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The View from Sand Island: Reconsidering the Peripheral Economy, 1880–1940

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The bird's-eye view that western historians typically assume to analyze economic development directs attention away from the point of production and obscures the local conditions that shaped economic life in the rural West. On Sand Island, Wisconsin, seasonal limitations, local transportation patterns, and the intersections of seemingly distinct industries dictated the daily activities of an economic frontier.

ON 4 OCTOBER 1922, THE STEAMER *C. W. Turner* made its tri-weekly stop at the East Bay of Sand Island, a small island off northern Wisconsin's Lake Superior shore and home to a small community of fishermen. The dilapidated steamer—it had been in constant use since 1900 and it reeked of fish—might seem an unlikely symbol of the multifaceted economy of northern Wisconsin and other parts of the rural West. But the *Turner* could be just that. The collection of the daily catch in service of the commercial fishing industry provided the primary reason for the *Turner's* visit to Sand Island. The Booth Fisheries Company, the largest fishpacking firm on the Great Lakes, dispatched the steamer from its base in Bayfield, Wisconsin, to pick up the whitefish and lake trout caught by the island fishermen, and to drop off the ice needed to keep the next catch fresh until its return. But the *Turner* did more than pick up fish and deliver ice; it also carried paying customers enjoying a cruise among the scenic Apostle Islands. Some of the passengers might even have disembarked on Sand Island for an extended stay. And when the *Turner* pulled away from the Sand Island dock, it bore more than just fish and tourists. Crates of berries, jugs of cream, bushels of potatoes, and other island produce were secured to the deck in all available space. This was no simple fishing boat. This was no simple economy.

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Figure 1. The Booth Fisheries Company tug *C. W. Turner* at rest at a Sand Island dock, preparing to load a cargo of fresh fish, agricultural produce, dairy products, and, perhaps, tourists. Photo courtesy Apostle Islands National Lakeshore.

Traditional explanations of economic development in the American West trace the expansion of markets, the spread of transportation networks, and the flow of capital—not the cargo of a beat-up fishing tug like the *Turner*. National, and even international, economic forces determined the growth or decline of Bayfield and countless other frontier towns and cities. Markets, capital, and railroads are at the center of most scholarly explorations of the economic history of the American West, a region characterized as a vast hinterland, a key supplier of natural resources to an expanding, international capitalist economy. As persuasive as these interpretations are for large, region-wide patterns of economic growth, however, they do not adequately explain the resource, extraction-based economies of the rural West. The bird's-eye view historians typically assume to analyze regional growth directs attention away from the places where the resource extraction occurred and obscures the local conditions that also helped to shape economic development. Seasonal limitations, local transportation patterns, and the intersections of ostensibly distinct industries reinforced each other, dictating the daily activities of the men and women who worked in the West's extractive industries. Well into the twentieth century, the residents of Sand Island and other parts of the rural West maintained a seasonal, diversified economy shaped as much by local conditions like the *C. W. Turner's* ability to carry multiple cargoes as by impersonal market forces. They mixed and matched different economic activities, worked in many industries at once, and took advantage of even the smallest opportunities. Tracking these local patterns, intersections, and strategies is essential to understanding the turn-of-the-century economy of the Bayfield Peninsula and other parts of the rural West.

Many scholars, of course, have interpreted the frontier as a process rather than as a place, and it is from this perspective that I am considering Sand Island. Northern Wisconsin does not at first glance seem like a western place. It lies east of the Mississippi River. It has no cowboys, few miners, and still fewer gunslingers. It does not have the aridity that defines many western places—Bayfield gets an average of 32 inches of precipitation a year, and hundreds of miles separate the town from the nearest tumbleweed. But when one methodically examines the economic processes that marked northern Wisconsin's development in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries one sees that these processes were clearly western. The region developed as the resource hinterland for a large market economy, as a remote outpost of an expanding economic frontier. Instead of gold, wheat, or beef cattle, the region supplied fish, timber, and cut stone to the national markets. As in other parts of the rural West, the extraction of these natural resources and the process of integration into the national market economy dictated economic development. Sand Island and the other parts of the Lake Superior region experienced this frontier process into the twentieth century.¹

Historians have long employed variations of the "Plundered Province" thesis to explain broad patterns of settlement and economic growth in the nineteenth-century American West. In its most basic terms, this thesis holds that the East, not the West, reaped the benefit of the West's bountiful natural resources. "[T]he few alpine forests of the West were leveled, its minerals were mined and smelted, all its resources were drained off through the perfectly engineered gutters of a system designed to flow eastward," commented Bernard DeVoto, who coined the phrase in 1934.² In the 1970s, the Plundered Province thesis received a jolt of international and theoretical rigor from the work of a variety of scholars, most directly from Immanuel Wallerstein. Wallerstein divided the world into two basic units: the core and the periphery. Core regions possessed mature economies, capital wealth, and a strong industrial base. Peripheral regions lacked capital, but produced natural resources to supply the economies of the core regions. For Wallerstein, the emergence of a capitalist world-system that linked core and periphery explained world history since the sixteenth century. Historians of the American West quickly applied Wallerstein's framework to their own region; the capitalist core—in Europe and later in the eastern United States—had incorporated the U. S. West into its economic system. Core and periphery emerged as essential explanatory terms in western history. Cowboys became the distant outposts of a national meatpacking industry rather than lonely range riders, and historians made over prospectors, lumberjacks, and other western archetypes in a similar way.³

Permutations of Wallerstein's world-systems theory have come to dominate explanations of economic development in the American West. "To attempt to describe change in the West as an isolated, internally homogenous process falsifies the material world; it ignores important and integral relationships involving the modern capitalist world system," explains William Robbins. Most important among these relationships, according to Robbins, is the profoundly unequal one between core and periphery. In each industry, in each economic cycle important to the western past, urban centers (first in Europe, then in the eastern U. S., and finally in the metropolitan West) exerted their influence and control over the rural periphery.⁴ In *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*, William Cronon focuses not on the impact of core on periphery but rather on the relationship between the two. Cronon employs a world-systems framework (although using the geographer's terms "metropolis" and "hinterland") to explore the phenomenal growth of Chicago and its region in the nineteenth century. Investment capital and finished goods traveled from Chicago into the hinterland; natural resources like grain, timber, and livestock returned to the city and fueled Chicago's explosive growth. Although balance sheets tabulating this relationship were hardly equal, Cronon illustrates that the country exerted as much influence on shaping the city as did the city on the country. "The central story of the nineteenth-century West is that of an expanding metropolitan economy creating ever more elaborate and intimate linkages between city and country," explains Cronon. "City and country shared a common past, and had fundamentally shaped each other." Like Robbins, Cronon argues that the rural West cannot be understood in isolation; a resource hinterland cannot be explained without examining its links to an industrial metropolis.⁵

