

## CHAPTER XI

I suppose the opening of any new country particularly when an industrial bonanza is involved always provides excitement, fierce competition and yet a certain comradeship and the Mesabi Range was no exception. In a business way Butler Brothers were pitted against some of the best financial and industrial brains in America. It had become obvious to us as early as 1910 that our stripping contracts would eventually run out and that if we were to continue on the Mesabi range it would be necessary to become mining operators. But we were still allergic to iron ore leases as such, principally because we were inexperienced in the merchandising of iron ore. One after another the principal mining companies were starting to remove their own overburden. We were something like "middlemen" in the overall production of ore and it appeared that there was a concerted campaign among the big companies to eliminate the middlemen.

As apparent proof of our inexperience in direct mining operations, in 1914 we let ourselves be drawn into a contract to operate the Minnesota Land Company's Quinn Mine at Nashwauk under an agreement to share the profits equally with Clement K. Quinn, young Michigan mining engineer.

After the contracts were signed we discovered for the first time that the mine was surrounded on all sides by property of the Great Northern Railway and the R. M. Bennett interests. There was no possible way by which we could get legal access to start mining the Quinn's 1,250, 000 ton iron reserve. Brother Walter raised particular hell with Quinn for luring us into such a deal. I suppose that 1,250,000 tons in the Quinn mine would still be there if it had not been for brother Pierce's friendship with Jim. Hill. Pierce went to Hill with the problem and we got consent from the Great Northern Railway to trespass their property to get at our ore. After the changeover from stripping contractors to mining operators was made Butler Brothers took only four more stripping projects. These were the Pease Mine in 1915, the Majorca near Calumet in 1916, the Judd at Taconite in 1920, and the Mahnomon Mine on the Guyana Range in 1928. In 1913 Butler Brothers had a net worth of \$1, 600,000 .

It took hard work, long hours, and you had to be tough. Some of the jobs we undertook were extremely difficult operations. Because open iron mining was still somewhat of a novelty and the problems that both stripping and mining presented were for the most part unprecedented there were few times when you could profit by the experiences of your neighbors or competitors.

The Sliver Mine which provided my first Mesabi Range experience was a particularly difficult operation it seemed to me then and now. The ore body itself was imbedded deeply in bog and swamp. At one point in the operation I had to build a dike to keep the swamp water from running into the pits and the following is an experience I will never forget:

It was seven o'clock in the evening of August 9, 1909 that the tremendous water pressure that had been building up against the mine crashed thru the dike. Within fifteen minutes the shovel runner and other members of the crew had to swim for their lives, and inside of an hour the mine floor and our equipment was washing under sixty feet of water. No single mining company in those days maintained pumping equipment to cope with such an emergency. And if we had had the equipment we didn't have the manpower experienced enough to know how use it. I took my problem to some officials of the Oliver Mining Company at Mountain Iron who, altho they were competitors of Butler Brothers provide an outstanding example of the brotherhood of mining operators when one of their number is in trouble.

"We are sorry as hell Emmett that this happened," they told me.

They told me that they had a dozen or more pumps in the shops of the D.M and N. Railway and that they would load them on flatcars and get them to me inside of ten hours. I telephoned railway officials and a boiler shop at Duluth and told them of the difficulty. In another few hours the boiler shop had loaded four portable two hundred horsepower steam boilers aboard a D.M. and N. flatcar and the railway furnished a special locomotive to get the equipment to us. Inside of about a week due to the finest cooperation I ever have witnessed among a group of men the Silver Mine was back in operation.

Good locomotive engineers in those days were about the scarcest of all the skilled workment we employed. In those days it was the practice of railroads to give locomotive engineers "clearance papers" when they left the railroad's employ for whatever reason. The clearances were printed on a kind of paper which if you held it to the light would reveal the likeness of a duck. If the job applicant had been discharged by his former employer for some misdemeanor or another this duck was always shown with its head cut off.

Most of the boomer engineers that roamed the range during those days carried "dead duck" clearance papers and we hired a lot of them.

One of these was an engineer named Percy Mitchell, who had no more business running a locomotive than I do flying an aeroplane. Mitchell was pushing a string of cars thru the ore yards to pick up a line of empties and instead of easing the locomotive to make the connection he smashed the standing empties hard and nearly tore the front end off the locomotive. I ran over to see what had happened and Mitchell who was a big man said that he wanted his time.

"After what you've done do you think you've got any time coming," I asked him.

