

BEAR RIVER VALLEY

Pre-1900 Era

by

John E. Perry & Harriet Kilborn

Bear River Valley in Pre-1900 Era

*This is a history of the Bear River Valley with
Importance of Bear River in the Industrial
Development of Petoskey to 1900.*

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BEAR RIVER PLAYED A KEY PART IN PETOSKEY HISTORY

On the banks of Bear River, where it empties into Little Traverse Bay, the city of Petoskey took root and grew. The river played an important part in its economic growth and development. Five dams provided water power to run the many mills and factories which lined its banks. Today, meaning 1968, hours of voluntary labor on the part of interested citizens and youths of Petoskey has and is, being spent clearing away the debris left by those industries. The aim of the Bear River Development Commission responsible for the endeavor, is to make this stretch of Bear River a place of natural beauty once again.

Government surveyors, here in August of 1840, laying out township and section lines, made note of what they saw here. "*It is worthy of remark,*" they wrote, "*that the creek in this township, after flowing through the swamp, passes over a limestone bed between high banks, and rushes like a mountain torrent into the lake, affording the very finest of mill sites.*" They reported the highlands were timbered with a mixture of Hemlock, Beech, Birch and Sugar {maple} trees. The lowlands and swamp areas were a tangle of Cedar, Spruce, Balsam, Hemlock and Pine. There were a few "*Indian Huts*" on the west side of the river, near its mouth, and a few more in sight from the mouth of the creek, on the hill on the east side. An Indian corn field was also reported. The surveyors had no name for the river, either on their map or in their notes.

WHERE THE BEAR WALK

The Indians knew it as Muh-guh-se-bing, meaning, a place where the bear walks. It was good habitat for bear. Chief Ignatius Petoskey was reported by one of his sons to have killed 40 bear here in one season. It was quite natural that the English speaking people converted the name of the river and the immediate area to Bear River.

The Bear River Indian settlement was a small one. Chief Petoskey and his numerous sons were probably among the first families to settle here on a more or less permanent basis. An article written in 1927 by Ella Petoskey, granddaughter of the Chief, states that her grandfather came from L'Arbre country to this side of the bay in 1830.

The size of the settlements was increased in 1850 and 1851 by the arrival of at least eight Indian families from Grand Traverse Bay area. Other families from various areas moved in following the 1852 establishment of the Presbyterian Mission and School by Andrew Porter. The name Bear River became official on December 2, 1857 when the government established a post office here, with Porter the postmaster.

The Bear River Band of Indians, following the government survey of 1840-41, to 1873, were pretty much in control of Bear River affairs. After the survey, all Emmet County land could be purchased from the Federal Land Office in Ionia for \$1.25 per acre. Within the present Petoskey city limits, Chief Ignatius Petoskey and his sons were among the first to buy land for themselves. Nine other Indian men also made land purchases. As of 1855, the date of the new Treaty when unsold lands were once again taken off the market, 944 acres, or approximately 42 percent of Petoskey land was owned individually by these Indians. Later, under the provisions of the 1855 treaty, 18 Indians had a total of 949 acres within the borders of Petoskey patented to them by the government, bringing the total percentage of land under Indian ownership to 85 percent. The only acreage left was the 160 acre Mission Farm bought by the Presbyterian organization in 1852 and the 160 acres of land given the State of Michigan by the federal government under the Swamp Lands Act. {The map outlines the area of the Mission Farm and partially shows the area owned by Chief Petoskey and his sons.}

FIRST GRIST MILL

Because of all this, Bear River remained in very nearly its natural state for 30 years after the surveyors first described it. Andrew Porter was the first to harness the river for power. In 1855 he

constructed a dam. {No. 1 on the map} and built a grist mill to grind the corn and wheat grown on the Mission Farm and by the Indians. In articles on local history this has sometimes been referred to as "*the old government grist mill.*" The government had nothing to do with it. It was Andrew Porter's project and the expense of building it was taken care of by the Presbyterian organization.

During the Mission period of Petoskey's history, one more dam and a saw-mill was put on Bear River. In 1860 and '61 two small pieces of property were purchased from the Indians by relatives of Andrew Porter. Both were on the west side of Bear River, bordering on the mission property. John Porter paid \$175.00 for a 15 acre lot and William H. Porter paid \$40.00 for a two acre patch. This two acres was an excellent site for another mill.

Mr. Porter constructed a small saw-mill there, then sold it the next year and moved back to Pennsylvania. At the same time, John Porter sold an adjoining two and a half acres of his land to the same individual. The total cost to the buyer for the 4½ acres was \$500.00. According to Andrew Porter, the man who bought this land was a "*sober kind of man, we think.*" The man referred to was H. O. Rose, Petoskey's founding father. {This is dam No. 2 of the map.}

H. O. ROSE COMES

Hiram O. Rose did not come to Petoskey to stay until 1873 but, it is clear he was making early plans to develop a village at this spot as soon as the 1855 Indian Treaty provisions would make it possible to again open Emmet County to white settlement, with railroad connections from southern Michigan to aid in developing industry and commerce. He bought himself one good water power site and waited.

