

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE JEFFERSON-GERMAN LAKES AREA

This historical overview of the Lake Jefferson-Lake German chain of lakes presents a capsule of the events that have made the lake area what it is today - - a growing recreational and residential community with a rich lake-life heritage. Several of the following articles have been taken from an earlier Brief written in circa 1994 and have been expounded upon. Many of the other articles include information from, among many other sources, Le Sueur Co. Soil and Water, Historical Society, MN DNR, MN Historical Society, old GJGLA newsletters, etc. Internet searches have aided in the creation of this document, and it should be considered a living, breathing document that will be amended and added onto in the future.

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1. Geological Descriptions and Watershed

The irregular hills and the lakes of the Jefferson-German chain of lakes are not very old in geological terms. When the last ice age came to an end, a part of a great glacier, the Des Moines lobe of the Lake Wisconsin Glaciation, came to a heated halt, leaving as glacial till a mixture of limestone, clay, and sand in Le Sueur County. The mixture was landscaped by the pushing, grinding, and gouging of that huge ice pack 10,000 years ago, and gigantic ice cubes, when they finally melted, left the pockets that became, among others, the Jefferson-German chain of lakes. Additionally bogs, marshes, and lakes formed in the lows. Although the lakes are geographically closest to the Minnesota River – with West Jefferson just five and one-half miles east of it – they spill their waters in the opposite direction, eastward toward the Cannon River, Lake Tetonka and eventually the mighty Mississippi.

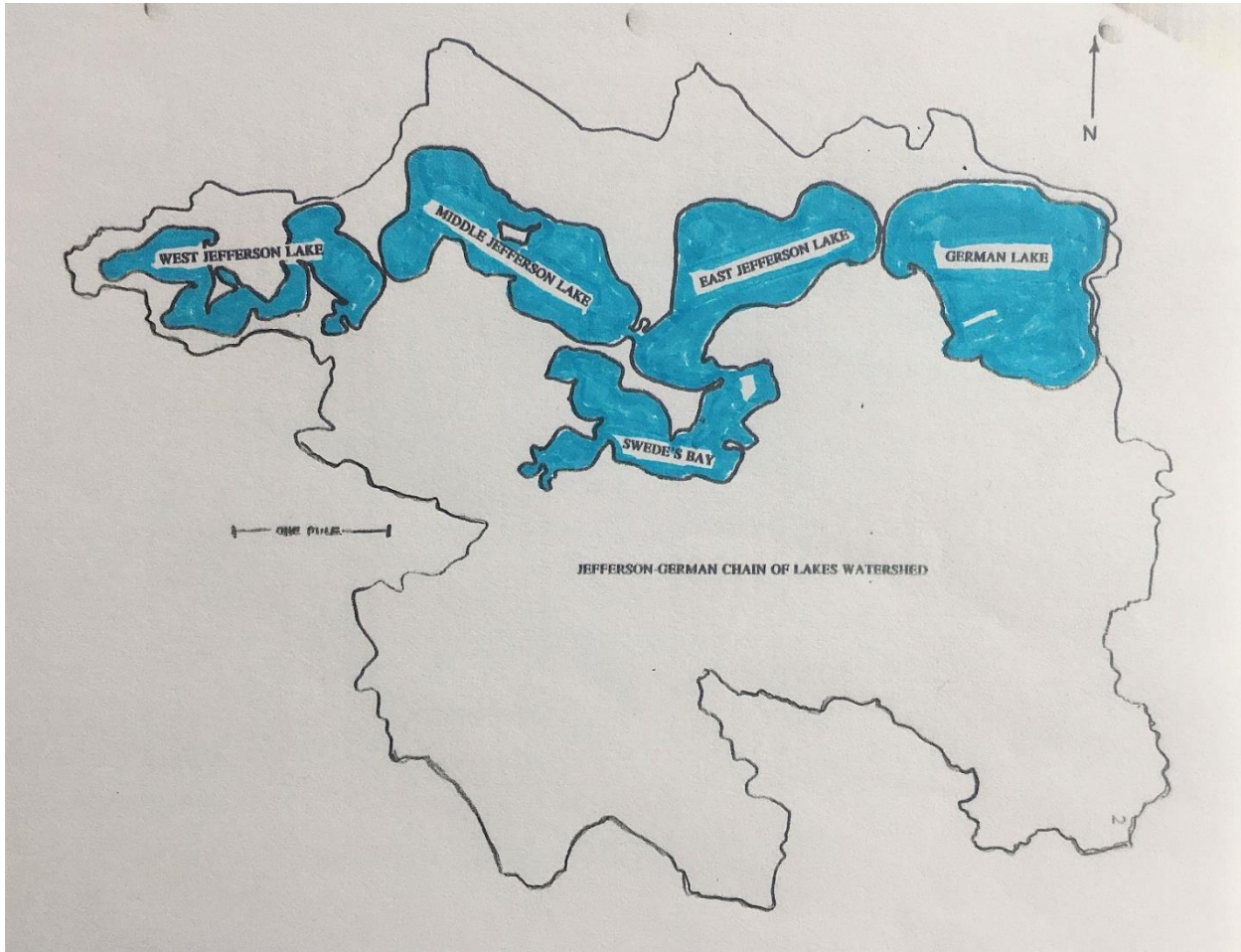
The Jefferson-German lakes are the westernmost part of what is considered the Cannon River watershed, with said watershed encompassing 16,716 acres surrounding the lakes. This watershed was at one time considerably larger. Cropland improvements were made in 1911 by cutting a series of county ditches north and east of German Lake that diverted the effluent of Mud, Bossout, Rice Lakes and Sander's Slough plus their watersheds directly to the Cannon River via the 1869 ditch that first lowered German Lake. This reduced by 25% the German Lake watershed and brought its boundaries to within just a few hundred feet of the lake itself along its northeast shores. There are a number of additional ditches that serve to speed the runoff on crop and pasture lands that eventually drain into the Jefferson-German chain of lakes; they have not materially affected the size of the watershed area. Because the lakes are at the western head of the watershed, they depend solely on the quality and quantity of the runoff in the immediate area. It must rain in the area if there is to be water in these lakes.

