THE REST LAKE DAM AND
THE MANITOWISH WATERS CHAIN OF LAKES--
1888 - 1978

Presented to Dr. Frank Crow
University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point

History 796

Submitted by:

James Bauer
July 25, 1978

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This paper is an attempt to survey the history of the Rest Lake Dam and the lakes affected by the dam--the Manitowish Chain of Lakes--in Manitowish Waters, Wisconsin.

As in many local history projects, the lack of written accounts became a major problem during the initial phase of the research. Some general background information was located in area newspaper files and an old book containing a history of Vilas County. More detailed information regarding some aspects of the dam was provided by documents at the Vilas County Register of Deeds office and in the written decisions handed down by the Public Service Commission in hearings concerning the dam. Maps were also beneficial, with a 1912 map of the Manitowish Chain located in the files of the Department of Natural Resources the most helpful.

The most readily available sources for research were, then, the "natives" of the area who actually experienced the early days of logging and resorting, or were younger members of the early pioneer families and were familiar with the history of their parents and grandparents. There were also some written recollections of early settlers who have since passed away which have proven invaluable for this study.

Oral interviews were held with many of the "natives"; the conversations were tape recorded and then transcribed and compared later. The personal recollections were fascinating.

The recall ability of many of those interviewed was astounding. At times, however, some discrepancies in details or dates did arise, which is an understandable problem when relying on memory. In such cases the information which seemed to be most often corroborated by the subjects interviewed was included.

A secondary purpose of the paper developed as the research was being conducted. It became evident that an enormous source of local history could disappear with the passing of any of these individuals unless some kind of written records was begun. This paper is, therefore, not only an attempt to explore developments of the area in the vicinity of Rest Lake Dam, but also is an attempt to start recording those personal accounts of "pioneers" which might otherwise be lost forever. It is hoped that the study and interviews might be expanded into the history classroom at Lakeland High School as a unit on local history.

GENERAL BACKGROUND

The Rest Lake Dam is located on Highway W, just north of the Manitowish Waters Shopping Center. The Manitowish Chain of Lakes today is a series of twelve lakes connected by the Manitowish River and a portion of the Trout River. Two of the lakes (Vance and Benson Lakes) are below the dam and can be reached from the others only by a portage across the dam area. Rest Lake is the main reservoir, located right at the dam site. It is connected to nine other lakes by the river channels and all ten can be navigated freely by boat. The nine other lakes are Island, Spider, Manitowish, Clear, Alder, Wild Rice, Little Star, Stone and Fawn Lakes.[1]

The Manitowish River is a tributary of the North Fork of the Flambeau River, which in turn is a tributary of the Chippewa River that eventually flows into the Mississippi River. The Manitowish Waters area is a part of the Wisconsin physiographic region known as the Northern Highland. The numerous lakes in the region (346 in Vilas County alone) had their origin in the glaciers which covered the area during the last ice age. The lake basins were most likely formed in a variety of ways. Some were probably shallow depressions in the ground moraine; some were most likely held in by terminal moraines, and others could have formed in hollows called kettles, created at the close of the glacial period by the melting of buried ice blocks. Few, if any, of the lakes in this area were formed in

---

[1]Manitowish Chain of Lakes Map (see appendix)

glacially excavated rock basins because this part of the state has the rock ledges deeply buried by glacial drift. The last ice age also apparently changed drainage systems, with some rivers filling many of the basins caused by glaciers, thus forming chains of lakes, such as the Manitowish Chain.[2]

THE FIRST DAM

By the 1880's the timber resources of the area were being recognized for their economic value. The Chippewa Lumber and Boom Company acquired much of the timber rights and obtained Permission from the state under the laws of 1887, Chapter 449, authorizing it "to improve the North Fork of the Flambeau River for log driving purposes by building and operating one or more dams or other structures and equipment in the headwaters of the river."[3]

Stephan Stewart, a former member of General Sherman's Union Army Unit which marched to the sea, was a timber cruiser hired by the Chippewa company to select the site for such a dam.[4] The outlet channel from Rest Lake to Vance Lake was chosen. In 1888 a small wooden dam was constructed which raised the water probably about three or four feet. Information is sketchy about this first dam, but, according to George LaPorte,

---

[2]George O. Jones and Norman S. McVean, History of Lincoln, Oneida and Vilas Counties (Minneapolis: H. C. Cooper, Jr., & Co., 1924), pp. 13-15.

[3]Public Service Commission of Wisconsin, Hearings for Fixing New Water Levels for Rest Lake, July 8, 1937.