The first white man, other than Andrew Porter, to come and stay during the Mission period was Hazen Ingalls, Sr. He and his large family of grown and almost grown up sons, arrived in the spring of 1866. It seems almost certain that he must have leased the saw-mill of H. O. Rose and at some later time converted it to a grist mill. The Ingalls and the Porters did not get along well at all. On two different

occasions Porter accused the Ingalls of running logs over his dam and willfully causing damage to the extent of \$50.00 the first time and \$200.00 the second.

G.R. & I. ARRIVES

The Grand Rapids and Indiana railroad reached Petoskey in the winter of 1873 and started regular service in the spring of 1874. Government land in Emmet County was available for purchase and or homesteading as of the fall of 1874 and spring 1875. A new era had commenced and Petoskey marked the change by getting the post office name changed from Bear River to Petoskey. This removed the post office from the Mission Farm to the east side of the river with William H. Little the new postmaster. Industrial development along the river and bay proceeded at a rapid pace.

In 1873, H.O. Rose had been successful in purchasing over 200 acres of land in Petoskey. Some of this was on the shore of the bay where the limestone cliffs would provide the natural resources for manufacturing lime. By 1875 his plant included 50 acres of limestone quarries, plus the buildings. A little later there were six kilns in continuous operation and they were well equipped with all modern mechanical devices. The kilns had a capacity of 250 barrels per day and the annual output was 30,000 barrels which was shipped all around Michigan and other states. The lime works gave employment to between 30 and 40 men with the annual payroll reaching a total of \$7,000.00

FIRST ELECTRIC LIGHTS

Mr. Rose had also purchased a second water power site on Bear River. {Dam No. 4 on the Map} In 1886 he started Petoskey's first electrical system. This was known as the Edison-Petoskey Light Company and later became the City Electric Light Works. The first plant supplied Petoskey with both arc and incandescent light. According to a Petoskey paper of March 5, 1886, electric lights were turned on for the first time yesterday on the corner of Lake and Howard and Michigan and Petoskey Streets. Prior to this venture, Mr. Rose leased his water power site to Loveless Blaney.

On June 4, 1875, Mr. Blaney started to erect a planing mill. Later in the summer he erected a building for manufacturing and by August, 1875 he had his own factory in operation. In that year Blaney's new building was used for a variety of community gatherings, including some Sunday church meetings.

1875 was also the year that John Kilborn bought the grist-mill site from Andrew Porter and converted it to a saw-mill. His plant was in operation by September, 1875. The next year he sold it to William L. McManus. This mill stayed in the McManus family for many years and was one of the largest early industries in Petoskey. In 1882 McManus added a planing mill to his operation. In spite of set-backs caused by forest fires and a fire in the mill, the following was written about the McManus Mills in May of 1895: "*The mill has a capacity of 50,000 feet of logs to cut. Large dry kilns are convenient to the mill and the lumber yard, lath mill and buildings, this business occupies between two and three acres. About 50 men are employed in the mills and lumber business.*"

SHAW AND McMILLAN

In June of 1875 the enterprising firm of Shaw and McMillan purchased a tract of land bordering on Bear River and it included a portion of the best water power in the state of Michigan. The jobbers started immediately to clear the land, getting ready to build a dam upon the upper portion of their land. This would turn the river from its natural course into a race where mills could be erected. Shaw and McMillan made an offer to any manufacturer that would come and erect a manufacturing industry that would employ 25 men the entire year, to the effect that they would give them water power and land to build on without money. By July 30 the dam was well under construction and on September 17, 1875, according to the local paper, "*It was filled with water and proved to be made in good workmanlike manner.*" {Dam No. 3 on the map.

At the same time the Shaw and McMillan dam was being constructed, Mr. E. Foglesonger was building a new saw-mill on the site of the old mill of Hazen Ingall's. 1875 was also the year that W.A. Blakely started his business of manufacturing house building

materials. His specialty was scroll sawing and he was an artist at this. His plant covered two lots and he had excellent machinery and buildings. His products were sold mostly to the local trade. Undoubtedly, many of the excellent examples of “*gingerbread*” trim in Bay View today is the work of Blakely.

The Blood Brothers came to Petoskey in 1878 and purchased the site for their works at the mouth of the river. The building had been occupied with a machine shop. After making the necessary changes and additions, their saw-mill and general turning works began operation in 1879. Their mill employed an average of 12 men in 1884. There were 3 brothers associated with the mill, Clarence C. Blood, Charles W. and Maurice E.

