Calumet and Hecla mining records—a mother lode of information

By Joseph F. Martin

The Upper Peninsula of Michigan was for many years an attractive location for European immigrants, not necessarily because of the natural beauty of the lakes and forests, but because of the jobs available in the copper mines. The discovery of the Calumet lode led to the foundation of many mines in Houghton County, and eventually the Calumet and Hecla Mining Company was formed in 1871. Soon immigrants were headed to the mines from England, Ireland, Russia, Germany, Finland, Hungary, Poland, and Croatia until more than thirty nationalities created a multi-ethnic population throughout the Upper Peninsula, with most of the men working in mining or related industries. The Calumet & Hecla Mining Company (C&H) became the largest of the employers, and it eventually bought out many

This group of miners includes Peter Tobola at the far right end of the second row. “Copper Miners,” negative 00554, date unknown; MTU Archives & Copper Country Historical Collections, Michigan Technological University, Houghton, Michigan.
of the smaller mines. The surviving employment records of this mining company offer an untold wealth of details to family historians whose ancestors worked for the company.

In February 2008 my research colleague Ceil Jensen, cg, and I received a 2008 Research Travel Award sponsored by the Friends of the Van Pelt Library at the Archives of Michigan Technological University in Houghton, Michigan. Our objective was to investigate the early Polish immigrants to Houghton County. We both have ancestors who immigrated from Bnin, Kornik, and Rogalinek in the Poznan province of Poland to Calumet where the men worked in the copper mines. My investigation in June 2008 focused on the men who worked for the C&H. The archives has two major sets of employment records: the first consists of 3″ x 5″ index cards for men who worked at the mine from about 1865 to 1914, although some cards were destroyed or water damaged in a fire; the second set consists of 8″ x 13½″ ledger sheets for miners from 1907 to 1970 that are in good condition. My research, using the first set of records, was aided by a CD that was produced in 2004 that contains an index of the 15,100 smaller employment cards. A digital extraction produced more than five hundred miners who spoke Polish, the criterion used for my project.

The smaller cards have a wealth of information—much of it significant for family history research—and some of the details might not be recorded in any other documents. The cards were filled out by C&H clerks at various times and seem to have served as a record of the amount paid to each employee during the time of his or her employment; eighty-eight women appear in the records as employees of the C&H Hospital. The information available includes many categories, although not every card was completed. Last name, first name, date hired, date of birth, date of immigration, place of birth, name of spouse, number of children, and date of death are just some of the facts on the cards. These details and many more appear on the CD, which has nineteen fields in an Excel spreadsheet and in other formats. Four employment cards demonstrate the available information: three small cards for John Szatkowski, George Bomblinski, and Michael Siemowski; and one large ledger sheet for Peter Tobola.

The front side of the employment card for John Szatkowski shows his pay book #3893 and this note “Began 1871.” Since he arrived at Castle Garden in New York on 29 October 1872, the year must have been an inaccurate recollection. His card had an alternate spelling for his surname, Shotkoskey, which could be helpful in further research, and it recorded “1898 October 27 Died,” a fact verified by his Houghton County death record. The reverse side of his card presented a veritable family group sheet. The line for “Names of relatives working for Calumet and Hecla” included the following facts: sons #3893 John, #5157 Leo, and #3339 Stephen; nephews #1423 Frank and #1423(a) John; brother #7903 Thomas (died ‘88); brother-in-law

![Image of John Szatkowski's employment card and a photo of Peter Tobola and his wife, Petronella Wojkiewicz.](image)

The back of John Szatkowski’s employment card shows his family members who also worked for C&H.
George Bomblinski; and son-in-law Anton Latowski. A number of other entries were blank, although check marks indicated that he could read and write and also spoke English. His date and place of birth were listed only as 1852 and Poland, which might not be much help, but previous research verified he was born on 20 June 1852 in Radzewo, Schrimm, Posen.

Bomblinski, his brother-in-law, was listed as born in Province Posen, Poland, in 1852 and noted he started work in 1872, all facts that will require additional research for verification. His card was clearly burned at the top and on the right side, thus obliterating some information. The front of his card showed that his aid expired in September 1912, which might be an indication of when the family moved to Detroit. On the back side of his card the line for “sons born” listed Stephen ’78, John ’82, Frank ’84, Andrew ’88, and William ’91, all but one of which are not accurate years based on their baptism records.

