

Crystal Falls

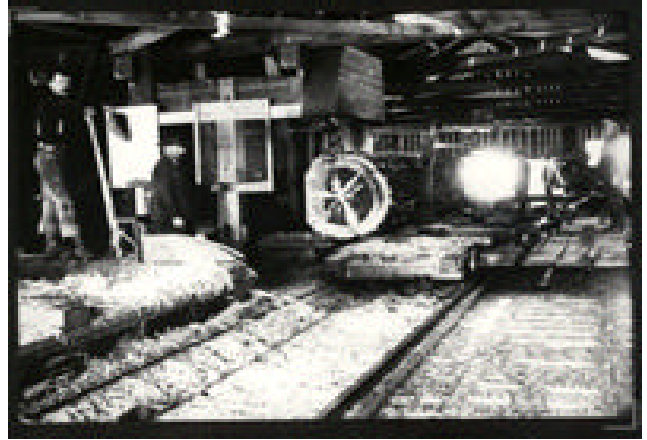
Although claims were filed on the property in southeastern Iron County along the Paint River, where Crystal Falls is now located, as early as 1886, no attempts were made toward the establishment of a settlement until early in the year 1880, when Chicago and Northwestern Railroad reached the village of Florence, just south of Iron County in Wisconsin.



railroad that any ores mined would have a rail outlet from Florence, Dr. D.M. Bond and Donald C. MacKinnon of Iron River began explorations and, in the late summer of 1880, opened the Paint River Mine. Two residents of Florence, S.D. Hollister, Sr. and George Runkel, reached the location in September of 1880. Runkel began operation of Crystal Falls Mine, which was located on the western bank of the Paint River at the foot of the falls. Together with Hollister and several other early explorers, he formed the Crystal Falls Iron Company, to enlist capital, explore for ore, and obtain leases.

The Crystal Falls Iron Company immediately established a sawmill, which, run by David Lockwood, broth-in-law of George Runkel, became the center of settlement activity in the area.

Other mines opened in rapid succession in the Crystal Falls area, attracting a healthy supply of settlers. By 1881, enough ore had been unearthed to warrant extension of the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad from Florence, 15 miles to the south, to Crystal Falls. The Crystal Falls Iron Company purchased and platted land along the railroad right-of-way on the side of a hill rising from the Paint River. With the arrival of the first train in



April 1882, the growth of the newly platted settlement was assured. According to the Lake Superior Mining Association Directory, there were seven mines in the Crystal Falls area shipping ore in the first year after the railroad opened. Collectively these mines employed more than 500 men. Crystal falls was truly a mining settlement.

The town mushroomed to serve its mining population. Although Crystal Falls contained only four commercial structures in the spring of 1882, by 1884 it boasted of some 25 business establishments, including three hotels, two drugstores, two dry goods stores, one hardware store, one bakery, three grocery stores, one restaurant, one barber shop, one jeweler, two public halls, and several saloons.



School District Number One was

established in July of 1882 and the first school was constructed in 1883. However, the incorporation of the settlement as a village did not take place until 1889. In that same year Crystal Falls was also made the county seat of Iron County. The present county courthouse was built a year later.

In spite of the quick growth of Crystal Falls, operations at the mines during the town's early years were sporadic. For example, a strike on miners in 1883 brought about the temporary suspension of activities and, a year later, the depressed iron market forced the closing of all mines but one. Lumbering, on the other hand, provided a steady and constant means of employment. Logging operations in the Crystal Falls area expanded rapidly and, by the time the village was incorporated, lumbering of the vast stands of pine in the vicinity was carried on by crews from 30 camps.

The population of Crystal Falls grew to 3,231 by the 1890 census and the number of commercial establishments continued to grow. During its first year as a village, Crystal Falls had 27 saloons doing a busy trade with the clientele of miners and lumberjacks. The village itself constructed a hydroelectric power plant and water system in 1891.

Crystal Falls was incorporated as a city in 1899. Entering into the twentieth century, the city continued to prosper. Public services were expanded with the installation of street lights and a sewer system in 1902. A city hall, including a fire hall and assembly hall for entertainment and recreational activities, was built in 1914. However, growth halted in the 1930's with the arrival of the Great Depression, when most of the mines were closed.

Although the mining industry in Crystal Falls briefly revived during World War II, it has since declined. Growth has been stabilized at a slow rate since the 1930's; Crystal Falls has become a quiet city that functions as the county seat and the center of the eastern half of Iron County.