

Marquette's Bishop Family: Pioneers, Soldiers, and Explorers

by
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The Bishops are one of Marquette's oldest yet least known pioneer families. Two generations of the family were Marquette pioneers, while the third generation included Civil War soldiers and an explorer of the American West. The family's work and writings attest to the fascinating history of Marquette and the United States.

Basil Bishop, patriarch of the Marquette family, was born in Vermont in 1789. The Bishops were Puritans who first settled in Connecticut in the seventeenth century. Basil was the son and grandson of American Revolutionary War soldiers, and during the War of 1812, he served at the Battle of Plattsburg. In 1812, he also built a famous forge at Split Rock Falls in New York. His family prospered along with his business; wife Elizabeth would bear him eighteen children. Then as the prosperous couple entered their golden years, they decided to move to the new settlement of Marquette, founded in 1849 by Amos Harlow.

The journey was arduous; the Bishops travelled through Ohio, where they contracted the ague, from which they would suffer the rest of their lives. Then by land they journeyed through Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula, long before there were railroads. Far from disappointed by the journey, Basil wrote to a friend of his arrival in Marquette:

"I heard of the iron Mountains on Lake Superior & that a Forge was going & I was wholly bent to Sea it & in April I Started & Reached hear the 1 day of May 1850 the next day I was on the Iron Mountains & Sea to Sea Millions upon Millions of the Richest ore I ever Saw piled up 200ft above the Laurel Maple timber land below it was the most delightfull Seane I ever experienced."

Basil believed the iron ore of the Upper Peninsula was the finest he had ever seen in forty years of working with iron. Although his original intention was to build his own forge, he ended up instead working in Amos Harlow's forge.

The early years of Marquette were difficult ones of near starvation in winter, and little contact with the outside world due to no railroads and the short shipping season. Nevertheless, Basil continually wrote letters to praise Marquette. He convinced four adult children and a nephew to move to the new settlement. He proudly watched the little village grow, and in 1852, he wrote to a friend, "it is but 2 years last july that the first blow was Struck hear & now it is quite a viledge 15 large uprite houses 95 numerous log & Small ones a forge 130 ft long a machine Shop Shingle Mill Lath Mill & grist mill all under one Roof." Today's Marquette residents who grumble about short growing seasons will marvel when Basil declares the area has the best growing soil ever, and that visitors to Marquette find it a "great wonder ' to see Basil's "Beets Carrots Cabbage Cucumbers onions corn pumpkin squash sugar cane 9 ft hy and beans . . . narrow fat peas 2 roes 6 rods long that were 9 feet hy & loaded down with pods." His visitors "expressed much astonishment to sea such crops heare where all thought this was a frozen reigion as I once did."

Basil writes of how rich everyone in Marquette is growing, and he is pleased to see his children prospering beyond their dreams. Writing to his other children back East, he remarks:

"I suppose you thought I was a visionary & too much taken up with this contry but experience now shows I was right in all my prodictions as far more has come to pass than I ever named in so short a time & now there is every indication of there being double of the business done hear next season than was done hear before in one year."

Basil foresees a great industrial metropolis arising in Marquette, and his letters speak of early Upper Peninsula statehood dreams. In a letter of December 1858, Basil notes, "a voat was passed in the legislature of this state last winter to let all of the Upper Peninsula for a new state & the first voat gave us a new state lacking but one & all believe we shall soon be set of & heare will be the capitol." Perhaps Basil was too visionary in this respect, but his letters speak to the optimism and determination of Marquette's first settlers, a spirit of survival that continues with today's residents. When he passed away in 1865, Basil could feel proud of his contributions to the new community.

In 2001, a plaque was placed at his grave in Park Cemetery to commemorate him as a War of 1812 veteran. His letters are available at the Marquette County Historical Society.

While iron ore attracted the Bishops to Marquette, religious reasons equally inspired them. Delivan, Basil's son, was a founder of Marquette's First Methodist Church. In the 1850s, Methodists were interested in two social causes: temperance and the abolition of slavery. Delivan and Basil helped to form the Marquette Temperance League, probably the first organization in Marquette to fight against the evils of alcohol. Other members of the family would aid the anti-slavery cause by fighting in the Civil War. Delivan became the first Sunday School Superintendent of the Methodist Church and a Class Leader. Other charter members of the church included Delivan's sisters, their spouses, and children. Delivan's wife, Pamela Bishop, became known as the "Mother of Methodism" in Marquette, a title that voices the Bishops' determination to bring religion to the wilderness settlement. Pamela is recorded in the congregation's records as working tirelessly to support church activities. The couple lived to see the construction of the beautiful sandstone church built on the corner of Ridge and Front Streets in the 1870s. Delivan and Pamela's contributions to the congregation are memorialized in one of the church's beautiful stained glass windows. More information on Marquette's early Methodists can be found in Rowena Jones's *Sculptured in Stone*.

Two members of the third generation of the Bishop family would serve in the Civil War, thus aiding in the Methodist cause to abolish slavery. Jerome Nehemiah White came to Marquette as a child. He was the son of Basil's daughter, Rosalia, and her husband Cyrus Beardsley White. Jerome was one of several Marquette men to join the Michigan 27th. By the end of the war, his company had marched across the South, from Mississippi and Kentucky to Tennessee and Virginia, and they fought at such significant battles as Cold Harbor, Petersburg, and the Battle of the Wilderness. The strenuous marching and Southern climate caused Jerome to suffer from sunstroke. At Petersburg, he was wounded by a ball entering his left and exiting through his right side. He was sent to a hospital in Washington where he recovered, though he would suffer partial paralysis the remainder of his life. He was released from the

hospital as the war was ending, and family tradition states he was in the Ford Theatre the night of Abraham Lincoln's assassination.

