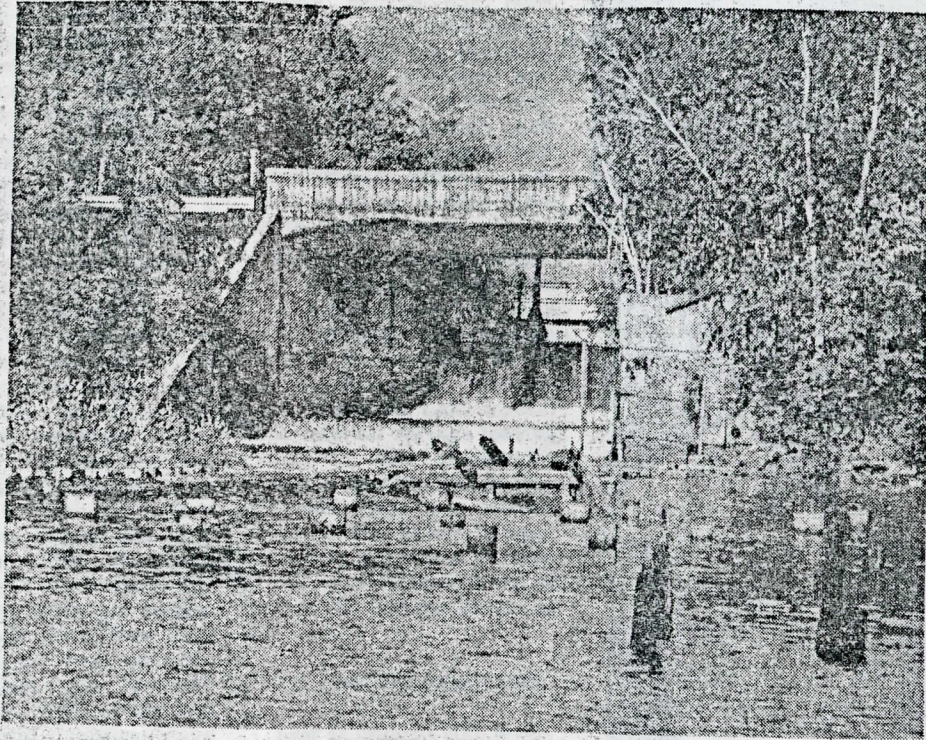




The Rest Lake Dam

But not unprecedented **Drought having great effect on lake levels**

BY MICHAEL DUNN

Extremely low July rainfall totals are having a sizeable--though not unprecedented--effect on lake levels and river flows throughout the Lakeland area. An interview with Calvin LaPorte of Manitowish Waters recently highlighted and explained some ways that waters are being affected in the northwestern part of the Lakeland area.

LaPorte is caretaker of the Rest Lake Dam that controls lake levels in the extensive Manitowish chain and thus is in a unique

position to assess and explain the current summer weather's impact on his area's lakes in particular and the larger area's water in general.

The Manitowish Waters chain is technically a 10-lake flowage or reservoir that can contain, at maximum levels, 1.01 billion cubic feet of water; theoretically the dam and reservoir-right owners can demand-draw upon these waters, but in practice they never do so, knowing what effect or hardship that might wreak in a vacation area and vacation season.

As any observer has already seen, lake levels are down throughout the area. Tributary or distributary (draining) stream flows are down as well. Dry windy days, moreover, can increase lake surface evaporation "incredibly", LaPorte points out.

The dam in LaPorte's charge drains the upper Manitowish River watershed, a watershed of from 50 to 60 square miles which includes areas up to Boulder and High Lakes around Boulder Junction; all of Big

(Continued on Page 6)

Manitowish Dam. . .

(Continued from Page 1)

Trout Lake and up beyond Trout as far as Allequash Lake; Big Lake and Round, up toward Presque Isle; and, of course the Manitowish chain itself. The dam, at full pond, holds back an 8 1/2 foot head of water.

The effects of low rainfalls on this watershed come to a peak at the Rest Lake Dam, and three facts that show up there this dry year are especially interesting.

First, 1976 water levels on the chain of lakes have not at any time, since fill-up began this spring, reached the full 8 1/2 foot reservoir height, nor were they that high last year. They are now not very likely to do so before drawdown begins just after Colorama. Then they will drop one to two inches a day till hitting minimum authorized levels about Nov. 10.

