

More About the Minnesota Museum of Mining

The Minnesota Museum of Mining is the only museum of its kind in the country, dedicated to preserving the history of the Iron Mining Industry in Minnesota as well as telling the story of the men and women who made a life working on the Iron Range.

The Minnesota Museum of Mining serves to educate visitors about the history of mining in Minnesota, and illustrates the life of ordinary people, mostly immigrant families, from the earliest years of European settlement and mining in Chisholm. Various school groups from around the state come to the museum to learn about mining from past to present, and are guided through the displays by museum volunteers. The museum sends packets of information, including a curriculum guide for use in teaching the history of mining in northern Minnesota, to elementary teachers in Northeastern Minnesota.

Originally a lumber town with a sawmill on the south side of town, iron mining began in Chisholm at the turn of the 20th century. At one time there were more than 100 mining pit operations in or near Chisholm, which is located in the heart of northern Minnesota's Mesabi Iron Range. The Mesabi, Vermilion and Cuyuna iron ranges make up the largest concentration of iron ore in the world.

The Museum is located in an expansive city park complex, surrounded by a massive rock wall built by Italian master stone masons under the WPA. A rock "castle" using the Army Corp of Engineers signature logo for its design, was used first as a shooting range, then as one of the oldest gun clubs in Minnesota. An outdoor amphitheater was built of stone and hosted pageants and programs in earlier days. The museum grounds extend over 15 acres, and picnicking on the grounds is encouraged. A pavilion shelters guests in rainy weather.

Established at the site of the "castle" in 1954 by Charles T. Wangenstein, the museum features an outdoor mining "truck park", huge mining shovels, a 1907 steam locomotive, ore cars, cabooses, assorted rock drills, pumps, and other mining heavy equipment. Inside the display buildings are a recreated mining town with offices, shops, and immigrant memorabilia, an authentic Finnish sauna, an extensive rock and mineral collection, and artist F. Lee Jacque's personal model train and diorama—40 years in the making—which fills one building by itself. And the simulated underground mine can be entered by visitors and is a must-see. The museum also boasts the first Greyhound bus (made of wood!) as well as a vintage fire truck. The museum is very kid-friendly, and visitors to the museum enjoy a hands-on experience.