[4]Phyllis Andrews, private interview held at Manitowish, Wisconsin, January 14, 1978.

the older loggers spoke of it as being too small to be able to float logs from all lakes of the Chain.[5] By 1892 the Chippewa company wanted to expand their logging activities, so it constructed a much larger wooden dam at the same site.

THE SECOND DAM

The second dam, also called the "High Dam," was built from timbers cut by Abe LaFave and Cal Doriot near Rice Creek during the winter of 1891-92.[6] This new dam was made with heavy timbers and huge iron bullwheels to control the gates to three spillways. The dam was of sufficient height and strength to hold a maximum head of seventeen feet of water. The water was allowed to rise as high as sixteen feet above the natural flow of the river during the winter months. During the log driving season, which began in late spring or early summer, the water was released, to facilitate the drives. After the driving season was over, the lakes were down to their natural level. The gates of the dam were again closed either in the fall or before the spring ice break-up, to store water for the approaching log driving season.[7]

With the higher level of water, resulting from the new dam, other problems were encountered. The water level became so high that at one point the flow of water in Little Star Lake

---

[5]George LaPorte, private interview held at Manitowish Waters, Wisconsin, April 22, 1978.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Ibid.

was reversed and water began flowing into the Three Stepping Stones Lakes, which are not part of the same drainage system. Finally a dike was constructed to stop this flow into the Stepping Stones. Today the road passes directly over the dike area on the southwest corner of Little Star Lake.[8] To illustrate how much higher the level of the lakes was at that time, today's maximum level is eight and one-half feet. This is seven and one=half feet lower than the second dam's sixteen-foot level. It would seem that raising the water level by sixteen feet in 1892 would have created problems for those living along the lakes. However, at that time there were hardly any permanent inhabitants on the lake shores, as the earliest resorts began to spring up after the high water levels were already established.

One account, however, of an inhabitant who did experience problems with the new water levels was related by John LaFave.

> Mrs. Dooley's sister lived in a home on the flat at the right side of the channel when going from Island Lake to Spider Lake. When the big wooden dam at Rest Lake would build up a head of water sixteen feet high, it did not, of course, create a water level sixteen feet higher on Island Lake since Island Lake had a higher elevation than Rest Lake. The new water level was, nevertheless, considerably higher and caused flooding of Mrs. Dooley's sister's house so she moved to Clear Lake. Later, brails of logs floating through the channel literally wiped the house off the ground.[9]

The land during the 1890's was owned primarily by the logging companies who purchased it quite reasonably for the

---

[8]Fred Copp, private interview at Trout Lake Forestry Headquarters, Trout Lake, Wisconsin, July 17, 1978.

[9]John LaFave, written accounts of early resort days, unpublished, 1968-73.

timber rights, and, then, after logging the area, allowed it to return back to the state in lieu of paying taxes. Therefore, no records of possible disputes over flooded property were available. George LaPorte did state that it was the understanding of the logging companies that if such a conflict arose, the Chippewa Lumber and Boom Company would have to buy easement rights to the flooded area from the property owners. Mr. LaPorte could not remember such a situation occurring, but was of the opinion that such action most likely did take place.

Before the second dam was built, some of the channels connecting the lakes were much more crooked than they are today. According to one account, "The river between Alder and Wild Rice Lakes was so crooked one had to travel about four miles just to get from one to the other. It was like a snake; four boats could be traveling that part of the river toward the same lake and all within two hundred feet of one another, yet none would likely be going in the same direction because of the crookedness."[10] Raising the water level by sixteen feet straightened out such crooked channels considerably, so that logs could be easily rafted or floated through them.

Two additional dams were established on the river before 1900; one near Fishtrap Lake and the other at the outlet of Boulder Lake. The dam at Fishtrap was able to raise the water level five to six feet while the one at Boulder Lake raised the water by eight to ten feet. During this period High Lake, Fishtrap Lake, and Boulder Lake were all considered a part of

---

[10]George LaPorte interview.

the Chain since they were all on the Manitowish River. After the first logging period these dams were left to deteriorate and these three lakes became disconnected from the main chain.[11]

During this first logging period huge virgin white pines were cut all around the Manitowish Chain as far as ten miles away from the lakes' shorelines. They were usually dragged to the water by oxen, then floated to the dam site at Rest Lake. A steamboat, built at the same time as the second dam, was used to travel the lakes and raft the logs to the dam area. The logs were usually cut during the late summer, fall, and winter, and sent down river as soon as the ice was out in the late spring. The sixteen-foot head of water, released by the dam, then carried the logs to Eau Claire or Chippewa Falls where they were divided up between the sponsoring mills. The log drives from the dam to the mills lasted about two hundred days. Camps were located all along the route. "Watching bend" became a crucial job; some log drivers spent fourteen- to sixteen-hour days watching the logs at a sharp bend in the river. They were to keep logs from piling up and blocking the flow of water, which would cause the water level to rise and float some logs out of the river channel where they would be hard to recover.[12]

Protection of the Rest Lake Dam was also crucial at the start of the log drives. When the logs were released through the middle spillway of the dam, they rushed through with tremendous force, some going end over end, and creating a

---

[11]Fred Copp interview.

