

Salt, Sand and Stone

Although iron ore, coal and grain get the most attention, they are hardly the only bulk commodities that flow in and out of the Twin Ports. Mountains of minerals move across 13 docks operated by eight companies serving shippers and receivers throughout Duluth-Superior's far-flung trade area. Every year, several million tons of limestone, cement, salt, bentonite clay, petroleum coke, fertilizer and aggregates are in motion or storage at specialized or multi-purpose facilities in the harbor.

Versatile, remarkable limestone – which in its many forms makes up “the stone trade” in the Great Lakes – is, by far, Duluth-Superior's largest inbound cargo. Quarried in the northern regions of the state of Michigan's thumb between Lakes Huron and Michigan, it comes in many shapes and sizes for many unrelated end-users:

- Crushed limestone arrives at the DM&IR Ore Docks and is backhauled on the railroad's run to the Iron Range where some taconite plants use it to make a “fluxed pellet;”¹
- Gravel-like screened and sized limestone is unloaded at Northland Pier, C. Reiss Terminal, Hallett Docks 5 and 7, and, at times, other open docks for use as Class 5 road-building material and aggregate in regional construction projects;



Limestone, the port's largest inbound commodity, is received by several Duluth-Superior docks and is remarkable for its wide variety of uses in industries throughout the greater trade area. (Duluth Seaway Port Authority Collection)





Salt is a specialty of Duluth-Superior's oldest continuously operating business, Cutler-Magner Company, whose origins date back to 1880, and its wholly owned subsidiary, CLM Corporation. (Duluth Seaway Port Authority Collection)

- Marble-sized chemical grade limestone comes to Cutler-Magner Company's CLM Corporation for conversion into quicklime and hydrated lime for eventual use in fertilizers or in chemicals needed for paper production, pollution control and wastewater treatment;

- Fist-sized "sugar stone" is transshipped by the C. Reiss Terminal and Hallett Dock 5 to western Minnesota and North Dakota companies as part of the process of converting sugar beets into sugar:

- Softball- and bowling ball-sized limestone rocks are sometimes delivered to various docks for foundation riprap or heavy construction fill.

In addition to the 2-1/2 million tons of limestone received in peak years, some arrives as a key ingredient in the nearly half-million tons of cement handled annually between Duluth's St. Lawrence Cement and the Lafarge Corporation's two terminals on each side of the harbor. From a historical perspective, St. Lawrence Cement and Lafarge are still newcomers, both arriving in the 1980s when the Swiss-owned St. Lawrence built a new terminal at the Clure Public Marine Terminal and French-owned Lafarge purchased its local facilities from Cutler-Magner Company.

The oldest, homegrown, home-based dock operators in Duluth-Superior are Cutler-Magner and Hallett Dock Company.

The senior member of the local maritime and Twin Ports business communities, and also one of the oldest continuously operating companies on the Great Lakes is Cutler-Magner. Founded in 1880 to supply lumber and cement to customers in the immediate area, the firm has been located off Railroad Street near downtown Duluth for almost a century-and-a-quarter. The firm got into the salt business two years after its founding, and in 1908, it became the Twin Ports distributor for Huron Cement Company of Michigan. In 1913, Henry LaLiberte joined the company as assistant manager, and the next year, it assumed its current name.² The company established its first lime manufacturing plant in Duluth in 1912, and in 1946, Cutler-Magner purchased a former coal dock property on Connors Point in Superior and installed a rotary kiln for manufacturing lime.³ The firm remained a distributor for Huron Cement until the mid-1980s when it sold the cement docks and silos to LaFarge Corporation.⁴

Today, Cutler-Magner and its wholly-owned subsidiary, CLM Corporation, remain major bulk cargo distributors in the Twin Ports. Cutler-Magner can stockpile up to 100,000 tons of de-icing salt at its Duluth facility, mostly

unloaded by bulk freighters during the summer months. The firm also processes and packages salt for water softeners and industrial applications at its Railroad Street site. At the CLM facility on the Superior side of the harbor, Cutler-Magner can stockpile nearly 500,000 tons of limestone. CLM's three rotary kilns turn the limestone into quicklime and hydrated lime, which is distributed to public and private customers.⁵

Although not as old as Cutler-Magner, Duluth's Hallett Dock is every bit as important to the regional maritime economy. Founded in the early 1930s by E.W. Hallett of Crosby-Ironton, the company was originally involved primarily in the construction and aggregates business.⁶ Longtime Hallett Dock Corporation General Manager Cliff Grindy noted that nobody except his wife called Mr. Hallett by his given name, Wilbur. "On his 90th birthday Mr. Hallett said he didn't quite make it through the third grade," Grindy said. "He had at one time practically all the gravel deposits in Minnesota under lease. It wasn't unusual for them to come to Mr. Hallett. He was the calmest of individuals, and he never raised his voice. He was a great philanthropist, he and Mrs. Hallett. When Mrs. Hallett died, he built a library in her honor. He built the hospital or the medical center in Crosby. He had an honorary doctorate from Macalaster College."⁷

