

"Algoma"

By D. E. Pugh

The name Algoma carries great historical significance. Coined by anthropologist Henry R. Schoolcraft from the first syllable "Al" of the "Algonquin" name, and "goma" from the Ojibwa word "gummee", meaning lake, his idea was that Lake Superior would properly be known as the "Lake of the Algonquins". Although his suggestion was not adopted, by 1858, his word was used to include all of Northern Ontario as the "Algoma Judicial District". This area, larger than the rest of Ontario, was designated Algoma as late as 1873 on maps. The North Western region of this vast district came into public focus following confederation in 1867 with a hot political battle waged between Ontario's Premier Sir Oliver Mowat and the Manitoba government over the boundary. Few people actually resided in the district.

Mr. Weymss Simpson, first MPP from Algoma, represented 529 members. His first son was named Algoma Simpson. The name Algoma has since been applied to many street names, hotels, and to the C.P.R. passenger ship, Algoma, a steamer afterwards wrecked on Isle Royale.

With the development of the industrial empire of pulpwood, hydro-electricity, iron ore, railways and steel factories by Francis Clergue in 1900, the name Algoma found its way into the industries, "Algoma Steel Company", and "Algoma Central Railway".

Today the geographical region of Algoma has been reduced to an area of 19,320 square miles, north of Lake Huron between the districts of Sudbury on the east, and Thunder Bay on the west. Unfortunately Algoma, as a geographical entity, no longer fits most government departments. Mining, highway, forestry and electoral districts all tend to overlap with Thunder Bay and other geographical districts.

With a growing tourist industry combined with lumbering, mining and commercial fisheries, Algoma District carries a bright future. It is hoped that the name "Algoma", historical in context, and distinct, short and euphonious, will continue to receive wide use.