

# *Bay Lake Area History: Railroads & Mining on the Cuyuna Range*

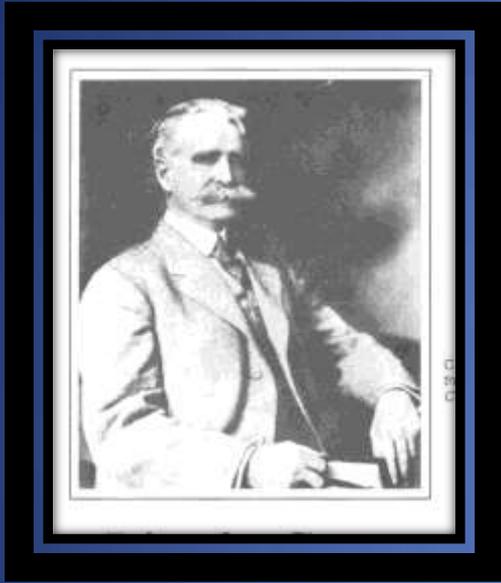
*This is a story of railroads, mining, immigration and entrepreneurs. It includes visionaries, gutsy men making risky, high stakes investments, boom and bust towns and workers, many of them immigrants, toiling in a dirty and dangerous environment. At best, it's a summary, covering only a few of the key characters and events. If it sparks an interest, learn where and how to buy the Cuyuna Country Historical Preservation Society books by going to the History Project page on BayLake.org.*

*Bay Lake is only a few miles from the southern edge of the Cuyuna Iron Range.*

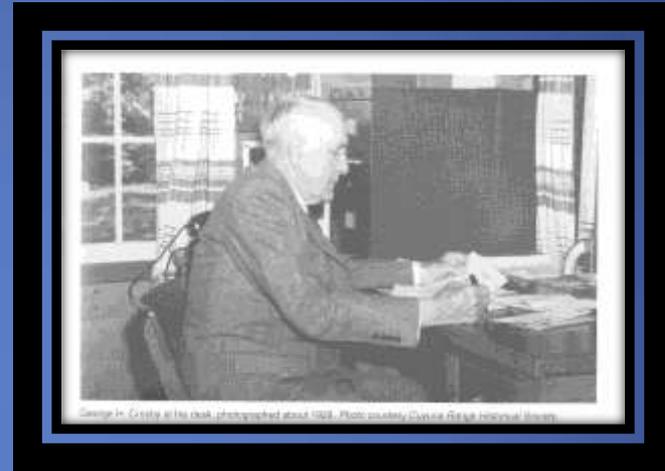
*Duration: About 10 minutes.  
Click or scroll to advance the slides.*

*Credit goes to all of the real historians and authors who have written about our area. See the last slide for the sources. The accuracy of the details isn't guaranteed, but the basics are true.  
Questions or comments : Contact Paul Erickson at [ericksonpaulsue@aol.com](mailto:ericksonpaulsue@aol.com)*

# *Keep These People, Dates & Facts In Mind*



*1852: Cuyler Adams  
was born in Canton, Il.*



*1861: George Crosby was  
born in Hastings, Mn.*

*1858: Minnesota Statehood*

*1860: The Civil War*

*Other than logging, our area was an undeveloped  
frontier until 1871.*

# *Railroad Expansion & Immigration*



*In 1871, the Northern Pacific Railroad reached Withington (later renamed Deerwood) paving the way for immigration.*

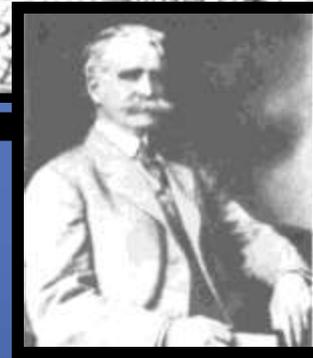
*For the next 40 years, the NPRR was the only railroad in this area.*

