

Adirondack Ore Division, Republic Steel Corporation

by Mark W. DeLawyer SME/AIME, Industrial Historian

The iron mining operations in the eastern and northeastern Adirondack Mountain range of New York known as the Adirondack Ore Division of Republic Steel Corp., started as a collection of individual small, but important mining operations taking early advantage of the extensive high-grade iron deposits of New York.

The deposits are essentially two in number. The first, known as the Chateaugay Bed and later known as the Lyon Mountain mines, is only of passing interest here, though the mine had a phenomenal output of very high grade ore which was known throughout the world as 'Chateaugay Iron.' It is rather the other ore bed which concerns us here.

The Mineville Deposits in the eastern section of the Adirondacks have been mined since pre-revolutionary time. Prior to the second world war they were developed by the Witherbee-Sherman company in partnership with Bethlehem Steel Corporation. The mines were well known as efficient, well designed iron ore producers.

With the advent of the thirties and the gathering of war clouds in Europe, the major steel producers scrambled to consolidate their ore holdings. Each firm putting its financial resources into the ore deposits they felt would yield the highest short-term return (due to the coming emergency) as well as the best long-term investment. Bethlehem left the New York mining area to operate other ore ventures and Republic Steel, a newcomer to New York's iron industry, purchased the controlling interest in Witherbee-Sherman, which had fallen on hard financial times. Republic began the actual operation and management of the Witherbee-Sherman properties in 1937.

The mining operations, while financially strapped, were by no means out of the running. Republic found itself with several fully developed mines in Mineville, Port Henry, Ironville, and elsewhere. The Witherbee-Sherman properties also included a fully equipped concentrating/sintering plant and extensive transportation facilities.

In 1939, Republic acquired the mining rights in the Chateaugay-Lyon Mt. region via a lease agreement with the Chateaugay Ore and Iron Company. The property contained extensive facilities including a sintering plant. During the war, both properties were developed with the help of the Defense Plan Corporation and the improvements leased back to Republic. At some point during the war, the operations were streamlined and the Chateaugay-Lyon Mt. and Witherbee-Sherman operations were consolidated to form the Adirondack Ore Division, Republic Steel Corporation.

After the war, the mines were operated by Republic, but as the depth of individual mines increased, and with it the operational costs involved in ore extraction, the firm turned towards the vast iron deposits of the Midwest. While the mines of Michigan and Minnesota contain lower grade ores than those found in New York, the ease of access (most NE New York mines were underground rather than strip mines), coupled with the fact that the major iron mines in New York all lie within the Adirondack State Park caused Republic to slowly phase out its Adirondack Operations beginning in the late 1960's.

First to close was the Lyon Mountain operation which shut down in 1967. The mine equipment was sold as were the great number of "company houses" which had been leased to mine employees. In 1971, the Mineville operation was shut down under the same circumstances. Both deposits still contain vast amounts of iron ore, but economic factors and transportation costs have made the mining of iron in New York largely a thing of the past.

There is one curious footnote to the story. Some time ago, a company specializing in rare earth metals (used in the electronics and aviation industries) determined that the tailing piles at the Mineville site contain considerable amounts of very rare metal ores. It is possible that in the future, a new operation may develop wherein the mine-waste is literally re-mined.

If nothing else, it proves the mining industry in New York may not be dead since to paraphrase the old adage, "Gold (as well as iron or anything else) is where you find it!"

References:

Republic Steel Co., Port Henry, NY, 1943 War Minerals Report 169, U.S. Bureau of Mines.

Iron Ore, T.P. Thayer et al, 1955 New York/New England Interagency Committee

Recollection of Some of the Highlights In the History of The Republic Steel Corporation, 1971, Thomas F. Patton, Chairman and CEO (retired)

Collectors Talk

Mark DeLawyer, whose article entitled **Adirondack Ore Division, Republic Steel Corporation**, appears on page 30 of this issue, included the following letter with his article. As mining historians are a treasure, please help Mark with his task.

History of Mining in New York State

I have recently begun the research needed to prepare the first written history of the mining industry in New York State. As my article implies, this is a long and complicated history involving many different commodities and nearly two hundred years of industrial progress.

I'd appreciate hearing from anyone with any information on the mining industry in New York. Persons with background material, references, or memorabilia are also asked to please lend a hand in this important effort to document a largely unknown segment of America's mining lore and legends.

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Avid readers will remember the unusual Blemus lamp featured in MAC Issue 3, Spring 1989. Ima Hokes of Goshen, Indiana, the owner of the Blemus, sent us some more remarkable information for our **April** issue. Shown to the right is an illustration of her recent find, the "droop snoot." Ms. Hokes, being the avid collector she is, researched the lamp and reports the following:

Very rare Trethaway "droop-snoot" oil-wick lamp, designed to prevent being extinguished by falling water. Patent refused. Aside from the problem that the oil tended to run out unless the wicking was packed very tightly, it failed to gain acceptance because any miner who used one was laughed out of the mine, having been made the butt of crude jokes. Nickname: "The Capon."

