MINNESOTA POINT was the home base of many of Duluth's fishermen. This view (ca. 1870), looking northwest along the shore of the point, shows fishing boats and shacks and, if one looks carefully, at least one net-drying reel next to one of the shacks.
THE STORY of commercial fishing along Minnesota's North Shore of Lake Superior forms an important chapter in the history of the unrestricted use, conservation, and depletion of aquatic resources in the state. After its beginning in the mid-1830s, when the American Fur Company first engaged in commercial fishing, the industry grew to a multimillion-pound-a-year business by the early 1900s, but, after years of increased catch, it experienced drastic decline brought about by overfishing and the havoc caused by the invading sea lamprey. All of the measures taken by government agencies for the conservation of the fishery along the shore, including the construction of a federal fish hatchery at Lester River in the late 1880s and the emergence and implementation of state regulatory policy, have proved to be futile so far in rehabilitating the once-flourishing industry.¹

The decrease in the quantity of fish caught was accompanied by a change in the kinds of fish taken. The once abundant and commercially dominant lake trout and whitefish were succeeded by lake herring. In more recent times, smelt have become increasingly important in the trade, while sturgeon are nearing extinction along the North Shore and in the waters of the St. Louis River. These changes, in turn, have affected adversely the economy of the fishing industry and the individual fishermen, forcing some to find employment in other industries and others to leave the area.²

Net houses, boats, piers, net-drying reels, and sundry equipment once used in gaining a livelihood along one of the most forbidding coasts of the Great Lakes remain on the North Shore. These relics on the landscape are reminders of the important role that commercial fishing played in the settlement of the shore in the nineteenth century. Although other aspects of commercial fishing in the area have received attention elsewhere, the years 1849 to 1870, key ones in the industry's history, remain to be described. It was this period, marked by a developing awareness of the fish resources of the North Shore and contemporaneous developments in transportation culminating in the completion of the Lake Superior and Mississippi Railroad between Duluth and St. Paul in 1870, which set the stage for the later vitality of commercial fishing in the area.

MINNESOTA'S North Shore consists of a relatively
MINNESOTA'S NORTH SHORE (above)
DULUTH-SUPERIOR HARBOR (right)

straight and predominantly rocky coast, with prominent headlands and cliffs reaching elevations in excess of 200 feet above the lake level, interspersed with diminutive bays and coves with pebble, boulder, and sand beaches. Except for the miniature archipelago near Pigeon River, and a few natural harbors, it is an open coast with only nine islets and some rocky patches to hamper the onslaught of waves. Back of the narrow shoreline, the land rises within a few miles to form hills and ridges with elevations ranging from less than 100 feet to more than 700 feet above the lake level. These hills and ridges form the watershed; consequently, the forty-three streams and creeks that reach the lake through a series of rapids and cascades are of insignificant length. At times when the mouths of the streams are not closed by bars or blocked with shifting gravel and sand, their lower courses in the immediate vicinity of the lake do offer some protection to canoes and small fishing craft. The offshore water, with depths of 100 to 500 feet within one-half mile of the shore, provides easy access to the lake and its fisheries.  

None of the streams of the North Shore ever functioned as routes to the interior, and they were shunned by fur traders on their journeys westward. Only at the extremities of the region are there rivers of sufficient magnitude to permit access from the lake through a series of portages to the Mississippi River and Red River drainage systems. At the southern end is the St. Louis River route, and at the northern extremity is the far more important Pigeon River route to the vast interior of North America. Near the mouth of the Pigeon and along the meandering lower course of the St. Louis, rivers over which voyageurs and fur traders traveled, were built important trading posts in the early days, the first non-Indian settlements in the area.

Although the North Shore in time became known as a continuous fishing ground, there were, nevertheless, places and seasons of greater abundance. Most fish were taken in the autumn when lake trout, whitefish, and herring emerged from deep waters to spawn in shallow areas near the shore. Generally, the lake trout begin their run in mid-October. They spawn on the rocky bottom in water as shallow as seven feet. In the days of the American Fur Company fishery, the rocky shore in the vicinity of Grand Portage and Encampment River (located some thirty-three miles northeast of Duluth) was heavily fished for trout. The whitefish are less discriminating about bottom conditions on which they


spawn, though they seem to prefer shallow bottoms of sand, clay, and gravel. Their spawning run begins in mid-November after the trout have migrated to deep water. In the late 1850s and the 1860s whitefish were common at Superior Entry and off Minnesota and Wisconsin points. The herring run is longer, lasting from November until late December. A secondary peak in fishing occurs from late May through July, when whitefish, and to a certain extent lake trout, come into shallow waters. Lake trout, whitefish, and herring were taken with gill nets set in the open lake and under the ice during the winter months. Trout were also caught with setlines and whitefish with seines. The St. Louis River fishery was especially productive during the April-to-June spawning run of walleye, northern pike, and sturgeon to the lower falls of the river.

One of the most positive contributions of the American Fur Company's abortive fishing enterprise on Lake Superior in the years 1835-41 was the confirmation that commercial fisheries could be operated profitably on the lake provided there were markets for the fish. The realization brought other companies to the lake where they established fisheries in the early 1840s. After the liquidation of the American Fur Company, some of the company's fishing grounds continued to be productive. In 1846 and 1847, men were fishing for lake trout and the related siscowet at the old American Fur Company station on Siskiwt Bay, Isle Royale. They may also have fished at Grand Portage. The National Intelligencer reported optimistically in 1849 that the season's catch at La Pointe would produce 2,000 barrels of fish.

Fishing also continued at Fond du Lac in the 1840s, at least for local subsistence. Charles Lanman, who visited Fond du Lac in August, 1846, noted: "After our repast was ended, two of the Indians lighted their birch torches and jumped into a canoe for the purpose of spearing fish [in St Louis River]." At this time, the Fond du Lac village or residential band of the Ojibway numbered at least 360, and fish were an important source of sustenance. George R. Stuntz, who surveyed the boundary line between Wisconsin and Minnesota in 1852, observed that on the Wisconsin side of St. Louis River opposite Fond du Lac, "several families of French Indians live in a half civilized manner. Hunting and fishing being their only occupations." According to the Minnesota territorial census of 1850, two fishermen (Joseph Roussain and Joseph Bellair) resided in what was then Itasca County, presumably at Fond du Lac, where both of the men had been employed years earlier by the American Fur Company. The "Traders Journal" of Eustache Roussain, who operated a trading post at Fond du Lac during 1848-49, contains several entries regarding the sale of gilling twine, sturgeon twine, and meter, further suggesting that commercial fisheries continued on a small scale at Fond du Lac in the late 1840s.

