

THIS is a revised version of a talk given before the St. Louis County Historical Society on February 23, 1954. The author, who teaches political science in the University of Minnesota, Duluth Branch, became interested in traces of early logging and mining operations while hunting and fishing in the Arrowhead region.

# Some Vanished Settlements *of the ARROWHEAD COUNTRY*

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FOR MORE THAN two centuries Minnesota has been known to white men who were exploring, trading, mining, logging, fishing, or farming in the area. The thriving communities of today are monuments to successful pioneer expansion in many fields. Yet there are numerous sites in Koochiching, Cook, Lake, and St. Louis counties that tell a different story — a story of failure, of attempts at settlement that did not bear fruit.

White habitation in northeastern Minnesota is largely confined to the last hundred years. To be sure, explorers, missionaries, and fur traders visited the area repeatedly after the seventeenth century and established scattered trading posts. The average American of the 1840s, however, considered the western Lake Superior country primitive and remote.

Apparently the earliest settlers on the North Shore of Lake Superior went there

in the 1840s in search of copper and other minerals. Such prospecting, however, was really poaching, since the area was Indian territory until it was ceded to the United States by the treaty of La Pointe in 1854. One of the first accounts of white habitation on the shore dates from the fall of that year, when R. B. McLean, a prospector who later became the area's first mail carrier, accompanied a party which scoured the shore for copper outcrops. McLean noted a few settlers near the mouths of the French, Sucker, Knife, and Encampment rivers and at Grand Marais.<sup>1</sup>

During the next two years a wave of settlers invaded the shore, and by 1857 inhabited places included Portland, Endion, Belville (all now part of Duluth), French River, Montezuma (Sucker River), Buchanan (just west of Knife River), Knife River, Agate Bay, Burlington Bay, Marmata (Stewart River), Encampment, Waterville, Beaver Bay, Saxton (at Two Island River), Grand Marais, and Grand Portage.<sup>2</sup> The latter spot, of course, was settled much earlier and is, in fact, the only place in Minnesota where white men lived before the Revolutionary War.

Although a United States land office was

<sup>1</sup>The late Bert Fesler reported the building of cabins by prospectors at French River in 1846. See "Back from the Shore," a manuscript in the collections of the Lake County Historical Society. It also has McLean's unpublished "Reminiscences of Early Days at the Head of the Lakes."

<sup>2</sup>See Otto Wieland, "Some Facts and Incidents of North Shore History," in the collections of the Lake County Historical Society.

established at Buchanan, Beaver Bay and Grand Marais were the most important settlements of the day, and a trail along the shore connected them. Beaver Bay was also the jumping-off-place for prospecting expeditions to the interior. Two routes, known as the Beaver Bay and the Pork Bay trails, ran northwestward from Lake Superior to Basswood Lake on the Canadian border. Parts of the Pork Bay Trail, which took its name from Pork Bay on Lake Superior west of the Caribou River, are visible today along the west bank of the river near Cramer and along the west shore of Silver Island Lake.<sup>3</sup>

The gold rush to the Lake Vermilion area in the 1860s was responsible for the construction of another route known as the Vermilion Trail, a wagon road that may be termed the first public works development in the lake country beyond Duluth. The search for gold was also responsible for the settlement of Winston, now a ghost town, which was apparently located on the south shore of Lake Vermilion in the Pike Bay area near the site of a North West Company trading post. As it was platted, Winston was to contain a store, a hotel, a post office, and four saloons. In the same area, the Vermilion Lake Mining District was set up as a unit of local government. With the collapse of the gold bubble, the district was speedily deserted, and Winston became the first mining ghost town in Minnesota's north country.<sup>4</sup>

Some years later, in 1893, gold strikes on both Big and Little American islands in Rainy Lake touched off a substantial population movement into that area. A town known as Rainy Lake City was platted and incorporated in 1894 on the shores of Black Bay. It was a sizeable community, and over a thousand persons (including guests from Fort Frances and International Falls) are said to have attended a Fourth of July celebration there in 1894, when the stamp mills began operation. Stores, two substantial hotels, fourteen saloons, a church, a bank, a jail, and many private dwellings were built at Rainy Lake City, and it also boasted a

newspaper. By 1901 the gold boom had faded, and most of the inhabitants slipped away to other communities. Rainy Lake City was eventually demolished, and most of its building materials were taken by barge to International Falls.<sup>5</sup>