# Cuyler Adams

*In 1870, Cuyler Adams, 18, who came from a “well to do” family, went to NE Minnesota to trade & trap. While there he learned about mining from men seeking iron ore on what later became the Vermillion Range.*

*When he heard about the NP’s expansion plans he bought large quantities of NP stock which he later exchanged for 100,000 acres of North Dakota farmland (that the US Government had given to the NP as an incentive to build their transcontinental line). He then moved to North Dakota where he sold his holdings to new farmers at a substantial profit.*

*In 1878, he used some of his fortune to purchase prime timber land south of Deerwood and to build a home on Reno Lake.*



# George Crosby

*In 1886, George Crosby, 25, went to the Hibbing area to search for iron ore.*

*He was highly successful and became wealthy by selling and leasing his claims to mining companies.*



*While on the Mesabi Range, he felt the living conditions of the miners was deplorable.*

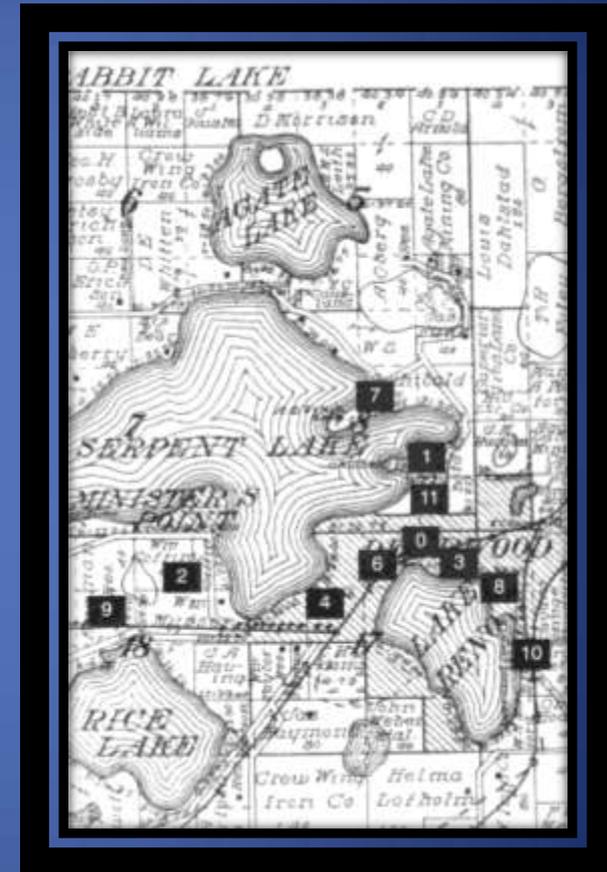
# Cuyler's Discovery

*In 1888, (two years after George Crosby went to look for ore on the Mesabi Range) while surveying his land SW of Deerwood, Cuyler's compass moved erratically and, based on what he had learned on the Vermillion Range, he suspected that there was iron ore.*

*He spent the next two years exploring the area, learning about mining and securing the most promising sites. He concluded there was a "north range" north of Serpent Lake and a "south range" south of Deerwood. Unlike the Mesabi Range, the ore was well below the surface.*

*In 1901 (after 13 years of secrecy), he told W. C. White, a well established and connected Duluth lawyer (who he'd known while in North Dakota) who owned a summer home near his home on Reno Lake. White would become his partner and primary connection to investors.*

*(Adams wasn't the first person to believe there was iron ore in this area. At least three unsuccessful attempts were made to find ore deposits between 1862 and 1883.)*



# *Cuy & Una*

*As he explored the area Cuyler was consistently accompanied by his St. Bernard, Una.*

*Eventually, the area became known as the Cuyuna Range.*



# The "Iron Ore Rush"

*From 1900 to 1910, events unfolded dramatically and rapidly. Exploration was extensive. Land values rose and fell on rumors. Adams & White formed Oreland Mining Company with plans to mine southwest of Deerwood and south of Rabbit Lake.*

*George Crosby came to the area and secured land near Rabbit Lake in 1905. Remembering the deplorable conditions on the Mesabi Range, Crosby founded the town of Crosby which he designed to higher standards.*

