

HAMPTON'S DESCRIPTION REPRINTED

Editor's Note:

History is best written by one who saw it happen and then had time to evaluate it. The following history of Petoskey is taken from The Independent Democrat of May 14, 1895. It was written by a trained newspaperman who lived in the area from 1878 on. C. S. Hampton, editor of The Independent Democrat, had personal acquaintance with the early settlers, the files of the early newspapers, and his own experience to call on. The article is probably the most accurate portrayal of Petoskey's early days.

Petoskey, as everybody knows, takes its name from Neyas Petosega, alias Ignatius Petoskey, commonly called Chief Petoskey, the original owner of the land upon which the city now stands. The site was known to navigators and traders as Bear River, the name of the rapid and rollicking stream that used to leap and tumble through a deep gorge shaded by lofty hemlocks and tangled cedars, falling 70 feet in a distance of half a mile.

It was upon a thickly wooded hill not far from the west bank of this stream that the first white man's house was built in 1852. Andrew Porter, missionary in the employ of the Presbyterian Board of Missions, brought the lumber upon a little vessel, and finally succeeded in getting the materials up the hill and through the unbroken forest, and put up the old mission house on the place now occupied by Alderman Jarman, of the third ward.

Here he conducted a mission until the government funds set apart for the purpose were exhausted in 1871. In 1876 Mr. Porter returned to his old home in Pennsylvania but in 1892 he came back to Petoskey to make his home with his son, Dr. Porter, and end his days where his life work was accomplished.

A Catholic mission was established at Bear River soon after Mr. Porter's school was started, the little mission church still standing on the beach near the Chicago and West Michigan railroad dock.

Hazen Ingalls, the first permanent white settler, came in May 1863 to make Bear River his home. He bought the little water mill which was built by a nephew of Mr. Porter in 1862 upon the site now occupied by Birkett Brothers' manufacturing plant (now Mitchell Dam) and purchased by H. O. Rose the same year and moved his family into a little house that stood on the river bank just where Charlevoix Avenue turns south.

His little trading store was the first place of business on the south side of Little Traverse Bay.

In 1873 the families of Mr. Porter and Mr. Ingalls were the only white families on this side of the bay. In anticipation of the completion of the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad, the advance guard of civilization began to arrive in the summer of that year.

In June, Amos Fox and Hiram O. Rose, constituting the firm of Fox & Rose, who had long done business in Northport and Charlevoix, lightered a small stock of goods ashore at the mouth of the river and opened the first store in an Indian's log cabin. A little later the first building erected by a white man in the future metropolis of the north was put up by George I. Smith, known to pioneers as "Pa Smith." It was located near the foot of Howard Street and was called "The Union Hotel" but was only a little board shanty which was afterwards found rather too small for a wood house for an ordinary family.

In the fall of the year Fox & Rose began a store building. The rails were laid into town in October, 1873, and November 1 Dr. Little and family arrived by rail. Dr. Little raised the frame of the "Rose House" which afterward became the Occidental.

And now the history of Petoskey begins. Soon after the hotel was completed, the post office at Bear Creek was discontinued and the mail carried across the river and turned over to Dr. Little who had just received his commission as the postmaster of the new post office, "Petoskey." John I. Shaw, the Grand Rapids capitalist, and Archibald McMillan, a railroad contractor, had platted a town in 1873 but it was not recorded. The original village plat was made by H. O. Rose in 1874 and McMillan's plat was recorded later as an addition.

Trains began running regularly late in the spring and in the early summer Fox & Rose built the first dock.

D. J. Cushman came up from Otsego and built the two-story structure which has grown into the spacious Cushman House.

The first railroad agent who came in the spring of 1874 did not fill the bill and a little later a wide-awake, freckled-faced lad was sent up in his place and for a long time he did the entire business: freight, ticket and telegraphing. He is still the G. R. & I. agent at Petoskey but he has a large corps of assistants and there are neither freckles nor flies on him now. (The writer referred to M. F. Quaintance.)

Among others who settled in Petoskey in 1874 were O. D. Tracy, H. G. Wait, Charles Carmichael, Austin Bunnell, Lute C. Watson and James Buckley.

In beginning its 10th volume in 1881, the Petoskey Democrat gave the following picture of the county and village as they were 20 years ago.

(At the time the following was written, Rozelle Rose was publisher of the Democrat.)

"With this issue, the Democrat enters upon the tenth year of its existence. Nine years ago it was cast upon the sea of journalism; for nine years it has watched with pride the growth and the development of Emmet County and the surrounding country.

"At the time of its birth, the entire white population of the county could not exceed 150 souls within its borders. Of these about 125 were located here in this village; two families at Cross Village, one at Brutus and the balance at Little Traverse.

"Now we would be glad if we could picture to our readers the appearance of the village. Not a street graded, stumps and logs pushed aside far enough to admit a team passing along with care. Not a rod of sidewalk in the village, not a lot fenced in and nearly all the houses standing upon pegs, devoid of paint or chimneys, with the lights shining through the cracks when lamps were lighted in the evening.

"On Lake Street, the building furthest west was the one occupied by Buckley and Daggett. To the east was the one used by H. G. Wait, opposite of Smith's barn. No building was to the east of that.

"On Mitchell Street not a building west of the railroad except a half-roof shed that stood near where the bank now stands. To the eastward one could throw a stone from the railroad almost to the furthest house or building.

“No regard was paid to street by teams or foot passengers, for all went the nearest possible way to reach the desired point. The entire village was simply a few straggling, scattered shanties, that to be dignified by the name of a village would almost be a libel upon the name.”

Since that time the growth of Petoskey has been steady and constant. There has been no fictitious boom but during the whole 20 years the onward progress of the place has never for a day been interrupted.

Petoskey is now (1895) an incorporated city of upwards of 4,000 inhabitants.

All of the principal business and residence streets have been graded and boulevarded, and good broad walks, lined with shade trees and bordered by well-kept lawns, extend to the remotest outskirts.

The water works plant is the best of any city of its size in the Union. A large and convenient building contains all the office and machinery with the superintendent's residence above.

There is a complete and perfect steam plant, including pumps that will throw a thousand gallons a minute ready for emergency and two sets of pumps driven by water power, with no extra expense except the grease for the journals, used for ordinary purposes.

There are several miles of water mains and a reservoir, which is kept constantly full on the highest point of land, 270 feet above the bay. An artesian well furnishes clear, pure water and another well can be connected in a moment if a conflagration should demand an increased supply.

A well-equipped fire department has repeatedly proved its efficiency and with the tremendous pressure and inexhaustible water supply, a sweeping fire is impossible.

All of the business portion and several of the residence streets have sewers and the sewer system has been planned so as to cover the entire city as necessity requires it.

The streets and parks are lighted with arc lights and the business places and many of the residences with incandescent electric lights. The telephone exchange is large and well-conducted and arrangements are now being made to connect Northern Michigan with the long distance exchange at Grand Rapids. In the meantime two telegraph companies afford more than usual facilities for communication.

The Grand Rapids and Indiana between Mackinaw and Richmond and the Chicago and West Michigan between Petoskey and Grand Rapids, each of which is part of the great trunk system, afford excellent facilities for transportation by rail, while the most magnificent steamers on the lakes afford daily communication both ways by water.

Work is just being begun on the new government breakwater which will increase the commercial importance of this place.

The manufacturing interests have grown to important proportions and the river banks are lined with factories where whirring wheels are driven by the harnessed steam. The unbroken forests of 20 years ago have given way to fertile fields and well-tilled farms, which contribute largely to Petoskey's progress.