As by-products of the gold rush of the 1890s, stopover points developed in upper St. Louis County. To reach the gold fields some took the Duluth and Iron Range Railroad to Tower, and then went up Lake Vermilion by steamboat to the Vermilion Dam, over the Crane Lake Portage Road to what is now Buyck, and on to Harding on Crane Lake. From there prospectors traveled by steamboat through Sand Point and Namakan lakes to Kettle Falls, across a portage to Rainy Lake, and finally by steamboat to Rainy Lake City. Stopovers along this route flourished during the gold rush, but faded with the decline of Rainy Lake City.<sup>6</sup>

Shortly before the Rainy Lake gold rush began, intense enthusiasm for iron ore exploitation resulted in the establishment of the now-vanished settlement of Mesaba. A fair-sized community located on the Mesabi Range some six miles northeast of Aurora, Mesaba was incorporated as a village in 1891. Its optimistic residents built homes, set up a school, a town hall, a jail, and even an electric plant, but the small mines near by quickly ran out, and the community was largely deserted.<sup>7</sup>

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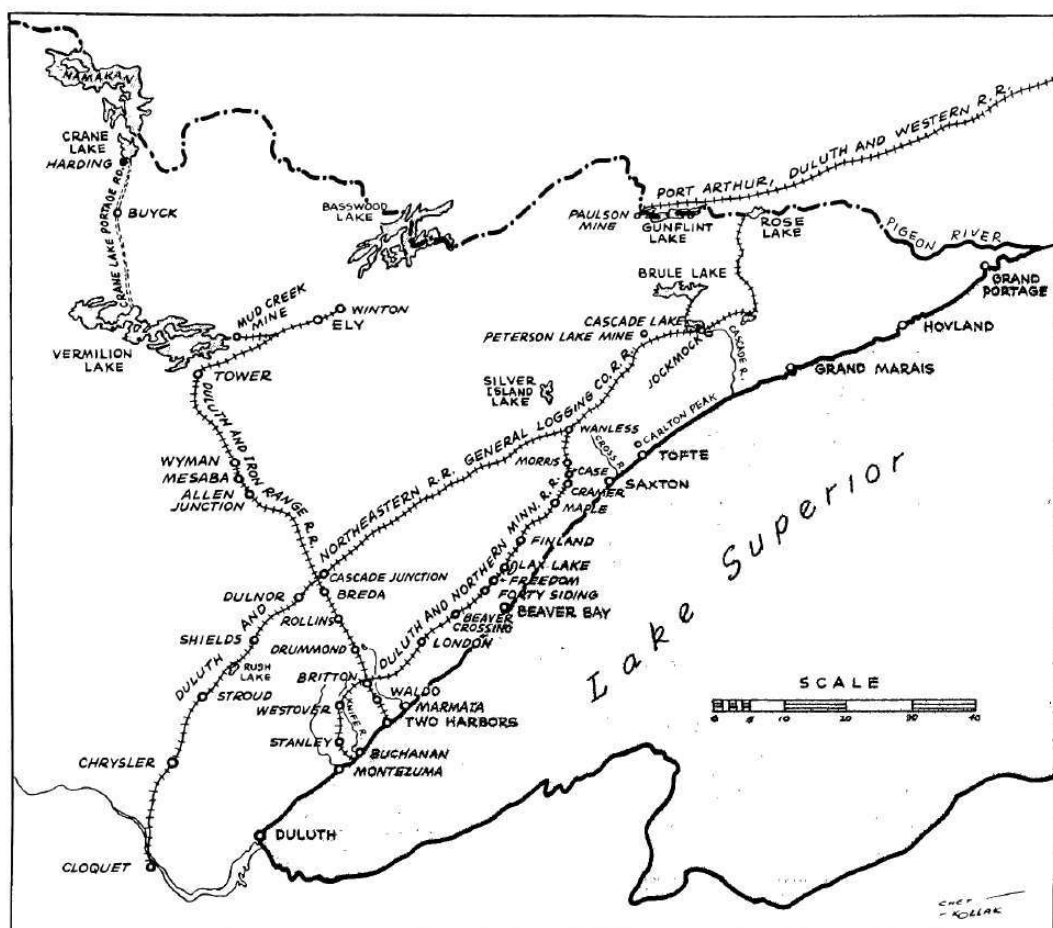
<sup>3</sup> The routes of these trails are discussed by Edward Greve in an article on "The Development of Lake County, Minnesota," in the *Two Harbors Chronicle and Times* for August 25, 1949.

