

Original, Full Text: "Beautiful Isles of the Chequamegon"
By Sam Fifield, Editor, Ashland Weekly Press
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"Along the south shore of the Great Northern Sea, the scenery, while of entirely different mold, is no less interesting and pleasing than that of the bold shores of the north. From Duluth to the Sault Ste. Marie, there is a great variety; from the peaceful isles of Chequamegon to the rugged cliffs of the Pictured Rocks. There are wild mountain ranges with their wealth of minerals, that fade away into the gray haze of the northern sky, as they roll inland to the height of the watershed. They are crowned with dense forests through which wind crystal streams and brooks, and the song of the waterfall keeps time with the beating waves and the sighing winds. It is a wonderful panorama that unrolls as one sails along the green shores, with their beautiful bays and inlets - nature's flower-decked parks, swept and trimmed by the summer gales'.

But of all the charming spots that gladdens the eye and heart, there are none that equal the magical islands of the Apostle group. How lovely they are, reflecting their brilliant foliage in the glistening waters that kiss their brownstone shores! A cruise among them for a few days even, and one becomes enchanted with their romantic beauty. And then there is such a variety in their wonderful formation that one never tires of their society. They seem to welcome one with their sheltering arms, safe harbors in all weather for all craft that visit them.

Almost every island has its own peculiarity, its bit of romance or its own curiosity to exhibit. Sailing among them they bear a considerable likeness to each other, but close inspection dissolves the illusion, for they differ very materially. They are mostly rock-bottomed, their foundations being old Potsdam sandstone, of the age of trilobites, which geologists claim to be the first evidence of life on the globe. If their theory be correct, then our isles are as old as life itself in any form, in this great mysterious world of ours. In these sandstone layers there are wonderful caverns shaped by the ceaseless waves that, during centuries, have carved them into magnificent grottoes and halls, connected and supported by grand arches and columns, requiring but a slight stretch of the imagination to transform into the ruins of some of the grand old cathedrals of the old world. Some of these "Nature pictures" are grand beyond conception, especially the group along the northeast face of Devil Island, the outer sentinel to the north, where a bright light at night guides the sailor on his way.

This island from its exposed position receives the full force of the sea when the Storm King reigns, hence to a greater extent than the others of the group its rocky base is honeycombed into these wonderful forms. Here, with a small boat, one can, when the sea is calm, row hundreds of feet under the island, passing through vaulted chambers, supported by numerous pillars and arches, fine specimens of

Nature's masonry, lighted by circular and gothic windows cut through walls of variegated stone. Truly some of the carved columns it is hard to believe Nature's work, so much do they resemble the work of man.

Devil's Island is owned by Uncle Sam and is reserved as a light house station. On the north end, a temporary tower has been erected containing alight of the fourth order. Two steam fog horns are in position for service, one always being held in reserve. A fine, substantial brick residence shelters the lightkeeper and his family, which includes two stalwart assistants. On the southwest side and near the south end of the island nearly a mile distant, is the life boat station, a trail through the woods from the lighthouse leading to it.

During severe gales, the spray from the surging sea among the rocks below dashes over the tower, and at no point on the great lake can a grander view be had of a storm at sea. The island then resembles a leviathan ship, around which the sea rushes with terrific force, sending its foaming spray high into the air with an almost deafening roar, as though the world's artillery was engaged in a terrible battle beneath and around it.

“Four miles southeast of Devil's Island lies Rice's Island, its nearest neighbor. It is low, irregular and heavily wooded, extending from N.E. to S.W., four miles in length, an angle in the center forming a safe harbor on the southeast short. The extreme southwest point is a long sand and gravel reef, dropping into deep water a quarter of a mile from its base. The harbor is one of the most important fishing stations of the Booth Packing Company. There is a dock and warehouse, while scattered along the sandy beach is a number of rustic huts, the homes of the fishermen. This station is occupied all the year round, in winter by gillnetters, who fish on the outside reefs, using dog teams with which to haul in their catch.

Rice's Island is named after the late ex-United States Senator, Henry M. Rice of Minnesota, who purchased it years ago from the Government and to whose estate it still belongs.

It is designated on the charts as “Rocky Island.” The soil is very poor, though there is a good spot on the east end where Mr. Rice had a clearing made in 1858, with a view to planting fruit trees, but the enterprise was soon after abandoned.

