

REMINISCENCES FROM *BORN FROM IRON 1879-1979*

DAYS GONE BY... By Garnet James

I was born on **May 5, 1893**, in **Iron Mountain, Michigan**. We were all born in the homes in those days. Our family doctor was **Dr. Cameron**. There were nine children in our family, five boys and four girls. They were **Irving, Garnet, Horace, Harold, Clarence, Bessie, Ethel, Gladys** and **Ruth**.

My father came from Cornwall, England; mother was from England also. There were three children in my dad's family, my father being the oldest. When my father's mom died, his father disappeared so my dad was raised in an orphanage. It was in his early life that he went into the mines.

In those days my father used a drill with a sledge hammer. One man would hold and twist the drill by hand while the other man would hit the drill with the sledge hammer. They would have kids doing that kind of work. Four boys and my father began to study the different mining manuals so that they could get ahead. These boys were all self-educated.

When my father came to Iron Mountain, he started working for the **Chapin Mine** as **head bookkeeper**. In later years he went into the **insurance business**.

The miners in the early days had rubber suits to wear because it was very wet underground. They also wore rubber boots. They had a candle stick which was made so that the candle would set within the stick. There was a long spike on the stick which was pointed at the end. They would wear this candle stick on their hats. The miners were able to take this stick out of their hats and jab it into the timber of the mine and work by its light.

The miners got up and down to the mine by way of cages which were hoisted with air. The air which was to purify the air in the mines came from the **Hydraulic Falls**.

It had a four-foot in diameter pipe from the Hydraulic Falls to the mine.

The timber used in the mines was bought by the various mines through different lumbering companies and also bought from the farmers when they would clear their land. The lumber was brought to the mines, where, at the mine's sawmill, it was made into the timber needed within the mine. They had special timber men who would work only on the foundations.

The miner made about \$1.00 per day back in the year 1886. The men would work 10 hours a day. The fellows that worked afternoon shift would work 13 hours and they went home early on Saturday night. Miners worked six days a week, but if I remember well, there wasn't much trouble with the employers. The men seemed happy working in the mines.

There were some games the miners had that I can remember. On the **Fourth of July**, the men would put a **platform on Stephenson Avenue**. They would then bring up about three great big rocks. They would then have a **drilling contest**. These contests were prepared just like the men from England worked in the mines. They used a hand-held drill and a sledge hammer. One guy twisting and the other guy pounding. The winner would be the team of men that could drill the farthest in the given amount of time.

There were many saloons in Iron Mountain. Hughitt Street was what was called the "red light district." It was also called "The Midway." You would find the lumberjacks coming in from the woods after being gone a couple-three months and they would head for Hughitt Street. Some of the bar-keepers would dope these men up and take every penny they had, so in a couple of days the lumberjack would be going back to the camp, as flat-broke as could be.

Most of the lumberjacks in the spring of the year, when the camps broke up, would come and stay in the barns. These men were mostly single and had no homes of

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their own. Well, they would sleep in a hay loft bumming their meals. Some would do odd jobs for their meals also. If there was a place that was pretty open-hearted, the lumberjacks would put their mark on the fence by the house so that other lumberjacks could also reap the harvest.

The lumberjacks and the miners had little in common. There were many fights between these two groups of men.

In the early days you could buy a five pound pail of beer for five cents! You would take a lard can which held two quarts, and as you would now say “fill-up,” we would say, “rush the can!”

The beer came in wooden barrels and the saloon keeper would get ice from the icehouses out at **Lake Antoine** and would set these wooden barrels on ice. **Walter Henze** and **Mr. Tollen** were in charge of the **Hydraulic Falls**, but also got into the **beer business** and made their own beer. They had all the stuff brought in on the trains and made their beer. They made “darn” good beer!

The saloons had imported whiskey and brandy and they would sell it for 25 cents a half-pint.

In my younger days the **English** were the dominating nationality. The **Swedes** came next and when the **Italians** moved in, the English started to go west and work in the copper mines. The Italians moved into the **North Side** of Iron Mountain, the Swedes into the **East Side** and the lower **West Side** was the **French** people. The French worked as loggers and also worked in the sawmills of the mine.

The Italians had such beautiful vegetable and flower gardens. We would go up to the North Side just to look at the gardens. We would buy vegetables from them. They also would get several tons of grapes and make 100 to 200 gallons of wine. They drank wine with every meal. The English would drink their tea. On the whole, the nationalities got along very well.

When I was a boy here in Iron Mountain, I can remember seeing stumps four feet or higher! This was all pineland around and we would have much more snow in those days. The loggers would use a two man saw and if a place needed cleaning out, they would just walk in there and whatever was a nice height to work, they would start sawing. They would leave all these big stumps. There would be millions of feet of lumber that was left.

