



MICHIGAN IRON ORE

On September 19, 1844, near present-day Negaunee, William Austin Burt and his surveying crew first discovered iron ore in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Within a few years iron ore mines were opened across the central Upper Peninsula. The first mine was the Jackson Mine near Negaunee. Early mines faced an unfriendly environment and transportation problems. When the Soo Locks opened at Sault Ste Marie, shipping iron ore became easier.

The iron mines were in areas known as ranges. The Upper Peninsula's biggest range was called the Marquette. Two smaller ranges were named the Menominee and Gogebic.

Michigan produced more iron ore than any other state between 1880 and 1890. Although production continued to increase, the state fell from first place because bigger mines opened elsewhere in the country.

Immigration to Iron Towns

Iron mining attracted many immigrants to the Upper Peninsula, especially the Cornish, Irish, Swedes, and Finns. They settled in communities near the mines. According to one observer, "the visitor to this mining country finds it the most cosmopolitan society he has ever entered." The proud immigrant mining experience is still present in towns like Iron Mountain, Ironwood, and Ishpeming.

From Powder to Pellets

Michigan iron ore fueled America's Industrial Revolution. It built factories, skyscrapers, railroads, farm machinery, and bridges. Michigan's auto industry used iron ore. During World War II, factories used iron ore to build tanks, trucks and jeeps and helped make Michigan the Arsenal of Democracy.

After World War II, American officials feared that the United States might run out of high-grade iron ore. There was iron ore in other countries, but American officials did not want to depend on those sources. President Harry Truman challenged the American iron ore industry to find a solution to the possible shortage. Iron pellets was the iron ore industry's solution.

Iron ore pellets are made from taconite, a low-grade iron ore. When the taconite is separated from waste rock (called silica) it is like baby powder. However, it cannot be shipped in that form. After

experimenting by mixing taconite with water and clay, then forming it into balls in large drums, the industry created iron ore, or taconite, pellets.

Today, all the mines on the Menominee and Gogebic Ranges have closed and almost all American iron ore used to make steel in this country is in the form of pellets. Yet, iron mining remains important in Michigan and the people of the Upper Peninsula.