The explanations for the process of western economic development suggested by Robbins, Cronon, and others focus on large trends and patterns; they examine regional, national, and even international economies with a bird's-eye view. This gives these models their explanatory power. But these interpretations share a persistent bias. They address their subjects from the perspective of the core, of the city, rather than from the periphery or the hinterland. The movement of investment capital, transportation corridors, and market fluctuations are more easily traced and interpreted where they are found in bulk—that is, in the cities. Cities relied on the resources supplied by their hinterlands, but never on any specific part of that hinterland. "Indeed," Cronon points out in an essay on Alaska, "no one place was essential to [the city dwellers'] survival, for they could always use their wealth and capital to look elsewhere if the resources of any one place began to run out." Analyses of the relationship between core and periphery—between a single, central point and a multitude of peripheral ones—naturally focus on the center. This macro-scale view diverts attention from the peripheral points of production, the places where the fishing, farming, and logging actually occurred. Broad patterns obscure the smaller details, the locally determined conditions equally important in the production process. Many of the critiques leveled at world-systems theory emerge from just this point, the persistent bias toward the core. And these critiques are apt: a more peripheral perspective is required. In the words of one of Wallerstein's critics: "We must, in short, put on new spectacles and look at world history with peripheral vision."⁶

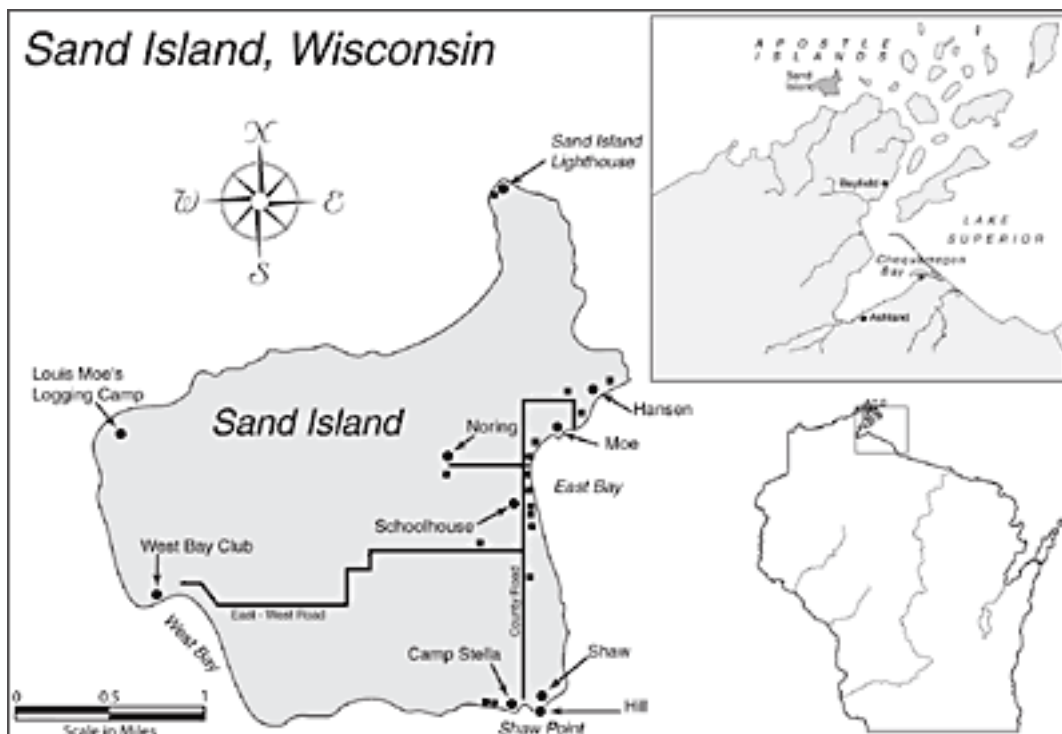


Figure 2. Sand Island, Bayfield County, Wisconsin, ca. 1910s.
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Scholarly analyses that isolate and abstract individual industries fall into a similar trap, sacrificing local details for the broad perspective. Study of a single industry provides distinct analytical advantages: the internal economic, environmental, and social dynamics of the specific industry become clear. Most studies of western and midwestern economic history follow this model, isolating and abstracting the fishing, mining, or tourism industries for detailed study. Such techniques have rendered persuasive interpretations.⁷ But much like the bird's-eye view, this abstraction obscures local details and conditions and draws attention away from the places of production, away from the forests where trees became lumber. On Sand Island, for example, fishermen and farmers—not large lumber companies—logged the swampy forest. When seen with "peripheral vision," seemingly distinct industries merge. Intersection, not isolation, provides the paradigm for understanding the peripheral economy.