The Jefferson-German chain of lakes consist of 5 bodies of water: West Jefferson, Middle Jefferson, Swedes Bay, East Jefferson and German Lake, for a total of 3,090 acres. Following is a breakdown of each body of water with basic facts; for more information of water depths and quality, fish species and stocking, see the DNR LakeFinder info on our website: www.jgla.org

West Jefferson:	439 Total Acres (348 Littoral Acres, defined as that area less than 15 feet deep). Maximum Depth is 24 feet Shore length is 7.95 miles
Middle Jefferson:	667 Total Acres (667 Littoral Acres) Maximum Depth is 8 feet Shore length is 5.56 miles
Swedes Bay:	507 Total Acres (507 Littoral Acres) Maximum Depth is 6 feet Shore length is 7.56 miles

East Jefferson: 685 Total Acres (343 Littoral Acres)
Maximum Depth is 37 feet
Shore length is 5.86 miles

German Lake: 792 Total Acres (521 Littoral Acres)
Maximum Depth is 51 feet
Shore length is 5.84 miles



2. The Eastern Dakota Wahpekutes

Our earliest inhabitants of our lakes area, the people whites called the “Sioux”, were not a single entity but rather a collection of tribes, bands, and villages loosely bound by language, custom, and kinship. In fact, the name of “Sioux” was given to them by the Ojibwe, their longtime rivals for the northern woods and waterways, before the word was co-opted by whites. The largest division, the Lakota, lived farthest west up and beyond the Missouri River, including the Black Hills. The Yankton and Yanktonais generally lived between the Missouri River and the Red River of the North, which divided the State of Minnesota from the **Dakota** Territory.

The **Eastern Dakota** lived in Minnesota in an ecosystem made of tallgrass prairies and deciduous woodlands, where the soil was rich and black and the waters hospitable to great quantities of fish and game. Moving roughly west to east down the length of the Minnesota River, the four major bands of the Eastern Dakota were called the Sisitonwans, Wahpetonwans, Bdewakantonwans, and Wahpekutes. The Jefferson-German lakes area was home to the Wahpekutes, and due to the huge deciduous forests in the area were named “People of the Green Leaves”. The shores of Lake Jefferson, the area between Lake Henry, West Lake Jefferson and Cape Horn, provided the Wahpekutes (hereinafter referred to as Dakota) with a resource of fish, deer, elk, and small game to hunt, shelter from the wind, and a wood supply to heat their lodges.



Dakota Encampment in Minnesota – <https://mndigital.org/>

An area woman, Marella Hobson whose maternal grandparents were of the Schickling family, tells how her ancestors made friends with the Dakota. The Schicklins lived at Swedes Bay off of East Lake Jefferson. They gave the Dakota food and clothing and also traded with them. The Dakota would look through the windows of the cabin and watch Mrs. Schickling doing her daily chores. As a result of their interaction, the Dakota began to learn to understand and speak

English. The family was forewarned by the Dakota of the uprising of 1862 and told to stay where they were because the Dakota were going to protest against the settlers in the area; they were safe.



Dog Dance of the Dahcotas – Seth Eastman, Capt. U.S. Army

It was August of 1862, after suffering decades of hardship, broken treaties, and relentless encroachment on their land, the Dakota leader Little Crow reluctantly agreed that his people must go to war. After six weeks of fighting, leaving 600+ dead settlers and unknown dead Dakota, the uprising was smashed and thousands of Dakota were taken prisoner by the U.S. Army; 303 Dakota men were sentenced to death.

President Lincoln, embroiled in the most devastating period of the Civil War, personally intervened to save the lives of 265 of the condemned men, but in the end, 38 Dakota men would be hanged in Mankato – the largest government-sanctioned execution in United States history. Many of those that died were buried at Fort Ridgely Cemetery, 21 miles northwest of New Ulm. <https://www.mnhs.org/fortridgely> ; <https://www.usdakotawar.org/>

Evidence of Dakota inhabitation still exists. Area lakes families have found artifacts on their farmland. Mrs. Jean Seely has found many arrowheads and tomahawks on the Wendelschafer family farm. Mary Alice Koppleman has found what is thought to be an axe-like tool used by the Dakota on her farm. Robert Kluntz has also found arrowheads on his family farm on Cape Horn. Also see: <https://www.mnopedia.org/land-water-and-language-dakota-minnesota-s-first-people>

*Taken from the 1994 Brief; also from “38 Nooses” by Scott W. Berg, and the Minnesota Historical Society (MNHS).
Photos courtesy of the Nicollet County Historical Society

3. Captain William B. Dodd and The Dodd Road

Most of you have probably seen the **Marker** one-half block north of the East Jefferson public boat landing on the German Lake side, across County Rd #13 from Bryn Mahr stating: 1855; CAPT.

