

CHARTER COMMISSION

At the request of the Chisholm City Council, the Charter Commission appointed by the District Court reactivated in the spring of 1981 to make a new charter replacing the original charter approved by voters October 8, 1934.

The new charter was presented to the voters of Chisholm at a public hearing October 21, 1981 and approved at the general election November 3, 1981. It went into effect January 1, 1982.

Voters had turned down a charter revision eleven years earlier by a small margin.

The original charter organized Chisholm from a village to a city of the fourth class. The new charter takes into account state statutes passed since 1934. Charles T. Wangensteen was appointed attorney to assist the commission in the drafting of the original charter. City Attorney Thomas Wangensteen was named attorney to assist in drafting the new charter. The commission met twice weekly throughout the summer to draft the new charter.

The City of Chisholm is located in almost the exact center of the Mesaba Iron Range and depends on the iron mining industry for its chief support. Since 1941, the taconite industry has been the main source of employment for the people and taxes for the maintenance of schools and city government.

Paradoxically enough, however, it was not ore, but timber that first attracted men to the site of the town. Before 1892 this site of what is now Chisholm, was covered by a forest of tall pine trees and some birch trees. During the next few years, powerful lumber barons sent cruisers to the area to explore for the giant pines that were the very foundation of their power, and although it is doubtful whether these cruisers found any signs of iron ore, their discoveries would have caused little concern on the part of their employers, if they had. They did find lumber however, vast forests of it, and by 1900 several lumber camps were booming in the vicinity, at least three springing up on Longyear Lake, on the shores of which Chisholm now flourishes.

E.J. Longyear, after whom the lake is named, explored the present site of Chisholm in 1892 and discovered the first mine there, the Pillsbury. The first shipment of approximately 100,000 tons of ore was made from the mine in 1898 when the Great Northern railroad built a line to Chisholm from Duluth. Mining operations continued from

that time on an ever increasing scale, and at the turn of the century, homes and business establishments began to spring up on the shores of the lake. In 1901, a hotel was built and the first school erected. The same year Chisholm, then a bustling little hamlet of 250 people, was incorporated as a village, and W.C. Northey was elected first mayor. The exact date was July 23, 1901, and on August 7, the first council meeting was held; on September 11, the first jail was established; on November 6, the first water works was put into operation. On June 12, 1902, the first Longyear Lake Bridge was completed; June 19, the first telephone franchise was granted; and on July 14, the first city hall was established.

The city of Chisholm was named after a man named Archie Chisholm, who had been working in Ely since 1888. He came to Hibbing in 1894. He discovered the Chisholm mine in 1900. Following the opening of the Chisholm Mine, he laid out the townsite of Chisholm and organized the Chisholm Improvement Company in 1901. There were 120 acres in the original townsite. The business of the Chisholm Improvement Company was to upbuild and improve the town.

On April 2, 1905, the First National Bank opened for business, and on July 1, the first Duluth, Missabe & Northern railway train arrived. On May 5, 1907, J.P. Vaughan, became Superintendent of Schools and held that position until the summer of 1948.

In the meantime, new mines were discovered, ore shipments skyrocketed and the new town prospered, thus, began an almost phenomenal growth. Civic improvements got under way with the construction of an electric light plant, and installation of a sewer system. Streets and sidewalks were built, a volunteer fire department was organized.

By 1908 nearly 500 buildings had been erected. Chisholm boasted a population of 4,000 and was becoming a ranking town of the Range.

In the fall of 1908 a major disaster struck this thriving and growing town with a force that all but swept it from the map and succeeded in wiping out its eight years of rapid growth. Brush and small forest fires which were burning outside the town had caused concern on the part of some of the townspeople, but the majority believed that they would burn themselves out or would pass around the town. On September 8, the wind, which had been blowing away from the village, suddenly changed, grew to almost gale proportions, and swept the fires straight into Chisholm and its unprepared population. The flames leaped and roared down the streets, driving those who attempted to fight them closer and closer to the lake until all resistance was abandoned and 4,000 frightened people grabbed whatever possessions they could and fled. Some found safety in the schools which were out of the path of the inferno, others waded into the lake, but the majority gathered at the railroad stations where a rescue train arrived in time to take them to Hibbing and other neighboring towns.

The fire struck at about 4:30 p.m. and burned most of the town in a few hours. By 11:00 p.m. martial law had been declared and militiamen were patrolling the streets to protect what property was left from looters, about 100 of whom were arrested. The next day, the population returned to Chisholm and found it little more than a heap of ashes. But 65 of the 500 buildings had been spared; supposedly fireproof buildings were destroyed; loss was placed at \$1,500,000; only about \$400,000 of which was covered by insurance. Remarkably enough, there weren't any casualties in the fire and no one was seriously injured.