*Knowing many of the miners would be immigrants (that had been recruited on the docks in Duluth), Crosby built affordable housing on lots large enough for vegetable gardens. Many of his "Honeymoon Row" houses are still in use today.*

*After disappointing results SW of Deerwood, Adams found high quality ore on his Rabbit Lake site in 1909. Overnight the town of Cuyuna became a boom town and the new town of Crosby grew to a population of 3,000 by 1910.*



**Drilling Rig**



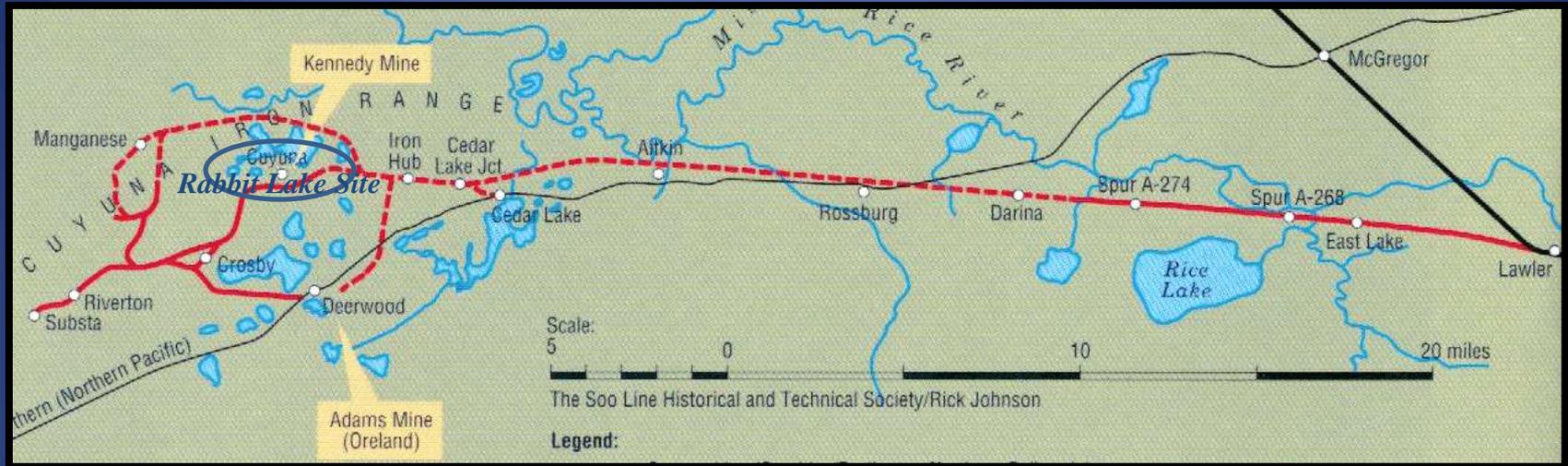
# Railroad Service

*Recognizing that the mines would need rail transportation for outbound iron ore and inbound supplies, Cuyler Adams began negotiations with the Northern Pacific regarding rates and the 4 miles of connecting track that would be required between Deerwood and the Rabbit Lake site.*

*The Northern Pacific wouldn't give Adams what he wanted so he began secret discussions with Soo Line President, Ed Pennington. Although the Soo Line didn't have track in the area, they needed a direct route from North Dakota to Duluth for wheat shipments. They soon struck a deal.*