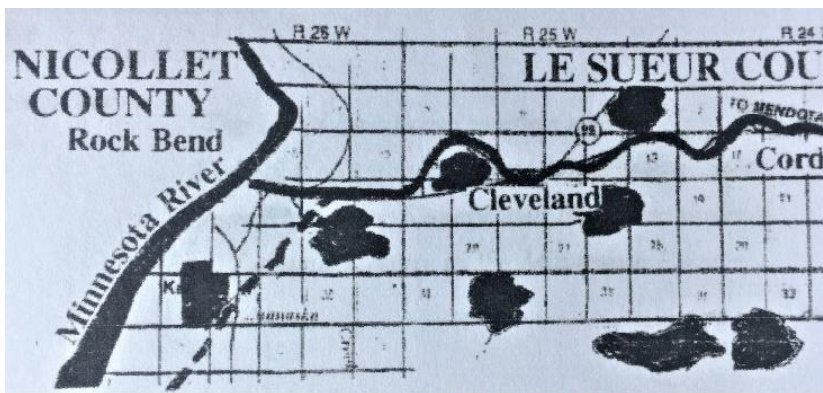


DODD N.B. LAMPTMAN M.S. CHEADLE CAMPED HERE It turns out that Captain William Bigalow Dodd was indeed an extremely important figure in Minnesota history, and to the settlement of this area.

When Minnesota became a Territory in 1849, several ungraded roads and Dakota trails had been used for years by fur traders between waterways. In 1850, four military roads to connect forts were funded, and became settler pathways. A fifth road awaiting funding was the Mendota-Big Sioux River Road to connect the Missouri River at Sioux City, Iowa and Mendota – east of the Minnesota River and Fort Snelling.

William B. Dodd, intrigued about what he had heard about the new Minnesota Territory, headed west in 1850. He was present at the July 23, 1851 signing of the Treaty of Traverse des Sioux between the U.S. Government and the Dakota, which was held north of St. Peter. He subsequently held a claim for 160 acres at Rock Bend and became a leader of that pioneer community – later renamed in 1855 as St. Peter. Steamboat service down the Minnesota River was infrequent at best, and he knew their village couldn't flourish without an overhead road to St. Paul, the head navigation on the Mississippi River. Dodd was aware the proposed Mendota-Big Sioux Road could be Rock Bend's roadway but was the last road on the "to-do" list, so he went ahead and collected private funds to finance a road building crew.

In late March or early April, 1853, Captain Dodd, a surveyor and 10 men departed Mendota and in 109 days whacked a winding 73-mile path through the Big Woods and unexplored labyrinth of lakes and marshes to Rock Bend on eastern shores of the Minnesota River. Meanwhile, the Military Road survey commenced and Captain Jesse Lee Reno came up from today's Sioux City, Iowa to Mankato and bumped into Dodd's road at Lake Emily. Dodd's men did just enough construction work along the way to permit passage of the army wagons, and Capt. Reno praised Dodd for his roadway and arranged \$3,270 for Dodd and his crew.



Dodd Road comes into Cleveland off County Rd 148, across MN Hwy #99 at the western edge of Cleveland's Main Street. It ran straight down Main St. continuing east on Cty Rd 148 to Cordova. Two segments in Le Sueur County are on the National Register of Historic Places: the unpaved 2.4 mile section on Cty Rd 148 west of Cleveland, and the unpaved 3.8 mile

section on Cty Rd 136 between Gorman Lake and MN Hwy #13 west of Kilkenny. Apparently the reason why the Dodd Road looped 2 miles north of Cleveland around Savidge Lake was to accommodate his friend's (M.S. Cheadle) family farmstead. There are brown signs with the inscription "Dodd Road 1853" on Cty Rd 148 and Cty Rd 2 identifying the Road's path.

In 1854 Dodd traveled back east, married and returned to St. Peter. He donated land for a wooden Episcopal church which was named Church of the Holy Communion. Today a stone church built in 1869 is on the site.

In 1862 the Dakota had not been paid what they had been promised for their land in the Treaty of Traverse des Sioux and with limited hunting and fishing rights were facing a cold winter with starvation. This led to the 1862 Dakota Conflict. When the nearby settlement of New Ulm was attacked, Capt. Dodd was with the militia from St. Peter who came to help defend New Ulm. Dodd saw what he thought were reinforcements and stood up. Warriors dressed in settler's clothing shot Dodd three times. In November of 1862 his body was re-interred on the Church grounds; his wife and two children were later buried in the plot.



In 1864 the Minnesota-Central Railroad was built straight from St. Paul to Faribault and points beyond, and the Dodd Road became superfluous. Before the Dodd Road one got to Minnesota by steamboat only; that Road opened up all kinds of new territory to all the immigrants flooding into the area.

Sources: www.findagrave.com/memorial/20968/william-bigalow-dodd; Star Tribune 2003 (with permission); <https://www.dakotahistory.org/images/OvertheYears/OTY-200310-Dodd-Road.pdf>

The Marker and Bryn Mahr

From what this author can surmise, Captain William Dodd, Milton Smith (M.S.) Cheadle and N.B. Lampman met in St. Peter and became friends. M.S. Cheadle was eventually postmaster of Cleveland. N.B. Lampman, engaged in the mercantile trade, also resided in Cleveland and had six children; L. Lampman was his son. L. Lampman's son, Clinton Parks Lampman was an adventurer, world traveler and business entrepreneur who documented his stories in his book *The Great Western Trail*. Clinton made his money in the export-import business, and when time to

retire, his faithful wife, Mary Frances, and he decided to build their cherished Dream – a **House of Dreams**. He bought the parcel from Judson Jonz between Jefferson Lake and German Lake



and built the noble cobblestone house in 1919, naming it Bryn Mahr. Uniquely enough there is a small private cemetery currently next to the boathouse with the graves of Judson Jonz, his mother, wife and son.

