

## The History of Scott's Pier

by John Vincent (2794 LFPR)

The next time you're strolling the beach near the Winnebago access road, try to envision a wooden trestle extending from the small road on the dune out over the beach and then another several hundred feet out over the lake. Tied fast at the far reach of this wide wooden pier is a sleek, multi-masted schooner, heavily laden with timber from mule-drawn wagons that teamsters turnaround when emptied. This is precisely what it looked like here 150 years ago.

### The Pier

Scott's Pier is named for William Alexander Scott who, in August of 1873, purchased Lot 1 of Section 14 on which this pier was located.<sup>1</sup> Although the structure and location bears Scott's name, the pier itself was likely constructed by James Tufts, during his brief period of ownership<sup>2</sup> from December 1871 to August 1873. Tufts is better known for owning and constructing similar piers to the south in Clay Banks Township, where he settled in 1860 as an experienced lumberman and became a true "jack-of-all-trades".<sup>3</sup>

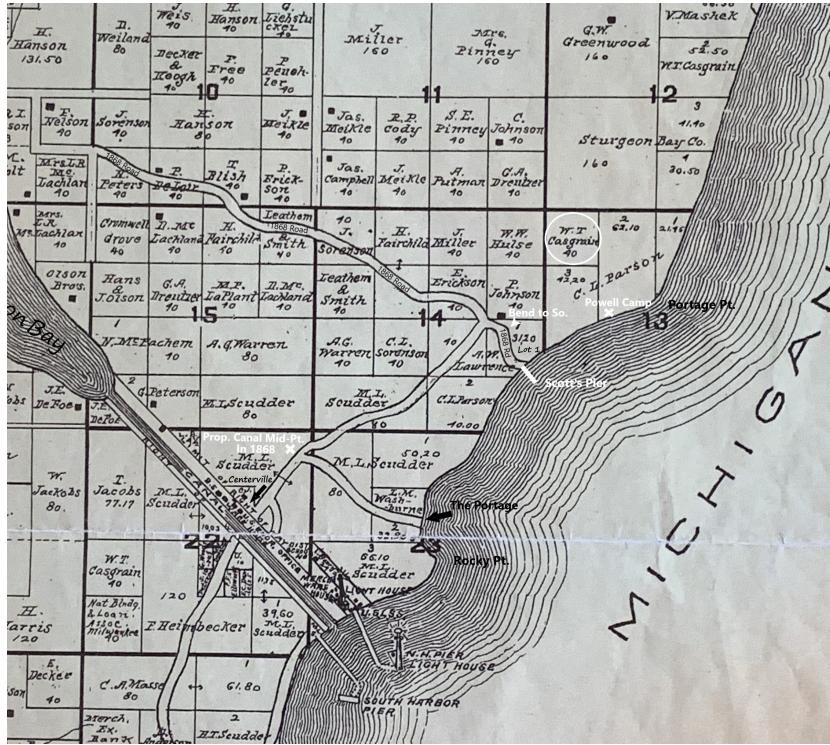
The wooden piers of Clay Banks date from the mid-1860's<sup>4</sup> and were constructed to support the burgeoning timber industry driven by the post-Civil War demand for lumber products. Virgin forests of pine, maple, hemlock, cedar and beech along the Lake Michigan shore provided a "seemingly endless supply" for localized lumber interests.<sup>5</sup>

People like Tufts, R.C. Brant, W.H. Horn, Nic Vader, and others owned these piers and developed ancillary milling, dry goods, and service enterprises as well. Between the late 1860's and late-1880's there were up to five substantial wooden piers, up to 1800 feet in length, operating in a 6-mile stretch from Foscoro at Stony Creek on the south to Horn's Pier on the north.<sup>6</sup> Thriving settlements grew up around these piers that rivaled Sturgeon Bay in both size and activity. No such settlement, however, was evident in the vicinity of Scott's Pier, which may be why Tufts abandoned the site by selling it to Scott in 1873.