Everyone in Iron Mountain owned a horse or cow. The horses were used for logging and others used them to deliver groceries to the homes. **A delivery boy would get the groceries and load his wagon. He would bring the groceries to the person and at the same time pick up another slip for the coming week. Those people who had cows would use the milk and also make butter. If they had more than they could use, they would sell the milk for five cents a quart.**

The roads in Iron Mountain were gravel. For many years they would take the rock from the mines and crush it up. They would use a steam crusher and go back and forth on the roads and then they would use a roller to roll it down. It really couldn't be called gravel for it was much finer than gravel. It was good to walk and bike on the rolled streets.

When I was young I worked in the **blacksmith shop**. That was one of the best trades there was. **We worked six days a week and made about \$18 a week, working a 10-hour day.** We would set tires. The wheels on the wagons and buggies had a steel rim. It was about three inches wide. We would take the tire off and heat it up and put it into the forge where it would be pressed together. We would have a wheel that had figures on it and put a scratch on one spot and count the number of revolutions it made. We would shrink the tire so that it was a little bit tighter than the wheel. We would build a big fire and put that tire in there so it got hot all the way

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around. This would make it expand. We would then put the tire on and dump water on it, this would allow the tire to shrink so that it would tighten up around the wheel. We would also shoe horses.

Hansen's Livery would rent horses and would rent buggies. They would rent these out for funerals and also for families having a picnic. The doctors' horses were boarded there. Hansen's would have buggies upstairs and horses downstairs.

Our water works department was at Lake Antoine. They wouldn't take the water out of the lake. It was taken from springs. The people would come into the town and couldn't wait to get this water.

Of all the people that I remember, one sticks out in my mind. That was **Tom King**. I remember when my dad came over from England, he worked for a while and then sent for my mother to come over. She was just 18 years old. They got married in Iron Mountain. My mother would be working in the kitchen or something and the door would open up, and there would be an Indian walking in. Why my mother was scared to death!

Tom King was the Indian chief of the Menominee tribe. Years ago there was no train to **Foster City**. You had to go to **Escanaba** to get into Foster or you could go with Tom King by horse and wagon. Well, one day these traveling men wanted to go there, so they got off at **Randville**. Tom King was to meet them at that location. On his way into the depot, about a mile away, Tom saw a porcupine. He went and picked up his passengers. He started down the road and soon put his nose in the air and said, "Porcupine up ahead. I can smell it." Well the passengers just looked at each other. Well this went on for about half a mile. Tom King then said, "The smell is getting stronger, I think he's in a tree on my side of the road." The men were amazed at his ability. Finally they were about 10 feet away and he said, without looking up, "He's in that big tree." The men

got out of the wagon and sure enough up in the tall tree was a porcupine. They couldn't get over it. Needless to say, Tom King did this many times for a laugh!

Garnet James married Alice Cecelia Melis in 1917 at Iron Mountain. Mrs. Alice James died in June of 1978. Mr. James resides at the Pine Manor Nursing Home.

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INTERVIEW WITH TOM MITCHELL By Tom Mitchell

Mr. **Tom Mitchell** was born in **Iron Mountain at Keel Ridge on October 6, 1894**. His parents bought a home at Keel Ridge on five or six acres in 1890, and lived there until a home was available in Iron Mountain. They started a **hardware store on Brown Street**. The family then moved to Brown Street, and later to "**C**" and **Prospect**.

Tom was a graduate of the class of 1913 from the then new Iron Mountain High School.

When Tom finished school, he worked for the **Brauns and Van Company**, a **wholesale grocery and fruit company**, which was located on **Ludington Street**, where **Andreini's** is now located. Tom then went to Oregon and New Mexico to work, and in 1920 returned to work in the family hardware store. **Mitchell's Hardware Store** was then **between the Parent Building and the First National Bank**.

Tom remember's [*sic – remembers*] **Jim Dickey**, one of the first settlers in the area. Dickey owned and operated a trading post near Lake Antoine. He dealt with the Indians, had a blacksmith shop, restaurant and also a weigh station at his post.

Dickey also operated the Goveland [*sic – Groveland*] Mine. Tom said that **Dickey's homestead was where the Iron Mountain Industrial Park is now located, near the Michigan State Police Post.**

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Dickey came from New Brunswick to the Upper Peninsula on the day Abraham Lincoln was shot. He came into the Upper Peninsula near Marinette, and helped people after the Peshtigo fire. He also had a boat on the Great Lakes. **Dickey came to this area via the Indian trails from Marinette through Vulcan and Quinnesec to Lake Fumee, as he was cruising for pine timbers [sic – timber].** These trails ran all the way to the Copper Country.

After starting the **Groveland Mine**, Dickey, while in Canada, found out that a railroad was going to run on his property. He returned immediately and barricaded his property and held off the workers with a shotgun. The railroad company took him to court and the judge ruled against him. Dickey then left the area and mined in New Mexico.

The **Chapin Mine** closed in 1932. The equipment was sold and the cables to the mines were cut. It was a blow to the economy in the area, which was already hit by the depression.