4. Canal Influence, Channels, and Lake Levels

During the time the territory was being settled by non-Wahpukuta settlers in the 1860's, a Charter was granted by the Minnesota Territorial Legislature to the Minnesota Valley Improvement Association. The intention was to build a canal system between the Mississippi River at Winona and the bend of the Minnesota River at Mankato. The Charter allowed the company to vary the water levels from the lakes and natural waters along the way in order to keep enough water in the proposed canal.

As it came about, the canal was never built because the railroad, which was more economical to build and less expensive to operate, came through the area. The Charter still allowed the Association to control the water levels.

Mills were built at frequent intervals along the waterways in this lake region, some along the Cannon River, into which the Jefferson-German lakes flowed. When dry years came, the milling operations were hampered due to low water levels. The Association exercised its rights under the Charter to secure additional water along the waterways.

In 1869 the Association bought an easement on German Lake and dug an outlet at the east end of the lake, less than a half mile north of the Lake's natural outlet. This lowered the lake three and one half feet, just enough to keep the wheels turning at the mills. The following year, 1870, a ditch from German Lake was dug two feet below its level into Lake Jefferson. This resulted in a substantial lowering of Lake Jefferson. These two events effectively changed the shoreline of the chain of lakes, and consequently the forms of the lakes themselves.

At the time, the lake area farmers did not resist the efforts to lower the lake levels. In fact, they derived several benefits from it. First, they were able to use the additional drained land for growing grass – additional hay for the horses they needed for clearing the land and for transportation. Secondly, fishing was improved, since after the water level was lowered, the fish occupied less water space, competing for the same food in a smaller area. The farmers could sell their fish harvest to willing buyers.

In 1911 County Ditch 36 was dug connecting Sanders Slough to German Lake's northeast shore via a culvert; Sanders Slough is that low area across the road and slightly downhill from St. Paul's Lutheran Church on German Lake. That culvert contains a trap door that keeps water in German Lake but allows water from the Slough flow into the lake if the ditch level is high enough. County Ditch 36 became an extremely contentious issue in 1974 between farmers who wanted the County to improve the flow of the ditch for better drain tile efficiency, and lake landowners who thought that the water is often too high and wanted a way to keep a lower, constant water level. In 1976 the County cleaned Ditch 36 and altered the ditch system by running it from the northeast corner of Sanders to Rice Lake (an extremely shallow "lake" east of the primary outflow culvert at County Rd #11/#12 on the eastern shore of German Lake). In 1986, the majority of Sanders Slough - 48.6 acres - was gifted to the MnDNR, and now is the Carl and Verna Schmidt WMA (Wildlife Management Area).

Meanwhile, back to the Depression days of the 1930s, lake levels were substantially lower than today. From the East Jefferson public boat landing to the northwest towards Hardeggers landing, there was a beach of 150 feet of sand shore, along with a sand island in the bay. When the first water was diverted from Sanders Slough into German in or about 1933 it took about 20 years for the water

to get to its current level. German Lake came up and made a good rise quite soon. The boat pass/channel was put in between German and Jefferson in 1939 by the Conservation Corps and German actually began to feed lower Jefferson.

The channel at the far end of Cape Horn between Middle Jefferson and East Jefferson was dug by the Sportsmen Club in 1940. The purpose of that channel was not for boat navigation, but for the sake of allowing large fish in the spring to get across that point and get into Middle Jefferson to spawn. Prior to the channel many spawning fish in Middle would die because they couldn't get back to East Jefferson, and the new channel cured that problem. When the lake continued to rise we ended up with a boat pass which was not the original purpose at all.

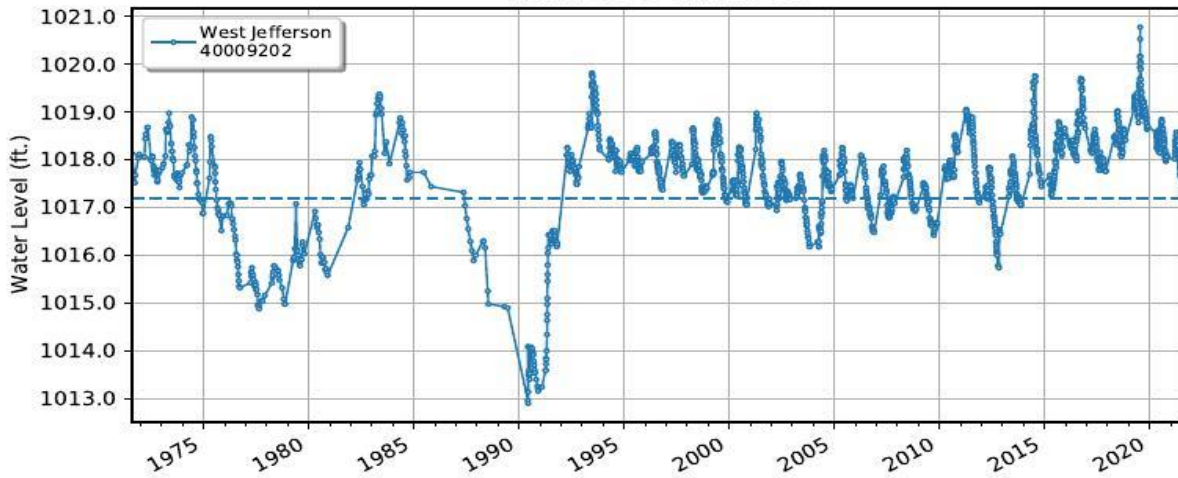
The pass between Middle Jefferson and West Jefferson was another story. In about 1900, where the road goes over the boat pass was all resort. The lakes were really narrow there, and Washington Township built a trestle across the lake using artificial fill. Before the trestle connected the two sides of the lake, travelers from Marysburg and south had to go around the west end of the West Jefferson to get to Cleveland. The road was put there and maintained for many years, and in about 1915 the Township started filling the road (now County Road 15) in a rebuilt it on about three separate occasions, raising the road level each time. In 1940 the first box culvert connected West and Middle Jefferson. The present box culvert was put in around 1954, and is in serious need of replacement.

