

Historic Bay Shores

The rich history of Oconto County dates back tens of thousands of years. About 5,000 years ago an archaic people, later called the Copper Culture, hunted, fished, and buried their dead on the banks of the Oconto River near the bay. The French Canadians came here in the 1600's to trade for the fur of beaver, muskrat and fox, canoeing by way of Mackinac and continuing down into Green Bay. Historic Bay Shores is the location of the first contact between European explorers and the native population in Wisconsin.

Early settlers arrived by steam-powered boats traveling on the Great Lakes. A Norwegian community grew on the bayshore and began fishing commercially, sending barrels of salted herring, whitefish, and trout to eastern markets.

Beginning in the 1850's lumbering was the primary focus. Logs were floated down the Oconto River where they were sawed into lumber at one of seven mills in Oconto and shipped out by boat to large growing cities on Lake Michigan.

Today we tend to rely on highway vehicles to carry passengers and cargo. The rivers, lakes, and bay are now the highway for fishing boats, canoes, pontoons, kayaks, sail and pleasure boats. We still hunt, fish, snowshoe, and ski just as people did long ago.

The Bayshore area also offers visible history lessons. The City of Oconto has thirty-three structures on the National Register of Historic Places. A visitor can take a self-guided tour of the city, walk the Historic West Main Street District, and in summer tour the 1890's Victorian mansion of George Beyer located on Park Avenue.

The rural areas contain many late nineteenth and early twentieth century farm buildings. People who enjoy nature in their backyard continue to build homes in the countryside. It's a good place to live – and to visit.



Photo Courtesy Chique Tousey-Tabar



Photo Courtesy Bob Jensen

Welcome to the Historic Bay Shores!



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