# Railroad "End Run"

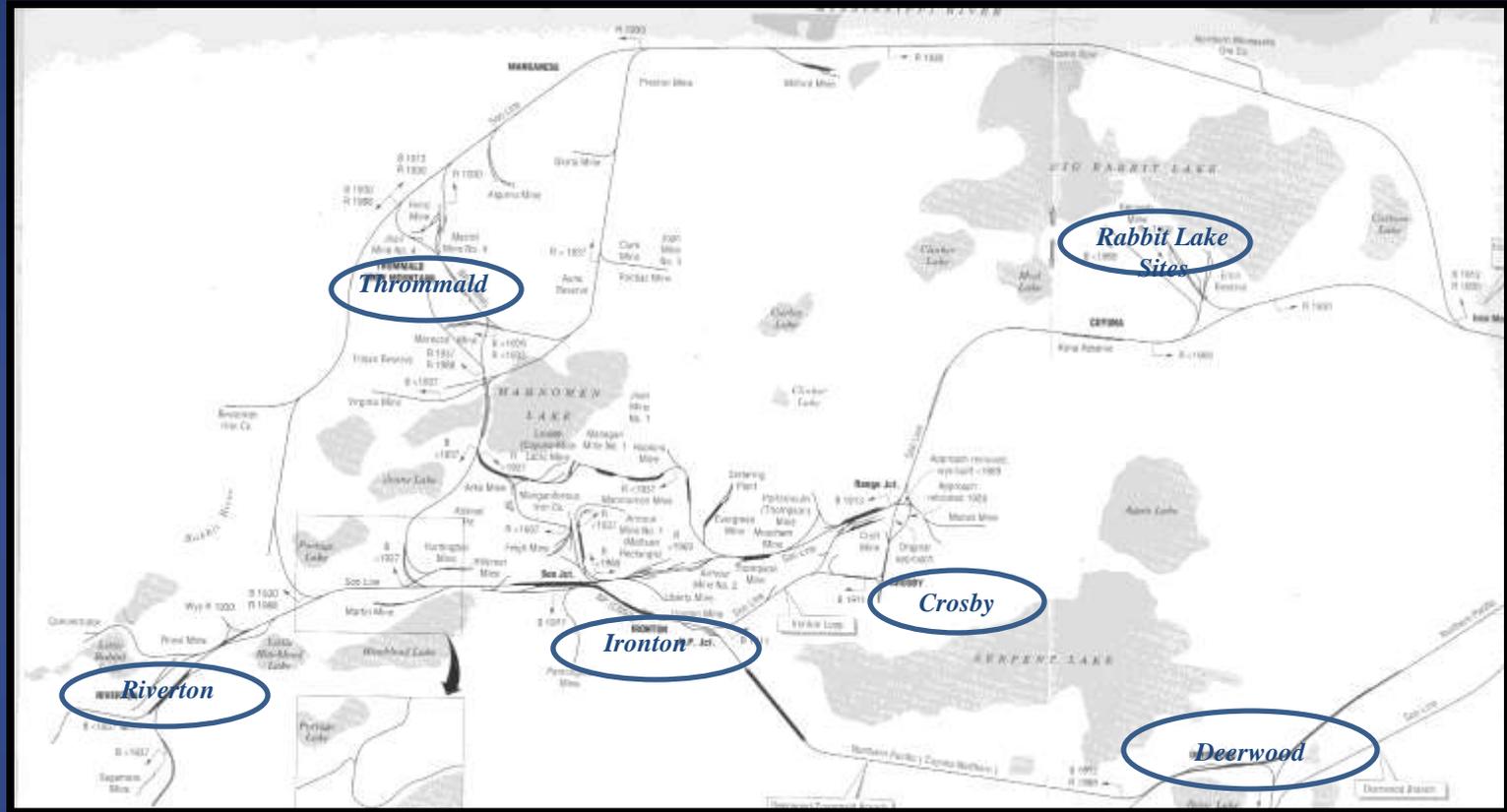


*As part of his agreement with the Soo Line, Adams formed the Cuyuna Iron Range Railroad, and began building track from the Rabbit Lake site toward Aitkin.*

*Everyone, including the NP, the town of Aitkin and land speculators, thought the new railroad would connect with the NP and that Aitkin would be the hub.*

*But then the Soo Line suddenly announced and built a new northern line down through McGregor. Adam's kept laying track beyond Aitkin to connect with the new line at what would become Lawler.....and then sold the Cuyuna Iron Range Railroad to the Soo Line.*