Levels last week were six inches below the "normal" maximum. Without the dam they would doubtless have been lower.

Second, normally a rainfall will result in a two-step increase in water levels: an immediate jump of the same number of inches as the rainfall, plus an added but delayed jump in levels due to runoff. Thus a one-inch fall boosts the waters an inch at once, LaPorte

explains, while another boost follows. This year the thirsty ground has been absorbing all rainfall except what actually has fallen on the lakes themselves, and there has been no two-step rising from rainfalls and runoff. Ground dryness now precludes any sudden runoff rises following routine rains in the near future.

Third, the total flow down the Manitowish River from the entire watershed, with all its tributary streams (the upper Manitowish River; Trout, Allequash, Papoose and Rice or Big Lake creeks) and internal springs feeding lakes in the Manitowish chain, is now at a rate of only 50 cubic feet per second. This is well below normal, and very far below possible peak, almost-flood flows of 600 to 700 feet per second at the dam.

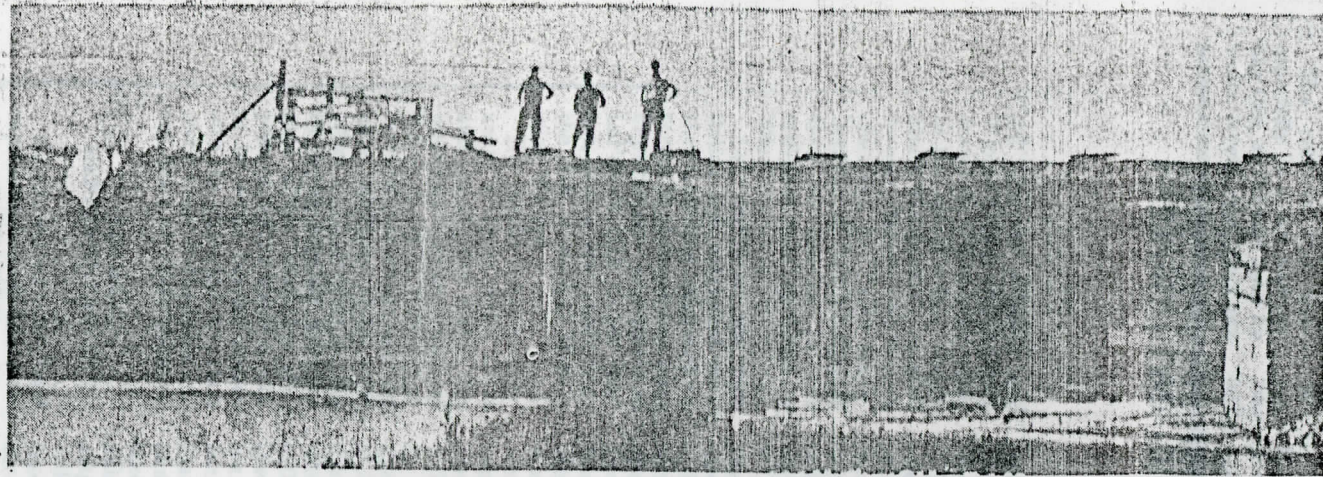
NOT UNPRECEDENTED

Low as present lake levels and river flows may seem, they are probably better than on many unregulated streams or landlocked lakes right now. And though rainfall totals have been low (only 0.28 inches of rain were measured at the dam in the first 20 days of July), the present lake and river situations are far from being

unprecedented. In 1946 and 1947, another dry biennium perhaps like 1975 and 1976, lakes here never reached within 18 inches of full pool, and in 1925 river flows were so skimpy that the flow of

the entire Flambeau River at Park Falls was only 74 cubic feet per second—and the usually mighty Flambeau drew that from hun-

(Continued on Page 12)



FATHER, SON...Rest Lake Dam caretaker Cal LaPorte (left) chats with his father, George LaPorte, about the caretaker's duties at the dam. The senior LaPorte first saw the dam around 1905, on his arrival in the Manitowish Waters area, and in 1909 was a stage driver between Manitowish depot and the dam; in his free time he often aided the dam-tender of the era. In the picture above, showing the dam in about 1909, George LaPorte is the tall man at the right of the picture. George thinks this picture was taken in 1909; for sure it was taken after log-driving had ended, for the waters are grown over with greenery.

July 29, 1976—Lakeland Times—Page 12

Manitowish Dam. . .