The primary outflow culvert on the eastern shore of German Lake, running underneath County Rd #11/12, prior to 1985 was at 1016.7 feet. Water only flows out of the lake system if it is above that level. In 1985 the County replaced that culvert with a 54" x 88" arch pipe 1017.3', six inches higher because the invert of the prior culvert had settled over years lowering the runout. The DNR last surveyed the outlet culvert in 1992 and found the elevation to be **1017.2'**

Lake levels have fluctuated greatly throughout the years. Because of the relatively small watershed to lake surface (5.4 acres of watershed to one acre of lake area), the lakes are sensitive to diminished or excessive rainfall, as seen in the West Jefferson Hydrograph and Elysian Township Precipitation Chart on the next page. The dash line on the Hydrograph is the German Lake outlet elevation. However, an increasing noticeable factor is the addition of farm field drain tiling. Many landscapes in low areas are not holding water as they had in the past, with many wetlands/low areas where water would historically stand and migrate downward have been tiled and the water is being out-letted to a drainage system to creeks and to rivers and to lakes. When the area gets a deluge of 6-8 inches of rain the level of the lakes rises much faster than in the past. In looking at the MN Climatology's detailed database moreover there are an increasing number of 6.5 to 9.5 total monthly inches of rainfall in the June thru September months that are as infrequently seen in earlier years. Also, in the past (2014-2020) the annual rainfall has been in the top 30 percentile of the period of record.

German Lake has the highest ratio of watershed-to-lake surface area, along with secondary benefit of being at the bottom of the chain of lakes. West Jefferson is the most susceptible to diminished annual rainfall while German is the least susceptible. Recognizing that in 2015-19 the lakes experienced very high lake levels, over the past 35 years there has been a 6 foot vertical variation, with historic lows in 1989-90 when much of Middle Jefferson was mud and fence posts from old pastures appeared in the lake. Locals talk about corn fields on various parts of the lakes back in the 1930s.

Recorded Water Levels
1971-8-6 to 2021-9-30



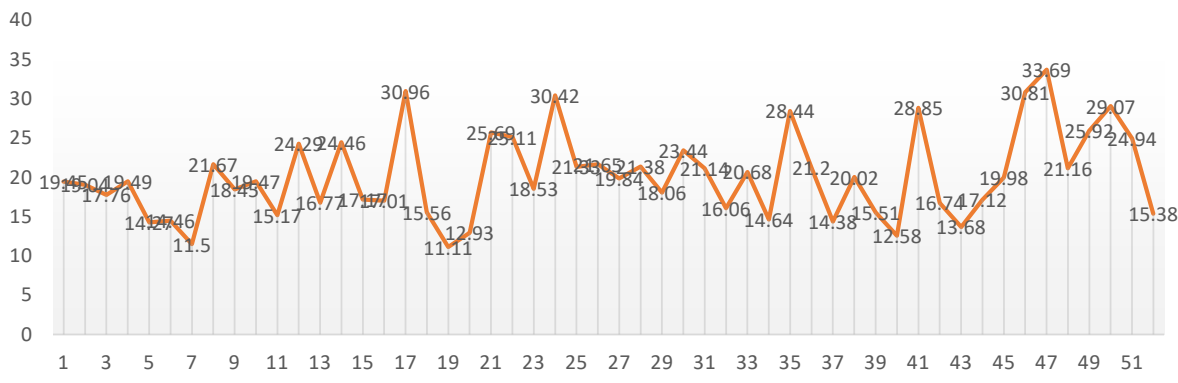
Minnesota State Climatology Office, Precipitation Data, Le Sueur County, Elysian Township

WARM = May thru Sept. totals; ANN = calendar year totals; **bold** = lowest 30th %; shaded = highest 30th %