Close by Rice's, which shelters it from the north and west is Willey's Island, named after the Senator's lifelong friend, Dr. Samuel Willey, who died at Bayfield in 1872. Dr. Willey entered the island at the Government land office at the same time Senator Rice did and had it improved by clearing up a small farm. It was occupied and tilled by the veteran fisherman, John Smith, whose son, born on the island still lives nearby on Rice's, following his father's calling.

The farm was deserted years ago and Nature has covered it with a forest of "second growth." The soil is excellent for small fruits and vegetables and there is just enough of it, about four hundred acres, to make a good farm. It is heavily timbered with hard and soft woods and well sheltered from the storms, having an excellent harbor on the northwest side.

Willey's Island is called "South Twin" on the government charts but all our state maps designate these two as Rice's and Willey's and one seldom hears them spoken of in any other way and generally coupled together as "Rice and Willey's."

Northeast of Willey and distant four miles is "North Twin" a low flat piece of sandstone, covered with a coarse sand-gravel soil upon which is a thick growth of balsam, cedar, white birch and poplar, with now and then a ragged knurly hemlock, bent and twisted by the storms of many years.

This island has but few attractions, though its northern point, storm beaten and bleak, forms an interesting and rugged rock picture. It is sort of a halfway mark between Devil and Outer Island lights. Its isolation is such that it is seldom visited.

"East of North Twin and on a parallel north line with Devil's Island is the third largest of the group, Outer Island. Here, upon its extreme northern point is located the finest lighthouse on the upper lake. It is a round brick tower painted snow white, 78 feet high, which with land elevation, places the light 130 feet above the lake level. The light is a white flash of the third order and in clear weather, is frequently seen at Grand Marais 47 mile away on the north shore. At the base of the tower and connected with it by a covered way is the red brick dwelling of the keepers, a neat and tasty building.

Five hundred feet west of the tower the fog whistles are located, one of which is never silent when it is foggy weather, for this is a rough and dangerous coast with reefs of glacial boulders which line the northern and western shores. The elevation of the bank at the light house is 52 feet from the water level and this is reached from the dock below by two separate flights of stairs containing over 100 steps each.

The dock is a solid crib, facing northeast and carries but four feet of water. There is a lifeboat house and a warehouse at the landing. Seen from the lake the tower and its cluster of buildings present a beautiful picture.

Outer Island differs from its associates in being almost entirely free from sandstone outcroppings, its banks being chiefly boulders and gravel supporting from thirty to fifty feet of red clay. The surface is a deep alluvial soil covered with a very heavy growth of sugar maple, birch and hemlock. There is, on the southwest end a small grove of Norway pine and a few small groves of white pine are to be found on the east side. The island contains about 15 sections of land, all fair farming land, capable of raising all kinds of root crops and grasses. If

cleared of its timber, it would make a fine dairy country; in fact, would support a good sized colony of farmers.

One drawback is the fact that there is no good harbor on the island, though one might be made by building a small breakwater in the little sandy bay at the south end, where a long reef extended southwest affords some natural protection from northeast gales. Outer Island is the nearest land on our coast to the North Shore and the sailor crossing, overlays his course for its friendly beacon, which is also hailed with delight by the crew of every storm-tossed vessel, seeking refuge among the Apostles.

Immediately west and five miles away is Cat or Hemlock Island, laying northwest by southeast four miles in length by about one mile in width. Unlike its neighbor, its shores are of solid stone, the northeast exposure being largely undermined with caverns, many of which are wonderful.

Twenty three years ago, the largest cave known among the islands was one of this cluster, but the entire roof fell in during a terrible gale in September 1873, and since then, the waves have beaten it into a shapeless mass of rocks.

The writer of this article visited this cave in 1870 with a party of jovial companions on board the yacht "Minnie V" which sailed into it and tied up at "Table Rock" upon which all landed and partook of a fine picnic dinner. This rock was located in the center of the cave and was a solid round islet. At that time there was a circular cone in the roof of the chamber about twenty-five feet in diameter, through which a hemlock tree, fully twenty inches through was growing, the roots of which were embedded in the seams of the little island. The cave proper was about 50 x 90 by 40 feet high. There was plenty of room for the little steamer and the scene of that strange picnic with its romantic surroundings will always remain a vivid one.