Faced with possible starvation and the sufferings of a fast-approaching winter, the people courageously set about clearing away the debris and rebuilding their town. The first day, residents of Buhl and Hibbing arrived with food and later relief trains arrived from Duluth with food, clothing and badly needed building material. A sympathetic state continued to contribute supplies and money for some time and a committee was organized to supervise distribution of the relief. Within a few months, much of the town had been rebuilt and within a short time the last scars of the catastrophe were removed and Chisholm continued its growth.

Rigid ordinances passed by the Chisholm Village Council after the fire have resulted in a main street whose buildings are constructed entirely of brick.

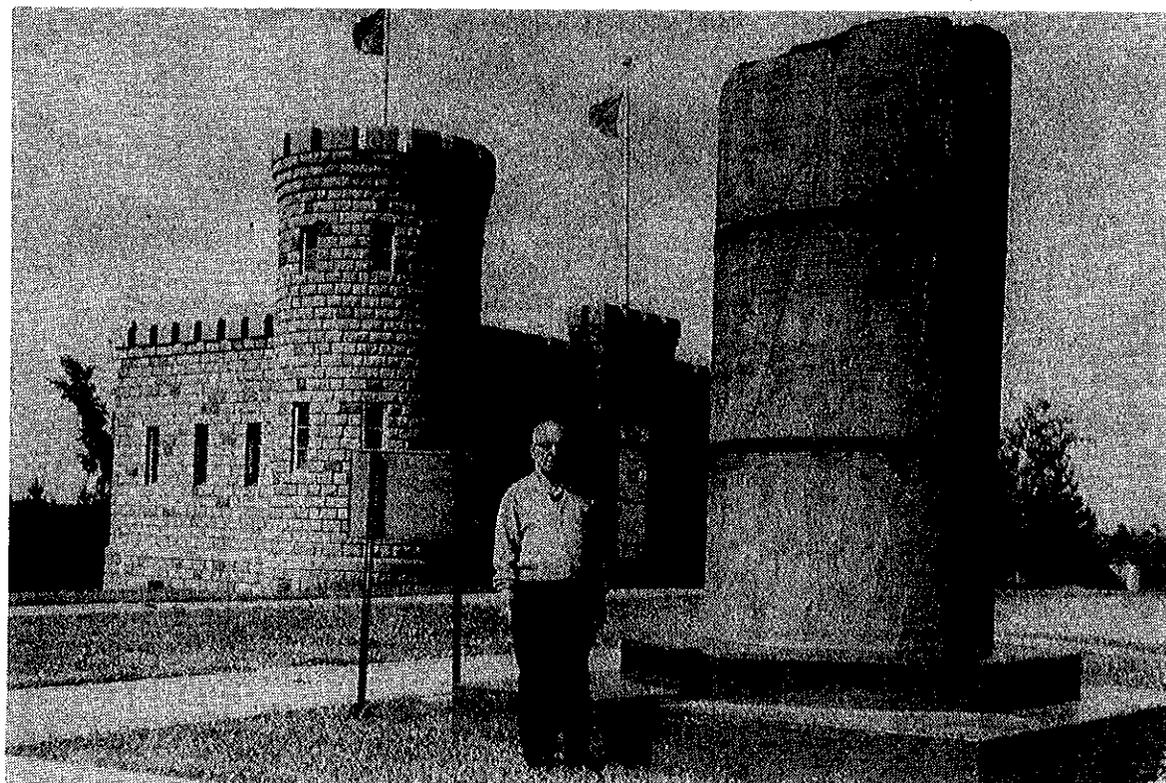
The first high school building was completed in 1907. The City Hall was completed in 1909; the Public Library in 1914; the present Senior High School in 1915; and the Junior High School and the Community Building in 1925. Chisholm's maximum population was reached in 1923 at 10,123, when large families were the rule and the mines depended heavily on man power.

Tourism is a major industry in the Chisholm area. The locally operated Museum of Mining has a large collection of mining equipment donated by mining companies in the area, from the early days of men and mules, to the more modern giant Euclids. The Interpretative Center, built and operated by the state of Minnesota, specializes in the ethnic history of the people of the Iron Range and promotes an Ethnic Days festival each August that draws thousands of visitors to the area. Approximately 90 lakes within 25 miles of Chisholm offer fishing and relaxation to tourists.

* * * * *



The Bridge of Peace.



The Minnesota Museum of Mining.