"Oh yes," Mitchell said. And while he was babbling an explanation of what happened I was trying something with which to clout him. Then I remembered that I had a hammer in my office and I said to Mitchell:

"Oh key, Percy, Let's go to the office."

When we got to the office I told the timekeeper to make out Mitchell's record and I went into the back room to find the hammer; while the timekeeper was handing Mitchell his check I let him have it. The first blow staggered him and he stumbled out the door and fell in the road.

I was going outside, to finish him off I suppose, when two travelling men pulled up to the office with a team and livery rig. They didn't pay too much attention to what was happening and came on into the office. In mortal I suppose, Mitchell jumped into their rig and put the whip to the horses. There was a horse and grocery wagon in front of the boarding house across the street so I picked up an handaxe, climbed into the wagon and gave chase. I could see that Mitchell was going to outdistance me, so I took aim and thru the handaxe. It stuck in the seat right at Mitchell's back, and I have no doubt now that had I hit him it would have killed him. To show how a man's mind can work under stress, I called the chief of police and told him to arrest Mitchell for horse and buggy theft. After thinking it over I recanted the charges but I never saw Mitchell again.

One of our good friends was J. C. Greenway who had achieved some fame with Teddy Roosevelt's Roughriders, and who was superintendent of the Canisteo Mine for the United States Steel Corporation. Greenway handled most of his work on horseback. I remember one time he rode the forty miles by horseback from Coleraine to the Sliver Mine to take a look at our operations.

He rode right down into the pit and reined his horse to the pit ladder. Just before leaving Greenway decided to climb the ladder for a last look around. The horse got frightened, gave a jerk, pulled the ladder out from under Greenway and sent the superintendent down forty feet into the mud. It was difficult for John and I to keep a straight face but we had to appear sorry for him. We became good friends. I can remember times later when John and I sat up all night with Greenway drinking whiskey and in his batchellor quarters at Coleraine and during some of those bouts we settled every mining problem extant and we refought and rewon nearly every battle in the Spanish American War.

There was the time when we broke a drumshaft during our operations at the Sliver Mine. Most of the stripping and mining companies had the same types of steam shovels in those days. After the accident I remember telephoning Clarence Moore, superintendent of the Wacootah Mine at Mountain Iron about three miles from the Sliver, at midnight and asking Moore if he would loan us a drum shaft from one of his shovels. He got out of bed, dressed and drove at once at once to the Sliver Mine in a horse and buggy. He rounded up a crew and some more horses and went to the Wacootah Mine where we picked up a new drum shaft. We were ready to work when the day shift reported.

There was no point in thanking Moore, because what he had done for Butler Brothers was a mere compliance with the code of the range.

There was another time when I was loading ore on the D.M. and N. Railroad and in the process broke an axle shaft in the steam shovel. There happened to be an ore car loaded with coal standing nearby. Without consulting anyone we put two jackscrews under the car, removed the trucks and attached them to our steamshovel so we could continue our work. The next day the track crew of the D.M. AND N. Railroad came along to fix the yard tracks and reported to the superintendent that I had taken the trucks out of the ore car. Being what I liked to refer to then as a precise man the superintendent telephoned me and said:

"Emmett you shouldn't have done that."

I told him that I had done it and that there wasn't much to be done about it now. Then he said:

"Well Emmett, you know that it's O.K. but I wish in the future you'd call me up before you do it."

Later I told the superintendent to send down another set of trucks and I would attach them with my own crew to the ore car. He sent down the new set of trucks and we attached them, and later I asked him to send me a bill. He said Butler Brothers didn't owe him anything.



On one of his periodic inspection trips the president of the D.M. and N. Railway was taking a look at some of the track approaches to our mines. He noticed that our tracks were sagging in some points. He turned to the track foreman and said:

"I want you to haul two or three extra trainloads of gravel and put it under the tracks of Butler Brothers."

I told him that Butler Brothers appreciated his interest and to send me a bill for the work. He said he would and altho the work cost in excess of \$500 Butler Brothers never got a bill.

During those early years of open pit mining on the Mesabi Range the operators couldn't get the ore to the Duluth docks fast enough. There were no rules as to the size of the ore chunks you loaded on to the cars and anything that would fit in a three yard dipper was considered permissible. You loaded the ore into the cars and when it got to the docks the railway company always had trouble getting it out of the cars and into the ore boats. The same thing happened when the ore boats reached their unloading areas. And some of the stuff Butler Brothers and the other mining companies shipped I know was in pieces too big for the blast furnaces to handle. The result of this confusion brought into being in 1910 a set of rules concerning the size of the ore that would be accepted.