The soil of Hemlock Island is cold and poor. It is covered with a dense hemlock forest scattered through which is some white pine of poor quality. Near the northwest end there is a small sand bay, which affords a fair shelter in a northeaster, and at the south end a sand spit runs for a quarter of a mile in a half circle forming a basin, the shore of which is lined with a beautiful grove of Norway. On the bank of this little harbor, beneath the shadows of the pines, is nestled a lonely cabin, the home of a fisherman - the only sign of life.

"Directly west of Hemlock (Island) lies a group of three very pretty islands, viz: Ironwood, Otter and Manitou. This group is separated by deep channels from one to one and a half miles wide. They are heavily wooded and possess a good soil. They are all well protected from the sea and in time will be settled. One of these, Otter, better known by the local name of Hardwood, is nearly round, and

contains about 1,000 acres; the soil is rich and covered mainly with hardwood through which is scattered groves of "sugar pine."

Manitou is a rather low island, its shores being mostly of hardpan and gravel, though there are some sandstone exposures on the northwest side. This island lies northeast by southwest and on the southwest presents one of the greatest curiosities of the south shore, "The Little Devil." This strange formation is composed of clay and hardpan, resting upon sandstone boulders rising to a height of sixty feet above the sea at the end of a rocky reef, extending nearly across the channel which separates it from its parent island. Though exposed to the fury of the elements for ages, it stands like a giant sentinel, guarding the reach before it. In length it is probably 500 feet, in width not over 150 at its base and 20 at its top in its widest place. Its crest is crowned on the north end and center with a few scattered evergreens, with two or three weather-beaten hemlock trunks, and on the south end by a series of hardpan cones, which afford an excellent rookery, for one of the two great families of gulls which rear their young on this coast. Seen from a distance, this remarkable islet greatly resembles a modern battleship with powerful ram and monitor cased batteries. On a bright sunny day, the illusion is complete.

South by east of the last named triplet lies Presque Island, the second in size and the queen of them all. This beautiful island derives its name from a narrow peninsula extending south from the main body a mile and ending in a circular knob, "nearly an island" or in the French "pres-qu'ile". The government chart calls it Stockton Island, but it is never spoken of locally except by its old French voyageur title. The island contains upward of half a township; is heavily wooded, mostly with hemlock and pine. There is a fine maple and birch grove on the west end and a large cedar swamp and cranberry marsh in the center of the south tier of sections.

The island lays almost east and west, is about eight miles in length by an average of three miles in width. There are three excellent harbors, two on the south side and one east of the "knob." All are deep sandy bays, affording good anchorage and ample shelter. Presque Isle is founded on a rock and a good solid foundation it is, too.

At the southwest corner of the main island is located the quarry of the Ashland Brownstone Company, one of the leading quarries on Lake Superior. Here, half way up the side of a steep brownstone bluff, which rises 90 feet in height, the works are located, surrounded by quite a village, all belonging to and a part of the plant. The company has put in a breakwater affording a safe harbor for their tugs and scows and extensive stone docks lined with steam derricks and tramways give them every facility for handling their product. The stone is the same as is quarried at other locations among the islands and on the main land, of

excellent color and quality. The south side of the island is quite low, near the center a mere strip of sand beach, back of which lies the big swamp, half a mile wide and over a mile long. From the north side of the swamp, the land gradually rises to an elevation of from 40 to 50 feet. The peninsula is a narrow neck of sand covered with scrub pine and blueberry bushes. The knob is a pile of broken sand rock, crowned with a thick growth of balsams, white birch and poplar.

The bays are famous fishing grounds, both for netting and bobbing, and there is always a colony of fishermen on the island, winter and summer. The north shore of the island is a high steep bank of clay with gravel and frequent outcroppings of sandstone. It is a bold shore devoid of reefs and with but one small bay near the west end.

But it is the east and northeast end of grand Presque Isle that gives it prominence. Here is a most wonderful collection of natural curiosities. For nearly four miles the shore presents a high wall of solid brownstone cut and carved into fantastic shapes with caves and grottoes, arches and columns, and wide riffs into which the sea rushes like a maelstrom during stormy weather; the roar of which can be heard miles away. No pen can describe this wonderful scenery, it is simply grand and beautiful.