How, then, did a peripheral economy work? Returning to Sand Island, which certainly qualifies as peripheral, reveals just that. The island lies one and one-half miles off the shore of the northern tip of the Bayfield Peninsula, Wisconsin's northernmost point. It is part of the Apostle Islands, a group of twenty-two islands that juts into Lake Superior. The nearest town is Bayfield, twenty miles away by boat—or by ice during the four or five months a year that the in-shore waters of Lake Superior remain frozen. Today, the islands make up Apostle Islands National Lakeshore. At the turn of the century, Sand Island provided a home for a small, but growing, community of fishermen and farmers. For sixty years, the residents of Sand Island engaged in a mixed economy that balanced fishing, farming, logging, and tourism. Although each of these activities functioned within a larger regional economy, viewing them in isolation distorts the reasons that any of them worked in the first place. Each pursuit proved economically viable because of the ways it intersected with the others. Sand Island's particular circumstances—the simple fact that it is an island—exaggerate these connections and make them easy to observe. Viewed from a peripheral place, standard frontier economic activities like fishing, logging, and tourism look different than when seen from the core. The rural historian Mary Neth uses the term "making do" to explain the ways midwestern farm women organized household economies in the early twentieth centuries. In addition to applying to farm women's work, the phrase "making do" provides a better model for understanding the multifaceted Sand Island economy than do the macro-scale frames typically employed by historians to analyze seemingly market-driven activities like commercial fishing and logging. The residents of Sand Island were not just fishermen or farmers. They made their living by mixing and matching a variety of economic activities, by making do as best they could.⁸

Customary elements of western economic history—railroads, eastern investment, demand for western natural resources—do establish the contours for the history of Bayfield and Sand Island. Copper deposits and white pine sparked initial American interest in the western Great Lakes, and the treaties signed between the United States government and the Ojibwe residents of the region in the 1830s and 1840s stand out in this respect—almost every other treaty signed during the period sought access to land, not natural resources. Euro-American settlement of western Lake Superior did not become feasible until the construction of the locks at Sault Ste. Marie opened shipping lanes to the lower Great Lakes in 1855. An eastern investment group financed the initial settlement of Bayfield because they saw the site as a potential location for railroad terminus. Extractive industries like fishing, logging, and quarrying fueled Bayfield's economy, but all of these industries burgeoned when the railroad arrived in 1883. The year-round community on Sand Island did not develop until the railroad guaranteed a method of transporting freshly caught fish to markets in St. Paul, Chicago, and other urban centers. Still, these extra-local economic forces mark only the outlines of Sand Island's economy, not its inner workings.⁹



Figure 3. Sand Island fishermen Peter Hansen, Fred Hansen, Lenus Jacobsen, and Herman Johnson, Sr. Photo courtesy Apostle Islands National Lakeshore.

The Sand Island community grew with the town of Bayfield. Frank Shaw became the first Euro- 10
American to own property on Sand Island when he used his Civil War veteran's bonus to acquire
land on the island's southeast corner in 1870. Shortly thereafter, Shaw and several other men began
to use the island as a summer fishing station. The fishermen packed their catch in barrels of salt and
sold it to the firm of N. & F. Boutin, whose representatives visited the island on regular intervals to
pick up fish barrels and transport them to Bayfield and then to more distant markets. In the 1870s,
the fisheries of the Apostle Islands and Bayfield vicinity emerged as the most productive on Lake
Superior. Sand Island provided easy access to the best fishing grounds on the lake, just off the
northern and western points of the island, and its sandy east bay provided shelter from Lake
Superior's famously violent storms.¹⁰

Sand Island evolved from a summer fishing station into a year-round community as the town of 11
Bayfield connected to national markets. Shaw and his family, as well as several hired men, began
living year-round on the island in the 1880s. Norwegian immigrant Louis Moe joined Shaw on the
island in 1893, and other immigrants quickly followed. One observer reported in 1895 that "there is
a settlement of Swede and Norwegian fishermen-farmers, on East bay, which bids fair to increase
in numbers and prosperity." Sand Island eventually provided a home for about seventy year-round
residents. Commercial fishing dominated the lives of the islanders. Collection boats from Bayfield's
fish packing companies arrived every day but Sunday, picking up the catch and dropping off ice to
keep the fish fresh. The seasonal nature of commercial fishing dictated daily activities. Fishing
season started when the ice cleared from the inshore islands—usually in April—freeing the
collection boats to make their rounds. From the time that they could first set their nets in the spring
through September or October, fishermen sought mostly lake trout and whitefish; the most
productive parts of the fishing cycle came early and late in the season—in May and October. The
summer months, when fish seek deeper, cooler waters, often proved the least fruitful. Fishermen
spent their off-season repairing nets and boats, preparing for the next year.¹¹

Almost all of the Sand Island fishermen were farmers, too. Frank Shaw stands as an example. 12
Even as he tended his nets during the summer fishing season, Shaw planted and tended crops. Most
of what Shaw grew went to feed his family and the hired men, but he also shipped produce to
market in Bayfield. In October 1886, for example, Shaw sailed to town laden with three hundred
bushels of potatoes. Through the rest of the 1890s, he continued to expand both his fishing and
farming operations. His farm was particularly known for its strawberries: "The finest strawberries
that have been brought into market this season are arriving daily from Frank Shaw's farm at Sand
Island," reported the *Bayfield County Press* in 1897. Shaw's farm looked like other farmsteads in
rural Wisconsin, complete with cows, chickens, and sheep, hayfields and apple orchards. By 1899
his fleet included four vessels and he kept three to four hired men on hand at all times. By 1895, the
Ashland Daily Press reported, "Captain 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 other permanent residents
of Sand Island followed Shaw's example. Sand Island fishermen-farmers grew root crops like
potatoes and rutabagas, fruit such as apples and berries, and also tended livestock. Strawberries and
raspberries were among their most important crops. Because of the cooling effect of Lake Superior,
the berry season on Sand Island started later and lasted longer than that on the mainland, allowing
the island farmers to sell their berries in Bayfield at a good price several weeks after other area

farms had stopped producing. Islanders consumed much of their produce at home, but they also shipped their surplus to Bayfield.^{[12](#)}



Figure 4. Frank Shaw established the first permanent home on the island in the early 1880s. He sold the property to his son-in-law, Burt Hill, in 1910, who shortly thereafter expanded the fields and orchards around the farm. This picture dates to the 1910s. Photo courtesy Apostle Islands National Lakeshore.