<sup>4</sup> See Eric C. Peterson, "Gold Mining in Northern Minnesota," an unpublished manuscript in the files of the department of history, University of Minnesota, Duluth Branch.

<sup>5</sup> On the Rainy Lake gold rush, see Peterson, "Gold Mining," and Grace Lee Nute, *Rainy River Country*, 74, 76-79 (St. Paul, 1950).

<sup>6</sup> Nute, *Rainy River Country*, 74-76.

<sup>7</sup> See the *Duluth News-Tribune*, July 30, 1939. The town of Mesaba is described in Grace Lee Nute, ed., *Mesabi Pioneer: Reminiscences of Edmund J. Longyear*, 7, 8 (St. Paul, 1951). Minutes of meetings of the Mesaba village council from 1891 to 1906 are owned by the Minnesota Historical Society.



EARLY logging and mining settlements and railroads in the Arrowhead country

In 1892 at Gunflint Lake northwest of Grand Marais, on the eastern end of the Mesabi formation, a small settlement called Paulson Mines developed about the mining area of the Gunflint Lake Iron Company. Although a railroad known as the Port Arthur, Duluth, and Western was constructed at considerable expense from Canada to the mine, the project was soon abandoned.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout the history of the Arrowhead country, mineral prospects have been ex-

ploited here and there in the area. In the 1890s a silver mine supposedly operated on Susie Island in Lake Superior near the North Shore village of Hovland until it was flooded out when pumps broke down. At Peterson Lake in Cook County a copper-mining venture was undertaken, and supplies were toted twenty-five miles or more through the forest from Grand Marais. Copper mining was attempted about 1900 near Tofte on Carlton Peak, now owned by the Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company. West of Knife River, near Mile Post 3 on the Alger-Smith logging railroad, the remains of a copper or silver mining endeavor may still be seen on the edge of Clover Valley. In 1903 speculative fever ran wild in the Arrowhead, and prospecting for iron

<sup>8</sup> The existence of this mining venture is mentioned by Newton H. Winchell, in the *Geology of Minnesota*, 4:480 (St. Paul, 1899). The property is now owned by the Oglebay and Norton Mining Company, according to Mr. Wesley White of Duluth. The United States Forest Service office, with which Mr. White is connected, has map records of the old development.

ore went on all the way from Highland on the Duluth and Iron Range Railroad in Lake County westward to Alborn in St. Louis County. None of these ventures, however, produced permanent changes in the pattern of settlement in northern Minnesota.<sup>9</sup>

Some four miles northeast of Armstrong Bay on Lake Vermilion lie the deserted remains of still another mining venture, this one marked by tragedy. There the Consolidated Vermilion and Extension Company operated the Mud Creek Mine during World War I, and from it more than twenty-two thousand tons of iron ore were mined and shipped. Adequate safety precautions apparently were not taken, however, and in 1916 the muck bottom of Mud Creek burst into the mine. No one was injured, however, for the crew of thirty or thirty-five men had just gone to dinner. The water was pumped out, and mining continued. Then a second flood broke through, drowning six of the miners. Thereupon, the mine was abandoned. The last of the ore in the stock pile was shipped in 1923. The head frame has been tipped over, and the mine buildings torn down except for the old warehouse, which was converted into a private home. This was still standing when the author visited it in 1941.<sup>10</sup>

TIMBER resources as well as minerals drew settlers to the Arrowhead at an early date. Actual settlement of northeastern Minnesota began about 1880, when both mining

and logging railroads pressed into the region. As these railways stretched forth their bands of steel, new place names began to dot the map. The Duluth and Iron Range Railroad, running from Two Harbors to Tower on the Vermilion Range, was the initial rail effort in the Arrowhead, and its construction in the early 1880s unleashed a wave of optimism concerning northeastern Minnesota's future. Although it later carried considerable timber traffic, the Duluth and Iron Range was primarily a mining road, and extensive settlement took place only at its extremities on Lake Superior and on the Vermilion Range. To be sure, farms grew up here and there along the line, and for decades lumber camps and even lumbering spurs were scattered along the right of way.