The notion of constructing Scott's Pier was likely in mind during the summer of 1868, when Sturgeon Bay Township laid out a new road<sup>7</sup> connecting the southeastern edge of Sturgeon Bay to the lakeshore (see Exhibit 1). Ostensibly, this road (today's Buffalo Ridge Trail) was built to provide an overland route to the midpoint of the then proposed ship canal route (see Exhibit 1), but its circuitous routing suggests otherwise. Near its eastern terminus, this 1868 Road crosses the "Buffalo Ridge" well north of the proposed canal route, then takes a sharp turn to the south to touch the lakeshore at a unique point in Lot 1 of Section 14 (see Exhibit 1).

This lot is a conventional 40-acre square that is truncated on its southeast corner by the lakeshore, reducing the tract to 31.2 acres. The truncation of Lot 1 is more accurately depicted on the 1927 Survey of Lake Forest Park (see Exhibit 2), which shows it having only 400 feet of lake frontage at the high-water mark and perhaps only 100 feet at the shore itself. The fact that the 1868 Road just happened to terminate at this narrow portal to the lake is not an accident, but rather the design of those anticipating the construction of a pier.

## History of Scott's Pier (continued)

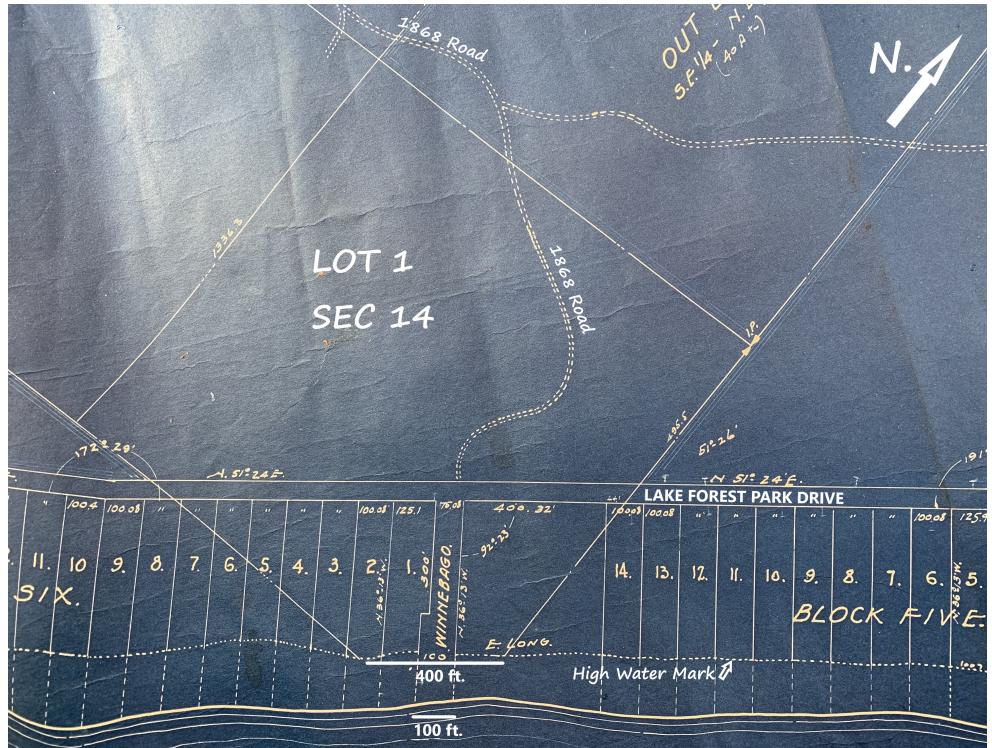


### Exhibit 1

From 1899 Sturgeon Bay Township Map.  
This shows the routing of the 1868 road and the location of Scott's Pier on Lot 1 of Section 14 during the 1870s.

### Exhibit 2

From 1927 Survey of Lake Forest Park.  
This shows the shape and detail of Lot 1, Section 14, prior to Scott's Pier in 1868.



## The History of Scott's Pier (continued)

The owner of Lot 1 in 1868 was E.C. Daniels, a Door County pioneer farmer and road builder, who became a local real estate dealer and township assessor. He acquired Lot 1 in May of 1868 by paying its delinquent property taxes.<sup>8</sup> Whether he initiated construction of the pier prior to selling this parcel to James Tufts<sup>9</sup> for \$50 in December 1871 is unknown. It is under Tufts' ownership and name that the first accounts of a functioning pier at this location appear.

