sup> Whereas the common good may have been promoted by the companies, it was the desire to ensure

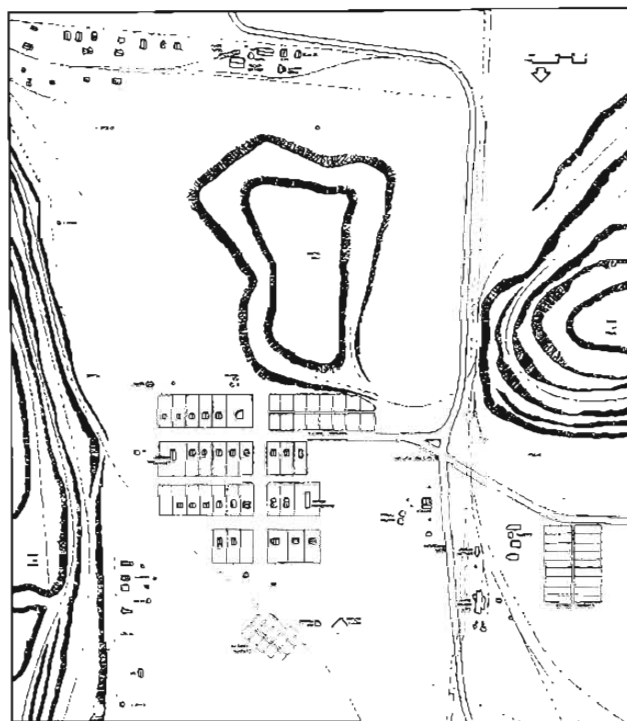
*MILES of boardwalk linked company locations like Morris to one another; they were characterized by gridlike layouts and monotonous architecture.*

efficiency, productivity, and of course, greater profitability that ultimately motivated capitalism on the mining ranges.

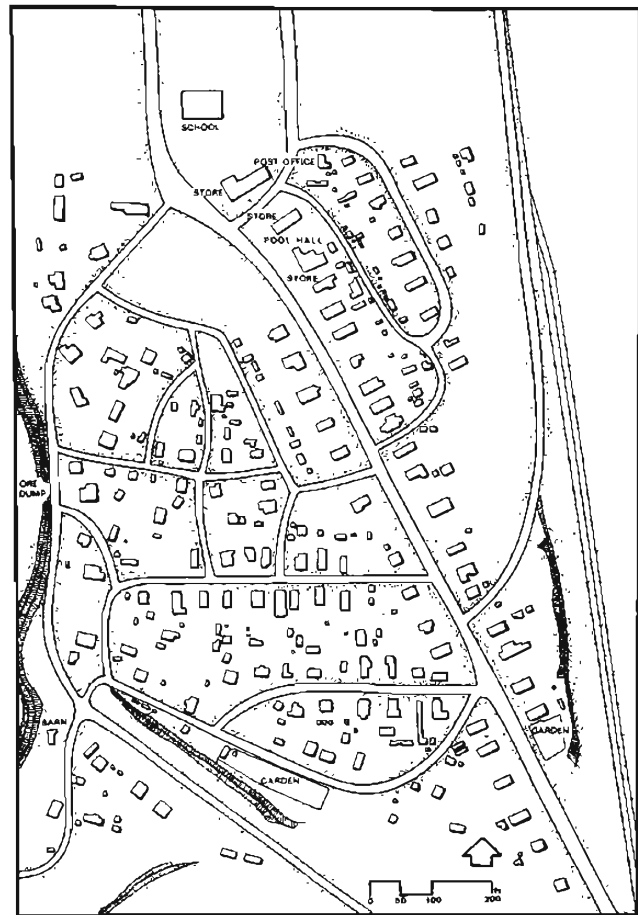
**FEW LOCATIONS** drew more comments from early observers than did those inhabited by squatters. Since there was no preconceived street plan or plat for such locations, the buildings were haphazardly arranged,

<sup>10</sup> Here and below, see Arnold R. Alanen, "The Planning of Company Communities in the Lake Superior Mining Region," in American Planning Association (APA), *Journal*, 45:264-269 (July, 1979); Clarke A. Chambers, "Social Welfare Policies and Programs on the Minnesota Iron Ranges — 1880-1930," 7-14, unpublished manuscript, 1963, copy in MHS; W. H. Moulton, "The Sociological Side of the Mining Industry," in Lake Superior Mining Institute, *Proceedings*, 14:97 (1909).