[12]George LaPorte interview.

backwash of water below the dam which in turn caused erosion at the lower sides of the dam. In order to cut down on the back current, logs were driven into the bottom of the channel at intervals just below the dam. These pilings broke up some of the momentum of the logs and the resulting current, thus reducing the amount of water wearing away at the dam.[13] Evidence of these pilings is still visible today just below the present dam.

Logging activity centered around the main camp at the dam site but other logging camps were scattered around the various lakes. By 1906 these major logging camps had pretty much disappeared.[14] There was some white pine logging and floating of logs on the lakes taking place after that, but it was usually on a small scale operation.

THE SECOND LOGGING PERIOD

As this first logging period declined, another type of logging appeared. The white pine logs were able to be floated long distances by water. The remaining Norway pine and hardwood forests still offered abundant lumber but such logs could not be floated for long periods of time. By 1906 a second logging boom occurred centering around railroad transportation. This boom lasted for about ten years in the Manitowish Waters area. The logs were still cut and hauled to the lakes. Once there, gasoline tugs towed the logs to one of the area railroad

---

[13] Ibid.

[14] Michael Dunn III, private interview at Manitowish Waters, Wisconsin, August 17, 1977.

spur line landings. At the landing, on either Little Star Lake or Rest Lake, the logs were loaded onto train cars by steam jammers or horses. This had to be done quickly, before the logs became waterlogged and sank.[15]

According to the recollection of George LaPorte, there were quite a few occasions when the logs were not loaded right away and finally sank to the bottom. It is estimated that six million feet of logs are still at the bottom of Rest Lake. Little Star Lake supposedly contains a few million feet of waterlogged wood, also.[16]

Individuals have made attempts to salvage some logs but it was legal only if they owned the "hammers" for the submerged logs. A hammer was used by each logging company to stamp its identification mark on the end of each log before it was put into the water. The legal rights to the submerged logs could be sold by the companies to individuals who might be interested in recovering the logs. This legal right was referred to as a "hammer." George LaPorte, for example, received "hammers" for some logs in Rest Lake as payment for a debt from a Yawkey-Bissell Lumber Company official. It gave him the right to salvage any logs in Rest Lake with a "7" stamped on them. He in turn sold the "hammers" to Bob Loveless of Alder Lake, since Loveless already had several other "hammers" and ran his own saw mill.[17] A few logs were recovered during the 1940's, but

---

[15]"Manitowish Waters History," Lakeland Times, Bicentennial Issue, June 24, 1976. Section 1, p. 9.

[16]George LaPorte interview.

[17]Ibid.

by that time they were quite brittle and made poor lumber, although they had a beautiful grain. The Loveless "hammers" were then passed on to his daughters who eventually sold them to Benji Roemer who still owns them today.[18] As of this time no salvage operation has been conducted in recent years. Legal ownership of the logs pertains either to the State of Wisconsin or to those who own "hammers." Recovery of submerged logs by any other party would not be legal.[19]

If submerged logs are recovered within a few years, they can still provide good lumber. The old Manitowish Waters school building was built using such lumber for dimension materials.[20]

By 1915 the railroad logging period was coming to an end. There were still many small local companies involved in logging activities, but it no longer was big business, centered around the railroad spur lines.

THE EARLY RESORTS

The resort business began at about the same time as the first logging period was flourishing. The earliest settlers homesteaded their land. It was land that the logging companies had allowed to revert back to the state after they had taken the white pine. Peter Vance, a timber cruiser, claimed to be the first white settler during the late 1880's but there has never

---

[18]Dolly Tirpe, private interview held at Manitowish Waters, Wisconsin, June 20, 1978.

[19]Vilas County News, July 23, 1924, p. 1.