The fishing and farming activities on Sand Island were tightly intertwined, and isolating these activities misses an essential aspect of Sand Island life and obscures the reasons why each activity proved economically viable. Island residents balanced the seasonal demands of both their fishing and farming activities. Early spring fishing did not compete with farming, and the slower fishing days of the summer could be filled with farm work. In May, however, islanders had to make time to plant crops. Norwegian immigrant Frederick Hansen's diary illustrates the balancing act:

May 1913

6 About 300 lbs. [fish] today. Planted in hot bed.

7 About 500 lbs. today. Nice weather but cold.

8 Nothing doing—no fish.

9 Stretched some fence.

10 Lifted as usual. [this means lifted fishing nets]

11 About 350 lbs. fish today.

12 Foggy, so we could not lift—finished our fence.

13 Lifted.

14 Nothing doing—stormy. Moved boat to Shaw's.

15 Brought boat back. Raised the barn roof.

16 Lifted—no fish.

17 Went to town and came back today. Sun.

18 Played cribbage and whist all day.

19 Lifted.

20 Plowed some—had to stop for rain.

21 Finished plowing—foggy.

22 Best lift of the season so far—about 1100 lbs.

The weather often helped determine where Hansen spent his time. Foggy, windy days that made for difficult lifting on the lake offered the chance to work around the farm.^{[13](#)}



Figure 5. Norwegian immigrant and Sand Island fisherman-farmer Fred Hansen, ca. 1900. Photo courtesy Apostle Islands National Lakeshore.

The most important intersection between fishing and farming came on the boats that transported fish and produce to Bayfield, like the Booth Company steamer *C. W. Turner*. When the fish boats stopped at the island to pick up the daily catch, they also took on board bushels of potatoes, jugs of cream, and crates of berries, all bound for the Bayfield market. Without the scheduled daily stops by the collection boats, Sand Island market agriculture would not have been viable. By dovetailing fishing and farming, island residents protected themselves against the vagaries of the national market. At times, prices for fresh fish dropped to such a point that it no longer made sense to fish; islanders could then work on improving their farms. The *C. W. Turner* traveled in the intersection between farming and fishing and allowed the mix and match economy of the island to function.¹⁴

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The island residents devoted primarily to farming frequently worked in the fishing industry, too. Frank Shaw's son-in-law, Burt Hill, abandoned fishing in 1919 to focus on his livestock and orchards, but he remained tied to the island's fishing industry in important ways. For about two weeks in late November, Lake Superior herring swarmed to the Apostle Islands to spawn. At such times, these small fish proved outrageously easy to catch—a single lift of the herring nets could produce many tons of fish. To capitalize on the herring run, the region's fishermen dramatically expanded the scale of their operations. Hill and his wife, Anna Mae, rented space at their dock to fisher-men during the herring season, and often sold room and board to entire herring crews as a way of earning extra cash. In the 1910s, for example, the Hills boarded a crew of herring fishermen for the S. L. Boutin Fish Company. The Hills continued to rent dock space and take boarders intermittently throughout the 1930s. In 1933 and 1936, the Hills boarded the crew hired by fellow Island resident Carl Dahl. In 1936, this meant housing up to thirty men for most of the month of November, charging five to seven dollars a day and earning a total of \$502.20 for the month. Burt Hill and the island farmers occasionally worked as hired hands on the fishing boats themselves. Sometimes this meant providing neighborly assistance for a day or two; sometimes it meant steady employment for the whole summer.¹⁵

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The mixed fishing and farming economy of Sand Island is difficult to quantify. Although Fred Hansen kept detailed records of his fishing operation, he did not record statistics for farming or dairying. The Hills, Norings, and Moes each had six to ten dairy cows at any given time, and the other families had two or three each. The Hills pastured their cattle behind their farm at the southern end of the island, while the Norwegian immigrants that lived on the east bay shared a common pasture in the north. Hill had three small apple orchards. Those families that did not participate in fishing had the largest farms; the Hills had fifty seven acres and the Norings forty. The Norings devoted more land to agriculture than any of the other families, and had the most cleared and improved land.¹⁶

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Figure 6. A group of Sand Islanders take a break from work. Photo courtesy Apostle Islands National Lakeshore.

Sand Island logging most clearly reveals on-the-ground connections between seemingly separate industries. The first commercial logging on Sand Island occurred in 1884, during the time when fishermen used Sand Island only as a summer camp. Logging, though, was a winter activity, when icy roads and frozen swamps made transporting sawlogs easier. In December 1884—well after the close of the fishing season, but before the winter freeze—the Boutin company's fish collection steamer arrived at the island towing a barge loaded with men, teams, and supplies for a logging camp established by the local firm of Boutin & Holston. The company estimated that its winter logging would total over 2,500,000 board feet of lumber, mostly high-grade white pine. At the end of the following June, another Boutin tug arrived at Sand Island to pick up a raft of the winter's work and to tow the logs to the local mills. The company resumed its operations the following winter. No records exist to document whether the men who lived on Sand Island in the summer and sold their daily catch to the Boutin collection steamer remained on the island as lumberjacks. But Frank Boutin and his family ran the companies that conducted both operations.¹⁷

Later logging operations followed the same seasonal pattern, occurring while the fishing boats remained locked in ice. In the winter of 1897, fisherman-farmer and Sand Island resident Louis Moe started a small logging camp on the west side of the island. Moe initially logged land that he owned outright, but he soon secured logging rights to the unsettled, western end of the island by working out arrangements with absentee owners of the land. Moe hired between eight and ten loggers, usually men from Bayfield, to come to the island each winter. As they got older, the sons of the Sand Island fishermen also worked in Moe's camp. Carl Dahl and Bill Noring both worked for Moe as sawyers, and Bill Palm worked as a swamper—identifying trees to be cut and finding routes for the skidways needed to move cut lumber to the shoreline for shipment. Bergitt Noring (Bill's mother) worked as the camp cook one year. Moe relied on his small herd of six to ten cows to provide beef for the loggers. Moe also had a blacksmith shop on his farmstead on the east side of the island, where he could repair logging equipment, shoe horses, and take care of other small-scale metalwork.¹⁸

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Moe sold each winters' cut to the sawmill located in Bayfield, much like other small, independent loggers in the region. Mill owners often relied on these jobbers for a significant percentage of their sawlogs. The Daniel Shaw Lumber Company, a mid-to-large sized company with headquarters in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, illustrates the importance of independent logging operations like Moe's to the Northwoods logging industry. The amount of lumber that the Shaw Company bought from independent loggers varied greatly, often hovering around one million board feet, but occasionally rising much higher. The company purchased twenty million board feet of lumber from independent loggers in the winter of 1892–1893, the great majority of its total supply. The next year, however, the company purchased only 3,500,000 board feet from jobbers. The amount of wood purchased from farmer-loggers (farmers who simply logged their own land) varied as well. Shaw's records include individual purchases ranging from as little as ten thousand board feet up to four hundred thousand board feet. Bayfield's R. D. Pike Lumber Company, the destination of Louis Moe's Sand Island sawlogs and equivalent in size to Shaw, acquired its logs in the same varied way.¹⁹