There are many prominent features such as "Lobster Point", a great arm of sandstone shaped like a lobster's claw: "Trip-hammer Point", an immense brownstone trip-hammer; "Silver Cascade", a very pretty feathery waterfall in a moss covered dell bordered with evergreens; "Lone Rock", a beautifully molded islet nestled in a charming little cove: "The Sphinx", a wonderful stone photograph of the Egyptian original: "The Anvil" and the "Hammer of Thor" which guards the entrance to "Split Rock", a deep chasm 190 feet deep with perpendicular walls 50 feet high into which a good sized yacht can be run and completely hidden; together with hundreds of beautiful points all of great interest to visitors

This upheaval of sandstone is undoubtedly the greatest on the south shore; certainly, the most interesting. One has not seen the "Wonderland" of the islands if Presque Isle has been passed by.

"Southeast of Presque Isle lies Michigan Island with its satellite, Gull Island, the home of the second family of our graceful sea birds. Michigan Island light is one of the oldest stations on the upper lake; is a fixed white light of the three and a half order, visible for twenty miles. The tower is of the old fashioned round white style such as are often seen on the north Atlantic coast, built of stone and brick with a one story stone cottage at its base. The south end of the island upon which the light is located is a bold headland 85 feet above the sea, which with the tower, 44 feet in height, gives the lantern an elevation of 129 feet. At the base of the bluff, reached by a flight of stairs containing 99 steps is a plank walk leading

to the life boat house. The light is the coast guide to Chewamic point via the south channel.

Michigan Island is three miles long and a mile wide, with deep clay soil covered with a mixed growth of timber. It is a pretty island with clean sand beach shores. In 1867, Mr. Pendergast, then lightkeeper, started a nursery near the tower and was quite successful with apples, plums and cherries, as well as small fruits. When he resigned in 1873, the nursery was distributed among his friends at Bayfield and Ashland and nothing now remains of his once beautiful garden except a few scattered cherry trees.

Gull Island lies northeast of Michigan, to which it is connected by a long rocky reef, over which there is seldom but little water. The island is a huge gravel drift thrown up by the sea. About two acres of it is covered with a stunted growth of mountain ash and willows. There is a low marsh in the center, containing a thick growth of wire grass. Most of the island is a coarse gravel bed, though on the south end there is a bunch of red clay covered with scraggy bushes. The island is an immense rookery and here every year thousands of young gulls are reared. It is a great sight to witness the flight of these birds when disturbed. They rise in a cloud containing many hundreds and their plaintive cries can be heard a long distance from the shore. The island is sometimes occupied by fishermen who feed the gulls from their cleaning tables. They become quite tame under these circumstances, especially the young ones. Near the center of the east side there is a lonely hut and a few abandoned net reels. If it were not for the gulls, there would be little of interest attached to this barren and worthless spot.

Taking Devil's Island as our starting point, we have now described the northeastern part of the group, which is much more numerous than the original twelve, containing double the number. How they received the name they bear is not recorded, but perhaps the early missionaries wishing to give them a pious turn, dubbed them the "Twelve Apostles." Investigation shows that Jonathan Carver was the first to give them their title in print, recording them in his book of early travels in the northwest as "Twelve Apostles."

Again, taking Devil's Island as a guide, we run southeast four miles and enter a beautiful bay on the east side of Bear Island, one of the most imposing and interesting on the western side of the archipelago. It is nearly round, laying north and south, a high ridge running through the center attaining an elevation of 200 feet near the north end. It is three miles long and two wide, and with the exception of a lonely, deserted clearing on the west side is covered with a forest of hemlock and pine. The entire west side is a high clay drift, the banks steep with many boulders at their base. The East side is lined with a brownstone ledge 25 feet high, cut and carved into many curious features by the rolling seas from the north and northeast to which it is fully exposed.

“Pipestem Bay”, the bay mentioned, is in nearly the center of the east coast line and has been cut out of this stone wall, in fact it has been beaten back inland by the great storms of the past centuries until it forms a beautiful circular basin half a mile across, which has in turn been filled with great drifts of white and amber sand, washed and separated into different grades, from grains the size of peas to drifts almost as fine as flour. There is also on the north end of this little bay a small drift of white and amber colored gravel, some of the stones of which are clear and quite brilliant.