# More Mines, More Railroads



*As more mines were opened, more rail connections were needed. Having sold the Cuyuna Iron Range Railroad to the Soo Line, Adams then formed the Cuyuna Northern Railroad to serve the new locations. This time he connected his railroad to the NP. In 1914, he sold it to the Northern Pacific.*

# *NP/Soo Line Joint Operating Agreement*

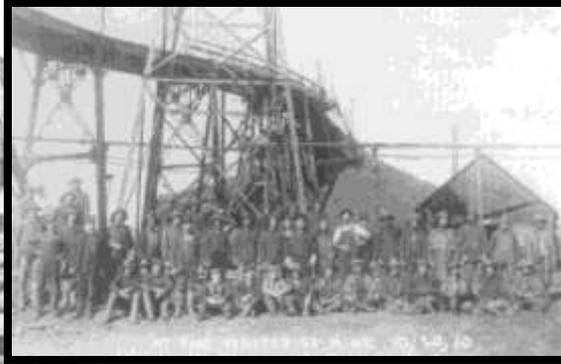
*In 1925, the Soo Line determined that their ore dock in Duluth needed extensive repairs and, rather than invest more money, they negotiated a Joint Operating Agreement that allowed their cars to unload at the NP ore dock in 1928.*

*A year later the two railroads agreed to merge their Cuyuna Range operations leading to the removal of trackage and depots that were no longer needed.*

# Mines & Miners



An impressive building specifically designed for its part in producing marketable ore from the Cuyuna Range was the sintering plant at Crosby. Note the railroad across.



1920 Croft Mine in Crosby, Minnesota. Postcard from the Edith Joseph collection.



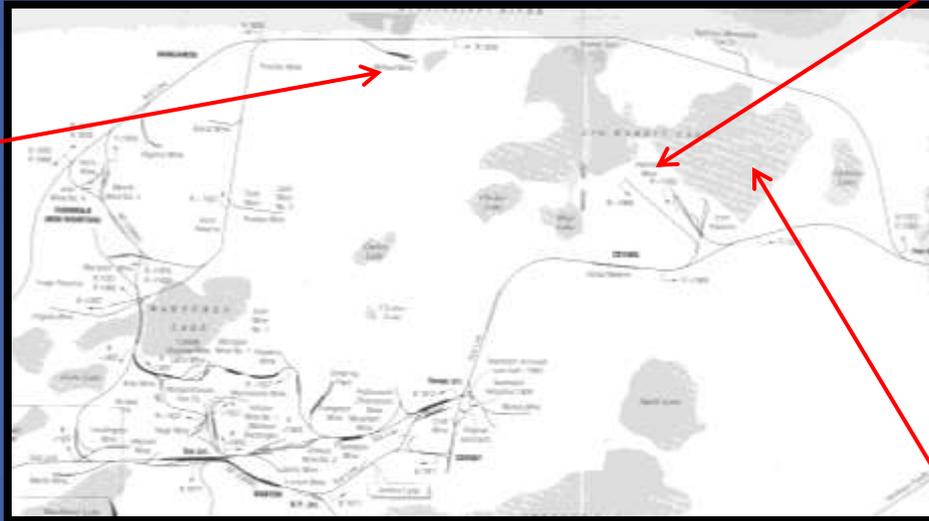
The Portsmouth Pit on the Cuyuna Range in North Crosby.

*It is hard for us to imagine what the buildings and landscape looked like 100 years ago. With the exception of the Oreland Mine, these pictures were all taken within 2 miles of Crosby. (Note Serpent Lake in the background of the picture of the Portsmouth Open Pit Mine.)*

# Mines & Miners (Continued)

*The Milford and Kennedy mines require special mention:*

*In 1924, the Milford Mine, a shaft mine (vs. open pit), flooded killing 41 miners.*



*The Kennedy Mine near Rabbit Lake (the original discovery site of high grade ore and likely the most successful of the sites) was a shaft mine.*