[20]George LaPorte interview.

been any real proof to support such a claim. He was called "Squaw Man" because he lived with an Indian woman, named "One-eyed Sarah." His home and tavern were located on the lake bearing his name, Vance Lake.[21]

The three earliest resorts on the chain were established by Abe LaFave, J. A. LaMotte, and George Buck, with most evidence pointing to LaFave's being the first in business. It was located on an island in Island Lake. Buck, with his brother, had already been operating a resort at Winchester called "The Divide" since 1893. He moved to the channel between Manitowish and Spider Lakes and homesteaded a resort there. A floating dock served as a makeshift ferry there until about 1914 when a bridge was built. Today Highway 51 crosses the chain at that location. LaMotte, a music store owner, was proving up his claim and opening up the Deer Park Lodge by 1903.[22]

During these early days of resorting the guests came from the large metropolitan areas such as Chicago and St. Louis. The average length of a vacation at that time was four to six weeks, much longer than the one- to two-week vacation periods of today.[23] Most guests came by rail to the station at Manitowish. From there they were taken by horse and buggy to the Rest Lake Dam area. Each resort had boats at the location where the water ski shows are held today. The guests were then rowed to the various

---

[21]Phyllis Andrews interview.

[22]Lakeland Times, p. 14.

[23]Olive Fitzgerald and Marie Mehl, private interview held at Manitowish Waters, Wisconsin, February 11, 1978.

resorts. Abe LaFave used to row from his Island Resort in Island Lake to the Rest Lake Dam, pick up guests and row back; the round trip was about twelve miles. On the return trip many eager guests fished along the way and in some cases were able to land a musky even before they had reached their resort accomodations. Later, big power launches were used to transport the guests.[24]

As the railroads expanded into the Rice Creek area, passengers were able to be picked up at that landing, which was more convenient for some resorts. Supplies for the resorts came by rail to the Manitowish, Star Lake, and Rice Creek landings.

By 1914 other resorts were appearing on the Chain. Henry Voss built Birchwood Lodge, which is still operated by the Voss family today. "Silver" Mitchell started a resort on Rest Lake across from today's airport.[25]

Automobiles changed resorting significantly. Yet, by 1917 most guests still came by rail to Manitowish and were met there by a car from each resort. "There would be quite a turmoil of baggage and guests as each resort's respective cars would be at the station to meet them. Sometimes there would be arguments and an occasional fist fight to determine 'whose guest was whose.' On one occasion, a guest who had been acquainted at one resort, decided on his following trip to try another resort. Trouble followed; the argument became heated. Finally the guest broke up the argument and straightened out the matter. This competition between the resorts grew over the years."[26]

---

[24] John LaFave, written accounts.

[25] Michael Dunn III interview.

[26] John LaFave, written accounts.

By the 1920's guests came to the resorts by automobile. The Northwoods became more opened up. The car brought another change to the area--shorter vacations. More and more guests were staying for just one or two weeks instead of the previous month or six weeks. Vacationers became interested in camping during the 1920's also. Bob Loveless, of Alder Lake, opened up a large campground facility at that time. "House cars," the forerunners of today's mobile vans, began to appear in his campground during the later Twenties.[27]

Meanwhile, other resorts were dotting the lakes by this time. The Ilg family built cottages and a resort near the Rest Lake Dam. The Winmar girls (Winnie Johnson and Marie Zimmerman) operated a bar, restaurant, and cottages where the present-day Rod n' Reel Sport Shop is located. Conrad Bakken did some farming in the Wild Rice Lake area but also ran a resort and did some carpentry work.[28]

Summer homes began to appear by 1915 with Cary Lewis building a house where Little Bohemia now stands. Dr. E. R. Perkins, a circuit riding dentist, and Scot Younger, a circus owner, both had summer homes on Rest Lake.[29] Richard Southgate built an isolated home on Little Trout Lake, but spent much time and money constructing a series of canals and locks to connect Little Trout with the Chain of Lakes. Remains of those old canals are still

---

[27]Dolly Tirpe interview.

[28]Lakeland Times, p. 15.

[29]Phyllis Andrews interview.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
U	V	W	X	Y	Z														
1	2	3	4	5	6														

visible today along Alder Lake on the Indermuehle property.[30] It is rumored that during Prohibition the canals were also used for boats running bootleg whiskey from stills on Trout Lake to the lakes on the Chain. Other early summer homeowners on the Chain included the Flaunchers on Manitowish Lake, the Friends and the Hertzes (of the auto rental chain) on Island Lake, the Moores and the Nashes (of the auto company) on Rest Lake.[31]

By the 1920's, then, the primary economic activity of the Manitowish Waters area had switched from logging to tourism, with the family resorts possibly the fastest growing businesses.