Another curiosity is a great brownstone bathtub filled with water three feet deep. This is kept constantly fresh through a wave-worn channel running into the lake. The stone is an immense flat layer of rather soft sandstone, which the sea has gradually hollowed out to its own level, leaving a hardened rim which forms the tub. It is fully 50 feet long and 20 feet wide.

The sandstone along the south shore of the bay is worthless for quarrying, as it is of many colors, much of it laminated and all more or less filled with gravel stones and agates. There is some that might be used on the extreme north end of the island, but it has broken into great blocks which have tumbled into the sea in a chaotic mass.

On the extreme south end of the island, a sand spit runs out several hundred feet, fringed with Norway pine and water maples. It is an ideal camp ground with good protection on each side. It is known as “The Bear’s Tail.”

“Seven miles southwest of the head of Bear Island is Sand Island Light, a fixed white light of the fourth order, on the extreme northern point of Sand Island. This light is the guide to the northwest channel from the open sea. Outer Island light bears on Devil’s Island light and Devil on Sand Island light, thus marking the outside course around the islands.

This lighthouse is modern in style and consists of an octagon tower 37 feet high attached to a story and a half dwelling, all built of variegated sandstone, quarried from the rocky point upon which it stands. The site and building is one of the beauty spots on our coast. From the tower, the view is indeed grand, the great sea stretching away to the north and west where the blue outline of the north shore can be seen from thirty to thirty seven miles distant. East and Southeast lie the islands spread out in a beautiful panorama, their green shores casting shadows upon the clear channels which surround them, forming a most interesting and charming picture. As the light is on the main course for all the craft which sail the lake, there is a grand procession of them constantly passing. On a bright summer day one can find no more beautiful spot from which to lazily watch the ships pass by.

Sand Island possesses many treasure in the way of natural art. On the extreme western point is "Grand Arch" a most wonderful structure. It has been photographed and painted by artists of high and low degree and is quite familiar. Bierstadt, the great American landscape painter, who visited the islands in 1878, was so pleased with it that he sketched it and afterward formed the subject of one of his little landscape gems.

The west side also possesses the largest and most perfect cave, known as "Trout Cave," to be found among the islands. This cave is entered through three circular openings rising out of the sea, just large enough to admit a small boat. Within the chamber expands into magnificent proportions, the vaulted roof being fully thirty feet above the water. It is lighted through an oblong window high up one side and in the center, one can stand on a miniature island of stone and cast a line into the dark pools after the gamey brook trout which in the months of July and August, are frequently taken there.

On the west shore there are two excellent harbors, one near the lighthouse, where there is a good substantial pier, behind which is kept the government life boat, and the other at O'Malley's bay. Both afford good protection from the north and northeast. On the east side there are also two good arbors for all except northeasters, one at Justice's bay and one at Eat bay. These two beautiful harbors are separated by a long peninsula of solid sandstone rising to a height of 35 feet, the northeast exposure of which contains many beautiful caverns. In East bay is perhaps the most wonderful piece of natural rock work to be found on the coast, "Temple Gate". This structure rises out of the water 35 feet high in the form of an arch, through the center of which extends a cross piece of stone. The sides are irregular columns of masonry laid up in courses and supporting the arch which forms the top and is composed of several layers of soft variegated stone in the crevices of which a few balsam and spruce bushes seem to thrive. To crown the whole on the top nearly over the center of the arch, the bleak and bark less trunk of a pine tree, fully 30 feet in length, stands as a signal staff.

There is a settlement of Swede and Norwegian fishermen-farmers on East bay which bids fair to increase the numbers and prosperity for Sand Island contains much rich soil for farming which only needs clearing and improvement.

On the south side of the island there is an excellent harbor at Shaw's Landing, upon which is located "Camp Stella" where for the past 15 years, the white tents have been pitched and a happy party have enjoyed their outing every August. Capt. Frank Shaw has a good snug farm at this point where he has been for the past twenty years engaged in fishing and farming. The nearness of Sand Island to the mainland makes it more desirable for settlement than any of the other islands

and it is justly a favorite place with sportsmen and campers. The island contains nearly 3,000 acres most of which is good soil and fairly well timbered.