Some of the early businesses in Iron Mountain were on the main street which extended from East Fleshiem to "C" Street. Some of the larger stores were: **Wills & Carbis Meat Market and Grocery Store, Rusky Brothers Department Store, Mitchell Hardware Store, Levy Department Store, Parent's Men's Clothing Store, Seiberts [sic – Seibert's] Drug Store** and the **First National Bank**.

Tom recalled when **Von Platen** came to this area in 1910. The people in the area put up a sum of money to get him into Iron Mountain. Years later, Mr. Von Platen paid off all the people who had invested money.

Henry Ford came to the area and built his plant in the 1920's. At that time, Kingsford didn't exist. Kingsford was named after **E.G. Kingsford**, who was the **head of the Ford Motor Company's Upper Peninsula operations.**

Tom remembers the **air-pipe that ran above ground from Hydraulic Falls over Pewabic Hill and to the Chapin Mine.** The air-pipe held compressed air [sic – air] which **ran the machinery at the Chapin.** The air-pipe also ran to the **Hulst School to the shop departments**, where the air was used to operate the tools.

Tom remembers when kids would walk the pipeline and when the air was running through it, one could hear the clanking sound all over town.

In **1940** when the **Chapin Pit caved in**, the Mitchell Hardware truck had just crossed to the North Side and had no way to get back downtown, so the driver had to go around Pine Mountain. Due to the cave-in, the roads from the North Side to the East Side and to 25 Location were built. After a time, all the water was pumped out of the caved area and was filled with a rock base. After the road was repaired the water was let back into the pits. Along with the road from downtown to the North Side, the two railroad lines, Chicago and Northwestern and the St. Paul, went down too.

Mr. Tom Mitchell retired from Mitchell Hardware in 1958. His sister, **Mrs. Neumeier**, ran the store until it closed its doors for the last time in **May, 1977.**

The Mitchell's [sic – Mitchells] reside at 513 Detroit Street during the summer months. In the winter, they travel to their house which is located on an island in Tampa Bay, Florida. **Jean** and **Tom** have a daughter **Georgina Johnson**, who resides in Iron Mountain with her husband, **Bill.**

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RUNDLE'S OPERA HOUSE
West Ludington Street
Iron Mountain, Michigan
By Myrtle (Thompson) Bartholomew

As far back as I can remember, 1896, "The Opera House" was the entertainment

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center of the community. It was not a real opera house with foyer and plush seats such as Calumet could boast, but a large hall with a well-equipped stage **above Rundle's Hardware Store.**

The building was on **West Ludington Street**, the site of the present post office. While the entrance to the store was on Ludington, you entered the opera house through a wide door facing Milwaukee [*sic – Merritt*] Avenue and the tracks.

There was no foyer, just a broad stairway you had to climb to reach the land of enchantment. At the door you presented your ticket and as it opened you faced the ornate curtain that would presently rise to reveal a scene from the romantic world of "East Lynn" or perhaps the sad views of "Uncle Tom's Cabin."

Traveling companies provided the theater with one-night stands and stock companies brought a repertoire of several plays, mostly romances, for a week of entertainment.

There were also variety shows of the vaudeville type. I remember being taken to a matinee on **December 24, 1897.** It was my first show where I heard new songs to banjo music and saw a little girl dance. Occasional home talent productions were presented. The most elaborate of these was the annual **Elks' Minstrel**, always done in black face, which today would no doubt be banned. This was the night when the local young blades had an opportunity to exhibit singing and dancing talents and a chance to try their wit in the humor of the day, "roasting" prominent citizens to the delight of everyone except, of course, the victims.

But the Opera House served many purposes other than theatrical. There were occasional **concerts** and **lectures** to stimulate the cultural life and politicians "hired the hall" to announce and defend their platforms. It was here that the senior classes from the **Hulst School** celebrated their **commencement exercises** for youth

and parents, a memorable event. In those days, since there were no caps and gowns for the graduates, dress for graduation was of upmost [*sic – utmost*] importance. The class was seated on the stage in full view of their world. Actually, the classes were small, that of 1908 the largest to date with 25 members and the audience was not large. The program consisted of a lecture by a college professor, intended to inspire the youth and not always a success!

Finally, the opera house was the scene of the big **social events** of the year, the **Easter Dance**, the **Elks' Ball** and the big **private parties.** For this purpose the banks of seats were moved to the side walls, the floors cleaned and waxed, plants and color brought in to add glamour and the big hall became a ball room [*sic – ballroom*] ready for the arrival of society, young and old.

I wish I could tell you more about these parties but when my sister and brother were most actively involved I was still a little girl. I do remember the popular dance was the waltz and that my sister carried her dancing slippers in a silk bag and had a beautiful white fan I wasn't supposed to touch. Her escort arrived for her in a hired hack.

From 1912 on the opera house is only a memory to me. I had gone to college in 1909 and do not remember having ever gone to anything there since. Only, when I returned to Iron Mountain in 1923, I found that Rundle's was only a fine hardware store.

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