

John Wunder who launched the Trap Rock project in 1914.



**Roy Olson -
longest employee at the Trap
Rock.**



Present day Trap Rock plant.

Chapter X

WE'RE ON T.V.

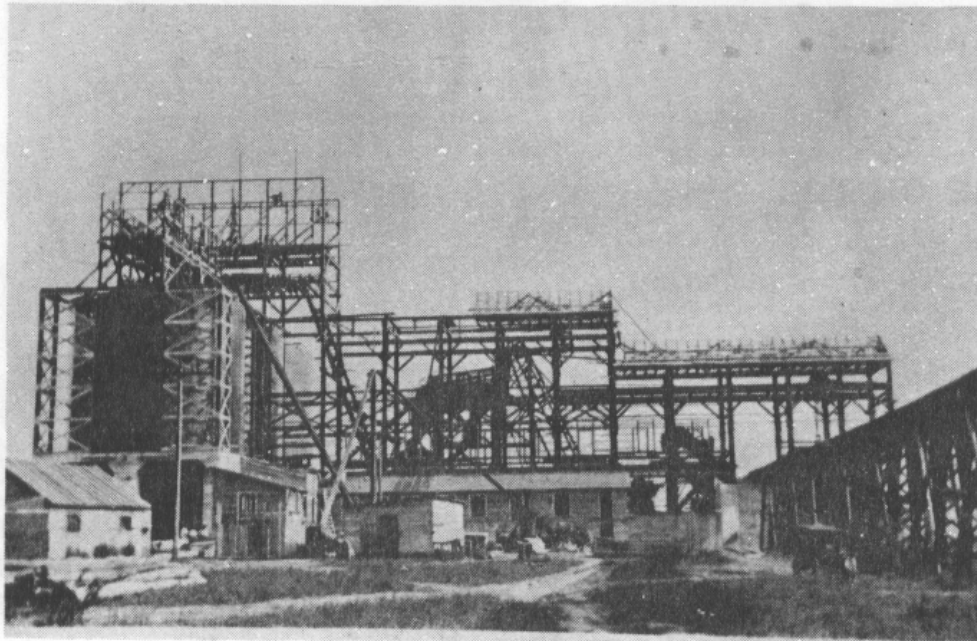
When the ground rumbles under your feet and you hear windows rattling it doesn't excite you in Dresser. It's not an earthquake, but only a small blast at the trap rock plant, just north of town. Explosions have been going on there since 1916, when the first rocks were blasted loose to furnish the raw material for crushing at the mill.

The first trap rock plant was started by a number of local farmers in Taylors Falls, Minnesota, on a small scale. In 1913, the Taylors Falls' operation was hard pressed for finances and for operating knowhow. The plant was too close to the village and many complaints were made about the blasting. Arrangements were made with John Wunder, a prominent contractor with headquarters in the Twin Cities, for his purchasing 50 percent of the stock of the company and assuming the responsibilities of management.*

John Wunder had his real estate agent purchase the land needed for the new plant, just one mile north of Dresser. One settler, Thomas Mickelson, sold his land believing it was to be a sheep ranch. Another, Bill Dresser was just glad to be able to sell his land since he didn't think it worth the taxes. None thought their rocky land to be of any value . . . how wrong they were!

*Harley, William L.: The Explosives Engineer—July-August 1957.

Work on the mill began as early as 1914. One-hundred-fifty Italians were hired to help build the plant along with several other carpenters. Two long buildings were constructed for living quarters. One was used as the cookhouse and the other as a bunkhouse. Even though they had the cookhouse, Mrs. Clow, of the Meadow View Hotel in Dresser, would pack as many as 42 lunches a day and send them by truck to the plant. The mill was of wooden construction covered with tin. One of the engineers of the project was John Wunder's son, Harvey. By the fall of 1914 the mill looked like this.



John Wunder's plant was called The Trap-Rock Company. John died in 1939, but the company was operated by his heirs until 1949.

The first quarry equipment consisted of 2 steam shovels, which would load the raw materials into quarry cars. These were then hauled to the crushing mill by the steam locomotives, called dinkys. The mill building had one large primary jaw crusher, which is still believed to be the largest open jaw crusher in the world. The crusher weighed about 250 tons and the swinging jaw about 40 tons. The swinging jaw crushed the rock.

Did you know car or so called truck-pools were popular in the early days? Well, back around 1927-28 the men of the village rode to work at the Trap Rock with the late Roy Olson in the back of his pickup. They paid about 50c a week for this service. Doug Schroeder had this job later. A picture of the working crew of 1934 showed 63 men. Another in 1948 showed only 36.



The 1948 Trap Rock crew.

When the Wunder family talked about closing the plant several businessmen of Dresser and St. Croix Falls decided to form a corporation and buy the plant. They considered the plant very important to the economy of the area. The new corporation was named Dresser Trap Rock Company. Operations were started on June 1, 1949, with Jule Larson, a vice president of the company, as general superintendent. Others in the corporation were: Carl Thye of Dresser, James C. Miller of St. Croix, L.G. Nagler of St. Croix, Leslie Olson of St. Croix, Harry S. Pomeroy of St. Croix, Floyd Pomeroy of St. Croix, Robert Soderberg of Dresser, Mel Astelford of Minneapolis, Francis H. Smith of St. Paul, and Elmer Strohbeen of Osceola. There were many minor stockholders who put \$100.00 to \$2,000.00 in the corporation.