At first Indian names were given to stations on the Duluth and Iron Range line. Many of these whistle stops still exist, but their names have been changed. Wabegon has become Waldo; Sibiwise is now Britton; Gakidina is called Drummond; Matawan became Rollins; Wissakode is now Breda; Binisibi is Allen Junction; and Okwanin is known as Wyman.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Mrs. Grace Condon, postmistress at Knife River. See the *Duluth News-Tribune* of January 17, 1903, for information on St. Louis County prospecting.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with John Savage of Duluth, who is now part owner of the Mud Creek property.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Owens, "Iron Ore Industry in Minnesota," a manuscript in the collections of the Lake County Historical Society.

#### *FIRST roundhouse of the Duluth and Iron Range Railroad at Two Harbors*



NORTH Shore  
transportation at  
Grand Marais, 1910



Along the shore of Lake Superior, the situation was somewhat different. The two principal logging railroads in that vicinity – the Duluth and Northern Minnesota and the Duluth and Northeastern – gave names to their stations. With the removal of the rails and the demise of logging, many of the settlements no longer exist. The names by which they were known, however, are now applied to the surrounding countryside.

The Duluth and Northern Minnesota Railroad (popularly known as the Alger Line because it was owned by the logging firm of Alger, Smith and Company) was constructed in 1898 from Knife River westward into the Knife and Sucker river watersheds.<sup>12</sup> It was later extended eastward along the shore to Cascade in Cook County, and a spur was built to Brule Lake.

On the lower stretches of the Alger Line few communities developed, although scattered settlers have since cleared farms. Station names like Stanley, Higgins, Alger, Buell, Westover, Clark, and Algonon seemingly have been forgotten or submerged under new names like Clover Valley or Alden.

At London a few houses still cluster

around the station area, and the old section house is now a private cabin. Beaver Crossing, also known as “Old Illgen City,” was located about fifteen miles southwest of Finland. The settlement has entirely disappeared. A hotel, a restaurant, and several cabins, the foundations of which are still visible, were once located there. The settlement was a point of call on the Two Harbors-Beaver Bay sleigh road, which ran near the Alger Line in the upper Gooseberry and Splitrock River areas. The summer stables and pasture for horses used by the Alger-Smith company were likewise located near the town. When the railroad ceased to operate in 1923, the hotel proprietor, Rudolph Illgen, moved to the present site of Illgen City, just east of the Baptism River on the North Shore. The Alger stations of Forty Siding, Freedom, and North Branch also have vanished. Today their locations are marked only by traces of the old grades.<sup>13</sup>

At Lax Lake, north and east of Beaver Bay, the railroad station has disappeared, but a community centers about the Lax Lake Resort. It is operated by descendants of members of the Waxlax family who homesteaded on the southeast corner of the lake in 1894, more than ten years before the railroad reached the area. The lake, originally called Schaft Lake, later became known by the second syllable of the settlers’ name. The original farmstead is still intact, and near it stand nine virgin pines,

<sup>12</sup> On this and other roads in the area, see J. C. Ryan, “Minnesota Logging Railroads,” in *Minnesota History*, 27:300–308 (December, 1946).

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Om Eckbeck, a resident of the Finland area for more than forty years.





HIGHWAY 61 east of Two Harbors, 1917

which were reserved by John Waxlax about 1906 when he sold the timber on his claim to a logging company. They are now among the very few specimens left on the whole ninety-nine-mile main line of the Alger road.<sup>14</sup>

THE ONLY former Alger Line station still prospering is Finland. Once merely a cluster of houses on the overland mail route from Beaver Bay to Schroeder, Finland is now strategically located on State Highway No. 1 near the southern edge of Superior National Forest. A popular fishing and hunting center, the little community has increased in vigor in recent years as a result of the taconite development at Silver Bay and the establishment of a United States Air Force radar station near by.<sup>15</sup>

The old logging settlements once located north of Finland have largely disappeared. Maple, five miles to the north, which once boasted a few settlers, a station, and a saloon, now lies within the bounds of a sizeable privately owned hunting preserve. Cramer, twelve miles northeast of Finland, survives only as a crossroads store built from the materials of the former railroad section house. About the time of World War I, Cramer was a sizeable settlement with a post office, a store, a hotel, a school, and seventeen cabins. It was organized as a town, but this status was abandoned in 1933. For a few years after the railroad was torn up in 1923, Cramer served as area headquarters for the Minnesota division of forestry, and several buildings were erected on a small island in near-by Nine Mile Creek, west of the old railroad bed. The forestry station was moved to Finland in 1928, and its buildings at Cramer were razed. A half mile west of Cramer, on a hilltop overlooking Cramer Lake, are the ruins of the Smith homestead, and some two miles east of the crossroads, cradled among rocky hills, are the deteriorating remnants of the Kowalski homestead. Aside from these vestiges of civilization, however, the brush and forest have obliterated all traces of what was once a substantial logging community.<sup>16</sup>

