OSKAR'S CHARCOAL BUSINESS

Charcoal Uses:

Charcoal was used in the Smelters. One smelter near Oskar was the Michigan Smelts on Coles Creek. Bob and Art Olson share: The river was dammed up, and the water diverted to the paddle wheel for power. It operated for about 30 years. Art Olson's wife Evelyn's father Mr. Kuru was one that operated the equipment that dumped the "slag",

Susan Riutta's document states- the charcoal was used to clarify copper in the smelting process. During prohibition charcoal was used for clarification in making 'moonshine'.

Richard Garnell shares: The mining companies bought all the charcoal. It burns without smoke so they could use it inside the buildings to warm the copper moulds before they poured copper into the moulds. Molten copper which runs like water will explode if run into a cold mold.



1

Charcoal makers/owners:

- Oscar Eliassen had three kilns on lakeshore of Oskar.

Oskar Eliassen had the kilns by the shore across from the cemetery road according to Susan Riutta paper. Read her project paper in other documents notebook used in this history. A 1897 Polk Directory has Oskar advertising charcoal. Susan says the Eliassen kilns were used after he left (1907) by Frank Eilola for a few years until they were noted as being in disrepair in the 1930's and torn down.



Oskar Eliasson's Charcoal kilns. Location was about across from the cemetery road.

Deric Garnell gave Barb a picture she believes comes from the Bill Brinkman or Richard Garnell collection of the former Great Lakes Transit Co. passenger steamer Octorara, passing by 3 charcoal kilns in Oskar.



Oskar Eliasson's three charcoal kilns.

The wording under the picture says: The Kilns made the charcoal for the refinery units at Cowle's creek, Ripley, frequently Calumet and Hecla, and Dollar Bay when the T and O

smelter was located there. 1933 photo. Someone has penned this information below the picture... "Oskar Eliassen started the charcoal kilns about 1900. (1897 Polk Directory has Oskar's advertisement saying Cordwood, Timber, Ties, Hard and Soft Lumber, Hay and Charcoal). When he retired Frank Eilola took over the kilns and operated them through the 1930's.

- Nels Burkman had 7 kilns on today's Ruohonen Road.

Nels Burkman (former blacksmith for Oskar Eliassen) had a Charcoal business begun in 1885 according to a Daily Mining Gazette article 10/7/1975. Seven large charcoal kilns were located in a row down the today's Ruohonen road where the twotrack is black. He provided charcoal for the Calumet and Hecla Mining Company. Susan Riutta paper says "After reviewing the documentation I propose that the Burkman kilns may have been built as early as 1878 and were last used about 1905 to 1908".

PLEASE RESPECT PROPERTY.



Ruohonen Road towards Joyce Bohjanen's property and the Charcoal Kilns. Road is black with the charcoal dust.





We believe these to be Nels Burkman charcoal kiln remains alongside the Ruohonen Road.



Charcoal Kiln foundation alongside the Ruohonen Road.





Charcoal Kiln foundation alongside the Ruohonen Road.

Barb Koski would like information on location of these 3 kilns in Onnela. Whose could these be?



Process of making Charcoal:

Author Barb Koski has combined information from 1) Jack Ruohonen's history of Oskar document, 2) Henry Garnell on his 1977 WMPL Heritage line interview 3) Susan Riutta paper and 4) Richard Garnell history of Oskar. All of these documents are in another section of this history.

The kilns were about 25 feet high and maybe 30 feet in circumference at the bottom. They slowly tapered narrower toward the top where there was a large door to throw in the cordwood. There was a long ramp in front of the kilns which sloped from the ground to the height of the kilns and back down on other side. There was an air draft door at bottom of cone shape with another above this door.

The kiln may have been all brick, or lined with brick and the exterior built of rock. The exterior of the kilns were white washed with lime to seal any cracks between the bricks. There were a series of small rectangular vent holes to regulate the intake of air. The burning coals were kept smoldering to bake the wood into charcoal.

The wood was cut into 4-foot lengths and loaded thru a side door near the top. Loading doors were at the top of the kiln. There was a long high ramp in the front top of kiln so horses could pull either sleigh or wagons filled with hardwood logs to be thrown into kilns when filling the kiln. Horses were backed down the ramp with wagons/sleighs empty. Each kiln took a large amount of hardwood, possibly 50-60 cords or more shares Richard Garnell. Susan Riutta document states 7-10 cords. Henry Garnell says 25-30 cords.

It took a week to make one batch of charcoal. Burning of the wood was a critical job as one needed to know when to close all the vents and flues to snuff out the fire. The man in charge had to be knowledgeable so that the wood wouldn't burn to ash. The operator had to know exactly when to turn off all air vents so the fire and all flames would die off. Opening the unloading door on ground levels too soon would let air in and it would start burning all over again and the whole kiln full of wood would be lost and burn to ash. The last charcoal burners were Timotus Uusitalo (also at the brick factory) and Matte Piilikangas. The cone would be whitewashed to keep out air for 5-6 days.

Richard tells Barb that they could see the smoke from their home on the North Superior Road/Red Barn Road intersection. (approx 2 miles away)

A burn lasted 6 or 7 days and then air drafts were opened to release the wood gas (wood alcohol). The kiln cooled for about 5+ days.

The charcoal was then loaded onto barges from a hole in a double-decker dock in Oskar Bay". The charcoal logs were hauled to smelters. Here is a picture of the double decker dock and Mrs. Herman Hermanson.



HANNA HERMANSON

The mining companies bought the charcoal in buildings to warm the copper molds before they poured copper into the moulds.

In 1925 there was a different method of smelting so charcoal was not needed.

Researched by Barb Koski, Osma Plat Road, Houghton MI. Submitted in 2009.