The first meeting of the corporation was on June 13, 1949 with the election of the following officers: Carl Thye, President; Louis G. Nagler, Secretary; and Harry S. Pomeroy, Treasurer. Nine members were elected for the board of directors: for a 1-year period, Floyd Pomeroy, James C. Miller, and Francis H. Smith; 2-year period, Harry S. Pomeroy, Elmer Strohbeen, M.G. Astleford; 3-year period, Carl R. Thye, Robert Soderberg and Louis Nagler.

In 1960, Bryan Rock Products purchased the plant and completely remodeled it, reducing the men working from 40 under the old system to 30 today. On April 1 of this year, 1976, John Conlon of Minneapolis purchased the plant in Dresser. *LS WREN*

Why was the plant called the Trap Rock plant? The name comes from the kind of rock being crushed at the plant. This rock is trap meaning igneous, or volcanic type rock. It is altered basalt with

irregular seams; few natural rocks surpass it in hardness. Combined with this hardness factor is its toughness of 19, which ranks it among the most indestructible rocks in the crust of the earth. It is the hardest rock in North America—so hard that boulders from Dresser were shipped to Maryland to be used by NASA in testing drills to be used on a moon probe. Considering these factors, one can see why quantities of this rock exist many miles from the site of the quarry. Crushed rock has been shipped as far as Canada, Chicago, Michigan, and all the midwestern states.

About every 2 years it is necessary to blast down more rock from the quarry face. The earliest method was the coyote method of tunneling under the rock bank. The first large blast was in 1918 when 35 tons of dynamite were used. Many still remember this blast. George Nelson, office worker at the plant (43 years), told me what he remembers. He said:

“All the work was done by hand. Two tunnels were dug and the dynamite loaded near the front of the tunnels. When the switch was closed the dynamite blew out and rocks were thrown as far as Poplar Lake. It cut off trees near the plant and roads were blocked for 2 days. No trains could get through for 2 to 3 days.”

Over the years there have been several large blasts at the plant. George Nelson gave me the following record of blasts:

1918	- 2 tunnels	- approx. 35 tons
1923	- 2 tunnels	- 30 tons
1933	- 3 tunnels	- 40 tons
1936	- 4 tunnels	- 60 tons
1945	- 2 tunnels	- 32 tons
1957	- 3 tunnels	- 43.5 tons
1958	- 2 tunnels	- 19.75 tons

As the record above shows the largest blast was in 1936. Yet this blast didn't get the publicity like the blast of 1957. It made T.V.

According to William L. Harley in the magazine “The Explosive Engineer—July-August 1957”, preparation for the blast of 1957 began in the middle of December, 1956, and continued until April 9, 1957. The driving of the tunnels was done during two 10-hour shifts a day, five days a week. Two men worked in a tunnel each shift by candlelight. Loading of the explosives was started on Tuesday morning, April 23, 1957. The last pocket was loaded with explosives at 11 a.m., Saturday, April 27.

On May 2 the blast was ready to be fired, and Jule Larson checked with the flagmen stationed completely around the area. After everyone and everything was in the clear, the signal was given

and Roy Olson, assistant general superintendent, closed the firing switch. There was a dull rumble as 870,000 tons of rock were pushed up into the air approximately 30 feet and then settled down to earth.

News of the intended firing of this blast had created much interest, as was evidenced by the number of newspaper, radio and television personnel present to witness the execution of the blast. Many thousands of people viewed the blast later when it was televised by KSTP-TV in both normal and slow motion.

Today the tunnel method of blasting is no longer used. They use the "drill and shoot" method. Over 400,000 tons of rocks are taken out a year.

Since the plant's early days the Soo Line Railroad has played an important part in the life of Dresser Trap Rock as it has in the life of the entire Dresser community. Today the Soo Line is the largest purchaser of rock. The next two largest contracts are with the City of Minneapolis and St. Paul. Most of this rock is transported by rail.

The uses of this rock are many. Much of the rock product is used for railroad ballast. Some is used on interstate highways in Iowa and southern Wisconsin for the construction of bridges, and some for highways in Wisconsin and Minnesota. The rock is also being used for baseball diamonds in St. Croix Falls and running tracks in Prescott and Ellsworth. General Manager Gene Hustad says that runners have shown "increased track speeds by using this material" and that it causes fewer injuries than do cinders. Packing houses use the rock for flooring because it won't absorb moisture or react to the acids.*

Today's plant employs about 30 men. Diesel shovels have replaced steam shovels, and Euclid trucks the steam locomotive. A new crusher has recently been installed but the original crusher is still in use. A crack in the crusher was repaired in 1954. During the winter of 1954-1955 Roy Olson and his brother Gordon welded the jaw working 4 months, 7 days a week and 10 hours a day. Bars were welded across the back saving the company the cost of replacing it at approximately \$40,000.00.

The late Roy Olson, longest employed of any man at the plant, retired in March, 1966, after 47½ years. He began as an engineer of a steam locomotive. A year later he was running the steam shovel which he did for about 12½ years. His next job was as a machinist for around 30 years along with being assistant superintendent for the last 12 years of this time.

For sixty years the buildings of Dresser Trap Rock have been a Dresser landmark, and the plant, which can easily be seen from Highway 35, has been a part of day-to-day life in the community.

*Heiose, Judy: Dresser Dispatch, July 23, 1974.



Group of Dresserites in front of home built by Eric Flink about 1884. Front row, third from left identified as Mrs. Eric Hogstrom, Annie Nelson next with two of her children, and then Mr. and Mrs. John Flink. Last person at extreme right is Eric Hogstrom. Picture taken in early 1900's.



Church group at Andrew Flink home built about 1904. Sign beside the door bears the name of Dresser's first doctor, George Ribernack. The residence served him as both living quarters and office in the early 1900's.