<sup>11</sup> United States Steel Corporation, Bureau of Safety, Sanitation & Welfare, *Bulletin No. 8*, December, 1920, p. 3.



scattered across the landscape, and appeared, according to one observer, "as if they had just all been poured out of something into a heap." A maze of winding roads, paths, and alleys connected the varied elements of this multifaceted residential complex. The 1893 location of Superior, for example, which preceded the platting and development of nearby Hibbing by a few months, was described as having a large number of shacks that were "picturesque, grotesque and otherwise [pointing] in all directions." In the Hibbing area alone, more than 30



THIS PLAT of Carson Lake (above) shows the helter-skelter pattern common in squatters' locations in contrast to the regular design of company locations like Morris (left).

locations had emerged by World War I, with two of the largest squatters' settlements being Pool and Carson Lake. The Carson Lake enclave was approached, wrote one young social worker, by picking "one's way amid the muddy alleys to houses set helter skelter without rhyme or reason, through . . . mazes of stick fences and pig stys [sic]." Her colleague, who described Carson Lake as "a fearful place," also questioned how the residents could joke about the location to the extent they did. She concluded that it was the only way they made life tolerable.<sup>12</sup>

Pool was an outgrowth of two former locations — French and Finn — and was situated just north of Hibbing. A newspaper reporter there described the settlement: "The houses are set at all angles, the few streets are zigzagging lanes. This is, of course, by reason of the fact that the streets were made some time after the houses were built in a neighborly cluster. Every little house boasts at least one woodshed or garage, consequently the sheds outnumber the houses. Boulders, more boulders, small haystacks, woodpiles, sheds, shacks, leantos are seen everywhere. Occasionally a neat cottage with sturdy cornices, geraniums in the window and clean yard is seen. Small trees and straggly shrubs grow thickly here and there without regard for the landscape effect. From the highest lane, one receives a view of vast, open pits, deep valleys, long clay ridges, and smoky, blue horizons."<sup>13</sup>

To supplement their incomes, squatters often kept chickens, pigs, sheep, and cows on the premises. Crude outbuildings accommodated the animals, but some observers reported that both livestock and humans shared the same quarters. At White City, situated east of Marble and probably the most squalid location on the Mesabi Range, one commentator in 1926 declared conditions were "unbelievable, log huts for they cannot be called houses, underground rooms with no ventilation and with the sheep and pigs a part of the family." (Apparently it was quite common for sheep to be brought into the warm kitchens of houses during lambing season.) Another person noted that White City was even worse than Carson Lake: "Such pigs and cows and sheep wandering around! I would be afraid to eat them. And I don't believe one could stand upright in the house[s]."<sup>14</sup>

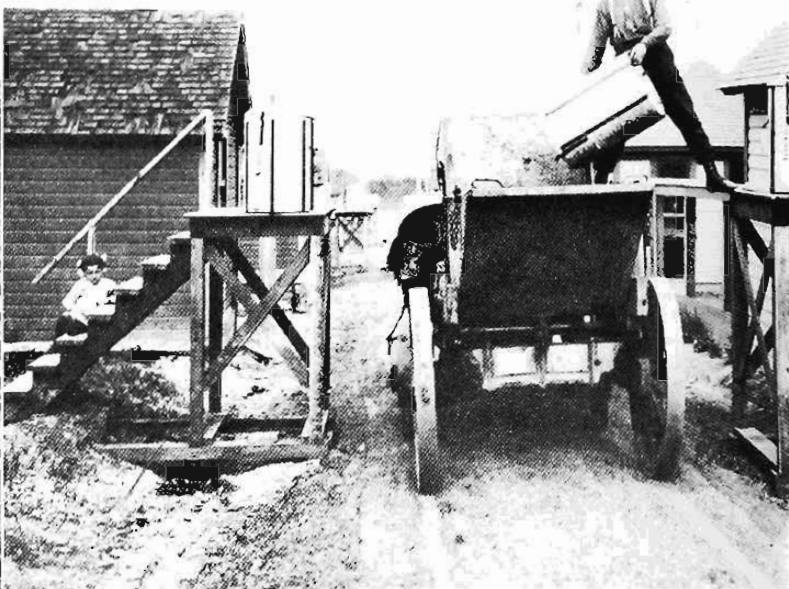
The company locations, on the other hand, were laid out by mining engineers in regular, gridlike patterns. Often they displayed well-built housing units that were similar in form, appearance, color, and dimension. One resident of Bruce Location near Chisholm stated that while the companies might have provided practical residences for their workers, "the mining engineers were lousy house designers."<sup>15</sup> One or more larger houses in the company locations generally demonstrated some architectural variety and were built on a prominent site;

<sup>12</sup> Marguerite Lains, "Six Weeks on the Range, 1928"; Charlotte Anderson, "Report, 1926"; and Wilma Fox, "Report, 1926" — all in DVBS reports, Bell Papers. See also *Mesaba Ore* (Hibbing), August 22, 1903, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Undated clipping, *Hibbing Daily News*, in Hibbing file, St. Louis County Collection, Northeast Minnesota Historical Center, University of Minnesota, Duluth.