Commercial fishing was certainly carried on at Grand Portage where H. H. McCullough, a native of New Jersey, had established a trading post in either 1849 or 1850. It is very likely that the Ojibway of the Grand Portage band, with a population of between 150 and 150 in 1847, fished for McCullough as well as for their own needs.

The abundance of fish and the activities of the commercial fisheries on the lake were known far beyond its shores in the 1830s and 1840s. In addition to personal contacts, the news was spread by an increasing volume of travel books and government reports containing references to the "inexhaustible" fish resources of the lake. According to an observation published in 1847, "the time is not far distant, when the fisheries of Lake Superior will be considered as among the most lucrative in the world." This information was especially pleasing to politicians and land speculators, who readily added Lake Superior fish to the litany of resources used to entice settlers and yield revenue for Minnesota. In his message before the first legislative assembly of the newly created Minnesota Territory, Governor Alexander Ramsey noted in 1849 that although the future growth and prosperity of the territory depended upon its "productive soil and salubrious climate," which would attract immigrants by the thousands, the copper and iron ore deposits known and rumored to exist in northeastern Minnesota and "the abundant fisheries of the western extremity of that Lake will, under a proper development, prove additional rich sources of revenue to the Territory." Furthermore, in his first annual report (1849-50) on the Indian affairs in the territory, Ramsey referred to the "important lake fisheries" that were awaiting development along the North Shore. Yet, years elapsed before commercial fisheries gained a firm foothold on the shore. In the meantime, fish from Lake Superior and the St. Louis

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River were marketed, sporadically and in small quantities at first, in St. Paul and in other towns situated along the upper Mississippi and St. Croix rivers.7

The earliest known reference to Lake Superior fish in the Twin Cities' area markets appears in St. Paul's Minnesota Pioneer of January 30, 1850: “A Frenchman, through in 12 days, with a train from lake Superior, was selling fish in St. Paul last Friday. White fish, 25 cents apiece; trout, 37 cents.” The “Frenchman” probably was a French Canadian from the Chequamegon Bay area, as the length of the journey by dogsled would suggest. The impetus for the overland fish trade, which was a notable departure from the customary practice of shipping fish to midwestern markets over the Great Lakes, may have come from Danish-born Charles W. W. Borup, who, long before taking up residence in St. Paul in 1849, had headed the American Fur Company post at La Pointe and thus was well acquainted with its fisheries.8

The trade remained small and irregular, however, and subject to the vagaries of supply, demand, and transportation. On March 3, 1850, the Minnesota Pioneer noted that “the inhabitants around the Lake [Superior] are suffering severely for want of their usual supplies of fish — not being able to resort to the usual fishing places, as there is no ice on the lake.” And, even when there was an abundance of fish at Lake Pointe, it did not result in increased trade. Transporting fish more than 175 miles through largely uninhabited forest country to St. Paul was difficult and could be accomplished only during the winter months. Also, in St. Paul and other settlements in southern Minnesota, Lake Superior fish had to contend for markets with locally caught wall-eyes, bass, catfish, and other species. Moreover, the potential for the Lake Superior fish trade was influenced adversely by the availability of game and fowl, and of other foods — including dried cod, barreled mackerel, salmon, and oysters — shipped from Galena and St. Louis, the main provision centers for the upper Mississippi Valley towns in the early 1850s.9

While the towns on the edge of the frontier were supplied with ocean fish shipped nearly halfway across the continent, attention was increasingly drawn to the abundance and excellence of Lake Superior fish. In the first book-length account of Minnesota, published in 1850, E. S. Seymour noted: “The fish of Lake Superior are of better quality than in the other lakes. Their abundance will no doubt render the fisheries lucrative, and give employment to a great number of persons.” According to Seymour, the fisheries were “rich and unlimited,” and at Fond du Lac “large quantities are annually taken.” The Reverend T. M. Fullerton’s description of the St. Louis River, published in the Annals of the Minnesota Historical Society for 1852 and reprinted in the Minnesota Pioneer of March 18, 1852, also refers to the Fond du Lac fishery: “There can scarcely be a limit to the amount of fish, pickerel chiefly, that may be taken on the rapids [of the St. Louis River] during about three weeks of the spring. In the spring of 1843 the writer often saw a two-fathom canoe filled in one hour in the morning by two men, one steering and the other using a dip-net.” This observation is repeated almost verbatim in J. Wesley Bond’s Minnesota and Its Resources (1853), while William G. Le Duc in his Minnesota Year Book for 1853 asserted that “the siskawit, the best of all salt fish, and found only in Lake Superior, might be packed in large quantities for foreign markets.”10

National attention was also brought to the prodigious but undeveloped fish resources of the North Shore by Israel D. Andrews’ 1853 report on the trade of the Great Lakes, prepared for the secretary of the treasury, which reported that the fish resources of Lake Superior were “exhaustless.” Moreover, he observed that the whitefish and trout of the lake were “unequaled by any fish in the world for excellence of flavor and nutritious qualities.” In 1851, an estimated 4,000 barrels of Lake Superior fish, that is 800,000 pounds, valued at five dollars per barrel, crossed the portage at Sault Ste. Marie. Andrews, who was a proponent of constructing a ship canal around the falls of the St. Marys River at the “Soo,” assured the secretary that the excellence of the lake fish “infinitely exceed those of the lower lakes, so that they will always command a higher price in the market.”11

DESPITE the enthusiasm and the numerous reports recounting the existence of remarkable fish resources of the North Shore, there remained three obstacles to the development of commercial fisheries in the area. First, a relatively small regional market existed for the fish. Second, a railroad or at least a road for transporting the fish from the lake to the Mississippi River Valley was needed. Third, fishing stations could not be established

7Lamman, Summer in the Wilderness, 161; Minnesota House Journal, 1849, p. 7, United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Annual Report, 1849-50, p. 95.
8Thomas M. Newson, Pen Pictures of St. Paul, Minnesota, and Biographical Sketches of Old Settlers, 170 (St. Paul, 1866); Nute, in Mississippi Valley Historical Review, 12:497.
9Minnesota Pioneer (St. Paul), January 16, 1850, p. 2, February 6, 1850, p. 2, May 23, 1850, p. 2, November 21, 1850, p. 2, February 6, 1851, p. 2, December 23, 1851, p. 2; Minnesota (St. Paul), September 17, 1851, p. 2, November 20, 1852, p. 2, St. Anthony Express, June 14, 1851, p. 2. See also the various advertisements for St. Louis and Galena firms scattered throughout these newspapers.
1133 Congress, 1 session, Senate Executive Documents, no. 112, p. 7, 209, 232 (serial 622). Sources indicate that a barrel of fish weighed 200 pounds. See Duluth Minnesotian, July 31, 1869, p. 4; Superior Gazette, April 30, 1864, p. 2.
Lake Superior Fishes

