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CHAPTER 9

I Undertake the Study of Iron Ore and Engage in Exploration and Prospecting

My newspaper work and its involvements did not give me enough to do so I began a systematic study of iron ore exploration in all of its practical and scientific phases, an enjoyable life's work which I still keep up and which has attracted me to every country in the world. Woodcraft and surveying are as necessary as anything else in a new country.

The government survey of Northern Michigan and Wisconsin was made between 1850 and 1860. Mostly it was well done but not always. Townships six miles square were measured off north and south from an arbitrary base line and east and west from a range or meridian line. These townships were subdivided into thirty-six sections one mile square, and the sections were quartered; later to be divided into forty-acre lots by country surveyors. The section corners and the points midway between them, quarter stakes, were marked. Great care was given to marking the section corner. Whether the monument was a cedar stake, or of something else, charcoal was buried at its base. Then bearing or witness trees, four when possible, were gouged with the legend of the location. Accurate location by distance and direction was made on the field notes. Observations of topography and geology were also written on the field notes, making them very valuable. The government survey by the United States is a creditable public achievement.

It was impossible to survey the magnetic fields in the region of Lake Superior with an ordinary compass. Necessity thus led to the contrivance of Burt's solar compass which has been developed now into the dial compass, a still more useful instrument.

It was a memorable day when Mr. Fisher, at my request, took
me into the woods and showed me for the first time an unmarred section corner and three witness trees. Another lesson was to walk along the section line two thousand paces to the next corner, locating the quarter stake enroute. I held a compass straight in front of my body, waist high, as I took sights along the line.

At noon we had a bouillon made of a pileated woodpecker. I had never before seen this beautiful bird. Mr. Fisher called it a wood cock and informed me that it was a fine game bird. It is just as good to eat as any woodpecker and no better. They are rapidly disappearing and are even more scarce than their southern rival, the ivory bill. I have never permitted the killing of one since that day except for alleged scientific purposes, and not many with that now poor excuse.

By evening Mr. Fisher said he could teach me no more; that all the rest of it would have to come by the experience that would attend keeping at it.

The Gogebic and Mesaba ranges and their extensions were little known and undeveloped. Charles Wright, geologist, had made what is yet the best map of the Menominee range.

The Brotherton boys, of Escanaba, doing the practical work, and John M. Longyear, the clerical, for the Lake Superior Ship Canal Railway & Iron Company, had made valuable land grant selections along what has been developed since as the Gogebic range. While doing this work Mr. Longyear laid the foundation for his great fortune by securing money backing and taking up lands adjoining, utilizing the Brotherton information for the purpose and obtaining a quarter interest in everything thus entered.

The entire Lake Superior country was overrun by agents of rapacious interests of one kind or another. Homesteaders were struggling for a share with no intention of making a home. Unearned land grants were being fought for. It was a Golconda and greed was after the diamonds. Beneath it all was a current flowing that was certain to purify everything. One had but to glance below the murky surface of the present.

Before I left Florence N. D. Moore and others were working in
the Gogebic region and with the coming of the railroad the Colby mine was opened.

My first year at Florence witnessed the payment for the little paper. Three years more of work there brought more than a living so that when I sold out early in 1887 I had nearly ten thousand dollars and the world by the tail.

Mr. Fisher, egged on by Boss Keyes and a natural tendency, took part in all the politics from the township "corkis" to the state convention. In fact, he was the political entity of the county and aspired to go to the legislature some day. In order to facilitate this and define more clearly his realm, he had Florence County cut out of Marinette and erected.

When there was any kind of a convention he would send for me and we would together write out a list of names of delegates, issue their credentials and sign them, and that was all there was to it. I have no idea that I would have been consulted if it had not been necessary to have some one sign as secretary of the convention that was never held.

At first I thought it was a trifle irregular, but as I did not know anything about the proper form, a brief conversation with the well-intending local boss caused me to have no qualms; and, in fact, I am certain that Mr. Fisher was conscientious in also believing it to be all right. They all did that way, he told me. The candidature for congress of Mr. Isaac Stephenson, a Nova Scotian lumberman at Marinette, reputed to be nearly a millionaire at a time when those commonplaces were uncommon, was announced. His district was the Ninth Wisconsin. Sounds like a military company, does it not? It included Florence County. We were entitled to two delegates and whom else could we appoint but ourselves? There was no other thought in our minds even if others might have had them.

Soon after our popular selection as delegates a most confounding thing occurred that stumped me completely for a while. Mr. A. C. Brown of Marinette, a lumbering partner of Mr. Stephenson, came to Florence and actually called on me. I was boyishly
glad to be recognized by Mr. Brown, who really was a fine gentleman and rich. My legs were almost removed from perpendicular connection with my body when he pulled out a fifty dollar bill and handed it to me. I had never seen one before and my first idea was that it might be a millionaire’s calling card, indicating his status, and only to be taken and returned. So I took it and searched it minutely and then offered to give it back. He waved it aside with an imperious smile, as if to convey that he had more of them than could be loaded into one of his Brule River batteaux.

“But what is it for? I asked.

He seemed stuck for a second and then replied, “For subscription to the Mining News.”

And I thought it was; cross my heart. So I ran over in my mind how long Mr. Brown would have paid in advance at two dollars and fifty cents a year, or whether he might not wish it to be divided among names he would furnish?

It made no difference to him, he said, and after visiting a while he got up to go, remarking that he would see me at the convention where we would be certain to land Stephenson all right.

I was also certain, because Boss Keyes was for Stephenson; A. C. Brown was for Stephenson; Stephenson was for Stephenson; Mr. Fisher was for Stephenson, and whom else could I be for, and I did not know the other fellow if there was one.

There was no need of scattering money all over the district the way they did, except for the observation of the same good form that makes a fellow set ’em up again who has had a drink with some one buying for a barroom crowd. And yet the money smoothed the way to Congress for Uncle Ike just as he iced logging roads, or as a ship’s ways are greased before launching.

Before I left Florence a revolution against the prevailing political methods occurred and conventions and caucuses were really held, but a few interested persons pulled the strings and manipulated things just the same.