



River of Iron

David Lee

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HEMATITE AND TALES of streets paved with gold drew boatloads of Europeans to the Marquette Iron Range in Michigan's Upper Peninsula in the late 1800s-including my ancestors. The rugged terrain and savage winters of their new home on the "mountain of iron" threatened their survival, yet they had no chance of returning to The Old County-and they knew it. Some left, but the hardy ones stayed, threw up mining camps and drove mineshafts deep into the granite. They raised families-built churches, railroads, and schools-they created a river of iron that cascaded out of the wilderness. Then the Great Depression struck in 1929 and the river of iron dwindled to a trickle. Without means of support the iron miners and their families persevered against a destroyed economy and fierce winters. This is a tale of how my family survived those tough times. It tells of simple things like collecting water, chopping firewood, and slaughtering hogs, but it is also a template for raising and educating a family on challenging terrain in the midst of poverty.

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