LAKE TROUT

WHITEFISH

CISCO (LAKE HERRING)

WALLEYE

Summer 1978
on the North Shore until the title to the land was ceded to the United States by the Ojibway under the La Pointe treaty, signed on September 30, 1854, and ratified on January 10, 1855. Though historian William W. Folwell called the treaty a "miners' proposition" because of the purported mineral wealth of the North Shore, it may be argued that the fish resources along the shore were also a motive in gaining the cession.¹²

The Point Douglas-St. Louis River government road, for which Governor Ramsey had expressed a need in 1849, was finally opened to winter traffic in January, 1856. The agitation for construction of a railroad between the Mississippi River and the lake, likewise, had a lengthy legislative history in which the future development of fisheries played a part. In 1853, Henry H. Sibley, in a speech before the United States House of Representatives advocating the construction of a railroad from the northern boundary of Minnesota Territory to New Orleans, remarked that "the valuable fisheries of Lake Superior would be increased in a tenfold ratio, if a market was thus opened to the South." Yet, seventeen years were to pass before the first railroad was extended from the Mississippi River northward to the lake.¹³

The immediate effect of the signing of the La Pointe treaty was the influx of copper prospectors (known locally as "copper hunters" and "claim makers"), surveyors, land speculators, and towns promoters to the North Shore, some of whom had made their way to Pigeon River by the summer of 1855. In the autumn of 1855, estimates of the non-Indian population scattered along the shore and living in pre-emption shacks ranged from as few as sixty men to a total population of 700. Provisions brought along in canoes and in Mackinaw boats were supplemented with root crops grown in small clearings made on mineral claims and with brook trout caught in streams along the lake. Lake trout, whitefish, and siscowet were procured from McCullough's trading post at Grand Portage. By the early 1850s, McCullough's commercial fishing operations extended to Isle Royale and southward on the shore to Grand Marais and Two Island River, where he had trading and fishing posts. In the autumn of 1854, Richard B. Godfrey and five "Frenchmen" from Detroit were in possession of the Grand Marais post. In 1855, Godfrey, an agent of the North West Exploring Company, engaged five fishermen from La Pointe and "some Indians" from Grand Portage to fish for him during the fall season. Apparently, Godfrey was the only individual on the shore who combined mineral prospecting with commercial fishing, and he undoubtedly sold some fish to the "copper hunters." Henry Elliott, who was in charge of McCullough's post at Grand Portage, also operated a trading post at Encampment River, but it is uncertain whether commercial fishing was carried on at that place.¹⁴

Lake fish were likewise available to the "claim mak-


¹⁴Minnesota, House Journal, 1856, Appendix, 21, 25, 40-42; Minnesota, Council Journal, 1856, Appendix, 47; R. B. McLean, Reminiscences, 6, 8; Superior Chronicle, November 25, 1856, p. 2.

¹⁶Charles L. Emerson, Rise and Progress of Minnesota Territory, 1 (St. Paul, 1855).

¹⁷Superior Chronicle, January 19, 1858, p. 2.
Ste. Marie in 1855. Fish were also sold to ships sailing the lakes.\footnote{17}

Because of the scanty nature of extant data, it is difficult to ascertain the nature of the fisheries at Superior. The earliest information comes from the diary kept by Charles Dwight Felt, who operated a general store on Wisconsin Point near Superior Entry. On January 31, 1855, he sold "one half bbl. fish." On May 9, he noted: "I helped Philips set nets, etc." On May 21, Felt "went to the nets," and on June 1, he "caught a lot of fish." The nets were gill nets, which were set from small rowboats or larger Mackinaw boats, probably in the lake off Wisconsin and Minnesota points, for the purpose of procuring lake trout and whitefish. Fish, including siscowet, were also brought to markets by other local fishermen. The Ojibway and mixed-bloods who each summer camped on Minnesota Point and on islands and shores along the lower course of the St. Louis River, fished with gill nets for "pike" and "pickerel" which they then brought to Superior and traded for goods. (The encampment near Superior Entry, incidentally, was referred to as a "small Indian fishing village" by the visiting German scientist and historian Johann Georg Kohl in the summer of 1855.) This may have been the case with the Ojibway at Fond du Lac as well, who were said to "subsist chiefly by hunting and fishing."\footnote{18} Superior residents fished for their own needs from time to time, and "Mackinaw Boats and Bark Canoes, provided with trusty crews, well acquainted with the North and South shores, and all the fishing points on the lake," were available at Superior in July, 1855, for "Fishing and Pleasure parties." By the autumn of 1855, the fisheries at the western end of the lake had achieved some degree of significance, for Hubbard and Robb of Chicago announced in the Superior newspaper that it could provide gill net twine, whitefish nets, cotton seine twine, cotton hauling lines, as well as "Nets and Seines, all sizes and descriptions made to order." According to statistics obtained from local "mercantile and warehouse men," the port of Superior shipped lake fish worth $3,500 in 1855, which was approximately 17 per cent of the entire Lake Superior fish trade on the American side.\footnote{19}

Judging by local newspaper accounts and advertisements, fish were readily available in Superior markets and constituted a major source of protein in the diets of inhabitants and visitors alike. When the Superior Yacht Club held its New Year's ball on January 1, 1856, the "Bill of Fare" for the "magnificent repast" listed, among many other dishes, "Baked Whitefish, Baked Siskowit, Baked Trout, Boiled Lake Superior Herring." Yet, not all the fish consumed in Superior and vicinity were caught locally. As noted by Bertrand and Pickled Oysters and "Pickled Lobsters," served as "Relishes." Advertisements in the Superior Chronicle listed cod, mackerel, and "Scotch herring" in addition to local fish. In part, this indicates the influence that distant wholesale houses had on retail trade in frontier towns, including the settlements on the North Shore, and in part it reflects the food preferences individuals had acquired elsewhere and which they transplanted to the Lake Superior area.\footnote{20}

THE OPENING of the Point Douglas-St. Louis River government road for winter traffic in January, 1856, was a major boost to the local fisheries in that it provided a means of transporting fish southward to an expanding midwestern market at a season when lake shipping was curtailed or abandoned altogether. The earliest notice of the overland fish trade appears in the Superior Chronicle for January 29, 1856: "Four teams left this place last week for St. Paul and intermediate points. . . They also took fresh fish from the Lake Superior fisheries. In return, they will bring provisions." These provisions commonly consisted of staples such as fresh and salted pork, lard, flour, beef, venison, butter, and such luxuries as "fresh oysters."\footnote{21}

