



HISTORY OF SUPERIOR AND DOUGLAS COUNTY

Douglas County, Wisconsin, embraces the northernmost tip of the Great Lake, Superior. Early explorers gave various names to the lake, the first being "Grand Lac". Father Marquette called it "Lac Superior De Tracy". Longfellow, in his poem, "Hiawatha", says the Chippewa Indians called it "Gitchee Gumee". The French explorers called it "Superior", because the lake is above or higher than the chain of lakes. Regardless of how the name originated, Lake Superior is still the largest, the coldest, the clearest and the deepest body of fresh water on the globe.

At the head of the Lake is located the City of Superior. The city is not only on the border of the vast inland sea, Lake Superior, but it is bounded by three bays and two rivers: St. Louis Bay, Superior Bay, Allouez Bay and the St. Louis and Nemadji Rivers.

Superior is the hub of North America. It is located approximately 2,100 miles from the Pacific Ocean, 1,500 miles from the Atlantic Ocean, 1,625 miles from Alaska and 1,400 miles from the Gulf of Mexico. This central location allows the Superior port to serve all boundaries equi-distantly. With a population of 27,368, Superior is situated in a metropolitan area that includes the 86,918 residents of Duluth, Minnesota, just across the St. Louis Bay.

The early history of Douglas County is a story of the Indian. The first-known inhabitants of what is now Douglas County were Mound Builders. These were an advanced group of people that appeared on the shores of Lake Superior sometime after the last glacier receded. They mined copper in the Minong Range and at Manitou Falls on the Black River. They pounded this metal into weapons, implements, and ornaments which were later found buried in mounds with their dead. Their civilization was eventually overrun by other tribes, mainly of Muskogean and Iroquois stock, and disappeared as a distinct culture in late prehistoric American times.

The next major group of Indians were the Mascoutins, "People of the Fire", a branch of the Potawatomi. They were forest hunters, who lived by trapping beaver, harvesting wild rice, spearing whitefish, and hunting deer. They remained until about 1400 when the Dacotah (Sioux), who were forced westward by the Iroquois, drove them out. From this time on, there were successions of Indian tribes from the northeastern United States invading and inhabiting this region, until 1490 when the Chippewa built a settlement on Madeline Island.

The first-known white men to visit the area were the French. In 1618, Stephen Brule, a voyager for Champlain, coasted along the south shore of Lake Superior where he met the Ojibwa. Upon returning to Quebec, he carried back some copper specimens and a glowing account of the region.

In 1632, Champlain's map appeared showing "Lac Superior de Tracy" as Lake Superior and the lower end shore as "Fond du Lac". Soon after, fur trading companies established settlements, while missionaries came bringing the first touches of civilization.

Names and dates of some of those who pioneered in exploring the Douglas County areas were; Father Menard (1653), Radisson and Grosseilliers (1655), Father Claude Allouez (1668), Nicholas Perrot (1671), Sier Randin (1673), Daniel Greysolon Du L' Hut (1679), and Pierre Charles Le Sueur (1693).

Douglas County lies on one of the major water highways used by early travelers and voyagers of inland America. This water trail, the Bois Brule-St. Croix River Portage Trail, was the most convenient connecting link between Lake Superior and the Mississippi River. The Bois Brule and St. Croix River systems were only separated by a short portage over the Continental Divide near Solon Springs. The northward traveler used this water trail to take him to Lake Superior, while the

downstream traveler could use it to go southwest to the Gulf of Mexico, unhindered by portages, by using the St. Croix and Mississippi Rivers. This waterway was also an important route in the Wisconsin fur trade, particularly when the French War with the Fox Indians closed the more southern routes.

This territory was transferred to British rule by the treaty of Paris in 1763 at the conclusion of the French and Indian War. It was explored by Capt. Johnathon Carver in 1767 and came under the flag of the United States government in 1783 under terms of the Treaty of Peace of that year.

Indian control of what is now Douglas County began to diminish in the early 1800's and in 1847 the Chippewa signed a treaty giving up all rights to the region. White settlers began to pour into the region to cut timber and prospect for minerals.

In 1852, the government survey of townships in the country was completed. That same year, the first settlers founded the city of Superior. A law enacted February 8, 1854, separated Douglas County from the larger county of La Pointe. Superior was immediately selected as the county seat; however, it wasn't incorporated as a city until 1887. St. Louis was actually the first name proposed for the County; however, R.R. Nelson submitted an amendment to change the proposed name to Douglas County after Nelson's friend, Stephen A. Douglas, Illinois Senator, who was financially interested in the new settlement. The opening of the Federal Land Office at Superior in 1855 marked the beginning of the white man's transformation of this area. Some notes from the census of 1860 show the population of Douglas County as 812 souls.

The first courthouse was built in 1871. The present courthouse was occupied in March 1920. It is considered the finest courthouse in the Northwest. The construction consists of selected Bedford blue cut stone and Pavanazza marble.

After more than a quarter of a century of patient waiting and many disappointments, on the 17th day of December, 1881, (the most memorable one in its history) the Northern Pacific Railroad formally opened to Superior. This marked the boom for Superior's industry and growth.