THE THIRD DAM

The Chippewa and Flambeau Improvement Company had taken over the second dam on December 31, 1912. The company was a corporation owned by the power companies of the area. It still owns and regulates the dam to this day. After the log-driving period was over, the dam was left to deteriorate, allowing the water level to drop to its natural level. The company then petitioned the Railroad Commission to fix a maximum and a minimum level of water for the Rest Lake reservoir maintained by the dam. "The Railroad Commission had been given authority to supervise and control dams and the extent of the water which could be drawn from reservoirs created by such dams. Section six of Chapter 640 of the State Laws of 1911 gave the Railroad Commission such authority."[32]

---

[30]Fred Copp interview.

[31]Lakeland Times, p. 15.

[32]Public Service Commission Hearings, July 8, 1937.

visible today along Alder Lake on the Indermuehle property.[30] It is rumored that during Prohibition the canals were also used for boats running bootleg whiskey from stills on Trout Lake to the lakes on the Chain. Other early summer homeowners on the Chain included the Flaunchers on Manitowish Lake, the Friends and the Hertzes (of the auto rental chain) on Island Lake, the Moores and the Nashes (of the auto company) on Rest Lake.[31]

By the 1920's, then, the primary economic activity of the Manitowish Waters area had switched from logging to tourism, with the family resorts possibly the fastest growing businesses.

THE THIRD DAM

The Chippewa and Flambeau Improvement Company had taken over the second dam on December 31, 1912. The company was a corporation owned by the power companies of the area. It still owns and regulates the dam to this day. After the log-driving period was over, the dam was left to deteriorate, allowing the water level to drop to its natural level. The company then petitioned the Railroad Commission to fix a maximum and a minimum level of water for the Rest Lake reservoir maintained by the dam. "The Railroad Commission had been given authority to supervise and control dams and the extent of the water which could be drawn from reservoirs created by such dams. Section six of Chapter 640 of the State Laws of 1911 gave the Railroad Commission such authority."[32]

---

[30]Fred Copp interview.

[31]Lakeland Times, p. 15.

[32]Public Service Commission Hearings, July 8, 1937.

After a public hearing, the Commission, on November 24, 1914, established "a maximum head of eight feet on the gauge and a minimum of five feet six inches on the gauge for the Rest Lake reservoir, thus allowing the company to vary the head of water in Rest Lake by two and one half feet."[33] The company was dissatisfied and requested a rehearing during which it asked for a maximum head of ten feet and minimum of zero or to the natural flow of the water. If that request would have been acceptable, the company would not have had to make repairs to the dam unless it wanted to at some future time.

On September 10, 1915, after arguments had been heard on the rehearing, the Commission reissued their original decision of eight feet maximum and five and one half feet minimum water levels. They did modify the decision somewhat in that they permitted the company to lower the water level to a minimum of two and one half feet when the entire surface of Rest Lake was covered by ice.[34] Since the dam had deteriorated considerably and the lakes were apparently close to their natural levels, the decision, in effect, ordered the company to make needed repairs in order to maintain the required minimum water levels.

The Chippewa and Flambeau Improvement Company, after that decision, repaired the dam to hold the required water level prescribed by the state, to provide a reservoir for power companies on the river during times of drought.

---

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

There is some disagreement over the date of the construction of the third dam. The most consistent oral accounts seem to indicate 1923 as the year of construction of the concrete dam to replace the big wooden structure. The wooden dam was apparently becoming more difficult and costly to maintain sufficiently to meet water level requirements.[35] The third dam is the present concrete structure functional yet today.

The company contracted to construct the dam did so without building a road over the dam area. A wooden plank road had spanned the previous dam and was part of a well-traveled road. The construction company had to be brought back and a new contract was drawn up to include payment for the steel bridge and road construction, which was eventually completed before winter.[36]

The new concrete dam was operated in such a way as to continue to raise and lower the water levels according to the 1915 Railroad Commission hearing. However, by 1937, a dispute arose and a hearing was held before the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin, which was in charge of regulating dams by that time. Seventy-three petitioners from the Manitowish Chain of Lakes area requested the hearing. During the winter of 1936-37 the water had been lowered to the minimum two and one-half foot level as prescribed in the 1915 regulations. The petitioners claimed that the low water level caused the death of fish and fish food that were trapped in potholes which had been drained to the point where ice rested upon the bed. They also claimed that the water was so

---

[35]George LaPorte interview.