Other “relatives working for Calumet & Hecla” included sons #1131(a) Stephen, #7800 Frank, #3171 John, #12983 Andrew, and #2712 William; brothers-in-law #885 John Wojkiewicz, #3893 John Szatkowski, Peter Tobola with no number, and John Kobieski with no number; and sons-in-law #5820 with no name and #19223 Thomas Mulligan. Other information at the bottom recorded the years of employment for each of his sons. Research in the set of employment ledger sheets uncovered additional records for his sons William, John, and Stephen.

The mining card for Michael Siemowski did not provide as much family information, but it did list accurate details that would be important to a family researcher. His card noted that he began work on 24 May 1900, and he lived at 126 Pewabic Street, which was in Laurium, the community adjacent to Calumet. It also showed that he quit on 10 June 1913, the year the family moved to Detroit, as verified by the obituary for his son Alex. The reverse side of Michael’s card listed his date of birth as 18 September 1867, which was actually his baptismal date, since many nineteenth-century Poles celebrated their date of baptism and not their birth date. His place of birth was Posen, Poland; previous research showed that he was born in Broniszewice, Pleszew, Posen. He was “last employed” at the Tamarack Mine and before that at the South Kearsarge Mine. His date of immigration was given as June 1888, and indeed, he traveled from Antwerp on the S.S. Wiesland and arrived on 8 June at Castle Garden. His only relative at the C&H mine was his brother-in-law Peter Tobola. None of his sons worked for C&H because the family moved to Detroit.

Peter Tobola #1272 started working at the C&H mine in March 1885 and quit in November 1919. His employment sheet gave his date of birth as 15 June 1853 in Posen, Poland, but he was born on that date two years earlier in Mieczewo, Schrimm, Posen. His record included a three-paragraph printed statement indicating that he was “not now a member of or in any way connected with the Western Federation of Miners or any branch or local thereof,” an effort on the part of the company to avoid some of the challenges faced by mine owners in the West. Other information on his card noted that he was pensioned on 1 August 1919 and he died on 2 October 1924.
John Szatkowski received this Silver Medal for his many years of service. It depicts Edwin J. Hulbert (back) who discovered the Calumet copper lode and Alexander Agassiz, the long time president of the C&H Copper Mining Company. Photo courtesy of Tim Bausano of Calumet, Michigan.

interesting note on his record stated “Silver Medal in 1916.” The C&H Mining Company awarded gold, silver, and bronze medals to long-time employees. Gold medals were awarded to one hundred and sixty nine men who had worked for more than forty years, silver medals to three hundred and seventy men who worked from thirty to forty years, and eight hundred and six men received bronze medals for working between twenty and thirty years.14 Peter and his family lived in Laurium for many years, and all of his sons worked for the mines at some time, although two later became long-time employees of the U.S. Post Office in Calumet.

Conclusion

The employment records of C&H from Calumet, Michigan, provide an abundance of information about the men who worked in the copper mines. These four sample reports demonstrate the kinds of family and historical information that can be obtained. Not all the surviving cards are completed, and some have very little information on them. Several letters of the alphabet have no cards that survived the fire. This project concentrated on the Polish miners, but many other immigrants worked at these mines, and their information is also accessible. The availability of the CD, Calumet & Hecla Pay Office Personnel Records, that indexes the twenty-five boxes of small cards means that family historians can obtain the information without having to make a trip to Houghton to search the cards. With these valuable records for C&H, researchers will be mining details about their ancestors for years to come.

Notes

2. Jeanette Medlyn, Thomas Gordon Ellis, and Jean Fisher Ellis, Calumet & Hecla Pay Office Personnel Records, 1865–1914 (Michigan: T.G. Ellis, 2004); CD-ROM. For more information, contact <jellis@pasty.com>.
3. John Szatkowski, employment record, Calumet & Hecla Copper Mining Company (C&H) Collection, MS-002, box 365/022, MTU Archives & Copper Country Collections; Michigan Technological University, Houghton, Michigan.
4. John Szatkowski entry, S.S. Frisia passenger manifest, 29 October 1872, sheet 8; Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, NY (1820–1897); National Archives micropublication M237, roll 368.
5. Poznan, Poland, Bnin Catholic Parish Registers, Family History Library (FHL) microfilm 1169512.
6. George Bomblinski, employment record, C&H Collection, Michigan Technological University, Houghton.
7. Michael Siemowski, employment record, C&H Collection, Michigan Technological University, Houghton.
9. Poznan, Poland, Broniszewice Catholic Parish Registers, FHL Microfilm 2103162.
12. Peter Tobola, employment record, C&H Collection, Michigan Technological University, Houghton.
13. Poznan, Poland, Bnin Catholic Parish Registers.

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