On 7/18/1872 the *Door County Advocate* (DCA) reported:<sup>10</sup> "A party of surveyors under charge of Lieut. Powell, U.S. Lake Survey, are encamped about half a mile easterly of Tuff's (*sic*) pier, on the Lake shore." The Lake Michigan shore ½ mile distant from the Winnebago access is short of Portage Point (see Exhibit 1), which is in a more easterly than northerly direction, consistent with the *Advocate* story.

On 9/26/1872 the DCA reported:<sup>11</sup> "A vessel, name unknown, went ashore at Tuft's Pier, near the Portage, during the gale on Tuesday. She had come there for a load, and went ashore while endeavoring to get away. At last accounts she was rapidly going to pieces." This shipwreck clearly occurred on our bay between Portage and Rocky Points (see Exhibit 1), since James Tufts did not own a pier in Clay Banks until 1873.<sup>12</sup>

The next account of the pier occurs in 1874 after Tufts sold it to Scott, along with the adjoining 71.2-acre tract to the west, for \$300 in August of 1873.<sup>13</sup> On 3/12/1874 the DCA reported:<sup>14</sup> "A section of 250 ft. of the roadway of Scott's pier, north of the Portage, was carried away last Friday. A large body of ice had formed around the pier and in moving out weakened the roadway so that it was unable to withstand a heavy swell that rolled in during the day." It was not uncommon for the wooden piers on Lake Michigan to be damaged in this way, particularly during winter and spring storms. The following day, the Expositor reported on this same incident:<sup>15</sup> "A part of the pier built by **James Tufts** (*emphasis added*), in Lake Michigan one half mile north of the Portage, was carried out last Friday by the combined action of the ice and the waves." This account confirms that Tufts did have a hand in the building Scott's pier. In March of 1875, Scott engaged Joseph Campbell, a local lumberman and deputy sheriff, to rebuild the pier<sup>16</sup> using cribs rather than piles to better withstand the ravages of the lake.

Piers that were damaged or destroyed by the elements were almost always repaired or rebuilt by their owners. It was just too lucrative not to do so. Local timber revenue was wholly dependent upon getting forest products shipped out from piers, since there were no railroads or good roads in the vicinity until the 1890's. The proximity of piers to where the trees were cut was important because of the difficulty of moving raw timber in 1870's Door County. The harvesting of trees was often confined to the winter months when the frozen ground permitted teams to pull heavily loaded wagons and sleighs over crude roads, paths, and in some cases wooden tram roads. Otherwise, such loads would simply sink into the sand or mire in mud. This winter harvest window required vast open spaces near the pier to store, or "bank", the wood products while awaiting the opening of navigation in the early spring. Sometimes unprocessed logs would be stored in creeks behind dams near the lakeshore that would also power sawmills for processing and finishing timber. The primary raw products were cord wood, cedar posts, railroad ties, telegraph poles, piles for docks, and stripped hemlock bark for tanning leather, while further milling was required for finished lumber and mass produced shingles.<sup>17</sup>

## The History of Scott's Pier (continued)

The land near the base of Scott's Pier would have been cleared for banking purposes and logging roads cut through the forest along the shore to supplement the 1868 Road for hauling in product. In October 1873, Scott sold 40 of the acres, a half mile north of the pier in Section 13, to William Casgrain (see Exhibit 1) for \$150, but retained the logging rights on the land for one year,<sup>18</sup> which he likely harvested that winter, banking the logs near his pier.

Since there was no water source nearby for powering a sawmill, only relatively unfinished products such as cordwood, posts, poles, piles, and ties could be shipped from Scott's Pier. Lacking a mill and a supportive settlement put Scott's Pier at a competitive disadvantage versus its neighboring piers. This was evident in December 1877, when W.H. Horn of Horn's Pier decided to expand his business north of Clay Banks township.<sup>19</sup> He bypassed acquiring Scott's working pier in order to build a new store and pier at what would become the Lily Bay settlement, then called "Sherman's Bay." This site offered a sawmill, a small settlement, a good road into town, and plenty of nearby timber to harvest. In addition, after the ship canal became navigable in 1879, forest products could be banked and shipped at Centerville,<sup>20</sup> a small settlement with a warehouse and dock near the mid-point of the canal (see Exhibit 1), providing an attractive alternative to Scott's Pier.