<sup>14</sup> Anderson, "Report," and Fox, "Report"; author interview with Sam Njegovan, Bovey, July 14, 1981, notes in author's possession.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with George Lyons, November, 1978, tape on file in Iron Range Research Center (IRRC), Chisholm.



these dwellings were for the mining superintendent, mining captains, and their families.

In addition to relatively well-built housing, the company locations boasted graded streets, water systems, and electric lights. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and for many years thereafter in the smaller locations, residents had to carry water to their houses from a central well pipe. As early as 1907 and 1909, however, some of the larger locations began to be supplied with water mains that led to individual dwelling units. An outdoor privy generally was situated behind each house, although indoor plumbing was eventually provided in some locations. By 1921, for example, the Oliver Mining Company owned just over 2,000 houses; of these, 31 per cent did not have piped-in water, and 43 per cent had outdoor privies.<sup>16</sup>

To reduce the possibility of disease epidemics, there were regular sanitary inspections; a company chemist assessed the water quality; and garbage and refuse collection services were provided. Before regular bus service began on the Mesabi Range, a system of elevated boardwalks linked many of the locations to nearby townsites. The monotonous appearance of these communities did not go unnoticed by observers. In the mid-1920s, a location near Mountain Iron was described as "quite neat and liveable [*sic*], although not especially attractive"; and as late as 1940, one scholar portrayed the locations that remained on the Mesabi Range as standing "stark against an open and drear background of mine shafts, open-pits, dumps, railroad tracks, and tree stumps and boulders."

The companies nonetheless made some effort to beautify location landscapes by encouraging residents to improve their yards and to plant gardens. Throughout the locations the employees held contests with prizes for the most attractive gardens and yards; company bulletins

published pictures of the winning projects to serve as examples of what could be accomplished by residents who used their free time wisely. In 1914 U.S. Steel reminded its subsidiaries of the benefits that might accrue: "The man who has learned to take pride in his garden hurries home from his work, spending little time in loitering and none in the saloon. Therefore, the garden tends to reduce alcoholism. The man's standing in the community is raised; and what is even better, his own self-respect is promoted."<sup>17</sup>

Despite the fact that company location residents experienced better living conditions than did their colleagues in the squatters' locations, both faced a common dilemma: the possibility of sudden removal to a new site when mining operations were scheduled to convert the settlement site into an open pit. Thus, some locations had two names; "Old Kerr" and "New Kerr," for example, typified this process of removal and redevelopment. Better-built houses were moved to the new location, to a nearby townsite, or to another location, and some architectural variety was added to regional townscapes by such relocations. The amount of time given to location residents before they were forced to move depended upon the company holding the lease, but a 90-day notice appears to have been fairly standard.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Here and below, see *Hibbing Tribune*, November 17, 1907, p. 3, June 1, 1909, p. 1; "Sanitation Record," June 30, 1921, in Oliver Iron Mining Company Papers, MHS; "Living Conditions," in *Iron Trade Review*, 52:247; Fox, "Report"; Syrjamaki, "Mesabi Communities," 235.

<sup>17</sup> U. S. Steel, Bureau of Safety, Sanitation & Welfare, *Bulletin No. 5*, December, 1914, p. 58.

<sup>18</sup> Hankey, "Report of Work." Numerous accounts of houses and locations being moved to new sites may be found in Hibbing newspapers: *Hibbing Tribune*, May 26, 1904, p. 1, October 10, 1907, p. 1, August 17, 1908, p. 1; *Hibbing Daily News and Mesaba Ore*, April 20, 1922, p. 1.



*BACKYARD GARDENS (left), regular garbage collections (center), and fire hydrants such as that pictured at the Monroe Location (right) in 1912 were part of life in the company-sponsored communities on the Mesabi Range.*

The few model locations developed in the region provided houses that were somewhat more substantial than those in company locations and offered improved utility systems, a small park or open-space area, and occasionally even a tennis court. Journalist C. Whit Pfeiffer, who viewed the model Monroe Location near Chisholm in 1916, described a "treeless dwelling place where the ideas of beauty are coming in with efficiency, but belatedly." Noting that Monroe still displayed a "monotonous sameness of houses and rigid streets," Pfeiffer acknowledged that at least an updated roadway had been provided and attractive yards and regular garbage collection were evident.<sup>19</sup>

*"Goodby, God, I'm going to the Iron Range."<sup>20</sup>*

EARLY 20th-century impressions of social conditions and life in the locations often differed rather considerably. The companies, quite naturally, viewed the locations they provided for workers and their families as being adequate, if not exemplary, manifestations of corporate benevolence. Some reporters and social and religious workers, however, believed that the locations provided a nexus for unique social and community problems. Embracing a range of impressions somewhere between these two views were most of the inhabitants, who often looked at the locations as expedient or necessary

<sup>19</sup> Pfeiffer, "From 'Bohunks' to Finns: The Scale of Life among the Ore Strippings of the Northwest," in *Survey*, 36:9 (April 1, 1916).