“Five miles southwest of Sand Island lie the last two islands to the westward, Steamboat and Little Steamboat. Steamboat is designated on the chart as Eagle Island. It is small and is covered with balsam, poplar and birch. Little Steamboat is a bunch of hardpan clay and a reef of boulders and gravel, with a covering of evergreens, the whole together having an area of less than one acre. These islands lie close together having an area of less than one acre. These islands lie close together and were without doubt originally one. A reef extends from them far to the westward and is a favorite fishing ground, especially for winter, ‘bobbing’ through the ice.

York Island lies directly east of Sand and about two miles distant. It is low and sandy and thinly wooded. A fine sand beach bay occupies two-thirds of the north side, and there is an old fishing station on the east end.

Raspberry Island is a high knob containing about 300 acres, and lies on the northwest steamboat channel. On the southwest point is located a white flash light of the fifth order, which is elevated in a tower on the frame residence of the keeper, 77 feet above the lake level. This light is a guide to vessels passing through the channel and ranges with Sand Island light. At the foot of the bank there is a lifeboat dock and boat house, from which a long flight of stairs leads to the top. Raspberry Island is very inviting in appearance. In the clearing in which the lighthouse is located, there is a fine lawn and an excellent garden, with small fruits and flowers and it is a charming place to visit.

Southeast of Raspberry lies Oak Island, fourth in size and of the greatest elevation, its hills rising fully four hundred feet above its companions and affording an excellent landmark far out at sea. In crossing the lake from the North Shore, the first land seen is the hazy outlines of Oak. The island has high, bold shores, and is heavily wooded in which hardwood predominates. The soil is red clay and the foundation sandstone which outcrops on the east side, where “Oak Head” a great brownstone point, is the single scenic feature.

On one of the hills there is an exposure of lean magnetic iron ore, the only mineral known to exist among the islands. In old times, Oak Island was quite an important point as there was a wood yard established there where wood was furnished steam vessels, which in the early days used it exclusively for fuel on Lake Superior.

The west side forms the east shore of the northwest channel. The banks are high clay drifts, with deep water to within a stone’s throw except at the south point, where a long circular sandbar runs out into the main thoroughfare for over half a mile.

While Oak Island is a fine large island, no one seems to like it well enough to make a settlement upon it, and with the exception of lumbermen who, in the winter, occasionally put in a camp to cut saw logs it is entirely deserted."

"South by east of Oak is Wilson or Hermit Island. In every large family there is always some particular one selected as the beauty, and so it is with the Apostles. Wilson is the beauty of the family. It lies east and west at the base of the two main channels separated by Oak, a snug, brownstone-bottomed oval and oblong island with a bouquet of evergreen and hardwood forest crowning its banks. In all there is about 800 acres of it and every acre good soil except on the east and where the outcropping brownstone presents its bold face to the sea. Here on a great ledge that extends inland for half a mile or so is located the Excelsior Brownstone quarry, belonging to Mr. Frederick Prentice. This property is considered one of the best brownstone properties on the lake, as the stone is of first quality and practically inexhaustible. Near the quarry on a projecting point of stone forty feet above the sea, Mr. Prentice has built a summer residence known as "Bark Cottage" it being completely shingled with cedar bark, an idea retreat, its verandas facing the east and a vista that is a dream of beauty, a poem in itself. A fine, natural lawn, a high flag staff from which "old glory" floats to the summer breeze, a romantic windmill and rustic seats and shade trees are the settings which adorn and embellish this lovely spot.

Near the west end and facing south there is a large grove of second growth birch and maples intermixed with stately balsams, whose perfect spires rise above them like steeples. This spot was once a garden surrounding a small log hut, the home of "Wilson, the Hermit." He was a strange old man, silent and grave with no companions or friends. He seldom left his island place where he worked away alone in the summer tilling his garden and attending to the wants of his chickens and dogs, of which he had a large number, the latter savage brutes in whose love he found his only solace. In winter he made fish barrels, for some time in his life he had learned the cooper's trade.

