

The Alger Line — Part 4  
Todd Lindahl  
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The death of General Manager John Millen was a tremendous blow to not only the huge Alger-Smith Lumber Company, but to all of its employees too. He was a manager who had started as a boy working on log drives in Michigan and became a logging camp foreman later. Eventually he was promoted to General Manager and President of the Alger Line in 1898. He knew every employee by his first name and took a keen interest in every aspect of the railroad and logging operation. He was highly respected and well liked.

Now, Millen's replacement was his son-in-law J. W. Bayley. Unlike the former manager, Bayley did not share John Millen's enthusiasm for railroading or logging. He as well as General Alger's son were enamored with the automobile industry. From the start, Bayley began to scale down the operation. They filed for abandonment with the Minnesota Railroad and Warehouse Commission, but were denied. Many homesteaders depended on the railroad for access to their isolated homes in areas where there were no roads. All maintenance on the line was stopped except for emergencies in 1918. Then in 1919 the entire logging operation was terminated. Again they filed for abandonment and again they were denied. They had carried over 14,863 passengers on their passenger train during 1918 and this constituted a public necessity. From 1919 until July 21, 1921 the only train to run on the track was the passenger train pulled by one of the two remaining locomotives. On that date the MRR&WC finally allowed the company to totally abandon its railroad.

Hugh Richardson, the former electrician for the railroad, rebuilt a model T Ford car with railroad wheels and carried the few homesteaders, fishermen, and passengers that were left up and down the line. This homemade contraption was known as the "Jitney." It was his own private enterprise, which he continued until the rails were taken up during the summer and fall of 1923.

Over the course of its 23 years, the Alger-Smith Lumber Co. had changed the landscape of northeastern Minnesota in a way that had not been seen since the ice age. This then was the final curtain for the most important logging railroad in this state. It was also the end of the era of big timber logging the like of which will never be seen again.