By the end of January there were five teams engaged in the St. Paul-Lake Superior trade. The Superior Chronicle noted that: "Large quantities of Lake Superior trout and herring are being caught by the fishermen at this end of the lake. The surplus quantities are being sent to St. Paul and Hudson, where they meet with ready sale at good prices." The trade also extended to other towns, including St. Anthony, Monticello, Stillwater, and Prescott, Wisconsin. Fish were shipped salted in barrels or frozen and sent as return cargo on sleighs that had little else to transport southward.\footnote{22}

The initial success of the fish trade was in part a function of the uncommonly mild winter of 1856. As little ice formed on the lake, fishing with gill nets probably continued throughout the season in open water. Although statistics on the trade are wanting, it must have

\footnotetext{17}{Superior Chronicle, June 12, 1855, p. 2, July 3, 1855, p. 2.}


\footnotetext{19}{Bertrand, "Recollections," 34, Superior Chronicle, July 24, 1855, p. 3, October 2, 1855, p. 3, February 26, 1856, p. 2, May 13, 1856, p. 2.}

\footnotetext{20}{Superior Chronicle, October 23, 1855, p. 3, January 15, 1856, p. 2.}


been a lucrative and promising venture as it led to a serious, but abortive, effort at establishing the first local fishing company at the western end of Lake Superior. On March 8, 1856, a diverse group of Superiorites, including a recently arrived physician from Iowa, the two editors and publishers of the Superior Chronicle, and other local citizens, gathered "for the purpose of considering the expediency of organizing an association having for its object a more complete and extensive development of the fish trade on Lake Superior." The company was to be known as "The Lake Superior White Fish, Salmon Trout, Siscowit, and Herring Fishing Company" of Superior, with a capital stock of $100,000. The grandiose scheme called for forwarding a memorial to Congress for the purpose of obtaining a land grant for the company and bounties for fishermen, extending fishing operations into Canadian waters, and making Superior "a port of fish entry." There is no evidence that the company, headed by men inexperienced in the business of fishing, ever caught as much as a herring, and the ambitious venture was apparently abandoned by the summer of 1856.\(^{22}\)

Important commercially were the spring walleye and northern pike fisheries of the St. Louis River. On May 6, 1856, the Superior Chronicle reported that "large quantities of pickerel are being caught from the St. Louis River by the Indians and fishermen." It is important to note that although the northern pike inhabited the St. Louis River, its tributaries, and Lake Superior, and might have been caught commercially in the area, the fish locally referred to as "pickerel" in the 1850s may have been the walleye. Other colloquial names for the walleye included "pikeperch," "wall-eyed pike," and "pike." In places where the northern pike was present the species was often known as "pickerel" in the nineteenth century. However, the local designation for the walleye changed with time. By the late 1860s, when both the northern pike and the walleye were caught commercially during the spring spawning run in St. Louis River near Fond du Lac, the two species were identified as "pickerel" and "wall-eyed pike," and subsequently as "pike" and "pickerel." In the 1850s, the walleye (and possibly the northern pike), were caught with seines (Indians also made use of dip nets) at the lower falls of the river when the fish ascended from the lake in large numbers to spawn in late April and early May.\(^{24}\)

The commercial fisheries along the North Shore were expanded significantly during the summer and autumn of 1856. Richard Godfrey operated a fishing station at Hiawatha (now Grand Marais), a new town located to the northeast of Poplar River, and Montgomery and Ashton had a fishery at Encampment. The transportation of fishermen, gear, salt, and barrels to the shore, and fish therefrom to Superior and La Pointe for transshipment


on the lake, was rendered less cumbersome on the schooners and steamers which had extended services to the North Shore in the summer of that year.\(^{25}\)

In 1856 and 1857, the North Shore experienced a boom, an unprecedented influx of copper prospectors, land speculators, and settlers. In the two-year period, fifteen towns were platted over a distance of some 105 miles from the village of Duluth to the town of Hiawatha. All of the towns and smaller settlements between Pigeon River and Fond du Lac were on or near the coast, and within the boundaries of Lake and St. Louis counties. According to the Minnesota territorial census of 1857, taken between September 28 and October 25 in St. Louis County, and between October 5 and October 19 in Lake County, the non-Indian population in the two counties totaled 2,772 (1,560 in St. Louis, 1,212 in Lake). An undetermined number of the individuals enumerated were “claim holders,” and therefore not permanent settlers. In addition to the unexpectedly high population figure for the two counties, the occupational structure for males also raises questions regarding the reliability of the census data. For example, in Lake County there were eighty-nine fishermen and 144 farmers, while St. Louis County had a total of ten fishermen and 333 farmers. While these figures are probably inflated, there were men who gained livelihood by fishing for local demand, as well as for markets elsewhere.\(^{26}\)

The panic of 1857 led to abandonment of most of the mineral claims, town sites, and settlements, to outmigration of settlers, and to a decline in commercial fishing along the North Shore. Yet, the shore was not entirely depopulated, nor were the fisheries abandoned completely. H. H. McCullough continued his fishing operations out of Grand Portage on a reduced basis along the northeast end of the shore and used the abandoned town of Saxton as a trading post for several years. Fishing was also carried on at Beaver Bay, where a colony of German immigrants had settled in 1856. The spring walleye

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\(^{25}\)Superior Chronicle, November 25, 1856, p. 2.

\(^{26}\)U.S. Manuscript Census Schedules, 1857, St. Louis and Lake counties, in Minnesota Historical Society.

\(^{27}\)McLean, Reminiscences, 5; Jessie C. Davis, Beaver Bay Original North Shore Village, 17-20 (Duluth, 1968); Dwight E. Woodbridge and John S. Pardee, eds., History of Duluth and St. Louis County, Past and Present, 1:87 (Chicago, 1910), Superior Chronicle, May 4, 1858, p. 3, June 22, 1858, p. 3 (quote), October 11, 1858, p. 3.

\(^{28}\)Information for Emigrants. The City of Superior, and the Lake Superior Region, 19, 21 (Superior, 1858); Superior Chronicle, September 3, 1859, p. 2.

