

HISTORY OF MINING AND IMMIGRATION IN NORTHEASTERN MINNESOTA



In the second part of a two part series, Mine Reader highlights the history of mining in northeast Minnesota and the impact immigration had on the industry and region. Many cities in the region can trace their beginnings to supporting iron mining projects, immigrant mine workers and their families. While the region's economy has diversified over time, cultural and historical ties to the early mining industry and European migration still define many communities. Below is a brief historical timeline of this history:

- The demand for workers on the Iron Range coincided with massive emigration from Europe. Mining jobs required few English language skills and little skilled work experience, well suited to the new arrivals.
- By the turn of the century, there were 4,600 Finns living on the Iron Range – the largest foreign-born group.
- By 1900, 70 percent of immigrants on the Iron Range came from Finland and Sweden, followed by Norway, England, Italy, Germany, Ireland, Russia, Poland and Denmark. Northeastern Minnesota became the state's melting pot with immigrants from dozens of other countries.

- In 1910, 45 percent of all Vermilion Range residents were born outside the U.S.
- Ely was known as a stronghold of Slovenian culture on the Vermilion Range.
- While the various immigrant groups lived and worked together, their individual identities were preserved in churches, synagogues and social halls.
- As the mining industry grew, communities started forming across the Iron Range, often dictated by mining activities.
- By the early 20th century, mining companies, businesses and civic leaders began to improve communities with schools, health facilities, recreational programs and other improvements.

DID YOU KNOW?

ELY, MINN., WAS NAMED IN HONOR OF SAMUEL P. ELY, A MINER FROM MICHIGAN (THE TOWN WAS ORIGINALLY NAMED 'FLORENCE').

Sources:
Minnesota Historical Society Digital Archives
<http://mn.gov/irrrb/DataCenter/history-iron-range.jsp>