Case, another Alger-Smith logging settlement, stood a mile and a half north of Cramer at a point where a second-rate county road now follows the old railroad right of way. In its heyday, Case boasted a store and a substantial group of cabins, but only piles of cinders and an occasional stack of rotted

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Mrs. Rudolph Waxlax. A manuscript in her possession by Loren Waxlax on "The Waxlax Family" was also helpful.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Gunnar Palm of Finland.

<sup>16</sup> Information on the Cramer area was obtained from Mr. Eckbeck and from John Fritzen of Duluth. The author has visited Cramer several times a year over the past twenty years and has conversed at length with Anthony Pacini and his daughter, the sole present-day inhabitants.

ties remind today's visitor that the grass-covered clearings along the rough forest road were once inhabited.

Farther along the present county road, traces of the logging railroad become slight indeed. Rotting trestles still stand on the east side of Echo Lake and along the old right of way between Hare Lake and Wanless. At Hare Lake the outlines of an extensive lumber camp and the remnants of a root house and a well can be seen. A quarter mile to the east, secluded in second-growth timber, lie the ruins of the old Morris homestead and the county school.

A SIZEABLE AREA in Lake County is now known as Wanless—a name originally applied to a community at the junction of the Alger Line and the General Logging Railroad. No sign of previous occupation is visible at this point today. The same name was given to a place located where the railroad crossed the Harriet Lake wagon road. There a fair-sized building marked with a sign reading "Wanless" stood until sometime in the 1940s, when it was torn down. Rumor has it that the building housed a saloon which catered to the thirsty lumberjacks working along the railroad line.

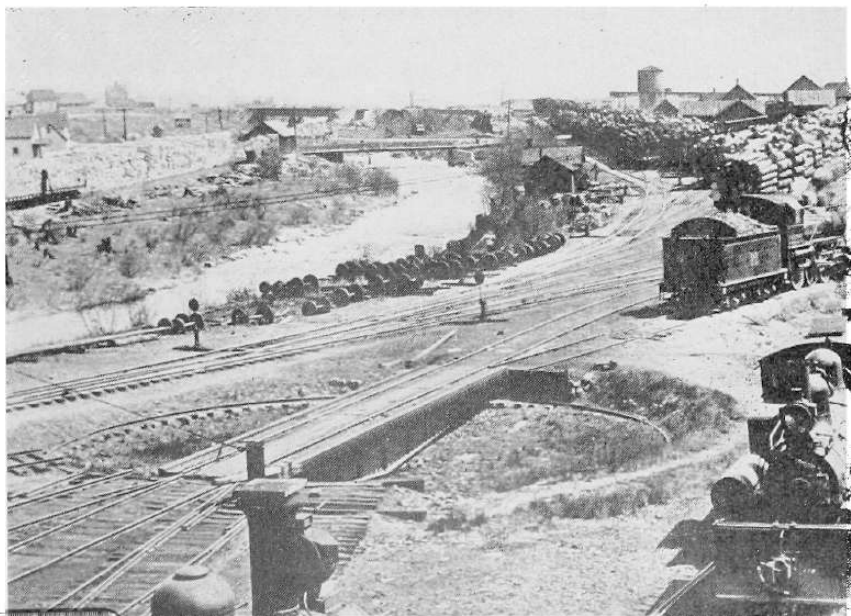
<sup>17</sup> Interviews with Ned Blynn and E. A. Krueger of Cloquet, officers of the Duluth and Northeastern Railroad, and with Major George Thompson of Finland.