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Fishermen and farmers all over the Great Lakes replicated the seasonal labor patterns evident at Sand Island, hanging up their nets or plows and looking for work in the area's many logging camps during the winter. This proved particularly true for hired hands, as opposed to fishermen who owned their own gear and boats. Frank Shaw employed "on an average three men, sometimes more, and when fishing is light but two. The rest of the time the men are engaged in the woods lumbering ..." Farmers, too, found employment in the lumber camps. Just as often, they rented out their oxen and horses to haul logs, and received wages themselves for tending the livestock. And the farmers frequently sold timber that they cut in the process of clearing their land to nearby sawmills.²⁰

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Figure 7. In the summertime, Camp Stella filled with visitors, providing important economic opportunities for the year-round island residents. Photo courtesy Apostle Islands National Lakeshore.

The Sand Island tourist trade reveals a final layer of interconnection. In 1881, Sam Fifield— editor of the Ashland paper, future lieutenant governor of Wisconsin, and one of the region's biggest boosters—spent part of the summer of 1881 camping on the island. In 1886, Fifield established the Apostle Islands' first summer resort, Camp Stella, on the south shore of the island, and he entertained guests there for nearly thirty years. Fifield set up a "street" lined with white canvas camping tents, a substantial dock, several permanent cottages, and a large dining space. Fifield promoted Camp Stella as an escape into nature and as a hay fever retreat. "Beneath the evergreen boughs the white tents glisten through the open spaces of a beautiful grove," Fifield described. "The sun finds its way among the tree tops that cast a welcome shade where the hammocks are hung, while a gentle breeze, cooled by the waves of the sparkling bay, plays summer airs, that lull and soothe the happy campers to delightful dreams.... It is a pretty picture, this camp in the wilderness...." At first, Camp Stella's visitors consisted mainly of Fifield's local friends and relatives. As the resort developed, Fifield's promotional efforts took hold, and Camp Stella attracted more out-of-state visitors. Fifield's guests spent their time relaxing, fishing, and watching the island fishermen hauling nets and rigging their boats. Guests also enjoyed picnics at the picturesque red sandstone lighthouse on the northern tip of Sand Island. Many Camp Stella visitors returned year after year, and several regular visitors built their own summer homes on the island.²¹

The big fish companies entered the tourist trade, too, outfitting their collection boats to carry tourists on pleasure cruises around the islands. In 1898, fifty cents purchased a trip aboard the *Hunter*, one of the A. Booth Company's steamers. The *Bayfield County Press* described the trip: "A ride to Duluth and return on the steamer *Hunter* is as fine a trip as there is on the lake. The boat passes through the Apostle Islands, which are noted for their beautiful scenery, and along the beautiful rocky shore...." The fishermen themselves served as a tourist attraction for visitors to the island. The city-folk who frequented Camp Stella relished the opportunity to watch Frank Shaw, Louis Moe, and the other island fishermen return in the middle of the day with a load of fresh fish. One observer described her trip on the Booth company boat: "While waiting for the fishing boats, the passengers explore the little fishing community, peering into unpainted sheds, where dry nets are hanging in big rolls from the rafters, and where trays of floats and sinkers are kept; examining the great wooden reels outside, on which the wet nets are spread to dry; and picking the raspberries that are so thick in the islands in the latter part of summer." Activities like fishing and farming did not preclude tourism on Sand Island. On the contrary, it was these other activities that made tourist endeavors on the island possible in the first place, and allowed them to continue.²²

Especially after the turn of the century, tourism joined fishing, farming, and logging as an essential element of Sand Island's mix and match economy. Summer residents became an increasingly important element of Sand Island's economic life. The *Bayfield County Press* reported in 1909 that "East Bay on Sand Island has been invaded by those in search of summer homes here." As a summer resort, Camp Stella did not survive the death of its founder, Sam Fifield, in 1915. Wealthy Wisconsin businessmen Charles Jensch and Fred C. Anderson eventually purchased the property for use as family summer homes. On the other side of the island, a group of St. Paul businessmen bought over one hundred acres in 1912 and 1913 and began construction of an Adirondack style lodge—the most substantial building on the island. The West Bay Club, as it was called, featured a large living area, a kitchen and pantry, running water, and gas and electric lights. Enterprising island resident Edwin Bonde subdivided a portion of his property into a series of small, one and one-half acre plots and promoted the area as a site for summer homes. In 1914, Bayfield County tax rolls reveal that nine people owned the fifteen lots of section 24—the land along East Bay. The following year, after Bonde's subdivision, the same acreage had been divided into 38 plots, with 32 separate owners. Some of the new owners chose not to build on their new land, and many of these lots remained vacant. Permanent residents of the island bought some of these lots, too. But most of the people who bought land from Bonde intended to build summer homes.²³

Summer residents quickly integrated into the social and economic networks of the Sand Island community. Summer residents depended on year-round islanders for food, transportation, and the upkeep of their houses. First Camp Stella, and then the individual summer residents, provided an important home market for Sand Island fisher-men-farmers. Summer families like the Andersons, the Disens, and the Jenschs appear regularly in Burt Hill's account books. They bought dairy products, meat, chickens, eggs, fruit, and other agricultural products. Summer visitors either arranged for travel to the island on one of the large fish collection boats or with one of the island fisher-men. On 13 August 1933, for example, Frederick Hansen altered his usual diary entries on fishing and farming to note: "Hauled tourists. \$4.00." Summer resident Howard Palm remembered: "We were dependent on them for transportation. When we came out to the island, the only way we could get across would be to have someone from the island come to get us...." Summer residents usually paid the islanders to serve as caretakers for their island property, as well. Burt Hill earned a flat fee of \$25 per year as caretaker for several island properties, plus additional money for work like cutting wood, roofing, and opening the summer homes for a new season. Herman Johnson worked as the caretaker for the Aabel family, opening their home just before they arrived from the Twin Cities.²⁴



Figure 8. West Bay Club member and summer resident Frank Eha, Sr. and year-round island resident Harold Dahl show off the prize of a sport fishing expedition, ca. 1920. Photo courtesy Apostle Islands National Lakeshore.