YEAR	WARM	ANN	YEAR	WARM	ANN	YEAR	WARM	ANN
2020	24.94	35.25	2003	14.64	22.21	1986	30.96	42.29
2019	29.07	46.85	2002	20.67	30.77	1985	17.01	30.03
2018	25.92	39.15	2001	16.06	30.30	1984	17.07	31.65
2017	21.16	34.16	2000	21.14	32.13	1983	25.46	39.07
2016	33.69	46.4	1999	23.44	36.04	1982	16.77	30.04
2015	30.81	44.89	1998	18.06	31.86	1981	24.29	34.30
2014	19.98	33.43	1997	21.38	29.19	1980	15.17	20.96
2013	17.12	31.47	1996	19.84	32.72	1979	19.47	31.83
2012	13.68	25.15	1995	21.05	33.2	1978	18.45	27.42
2011	16.74	27.29	1994	21.33	33.68	1977	21.67	36.83
2010	28.85	39.82	1993	30.42	39.50	1976	11.50	17.06
2009	12.58	29.14	1992	18.53	31.48	1975	14.46	28.85
2008	15.51	28.21	1991	25.11	39.99	1974	14.27	21.34
2007	20.02	33.95	1990	24.69	36.06	1973	19.49	33.80
2006	14.38	25.04	1989	12.93	21.15	1972	17.76	27.61
2005	21.20	34.97	1988	11.11	19.91	1971	19.04	32.39
2004	28.41	37.63	1987	15.56	21.61	1970	19.45	35.19

In the 131 year (1891-2020) Period of Record the mean rainfall for Warm is 19.29 and Annual is 29.58

Precipitation in Inches May thru September
1970 (#1) to 2021 (#51)



5. The Geldner Saw Mill

Geldner Saw Mill and Park is located at 46542 Beaver Dam Road (County Rd 13) just south of the East Jefferson Lake public boat landing. This historic sawmill played an important role in the settlement, clearing, and development of the Beaver Dam countryside. The machinery was manufactured in the late 1860's in Ohio and Vermont, and shipped by steamboat up the Minnesota River. It was initially placed in operation on upper Lake Jefferson, then moved in 1870 to his location as settlers cleared the "Big Woods" of basswood, elm, maple and red oak that once dominated south central Minnesota.

Because of frequent financial panics between 1870 and 1900, the mill passed through the hands of a number of owners before Leonard Geldner purchased it from the McCabe brothers. Geldner had worked as a millhand for several previous owners before becoming the proprietor of the mill in 1906. Leo Geldner, a second generation of his family to have worked much of his life at the Geldner Mill, sold it to Le Sueur County in 1978.

From 1978 to 1983 the saw mill was restored by the County with local funds and the help of grants from the US Dept. of Interior and the Minnesota Historical Society. The Geldner Saw Mill was one of the last remaining stationary steam-powered saws in the United States and the only one in Minnesota; it is currently on the National Register of Historic Places. There were monthly summertime demonstrations until 2012 when the boiler became unfunctional. The County is currently applying for grants to rehab the facility as an interpretive site to inform and teach the public about its historic importance in our area's development.

The 4.5 acre Park surrounding the saw mill has a 45 foot long pier, built in 2010, that is handicap accessible and features benches and 9 rod holders. Amenities within the park include 3 picnic tables, large gravel parking lot and a seasonal porta-potty. The park's bay off of East Jefferson Lake is a popular spot for anglers looking to catch panfish depending on the time of the year, whether off of the pier of 750 feet of park shoreline.



6. How Beaver Dam Got Its Name

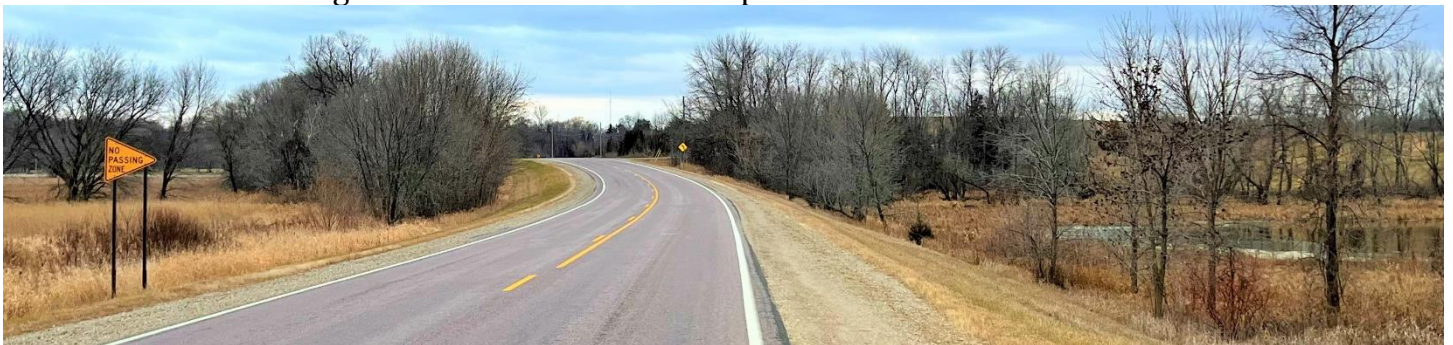
The following was written by Ted Roemers, a retired postmaster from Madison Lake who collected many stories from our area; his article - How Beaver Dam Got Its Name - was published in the Winter 1998 Jefferson-German Lakes Newsletter and has been slightly edited for clarity. His interview with Edmund Roemhildt was believed to have occurred in the mid 1970's.

Scores of tourists and lake property owners have for years asked if there really was a “beavers’ dam” at one time. Ted Roemers talked to many old timers but got nothing concrete until a letter from Leonard Geldner sent him over to Edmund Roemhildt. (FYI: Leonard Geldner owned a good section of property on the southern shore of East Jefferson, and developed what is now the Geldner’s Addition; he also was a family member who owned and operated the Geldner Saw Mill.

