

**CATHY** So we're going to launch a new Minnesota history segment on the show right now. Listener Bill Palmer even gave  
**WURZER:** us a name for it *Minnesota Now and Then*. Back then, some 45 years ago on this very day, July 13, 1977, the tiny town of Kinney, Minnesota, on the Iron Range, sought to gain independence from the United States. True story. Imagine the United State of Kinney, Minnesota.

The *Mesabi Daily News* headline read, move over, Monaco. Here comes Kinney. The Kinney city council had voted to secede from the United States because of a dispute over a federal grant. Here to tell us the details is Jennifer Klein Young. She's the former education coordinator at the Minnesota Discovery Center in Chisholm, Minnesota, formerly known as the Iron World Discovery Center. Jennifer, welcome.

**JENNIFER KLEIN**Hi. Thanks, Cathy.

**YOUNG:**

**CATHY** Kinney is a really small town. Even in the '70s, I think it only had about what, 500-600 people. Pretty kind of  
**WURZER:** unmapped out. So to think it would declare its independence is funny. I understand a lot of this revolved around a federal grant. What was the deal with that?

**JENNIFER KLEIN**Mm-hmm. Well, the story of that was that the tiny town of Kinney had a failing water system. The infrastructure  
**YOUNG:** for its water system was really in trouble. They couldn't get decent water pressure. Actually, to put out a fire that had happened in the home of Mayor Mary Anderson's family home had burned down because of lack of water pressure. The citizens in Kinney had mineral deposits in their water that was turning their laundry orange and brown.

And the city government had been trying their hardest to apply for any federal grant, any state, local grant, any option for getting money to fix the failing water system because that was money their city government just didn't have. And what you're referring to as the secession of Kinney really was a final straw after Mayor Mary Anderson and other city officials had tried everything they could.

And at one city council meeting on July 12, 1977, in frustration, the comment was thrown out there, "You know what. I bet it would be easier if we were a foreign country to get foreign aid from the United States. That would fix our water system instead of being the tiny town of Kinney in Northeastern Minnesota."

And an offhanded remark, [LAUGHING] a joke actually turned into something that city attorney Jim Randall drafted a letter addressed to the Secretary of State Cyrus B. Vance at the time. That then on July 13, 1977, was actually sent via registered mail to the US Secretary of State saying we declare that we are seceding from the union.

If necessary, we're willing to declare war and surrender real quick because our mayor is a nurse in a nearby hospital. And many of our council members work in the nearby mines and can't get the time off of work. [LAUGHING] But declaring our independence it was amazing.

**CATHY** Yes, oh my goodness. I want to go back to Mayor Anderson for just a moment because the range is full of  
**WURZER:** characters.

**JENNIFER KLEIN** Oh, yeah.

**YOUNG:**

**CATHY** And Mayor Anderson, she was an outsized force on the Iron Range, kind of a memorable character. Tell me a  
**WURZER:** little bit about her.

**JENNIFER KLEIN** Most definitely. Mary Anderson is something of a political legend up on the Iron Range. She was the first woman

**YOUNG:** mayor of the town of Kinney and actually led a government, at the time in the '70s, as of 1976, that was run by women this small town.

And she owned and operated the local bar Mary's Bar that was definitely a hot spot. Particularly, in the '80s for politicians of all levels to kind of come and launch campaigns, including Paul Wellstone, I believe Dukakis stopped by there.

She was very connected to Governor Perpich at the time, and I would say, is something of a kingmaker. I view Mary Anderson, and Veda Ponikvar are definitely in the same league, just as women of the Iron Range who were larger than life. Who knew how to get things done, and weren't afraid to think outside the box.

**CATHY** Veda, of course, was a longtime newspaper editor on the range.

**WURZER:**

**JENNIFER KLEIN** Mm-hmm.

**YOUNG:**

**CATHY** Mm-hmm. She was a force to contend with. So getting back here to the secession effort. If I'm not incorrect,  
**WURZER:** didn't Jen Paulucci-- remember, for folks who remember that name, he was kind of the frozen food King out of Duluth.