Summer residents added something of their own to the Sand Island economy: cash. Permanent residents often paid their debts to each other with labor, fish, or butchered meat. Summer visitors paid in cash for the services provided by permanent residents. The lighthouse situated at the northern end of Sand Island added another small supply of cash to the island economy. Lighthouse keeper Immanuel Luick and his family bought eggs, fish, milk, and other produce provided by the islanders. The Luicks, too, can be regarded as summer residents, as they left the island in winter when ice closed the Great Lakes shipping lanes. In a cash-poor peripheral economy, even cash exchanges of very small amounts made a big difference in house-hold finances.²⁵

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Anna Mae Hill—not her husband—performed the most lucrative work for the summer residents by providing room and board. Some of the summer families that lived close to the Hill farm chose not to cook their own meals, instead paying Anna Mae Hill to cook for them. The Andersons, for example, paid \$78.00 for meals in August 1938. Especially in the late 1930s, when Burt Hill had curtailed his farming operations due to advancing age, meals and boarding receipts made up the largest portion of the family income. In 1938, Anna Mae Hill's boarding work accounted for nearly six hundred dollars, more than the combined income derived from the sale of chicken and dairy products, apples, and the money earned by Burt Hill through labor and renting his horse team and plow. The Loftfields, too, provided room and board to summer visitors, although on a smaller scale than the Hills.²⁶

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Figure 9. Tourists visit Sand Island Lighthouse, a favorite picnic location for summer residents, year-round islanders, and other tourists. Photo courtesy Apostle Islands National Lakeshore.

Women like Anna Mae Hill played an essential role in the multifaceted Sand Island economy, although their labor is hard to trace. A gender-based division of labor certainly shaped the actions of the men and women who lived on the island. The primary sources on Sand Island are silent on women's economic roles, other than Anna Mae Hill's work in lodging and feeding summer tourists and November herring crews. It is not clear who worked in the gardens and tended the dairy cows—two areas traditionally considered women's work on midwestern farms, but that were undergoing changes as farms became more specialized. Burt Hill cared for his small dairy herd. In traditional Norwegian families, on the other hand, tending to dairy cows was considered women's work. In his diary, Fred Hansen mentions butchering hogs and cattle but never milking or feeding them, and frequently records his farm work. Records or not, it is certain that the women of Sand Island contributed a great deal of the labor of berry picking and garden tending. There is no evidence of Sand Island wives or daughters working on the fishing boats—although they might have—women did in fishing families elsewhere on the Great Lakes. And women often helped with the shore work such as cleaning and drying nets. Women's reproductive and domestic work also played an essential role in the economic activities on Sand Island; island children worked in the fields and on the boats, at far cheaper rates than hired hands.²⁷



Figure 10. Anna Mae Shaw Hill in 1906. Anna Mae's work in feeding summer island residents and in boarding herring crews became an increasingly important part of the Hill's economic strategy. Photo courtesy Apostle Islands National Lakeshore.

Viewed from Sand Island, a peripheral point of production, the intersections between various industries take on added importance. Rather than independent industries, fishing, farming, logging, and tourism reinforced each other. Overlapping transportation methods made each individual activity economically feasible. The seasonal nature of the different industries complemented each other. Even tourism, an industry reliant on outsiders, functioned within the space made available on the margins of other activities. Sand Island's isolation—and the very fact that it is an island—exaggerates some interconnections, and this makes them easier to identify and to trace. But *every* small place had purely local conditions and economic intersections like these, and in each place they came together differently. Throughout the hinterland regions of the West and Midwest, this type of local interconnection determined how and when people engaged in economic activity.

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Still, the connections between industries were not limited to places so peripheral as Sand Island. Seemingly distinct industries based in Bayfield—the town through which Sand Island's fish, lumber, produce, and tourists traveled—also intersected in important ways. Few of Bayfield's leading businessmen focused their attention on a single industry or economic endeavor. Robinson D. Pike stands as an example. Pike was one of Bayfield's oldest residents, and a founder of the Bayfield Businessmen's Association. He owned extensive timberlands on the Bayfield Peninsula as well as the town's largest mill. But Pike's interests extended far beyond lumber. He also invested in Bayfield real estate, including sandstone quarries, and he owned and managed one of the town's two commercial docks—from which the region's products made their way to market. Bayfield's other business leaders had similarly diverse portfolios. These men did not experience the intersecting nature of their various ventures in the same way as the residents of Sand Island. Robinson D. Pike did not need to cut stone at his quarry in the summer and fill his winter months with hard labor in his lumber camps. But he hired people—probably many of the same people—to work in both operations. Business leaders, too, exploited the intersections among different industries.²⁸

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The multifaceted investments of Bayfield's leading businessmen directly shaped the development of Sand Island. The Boutin family, for example, not only ran one of the large packing firms that picked up Sand Island fish, they also conducted the first major logging operation on the island in the 1880s. And Sand Islanders might have purchased dry goods at the Boutins' Bayfield store. When Frank Shaw sought to expand his farm in 1890, he bought additional land from real estate speculator William Knight. Ten years later, when Knight promoted the region's fruit through his presidency of the Bayfield Peninsula Horticultural Society, he helped to market the apples, strawberries, and raspberries that Shaw and his neighbors grew on Sand Island. The connections between the apparently distinct investments of Bayfield's leading businessmen thus become apparent when examined at the point of production.²⁹

