

The founding of Bayfield: Part 3

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The "founding boom" of Bayfield abruptly ended with the national financial crisis of 1857. The decline of Bayfield is reflected in the June 1860 federal census, which showed a population of 353, a substantial decline from an estimate of "nearly 600 persons" in April 1857. During the 1860s Bayfield remained a viable community, supported by small-scale fishing, lumbering, and tourism. The 1865 State Census showed a population of 269 (143 males, 126 females) for La Pointe County. Most of these people undoubtedly lived in Bayfield, but there was no separate list for the settlement. Many years later, Delia Whittlesey Chapman reminisced about the town during this period. There was one sawmill, owned by Samuel S. Vaughn, who also owned a general merchandise store. There were shingle makers, coopers who made barrels for the fishermen, and blacksmiths who shod the village horses. Many tourists came to stay at Smith's Hotel and "lingered to eat our white fish and went away to praise it." After the Civil War, many famous people stayed at Smith's Hotel, among them Union General William T. Sherman, Confederate General Pierre



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G.T. Beauregard, and Mrs. Abraham Lincoln and son Robert. The Federal land office, Indian agent, and post office were located there. There was one physician, Dr. V. Smith, and a retired Presbyterian minister, J. Harvey Nourse, who taught school, preached sermons, and held Sunday school and prayer meetings. Father John Cebul attended to the needs of Catholic parishioners in Bayfield and La Pointe. Contact with the outside world was maintained in the summer by steamers which arrived regularly from Chicago and Buffalo, and in the winter by dog sled and Indian packer over primitive trails through the wilderness to the Mississippi river. During the Civil War men left in "twos and threes" to volunteer to defend the Union; while others sent substitutes which, she said, "seemed to me a very cowardly thing to do."

Undoubtedly the most exciting event of the Civil War period was the Indian uprising scare. The massacres by the Sioux in Minnesota in August 1862 spread panic among the settlers at

Bayfield, who feared that the Chippewa among whom they lived would follow suit. The Chippewa had no intention of attacking the whites, however, and were as frightened of the Sioux, their traditional enemies, as were the whites. Nevertheless, at the insistence of Governor Edward Salomon, a company of paroled Federal soldiers was sent to the settlement. They built a fort and whiled away the time for a year when they departed, there having been no Indian attack or the slightest danger of one for that matter. They left one of their number behind, a victim of an accidental shooting; one settler was also killed by a nervous guard.

William Knight, who was to become a prominent citizen of the Bayfield in later years, described the settlement upon his arrival there on December 24 1869: "On entering the clearing where the town was built, I can remember but three houses. One was opposite Dr. Merten's house, one on the corner below Stark's store, and two small houses on Broad

Street, down toward the depot. There was a small house where the bank stands and a small house across the street where the Pharmacy (Iverson's store) stands and over the door was a wooden sign lettered in black letters, 'S.S. Vaughn.' Below it was a sign on a smaller board with smaller letters, 'Post office.'

The Vaughn sign was about 8 inches wide and 3 feet long and the post office board about 2 feet. Both boards were nailed to the house over the door. This was the principle store of the town and sold groceries, shoes, dry goods, clothing and hardware. On this street north there were two or three houses and the same number south and a few scattered buildings along the south lake front with but little attention to street location. Up on the hill near the Roman Catholic Church there were some dwelling houses. In fact, about [almost] the whole town was on about six blocks on the flat and those blocks were long from being full. From memory, I can count but twenty families living in the city of Bayfield, and one family living on a farm outside, and that was Elisha Pike, father of R.D. Pike, living on the old homestead on Pike's Creek. Nearly all of these families were intelligent, well educated people from

the East and would be considered the best in any country. It is hardly possible for people who never lived in a community almost entirely cut off from the world to appreciate the friendship and mutual sympathy and kindness that binds them so closely together and to understand the sacrifices they will make for the community."