

The founding of Bayfield: Part 2

105

On April 18, 1857, The Bayfield Mercury, sponsored by the proprietors of the town and edited by two men they had recruited from southern Minnesota, published its first issue.

As with all such newspapers in newly-founded settlements, one of its principal purposes was to "boom" Bayfield, and the editors immediately set about this assignment.

Bayfield, they declared, "with a population of nearly 600 with many good substantially constructed buildings ... is not by any means a matter of speculation, but a matter of fact, of utility, the wants of the country demand it, and nature has performed its every duty toward it in providing every requisite necessary to supply those wants."

It has "the largest, safest and best harbor on the Lake," it is "rich in mines, abounding with timber," "possesses an agricultural country back of it that cannot be surpassed," and "the climate is such as to confer on its inhabitants the choicest and most valuable blessing that any people can enjoy, viz: good health."

And it is served by "large and commodious steamers" from Detroit, Buffalo and Chicago, and will soon be connected to St. Paul by a "daily line of coaches" and "by



Lars Larson GJ 10/18/12

the 10th of July, 1859, it will be connected with Madison, Wis., by means of a railroad now under course of construction."

The Mercury also published articles from other newspapers or letters from individuals, some no doubt planted by the editors, which praised the new settlement or posed questions that provided opportunities to expound on its advantages and future prospects.

One letter, supposedly received by William McAboy, the agent for the town proprietors, questioned whether Bayfield held any advantages "over a thousand other new towns laid out in the West and North-West solely as a matter of speculation."

In response, McAboy noted the promise of wealth from the timber and mineral resources of the area, but stated that "commercially the town has still greater prospects" as the shipping point for the agricultural products of the north-west and west.

It was common for the settlers in Bayfield to compare their geographic situation to that of Chicago, and to conclude that since Chicago had rapidly developed as a major shipping center for its hinterland, the same thing would surely happen for Bayfield.

A business directory published in the July 11, 1857 issue of the Mercury listed one hardware store and three provision stores (one in La Pointe), the largest of which appears to have been Vaughn's store, stocking groceries, dry goods, housewares, drugs and medicines, and so on.

Also listed were six carpenters, two contractors, a painter, a blacksmith, an insurance agent, a land office, an attorney, a commission and forwarding agent, and an engineer in Bayfield and a civil engineer at La Pointe.

There was also an "arcade" and an "exchange," the latter apparently a hotel, and the Madeline House and an "exchange" at La Pointe. It was even possible to charter the Etta, a "good, staunch sail boat," for "pleasure excursions."

A large hotel constructed by the proprietors was opened in the summer, and the sawmill was rebuilt in the fall. A highlight of July was the arrival of the first wagon from St. Paul, while the "Marine List" pub-

lished by the Mercury listed steamers from Superior, Cleveland, Chicago and Detroit.

The religious and educational needs of the community were not neglected either. On March 10, 1857, a Methodist church was organized with Rev. James Peet as pastor, and on Aug. 16

of that year a Presbyterian church was established with Rev. Thomas B. Elder as pastor.

A Catholic church was established in 1858, although there had been Catholic clergy at La Pointe for many years prior to that. In the spring of 1858, a public school district was organized and the first school opened in July.

Bayfield also received official recognition of its existence. A post office was opened in October 1856, while in December 1858 it was designated a port of entry and a revenue cutter was stationed there the following May.

In May 1860, the Indian agency and, in October, the government land office were moved to Bayfield, from Superior.

On March 24, 1858, the people of Bayfield, proud of their new town and confident of its future prosperity and prominence, celebrated the second anniversary of its founding "with a substantial picnic dinner" and a dance in the evening.

To enhance further the town's importance, they were successful in 1859 in having the La Pointe County seat transferred there from La Pointe.

The move backfired, however, for in response the citizens at Whittlesey and Bay City succeeded in having Ashland County established, encompassing not only the Apostle Islands but also about two-thirds of the area of La Pointe County.