Edmund Roemhildt got this true story from his father, Edward Roemhildt. The year was 1877, and Edward was seven years old at the time. Edwards father, Wilhelm, and two other pioneers, all native Germans, had land and timber holdings south of German and Jefferson lakes and wanted to find a crossing between the two lakes to facilitate trading and social communications with the country to the north. They went through the heavy timber and they did find a way – only it was obstructed by a beaver’s dam. This dam was ½ mile south of the present narrows where the East Jefferson Public Landing and water connection between the two lakes is now located.

This dam was a scant one hundred feet in length. They promptly cut oak and elm logs from the trees which thickly covered the high ground to the south and with their oxen dragged them into place making a corduroy road across the top of the dam. The first few layers sunk out of sight after a few crossings with their heavy ox carts, but they filled with earth and cut more logs. Then they fell a cart-way of timber through the thicket northward and emerged to where present Beaver Dam Resort now stands. They had their road! This road eventually went up to the Lutheran Church on the north shore of German Lake (presently St. Paul’s Lutheran Church on German Lake) and then a road was cut to connect with the old Dodd Road running west to east approximately 5 miles north of the Church.

When the corduroy oxcart trail was completed after several weeks of hard labor by Wilhelm and his partners, Edward, then only seven years old, heard his father, Edmund say, “Well, we had to cross a beavers’ dam to get here. We should call this place **“Beaver Dam”**”. And so the name stuck!



The dam and the making of the old corduroy road is ½ mile south of the Public Landing on County Rd #13 and 1/10th of mile north of Arrowhead Trail road to Jefferson Heights. Traveling south you pass the Geldner Saw Mill and just before you come to a small hill on the left you’ll see a slough to the right and a little further south a large slough to the left. This little stop-gap the wily beavers had located, and at one time there were hundreds of beaver houses in the Geldner slough on the right hand side.

7. Klondike Hill/aka Jesse James Hill

A most interesting historical attraction in the Lakes region is Klondike Hill, also known as Jesse James Hill, located northwest of Elysian off of Elysian Road/243rd St, and 3 blocks south on Lake Francis Road. As the James/Cole Younger Gang left Mankato in late August of 1876, they camped at Klondike Hill and utilized the CGW route (Cannon River Improvement Co. Railroad), now the 39 mile-long Sakatah Singing Hills bike trail, and parts of the Dodd Road to make their way to Northfield for the infamous foiled bank robbery on September 7, 1876.

Geocaching.com is a popular site for hobbyists who use their cellphones GPS to explore historical and geographical sites around the U.S: <https://www.geocaching.com>. The following describes their route: On Thursday, September 7, 1876, eight notorious bandits rode into Northfield in an attempt to rob the First National Bank; they miserably failed, leaving two bandits dead on the street and fleeing back southwest at 2:07 p.m. They reached Dundas at 2:30 p.m., Millersburg at 3:00, Shieldsville at 4:00, and spent the night – Night #1 - in a barn near Calvary Cemetery in Kilkenny. Friday morning the gang traveled south and west paralleling the Sakatah railroad but on the north side of the Cannon-Sakata-Tetonka-Elysian-Frances chain of lakes. They encountered a large posse near Waterville but were able to escape on the north side of Tetonka. The gang headed towards Klondike Hill. The posse, realizing that the hill would make a great lookout and figuring the gang was there, surrounded the hill and decided to wait the gang out. And they waited, and waited. Finally in the morning they closed in. No gang. Either the gang gave them the slip or they by-passed the hill. Friday evening settles in. The rain increases as the gang headed north and west towards **Lakes German and Jefferson**.

Saturday, September 9th – 12th. Having had several near misses, the gang takes some diversionary tactics and is not seen for several days. About three miles northwest of Elysian (although their goal is southwest) they abandon their horses. Friday night #2 and Saturday night #3 are spent alternately creeping and resting in the woods and marshes heading along the south-side of the **German-Jefferson chain of lakes**. On September 10th, Sunday morning, as they approach Marysburg they hear the bells of the Immaculate Conception of Marysburgh Church, and circle south around the village to avoid detection. Marysburg was much bigger in 1876 than it is now; what remains is the Church, the bell, Parish Rectory and Parish/Marysburg Hall, and several nearby homes. A few miles west of town the Gang finds an abandoned farmhouse where they spend the next three nights recuperating, drying out and resting.

Meanwhile the posse, numbering over a thousand, the biggest in the history of the U.S., is becoming increasingly discouraged, disorganized and discontented. Rewards encourage many members to go their own way rather than to follow orders. Glory-seekers start taking chances. Rumors fly. Any innocent stranger is likely to generate a report that an outlaw has been spotted and the posse splits off to pursue every lead. The rain is incessant making tracking impossible and posse members shirk their duties.



Present-day Klondike Hill is an area set aside for hiking and enjoying nature; it is owned by the MN DNR. It is the highest point in three counties, offering a slightly obstructed panoramic view of the surrounding area. A parking lot adjoins Lake Francis Road and unmarked trails will take you to the top. More information can be seen at www.northfieldhistory.org/the-bank-raid and the aforementioned geocaching.com website.

Klondike Hill as seen heading west on Elysian Road/243rd St,

8. The Early Settlers

The following two episodes of Early Settlers will be followed up by additional episodes later on.

