

Bayfield - Progress and Prosperity 4 ¹⁸⁰

Part 4

An article in the Bayfield Press in January 1883 assessing the improvements in the community during 1882 declared that "The Boom Has Struck." While no new industries or major businesses had been established, there had been "a general enlarging . . . of those already in existence." R.D. Pike had completely rebuilt his mill, installing the latest machinery, some of his own invention, and increasing capacity from 30,000 to 50,000 board feet per day, with a view to further enlargement of capacity. The dock facilities for the mill were also substantially extended. Samuel S. Vaughn had enlarged his dock and warehouse facilities; and was constructing a new hotel which, in the words of the Press, "will be an ornament to the place and prove of lasting benefit to her citizens." (Vaughn had closed down his sawmill earlier.) Boutin and Mahan had erected a "large and commodious dock" at the foot of Washington Avenue; a warehouse with a capacity of 500 tons; and a "large double store and numerous buildings." These improvements, plus additions to or construction of residences, retail business,

amounted to \$106,000 for the year. Finally, a long Press article in early February 1883, reported on Bayfield's fisheries—Frank Bou-



Lars Larson 11/21/12

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

tin, Boutin and Mahan, and Fred Fisher. These firms, plus one small operator, handled 1,973,756 pounds of fish, all except 77,000 pounds sold in Bayfield were shipped to major midwest cities and Ashland. The total expenditures for the year of the three major firms was \$69,279.

This so-called "boom," a dramatic increase in the prosperity of the community, was based on the assumption that Bayfield would become a major Great Lakes port because it would be an important railroad terminal. When Henry Rice purchased the Bayfield site charters had been granted for several railroads to Lake Superior, including one

in 1854 that provided for a road to St. Louis Bay—that is to Superior—with a branch running to some point at, or near, La Pointe.

To insure that the railroad would be built to Bayfield, Rice had inserted in the land grant bill authorizing the construc-

tion of a line to the western end of Lake Superior—that is to Superior—the words "and to Bayfield." The federal land office interpreted this to mean a continuous line from St. Croix on the Mississippi River to Superior and then to Bayfield, and not two roads from St. Croix, one to Superior and one to Bayfield. The continuous line from Superior was necessary if Bayfield was to become a major port, for at the "western end of Lake Superior," that is at Superior, the line to Bayfield would connect with the railroad from St. Paul and other Minnesota railroads, and with the transcontinental railroad.

But the leading citizens of Superior did not share Rice's vision of Bayfield as a great port competing with or surpassing their city. The line from Superior to Bayfield was referred to as a "branch line," "a valuable auxiliary to the main trunk." This concept of the auxiliary role of the line to Bayfield, and by implication the subordinate position of

Bayfield to Superior, aroused the wrath of Bayfield partisans. In late February 1857, a long letter from one "Hatterstax" of Bayfield was published in a St. Paul paper. The key question, according to "Hatterstax," was whether "the road be built to Superior, and thence to Bayfield, or will it branch at some intermediate point, and separate roads run to each." The preferred route was the former one, for Bayfield would then "become the terminus, and Superior but a way station; all the travel would stop here, and only pass through Superior." But if the road is "forked at some point on the St. Croix," Bayfield would still have an advantage in that passengers and freight could be transported directly to St. Paul in less than the time required for a steamer to go from Bayfield to Superior. Since this latter route would probably be selected by the railroad company, Bayfield would itself build the line to Superior to connect with the one from Hudson.

The reason trade from west of Superior would be transported by rail to Bayfield for lake shipment, "Hatterstax" continued, was that Superior's harbor was not accessible at night or during storms, and was shallow—indeed,

"is not considered as a harbor by masters of vessels." While Superior is "shut in by sand bars" and people are mired "to the knees in clay" on the streets, Bayfield was growing rapidly and preparing for its destiny as a "future city." Soon "every newspaper in the country, shall sing out that 'Bayfield possesses a better site! a better harbor! and greater advantages for a commercial city than any other point in the Northwest!'"