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## FORTY-ONE MINERS MEET DEATH IN MILFORD MINE

Mine Fills With Water, Mud and Quick Sand From Lake Above East Drift. Accident Happened At 3:45 Tuesday Afternoon. Miners Given No Warning.

### SEVEN MINERS NARROWLY ESCAPE

Within Fifteen Minutes Mine Filled with Water within 15 Feet of Top of Shaft. Seven Miners Escape by Climbing Ladder.

Red Cross With Headquarters at High School, Kept Busy Given Aid and Assistance to Dependents.

May take Weeks before Entombed Miners Can be Taken from Mine. Pumps Will Soon Start.

St. Paul, Minn., Feb. 8, 1924.  
MARRIETTA N. WILSON  
Mayor, Crosby, Minn.  
St. Paul extends its sympathy to the citizens of Crosby in their bereavement. How can we be of service?  
ARTHUR E. NELSON,  
Mayor, St. Paul, Minn.

climbed out . . . 41 could not make it. The men were working at the 165-foot level.

There was no time to wait for the cage to come from the surface. When the cage was hurriedly lowered some moments later, it came back with only mud and water, no occupants.

The mine employed 115 workers at the time. Forty-eight were on the day shift. Forty-one died, thirty-one of them married men, leaving a total of eighty-eight children fatherless.

The first bodies were not found until six weeks and three days later; the last, not until Nov. 4 of that year of tragedy.

### What happened

Writing of the incident some years later in a history of Cuyuna Range mining, Anna Himrod said: "This was the greatest disaster that has ever occurred in any iron mine in the Lake Superior District. The Milford was located between two lakes . . . Wolford to the northwest and Foley to the southeast. The mine shaft was almost 2,000 feet from Foley with the bottom level within 150 feet. The water must have broken into the mine some 500 feet from the lake from under a bog."

August Swanson, Crow Wing County mine inspector, said there was no way the mishap could have been anticipated. He had inspected the property the previous week, finding it drier than it had been on an earlier inspection, he reported.

Apparently, it was theorized, a subterranean channel from Foley Lake seeped over the mine in ever increasing volume and weight. Eventually the mine supports gave way without warning.

The mine had reached a depth of 200 feet with the main level at 165 feet and sub-level at the 200-foot mark. The ore body was under about 120 feet of sand, officials said.

### Range tragedy remembered

February, 1976, marks the 52nd anniversary of one of the Cuyuna Range's blackest moments in its history. On Feb. 5, 1924, forty-one miners lost their lives in the Milford mine disaster.

"Forty-One Miners Meet Death in Milford Mine. Mine fills with water, mud and quick sand from lake above east drift." (Crosby Courier, Feb. 8, 1924.)

"The Milford Mine on the Cuyuna iron range in Minnesota was drowned by a sudden inrush of waters in devastating volume, and forty-one miners perished with a suddenness that was appalling." (Skillings Mining Review, Feb. 9, 1924.)

### Mine inundated

At 3:45 p.m. Tuesday, some 15 minutes before the 48 men on the day shift at the Milford mine were to go off duty, the mine was inundated with a sudden and overwhelming inrush of water.

Within a span of some 25 minutes, the mine had filled with water to within 15 feet of the surface. The seven men nearest the shaft reached the ladder and

HANSEN, ARVY. CUY-UNAI 1976

### Memorial service

A Miners Memorial Service was held Sunday, Feb. 10, 1924, at the Crosby Armory. Mayor N. Wladimiroff of Crosby read names of the deceased, the Hon. E.P. Scallon gave an address, the Revs. Dowler, Stevenson, Fredrick and Erlander participated. Music was provided by the Concert Band and Philharmonic.

FOR REFERENCE

Do Not Take From This Room

Iron Range Research Center  
Highway 169 West  
P.O. Box 392  
Chisholm, Minnesota 55719

## Milford background

Originally named the Ida Mae mine for the wife of its developer, Franklin Merritt, the property was drilled in 1912-14 under the supervision of Edward LeDuc, president of the Mesabi-Cuyuna Iron Land Co. Producing began in 1918, with 4,900 tons shipped under operation of Cuyuna-Minneapolis Iron Co. In 1922, Whitmarsh Co. of Duluth took over operation, and the mine was renamed Milford for the eastern town that was the home of George H. Crosby's mother. The same property became Amherst Mining Co., following the 1924 tragedy with George H. Crosby Sr., George H. Crosby Jr., William Harrison and W. A. Rowe, operators. From 1918 to 1919, the property shipped 1,266,172 tons of ore.