Douglas County is the fourth largest county in Wisconsin (land area). Most of the county is within a half hour's drive from Superior, the County Seat. Today, the County is governed by the County Board consisting of 28 supervisors representing twenty districts of the City of Superior, five incorporated villages and sixteen towns, covering 1,342 square miles. The Superior-Duluth harbor ranks second in the nation in tonnage. Industry, Agriculture, Recreation, and Forestry are the major sources of income for Douglas County residents today.

Douglas County is dotted with picturesque villages and towns and has its own unique natural beauty and quiet restful havens.

Our most memorable attraction, the majestic Lake Superior, is the largest fresh water lake in the world, encompassing 3,200 square miles. The "Grand Lac" has a maximum depth of 1,290 feet and a maximum width of 160 miles. The Seaman's Memorial Statue, dedicated to those men who lost their lives on the great lake, is located on Barker's Island in Superior, adjacent to the S.S. Meteor Maritime Museum, the last remaining "whaleback" freighter. Also boarding on Barker's Island are the Vista Fleet excursions, a mandatory stop for any visitor wishing to experience the excitement of the world's largest port. Ships from many foreign ports, as well as huge "lakers" over one thousand feet in length, cruise in and out of the Superior/Duluth harbor at regular intervals between April and November. Lumbering is another of Douglas County's major industries, reflected in the rich history portrayed at Fairlawn Mansion and Museum, built by Superior's second Mayor, timber baron, Martin Pattison. The historical lore of a gone-by age is abundant at Superior's Fire House and Police Museum, where a treasure of vintage fire engines is housed. Tales of immigration, industry and daily life in Superior and Douglas County's past are also plentiful at the Douglas County Historical

Society through archival research, exhibits and history based theater performances.

Superior's Municipal Forest, the 2nd largest city municipal forest in the nation, offers 28K of cross country ski trails, hiking trails and an archery course. The Nemadji Municipal Golf Course, alluring and challenging to all levels of golfers, features "Greens to Remember". They were given a "Four Star" rating in Golf Digest's "Places to Play". The Superior Speedway offers the best racing action in the Northland. Classes include late model, modified, super stock and street stock racing. The banked clay, oval, 3/8 mile track is the area's fastest. Races take place every Friday night, starting mid-May through the Northern Nationals in September. Barker's Island Marina, nestled in the middle of Superior, is a 420 slip, full service marina. Boaters use this facility as their gateway to magnificent Lake Superior. A Ship's Store, clubhouse and complete service & repair department makes Barker's Island Marina more than a place to dock your boat--it's a complete boating center and marina community. Several hundred miles of trails throughout Douglas County provide the snowmobiler, ATV'er, snowshoer, cross country and downhill skier a variety of adventures. The Tri-County Corridor, a 60-mile multi-use trail from Ashland to Superior, connects Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan to various club trails throughout the county.

Located on the eastern edge of Lake Superior, Wisconsin Point allows an unforgettable view of Lake Superior. "The Point" also offers an abundance of natural beauty for the nature lover, hiker, picnicker, swimmer and photo buff. Untouched by human hands, it is a veritable goldmine of driftwood and agates. A sandy beach, lighthouse and the Superior entry draw visitors for a memorable afternoon or a star-filled evening. An Indian burial ground also offers a glimpse of the past.

East of Superior, you will find the Brule River, Amnicon Falls State Park and the Richard I. Bong Memorial. Known as the "River of Presidents" the Brule is a perfect location for canoeing, kayaking, and fishing. The Brule River Forest offers an abundance of wooded hiking trails for the nature enthusiast. Presidents Grant and Cleveland fished the Brule, and Calvin Collidge made it the site of his summer White House. Eisenhower enjoyed the hospitality of Cedar Lake Lodge as well. Amnicon Falls State Park is an 800-acre, untouched natural setting, which provides a quiet oasis for campers, picnickers, hikers and nature lovers. At one point, the Amnicon River divides to form an island, which can be reached by a covered bridge. The picturesque bridge provides an excellent vantage point of the falls for photographers. The Bong Memorial Marker, located in Poplar is dedicated to Major Richard I. Bong, America's Ace of Aces. Major Bong was inducted into the National Aviation Hall of Fame in July of 1986.

A trip south of Superior is just as rewarding as a trip east. Highway 35 will take the visitor to Pattison State Park, named after timber baron, Martin Pattison. Highlighted by spectacular scenery, including the highest waterfall in the state, Pattison Park offers excellent camping, picnicking, swimming, hiking trails and groomed cross-country ski trails.

Lucius Woods County Park, located on Highway 53 in Solon Springs, is another must for any visitor to Douglas County. Situated on St. Croix Lake, the park offers swimming, boating, fishing and camping. A divide at the north end of the lake is the result of glacier activity 10,000 years ago. It created the unusual northern flow of the Brule River and the southern flow of the St. Croix.

Overall, Douglas County is a sportsman's paradise, a history buff's dream, a nature lover's utopia and a ship enthusiast's delight.

Superior and Douglas County celebrated their joint Sesquicentennial (150th birthday) in 2004.