HANKEY MILLING COMPANY

In 1879, the year Petoskey was incorporated as a village, Joseph Gardner purchased 14 acres on the east bank of Bear River and erected a flouring mill on the high bank. He operated it only a short time before selling to C.F. Hankey. Under Mr. Hankey's management, the mill became a vry successful venture. Water power turned the wheels of this plant by means of a steel cable, from which the Name “*cable mills*” derived. The dam supplying the power for the Hankey mill was the one constructed by Shaw and McMillan in 1875. In 1895 the firm was composed of C.F. Hankey and his son Lou C. Hankey. They manufactured high grade flour. Brand names were O.B., R.F., and Reliable. Capacity of the mill was 75 barrels per day. They had a large two-story building and the plant covered six lots. The Hankey Milling Company was incorporated in 1912 for \$85,000.

C.F. Hankey's daughter, Minnie, married Thomas Forman of the Forman Company, and on March 24, 1893, Hankey and Forman purchased the Armstrong Company factory which later became the Forman Company.

FIRST WATER WORKS

On May 13, 1881, the citizens of Petoskey voted in favor of erecting a water works plant on the Bear. On December 9, that year they staged a grand celebration of the completion of the waterworks. To show the new water force, they attached a hose to the new hydrants and threw a stream higher than any building in Petoskey. The cost of this new enterprise was reported to be \$20,000. The well had a capacity of 40,000 gallons per hour and the reservoir held 1400 barrels. {Dam No. 5 on the map}

F.K. Winsor's saw-mill and woodenware factory was built in 1883, on the opposite {west side of the river from Hankey Cable Mills.} They used both steam and water power, the water power being supplied by the Shaw and McMillan Dam. The plant had all kinds of machinery for making wooden bowls, rolling pins, handles, etc. The plant had several large two-story buildings with nearly an acre of floor space. It employed 30 men.

BIRKETT BROTHERS

William Birkett of Petoskey and Thomas Birkett of Dexter were partners in Birkett Brothers who first opened their wood pulp mill in 1885. Soon after they changed to hardwood manufacturing and special furniture work. They made tables, stands, chairs and everything in lathe work. Slat-bottomed rockers and settees were a specialty. The building for the hardwood manufacturing stood on the hill above the river, power being obtained by the ingenious patented rope cable connected with the water wheels. The Birkett Brothers associated themselves with Mr. Bauerle in this enterprise. He was the inventor of a number of woodworking machines several of which were for the making of faucets and wooden measures, in the manufacture of which he had no equal.

It appears that the Birkett's also had a custom grist-mill at this time and with their dam were also able to furnish power to the plant of Bull, Bauerle and Jones. This mill did an extensive business in the manufacture of Indian clubs, dumb-bells, ball bats, and

variety turning. They shipped to all parts of the United States and did a thriving business. In 1890 this mill burned with a loss of nearly \$100,000. It was reorganized that same year as the Armstrong Company, and in 1892 was considered one of the most complete hardwood manufacturing mills in the world.

The immense hardwood factory of the Armstrong Company was bought March 23, 1893 by Hankey and Forman and in the same year Thomas Forman and young Morgan Curtis formed a partnership in Forman and Curtis Flooring Company. This was the largest industry on Bear River. The plant covered eighteen acres and made 7 million feet of maple flooring a year. This factory burned in the early 1900's.

DESTROYED BY FIRE

In the 1880's, Barley started his butter bowl factory on the west side of the river. After a few years he took in Charlie Broman and a Mr. Bull as partners and 1898 only Broman owned the factory and changed its name to Petoskey Block and Manufacturing Company. This plant was destroyed by fire in 1913 and when it was rebuilt it became the present Michigan Maple Block Company.