It might be tempting to view Sand Island as exceptional or irrelevant because of its isolation and the small scale of the market production that occurred there. Such a view is a mistake. All aspects of Sand Island's balanced, diverse economy functioned as parts of a larger, regional whole. The commercial fishery of the Apostle Islands and Bayfield vicinity emerged in the 1870s as one of the most productive on Lake Superior, and it maintained this position for close to a century. In 1927, Frederick Hansen caught 23,478 pounds of lake trout and whitefish; the Bayfield area's 142 other fisher-men totaled 608,276 pounds (meaning Hansen caught far more than most). Specific measurements of the sawlogs taken from Sand Island are not available, other than the 2.5 million board feet harvested in the mid-1880s. But sawmills all over the region bought logs from independent farmer-loggers and from contract loggers like Louis Moe. When islanders sold crates of berries or bushels of apples in town, their actions need to be understood as a part of the effort by local business leaders to establish the Bayfield Peninsula as a fruit-growing district of national importance. Samuel Fifield's promotion of Camp Stella had an important regional context, as well, in the attempts by the railroad companies to lure tourists from the nation's cities to Bayfield, Ashland, and particularly, the Apostle Islands. The railroad companies used exactly the same rhetoric, advertised exactly the same advantages, as Fifield did for Camp Stella. Fifield himself had served as a manager of the Hotel Chequamegon, the luxurious resort built by the Wisconsin Central Railroad as the centerpiece of its Northwoods tourism business. Sand Island emerged as a spot for summer homes in the 1910s and 1920s because of region-wide promotion of tourism as replacement for logging in the area's economy. In all of these cases, economic activity on Sand Island served as important parts of a regional economic framework.³⁰



Figure 11. Sand Island schoolhouse, ca. 1910–1920. Photo courtesy Apostle Islands National Lakeshore.

Sand Island's residents carved out a living for themselves by occupying the intersections of these different industries for over sixty years. At its height in the 1910s and 1920s, the island community boasted a one-room schoolhouse, a cooperative store, a post office, and even a short-lived telephone connection to the mainland. But the East Bay community eventually faced the same dilemma as many other isolated, rural communities—few of the children chose to stay in the area as adults. The isolation of island life exaggerated the problem. The closing of the school in 1928 for lack of students marked the imminent decline of the community. One by one, the island families began to leave. With their children grown, keeping up the farming and fishing operations proved more and more taxing for the settler generation. The Norings were the last family to leave Sand Island, in 1944. One islander remembered: "When the Noring's family was raised—all the kids were on their own—the Norings abandoned the farm and built another house down by the lake near the shore. They lived there for a few years until they started getting older and weren't able to live on the island anymore. They wanted to live in town—be closer to medical help if they needed. Which is what all of them do eventually." The descendants of the island's fishermen and farmers continued to use their childhood homes in the summer for rest and relaxation. In 1970, the National

Park Service bought out all of the island landowners and created Apostle Islands National Lakeshore.³¹

What can the mixed economy of a small island in Lake Superior tell us about patterns of economic development in the West? Historians usually interpret the history of a place like Sand Island within a much larger framework, emphasizing the importance of railroads, market connections, and investment capital in the development of the economic hinterland. Surely these extra-local forces did dictate life on Sand Island in real ways. But they established only the outlines of Sand Island economic life. The inner workings of the island economy—the way that island residents experienced the daily routines of fishing, farming, and logging—depended on local concerns. In this respect, the models that historians traditionally employ to explain economic development offer less guidance.

Islanders did not practice a subsistence lifestyle or a purely market-based one, but rather a blend of the two. Rural, economic, and agricultural historians have engaged in a vigorous debate over when and how fully American farm families embraced market capitalism. Did farm economies embrace the imperatives of the market—a focus on the accumulation of wealth by reliance on a single cash crop—in the early 1800s or not until the middle of the 1900s? On Sand Island, at least, decidedly non-market factors helped to shape daily life well into the twentieth century. Economic life remained seasonal, diversified, and flexible. When the price for fresh fish fell below a certain point—or the weather prevented successful fishing—they could simply switch to farming. They consumed much of their agricultural produce at home, but also planted crops with an eye on the market. Wage work provided supplemental income as needed. Islanders worked for and with each other, paying their debts with labor or bartered goods, not in cash. And yet, the Sand Island economy clearly connected to—and depended on—national markets. But to view these economies in purely industrial terms is to overlook how they functioned on the ground, in the places where fishermen caught fish and lumberjacks cut trees.³²

Domestic households suggest a second, non-industrial model for the organization of the peripheral economy. In *Preserving the Family Farm*, Mary Neth offers the concept of "making do" as the organizational center of the women's role in the household economy in the rural Midwest during the early twentieth century. Making do, she explains, "a simple term applied to the practice of making use of the goods at hand or doing without, was an economic necessity, a rural tradition, and a custom valued by farm people." This kind of strategy included such things as mending clothes instead of buying new, trading farm products with neighbors, or taking on small jobs that added a marginal amount of money to the household income. Historians typically place fishing, farming, logging and tourism outside the home and outside the confines of the household economy. But island families organized their economic lives in much the same way that rural women managed their households—by working in a variety of industries, by taking on odd jobs, by exploiting the opportunities made available at the intersections of seemingly distinct activities. In this way, "making do" becomes the model not just for a single household, but for the inner workings of the diverse economy of a peripheral point of production. Similarly local factors and economic intersections dictated the economic lives of men and women elsewhere in the rural West, everywhere on the economic frontier.³³

When historians seek to explain patterns of economic growth in the American West, they do not pay enough attention to the way that the men and women of the hinterland simply made do. The isolation of a single industry like logging might reveal the environmental impact of clear cutting or the relationship between those who worked in the lumber camps and those who owned them. But with such abstraction, historians remove the act of cutting trees from the context in which that act occurred. The men and women of Sand Island—and of many other parts of the rural West—did not experience logging, fishing, farming, and other industries in isolation. These industries were part of a tapestry, a fabric of economic options, which together determined the way they spent their days. If railroads, investment, and markets are the keys to discerning large patterns of economic development, then seasonal work, diversification, and making do are the keys for discerning smaller ones. Our understanding of the economic history of the rural West is not complete without paying close attention to these very local factors.

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NOTES

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² Bernard DeVoto, "The West: A Plundered Province," *Harper's* (August 1934): 360 and William G. Robbins, "The 'Plundered Province' Thesis and the Recent Historiography of the American West," *Pacific Historical Review* 55 (November 1986): 577–97.

³ Wallerstein presented his world-system theory in three volumes: *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York, 1974), *The Modern World-System II: Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World Economy, 1600–1750* (New York, 1980), and *The Second Era of Great Expansion of the Capitalist World-Economy, 1730–1840s* (San Diego, 1989).

