

"Where was the war?-
World War II and its effect on the Iron Ore Industry"
by John Marra
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The Upper Peninsula of Michigan has always been someplace withdrawn from the world. Although it has been said many times that World War II mobilized the entire country into one giant industrial force, in this land of iron ore mines and railroad tracks, little was done to mobilize for war. In the years 1941-1945, World War II had almost no effect on the iron ore industry in Marquette County.

The late 1920s was an extremely prosperous time for the iron ore industry. Hence, the term "The Iron Ore Boom" was given to this era. The entire Lake Superior region from Duluth to Saulte Ste Marie produced some 66,157,351 tons of iron ore, with the Marquette region contributing about 4.5 million tons. Almost all of the iron ore mined in Marquette County was shipped to Cleveland via large iron ore transport vessels on the Great Lakes. These ships were loaded at two docks, both located in the city of Marquette. The dock at the North end of town, or the Presque Isle dock, is owned by the Lake Superior and Ishpeming Railroad company (L.S. & I.). The dock at the south end of town, or the South Shore Dock, was owned by the Duluth Co. (DSS&A). Filled to capacity, these two docks could hold 102,000 tons of iron ore.

When the Great Depression hit in 1930, the steel industry was initially hit hard. Consequently, the iron ore industry, including the Marquette Range, was forced to idle operations.

Unlike most other major industries, the iron ore and steel industries rebounded rather quickly. One factor that led to the quick rebound of this industry was the increasing government and allied demand for steel and steel products. The demand increased as the thirties went by and the prospects for war increased.

The condition of mines in the thirties was still considered primitive to modern day standards, but relatively safe compared to the early days of mining. Women were not allowed in the mines at any time, including in times of war. Almost all of the mines in the Marquette Range were underground mines. Safety and safety measure were slowly beginning to be implemented throughout the mines. Safety inspectors, once despised by the minors, became common place in underground mines. President Mathers of the Cleveland Cliffs Iron Ore Company (CCI) was a believer in safety and had most of the underground wooden archways replaced with concrete reinforcements. Although never completely safe, the thirties was a time when many of the modern safety techniques were implemented in the iron ore mines. With the introduction of safety features and the increase in the number of mines open in the Marquette Range, the 1930's could be considered a rather prosperous time for the mining industry in comparison with the rest of the Depressed country. It should also be noted that almost all the expansion in the mining industry occurred prior to 1940.

In 1937, with Hitler beginning to move, iron ore shipments began to increase. This year would be a record setting year for the Marquette Iron Ore Range. It would mine and ship some 5,102,700 tons of iron ore by way of its two docks. At this time, there were a total of 13 iron mines in the Marquette. "Those supplying ore for the L.S. & I. are the Tilden, Cliffs Shaft, Morris, Lloyd Maas, Negaunee, Athens, Mary Charlotte, Cambria, and Holmes. The Richmond and Volunteer mines furnish ore exclusively for the South Shore. The Blueberry, Holmes, and Cliffs Shaft supplies ore for both L.S. & I. and the South Shore."¹ Each year from 1937 to about 1943, a headline would appear stating something about the upcoming shipping year being a recording breaking one. For the most part, these predictions were true as 1940, 1941, and 1942 were all recording breaking years for ore shipments. Ore Shipping on the Great Lakes was a seasonal job. Shipping would start in about mid April when fleets of boats would race through the icy waters of Superior accepting the traditional challenge of being the first to dock in Marquette. The shipping season would end in mid to late November when ice and gales became too strong. The mines would often idle down in the winter and stock pile ore in anticipation of the following shipping season.

¹-----, "13 Mines Serve This Port; Capacity of Two Marquette Ore Docks Is 102,000 Tons," The Daily Mining Journal, 12 April 1941, p. 14.

In April of 1941, President Roosevelt requested that the iron mines be manned 24 hours a day to satisfy the growing Allied and U.S. need for steel. For the rest of the country, this was a time when many people left the countryside and headed for the job filled cities. In Marquette County, many people did leave the U.P. and headed for places like Detroit, Milwaukee, and Chicago, in search of industrial jobs. However, there was never a shortage of workers in the iron ore industry. "Preparations for the ore shipping season, officials said are more routine. No more have been put to work and it is not contemplated that forces will be increased."² There were, however, shortages in the paper and wood industries as many workers migrated from these jobs to the higher paying mining positions. The mines lost few workers to the draft and/or military. A great majority of the miners were lifers, meaning, that they would put anywhere from 10 to 40 years in the mines. Consequently, there were few actual miners in the age range of 19-24.