Hallett had dozens of companies under his control, and his policy always was to let his managers and employees become part-owners of his operations. When he died, Hallett bequeathed stock in his companies to his employees.⁸

Hallett's operations changed to a maritime focus when Duluth's McGiffert family took an active management role in the early 1960s.⁹ In 1961, Hallett purchased an abandoned dock from the M.A. Hanna Coal Company at 37th Avenue West in Duluth. During the next 35 years, the company purchased three more docks in West Duluth.¹⁰ By the late 1960s, Hallett was handling an average of 150 Great Lakes freighters each year.¹¹

Today, Hallett Dock Company operates four facilities: Dock 5, at 37th Avenue West just west of the DM&IR Ore Docks; Docks 6 and 7 at the upper end of the St. Louis River navigation channel; and Dock 8, directly across St. Louis Bay from Dock 5 in the western shadow of the Superior Midwest Energy Terminal. Today's cargo roster includes Michigan limestone for sugar-making in the Red River Valley, Wyoming bentonite clay for the U.S. and Canadian steel industries, Black Sea fertilizer for Minnesota and Dakota farms, various other assorted minerals and, since the late 1990s, Canadian lumber arriving by tug and barge from Thunder Bay, Ontario, for Upper Midwest builders and contractors.

In 1996, Hallett installed a 131-foot-long shiploader for use mainly at its Dock No. 5 next to the DM&IR Ore Docks to speed the turn-around of Great Lakes vessels. The shiploader, purchased from an equipment broker, allows Hallett crews to load bentonite at 2,000 tons per hour and petroleum coke at a rate of 1,500 tons per hour. Its acquisition permitted Hallett to demolish and remove the two bridge cranes upriver at Dock No. 6 that were a

signature element of the West Duluth skyline for decades. The 180-foot-tall bridge cranes were installed in 1926 and removed during 2000 and 2001.¹²

In the early years of the 21st century, the biggest threat to continued successful operation of Hallett Dock and Cutler-Magner is society's increasing desire to convert waterfront industrial land to residential and retail usage. A bulk cargo dock that had once been viewed as an economic asset is now seen by some as an industrial blight on the landscape. In 2002, the Hallett Dock property in West Duluth's Raleigh Street area was being considered for development as a multi-use facility, including single-family homes, townhouses, waterfront restaurants, soccer fields, a public boat launch and a golf course, but those plans were later abandoned.¹³

¹ Steve Brede, "Great Lakes stone trade is rock solid," *Seaway Review*, July-September 1996, p.67. Limestone is needed in steelmaking as a fluxing agent. Some steel mills add limestone to the blast furnace and use unfluxed taconite pellets, while others have found that pellets fluxed at the taconite plant will produce higher tonnages of steel more efficiently. In event of the latter, the limestone thus arrives by ship and then, as part of the fluxed pellet, departs Duluth-Superior by ship.

² "Cutler-Magner – 100 Years," 1980, p.4. The LaLiberte family has been active in the management of Cutler-Magner for 90 years. President Clarence LaLiberte has been with the company since 1946.

³ *Ibid.*, p.5

⁴ "The Salt (and Lime) of the Earth," *Lake Superior Magazine*, December-January 1989

⁵ Julie Zenner, "Just a pinch of salt? Not at Cutler-Magner..." *Minnesota's World Port*, Winter 1998-1999, pp.4-5

⁶ Beck, "Duluth's Hallett Dock re-equips for the future," *Great Lakes/Seaway Review*, October-December 1997, p.59. E.W. Hallett owned construction businesses in Minnesota, Ohio and Florida. During the 1930s, his firms were major subcontractors on the Ft. Peck Dam in Montana and on lock and dam construction on the Mississippi River.

⁷ Tape-Recorded Oral History Interview with Cliff Grindy, Duluth, Minnesota, May 25, 2000, p.11. Hallett died in 1983 at the age of 101. During the years that Grindy knew him, from 1959 to 1983, Hallett only once visited the dock in Duluth that bore his name.

⁸ Grindy Interview, p.12

⁹ The president of Hallett Dock Company is Jeremy Fryberger, an employee of the company for more than 30 years and highly active in regional civic and professional organizations. The McGiffert connection also continues in the person of William McGiffert, vice president of operations and a nephew of former chairman M.A. "Turk" McGiffert.

¹⁰ Beck, "Duluth's Hallett Dock re-equips for the future," p.61

¹¹ "Bulk Handling and Storage for any shipper," *SPAD*, January 1968, p.3

¹² "Last of the bridge cranes falls to the times," *North Star Port*, Spring 2001, p.11

¹³ Chuck Frederick, "Developer proposes Hallett project," *Duluth News-Tribune*, March 21, 2002. Cutler-Magner's Railroad Street site in Duluth is also being eyed for possible waterfront tourism development.