[36]Ibid.

low that the free oxygen in the water was soon exhausted, causing fish and other water animal life to be suffocated.[37] As a result of the hearing, the Public Service Commission ordered that

> . . . . the minimum reservoir level which may be maintained in the Rest Lake reservoir at the dam from November 1 to the time of the spring break-up of ice to be set at a gauge height of 5'0". From the time of the spring break-up until April 15 the water is to be at a minimum of 7'3". From April 15 until July 1 the level is to be raised to 8'6", which is the maximum level which is to be maintained at any time as long as the minimum discharge of water required by law, rainfall, and runoff will permit. From July 1 to September 1 the minimum is 5'0". At no time is the reservoir to be lowered at a rate exceeding two inches per day. At no time shall the reservoir be lowered after the ice sheet forms in the early winter and before the ice breaks up the following spring.[38]

Other requirements established by the Commission included an order for the Chippewa and Flambeau Improvement Company to employ a person to patrol the reservoir during the filling and lowering of it to record the number of potholes which were being isolated and the effect on fish life. The company was also required to spend at least $1,000 per year on dredging the sand bars building up between the potholes and the main reservoir for a five-year period or until the objectionable conditions were rectified.[39]

Not being satisfied with the Commission findings, another petition was filed during 1938 by the same seventy-three complainants. A rehearing was held on October 14, 1938. The petitioners requested that the minimum winter water levels be established at 6'6" instead of 5'0", and the maximum water level be

---

[37]Public Service Commission Hearings, July 8, 1937.

[38]Ibid.

[39]Ibid.

changed from 8'6" to 8'0".

The Public Service Commission, on February 15, 1939, after hearing additional testimony from individuals, upheld their earlier decisions established in the 1937 ruling. Their ruling was based on a compromise between the recreational benefits and the reserve power benefits. Little variation between the maximum and minimum water levels would be most beneficial for fishing and recreation, whereas a greater difference in water levels would cause the Rest Lake Dam to become a more efficient reservoir to provide reserve water power downstream during dry periods; the latter was the initial purpose of the dam after the Power Companies Corporation took it over in 1912. The Commission thus felt that in order to be consistent with the primary purpose of the dam, they could not justify reducing the water level variation any further.[40] Today the Rest Lake Dam caretaker is required to adhere to the same water level requirements as established in 1937. Presently the caretaker is Cal LaPorte. It is his responsibility to regulate the water levels and maintain the physical condition of the dam. He is hired by the Chippewa and Flambeau Improvement Company and communicates with the corporation through the Flambeau Paper Company in Park Falls. During the spring and fall when the water level is raised and lowered he is required by the company to report daily on the amount of water being discharged through the dam. In some ways, caretaking is a thankless job, because he is criticized by some in the spring for raising the water level too

---

[40]Public Service Commission Hearings, February 15, 1939.

changed from 8'6" to 8'0".

The Public Service Commission, on February 15, 1939, after hearing additional testimony from individuals, upheld their earlier decisions established in the 1937 ruling. Their ruling was based on a compromise between the recreational benefits and the reserve power benefits. Little variation between the maximum and minimum water levels would be most beneficial for fishing and recreation, whereas a greater difference in water levels would cause the Rest Lake Dam to become a more efficient reservoir to provide reserve water power downstream during dry periods; the latter was the initial purpose of the dam after the Power Companies Corporation took it over in 1912. The Commission thus felt that in order to be consistent with the primary purpose of the dam, they could not justify reducing the water level variation any further.[40] Today the Rest Lake Dam caretaker is required to adhere to the same water level requirements as established in 1937. Presently the caretaker is Cal LaPorte. It is his responsibility to regulate the water levels and maintain the physical condition of the dam. He is hired by the Chippewa and Flambeau Improvement Company and communicates with the corporation through the Flambeau Paper Company in Park Falls. During the spring and fall when the water level is raised and lowered he is required by the company to report daily on the amount of water being discharged through the dam. In some ways, caretaking is a thankless job, because he is criticized by some in the spring for raising the water level too soon and by others for raising the water level too

---

[40]Public Service Commission Hearings, February 15, 1939.

slowly, affecting opening day of fishing season. In effect, he does determine when to start raising or lowering the water level, but he has to follow the guidelines spelled out in 1937. The water has to be lowered before ice forms in the fall and can't be raised until the ice has broken up in the spring.[41]

Cal LaPorte has been caretaker for thirty-one years. The Rest Lake Dam has always had a caretaker since 1892. The first was a man with the last name of Prue, followed by a man named Miller. By 1910, Dad Johnson held the job; then the Winmar girls, mentioned earlier, took over during the late 1930's. One of the girls, Winnie Johnson, was Dad Johnson's daughter. After that, Cal LaPorte took over in 1947.[42]

FISH HATCHERIES

A fish hatchery was built in 1932 just below the Rest Lake Dam. It was later enlarged in 1936. The town ran the hatchery until 1942 when it became difficult for the town to support it on tax money. The state then took it over and by 1944 it was abandoned by the state, as were other private hatcheries around Wisconsin. The state wanted to be able to regulate the stocking of lakes; therefore, only state hatcheries were thereafter allowed.[43]

While the hatchery was being run by the town, it provided walleye and musky fry and fingerlings for planting in the Chain

---

[41]Cal LaPorte, private interview held at Manitowish Waters, Wisconsin, June 20, 1978.