<sup>20</sup> Eastman, in *Outlook*, 147:496.

<sup>21</sup> Dennett, "United States Steel Corporation, Employer," in *Outlook*, 111:728 (November 24, 1915); Gary to William J. Olcott, March 1, 1920, Oliver Papers.

<sup>22</sup> U. S. Steel, Bureau of Safety, Sanitation & Welfare, *Bulletin No. 7*, December, 1918, p. 32; "Proposed Outline of Visiting Nurse Work: Report of Special Committee of the Subcommittee on Sanitation July 27, 1920," Oliver Papers.

solutions to the housing problem all mining residents encountered. Whereas some location residents chafed under the paternalistic rules and regulations imposed upon them, others viewed a low-rent location house as a convenient way to supplement wages and salaries.

Viewing the efforts of the companies to supply housing for miners, educator and author Tyler Dennett reported in 1915 that "the necessity of the employer and the welfare of the employee have met." In addition to supplying housing, the companies sponsored programs and social events for location and town residents. These activities generally occurred in the company-built clubhouses found in some of the larger communities such as Eveleth, Hibbing, and Virginia. The attitudes and impressions that company executives hoped to engender among workers and their families were clearly communicated in 1920 by the head of U.S. Steel. After seeing pictures of a Christmas celebration and minstrel show held in the Oliver Clubhouse of the Eveleth district, Gary wrote to the president of Oliver Mining in Duluth: "This is good work. I congratulate you on the success of these enjoyable occasions. The more intimate the relations that exist between the managers and the families of the workmen, the better satisfied all of us should be."<sup>21</sup>

Another form of direct social welfare was the provision of medical services. Though company doctors had long been evident in mining communities, visiting-nurse programs were initiated by several companies in the early 20th century. Nurses employed by U.S. Steel and the Oliver company, for example, attended the sick, gave instructions in personal and domestic hygiene and domestic science, and assisted families with their monetary, marital, and related problems. Such provisions, executives believed, "resulted in a very decided improvement in living conditions and also a very kindly feeling toward the company."<sup>22</sup>





*THE OLIVER Company clubhouse in Hibbing as it looked about 1910*

Serving the needs of residents in the locations and communities was a demanding task for even the most cheerful and able nurse. Health-related problems obviously were a constant concern; one nurse in the mining region reported that the nine cases of pneumonia and six of "LaGrippe" she encountered in one month required "more energy than a same number at any other time in my nursing career." Immigrant customs and values often frustrated the nurses, whether it was mothers who reportedly fed their babies coffee and all kinds of food from the table, or women who failed to clean their houses in a manner deemed adequate by American standards. One nurse stated that neighborhood feuds among nationality groups posed as serious a difficulty as did health problems: "To work here requires infinite patience. In such cases one must be prepared to turn seamstress, dietician, sanitarian, home demonstrator, gardener, yes, even mechanic, and in these things can a worker demonstrate the results of kindness and win her way for further health work, something the entire neighborhood has in common."<sup>23</sup>

Despite their valiant efforts, the nurses could not satisfy all the social needs of location residents. To fill this void, the Reverend William J. Bell, a young Presbyterian missionary, began a nondenominational ministry in 1913 that sought to reach into the iron range locations. Bell, a native of Fergus Falls, secured a one-year grant from the Presbyterian Home Board in 1913 that allowed him to live and work on the Mesabi Range, where he became intimately acquainted with the social problems of its foreign-born population. Following this initial year of service, Bell expanded his ministry and served mining communities until 1931. During his early years Bell worked alone, driving to various locations in a Model T Ford automobile. Later he acquired a cadre of workers, many of whom were summertime assistants from Macalester College in St. Paul. Bell recognized

that the locations represented "a new social order with a staggering array of complicated human problems." His seminary training had not equipped him for this, and so the novice missionary set about to begin his "self education."<sup>24</sup>

To do so, Bell began by visiting the locations and assessing them through eyes that could have belonged to a social worker or engineer. After his first year, he tersely summarized some of the communities: "Morton and Harold are company locations, well laid out, with water supply — well drained. Leetonia is bad beyond description. No drainage, no water except that brot [sic] in barrels. No ventilation or sanitation. All toilets are outside. The only bathing is that afforded to the men in the mine dressing house. Showers there. No laundry facilities. Beds constantly occupied, day and night shift men. Leetonia is a sample of the worst."