To Butler Brothers this meant the purchase of expensive crushing equipment and to circumvent this necessity we bought drills and hammers and dynamite in a plan to reduce the ore lodes to acceptable sizes. We instructed our shovel operators to set aside the larger ore pieces until they could load them on top of the ore cars. Having done that we drilled and smashed the pieces with a dynamite blast. It wasn't long however before the railroad officials were complaining that altho the system might be all right for Butler Brothers the dynamite explosions did not distinguish between the lumps of ore to be broken up and the ore cars.

There was a chemist named Fred Lerch whose job it was to take samples of the ore we were loading and to analyze it for specific ore content. A similar analysis is always made when the ore boats reach the lower ports of the purchases. Under ordinary circumstances the two analysis should correspond within a reasonable allowance for error. But these weren't ordinary circumstances. I had told Lerch to draw his samples from the ore lodes. These samples were high grade ore. Naturally Lerch's analysis were at variance with those of the steel companies. I remember that we indulged in a long series of correspondence and telegrams arguing with each other across the expense of the Great Lakes.

Charles H. Hendrick, who was superintendent of the M. A. Hanna Company, whose ore we were loading, scolded Lerch about our practices. A nervous little man, Lerch came out to the mine one day and said:

"Emmett you can't load ore that way. I can't even get a fair sample."

"Fred, you're a chemist. You're supposed to be able to tell anybody that brings anything to you for analysis what is in it even if it's horse manure."

Lerch told Mr. Hendricks that he was offended by my language, but for the remainder of the year we sampled every bucket of ore that was shipped. Our great deception ended the following year when we put in screens and crushers and sized every load of ore that was shipped.

In the meantime my young family was growing up. There was the time when brother John telephoned and wanted a team of horses sent to Buhl, about twelve miles away. I had intended sending one of my men with the team, but my sons Hazen then thirteen and Pat, nine, heard about the telephone call and talked me into letting them take the horses to Buhl and they delivered them all right. Hazen and Pat returned home by the night train. There was another time when my daughter Mary Ellen and the three oldest boys Hazen, Pat, and Larry were coming home to the Range for a vacation from their school studies at St. Paul.

The tickets called for seats on the Great Northern Railway from St. Paul to Duluth and the changeover to the D.M. and N. Railway from Duluth to Wolf Junction, the nearest railroad point to where we were then living. The D.M. and N. porter had had his instructions to let the children off at Wolf Junction but had forgotten his assignment and the youngsters went on to Hibbing while my disappointed wife and myself paced the station platform at Wolf Junction. Nonplussed after hours of waiting for phone calls that never came we finally checked every hotel in Hibbing until we found them. When we did the youngsters were having a great time drinking pop and eating popcorn and we arranged for them to spend their first night alone in a hotel.

Back home I telephoned the superintendent of the D.M. and N. Railroad at Duluth and told him in no uncertain terms what I thought of the service on his railroad. He said he was very sorry.

"Sure you're sorry," I said, "but what about the nervous prostration you're railroad has caused Mrs. Butler."

We had some more nasty exchanges of correspondence about the incident and one daysome time later I met the railroad president.

"Emmett," he said "what the hell are you trying to do. Give my trainmen nervous prostration?"

It was on of these sojourns home from St. Thomas prep school in St. Paul that my son Patrick brought with him a violin. One of the instructors at the school had decided that Patrick had a musical talent and could develop into an accomplished violin virtuoso. When I came home the first night from work Pat was practising away on his violin. I don't suppose I was much different from the average father when I said to Pat:

"Son if you want to saw on that damned thing its all right with me, but go out on the water tower and play on it to your heart's content and not here in the house." Pat never learned to play the violin.

July 4, 1911 is probably still remembered by residents of Virginia as the most spectacular independence day celebration in history. It centered around Butler Brothers power house where we stored the black powder used for blasting. We had built the powder house on top of a bank not too far from my home, and a section of it was used to store the powder cans which were always returned after use to the Dupont Company. There were 365 days in 1911 so a better day couldn't have been picked for the powder house to explode than the fourth of July. The thing started popping off shortly after midnight and the series of explosions which followed provided Virginia residents with the damndest fourth of July they had ever heard or seen.

There was practically no water protection available so we just let it burn. I can remember watching the conflagration from my window. People came from all over the Mesabi Range to watch-and to listen.

It was the most spontaneous celebration in Butler Brothers history.