*But when demand for ore peaked during WW2, the east half of Rabbit Lake was drained and replaced by an open pit mine.*

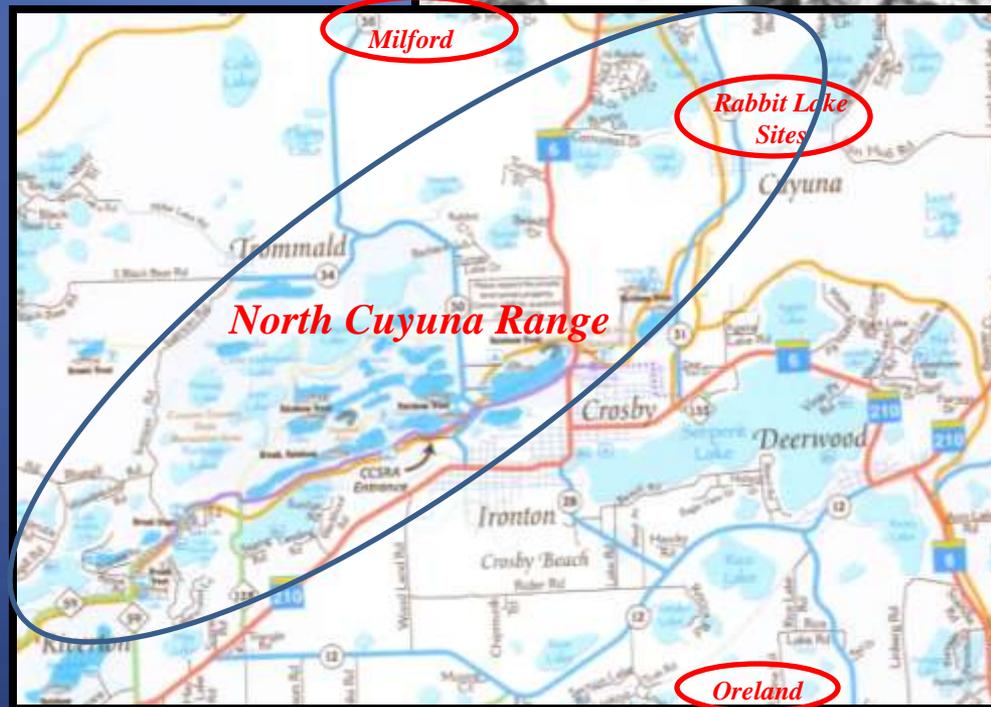


*Milford Miners*

# Mine Locations

This aerial picture was taken aiming southwest. The Portsmouth open pit mine (#2 in the picture) was on the northwestern edge of Crosby and the Croft shaft mine (not shown) was on the northern edge of the town.

The Rabbit Lake sites and the town of Cuyuna are off to the left of the photo and the Riverton and Thrommald areas are below the photo.....so this is just a portion of the Cuyuna Range. The dark blue lakes were mines.



1. Serpent Lake.
2. Portsmouth Pit Lake.
3. Pennington Pit Lake.
4. Feigh Pit Lake.
5. Hillcrest Pit Lake.
6. Huntington Pit Lake.
7. Martin Pit Lake.
8. Black Hoof Lake.
9. Arco Pit Lake.
10. Alstead Pit Lake.
11. Mahnomen Pit Lake.
12. Mahnomen Pit Lake #2.
13. Mahnomen Pit Lake #3.
14. City of Crosby.
15. City of Ironton.
16. North Hillcrest Pit Lake.

# Construction Challenges



Locomotive #131 derailed at Malvern Minn. February 2, 1912. The engine was derailed at 1912  
A. Duffus Photo by Vance L. Smith



Stories of a railroad accident that threw a locomotive into the waters of a lake east of Deerwood have persisted through the years. This reproduction of a picture of the event was loaned by retired railwayman *Oscar W. Hoeltz* of *Aitkin*. While the engine was never submerged in Casey Lake, the cave-in did force the realignment of the track around the lake.