In June of 1876, the ownership of Scott's Pier took a bizarre turn when L. M. Washburn, the State Assemblyman from Sturgeon Bay, is granted a tax deed for Lot 1, Section 14, and the adjoining 40 acres (the 71.2-acre parcel).<sup>21</sup> Washburn had previously purchased a lien on this property at a County public auction in May of 1872 (during Tufts' period of ownership) for the \$13.97 of delinquent taxes due.<sup>22</sup> This placed Scott's ownership of the pier and the adjoining 71.2 acres in limbo.

Tufts and Scott entered into litigation<sup>23</sup> in July 1876 that was apparently resolved in March 1877, with Scott selling the parcel back to Tufts for \$500.<sup>24</sup> I have found no record of further shipping activity at Scott's Pier following the 1875 Campbell rebuild, and by March 1876, Scott had moved from Sturgeon Bay to Kewaunee County.<sup>25</sup>

One way to ascertain the longevity of Scott's Pier as a working pier is to examine the County tax records. Such records show an assessed value (AV) of Lot 1 of Section 14 (where the pier is located) of \$175 in 1871, higher than the \$40 typically assigned to roadless and unimproved 40-acre tracts (see Exhibit 3). Under Tufts' ownership the AV increases to \$200 in 1872.<sup>26</sup> As Scott's Pier, the AV increased to \$250 in 1874 and peaked at \$275 in 1876 (See Exhibit 4). This indicates that it likely remained a working pier at least until 1876. In 1878, the AV for Lot 1 of Section 14 dropped to \$100 and then bottomed out at \$50 in 1980 with L. M. Washburn listed as the owner.<sup>27</sup> This low assessment indicates no improvements of recognizable value assigned to the property.

In 1882, there were at least 60 wooden piers still functioning on Door County's shores.<sup>28</sup> Although Scott's Pier's useful life was short-lived relative to others, its demise foreshadowed the fate of nearly all the County's wooden piers exposed to Lake Michigan. By the turn of the century, there were very few functioning piers left along the lakeshore. The short answer as to why is that the lumber ran out. After that "seemingly endless supply" of trees had been cut, some pier owners turned to shipping other agricultural products. The volume and profitability, however, was not sufficient to sustain the costs of the inevitable seasonal repairs required by the wooden piers.

## The History of Scott's Pier (continued)

Also, by 1900, County roads and transportation modes had improved, facilitating the movement of products to more sheltered ports such as Sturgeon Bay, Ahnapee (Algoma), and Green Bay. The abandoned wooden piers simply withered away with time and disappeared, as did the once-thriving settlements at Horn's Pier, Tuft's Pier, Clay Banks, and Foscoro, while Jacksonport, Bailey's Harbor, Egg Harbor, Ellison Bay, and others survived the loss of their piers.

### The Place

Long after it ceased functioning as a pier, "Scott's Pier" was still known locally as a destination for quite some time. For years, the vast open space of its banking ground served as a venue for school, church, and family picnics. The Evergreen School often used the site for their end-of-year outings.<sup>29</sup> In August 1904, the Congregationalists and Methodists held their Sunday School picnics there on back-to-back days, arriving at this location in a roundabout way:<sup>30</sup>

"The people were carried to the canal in boats and then made their way to the grounds by following the sand beach, the distance being about one mile. Scott's Pier is located a short distance to the east of the bight which had originally been selected as the lake entrance to the ship canal by the late Joseph Harris." Try to imagine what this bay would look like today had the canal been cut through here rather than ¾ of a mile to the south.

There are no indications of any residual dwellings on the grounds of Scott's Pier from its working days, and it remained so until Ernest and Laura Long purchased Lot 1 in February 1921.<sup>31</sup> The Longs, who lived in Sturgeon Bay, created a weekend retreat for themselves and their friends, George and Lydia Draeb, by moving a circa 1860s log cabin from the ship canal onto the clearing at the base of Scott's Pier. Any vestige of the pier had long since disappeared from the lake, although the shore was strewn in both directions with the timbers of many shipwrecks<sup>32</sup> and undoubtedly remnants from the pier itself.