He came to LaPointe in 1841 and for a time worked at his trade in the American Fur Company's shop. He was evidently a hard drinker and his personal appearance indicated that he had endured many hardships. Soon after he located in LaPointe, he and Judge Bell, then in the prime of life, fell out, and the result was that Wilson got the worst of the encounter and swore he would never live where he was not the "best man." Soon after, he went to Wilson Island and built his cabin, remaining there until his death. He soon became sullen and ugly, allowing but very few to visit him and, on several occasions, it is said that he used his gun to drive away unwelcome meddlers.

Wilson was a well-educated man, and it was told the writer in 1870, by one who knew the lonely old voyageur well, that he had been in the employ of the American Fur Company since a very young man, having enlisted with Ramsey Crooks as a hunter, and made the overland trip to Astoria, enduring all the hardships of that ill-fated enterprise. He came through to Lake Superior from a trading post on the Missouri when he came to LaPointe. That he had a hidden history is quite evident, for he could never be prevailed upon to speak of his early home.

For many years he purchased his supplies at Bayfield, always paying for them in specie, mostly in Mexican silver dollars. He came there once or twice a year to transact his business, remaining only long enough to load up his boat with his goods. Because he always had money for all his needs, rumors among the people living in Bayfield and LaPointe attributed to him some dark crime by which he had come by it unlawfully, and many wild stories were told of him which had no foundation in truth. It was our informant's opinion that he had but little money and that his savings from his service as hunter and voyageur and from the sale of his barrels was all he had.

In 1861, he was found dead in his cabin where he had undoubtedly been murdered as everything had been overturned, evidently by parties in search of his wealth. Judge Bell, as county judge, had his body brought to LaPointe and it was buried in the old cemetery, where he sleeps in an unmarked and unknown grave.

When Judge Bell searched the premises, he found a shot sack in the clock which had been overlooked containing 35 Mexican dollars, all the money ever known to have been discovered, though parties for years after his death searched the premises, literally tearing his home to pieces in search for his gold.

In looking over the site of the Hermit's home not long ago, we found the decaying foundation of his root-house and could discern by outlines in the soil the place where his cabin stood. He chose a beautiful spot in which to hide himself from his fellow men and where for many ears he alone was master. And from this, the story of Wilson the Herman, the island takes its name.

"A little west of south (from Wilson Island) two miles distant is Basswood, or as commonly called, "Bass Island." It is another beautiful member of the Apostles, nearly twice the size of Wilson. It is noted as being the site of the Superior Brownstone quarry, the first to be opened in this district, in 1869. For the past two years it has been worked but little, though the leasee, Capt. W. H. Singer, has it well-equipped with machinery and will resume business when the times improve.

Col. C. P. Rudd has a farm near the center of the island on the west side and nearby is the homestead of Judge McCloud, who for many years has lived alone on the island, leading an almost hermit life.

Basswood is timbered like the rest, with perhaps more hardwood than is usually found. On the southeast side a quarry was started by Duluth parties in 1890, but after spending considerable money in building houses and clearing, the property was abandoned.

Bass Island has its natural curiosity to present as well as the reset in "Profile Rock," located near the north end, a most striking and interesting feature. There are also a number of rock pictures along the northeast exposure where the waves have left their impress upon its foundation walls.

Last comes fair Madeline, the most noted of all. It lies to the southwest of the rest, its trend being northeast and southwest 12 miles long and an average of three in width. Its foundation is a poor quality of brownstone, which shows in numerous ledges along its shores, that in general are of clay drift, full of boulders, steep, ragged and irregular from the washing rains and heaving frosts. The southwest end forms the north side of the south channel at the entrance to Chequamegon Bay, opposite Chewamic point and light which is a red flash light of the fourth order.

Madeline Island will someday be settled by farmers. The soil is good and will support quite a community. Of course, like all the islands, it is heavily wooded, hence its improvement will be slow and not until all the most valuable timber is exhausted, for it is not mostly held for its timber values. The surface is gently rolling attaining in places an elevation of 150 feet, but generally speaking it is only rolling enough for good drainage. Its northwest coast is the lowest and quite straight, with but one shallow sandy bay, while on the east side, the coast line is broken with two deep bays, one Big Bay extending inland over a mile and a half, bordered with a beautiful sand beach, lined with a scattered fringe of Norway pines. This is a famous blueberry patch and the Indians gathered hundreds of bushels of them here every year. Back of this bay is a lake nearly two miles in length, filled with small, swampy islands, the shores lined with fragrant pond lilies. The water is quite deep in places, but darkly covered with tamarack root, just such water as the pike family thrive in. Through a bayou, at the extreme northeast end of the bay, the lake finds an outlet. The bay and lake is often visited by sportsmen as it is good duck ground in season and there are plenty of pike and perch for the angler in June, while later in the season the pond lilies are plenty. At the head of the lake there is a cranberry marsh where the Indians gather their supplies of the delicious fruit.