**JENNIFER KLEIN** Mm-hmm.

**YOUNG:**

**CATHY** Jen gave Kinney a used Ford to replace the City Police car, which I think no longer ran, and gave them 10 cases  
**WURZER:** of frozen pizza. He was part of this whole thing, too, I think.

**JENNIFER KLEIN** Yes. [LAUGHING] He was part of the story. It was actually really fabulous because the letter was sent in July of

**YOUNG:** '77. There was no response. There were crickets. And then, as you were saying, quoting that article that came out in the *Mesabi Daily News* the following February. Nothing was really said until that following February when that article ran, and then that initiated everything.

Including Jen giving the city of Kinney or the independent Republic of Kinney, I should say, its first foreign aid, which was a 1974 LTD for use as their squad car and 10 cases of frozen pizza mix. And I believe there were even used tires included in that foreign aid delivery, which was pretty epic. So actually, the [LAUGHING] independent Republic of Kinney does celebrate as an official holiday March 5th every year is Jen Paulucci Pizza Day.

**CATHY** I did not know that.

**WURZER:**

**JENNIFER KLEIN**Mm-hmm.

**YOUNG:**

**CATHY** Now, did they make passports?

**WURZER:**

**JENNIFER KLEIN**They did. Yes, when the media coverage really took off in late February, March, April, passports were created,

**YOUNG:** and I believe around 1,600 were issued. They were sold in Mary's Bar in Kinney, and also sent to particular people.

A lot of who's who of state and local politicians. I believe Governor Perpich was passport holder number six. I know Jim Oberstar was a passport holder. [LAUGHING] There were passports sent to Twin Cities television stations, so.

**CATHY** Oh, of course. Of course, you wouldn't happen to have seen any of these passports?

**WURZER:**

**JENNIFER KLEIN**I did not see any of the originals issued. But in 2007, when I was the Education Coordinator at Iron World, there

**YOUNG:** was an effort to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the secession. So the city of Kenny reissued passports.

**CATHY** Oh.

**WURZER:**

**JENNIFER KLEIN**And I am the proud holder of passport 4,063 of the second version.

**YOUNG:**

**CATHY** Oh, see how it's grown. It's grown.

**WURZER:**

**JENNIFER KLEIN**Exactly. [LAUGHING] There are a lot of citizens of the independent Republic of Kenny out there. You just have to

**YOUNG:** go looking.

**CATHY** Now, this is a pretty innovative publicity stunt. Did Kinney ever get the funding for the water system? I don't

**WURZER:** remember.

**JENNIFER KLEIN**They did. They did. It took a while. The interesting thing is, as I mentioned, it took a while for the media to catch

**YOUNG:** up and get this story. But within a month of the story breaking in the *Mesabi Daily News*, a grant did come in from the IRRRB, the Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Board, for \$60,000.00.

That started that water system repair work. And then, it was followed up the following December with another grant of a little under \$200,000.00, and the water system was fully repaired.

**CATHY** So I'm assuming that the water is no longer orange in Kinney, and everything is OK.

**WURZER:**

**JENNIFER KLEIN**That's the idea.

**YOUNG:**

**CATHY** OK, I'm glad to hear that. Jennifer, you did a beautiful job explaining this. It was really a lot of fun talking to you.

**WURZER:**

**JENNIFER KLEIN** Yeah. Well, it's my favorite story from Iron Range history. So happy to chat about it whenever. Happy Kinney

**YOUNG:** Independence Day.

**CATHY** And thank you, and to you as well, Jennifer. Take care of yourself.

**WURZER:**

**JENNIFER KLEIN** You too.

**YOUNG:**

**CATHY** Jennifer Klein Young is the former education coordinator at the Minnesota Discovery Center in Chisholm, Minnesota, that was once known as the Iron World Discovery Center. If you want to know more about the Kinney secession effort, you can go to the Minnesota Historical Society online.

**WURZER:**

And by the way, we did a story, of course, we did, we're *MPR News*. We did a story how many years ago now? Several, about the time Kinney, Minnesota, seceded. Seceded, that's a hard word to say. Seceded from the Union. Check it out by going to [mprnews.org](http://mprnews.org).