\(^{29}\)U.S. Manuscript Census Schedules, 1860, St. Louis and Lake counties, in Minnesota Historical Society. The statistics on fish shipped from Superior were compiled by the author from weekly figures given in the Superior Chronicle, May 19-November 23, 1860.

fishery in the St. Louis River was likewise continued, as was the fishery at Encampment. And brook trout were being “caught in great numbers in the streams of the North Shore” by anglers. The increased reliance on fish earned the epithet, “fish eaters,” for the population who stayed in Duluth and its vicinity during the financial depression of the late 1850s.\(^{27}\)

Although the output from Lake Superior fisheries had declined by more than one-half during these years, there was optimism about its recovery. Said a pamphlet designed to lure immigrants to northern Wisconsin and the North Shore: “The fisheries of Lake Superior are one of the most important elements of its future commerce, and should engage more attention and capital than it has heretofore.” The same pamphlet also noted that “the mouth of every stream is a good fishing ground,” and that “trout, whitefish and siskowet are caught in large quantities.” This propaganda may have influenced a Norwegian from Green Bay to undertake a journey alone in a “small boat” along the North Shore of Lake Superior in 1859 for the purpose of locating a fishing ground and land for settling a colony of Norwegians and Swedes. Though the unknown individual reportedly chose a site in the valley of the St. Louis River, the scheme seems to have been abandoned.\(^{28}\)

By 1860, the commercial fisheries at the western end of Lake Superior and the economy in general were recovering from the financial recession of the preceding years, and the population on the North Shore once again was on the increase. The United States Census enumerated a total of 642 non-Indian inhabitants in St. Louis (394) and Lake (248) counties in that year. Of the twenty-two fishermen listed (of whom fifteen were Minnesota-born mixed-bloods), thirteen resided in St. Louis County and nine in Lake County. Superior was still the market center and the main port for most of the shore trade. It shipped more than 435 barrels (87,700 pounds) of salted fish on Lake Superior eastward, some of it to the Keewenaw mining towns, but the bulk of it to the ports on the lower lakes. Although evidence is lacking, it seems reasonable that fish caught at Grand Portage and vicinity were shipped directly to the afore-mentioned areas.\(^{29}\)

Fresh and salted fish (trout, herring, and whitefish) were again shipped overland during the winter months to towns located in the St. Croix and Mississippi river valleys. In February, 1860, a St. Paul newspaper noted: “Several large loads of fresh fish have arrived in St. Paul this winter from Lake Superior, and have met with ready sale. If we had railroad communication with the lake, there is no doubt that there would be a large trade in the product of the Lake Superior fisheries... The Lake has long been celebrated for the excellence of every variety existing in fresh water, no less than the abundance
of each." While for the time being the expansion of the trade to St. Paul, where fish might have been kept frozen and fresh all summer long in ice houses, was hampered by inadequate transportation, the article correctly predicted the future inroads Lake Superior fish were to make on the midwestern markets which were then supplied with fish from Boston.\(^{30}\)

On January 10, 1860, the Minnesota legislature passed "A Memorial of the Legislature of the State of Minnesota, to the President of United States, in Reference to the Light Houses on Lake Superior." In it the state asked that unspent appropriations previously passed by Congress for the construction of three light-houses, at Beaver Bay, at Grand Portage (at the mouth of the Pigeon River), and at Two Island River, be spent for that construction. The memorial stated that there were "upwards of forty sail craft engaged in fishing and coasting on said coast." Though it is unlikely that all of the craft were permanently engaged in fishing, it nevertheless indicates the ongoing revival of commercial fisheries along the shore. The memorial was the first gesture of Minnesota legislative support for the North Shore fisheries. In presenting the case, proponents argued that the lighthouses would benefit navigation, the growth of settlement, agriculture, and mineral production. They also pointed out that "the fishing resources of the lake will be materially developed by the establishment of such lights."\(^{31}\)

Meanwhile, the fisheries off Minnesota and Wisconsin points were being revived. Whitefish were caught in seines and gill nets during the spring and early summer, and, in the autumn and winter, lake trout, herring, and siscowet were taken in open water with gill nets. The earliest known reference to commercial fishing through ice at the western end of the lake dates from March, 1862. It is uncertain whether it was accomplished with hooks or with gangs of gill nets set below ice through holes cut for that purpose. The spring walleye fishery on the St. Louis River continued to yield good returns, and some notion about its annual catch is provided by the number of barrels packed in 1860. On May 5 the Superior Chronicle reported: "Pickerel — the run of these fish on the St. Louis river is now over, within the past three weeks there has been caught about three hundred barrels," that is, some 60,000 pounds of dressed fish. Two hundred and sixty barrels were the product of two commercial fisheries and the rest "about forty or fifty [barrels], in small lots of from five to ten for family use," represented individual effort.\(^{32}\)

The diary of the Reverend James Peet, who then resided at Oneota, provides some engaging vignettes about the river fishery. On April 10, he wrote: "P.M.[.] the ice is rapidly melting out of the Bay — one boat came down the river from Fon-du-lac with fish." The entry for April 18 reads: "I saw and heard frogs today for the first," and, "A.M. I went to Fon-du-lac fishing grounds[.] They are catching vast quantities of the Walleyed Pike with a seine." This leaves little doubt that the locally known "pickerel" were walleye. The following day he noted: "This morning I helped haul in the seine which had 523 fish in besides the bad that was thrown away. I had a present of 25 fish one of which before dressed weighed 10 lbs. & 5 1/2 after it was dressed. Bro. J. Merritt was with me and we brought home to Oneota for ourselves & others over 250 fish in my boat, Equal to over 2 1/2 barrels. They take 35 or 40 bbls. per day." On April 23, he was back at Fond du Lac: "A.M. I went with my boat with Bro. Merritt to Fon-du-lac to get more fish. Mr. Harringtons party have caught over 15,000 fish. I staid at his house over night — Br. Barlows party have caught over 30 barrels[.] he says 90 fish make a barrel." (Harrington and Barlow were fishing commercially.) On April 24, Peet noted: "A.M. we returned hom. Took tea at Bro. Merritts then dressed our fish in the evening. Got very tired. 3 doz. of the fish I got of Mr. Harrington for my self." The last statement suggests that he may have earned some cash by cleaning and packing fish for Harrington.\(^{33}\)

Renewed and intensified exploration for minerals, particularly for copper, by individual prospectors and newly founded mining companies characterized the major economic development along the North Shore during the Civil War era. The output of commercial fisheries along the shore and in St. Louis River did not increase significantly, however. In 1864, Superior shipped 356 barrels of fish on the lake and an undetermined quantity southward overhead to the towns in the Mississippi and St. Croix valleys. For the first time the producing area tributary to Superior was defined as being "within a circle of twenty-five miles around the head of Lake Superior." The trade of the shore was not given, as the settlements there shipped "mostly direct to and from their own ports." Thus, not all of the fish caught along the North Shore were included in the above statistic of 356 barrels.\(^{34}\)

The fishing areas exploited by fishermen from Superior, however, were subject to change. McCulloch's trading post at Grand Portage and his fisheries there and on Isle Royale had been purchased in 1863 by Peter E. Bradshaw and Company of Superior, dealers in groceries, provisions, fish, and in "furs and Indian goods." This firm, which handled most of the fish and fur

\(^{30}\)Daily Pioneer and Democrat (St. Paul), February 3, 1860, p. 3.


\(^{32}\)Superior Chronicle, March 22, 1863, p. 3.

