

Alpha

The village of Alpha, located in the southeastern Iron County in Mastodon Township, began, like many other communities in the county, as a mining settlement. Although mining activity occurred in Mastodon Township as early as 1882 with the opening of the Mastodon Mine several miles south of the site that became Alpha, this and other early mining ventures were short-lived, not surviving the Panic of 1893. No attempt appears to have been made during the operation of the early mines to establish a real village. Instead, lodging for the miners was provided by boarding houses at the mine locations.



In 1910, however, the Pickands-Mather Company began large scale exploratory operations in the area, which in turn brought an influx of laborers. At this time, a settlement was platted north of the operations by the Nevada Land Company. This was unusually well planned for mining settlement, with streets radiating east, west, and south from Balkan mine began operating in 1915. With the development of these two productive mines in the vicinity, a boom began in the new settlement.

The community grew rapidly, fueled by the success of the mines and also encouraged by the Nevada Land Company. This company, which owned much of the platted land, promoted quick development of the area and the sale of lots through advertising and boosterism. In 1913, the growing settlement was given a post office named Alpha, one of

several Michigan post offices given the name of a letter from the Greek alphabet. Soon the need for organized government was felt. A village charter was drawn up and the institution of village government overwhelmingly ratified in a general election in August 1914.



Development of the settlement reached its peak the same year that the village was incorporated. During that year, the Nevada Land Company donated to the village and township school system a four-and-one-half-acre parcel of land on which the Alpha Village Hall, the water tower (part of the village water system), and the George F. Porter Public School were constructed. In 1914, also, a bank was organized, many stores and businesses were established, electric lights were installed, and a hotel opened. Six passenger trains a day serviced the bustling village along the Chicago and Northwestern line, which had been extended in 1882 through the area that became Alpha. The future looked bright.

However, although initial growth was rapid, the boom was short-lived. By the early 1930s, all mining activity had ceased in the area. Passenger trains and bus service stopped. Since the closing of the mines, Alpha has become primarily a residential community, with few business establishments. Its citizens rely on Crystal Falls, six miles to the northeast, not only for employment, but for goods and services. Alpha's cycle of boom and decline provides a classic example of the historic pattern followed by many such mining communities, and is thus expressive of the rich mining related history of Iron County.