

Bayfield - Progress and Prosperity 2 178

Part 2

The leaders and investors in Bayfield had an expansive vision of the community's future, as described by Sam Fifield in June 1871. Bayfield, he declared, is "the best point on the lake for a railroad terminus;" already it was the lake terminus of two railroads, "and will, in all probability have a branch of the Northern Pacific." Its harbor was open on an average thirty-five days longer each year than Duluth or Superior, and it was 60 miles nearer New York by water and 70 miles nearer San Francisco by rail, than Chicago. Fifield concluded that "With these advantages and a fair chance in the race, it is expected of Bayfield, that in the years that are to come, she will become a city of commercial importance, second to none on the chain of the Great Lakes." Fifield's boasts about Bayfield's harbor at the expense of Superior and Duluth revived the old rivalry between them. The Superior Times replied immediately, belittling Bayfield's harbor as a "mere roadstead" exposed to the fury of wind and waves from the lake. The Press responded in turn by suggesting that the Times editor was in danger of being credited "a near rela-

tion to the long eared portion of the earth's population" because of his geographic ignorance, while describing the Duluth-Superior harbor as a "frog



Lars Larson CS 11/8/12

pond" more suited to "the sailing of birch-bark canoes" than as a "haven of safety."

Perhaps even more fanciful than Fifield's predictions about the future of Bayfield's harbor was his assertion that Bayfield was "the lake terminus of two railroads." This, of course, was without foundation. The railroads referred to—the Portage, Winnebago and Superior in the central region of the state and the St. Croix and Lake Superior in the west—were then a long ways away and their progress northward was continually being interrupted by economic, legal, and political factors.

A "Letter From Bayfield" to the Milwaukee Sentinel described what probably was the true situation in Bayfield in the fall of 1872. "Bayfield

is a small village of some seven hundred inhabitants" with "saw mills, stores and other outfits sufficient for a place of considerable business. . . . The fixing of the lake terminus of the

Wisconsin Central at Ashland has, however had a chilling influence upon this place. It has grown but little, if any, the past year, while the tide of emigration, business and excitement, sets in towards the new and rising city of Ashland. But the people here are not without hopes of railroad communications with Ashland, Duluth, St. Paul and the rest of world in some good time still coming." In June 1872 the Fifield brothers, no doubt having concluded that at least for the time being the "action" was to be in Ashland rather than Bayfield, moved their paper there. The last issue was published on June 15th with a curt note that "On account of our removal, this week's local is unavoidably small." There was no local coverage of events in Bayfield from June 1872 to June 1877, when Samuel Fifield re-established the Bayfield Press.

Eighteen seventy three opened with the dispatch of a posse of men under Sheriff Nelson Boutin and Robinson Pike to Ashland to deal with disorderly railroad workers, an event which

must have enlivened what was probably a dreary New Year's Day in both communities. Having had a taste of "military life" and perhaps to be prepared to deal with future trouble from the unruly elements among the population, a volunteer militia company was organized on February 5th. Named the Bayfield Rifles, the company was the pride of Bayfield, and was an important part of community life for many years.

Bad luck seemed to dog Bayfield, for on top of the loss of Wisconsin Central terminal and then of its newspaper, early in the morning of February 6th 1883 the wooden Bayfield County Courthouse, located on the corner of Broad Street and Manypenny (now Fant), was destroyed by fire. Then in March 1873 the Bayfield House, a hotel that the community depended for its summer tourist business, burnt down. But a May article about ongoing improvements in the village was hopeful nevertheless. "Bayfield," it declared, "has emerged from the long winter and comes out like a bright new butterfly this spring. Improvements are going on everywhere, and the bright gem of Lake Superior proposes to even outshine itself that season." A jewelry store and

restaurant were to be opened soon, the Bayfield House was being rebuilt, various homes and other buildings were being refurbished or added to, the sawmills were running and the fisheries were busy, and "the merchants seem to be doing a fair business, while the "Chagwamigon Light" and the "Raspberry Light" were in "full blaze nightly."