\(^{33}\)James Peet Diary, in Peet Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, division of archives and manuscripts; Superior Chronicle, May 3, 1860, p. 3.

\(^{34}\)Superior Gazette, January 7, 1865, p. 3.
BROOK-TROUT FISHING in the waters of the Devil's Track River is shown in this section of an 1878 stereoscopic view.

trade in the area, employed a number of fishermen and also obtained fish from local fishermen, including mixed-bloods, who resided in and about Superior. In August, 1865, Bradshaw acquired a thirty-five-foot-long schooner, The Stranger, from St. Joseph, Michigan, which he employed in the North Shore trade, transporting furs and fish to Superior and thereby reducing the quantity of fish shipped directly from Beaver Bay and Grand Portage eastward. Fish caught around Isle Royale were, as they had been in previous years, most likely shipped directly to the lower Great Lakes ports, and in smaller quantities to the copper and iron mining towns of northern Michigan. Apparently, a number of fishermen from the North Shore and from Superior were employed seasonally in the Isle Royale fisheries. The expansion of fisheries resulted in greater demand for fishing boats and in the manufacture of fish barrels at Superior.45

Indeed, the prospects for further development of North Shore fisheries were most encouraging. Thomas Clark, the assistant state geologist of Minnesota, who surveyed the North Shore during August, 1864, predicted that: "As a resource of trade and commerce the fish of Lake Superior will become an item of both luxury and value. The trout, siscowit and white fish are taken in all seasons of the year; fresh from the pure cool depths of the lake they excel in flavor, size and delicacy any thing of the kind taken elsewhere from salt or fresh water." 36

Clark could personally attest to the quality of the fish because the geologist and his party had on more than one occasion feasted on fresh trout and whitefish obtained from non-Indian fishermen, mixed-bloods, and Indians. Moreover, he noted that "two men, with a gang of a hundred fathoms of nets, take from two to five barrels of fish a night, almost the entire Minnesota coast of one hundred and fifty miles is one fishing ground, each mile or even half mile of it may be occupied by a gang." Looking toward the future, Clark noted that "ten thousands barrels would be a moderate estimate for the annual product of Minnesota alone, when the needed facilities shall be furnished to take them to the markets of the Mississippi Valley." 37

Clark's manuscript notebook and the published report also contain a memorable description of Indian fisheries on Wauswaugoning ("Spearfish" or "making-a-light-by-torches") Bay, near Pigeon River. On August 13, he recorded: "Land at bottom of Wauswewining Bay . . . Pleasant half cloudy evening. Nine Canoes with torch lights (spear) fishing." After they had camped for the night, the members of the party had been surprised to see "a dozen or more torchlights burst to view under the dark shade of the black spruces crowning the bluffs of the east shore of the bay; they moved in a line a dozen yards from each other in a westerly direction, presently they began to dart hither and thither, the lights reflected
down in the clear water gave them the appearance of so many fiery comets, as each native captured a fish his shout and the shrill laugh of the boys and girls in the canoes echoed and multiplied until the bay, cliffs, crags and forest seemed a merry pandemonium; of course sleep was out of the question, but we were amply remunerated with a breakfast of the most delicious white fish epicure could covet.\footnote{Minnesota State Geologist, Report, 1864, p. 49-50; Thomas Clark Notebook, August 13, 1864, in Douglas County Historical Society, Superior, Wisconsin.}

THE NATIONWIDE economic expansion and general prosperity that followed the Civil War era had a profound effect on the settlement of the western end of Lake Superior in general and the expansion of the fisheries along the North Shore in particular. By far the most important event locally was the completion on August 1, 1870, of the Lake Superior and Mississippi Railroad, the first railroad to link the old fur trade frontier of Lake Superior with the westward expanding agricultural and urban settlement frontiers of the nineteenth century. Armed with substantial federal and state land grants and with a donation of bonds valued at $250,000 from the city of St. Paul, the railroad commenced construction at St. Paul in 1867 and at Duluth in the spring of 1869.\footnote{Theodore C. Blegen, August 13, 1864, in Douglas County Historical Society, Superior, Wisconsin.}

Even before the completion of the railroad, the company counted on the fish trade as a potential source of revenue. According to a prospectus published in January, 1866, the transport of "Slate, Fish, etc., etc.," alone were to bring the company an estimated income of $150,000 by 1870. A subsequent "Official Statement of the Assets and Probable Business of the Lake Superior and Mississippi Railroad," released in the spring of 1869, noted that "The fish trade west and south in salted fish in the summer, and frozen fresh in winter, will be very great one over this Road. Trout, white-fish and siskowit, of unequalled excellence, are taken in Lake Superior at all seasons. The lake is never frozen." The value of the fish trade, especially in salted fish, was said to be "inestimable," not the least because "The entire coast of Minnesota, for a length of 159 miles, is an uninterrupted fishing ground." — an observation reminiscent of Thomas Clark's evaluation made some five years earlier.\footnote{U.S. Manuscript Census Schedules, 1870. St. Louis County, in Minnesota Historical Society; Superior Gazette, January 9, 1869. p. 4.}

The beginning of construction of the northern end of the railroad brought an influx of people to Duluth and neighboring towns. By early September, 1869, Duluth had an estimated population of 1,100, with perhaps as many more working on the railroad between the city and Fond du Lac. In the summer of 1870, the United States Census enumerated a non-Indian population of 4,561 for St. Louis County, of whom all but thirty-six lived in Duluth (3,131) and in and between the settlements of Oneota (594) and Fond du Lac (800). At this time the population of Lake County totaled 135. The expanding population provided an enlarged market of Lake Superior fish locally. On June 5, 1869, the Duluth Minnesotian reported that men working on the railroad were fed sugar-cured hams and "fresh lake fish." In addition to the customary fish trade on the lake to the east and by land to the south, fish may have been shipped to lumber camps located on the St. Croix River and along its tributaries and in the upper Mississippi Valley.\footnote{"Duluth Minnesotian, May 8, 1869, p. 3 ("failure" quote).}