The cabin was later combined with another nearby circa 1860s logging cabin in order to provide a sleeping quarters in the rear.<sup>33</sup> The resulting cottage still stands today, just north of the Winnebago access road, and is the oldest dwelling in Lake Forest Park (see photo). In January 1927, the Longs negotiated a land swap<sup>34</sup> with Milwaukee developer Oscar Stegeman, which opened the door to the development of Lake Forest Park. After that, the notion of "Scott's Pier" as a locally known place was abandoned, just as the wooden pier had been some 50 years earlier.

### Acknowledgements:

Contributing to this article through conversations with the author and through providing resource information were: Douglas Weimer (Clay Banks historian), Steven Rice (Door County Historical Museum), Laura Kayacan (Door County Library), Robert Jaeck (WUAA), Paul Lutzke (LFPR resident), and Robert Hays (former LFPR resident).

## **The History of Scott's Pier (continued)**

## **No Real Estate Assessment Roll.**

For the Town of Sturgeon Bay, County of Door, for the year 1891.

OWNER'S NAME,		DESCRIPTION.	Section.	Town.	Range.	No. of Acres	Value fixed by Assessor.	Value fixed by Town Board.	REMARKS.
	2.13	Lot- 1	14	27	26	31.20	175 00	3 77	Dir 4
	2.72	" 2	" "	" "	"	40.00	225 00	4 84	"
							37		
	1.21	SW NE	" "	" "	"	40.00	100 00	2 15	
	1.48	NW NW	" "	" "	"	40.00	40 00	86	
	1.72	SW "	" "	" "	"	40.00	75 00	1 62	
	1.51	NE SW	" "	" "	"	40	125 00	2 68	
Al Warren	48	NW	" "	" "	"	40	40 00	86	
	1.51	SW	" "	" "	"	40	125 00	2 68	
	1.51	SE	" "	" "	"	40	125 00	2 68	
	2.13	NW SE	" "	" "	"	40	175 00	3 77	
							32		

## **Exhibit 3**

Sturgeon Bay Township  
Assessment Roll of  
1871 for Section 14

## **Exhibit 4**

Sturgeon Bay Township  
Assessment Roll of 1880  
for Sections 13 & 14

REAL ESTATE ASSESSMENT ROLL.								
For the Town of Sligo on Bay in the County of Door, for the year 1876.								
OWNER'S NAME.	DESCRIPTION	Lot.	Block.	S.	T.	R.	No. of Acres.	Value Fixed by Assessor.
	Seofslt			12	27	26	40. -	300
	Lot 1			13	27	26	21.45	100
	" 2				"		62.10	250
	" 3				"		42.20	200
	Atwof Atw				"		40. -	150
	Lot 1			14	27	26	31.20	275
	Sp. E. of N.E. not assessed in 1875				"		40. -	200
	1. E. of N.E.				"		40	100
	SW "				"		40	100
	SE "				"		40	50
	SW "				"		40	50
	NW of NW				"		40.	50
	NW "				"		40	10
	SE "				"		40.	15
	NE of SW.				"		40. -	120
	WN "				"		40. -	40
	SW "				"		40. -	120
	SE "				"		40. -	150
	SW of SE				"		40. -	50
	NE of NE			15	27	26	40. -	40
							90.695	287.5

## The History of Scott's Pier (continued)



### Photograph:

The original combined log cabin as it appeared in the 1940s when owned by the Draeb family. Pictured are Grace Draeb and her husband Dale Chapman. They lived at the cabin during the post-WWII housing shortage. Grace is George and Lydia Draeb's daughter.