*In 1871, when their new line reached Deerwood, the NP had 1200 men working. Ties were cut by axe from local timber. 50 ties per day per man.*

*In 1910, the Cuyuna Iron Range Railroad and the Soo Line Railroad laid track at an average rate of one mile per day.*

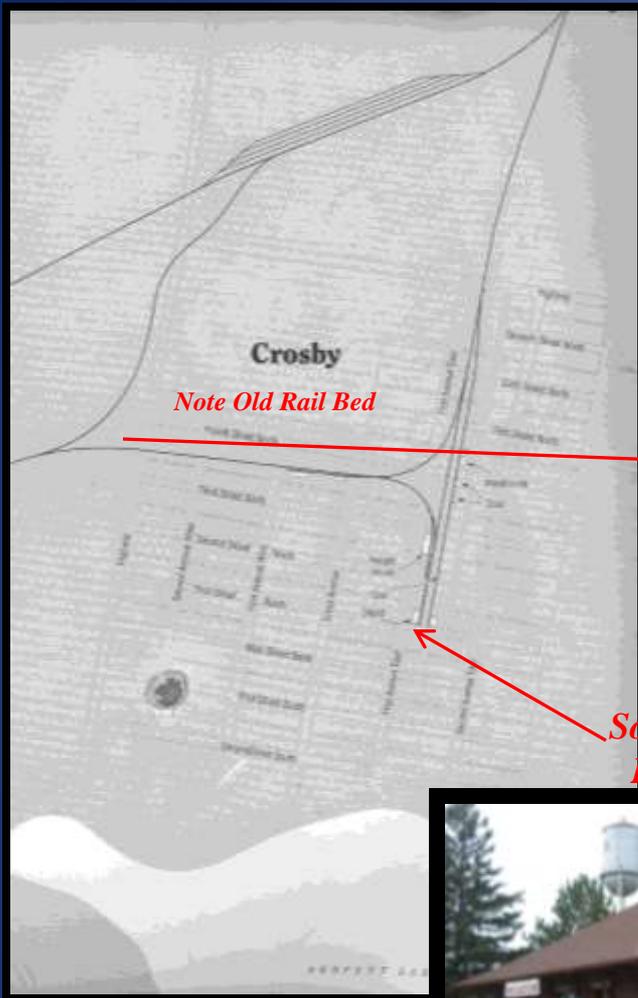
# Passenger Service

*The trains moved more than ore and supplies. Passenger service began 6 months prior to the ore shipments.*

*Immigrants landing in Duluth were recruited on the docks and then transported west to work in the mines. The train left Duluth at 7:20 AM and arrived in Crosby at Noon.*

*By 1912, the trains included Parlor Cars and passengers from the Iron Range could make day trips to Duluth and Duluth area residents could travel to the “resort areas” and passengers from either end could connect at Moose Lake to travel to Minneapolis.*

# Crosby Depot & Siding



Note Old Rail Bed

Soo Line  
Depot



Portsmouth Mine Site

Honeymoon Row

Serpent Lake



The siding was designed to be a "Y" allowing trains to turn around.

The Crosby Soo Line depot is located behind Super Value. It is now a wonderful museum. The building was 100 years old in 2010.

The NP depot was built in 1871. It was located where the park is today. It was destroyed by fire in 1915. A brick replacement was built in 1917 and demolished in 1987.

# Deerwood Depots & Sidings

In about 1914, the NP built a line that ran behind the current location of Magnum Machining to service the Oreland site 4 miles SW of Deerwood.

In 1910, the Soo Line built a line SE of Deerwood to supply coal to the new Cuyuna Power Company. A depot was built southeast of the current intersection of highways 6 & 10. It was moved to Riverton in 1922 because the power plant was replaced by dams in Sylvan and Pillager, passenger traffic was down due to new roads and lumber was down because the area had been logged off.