Between Madeline and Michigan there is a dangerous reef of boulders along which in winter the fishermen catch the Mackinaw trout with hooks through the

ice. In early days when the fish were more plenty than now, the Indians used to go there for their winter's supply, camping out in great numbers and following the reef with their holes across the channel to Michigan Island which they called "Bug-a-da-by-Minis", or hook and line island.

"Madeline Island figures in history as the first site occupied by the Ojibwas when they emigrated from the St. Lawrence Valley in Canada to Lake Superior according to the best authorities about four hundred years ago. They chose the island as it afforded them protection from their dreaded enemies, the Sioux, into whose territory they had come to make themselves a home, having been driven from their own land by the fierce and bloody Iroquois, and for the further reason that there was an abundance of fish in the channel which could easily be taken with their crude nets and spears.

It was also the site of the first white settlement on our northern boundary. Ancient LaPointe has figured extensively in the history of the northwest. Here all the great fur companies of history have in their day had trading posts and received recognition from the governments under which they lived.

As early as 1718, the Northwest Fur Company established a post there and the government of New France occupied the southeast point of the island with a fort, which was garrisoned by a company of French regulars. This fort was built by Capt. St. Pierre in 1718, who was in command until relieved by Sœur De Linctot in 1726, who was sent there by his government to negotiate a peace between the Ojibwa and Sioux.

When the French were succeeded by the British, Fort St. Pierre was abandoned, and it became a trading post. When the United States, after the war of 1812, took possession of the country, Michael Cadotte was in possession of the old fort as a trader.

In 1818, John Jacob Astor made LaPointe headquarters for the northwest trade of the American Fur Company. It was under this rule that LaPointe reached the measure of its greatness. The population reached high water mark in 1830-5 about 2,500 souls, traders, voyageurs, half-breeds and Indians.

Bishop Baraga, during the year 1834, founded the first Catholic Mission at LaPointe and in 1835 built the old church that still stands as a monument to his zeal. In 1835, the Rev. Sherman Halle established a Protestant Mission at "Middle Port" halfway between the village and the old French fort and the old Mission house as well as the little church in the village, built in 1836, still remain to mark the field of his labors.

The American Fur Company wound up its affairs in 1857 and since then, LaPointe has gradually wasted away. The buildings at the old fort long since disappeared

and now the once garrisoned camp from whose flag staff floated the Lilies of France is a deserted waste.

There are four cemeteries at LaPointe where the dust of Christian and Pagan mingle together. In one of these near the old Catholic church, John W. Bell, "King of the Apostle Islands" sleeps soundly, while at the "old Catholic burial ground" at Middle port the dust of old Chief Buffalo, whose forefathers first brought life to the inland wilderness mingles with the mother earth. On a hillside nearly half way between the old Mission and Fort Point is the lonely Protestant cemetery where many Protestant settlers of the early days lie deserted and forgotten; while near the site of the ancient French fort on the bank where the waves beat their requiem is deposited the dust of soldier, trader and voyageur, who were laid to rest nearly two centuries ago.

Of the later history of LaPointe, much of interest might be written, but it is not essential. It was the capital of the first county organized on our shore of the great lake, the county of LaPointe, and later, when absorbed by the counties of Bayfield and Ashland, it also retained the seat of government of the latter until 1874 when it was removed to the city of Ashland, thus ending its political importance.

The LaPointe of today is, however, very interesting to the visitor and in summer is a favorite camping ground. The village is the seat of justice for the Town of LaPointe, composed entirely of islands with a population of 300 souls. There have been quite a number of summer cottages erected on the site of the ancient village during the past few years and it bids fair to become a summer resort not only for strangers who seek our invigorating climate, but for our own people as well, who love its rustic simplicity and romantic associations."