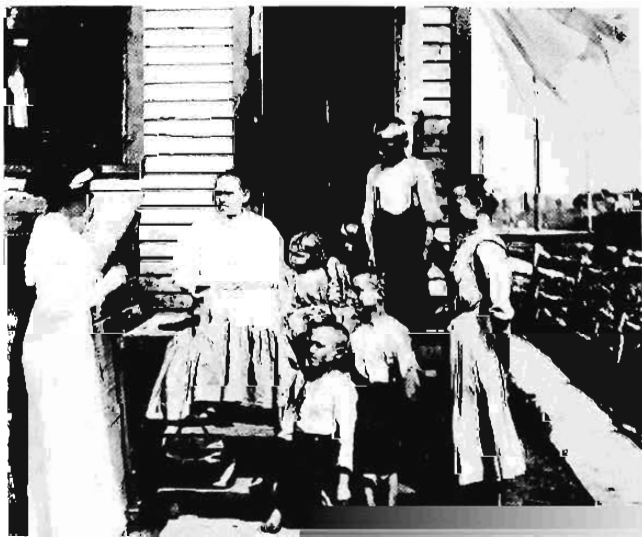
Observing that company clubhouses were strictly for secular purposes and did not satisfy the full range of needs experienced by ordinary immigrant miners, Bell and his colleagues found that the saloonkeeper often served as the immigrant's "banker, ticket-agent and sole friend." To minister to the spiritual requirements of location residents, Bell realized that his missionary group would have to develop a transportation system as effective as that provided for the public schools.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Mary Gleason to D.E. Sutherland, April 30, 1928; Anne B. Murphy to O. C. Davidson, April 9, 1928; Alma B. Brown to Pentecost Mitchell, "Monthly Report of Visiting Nurse — October," November 16, 1928 — all in Oliver Papers.

<sup>24</sup> Here and below, see William J. Bell, "Summary of 1913 Diary," and "Church Statistics, 1913," both in Bell Papers. For background on Bell's early career, see Fred Bellamy, "Bell of the Iron Range," in *Red Cross Magazine*, December, 1919, p. 18–20.

<sup>25</sup> William P. Shriver, "Immigrant Pioneers," [9], typescript of a lecture for the Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. [1914?]; "The Range Parish, Presbyterian, Mountain Iron, Minn.," undated lecture; and Bell memorandum to Eastman, September 15, 1920, p. 2 — all in Bell Papers.

*A MINER'S WIFE and children receiving hygiene instructions from a visiting company nurse (left)*



Using available buildings such as location schoolhouses, Bell sought to provide for a broad range of services that went well beyond traditional evangelism. These activities included scout work, story and play hours, nature study classes, nursery facilities for the children of working mothers, immigrant workers' quarters, men's brotherhood groups, public receptions for newcomers, motion pictures for instructional purposes, orchestra and drama clubs, baby clinics, pig clubs, good roads associations, and classes that taught cooking, housekeeping, and immigrant folklore.<sup>26</sup>

When Bell's college-student helpers, most of whom came from middle-class backgrounds, visited immigrant homes during the summer season, they often were shocked by what they encountered. One student exclaimed that he "never dreamed Minnesota was so — barbaric." Another reported: "Lord, I never realized families lived like that I thot [sic] I would die.

It seemed so pitiful — Betty being so proud of her home — nothing but flies and dirty blankets & a terrible smell.

... Makes me weak all over — sort of ashamed of being well off."<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup>Chambers, "Social Welfare Policies," 72, 73; Eastman, in *Outlook*, 147:497; *St. Paul Sunday Pioneer Press*, August 8, 1920, sec. 3, p. 9.

<sup>27</sup>Ronald Fredrickson, "Report, 1927," and Ethel Millice, untitled report, [1930], both in DVBS reports, Bell Papers.

<sup>28</sup>Skulda V. Banér, *Latchstring Out*, 172 (Cambridge, Mass., 1944).

<sup>29</sup>*Mesaba Ore*, May 17, 1918, p. 3; interview with Ludwig Lipovetz, October 4, 1978, tape on file in IRRC.

The mining companies did make certain attempts to satisfy some of their employees' needs, but the programs often proved to be incomplete and inadequate — especially in meeting the requirements of unskilled workers, many of whom came from eastern and southern Europe. Therefore, it was organizations such as Bell's Range Ministry that endeavored to meet both the secular and spiritual needs of Minnesota's mining location residents.