(Continued from Page 6)

dred of miles of watershed, including the Manitowish watershed as a tiny part!

The role of the dam, especially in a dry summer like this, as it helps keep up water levels, spotlights not

only the dam itself, but also its interesting caretaker and its fascinating history.

Cal LaPorte has been caretaker of the dam for 29 years. His predecessors for a long time were a colorful father-and-daughter team,

bateaux for the log drive

old Walcott Johnson and Winnie Young; sharing their duties was Winnie's partner in the old Win-Mar resort, Marie Zimmerman, recalled by many Manitowish Waters oldtimers as "Pants Marie" because of her predisposition to slacks in the still-skirt-wearing 1930s or '40s.

Cal combines his dam duties and attendant weather recording tasks with his career as co-owner and meat department manager of LaPorte's IGA Super Market, just a few yards from the dam in central Manitowish Waters.

He checks the dam daily, keeps a log of water flows and levels, and makes the necessary adjustments in water levels by reducing or increasing drainage over the dam (sluicing water, the latter is called). This he does by prying logs up from the gate slides with his pike pole, to reduce water levels, or he drops barrier boards into the gateways to retain more water in the lakes and cut down on river volume.

LOCAL REPRESENTATIVE

He also serves as the local representative of the company that owns the dam, explaining or interpreting company policy and trying to keep sportsmen and

lakeside property owners content with the lakes' levels and behavior.

The company that owns the dam and reservoir rights is the Chippewa and Flambeau Improvement Company, and it is composed principally of water users further down the Manitowish-Flambeau-Chippewa river system, like paper and power firms.

Because Cal LaPorte usually does his dam-checking on his way to or from the store, Manitowish Waters can probably claim the only dam tender in the world who does his work in white dress shirt and tie, especially a bow tie, Cal's trademark!

The name LaPorte is by no means new around the dam. Cal's father, George, belonged to a pioneer family that came to the area around 1905, and as a young man in 1909 was employed to drive the horse-drawn stage that was the only transport between the railroad at Manitowish and the residents along the chain of lakes. Travelers and goods alike had to shift from the stage to boats at the dam in order to reach points on the lakes, for the road ended at the dam. While he waited to make his return runs with the stage, the still-vigorous senior LaPorte recalls, he often helped the old dam

keeper of that time, a man named Miller.

CREATED "WATERS"

The dam has been more than a scenic feature of the area. It even went beyond helping to create the "waters" in the name and fame of Manitowish Waters. It has always been the focus of activity in the Manitowish Waters community, for the central business area of the town developed early and naturally around the dam and has remained there ever since.

The dam is built atop a 2 1/2 foot rapids that no one alive has ever seen, for the present dam is apparently the third on the site since 1887.

The state legislature authorized a log-driving dam in 1887 and the first dam went up soon afterward; tradition has it that the dam held back eight feet of water, and that it was replaced around 1900 by another, capable of holding back a 17 foot head. Those dams were wooden dams with huge rock cribs. Massive bullwheels and chains lowered and raised wooden gates. The last wooden dam is said to have a fishway off to one side.

On the higher and much more far-spreading waters that the dams raised, rafters used a steamboat to collect white pine logs that lumberjacks had been cutting and decking all winter long on or near the lake ice. Meanwhile, below the dam, workers annually built a wanigan (cook-shanty/supply boat) and repaired bateaux for the log drive. Then for weeks in early summer huge gulps of water and logs were shot through the dam to drive the light logs downriver to Chippewa Falls or Eau Claire sawmills. Gates on downstream dams, like at Park Falls, were wide enough (20 feet) to pass the logs and even the wanigan.

wildly as the lumber barons lost interest in the monster they had created and left behind them. Often the gates might simply be left wide open. Fishermen and property owners were infuriated with the fluctuating and with the extremes, and finally one group or individual, probably emboldened by John Barleycorn, went so far as to dynamite the dam. Repairs took only two or three days to the old wood structure, but the dynamiters may have made their point.

For a new, concrete dam was built around 1923 and water levels were stabilized at a minimum of five feet above the river below, and a maximum of another three and a half feet above that (the usual summer level). The lakes are drawn down to the lower level in fall and raised again beginning Mar. 15 or as soon as practicable after that. The state Public Service Commission also now exercises jurisdiction over the dam to protect all parties concerned.