

Who Was Who In Washburn: The Founders - 1

The fabric of history is woven from the actions of individual people, from a few to millions, each person's unique contribution, be it large or small, constituting a thread of that fabric. Brief biographical sketches of selected individuals from among those who contributed to Washburn's historic tapestry will be presented in this and future articles. The founders of Washburn, that is the shareholders in the Bay Land and Improvement Company, included railroad executives, speculators, and businessmen, three of whom were well known in the Chequamegon Bay region—Edwin Ellis from Ashland, and Robinson D. Pike and Isaac Wing, both from Bayfield.

Edwin Ellis was born in Peru, Maine on May 24 1824. He graduated from Bowdoin College in 1844, and from the University of the City of New York in 1846 as a medical doctor. He returned to Farmington, Maine where he practiced medicine for several years and then moved with his family to St. Paul in April 1854. In February 1855 Ellis journeyed to Superior and then to La Pointe, and finally across the bay to Bay City. In 1861, with the decline of Bay City and Ashland after the panic of 1857, he moved to Odanah, where he taught in the mission school for four years. He



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then moved to Ontonagon, Michigan, where he practiced medicine at the copper mines. In the summer of 1872 Ellis returned to Bay City, where he resumed his medical practice. He was instrumental in securing the Wisconsin Central Railroad for Ashland in 1873. He eventually retired from medical practice, devoting himself to his business interests, while serving in several city and county offices. He was a founder of North Wisconsin Academy, now Northland College. In 1847 he married Sophia S. Davis, but she died after the birth of their first child; he then married Martha Baker in 1850. He died in Ashland on May 3 1903.

Robinson Derling Pike was born in Meadville, Pennsylvania on April 13 1838. The family moved to Toledo, Ohio in 1845, where he received a rudimentary

education. In 1855, the family moved to Chequamegon Bay for the father's health. He enlisted as a private in the 27th Michigan Infantry at Ontonagon on August 13 1862, and was transferred to the 1st Michigan Cavalry, and commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant. Pike fought in several major battles and in numerous minor engagements. He was present at Appomattox Court House on April 9 1865 when Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia. After the war he served in the cavalry on the western plains. He was discharged at Fort Bridges in the Utah Territory on March 31 1866. Returning to Bayfield, Pike purchased a shingle mill on Pike's Creek but it burnt down. He then built a shingle mill at La Pointe, but on May 17 1869 the mill caught fire, destroying a large part of the village. He then built a shingle mill in Bayfield, and the following year a saw mill, which he named "Little Daisy." Soon Pikes's dockage and warehouses covered some 20 blocks of the Bayfield waterfront. He had extensive real estate holdings and was involved in numerous business enterprises in the bay region. He was also active in community affairs, serving in county offices and as the captain of the Bayfield Rifles (a local militia group). Pike's last- ing contribution to the

region was the State Fish Hatchery on Pike's Creek, dedicated on September 10 1897, for which he donated a large tract of land. He was married to Eva L. Johnson on January 28 1886. He died on March 27 1906.

Isaac H. Wing was born on July 8 1832, in Winthrop, Maine. Sometime after graduation from Bowden College he came to Hudson, Wisconsin as the business manager for a sawmill proprietor. When that business failed in the panic of 1857, he read law for a year in a judge's office, and was then admitted to the bar but never practiced. He enlisted in the army on April 19 1861, serving as first lieutenant in the Wisconsin Volunteer Calvary Regiment. He was taken prisoner but escaped through the enemy lines. His health was broken by his experiences in battle and as prisoner, and he resigned from the army on August 20 1862. Returning to Hudson Wing served as county clerk before going to Bayfield in 1870 as receiver in the U.S. Land Office located there. In 1882 he resigned that position and entered the real estate and lumber business, where he made a substantial fortune. Wing retired from business but remained in Bayfield where he was active in civic and philanthropic affairs. He was unmarried. He died in Bayfield on August 27 1907.