After the war, Jerome returned to Marquette and raised a family. He continued his Methodist association by serving as the Superintendent of the Chocolay branch of the Sunday School. He also farmed in Cherry Creek, and his farmhouse is still standing today. In 1900, he died of wounds received from a runaway carriage accident at the Carp River Bridge.

Francis Marion Bishop, Delivan and Pamela's son and Jerome's cousin, also served in the Civil War. Like his grandfather Basil, Francis was a letter writer. His letters personalize the Civil War, making the modern reader understand what it was like to be twenty, brave, homesick, and frightened. His parents' letters have not survived, but his responses to them give insight into Marquette's early years. He comments in 1863, after hearing of the burning down of Chocolay, that he had warned people the fire would happen, and next time maybe they will be more careful. He constantly names relatives, friends, and church members, asking to be remembered to them. He asks his grandfather to write if he can, and he tells his father to thank Mr. Everett, presumably businessman Philo M. Everett, for the loan of thirty dollars.

Francis continually comments on the war, the marches, army food, and his fellow soldiers. The dramatic climax of the letters occurs when an army chaplain writes to Francis's parents: "your son Marion still lives. He is in Washington, badly wounded, but will recover, so says his surgeon. The ball lodged in his shoulder blade has been extracted and he is doing nicely." A few weeks later, Francis describes in near-epic prose how he fell at the Battle of Fredericksburg:

"At the time I received my wound we were advancing on the enemies works in double-quick time at charge bayonet. When within about 20 paces of our line I saw my Company were somewhat scattered by getting over a fence we had to pass and turning for a moment to my men I waved my sword over my head shouted "Come on Boys" Mind you I was not behind them but no sooner had I turned again to face the foe than I felt a stinging sensation pass through my left breast near the heart and I fell

powerless to the Earth, turning as I fell striking on my back. I uttered a low groan and offered a prayer to God."

Francis states he fell "with sword unsheathed for the protection of our glorious starry Banner, whose gallant folds waved o'er my head as I fell, for you must know mine was a post of honor, as commander of the 1st Company I stood beside the good old flag of freedom." He tells his brother he now has "an honorable scar and one received in the best cause for which ever man fought and died."

Despite his wounds, Francis wanted to continue his service so he was transferred to be Adjutant at Rock Island, Illinois, a prison for Confederate soldiers in the Mississippi River. Here his duties were less rigorous, although he does mention a breakout when the prisoners dug a tunnel. Six rebels escaped and one drowned trying to get across the river, while an officer of the guard was also killed.

When the war ended, Francis remained in Illinois to study zoology at Wesleyan University. His interest in Marquette continued, and prior to an 1866 visit he remarks, "I expect I will scarcely know Marquette when I see it. It has grown so much if I am to judge from the [Lake Superior] Journal."

In May 1871, he joined Major Powell's second expedition down the Colorado and Green Rivers and through the Grand Canyon; today, the expedition is considered the last great exploration of the American West. Powell's first voyage had been a disaster that included shipwreck and the murder of crew members by the Shivwits Indians. Francis, known by his fellow travellers as "Cap" for achieving the rank of captain during the Civil War, was ready for adventure and fame as zoologist and cartographer of the expedition.

The journey was the adventure of a lifetime, marked by difficult work, rough rapids, and placid moments of floating down river while Major Powell read aloud from the Bible or Tennyson's poetry. While the first expedition had been a travel into the unknown, this journey would be more scientific, as surveys were conducted and specimens gathered. Moments of excitement included Francis being attacked by a deer that he had to wrestle by grabbing its antlers. The Fourth of July was celebrated by a simple shooting off of guns. At times, the men had to carry their gear overland when the river

was too wild to be navigated. Most of the travelers kept diaries, including Francis, and hundreds of photographs were taken. Francis's maps of the river and canyons would become the first official government surveys of the area. However, in the spring of the expedition's second year, Francis's war wounds became too painful for him to continue the journey; reluctantly he left the party before the final stretch through the Grand Canyon. His companions sadly parted from him, and they named Bishop Creek in the Uintas Mountains in his honor.

Francis then settled in Utah, befriendng the local Mormons. He converted to the new religion and married the daughter of Orson Pratt, one of the original twelve apostles of the Mormon Church; one wonders what his staunch Methodist parents thought of his religious conversion and marriage. Francis became Chair of the Natural Science Department at Deseret University, today's University of Utah, where the originals of his letters currently reside. In later years, his companions from the expedition visited him and presented him with Major Powell's special chair from the expedition. Francis would long remember his famous journey, and in his later years, he published an article on Major Powell's life and his own journal from the expedition. He died in Utah in 1933, at the age of ninety.

Francis Marion Bishop is today one of Marquette's famous, although forgotten sons, a pioneer of national importance, while his family members were pioneers of Marquette. The Bishop family's memory has fallen into obscurity, but their contributions survive in their historical letters, Marquette's iron industry, the First Methodist Church of Marquette, the opening of the West, and their many descendants living in Marquette today.

- The author is a descendant of the Bishop family. Other descendants in the Marquette area include the White, Bignall, Riopelle, Tichelaar, Specker, McClelland, Fletcher, and Martel families.

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