

# The founding of Bayfield 1

By the early 1850s the Chequamegon Bay area had become well known for its healthy climate and beautiful scenery, and many people came by lake steamer from the east and mid-west, staying at the Madeline House at La Pointe. Among them was Elisha Pike, of Toledo, Ohio, who came in June 1855. Entranced by the region, he bought a water-powered sawmill and a log cabin, and the 80 acres of land on which these were located, about one and one half miles up what is now Pike's Creek. He returned to Toledo, sold his farm, and in October 1855 returned to La Pointe with his family. They moved to the cabin at the mill site on Pike's Creek, becoming the first settlers on the Bayfield peninsula and a pioneer family in Bayfield.

Important men of affairs also came to La Pointe, who while enjoying the natural amenities of the area, assessed the possibilities for lucrative investments in land, timber, and minerals. Included was Henry M. Rice, one of the founders of Superior. In the spring of 1855 he was granted 349 acres on the site of an old Indian village on the mainland across the channel from La Pointe. He named the townsite "Bayfield" in honor of Admiral Henry W. Bayfield of the British Navy, who



Lars Larson 10/11/12

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

made the first surveys of Lake Superior. Rice's vision of the future of Bayfield was probably that it would become a port for the upper and far west, and eventually for Asia. Historically, La Pointe and Chequamegon Bay had been the communication and transportation hub of the western Great Lakes region, and there was no apparent reason why it could not continue to be so. As a candidate for a leading port at the western end of Lake Superior, it was considered to be on a par with Superior. Indeed, the deep and protected roadstead on which the site fronted was at that time better than Superior's harbor. The Bayfield site was also adjacent to the settlements on the Keweenaw Peninsula, and closer than Superior to the lower lake ports. The difference was only about eighty

miles, but this could be significant given the shipping technology of the time, that is small vessels, many of them powered by sails, with limited cargo capacities. Finally, Rice may also have been led to believe that the pieces of copper occasionally found in the vicinity of Bayfield and on Madeline Island, carried there by the glacier, were evidence of rich deposits such as those on the Keweenaw Peninsula, promising to make Bayfield a mining center.

The founding of the settlement has been described as follows: "The first settlement was made by a party of nine men, under charge of John C. Henley, March 24, 1856, who landed on a point now occupied by the residence of Col. John H. Knight. The first tree was felled, and the party erected a log cabin on the spot now occupied by the United States land-office. The cabin was finished March 26. On the twenty-seventh, John M. Free arrived, bringing Maj. McAboy, a civil engineer, and others, to lay out the town. They came overland from Superior. A dock was built . . . The first family to arrive was John C. Henley's, on the schooner 'Algonquin,' May 8, 1856, this being the first vessel. Others who came about this time were Andrew Tate, Peter H. Ley, John Hamlin and S.S. Vaughn. Others soon followed. The first

steamer to arrive was the 'Lady Elgin,' on June 16, 1856, and the propeller 'Manhattan,' July 7. The propeller 'Mineral Rock' arrived July 27 with an engine and mill machinery with Mr. Kahoe. [This was the first sawmill, located on the shoreline between 3rd and 4th Streets.] The first frame house was built by John C. Henley, July 16, 1856. The first hardware store was started by John and R.W. McCloud, of St. Paul, under charge of Joseph McCloud, in September of the same year. S.S. Vaughn opened the first provision store in October. The building of a hotel by the Bayfield Land Company was commenced December 25, 1856, and was finished in June, 1857. It was opened by J.H. Nourse. This hotel was burned in 1860, [early 1861], then kept by George D. Livingston." In August 1861 one of the editors of the Superior Chronicle visited "the new city of Bayfield" and reported that "three or four houses and a moderate clearing denotes the spot," while "fourteen more are in course of construction," and a "very good wagon road to the St. Croix, connecting with our road by ferry at Sunrise, has been opened." A pier and a warehouse were also constructed, and during the fall and winter many additional stores and houses were built.