

Boats on the Bay -2

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PART 2

Ferry service between Washburn, Ashland, and Bayfield was an important part of the communication system on which the prosperity of the three communities depended.

While there were train connections among the communities, the ferries ran more frequently than the trains, probably taking less time to make the trip. Ferry service on the bay began in the fall of 1883, with the Barker making several trips daily between Washburn and Ashland. By the spring of 1887 the Barker had been joined by the Daisy and later by the Fashion. In June 1895 they were making nine round trips a day between the two communities, coordinated with the schedules of the Wisconsin Central and Northern Pacific Railroads at Ashland. The Plowboy made one round trip a day between Ashland, Washburn, and Bayfield, with a stop at the quarry dock at Houghton. The Plowboy, Barker and Lucille also carried excursions around the bay and among the Apostle Islands, as did the large side-wheel steamer Emerald.

In the summer of 1901, daily ferry service between Washburn and Ashland was provided by the Lucille and Mary Scott, while the Plowboy ran between Washburn, Ashland and Bayfield. The time tables for the three ferries for July 1901 showed that the



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Lucille and Mary Scott made 12 trips each day back and forth between the two communities, the first trip of the day by the Mary Scott leaving Ashland at 6:00AM, and Washburn at 7:00AM, and the last trip by the Lucille leaving Ashland at 7:20PM and Washburn at 8:00PM. The Plowboy made two round trips daily among the three communities, leaving

Ashland for Washburn at 9:00AM on the first trip and arriving back in Ashland from Bayfield on the second trip at 6:15PM, with stops at Madeline Island. The ferries were used, not only by the local people, but also by men with business in Washburn, who arrived on the four railroads that served Ashland. These cross-bay ferries were small, wooden vessels—for example, Barker was 93 feet long and weighed 79 tons; Chequamegon, 101 feet and 141 tons; and Daisy, 44 feet and 17 tons. The largest was Emerald, a "side-wheeler," 150 feet and 215 tons. With the construction of good

roads among the three bay communities, automobiles and trucks gradually replaced the ferries. In the spring of 1920 Captain John E. Doherty, who had operated the Mary Scott between Washburn and Ashland for 15 years, announced that it would no longer run, ending some 40 years of ferry service between the two communities.

The Omaha Railroad's practice of charging fees for the Washburn-Ashland ferries docking at its terminal prompted a movement to construct a public, or city, dock directly down from the end of Washington Avenue. Money was collected by private subscription (the town may also have contributed) and the city dock was built in August 1895. But the railroad company would not agree to the extension of Washington Avenue from Omaha Street across its right-of-way to the dock. No doubt the company was concerned about wagon traffic across its switching tracks in that area and certainly about the possible loss of freight traffic from its terminal, if there was access for wagons to the public dock. It finally agreed to the construction of a sidewalk from the end of Washington Avenue to the dock, but placed a post in the middle of the sidewalk so that it could not be used by wagons.

The principal cargoes carried on the lakes were bulk cargoes—coal, ores, wheat, flour, and lumber. The greater

carrying capacity of vessels resulting from an increase in draft by 2 to 4 feet to 20 feet would substantially lower the freight rates on these cargoes, benefiting producers, consumers, shippers, and others. To community leaders it appeared that Washburn, with at least 20 feet of water depth in its natural harbor, would benefit greatly from deep waterways through the lakes, and in particular would gain a clear advantage over Ashland and Duluth-Superior, whose harbors required frequent and expensive dredging. The interconnecting waterway of the Great Lakes are the Straits of Mackinac, between Lakes Michigan and Huron; the St. Mary's River, between Lakes Superior and Huron; the St. Clair Lake-Detroit River, between Lakes Huron and Erie; and the Niagara River, between Lakes Erie and Ontario. But the big ocean-going ships that these deepened interconnecting waterways allowed into Lake Superior increasingly went to where the big cargoes were—Ashland and Duluth-

Superior. Nevertheless, people were not discouraged, remaining confident that the St. Lawrence River waterway, connecting the Great Lakes to the Atlantic Ocean, would bring vessels from around the world to Washburn's docks. But the St. Lawrence Seaway did not become a reality until 1959, and no foreign vessel ever docked at Washburn after it was opened.

A 1896 "bird's eye view" of Washburn shows a number of vessels as the freight

terminal, coal dock, grain elevator, and dock. All of the vessels depicted are "steamers" or "propellers," and all are schooner-rigged (fore and aft sails), even the steam barges at the coal dock. Schooners continued in use, particularly for hauling lumber, and were frequent callers at Washburn, including the A.W. Wright and the Goshawk. A photograph of the A.W. Wright reveals the fate of many schooners—their main masts were removed for conversion to lumber barges, two or more of which were towed behind a steamer. The bowed structure shown over the midsheeps of many of the vessels strengthened their wooden hulls and prevented "hogging," or the drooping of the fore and aft sections of the vessel with respect to the mid-section. In contrast to the old wooden hull schooners were the new, steel-hull E.C. Pope and Alva, which were among the largest vessels in their class on the lakes. The E.C. Pope delivered 2,800 tons of coal in October 1845, the largest cargo of coal up to that time. Except in length, these ships were identical to modern coal and ore lake carriers with a large cargo space between fore and aft super-structures.