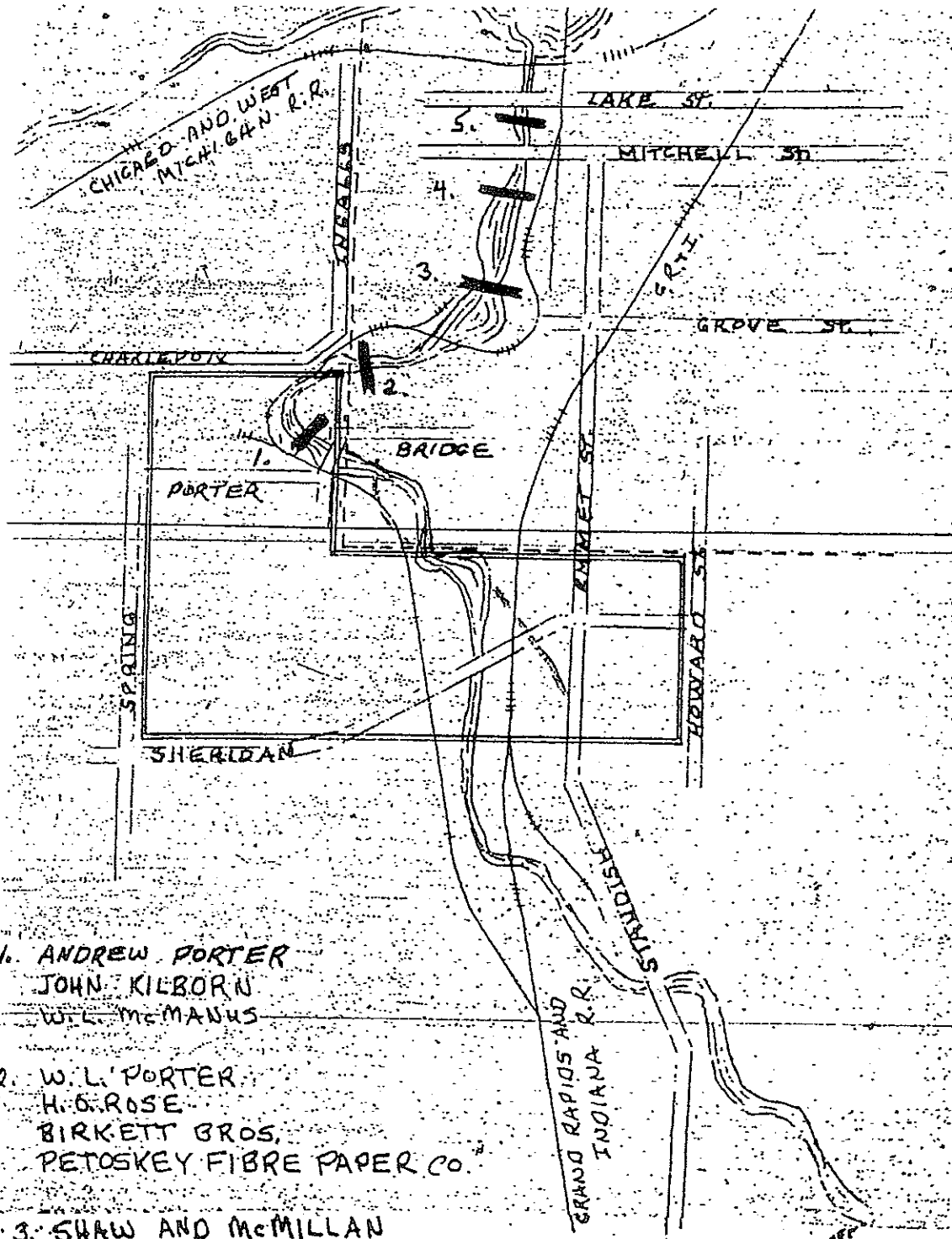
The Washburn Manufacturing Company, started in 1890, made Indian clubs and dumb-bells. It was situated on the hill above the Windsor Factory and derived its power by means of a cable. Caskey and Quinlan opened a furniture factory on September 23, 1892, but this venture was not successful and by 1895 the plant was no longer in operation. There were other saw-mills on the Bear River prior to 1900 which had a short span of operation. Plank's saw-mill burned in 1889 and the one belonging to Fell and DeArment in 1891.

MINERAL WATER

About 1888 another natural resource was found along Bear River. There was a natural gas fever, raging in the whole area and our local citizens raised 3 or 4 thousand dollars to put down a well. At a depth of 280 feet, they got a tremendous flow of pure, ice-cold water. After some difficulty this was shut off and drilling continued until, at a depth of 450 feet another flow was struck which this time, it was impossible to stop. Work on the gas well was discontinued and

people felt they had nothing to show for their money as the well was considered worthless. It proved to be a blessing in disguise, for when people started to use the water of this artisan mineral well they found it beneficial for such things as kidney trouble and indigestion. It became a tourist mecca. On May 9, 1890, the artisan well was bought by a company which opened a health spa with mineral well baths as a specialty.

This paper attempts to cover the development of industries along Bear River to 1900, with special reference to those that made use of the river for water power. There was another which should receive mention although it was not organized until 1901. This was the Petoskey Fibre Paper Company which, from its wage standpoint was one of the largest and most important industrial concerns in northern Michigan. Per year it is estimated to have put \$125,000 in the pockets of Petoskey people. Its biggest drawback was the way it polluted the air with a most unpleasant smell.



1. ANDREW PORTER
 JOHN KILBORN
 W. L. McMANUS

2. W. L. PORTER
 H. G. ROSE
 BIRKETT BROS.
 PETOSKEY FIBRE PAPER CO.

3. SHAW AND McMILLAN
 J. A. BARDNER
 C. F. HANKEY

4. H. A. ROSE
 PETOSKEY ELECTRIC LIGHT WORKS

5. WATER WORKS

Area surrounded by double lines (==) was Minton's farm.

Area surrounded by broken lines (- -) was owned by Petoskey Realty