The Wanless area takes its name from a Duluthian who had a farm and a summer home on Harriet Lake. The name is applied to various geographic features and locations in Sections 18, 25, 26, and 29 of Township 60 North, Ranges 6 and 7 West. Among them are Wanless Lake and a fire tower of the United States Forest Service. The United States Civilian Conservation Corps gave the name to a camp which it maintained near the old saloon in the 1930s. Among the settlers who homesteaded in the vicinity shortly after 1900 was one Anthony Gasco. His claim was on the northwest corner of Harriet Lake. Gunnar Palm of Finland recalls that Gasco domesticated a pair of moose and used them to haul his sleigh. In recent years the Gasco homestead has been occupied by Harry Hilly.<sup>17</sup>

Northeast of the Wanless region there is less and less evidence of logging settlement. A section house, siding, and apparently a hoist were located on the east side of Twohey Lake. On the northeast side of Little Cascade Lake lived one of the most memorable characters on the whole Alger Line. His name was Gust Hagberg, but he was better known as "Jockmock," from a town on the Swedish-Finnish border from which he emigrated. Jockmock lived in a substantial cabin, and allegedly catered to the lumberjacks' thirst. Mr. Joseph Brickner, former chief warden of the Minnesota divi-

COURTESY F. A. KING, DULUTH

DULUTH and  
Northern Minnesota  
Railroad yards,  
Knife River, 1915



sion of game and fish, recalls that Jockmock was still living there as late as 1924. The present writer visited the presumed site of Jockmock's activities in August, 1952. The main cabin apparently had been destroyed by fire, although the chimney and the stone mantle remained. In the back yard a mound of stones several feet high, enclosed by a deteriorating wire fence, marked what was apparently a grave. Local foresters suggested that it was probably the last resting place of Jockmock's favorite dog.

Cascade, on the south shore of Cascade Lake, was the northern terminal of the Alger Line. It was marked only by camps and a boardinghouse until the General Logging Company purchased the Alger-Smith interests after World War I. Then Cascade became a more extensive settlement with a roundhouse, railroad shops, a headquarters building, a restaurant, a school, and a number of cabins. At one time more than a thousand lumberjacks reputedly worked in the Cascade area. The writer visited the site in 1952, driving on the railroad right of way in an old car. Many of the larger buildings were in bad repair. The General Logging Company kept a caretaker there until 1953, when his cabin was destroyed by fire.

ANOTHER logging railroad which contributed to the settlement of the Arrowhead was the Duluth and Northeastern, a stub of which is still in use between Cloquet and Saginaw. The road had its beginning in 1898, when a short line was built from Hornby, on the Duluth and Iron Range Railroad, south to Island Lake. It was later extended to Saginaw, Cloquet, and Cascade Junction. A number of temporary settlements appeared in connection with the operation of this line, but few permanent communities resulted.

Cloquet, of course, continues as a prosperous wood products center, and Saginaw stands in the midst of a small dairy farming area. Most of the other former Duluth and Northeastern stations have disappeared, and their early names are remembered only by

hunters and fishermen, who use them to designate areas of this northern hinterland. Chrysler, once located two miles southwest of the modern Duluth, Winnipeg, and Pacific station of Taft, but now deserted, formerly had a section house, a headquarters building, and three large lumber camps. It was once known as Anatole, the name of an early settler. Stroud, another logging station, is likewise a place of the past. From 1925 to 1930 it was the site of several camps, railroad cars fitted with living quarters, and a siding. Farther north, Rush Lake was even more developed, having a water tank, railroad shops, a section house, and several cabins. Some of the latter are now used by the Rush Lake Gun Club. The station of Shiels had a headquarters building and several dwellings, although nothing remains there today.<sup>18</sup>

On the upper reaches of the Duluth and Northeastern, settlement was generally confined to logging camps and to clusters of small cabins. At Mile Post 52, commonly known as the Hegstrom farm, a number of Finns settled. The station of Dulnor, at the junction with the spur to Otto Lake, had camps and a landing. Cascade Junction, terminal of the Duluth and Northeastern during most of its existence, had rail yards, camps, and section houses.

Additional investigation could undoubtedly uncover dozens of other deserted northern Minnesota settlements left in the wake of early expansion. Many mining and logging settlements in this area have vanished. They were important, however, as steps in the industrialization of the Arrowhead, and their stories constitute a chapter in the trial and error method by which Minnesota has become a modern commonwealth. A few grew into substantial towns, but today most of them are only clearings in the forest marked by the debris of former habitation and the cinders of old logging engines.

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<sup>18</sup> Information on the Duluth and Northeastern was supplied by J. C. Ryan of Makinen, and by Ned Blynn and E. A. Krueger of Cloquet. See Ryan, in *Minnesota History*, 27:300, 308.





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