*"Look! I said to Esther and pointed. 'Not one store! Not even one saloon!'*

*Esther wasn't impressed. 'That's because this is Location. There aren't hardly any stores, ever, in a Location.'"*<sup>28</sup>

THIS PASSAGE, from a novel about a young girl's life on the Gogebic Range of Michigan and Wisconsin, points out a functional characteristic of most locations throughout the Lake Superior region. While a large squatters' location such as Carson Lake had a few privately run stores, a post office, a pool hall, and a movie theater, the mining firms generally sought to avoid the day-to-day problems associated with commercial retail enterprise. Hence, company stores, when they did exist, emerged primarily during the early years of location development before nearby townsites provided commercial outlets. It was only occasionally that individuals operated within a location. Since most settlements eventually were within walking distance of a townsite or could be served by the delivery services that some stores provided, company officials apparently assumed that location residents did not require locally operated retail outlets.<sup>29</sup>



AN OLIVER NURSE (right) weighs a new baby as the mother and her other children look on.

Nothing in a location was more forbidden, however, than a saloon or tavern. With overindulgence regarded as a premier vice that threatened the productivity of laborers, the mining companies outlawed the sale of all alcohol in their locations. Despite the stringent regulations, "blind pigs," or illegal alcohol sales operations, still persisted in various enclaves. Burton O. Greening, superintendent of the Eveleth school district in the early 20th century, prodded the Oliver company to find and evict all illegal retailers whenever their activities became evident. Noting that he and his fellow educators found life in the mining communities to be "not an unmixed joy," Greening pointed out that inebriated men were an added expense to all employers, but especially to those engaged in mining operations. He concluded his remarks with the observation that if greater efforts were not made by the Oliver president to eliminate "Demon Rum" from the locations, "the burden of the swarm of degenerate children will be felt by you in the future as it is now by me in the schools." The direct company controls exerted in the locations did not extend to the town-sites, of course, where saloons and taverns, at least in the eyes of mining supervisors and other observers, proliferated at an alarming rate. In 1911 and 1912, for example, there were reportedly 40 saloons on the Vermilion Range and close to 350 on the Mesabi.<sup>30</sup>

The only community institution commonly found in the locations was an elementary school. William Bell observed in 1927 that the schoolhouse "dominates the local landscape and is a most powerful agency in community progress." In an assessment of educational developments on the iron ranges, one historian pointed out that mining superintendents, hoping to attract dependable laborers to the locations and to help instill individual and community pride among residents, insisted on keeping the location schools open rather than transporting elementary students to larger facilities in the towns. The location schools also were perceived as examples that introduced American values into immigrant homes. "Their polished hardwood floors, electric lights, telephone, running water and mysterious indoor toilets contrasted sharply with the homes from which the children came. The school was like a palace, and its teacher a reigning queen."<sup>31</sup>

Since mining and local officials considered the schools as places where future citizens would acquire useful skills and learn to respect American ideals and institutions, any attempts by location residents to form organizations that might challenge the *status quo* were viewed with alarm. Nowhere was this more evident than among the Finnish immigrant community. The Finns, who in the early 20th century emerged as the largest foreign-born contingent in the entire Lake Superior region, embraced a full spectrum of political beliefs. While the churches and temperance halls that Finnish location



WILLIAM J. BELL, iron range minister

residents attended in the mining towns often received financial and moral support from the companies, the consumers' co-operatives, labor organizations, and socialist halls of the Finns were conspicuously absent whenever the benefits of corporate largesse were distributed. Thus, of the 13 consumers' co-operatives that Finns organized on Minnesota's iron ranges between 1906 and 1929 (the period when the Finnish-American co-operative movement had a pronounced leftist orientation), not one existed in a location. Between 1906 and

<sup>30</sup> Greening to Thomas F. Cole, January 30, 1908, Oliver Papers; Hodges, in *Survey*, 28:707; W. J. Lauck, "Iron-Ore Mines on Mesabi and Vermilion Ranges," in *Mining and Engineering World*, 35:1270 (December 23, 1911).

<sup>31</sup> Bell, untitled speech manuscript, May, 1927, Bell Papers; Timothy L. Smith, "School and Community: The Quest of Equal Opportunity, 1910-1921," 9, unpublished manuscript, 1963, copy in MHS.