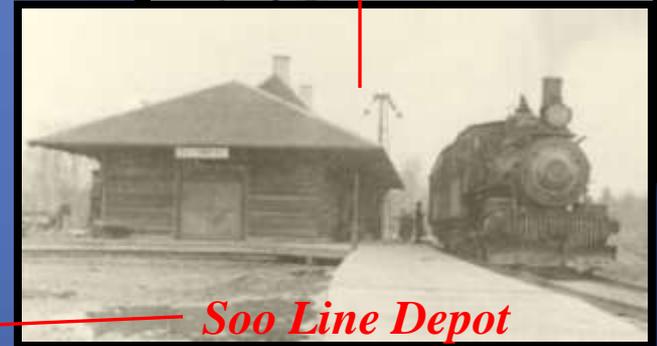
**Northern Pacific Depot**



**NP Line to Oreland Site**

**Soo Line Depot**

**Deerwood  
Ca. 1916**



**Soo Line Depot**



*The Soo Line depot was cut into sections for the move to Riverton.*

# The Rise & Fall Of An Industry

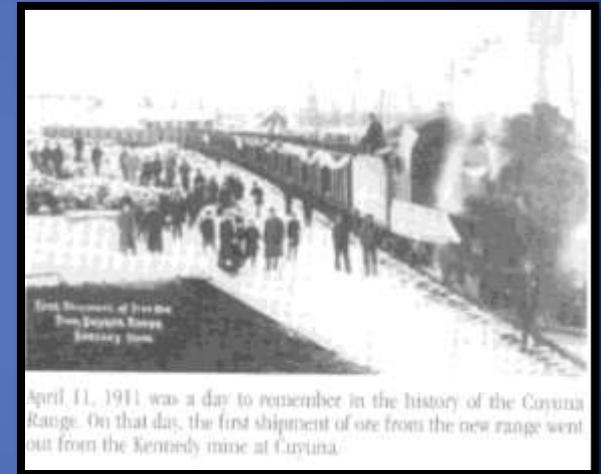
*In 1911, the Cuyuna Range began shipping iron ore.*

*Within 7 years, the volume reached 2,588,106 tones.*

*That's approximately 40,000 carloads shipped during the 8 months that the Great Lakes are open or about 2 trains of 85 cars per day, 7 days a week. A substantial logistical and commercial accomplishment .....at a time when little else was going on in this area.*

Year	Tons Shipped	Men Employed	Active Mines
1911	147,431		1
1912	305,112		1
1913	452,450	1327	2
1914	674,516	1054	5
1915	968,495	1242	8
1916	1,429,178	1622	5
1917	1,930,422	2099	5
1918	2,588,106	2120	8
1919	2,262,576	2747	25
1920	2,058,957	1746	28
1921	1,530,987	1303	38
1923	2,220,474	1336	29
1924	1,421,052	1321	30
1925	1,511,232	1215	33
1926	2,097,427	1364	27
1927	1,921,760	1080	27
1928	2,103,620	1162	22
1929	2,693,440	1200	22
1930	1,929,145	1010	22
1931	904,649	780	25
1932	98,858	594	30
1933	741,134	529	26
1934	532,511	312	29
1935	812,881	305	30

*In 1919, employment peaked at 2,747 men.*



April 11, 1911 was a day to remember in the history of the Cuyuna Range. On that day, the first shipment of ore from the new range went out from the Kennedy mine at Cuyuna.

# *The Rise & Fall Of An Industry (Continued)*

*Volume and employment declined dramatically during the depression and then ramped up to record levels during World War 2 when the demand for steel was exceptionally strong.*

*After that the Cuyuna Range gradually went out of business. The last shipment was in 1984.*

*Mother Nature filled the open pit mines with water. Today they are lakes and the Cuyuna Lakes Trail Association has installed scenic lookouts and a wonderful network of bike trails.*



# Sources

*The contents of this presentation came from an interview with Jim Nelson, a BayLaker with a passion for railroad history (appropriately seated in the original Crosby Soo Line Depot!) and these books.*



*See how and where to buy the Cuyuna Country books on the History Project page at [BayLake.org](http://BayLake.org).*

*The End*