The increased demand in lake fish resulted in expansion and intensification of commercial fishing in and about Duluth, including the north and south shores. While the St. Louis River fishery in the spring of 1869 was for some inexplicable reason a "total failure," there were reports of expanding fisheries along the North Shore. The Duluth Minnesotian noted on May 15, 1869: "On Monday last old man Landry arrived down the North Shore with a nice lot of lake fish, including lake trout, siskowit and white-fish — principally of the two first varieties," which he probably secured with gill nets. So delicious were whitefish deemed that the Philadelphia-born editor of the newspaper dubbed them "the shad of Lake Superior." In the autumn of that year, the newspaper noted that "Lake Fishing, with a view to supplying this winter, our neighborhood and St. Paul and other towns on the Mississippi, with whitefish, trout and siskowit, has opened briskly down the North Shore in the vicinity of Sucker river, twenty miles from Duluth. The Palmer's and Robert McLean, have several gill nets set, and have met with good success so far. The latter, we hear, took 800 fish in one haul of the net. He has secured the Pop Factory of the [Minnesota] Point, near the new Lake Dock, as his fish depot — between which and the fishing ground large boats will ply as long as the Outer Harbor is open which bids fair now to be the case quite into mid-winter." The Palmers also fished for trout and siskowit along the south or Wisconsin shore where, at a distance of seven miles from Minnesota Point, they had a pound net in the spring of 1869. By early June they had shipped "one hundred and twenty packages of white-fish and siskowit" on the tug Amethyst to Duluth.\footnote{"Duluth Minnesotian, May 8, 1869, p. 3 ("Lake Fishing" quote).}
Mississippi Railroad, providing access to new markets in Minnesota and northern Iowa, attracted to the south shore several fishermen-entrepreneurs with sufficient capital to acquire pound nets and employ fishermen. On July 10, 1869, the Duluth Minnesotian reported: "Lands at the entrances of all the small rivers on the South Shore of the lake are being sought after for fishing purposes." The firm of Bradshaw, Bly and Company of Superior had purchased land at the mouth of the Amnicon and fished there, while G. H. Mason and E. M. Shayer, "experienced fishermen" recently arrived from Green Bay, employing "already a considerable number of men," had constructed buildings and fished with three pound nets near the mouth of the Brule. As will be noted, the fisheries of the North Shore developed along different lines; the main attraction there, for the time being, was still mineral exploration and the purchase of "large tracts of mineral lands" by speculators. But angling for trout in the streams of the North Shore also created interest in the area. According to the Duluth Minnesotian in 1869, five sport fishermen caught a total of 367 brook trout in a single day at French River.43

THE COMPLETION of the Lake Superior and Mississippi Railroad to St. Paul and the beginning of construction on the Northern Pacific Railroad in 1870 provided the local fisheries with a vastly improved distributive system, making Duluth an important receiving and transshipment point of the trade. The statistics on the quantity of fish landed at, and shipped from, Duluth in 1870 are fragmentary, however. According to receipts at Duluth's two commercial docks, the Citizen's Dock and the dock of the Lake Superior and the Mississippi Railroad, a total of 173,500 pounds (465 barrels at the former and 808 half-barrels at the latter) of salted fish — presumably lake trout, whitefish, and siscowet — were landed during the last six months of the year. A total of 34,627 pounds of fresh fish and 788 half-barrels of salted fish were sent from the city by rail. A mere 114 half-barrels of fish were shipped via the lake. These statistics do not include fish landed at other dock facilities in and about the town, nor fish received in containers other than in barrels. For example, the schooner Charlie transported from Beaver Bay to Duluth some 370 packages of fish from September to November, 1870.44

Trade in fresh frozen fish from the North Shore in the latter part of the year was likewise excluded from the dock statistics, as was the trade from the south shore to Duluth for transshipment southward. On December 10, 1870, the Duluth Minnesotian observed: "Yesterday, Friday, Dec. 9, the schooner Alice Craig, Capt. Bunker, arrived from Bayfield, bringing 400 packages of fish from N. Barton [sic] & Co. of Bayfield, consigned to themselves and 10 boxes of fish from R. D. Pike, consigned to himself. We believe the whole cargo was shipped [on the railroad] to St. Paul after it arrived here." The winter fish trade from the Chequamegon Bay-Apostle Islands area to Duluth for transshipment was greatly intensified after the opening of a Bayfield-Superior road in the winter of 1870–71.45

The fragmentary statistics thus suggest that the fish trade at Duluth was in excess of 250,000 pounds, perhaps as high as 300,000 pounds, in 1870. Excluded from the approximation is the undetermined quantity of fish sold as provisions to the numerous Great Lakes ships that frequented the port, and fish consumed locally in Duluth and vicinity. Lake fish probably accounted for a good share of the protein consumed by the local inhabitants because of its relative cheapness. In the summer of 1870, fresh whitefish and lake trout retailed for a good share of the protein consumed by the local inhabitants because of its relative cheapness. In the summer of 1870, fresh whitefish and lake trout retailed for half the going price of round steak in Duluth.46

Of the total of thirty-two fishermen enumerated in St. Louis and Lake counties by the United States Census of 1870, eleven (of whom three were Indians) resided at Fond du Lac, eight in Duluth, and the remaining thirteen were scattered along the North Shore at Beaver Bay, Grand Marais, and Pigeon River. At or near Beaver Bay, the Canadian-born John LaSarge was in charge of fishing operations. He was assisted by his Michigan-born son and by six mixed-bloods and Indians. German farmers who settled at Beaver Bay, some of whom fished for sustenance and at times for profit, are not listed as fishermen in the census because fishing was not considered their primary occupation. At Pigeon River, the New York-born A. A. Parker, a fisherman and the United States deputy collector of customs, and W. Farr, the Wisconsin-born postmaster, operated a "fishing and trading establishment." Of the remaining four fishermen at that location, two were born in Pennsylvania, one in Michigan, and one in Canada. It is probable that the Indians and the two government employees, a blacksmith and a schoolteacher, on the Grand Portage Indian Reservation, and the two families who had settled and cleared some twenty acres of land at the mouth of the Brule River (northeast of Grand Marais) fished commercially as well as for their own needs.47

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43 Duluth Minnesotian, July 3, 1869, p. 2.
44 Duluth Minnesotian, January 21, 1871, p. 2; Minnesota Commissioner of Statistics, Report, 1870, p. 169–170. The figures on fish transported by the schooner Charlie were calculated from statistics given in Duluth Minnesotian, September 24–November 5, 1870.
45 Bayfield Press, January 7, 1871, p. 2; January 14, 1871, p. 2; January 21, 1871, p. 3; February 11, 1871, p. 3. During the winter months when ice conditions on the lakes prevented the shipment of fish by the lake, fish from Bayfield were transported via Duluth to various eastern and western markets.
46 Duluth Minnesotian, June 25, 1870, p. 3.
47 U.S. Manuscript Census Schedule, 1870, St. Louis and Lake counties, in Minnesota Historical Society: Duluth Minnesotian, April 29, 1871, p. 2.
WHEN the Lake Superior and Mississippi Railroad was completed in 1870, it provided the North Shore fishing industry with a vastly expanded market and thus opened a new era of prosperity for the region. These three views of Duluth, all taken in the early 1870s, show the railroad terminus and dock just north of the base of Minnesota Point. Included in two of the photographs (above and below) is the freight depot. All three show the railroad's grain elevator A.
Of the eight fishermen enumerated in Duluth, three were born in Norway, two in Canada, two in Wisconsin, and one in Ohio. Most of these fishermen, together with their gear, net houses, net-drying reels, and boats were located on the lakeshore near the base of Minnesota Point. Because the census was taken during June through August when fishing was slack and some of the fishermen held secondary or part-time jobs, the number of fishermen listed in the census would have been lower than the number during the spring and fall fishing seasons. Moreover, the census does not identify or reveal the number of individuals who earned money by cleaning and packing fish or making barrels for the fish trade. By the end of the year, the fisheries had expanded, and there were at least two wholesalers in Duluth who traded in Lake Superior fish. The fish trade does not seem to have been monopolized by any one firm.