*THE LOCATION school at Mahoning near Hibbing in 1900; by mid-century this site was part of an open mine pit.*

1910, Finns also organized at least 16 socialist locals in the mining communities of Minnesota, but only that at Soudan had a location address. As a mining company executive on the Vermilion Range told United States Immigration Commission investigators in 1911: "We need the Finns in our mines, as they are good laborers, men who can stand the heavy work required, but they are trouble breeders and a class not to be trusted."<sup>32</sup>

Virtually all locations developed and organized as unincorporated entities situated on company-owned land; thus, while township governments ostensibly furnished local services, the companies assumed actual responsibility for the majority of benefits, from road and building maintenance to police and fire protection. But the com-

panies did incorporate certain locations when nearby towns endeavored to annex them. Such incorporation aimed to avoid heavy taxes that local towns sought to levy — primarily to finance schools and public services — against large ore deposits on location sites. Therefore, Mesabi Range locations such as Cooley, Franklin, Fraser, Leonidas, and a few others were incorporated between 1915 and 1929. James Corgan, editor of a Hibbing newspaper, claimed these actions occurred only because of the "interests and selfish motives of the mining companies in the matter of tax evasion." He went on to describe the Fraser Location near Chisholm as having "no church, no school, no public buildings, no store, no park, no city police, and no fire department — only twenty-eight framed houses allowed by the mining company and a set of municipal officers housed in the mining company office." Corgan was even less kind in his description of Franklin, situated immediately adjacent to Virginia: "As a municipality it is about as miserable a bunch of shacks as could be found. Just a huddle of twenty unpainted, weather beaten frame houses, ninety-five per cent of them ready to collapse."<sup>33</sup>

Corgan noted, nevertheless, that by the 1930s the old locations were symbols of an earlier era, since increased automobile ownership meant miners' homes no longer had to be tied so closely to their place of work. The process of closing locations actually began during the 1920s when, because of increased maintenance and development costs, the companies had difficulty replicating (or chose not to replicate) the array of services provided in the towns. One historian asserted that rising

<sup>32</sup> Arnold R. Alanen, "The Development and Distribution of Finnish Consumers' Cooperatives in Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin, 1903-1973," in Michael G. Karni, Matti E. Kaups, and Douglas Ollila, eds., *The Finnish Experience in the Western Great Lakes Region: New Perspectives*, 112, 117 (Vammala, Finland, 1975); the figure on co-operatives was derived from sources used by the author in preparing the above article. See also Arthur E. Puotinen, *Finnish Radicals and Religion in Midwestern Mining Towns, 1865-1914*, 317-319 (New York, 1979); U.S. Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries*, part 18, *Iron Ore Mining*, in 61 Congress, 2 session, *Senate Documents*, no. 633, p. 340 (serial 5677).

<sup>33</sup> Here and below, see Corgan, "Industrial Development of Minnesota Iron Ranges," in *St. Louis County Independent* (Hibbing), October 14, p. 5, October 21, p. 7, 1938; Chambers, "Social Welfare Policies," 76; Syrjamaki, "Mesabi Communities," 355.

expectations on the part of miners and their families led to discontent with the quality of schools and housing.

As locations shut down, residents often were given an opportunity to buy their houses and have them transported to a new site in one of the towns. In the early 1920s a group of squatters were informed they would be forced to vacate the northern area of Hibbing, and Oliver officials calculated that to purchase and move a housing unit from that site would amount to \$1,670. Subsequently it was learned that a destitute widow could pay no more than a total of \$700 in several monthly increments, and company executives decided that the smaller amount would suffice. A former resident of Bruce Location recalled, on the other hand, that when the International Harvester Company closed its mine in 1939, her family could not afford the entire purchase price that was demanded and was forced to move away.<sup>34</sup>

A STEADY DECLINE in the number of locations occurred during the years following World War II. By the late 1950s most locations had been razed or the houses moved to various townsites, and some that still existed had obvious inadequacies. In the case of Pool near Hibbing, these shortcomings were spelled out by architectural consultants preparing an urban renewal application for the area. Noting that Pool had more dilapidated housing than any other section of Hibbing, that it contained only one septic tank, that numerous wells were dry and privies contaminated, the consultants continued: "Much original construction was inadequate; new construction is prohibited; there is no sewer or water; schools are nine miles away; playground facilities are poorly equipped and developed; fire protection is inadequate; and the street pattern is a confusing maze of self-made winding, unpaved lanes and angular roads."<sup>35</sup>

The Fraser Location was in considerably better condition than Pool, but approximately half of it was abandoned in the late 1950s when mining activities expanded in the Chisholm area. By 1972, Fraser's remaining 15 houses had been removed or demolished. Unlike former decades when the companies sought to realize their total monetary investments at the time of a house sale, the fully amortized Fraser units were made available to residents in 1972 for \$1.00 plus moving costs.<sup>36</sup>

While the inadequacies of locations such as Pool seem clear, some inhabitants apparently mourned their passing. "Resident after resident," claimed an Eveleth newspaper in a retrospective article, "regretted the ultimate movement of both miners and homes to the more formalized mining villages and cities." Just as one resident of a Michigan location was reported to have said that the companies were wonderful since a man always was available to fix the toilet, so too did many inhabitants of Minnesota's locations bemoan the end of low-rent housing and maintenance services provided by the com-

panies. The appearance and form of the locations, with a few exceptions, might have been relatively similar, but the impressions and attitudes of mining region residents toward their communities were diverse.