Homesteading and the establishment of subsistence farming by non-native settlers (non-Eastern Dakota Wahpekutes) began in earnest in this area in the 1860's. This was a part of the "Big Woods" of Minnesota, of which originally all of Le Sueur County was covered by deciduous hard timber. The newcomers needed to clear the trees and stumps from the land before raising crops that could be sold to pay taxes and buy necessities that could not be raised by the settlers themselves. It was hard work, and slow. The trees that were cleared were simply burned to be rid of them, burned to heat homes, sold at the wood market in St. Peter as fuel for transportation or heating, or sold to the lumber mill that transformed them into building material.

John and Martha Schickling settled on the Big Island on the south shore of East Jefferson in 1850, and homesteaded it in 1861. This East Jefferson "Big Island" is that large parcel at the very southwestern part of East Jefferson and the northern part of Swedes Bay; see the watershed map on Chapter 1 and you'll see how it was called an "island". As mentioned in Chapter 2, The Eastern Dakota Wahpekutes, the Schicklings befriended the Dakota who literally had teepees outside their house and who provided some meat for them. When the Sioux Uprising in 1862 started, the Dakota told them "Do not go to New Ulm" even though the army at New Ulm told all settlers to come there. All the settlers in this local area who stayed here were just fine, thanks to the Dakota; many of those that headed to New Ulm never made it.



There were times in lake history when it was necessary to travel through water as much as three feet deep to reach some parts of the Schickling farm. The "island" is now connected by a tractor road and is farmed. The Schickling Woods is now where the housing development is on the south side of Middle Jefferson – the very end of Sioux Trail. A grandson of John Schickling, Charles Schickling, bought the farm and lived there from 1917 to 1942 building a

modern house for the days with **the Big Island surrounded by Swedes Bay & East Jefferson** steam heat, a bathroom and hand-pumped running water, and a cistern pump in the kitchen. Charles started raising ginseng in the woods where there was a lot of shade and made most of his money selling it, with buyers coming here from New York and the product hauled by horse to St. Peter where it then went by rail to New York.

In 1841, at the age of 17, **Theobald Kluntz** came from Germany with his parents, and while in Fort Wayne, Indiana, in 1854, married Margaret Barbara Wilfert who had immigrated from Germany in 1852. In a covered wagon with children and Margaret's brother, Andrew Wilfert, they were the first Kluntz' to arrive in Minnesota in 1856. After residing in Cordova for several years Theobald began buying acreage in 1867 totaling 220 acres which later became **Cape Horn** and the northern shores of Middle Jefferson, including the big island on Middle Jefferson. Starting with a small log cabin, Theobald and his Wilfert brother-in-laws faced a formidable task of clearing the "Big Woods" by cutting timber and hauling it to Cleveland and St. Peter; by 1880 he had 50 acres cleared and plowed by oxen/horses with grain planted by hand. Prior to clearing the woods Theobald and others needed cash so they also chopped ginseng root with a grub hoe which flourished throughout the Big Woods. Theobald and three of his brother-in-laws in 1868 founded, organized and constructed the First Lutheran Church of Lake Jefferson, south of Cleveland. The Church was rebuilt in 1891 and then moved to Cleveland in 1949 with its name changed to the current Our Savior's Lutheran Church.

The cabin was replaced by John Jacob, Theobald and Margaret's son, with a stately two story old Victorian southern colonial style house with a wrap-around porch, open staircase, hardwood flooring throughout and reportedly was one of the first houses to have plumbing and electricity. "The farmhouse" was the centerpiece of their growing farm estate and was torn down in 1989. John Jacob even built a cabin-to-rent to tourists on Cape Horn just north of the East Jefferson/Middle Jefferson channel. Parts of that farmstead, with a small silo, can still be seen on property next to The Boathouse of the *Landing at Jefferson Lakes*, and a fifth "American" generation family member now lives nearby. John Jacob was County Commissioner from 1909-1912.

Third generation John Ward Kluntz started the Lakeshore development in 1959 (Kluntz Lakewood Knoll, now the Cape Horn community). John Ward, like his father John Jacob, LOVED to fish the lakes and hunt. A "fun fact" about John Ward was that he organized hunting outings around the farm area, and in November of 1940 Henry Bachman Jr. (son of Bachman's Nursery founder) and his son, Stanley, came down from Minneapolis to go duck hunting on Kluntz' property on Middle Jefferson. As they sat in their blind at



**John Jacob Kluntz (left)
at the House**

daylight heavy snow began to fall with a strong wind. A blinding blizzard emerged and they left their decoys barely making it to the Kluntz farmhouse. A total of 7 hunters and 12 Kluntz family members hunkered down for the night, the hunters with blankets on the floor, with even a chimney fire filling the house during the night and one brave soul climbing the roof scrapping a chain in the flue to extinguish the fire! Fifteen foot drifts stranded the hunters for another three days, but they were resourceful and went hunting for pheasants, ducks, coots, rabbits and squirrels which all went into a gigantic stew with potatoes and some vegetables. Finally on the fourth day they were able to get to a plowed road to learn that the blizzard left thousands stranded with many dead. This famous blizzard is now known as the **Armistice Day 1940 Blizzard!** (taken from *All Hell Broke Loose; Experiences of Young People During the Armistice Day 1940 Blizzard* by William Hull, Edina, 1985, pp 180-182)

Taken from *The Family of Joh Friedrich Wilfert & Catharina Margaretha Hierdegen, Volume III: Margaret Barbara Wilfert and Theobald Kluntz* by Corinne Kay MacLaurin, 2009.