

THE BEGINNINGS:

THE ALGOMA CENTRAL RAILWAY

-by **Wald E. Pugh**

Ben Boyer, a prospector, discovered in 1897 an outcropping of hard hematite while prospecting for gold in the Michipicoten country. He recalled that he "was on top of what seemed to be a mountain. Across the lake was a swath of brownish-red that ran from the water's edge to the top of the cliff. I had found a vein 300 feet wide, and 100 feet high from the water's edge."

Unable to develop his property, Boyer offered to show the location of the find to Francis Clergue, a knowledgeable American entrepreneur & promoter from Maine, for the sum of five-hundred dollars.

As president of the Consolidated Lake Superior Company with a capital of \$117. million, Clergue was interested in developing further industries at Sault Ste. Marie using regional resources; hydro-electricity from the St. Mary's River, pulp and paper from the spruce of the Lake Superior highlands, and steel from hematite deposits.

To exploit Boyer's discovery Clergue incorporated the Algoma Central Railway in 1899 and constructed a 12 mile mineral transportation line from Michipicoten Harbour to the hematite site; named the Helen mine after Clergue's sister.

In 1900 approximately 50,000 tons of the estimated deposit of 30 million tons of ore were shipped to Michipicoten Harbour. Here, the Algoma Central Railway Steamship Line operated a regular service importing supplies and shipping the ore to blast furnaces in Sault Ste. Marie.

Clergue also decided to build a railway from the Sault to a point near Hawk Lake, then northward to open up the vast mineral and pulpwood resources of the interior. In spite of the difficulties of glacier abraded hog backed hills, numerous lakes bogs, and stream valleys, the Algoma Central Railway completed fifty-six miles of track from the Sault by 1903, as well as six miles between Hawk Junction and the Josephine Mine.

In spite of severe financial

setbacks, the Algoma Central Railway was constructed to Hearst by 1914. By 1918 the railway had handled nearly three million tons of high grade iron ore produced from the Helen Mine. The Algoma Central Railway was well on its way to profit and success.
