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# The boom, bust of population in Chequamegon Bay area

The Chequamegon Bay area had been sparsely and intermittently populated by the Indian tribes from time immemorial.

When the Jesuit priest, Claude Jean Allouez, arrived at the bay in the fall of 1665, he found peoples from seven different tribes, with about 800 warriors living around the bay.

The first permanent, if precarious, European settlement on the bay was La Pointe, on the southwestern tip of Madeline Island, founded in 1695. There is no information on the number of people — fur traders, fishermen and Indians — who lived there at the time, but they probably did not number more than a hundred or so.

The sequence of “boom and bust” — mostly “bust” — after the Civil War is reflected in population figures in the federal censuses from 1870 to 1980.

The first census in 1870 showed 221 people living in Ashland County and 334 in Bayfield County. From 1870 to 1885, as the great lumbering boom began, the population around the bay exploded, the number of people in the Town of Ashland increasing to 4,844 and in the Town of Bayfield to 1,409.

Rapid population growth continued in the 1890s and by 1900 there were 13,074 people in the City of Ashland and 1,689 in the Village of Bayfield, with 262 in the Town of La Pointe, most of them in the Village of La Pointe.

Ashland’s peak population was 13,074 in 1900, declining unevenly thereafter to 9,115 in 1980, or to 70 percent of its peak population.

Bayfield’s village highest census population was 1,689 in 1900, declining to 778 in 1980, or to 46 percent of its peak population.

Washburn, established in 1883, had a census population of 741 in 1885, composed of 499 males and 242 females — more than twice as many males as females.

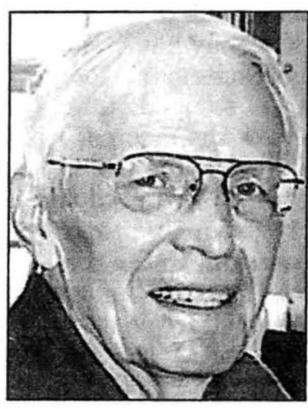
It was a multinational population, with 405, or 55 percent, native born, and 336, or 45 percent, born in foreign countries.

Of the foreign born, 38 percent were born in Canada and 365 in Scandinavia, with the remainder born in Germany, Great Britain, Ireland and other European countries.

By 1890 Washburn’s population had increased to 3,039, and by 1895 to 5,178, its peak population during the lumbering boom. Of this population of 5,178, 61 percent were males, with 52 percent foreign born, most of them in Canada, Norway and Sweden.

By 1905, reflecting the decline of the lumbering boom, the population had decreased to 4,924, composed of 55 percent males, with 37 percent foreign born.

Except during the boom years of World War I, when the population increased to around 6,000 in 1917 and 1918, due to the influx of workers for the DuPont explosives plant, Washburn’s population continued to decline from 3,707 in 1920 to 2,363 in 1940, and to 1,896 in 1960, with small increases to 1,957 in 1970, and 2,080 in 1980. The population in the last census in 2010 was 2,117, with 49 percent males and 51 percent females.



**Lars Larson**

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