## Ironies

One miner killed in the Milford mine disaster had begun work only the previous day. Two who were lost had traded shifts with another team in order to get a ride to work. Another had "partied" too much the previous evening and missed work that February day.

A mechanic had come to the surface to repair a piece of equipment. It took longer than anticipated, and he had not gone back into the mine by the time the accident occurred.

Had the accident happened some 15 or more minutes later, there would have been no one or very few in the mine. There was no 4 to 8 p.m. shift.

Some children were born after the tragedy claimed their fathers and they never knew them.

Capt. Evan Crellin, mining captain who died with his men, was the son of a pioneer mining official at Eveleth, Capt. John Crellin.

Ronald McDonald, another victim, was here from Scotland learning the iron mining field. A mining engineer in coal mining, he left a wife and daughter in Scotland.

Harry Middlebrook, superintendent of the mine, was away on business when the tragedy occurred.

## The aftermath

Two large electric pumps were speedily moved to the Milford site, each with 3,000 gallon capacity and draining was started. Water was pumped into the lake north of the mine. A large sand sucker was also moved to the property.

Mud and muskeg were loaded into wheelbarrows when rescue teams could get into the mine, hoisted to the surface and emptied. One source said the rescue operations cost some \$1,000 a day.

The first bodies were found at the 135-foot level on March 20, six weeks and three days following the accident. The third victim was not recovered until April 17, at 175 feet; the last was brought out on Nov. 4. Crews worked around the clock. In some instances, dynamiting was necessary to reach some locales. Capt. Davies was injured while leading some of the rescue operations.

In the first hours following the tragedy, the busiest place in Crosby was the telephone exchange. Miss Emily Blomberg and Miss Maybelle and Miss Jennie Myhers were on duty. The latter two women's brother, Arthur Myhers, was one of those who perished. It was some time before off-duty telephone operators arrived to replace them at the switchboard. Some 1,000 local calls were handled by that evening, along with 150 long distance calls within the first two days.

The Red Cross set up headquarters at the high school with Miss Elizabeth Olson and a committee in charge. State, county and village officials; Scouts, hospital personnel, organizations and individuals offered help in the days and weeks that followed, and Capt. J. A. Petraborg of Aitkin, commander of the National Guard, spent some time assisting in the area.

Workmen's compensation, indemnity and accident insurance in varying amounts, none exceeding \$7,500, were provided.

## Forty-one lives lost

*The Milford mine disaster took the following lives:*

<i>Evan Crellin</i>	<i>John Hatcher</i>
<i>Ronald McDonald</i>	<i>John Maurich</i>
<i>Oliver Burns</i>	<i>William Johnson</i>
<i>Valentine Cole</i>	<i>Nels Ritani</i>
<i>Clyde Revord</i>	<i>A. E. Wolford</i>
<i>John Minerich</i>	<i>Fred Harte</i>
<i>Mike Bizal</i>	<i>Frank Hrvatin</i>
<i>Mike Tomac</i>	<i>Elmer Houg</i>
<i>Nick Radich</i>	<i>Marko Toljan</i>
<i>Martin Valencich</i>	<i>John Hendrickson</i>
<i>Henry Palomaki</i>	<i>Minor Graves</i>
<i>Harvey Lehti</i>	<i>G. H. Revord</i>
<i>George Butkovich</i>	<i>Herman Hohm</i>
<i>Peter Magdich</i>	<i>Tony Slack</i>
<i>Arthur Myhers</i>	<i>C. A. Harris</i>
<i>Alex Jyhla</i>	<i>Earl Bedard</i>
<i>Jerome Ryan</i>	<i>L. J. Labrash</i>
<i>Emil Carlson</i>	<i>Frank Zeitz</i>
<i>Vic Ketola</i>	<i>Joseph Snider</i>
<i>George Hochevar</i>	<i>Roy Cunningham</i>
<i>John Yaklich</i>	

\* \* \*  
ACTUAL exploration for ore started in 1903, with the greatest development in the last two years only. (Brainerd Dispatch, 1912)

\* \* \*  
FIFTY MILES of new railroad lines have been built since the fall of 1910. The Soo Line has built the greatest mileage. (Brainerd Dispatch, 1912)

\* \* \*  
AVERAGE depth of all the drill holes is just 275 feet; the deepest hole is 896 feet. (Brainerd Dispatch, 1912)

\* \* \*  
FURNACE men are experimenting with Cuyuna ores now. The ores are not high grade but have values for certain purposes. (Brainerd Dispatch, 1912)

## Mine pit now lake

The Portsmouth mine pit, north of Crosby on Highway Six, became inactive and filled with water. In 1972, the new "lake" was stocked with 2,500 rainbow trout. Fishermen have been reporting increased success at the experimental location.