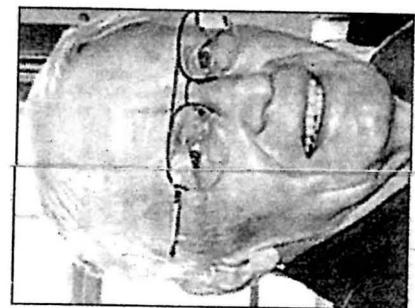


“The six-pound field-piece brought over from Bayfield by a delegation of prominent citizens thundered forth a salute that sent its echoes vibrating through surrounding forests and across the waters, heralding the tidings of great joy to all people who inhabit the shores of Chequamegon Bay.”

— The Ashland Weekly Press,

Upon the arrival of the first Wisconsin Central train at Ashland on June 7, 1877

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Old Brass Cannon, the 'historic relic,' wound up as scrap

Undoubtedly the most exciting — and in some ways, amusing — event of the Civil War period was the Indian uprising scare. The massacres by the Sioux in Minnesota in August 1862 spread panic throughout the settlers at Bayfield, who feared 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 Henry M. Rice, a company of 65 federal soldiers along with a small brass cannon were sent to Bayfield to keep the peace.

These soldiers had been paroled — that is, released — from a notorious Confederate prison with the understanding that they would not serve in the war again.

A warehouse located at the lake side of Broad Street served as a barracks for the soldiers. A log fort was erected on the corner, occupied by the residence of William Knight. No occasion to use the fort for defensive purposes ever arose, however, and it was eventually converted to a slaughter house.

The soldiers put out a paper called The Republican, in which reports from men fighting in the war were published.

One soldier wrote: “It must be apparent to any thinking mind that when the war closes, the destinies of our Republic will rest with the private soldiers of our noble army. Then let us ask, are we competent to undertake the task? We drill day after day, and week after week, that we may be confident in the day of battle. Shall we not then use some of our leisure moments in preparing for the great battle of Civil Life?”

The soldiers were withdrawn from Bayfield in 1863, leaving behind one of their own, Private Andrew McConnell of Company E, 30th Regiment of the Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry, who died on July 29, 1863, as a result of an accidental gunshot and was buried in Greenwood Cemetery.

They also left behind a brass cannon “six-pounder,” referring to the weight of the shot the cannon could fire.

The cannon was declared to be worthless and was more or less abandoned along with its ammunitions, apparently on the boulevard in front of the old courthouse. It remained there undisturbed until one Fourth of July, “Patriotism overcame several Civil War veterans, who celebrated the day by firing off all the ammunition.”

For many years the old cannon served in a noisy ceremonial role: “Its resounding boom at sunrise ushered in the glorious Fourth of July; on numerous occasions its thundering tones

spread the tidings of political victories and defeats; still again, its deafening reports brought joy to local enthusiasts when our high school students demonstrated in joint debate with the Washburn high school that the removal of the county seat was unwise and detrimental to the county.”

On the occasion of Gen. Sherman’s visit to Bayfield a number of years after the Civil war, it was mounted on the dock, ready to salute the hero of the famous march through Georgia.

On the more solemn occasion of the death of Gen. Grant it was fired off at regular intervals during the time of the funeral, “thus fittingly paying tribute to the memory of this great soldier and statesman,” wrote Lila Stark in an article about the old cannon, published by the Bayfield County Press, July 2, 1909.

Perhaps the most memorable occasion in which the old cannon participated was the arrival of the first Wisconsin Central train at Ashland on June 7, 1877, the Ashland Weekly Press reporting that “the six-pound field-piece brought over from Bayfield by a delegation of prominent citizens thundered forth a salute that sent its echoes vibrating through surrounding forests and across the waters, heralding the tidings of great joy to all people who inhabit the shores of Chequamegon Bay.”

Regrettably, the contributions of the cannon to this and many other ceremonial events in the history of Chequamegon Bay could not save it.

Lila Stark stated in her article, “It lies in a scrap heap at the rear of the Court House — a temptation to a vender of scraps to make disposal of it as an article of junk.”

She appealed to “public sentiment” to preserve the “historic relic,” but to no avail. The old brass cannon finally disappeared without notice, apparently the victim of a “vender of scrap.”