



Remnants of Calumet & Hecla: A Copper Mining Giant

Narration

Looking at Calumet today, it may be hard to imagine that not long ago this was a gritty, smoky, industrial area teeming with the sounds of men and machines hauling copper deep from the Earth.

At the beginning of the Keweenaw Peninsula's mining rush there was little indication that this area would develop into the region's largest and busiest industrial town. Covered with forest, evidence of the rich copper lode underground was not identified until 1858, when engineer Edwin Hulbert found signs of prehistoric mining activity. Along with investors in Boston, Hulbert formed the Calumet and Hecla mining companies in 1866.

Difficulties with transportation, cave-ins, and poor management caused problems for Hulbert. Investors removed him as superintendent of the mines in 1867 and turned over management to Alexander Agassiz, a Swiss immigrant, college professor and president of a coal mining company. Under Agassiz' leadership the companies prospered. By the 1870s, the mines were responsible for nearly half of total United States copper production.

At its peak, the Calumet and Hecla mining company, also known as C&H, employed over 4,000 people and operated day and night for 310 days of the year.

The 1900s brought increased challenges for the company. C&H's dominance in the copper industry waned as it struggled with changing copper prices, economic recessions competing mines and labor issues. In 1968 after 100 years of operation, the mine closed its doors forever.

Though much has changed since its boom days, many features from C&H remain. Mine Street still follows the direction of the copper lode below. Walking along this street takes you past mine shafts, smokestacks and other industrial remnants.

The office building for the company's management and technical staff today serves as the headquarters for Keweenaw National Historical Park. Inside is staffed information desk; and for those who want to explore the area in more depth, self-guided tour booklets of Calumet's former industrial site and the historic downtown are available for purchase.

A walk through the now quiet landscape still offers a chance to experience the history of an industrial giant.

Scene

Ranger walking along section of railroad track.

Historic photo: Dirt road through dense forest.

Historic photo: men digging mine shaft.

Historic photos: Sailing ship unloading supplies, broken support timbers in mines, Edwin Hulbert portrait and portrait of Alexander Agassiz.

Historic photo: Calumet from Swedetown Hill

Historic postcard: Copper ingots on dock.

Historic photo: Calumet & Hecla employees, close-up of same photo.

Historic photos: trammers working underground, C&H rail yard, stockpiled copper ingots, photo of El Chino Mine, 1913 Strike parade on Red Jacket Road.

Ranger walking along Mine Street with C&H Warehouse #1 in background.

Park headquarters building.

Ranger at desk greeting visitor.

Visitor looking at booklets.

Ranger walking near an industrial building.