The locations, groupings of company-controlled residences that abutted mining sites, mushroomed throughout the one copper and six iron ore ranges of northern Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. It was in these locations that immigrant miners and families, many of whom only recently had left a traditional European folk society behind them, often found their first homes in industrial America.

A widespread form of settlement in the Lake Superior region from the 1840s to the 1940s, some locations continued to function for several years after World War II. Today, a few relatively intact locations may be found in the copper country of Michigan, but the best extant example is Montreal, Wisconsin, just west of Hurley. In Minnesota, Soudan, Chandler (located in the northern part of Ely), and Kerr (just west of Hibbing) still provide some indication of their previous status as locations, and Mesabi Range townsites such as Hibbing, Virginia, Chisholm, and Eveleth have a sprinkling of houses moved there from different locations.

By the late 19th century when full-scale mining activities were under way in Minnesota, corporate-sponsored paternalism still was evident, but the company offerings were defined by the new rubric of "welfare capitalism." In addition to providing housing and related community services, welfare capitalism involved profit-sharing plans, pensions, medical services, and other similar benefits. Whereas many early company programs were necessary when mining activities occurred in areas far removed from existing population centers, the later welfare provisions had rather different objectives — at least in the eyes of corporate executives. As Rowland Berthoff has stated, the company-initiated programs from the late 1890s on were offered "partly to allay public scepticism of their role as self-appointed trustees for the general welfare and the liberty of the individual, and partly to keep their own employees from organizing as a hostile interest."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>M. J. Godfrey to Olcott, July 23, 1920, and Olcott to Godfrey, September 13, 1920, Oliver Papers; interview with Jenny Taskinen, August 2, 1978, tape on file in IRRC.

<sup>35</sup>Consultants Jyring, Whiteman, Hasbrouck, "Pool Location Urban Renewal Study, August, 1959," 2, copy on file in Hibbing Historical Society. Pool eventually became part of a taconite open-pit mine.

<sup>36</sup>Here and below, see *Tribune-Press* (Chisholm), February 1, 1972, p. 1; *Eveleth News*, July 23, 1970, p. 3; Angus Murdoch, *Boom Copper: The Story of the First U.S. Mining Boom*, 153 (New York, 1943).

<sup>37</sup>Here and below, see Rowland Berthoff, *An Unsettled People: Social Order and Disorder in American History*, 336, 337 (New York, 1971); Alanen, in *APA, Journal*, 45:273, 274.



*"THE RANGE House Mover," A. J. Lindsley, pulling one of the better-built location houses to a new area*

At first glance, the company programs may have appeared highly benevolent, but in reality the worker often became even more dependent upon corporate largesse. Pension plans tied employees to the company; profit sharing supposedly gave labor and capital a common incentive, although laborers often considered this to be an example of wages owed but previously unpaid; and company housing, which effectively linked the employee both to workplace and residence, meant that standards of deportment and behavior determined by the corporation had to be maintained by the worker. "The practical effect," according to Berthoff, "was to impose his [*the employer's*] conception of system and order upon his employees."

The locations served as the most visible manifestation of company-sponsored paternalism and welfare in the Lake Superior mining region. Though they played a very important role in defining settlement patterns and

in determining relationships between employer and laborer, they remain as a relatively unstudied and forgotten aspect of early mining activities. In Minnesota alone, where at least 200 of these settlements existed on the state's three iron ranges, the now vacant or nonexistent location sites alongside the defunct mines mirror the ephemeral, boom-and-bust nature of extraction activities. More than anything else, the locations represent the untold experiences of those thousands of anonymous people who lived and worked at a vital state industry.

THE PHOTOGRAPHS on pages 100, 102 (right), and 103 are from the Northeast Minnesota History Center, University of Minnesota-Duluth; those on pages 94 and 100 are by L. P. Gallagher, Duluth. The maps on pages 98 and 99 are based on engineering maps in the Hibbing Historical Society and the Northeast Minnesota History Center, and the one on page 96 was adapted by Alan Ominsky. All other illustrations are in the MHS audio-visual library.



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