⁴ William G. Robbins, *Colony and Empire: The Capitalist Transformation of the American West* (Lawrence, KS, 1995), 7, 63.

⁵ William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York, 1991), xv, 6–7.

⁶ William Cronon, "Kennecott Journey: The Paths out of Town," in *Under an Open Sky*, 40 and Steve J. Stern,

"Feudalism, Capitalism, and the World-System in the Perspective of Latin America and the Carribean," *American Historical Review* 93 (October 1988): 829–72, quote on 832. Cronon himself agrees with the point that *Nature's Metropolis* sacrifices a peripheral perspective for the benefits of the broader view. The book "... does not do full justice to the lives of farmers and townspeople in Chicago's hinterland," he explains. In the search for connection between city and country, Cronon admits to "giving my descriptions the rather distant and abstract quality of a bird's-eye view.... But certainly the bird's-eye view needs to be complemented by the more fine-grained treatment..." See Marvin Bergman, ed., "Perspectives on *Nature's Metropolis*: A Book Forum," *Annals of Iowa* 51 (Summer 1992): 518.

⁷ See, for example, Arthur F. McEvoy, *The Fisherman's Problem: Ecology and Law in the California Fisheries, 1850–1950* (New York, 1986); Joseph E. Taylor III, *Making Salmon: An Environmental History of the Northwest Fisheries Crisis* (Seattle, 1999); Michael Williams, *Americans and Their Forests: A Historical Geography* (New York, 1989); William G. Robbins, *Hard Times in Paradise: Coos Bay, Oregon, 1850–1986* (Seattle, 1988); Robert F. Fries, *Empire in Pine: The Story of Lumbering in Wisconsin, 1830–1900* (Evanston, IL, 1989); Hal K. Rothman, *Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West* (Lawrence, KS, 1998); Cindy S. Aron, *Working at Play: A History of Vacations in the United States* (New York, 1999).

⁸ Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900–1940* (Baltimore, 1995), 30.

⁹ Charles E. Cleland, "Preliminary Report of the Ethnohistorical Basis of the Hunting, Fishing, and Gathering Rights of the Mille Lacs Chippewa," in *Fish in the Lakes, Wild Rice, and Game in Abundance: Testimony on Behalf of Mille Lacs Ojibwe Hunting and Fishing Rights*, comp. James M. McClurken (East Lansing, MI, 2000), 36–9; Lars Larson, *Chequamegon Bay and Its Communities: A Brief History, 1659–1883* (Whitewater, WI, 2001), 92–3, 133; William T. Sherman to Henry M. Rice, 26 June 1866, Box 1, Henry Rice Papers, Minnesota Historical Society (hereafter MHS); *Bayfield County (Wisconsin) Press* (hereafter *BCP*), 1 March 1884, 1, and 12 December 1885, 8.

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¹¹ *Ashland (Wisconsin) Daily Press* (hereafter *ADP*), 21 December 1895, 14; Manuscript Schedules for the Wisconsin State Census, 1895 and 1905, Wisconsin Historical Society, (hereafter WHS); William H. Tishler, Arnold R. Alanen, George Thompson, "Early Agricultural Development on the Apostle Islands," (Madison, WI, 1984), AINL Library; U.S. Department of the Interior/National Park Service, *Family-managed Commercial Fishing in the Apostle Islands during the 20th Century* (Bayfield, WI, 1985), 13–22.

¹² *BCP*, 16 October 1886, 1, 31 July 1897, 1, and 5 July 1912, 8; *ADP*, 21 December 1895, 14; Arnold R. Alanen and William H. Tishler, "Farming the Lake Superior Shore: Agriculture and Horticulture on the Apostle Islands, 1840–1940," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 79 (Spring 1996): 163–204.

¹³ *Diary of a Norwegian Fisherman: The Collected Diaries of Frederick A. Hansen*, ed. Frederick H. Dahl

(Jacksonville, FL, 1989) (hereafter Hansen Diary).

¹⁴Ê Bill Noring, interview by Norma Lien and Jan Moran, 16 December 1980, AINL Name File.

¹⁵Ê Burt Hill Diary, AINL Name File, 9; Burt Hill Account Books, 1914–1944, AINL Archives; Hansen Diary, 5 July 1916.

¹⁶Ê Hansen Diary; Clyde and Dorothy Jensch, interview by Arnold Alanen, 12 July 1988, AINL Name File; Tishler, Alanen, and Thompson, "Early Agricultural Development," 35; Bill Noring, interview by William Tishler, 14 September 1981, AINL Library; Bayfield County Tax Rolls, 1925 and 1930, Bayfield County Courthouse, Washburn, WI.

¹⁷Ê *BCP*, 13 December 1884, 1; 20 December 1884, 1; 14 February 1885, 8; 27 June 1885, 4; 28 November 1885, 1; *The Industries of Bayfield* (St. Paul, MN, 1883), 23, MHS.

¹⁸Ê *BCP*, 13 March 1897, 1; Tishler, Alanen, and Thompson, "Early Agricultural Development," 35; Bayfield County Tax Rolls, Register of Deeds Office, Vol. 63 Deeds, p. 18, Bayfield County Courthouse, Washburn, WI; *BCP*, 28 May 1898, 1, and 12 March 1924, 4; Carl Dahl, Alma Dahl, and Bill Noring, interview by Norma Lien and Jan Moran, 2 February 1981, AINL Name File; *BCP*, 21 January 1916, 1.

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²³Ê *BCP*, 2 July 1909, 8, and 19 February 1915, 1; Burt Hill Diary, 6; Peterson, "Camp Stella," 98; Thomas Gerstenberger, "Island Hideaway: The West Bay Club," *Lake Superior Magazine* (December/January 1992): 50–3; Bayfield County Tax Rolls, 1914 and 1915; Howard Palm, interview by Carol Ahlgren, 17 October 1987, White Bear Lake, MN, AINL Name File.

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²⁶Ê Burt Hill Account Books and Helen Hillstrom, "My Recollections of Sand Island, 1926–1984," n.d., AINL Name File.

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³¹Ê Tishler and Alanen, "Farming the Lake Superior Shore," 195–7; Howard Palm interview; "Sand Island Utterly Deserted, 1st Time in Half a Century," *ADP*, 17 October 1944, 1.

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