[42]Lakeland Times, p. 15.

[43]Lakeland Times, p. 15.

of Lakes. Peak walleye production was around 14,000,000 in 1942, while the greatest number of young muskies produced was 2,700,000 in 1939.[44]

One of the highlights of the hatchery activity was the breeding of the hybrid musky. They had netted a female musky and it was kept in the tank at the hatchery. They looked all over for a big male musky but instead netted two large male northern pike in the channel between Little Star and Manitowish Lakes. The northern were placed in with the musky eggs to see what might happen. The eggs hatched and a new variety had been produced--the hybrid, or tiger, musky. The state, upon hearing of this, stepped in and took all of the jars containing the hatching eggs and spread them around to their own state hatcheries across the state.[45]

A unique invention was also related to the Manitowish Waters hatchery. Since the hatchery was below the dam, some type of conveyance was needed to allow fish to get up over the dam and into Rest Lake. Finally, a man by the name of Bahr, from Saxon, Wisconsin, invented the fish ladder, also called a fish lock.[46] It was a series of tanks at different elevations. Water would empty from one into another until it filled the uppermost tank. From there the water was dumped across the highest point into Rest Lake.[47]

---

[44]Ibid.

[45]George LaPorte interview.

[46]Phyllis Andrews interview.

[47]George LaPorte interview.

Evidence of the old fish hatchery can be seen yet today in the pilings below the dam, just along the near shore, next to the "Pea Patch" tavern.

Other hatcheries were located in the area during the 1930's and 40's, too. Below the Boulder Dam a small hatchery was operated by the town for a short time. Another was located in Rice Creek, just one-half mile south of Big Lake. Both of these, also, were later taken over by the state because of new legislation. Finally, they, too, were abandoned by the state, in favor of regionally located larger hatcheries.[48]

THE FUTURE OF THE DAM

Today the primary economic activity of the area revolves around tourism. Combinations of resorts, summer homes and campgrounds offer any type of vacation atmosphere to suit various individual tastes. The number of permanent year-round residents has increased tremendously, also, in the past five years. It seems that people who do live here year-round and all during the summer have come to accept the raising and lowering of the lakes on the Chain as natural as the changing of the seasons. Actually, the Chippewa and Flambeau Improvement Company would not have to raise and lower the water levels as much as they do and could still meet the Public Service Commission requirement.[49] The dam, then, has come to be an expected convenience which the company continues to provide. The lowering of the water by three and one-half feet in the fall helps to protect docks and piers from

---

[48]Fred Copp interview.

