

The Village of Ashland: Progress and Prosperity 1880-1883-2

PART II

By 1883 Ashland had become an important railroad hub on the western Great Lakes. The Wisconsin Central reached Ashland from the south in June 1877, while in June 1883 the tracks of the Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Omaha were extended into Ashland, providing a direct connection to the St. Croix and Mississippi river valleys and the Twin Cities. And in October 1883 construction of the Northern Pacific Railroad from Superior to Ashland was underway from both ends of the line. This road connected Ashland to the ports at the head of the lakes, the lumber markets, and the wheat fields of the northern prairies, and the Pacific Ocean trade. The Ashland weekly Press declared that the railroad would "give the city a big boost towards its 'manifest destiny.'"

In October 1880 the Ashland Weekly Press noted that not only had "general business increased" but that the improvements showed "that our people have been generally prosperous." The list of improvements included the rebuilding of the White and Childs planing mill, the construction

of the Mueller and Ritchie mill, improvements to the Union Mill, new stores for Vaughn and Garnich, improvements to the court house, Wisconsin Central Railroad facilities, and numerous dwellings and places of business, amount-

Lars Larson *CJ 9/6/12*

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

ing to \$55,225. Also, a local telephone company was organized at the end of the year, "intended to connect both ends of town with the post office, court house, hotels, mills, and such stores as desire an instrument." Construction projects in 1881 included a new passenger depot and other facilities for the Wisconsin Central and an enlargement of the Chequamegon Hotel. The hotel now featured 100 rooms, gas lighting, and "all modern improvements such as electric bells, bath rooms, closets, steam laundry, etc." These projects, along with building and improvements of dwellings and business buildings, amounted to \$56,750.

While business conditions on the national level worsened in 1883, the demand for lumber in the growing cities and in the

farms and villages of the great plains, plus the need for the shipping outlets on the lakes, insulated the Chequamegon Bay communities from the depression. The Press reported at year's end that 1883 had been "a

prosperous one for our fair young city, which has taken long strides toward its future destiny." The Union Mill Company constructed a large hotel, improved its mill facilities and extended its dock; the Ashland Lumber Company improved its mill and dock, as did the Michigan Lumber Company, and the Mueller and Ritchie Company. The Superior Lumber Company also improved its mill and docks, constructed an office and warehouses, and added to its sash and door factory. There were numerous small business undertakings also, including two brickyards, badly needed to provide material for the many buildings which were being constructed. Other major projects included a Presbyterian church, a high school, improvements to the county courthouse, and numerous bridges, sidewalks, and streets throughout the village. A telegraph line to Bayfield was completed, the old telephone line connecting the communities was rebuilt, and

wires were extended throughout Ashland.

Despite the pessimistic—or at least equivocal—reports of the professional geologists, there were those who persisted in believing that a bonanza lay buried somewhere in the ranges behind Ashland. Now it was gold and silver in the copper range, located north of the Penoke Range, which aroused their enthusiasm. At least one outside company was formed, the Chicago and Lake Superior Mining Company, which opened a mine on the Brunsweller River, as well as local companies in Ashland and Bayfield. Rumors about precious metals on the range had been circulating in Ashland for a year or more, but the Press had remained skeptical and silent. Now, however, in the spring of 1880 in an article with the headline, "The New Eldorado!" it declared that the proof was so strong that it was "useless to doubt longer" that the discoveries of the gold and silver were true. The gold and silver mining ventures apparently did not "pan out," however, for after this initial burst of excitement in the spring, no further major reports about them appeared in the Press.

By the spring of 1883 interest in iron mining had shifted to deposits along the Montreal River in Wisconsin and Michigan, which proved to be rich in iron that was low in silica and easily accessible. The Gogebic Range farther east was also beginning to be explored, and soon the immense deposits of ore there would be discovered and exploited. "Considerable interest [was] again awakened" in gold and silver mining by the claim of a newly organized company, the Ashland Gold and Silver Mining Company, to have discovered "a rich vein bearing gold and silver" on the copper range near the old Brunschweiler Creek location.