The organization of the fishing industry at Duluth and the development of the North Shore fisheries on a sustained basis were well under way before the end of 1870. However, it is difficult to determine the quantity and the market value of the year's catch along the shore. First, as noted above, there are no reliable and comprehensive statistics concerning the fisheries. Second, the old practice of shipping fish from the North Shore directly to markets farther east was continued. Third, state boundaries did not act as deterrents to the movement of fishermen. A number of south-shore fishermen fished seasonally along the North Shore. The barreled fish were shipped across the lake, particularly to Bayfield, which by the autumn of 1870 had an extensive fish trade with Milwaukee and Chicago.

In any case, the year's catch apparently was smaller than what had been expected. In ominous language, the Superior Times reported on November 19, 1870: 'The lake fisheries in this vicinity have not been very profitable this season. The catch has been barely sufficient to pay expenses. The cause of the scarcity of fish in this end of the lake the past year, old fishermen attribute to the carelessness of the inexperienced in throwing into the water and leaving on the shore the offal and entrails of the great numbers of fish caught in previous years. It is said that fish will not resort to waters tainted with this matter, as has been abundantly confirmed in the case of fisheries on the lower lakes. The noise and concussions produced by the great amount of heavy rock blasting done in this vicinity the past year, is also thought to have had an effect in driving away from our shores the scaly inhabitants of the lake.'

Already by the end of 1870 the North Shore fisheries had acquired a set of traits which were unmistakably conditioned by the ubiquity of the fish resource, the proximity of fishing grounds, and the geography of the shore. The traits which were to characterize the fishery in years to come were: geographical dispersal of the industry, dispersal of ownership of boats and gear, simplicity of gear and boats, the relatively small investment required in getting started in the fishery. While there were fish wholesalers in Duluth who purchased and transported fish (either fresh or barreled) in their schooners and fishing tugs to the city, fishing was in the hands of the individuals who owned their own boats and equipment. Getting started in fishing did not require large amounts of capital, and credit was available from fish dealers in Duluth who also supplied the fishermen with some provisions and equipment. By squatting or homesteading along the sparsely settled shore, fishermen acquired land and thereby access to the lake and its fish resources. On cleared land they could raise potatoes and hay, keep a vegetable garden, own a cow or two, a few pigs, and some chickens.

The part-time fishermen who ventured to the shore during the fall fishing season generally lived in shanties, returning to Duluth before the onset of winter. The fishing boats used, including the Mackinaw, the Norwegian Nordlandsbaade or Northland boat, and skiffs, were built by fishermen and by boat builders in Duluth. Because fishing was carried on within a few miles of the coast, there was no need for larger fishing boats or schooners. Likewise, the gear used in fishing was simple. It consisted primarily of Gill nets and setlines. In large measure the success of the North Shore fishery in years to come was based on vertically adjustable setlines and gill nets introduced by Norwegian fishermen, though seines were employed off Minnesota Point.

Significantly, with the possible exception of Minnesota Point fishing, and an attempt in Wauswaugoning Bay beginning in 1873, the growth of the North Shore fishery proceeded without the use of pound nets, which together with seines and gill nets were the mainstay of the American commercial fishing frontier on Lake Superior in the 1860s and 1870s. These large, efficient, and relatively expensive nets, the use of which required a crew of three or four men and a specially designed pound or stake boat, were introduced from Lake Michigan to the eastern end of Lake Superior in 1864. From Whitefish Bay in Michigan the nets diffused westward on fishing grounds wherever lake bottom conditions were favorable for driving stakes which supported the lengthy leaders of more than 200 feet and the pot or crib of the
net. By the summer of 1868 the pound net frontier had reached Wisconsin Point where, "on more than one occasion the pounds have contained such quantities [of fish] that it was not policy to empty them entire, for fear the fish would spoil before they could be cleaned and packed; then only a boat load (about thirty barrels [6,000 pounds]) would be taken ashore, and the balance left for the next day's lift." In the autumn of 1870, seventeen pound nets were operated in the Chequamegon Bay-Apostle Islands area alone.22

At the southwestern end of the lake the pound net fishery met an insurmountable barrier which prevented the spread of the rigs northeastward along the North Shore (except for Wauswaugoning Bay). In contrast to the relatively shallow, clay-, gravel-, and sand-bottomed waters off the southern shore — ideally suited for the pound nets — the North Shore with its rocky bottom and relatively deep waters adjacent to the shoreline made the use of pound nets impractical and thus excluded for the time being large-scale fishing enterprises controlled by moneyed fishermen-entrepreneurs from the shore.

By the 1870s after more than twenty years of prognostication and liliputian efforts to establish the Lake Superior fisheries, Governor Ramsey's prediction of 1849, that "the abundant fisheries of the western extremity of that Lake, will, under proper development, prove additional rich sources of revenue to the Territory," was being partially fulfilled. The growth of population in the Midwest and the construction of railroads connecting the lake with markets were the main factors in the development of the North Shore fishing industry. And the initial success led to further prophecies. According to an enthusiastic and knowledgeable Duluthian: "The demand for Lake Superior fish, both fresh and salted, will grow rapidly. The demand can never exceed the supply, Duluth must become [an] unequalled fish market." Indeed, there were good grounds for the optimism. During the first month and a half of 1871, more than 50,000 pounds of fresh fish from Bayfield arrived in Duluth, and in the beginning of May it was estimated that "fishing alone employs 50 or more men [in Duluth]." Moreover, the number of fishermen-settlers was increasing along the North Shore. Thus, the fisheries, not the "inexhaustible" deposits of iron ore and copper, were finally bringing permanent settlers and settlements to the shore.32

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32Minnesota, House Journal, 1849, p. 7; H. T. Johns, address delivered in Duluth, June 1, 1870, copy in Douglas County Historical Society, Superior, Wisconsin; Duluth Minnesotian, February 25, 1871, p. 1, May 13, 1871, p. 3; Bayfield Press, January 7, 1871, p. 3, February 18, 1871. See also H. T. Johns, Duluth, 15-16 (Duluth, [1873]).