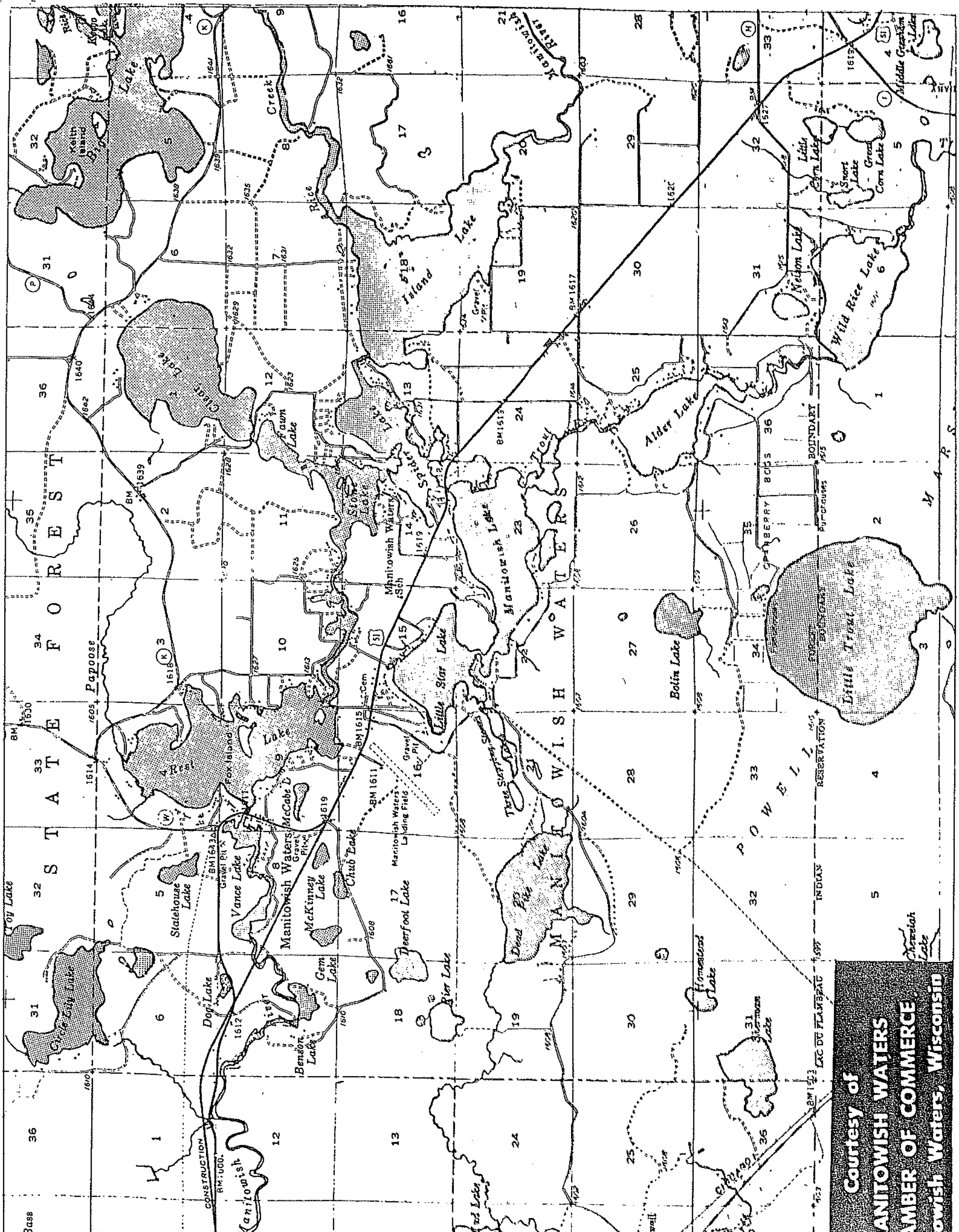
[49]Cal LaPorte interview.

ice damage, and when the danger of shifting ice is past, in the spring, the water level is raised by three and one-half feet again. If the dam were ever to be removed completely, the water level would be reduced greatly year-round. In the past few years some residents have expressed just such a wish hoping to have a permanent spillway installed to replace the dam. Such individuals are of the opinion that the changing water levels have affected fish spawning activities and, in turn, fishing. Others like the convenience of the changing water levels. In the future, another dispute may arise, as occurred in 1937. Personally, I feel the majority of people favor the dam and its present regulation.

CONCLUSION

I feel that the primary purpose of the paper has been accomplished. A general history of the area and, specifically, the Rest Lake Dam was presented. Interviewing the "old timers" of the community has been both interesting and enjoyable. This study, however, has really just skimmed the surface. The interviews provided answers to my original questions; however, as more information became available new questions were raised. To complete this study, further exploration of the available resources would be required. I hope some of this can be accomplished in the near future. Further information may be obtained through Lakeland High School students who wish to get involved in a local history project that I plan to include in my classroom activities.

The study has also illustrated the need for someone to record (in writing) the accounts of pioneers of this area before these people are deceased. Michael Dunn III, the official Vilas


STATE FOREST
MANITOWISH WATERS
POWELL MARSH
Papoose
Cedar Lake
Rest Lake
Fox Island
Stone Lake
Fawn Lake
Spider Lake
Island Lake
Rice Creek
Manitowish River
Manitowish Lake
Little Star Lake
Three Sleeping Sisters Lake
Alder Lake
Wild Rice Lake
Nelson Lake
Little Corn Lake
Great Corn Lake
Little Trout Lake
Bolin Lake
Dead Pike Lake
Deerfoot Lake
Vance Lake
Statehouse Lake
McKinney Lake
Chub Lake
McCabe L
Gem Lake
Dog Lake
Benson Lake
Circle Lily Lake
Homestead Lake
Sherman Lake
Manitowish Waters Landing Field
LAC DU FLAMBEAU INDIAN RESERVATION BOUNDARY
Courtesy of
ANITOWISH WATERS
AMBER OF COMMERCE
itowish Waters, Wisconsin