

# Progress and Prosperity 1880-1883 -1

## PART I

The story of the village of Ashland from 1880 to 1883 was one of progress and prosperity. The federal census of June 1880 for the Town of Ashland (there was no separate listing for the village) showed a population of 766 whites and 176 Native Americans at the Bad River reservation. Of the 766 whites, 273 were from Wisconsin and 235 from 19 other states. Two hundred fifty eight, or 34%, were born in foreign countries, including Canada, Germany, Norway, Ireland, and ten other countries. There were 45 different occupations pursued by 323 whites, the most frequent being laborer (123), sawmill worker (43), farmer (20), and lumberman (16). Two physicians, two lawyers, three school teachers, and four pastors or missionaries were also listed.

While Ashland was becoming a Mecca for sportsmen, nature lovers, fresh air enthusiasts, and ordinary tourists, it was above all a lumber town. The 1880 census listed three sawmills in operation. The Union Mill Company operated for six months. It employed 40 males (including five children and youths) at daily wages of \$1.75 for laborers and \$3.00 for skilled mechanics. It was powered by a 75 horsepower steam engine, which drove 16 circular saws. The Ashland Lumber Company operated for two months during the census year.



Lars Larson 8/30/12

■ has been a guest columnist for The County Journal for many years.

It employed 40 males (including three children and youths) at average daily wages of \$1.50 for laborers and \$2.50 for skilled mechanics. It was powered by a 60 horsepower steam engine with 11 circular saws. Finally, the White and Childs Sash, Door and Blind Mill operated for ten months during the census year. It employed 16 males at daily wages of \$1.50 for laborers and \$2.00 for skilled mechanics. It was powered by a 25 horsepower steam engine with four circular saws.

In January 1881 the Superior Lumber Company, organized in January by John H. Knight from Bayfield began construction of a sawmill and dock along the bay shore between 6th and 10th Avenues (then Lake and Indiana Streets). The company also owned the Fish Creek Boom and Log Driving Company and the Bad River Boom and Canal Company, which provided it with a dependable

supply of logs. In April 1882 the Press reported that the four mills—Ashland Lumber Company, the Mueller and Ritchie Mill, Superior Lumber Company, and the Union Mill—were expected to cut about 34 million board feet of lumber. Subsequently, the Superior Lumber Company rebuilt its mill to increase capacity, and a fifth mill was erected by the Michigan Lumber Company at the foot of Prentice Avenue. Other additions to the industrial base of Ashland during 1882 were the Ashland Manufacturing Company, which included a combination sash, door, and blind factory, a planing mill, and a machine shop and foundry.

The Press reported in April 1882 that 37,250,000 board feet of logs had been "banked" at Ashland for the coming cutting season, and another 6,000,000 at Bayfield, 1,800,000 at Butternut, and 6,000,000 at Jacob. The following month it published a prescient report on the pine supply. In the Chequamegon Bay region, it was estimated that there were "two thousand million feet"—that is, two billion—feet of "merchantable pine." But rather than the usual prediction that the supply of pine was "inexhaustible," the report went on to note that "if the present rate of production is kept up . . . it is fair to conclude that from fifteen to twenty years will see the end of the lumber industry in our State, as far as pine

is concerned," a prediction that was almost exactly correct.

In November 1882 the first boat built in Ashland—named "The City of Ashland"—was launched from the Ashland Lumber Company's boat yard. It was a shallow-draft tug with side wheels for propulsion, intended to pull log rafts from the Bad River area through the shallow opening or "sand cut" between Chequamegon Point and Long Island, thus avoiding the long circumvention of the island. Despite the optimistic expectations that the port would become an important shipbuilding center on the Great Lakes, the "City of Ashland" was the only vessel ever constructed in Ashland. Unfortunately it burned and sank near Long Island in August 1887.

Railroad excitement was again in the air in 1880. The North Wisconsin Railroad (now the Northern Division of the Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis and Omaha) had reached Long Lake (Lake Owen), and the engineers were reconnoitering the line from that point to Bayfield. Also, it was announced that the Northern Pacific would begin the preliminary survey of its "South Shore Line" from Duluth to Sault Ste. Marie, the first section being to the Montreal River. There was considerable concern in Ashland that the main line would pass to the south, with only a branch into the village.