Although the mining work force was not expanded, more equipment was put into service in 1941. "L.S. & I. expanded it's railroad shipping fleet by 200 cars for a total of 1835 ore cars in service."³ 1941 was also the year that Ralph Budd, transportation commissioner of the national defense advisory

² Ib:d.

³ Ib:d

council, decreed that "Iron ore essential to American armament will have first call on the 1941 services of 291 freighters of the Great Lakes bulk shipping fleet. Lake Superior Iron ore is the chief commodity of Great Lakes shipping. Because stock piles at steel mills and lower lake ports are low and ore consumption is running around 6,000,000 gross tons a month..."⁴

It seemed that boom times had hit Marquette again as war year after war year, saw another record export year. For those miners of CCI who were drafted, the company opted to send them a Christmas present of \$10 each. Miners also directly aided the war effort by purchasing war bonds through direct purchase or payroll deduction. In 1942, CCI workers purchased \$83,400 worth in war bonds.⁵ 1942 would be the peak year for the Marquette County Iron Ore industry. The entire Lake Superior region would produce some 92,076,781 tons of iron ore, over 8 million of which would come from Marquette County.⁶ As the war began to wind down, so did ore production. In 1943, the Lake Superior ore region would produce 84,404,852 tons of ore, an 8 million ton

⁴-----, "Iron Ore Gets First Call," The Daily Mining Journal, 3 April 1941, p. 3

⁵-----, "\$83,400 Bond Record For CCI Workers," The Daily Mining Journal, 14 December 1942, p. 4

⁶-----, "81 million Tons of Ore Moved In '44", The Daily Mining Journal, 4 December 1944, p. 3

drop.⁷ In 1944, that number would drop to 81,000,000 tons. 3,730,262 ton of that 81 million would come from Marquette County's two ore docks.⁸ In the last year of war, 1945, the Lake Superior region would produce 75 million tons and Marquette County would contribute 3,890,974 tons.⁹ 1945 would see an end to the second "war to end all wars" and the beginning of the mobilization back to a market place economy.

The end of the war may be marked as a bitter-sweet time in the eyes of those in Marquette County. Most of the country was entering a phase of rebuilding the market place economy that the war had set aside to prepare for a war-time economy. Marquette County had never really encountered a transition to a war time economy, hence the reverse was not needed five years later. Expansion of the mining industry occurred primarily prior to 1940, a few years before the rest of the country. Things may have stayed prosperous for Marquette for years to come if it had not been for two important factors, the first being discovery. Discovery of Iron Ore in the South and Latin American countries led to the rapid industrial expansion of these countries. High

⁷-----, "84,404,852 Tons of Ore Loaded in '43", The Daily Mining Journal, 8 December 1943, p 2

⁸-----, "81 million Tons of Ore Moved In '44", The Daily Mining Journal, 4 December 1944, p. 3

⁹-----, "District Ore Tonnage Over 75,000,000", The Daily Mining Journal, 3 December 1945, p 3

grade ore, cheap labor, and cheap shipping hurt the entire Lake Superior Region immensely. Interest was turned away from the region and directed to the cheaper, less restrictive, and more mineral abundant South and Latin American countries.

The second tragedy in the region was mother nature. The hard, high grade, ore seen in the Southern and Latin American countries was not to be seen in this region. Companies were no longer quick to drill holes in the ground in hopes of finding high grade ores. At this time, little could be done with low grade ores. The abundance of low grade ores found in this area were deemed profitless, and therefore abandoned. Like the end of the Cooper boom in the Keweenaw peninsula, the County began to shrink. One by one, the mines closed. There were 13 mines operating in Marquette County in 1942. In 1984, there were 2. The end of World War II marked the end of the last boom in Marquette County. Although this time was sure to come sooner or later, the increased war time production speed up the process immensely.

It should be noted, however, that the war did produce some positive outcomes. For the first time in its history, all the miners in the Marquette range were unionized under the Committee for Industrial Organization or CIO, which would eventually become the AFL-CIO. Unionization would lead to better pay, benefits, and safer working conditions, which continue to aid miners today.

World War II also saw the development of good labor relations between the employer and the employee in the mines. Unlike the steel and rail industries, the Marquette iron ore industry did not strike for the entire duration of the war. Although the war produced a few benefits, these benefits were benefits for the individual worker, not the industry. Job benefits increased for the miner, but mining jobs began to drop off after the war.

The beginning of World War II transformed the entire country into a complex, industrial war machine. This was not the case with the Marquette County Iron Ore Industry. The iron ore industry increased production to aid the war effort but made no serious leaps when considering its past achievements. Many people left the county to join the metropolitan war effort, yet there was never a shortage of workers in the mines, nor was there a need to increase its work force by any significant number. Although the war produced a few benefits for the miners, the Marquette County iron ore industry was not significantly affected by the events of World War II.

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