### Footnotes

- 1 Quit Claim Deed / Indenture dated 8/20/1873 between James Tufts (& wife) and Wm. Alexander Scott, recorded in Door County on 8/22/1873 in Vol. A, p. 408.
- 2 Quit Claim Deed / Indenture dated 12/26/1871 between E. C. Daniels (& wife) and A. C. Pierce & James Tufts, recorded in Door County on 12/30/1871 in Vol. A, p. 270; and See Footnote 1.
- 3 *Ghost Port Settlements and Shipwrecks in Door County's Clay Banks Township: A Wisconsin Maritime Study* by Dr. Richard Boyd, Russel Leitz and Douglas Weimer; 2020; A Wisconsin Underwater Archeological Association (WUAA) research publication, p. 23.
- 4 *Ibid.* p. 57.
- 5 *Ibid.* p. 22.
- 6 *Ibid.* p. 26.
- 7 *Door County Advocate* (DCA), 7/2/1868, p. 4, under "New Road".
- 8 Tax Deed dated 5/24/1871 granted to E. C. Daniels by Door County, recorded in Door County on 5/25/1871 in Vol. A, p. 178.
- 9 Quit Claim Deed / Indenture dated 12/26/1871 between E. C. Daniels (& wife) and A.C. Pierce & James Tufts, recorded in Door County on 12/30/1871 in Vol. A, p. 270.
- 10 DCA 7/18/1872, p. 3, Under "Local Slivers".
- 11 DCA 9/26/1872, p. 3, Under "Vessel Ashore".
- 12 Weimer, *Ghost Port Settlements*, p 58.

## Footnotes (continued)

- 13 See Footnote 1.
- 14 DCA 3/12/1874, p. 3, Under “Local Slivers”.
- 15 *The Expositor* 3/13/1874, p. 1, Col. 4.
- 16 DCA 3/18/1875, p. 3, under “Local Slivers”; and *The Expositor* 3/19/1875, p. 1, Col. 3.
- 17 Weimer, *Ghost Port Settlements*, pp. 33-35; and from conversations with Doug Weimer regarding late-1800’s logging practices in Door County.
- 18 Warranty Deed / Indenture dated 10/11/1873 between Wm. A. Scott and Wm. T. Casgrain, recorded in Door County on 10/11/1873 in Vol. I, p. 325.
- 19 DCA 12/20/1877, p. 3, under “Sherman’s Bay”
- 20 DCA 1/27/1894, p. 8, under “Sturgeon Bay Town – A large quantity of wood....hauled to the canal.”; DCA 12/6/1877, p. 1, under “Sturgeon Bay Canal – Midway between the lake and the bay stands Centerville”; and DCA 7/17/1879, p. 3, under “Grand Excursion – Centerville canal dock”.
- 21 Tax Deed dated 6/22/1876 granted to L. M. Washburn by Door County, recorded in Door County on 6/22/1876 in Vol. A, p. 590.
- 22 *Ibid.*
- 23 *The Expositor* 7/14/1876, p. 4, under “Circuit Court”; DCA 7/20/1876, p. 3, under “Circuit Court”; DCA 7/27/1876, p. 3, under “Circuit Court”; DCA 2/15/1877, p. 3, under “Circuit Court”; and *The Expositor* 2/23/1877, p. 4, under “Circuit Court”.
- 24 Quit Claim Deed / Indenture dated 3/31/1877 between William Alexander Scott and Sophia M. C. Tufts, recorded in Door County on 3/31/1877 in Vol. C, p. 29, Doc # 100854.
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 Town of Sturgeon Bay Real Estate Assessment Roll for the year 1872 for Lot 1, Section 14, Township 27, Range 26.
- 27 Town of Sturgeon Bay Real Estate Assessment Roll for the year 1880 for Lot 1, Section 14, Township 27, Range 26.
- 28 Weimer, *Ghost Port Settlements*, p 26.
- 29 *Door County Democrat (DCD)* 5/1/1909, p. 3, under “Evergreen”.
- 30 *The Advocate* 8/27/1904, p. 5, under “Local News”.
- 31 Quit Claim Deed / Indenture dated 2/2/1921 between L. M. Washburn and E. W. Long & Laura Long, recorded in Door County on 2/2/1921 in Vol. 10, p. 27, Doc # 192863A.
- 32 DCA 8/22/1930, p. 5, under “Glimpses of Early Door County by Harry E. Dankoler - The whole shore line is littered with the remains.....”
- 33 From conversations with Robert Hays, an owner of the combined cabin for many years.
- 34 Warranty Deeds / Indentures dated 1/19/1927 between Ernest Long & Laura Long and Whitefish Bay Company, recorded in Door County on 3/7/1927 in Vol. 36, pp. 125-126, Doc #'s 206110A-206111A.

