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History nearly lost

Names of Douglas County lakes remain as visible history of Indigenous people

Editor's note: This story is part of an occasional series about the history of local lakes in the area and how they got their names.

By Thalen Zimmerman
Alexandria Echo Press

DOUGLAS COUNTY — Before the formation of the State of Minnesota and the birth of Alexandria in 1858 — officially incorporated in 1877 with a population of 800 — the area of Douglas County was occupied by Native American tribes — mostly Sioux and Ojibwe.

After wars and treaties, some of the only visible history of the native Americans who used to cultivate the area we know as Douglas County are mounds of earth and names of lakes.

Lake Latoka

According to Brittany Johnson, director of the Douglas County Historical Society, Latoka likely got its name due to a mispronunciation or spelling of Lakota — one of the three prominent subcultures of the Sioux people — as there is no known historical or linguistic context for

the word “latoka.”

According to “What Does Latoka Mean?” by Darwin J. Casler on the website of Lake Latoka Property Owners Association, “the word Latoka, has appeared on numerous maps at least since 1879 as the name of our lake.” Casler added that a map in 1913 had “Lake Lokta” listed as the lake’s name but was then changed back to “Latoka.”

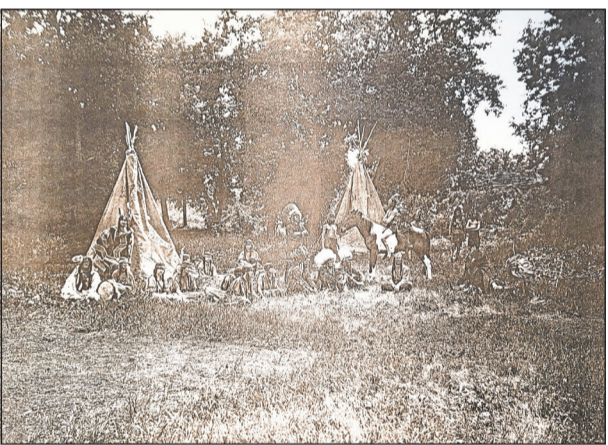
Lake Osakis

Osakis is an Ojibwe name meaning “place of the Sauk.”

The story goes that a group of Sauk or Sak Indians took refuge on a piece of the shoreline in what was then Ojibwe territory after being banished from their own tribe. Allegedly, the Sauk were later killed by Dakota tribesmen.

“That was a story that allegedly came from the Ojibwe in the area. Not the Dakota in the area,” said Johnson. “It may not have been murder. It could have been assimilation into the Ojibwe or Dakota tribe.”

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Contributed

A Douglas County Historical Society photo shows Native Americans at what is now Knute Nelson Memorial Field in Alexandria.



Contributed / Stacie Kimball of Eagle Bend

The Pro Ag Farmers Co-Op grain bin in Eagle Bend was torn apart by a tornado on Memorial Day, May 31.

IN A BIND OVER BINS

Destroyed grain bins cause headaches for some west-central Minnesota farmers

By Karen Tolkinen
Alexandria Echo Press

Damaging winds throughout the region in May inflicted serious damage on grain storage bins, raising questions about grain storage come harvest time.

“I’m concerned for fall,” said Jim Hlatky, general manager of Parkers Prairie-based Pro-Ag Farmers’ Cooperative, whose Eagle Bend location took a direct hit from the Memorial Day storm. “It’s almost impossible to get equipment and bins back up in this short a time frame.”

Pro-Ag has multiple locations and the Memorial Day twisters destroyed every bin at its Eagle Bend site. It also lost grain conveyors, and Hlatky said he is searching out alternative

places for farmers to bring their grain at harvest time.

Two other Pro-Ag locations suffered serious damage from the May 12 storm. A small grain bin was destroyed at its Hoffman site, where a mid-size bin will have to be repaired and some conveyors were lost, he said. An elevator leg at its Clarissa fertilizer plant was bent and will have to be torn down.

Agricultural experts stress that every year, bins are lost around the country, and that while the damage might cause local headaches, it is far from impeding the harvest, storage and shipping of grains as a whole. Of greater concern to all farmers are fuel costs, although the lost grain bins around the region may have some local impact. Douglas

County farmers may see longer wait times as demand increases at local elevators, for instance.

The grain storage industry is hampered by a steel shortage, supply chain disruptions, and labor shortages. While winds can and do damage grain bins, especially when they’re empty, Kevin Johnson, president of Gateway Building Systems in Fargo, says he’s never seen destruction on the scale of that caused by last month’s storms.

“This is one of the worst years I’ve seen,” Johnson said. “It’s probably four times as bad as I’ve ever seen it.”

Johnson said he has 70 bins in stock and 60 more on their way, plus five crews repairing and replacing bins, although they tend to be smaller

than what is needed by an elevator like Pro-Ag. Pro-Ag’s damage was so extensive that Hlatky is searching out alternative places for farmers to bring their grain at harvest time.

Douglas County farms largely escaped the damage, said Adam Johnson, president of the Douglas County Corn & Soybean Growers Association. However, it is surrounded by counties that did lose grain storage, and that might lead to more grain trucks in line at elevators that serve Douglas County farmers.

Elbow Lake Co-op Grain Company lost one of its smaller bins, said manager Kevin Stein. It had been damaged in the May 12 storm and the Memorial Day winds finished it off, he said.

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DeGier named Vikingland Band Festival grand marshal



DeGier

Echo Press staff report

ALEXANDRIA — The Vikingland Band Festival committee is proud to announce that Greg DeGier, retired band director from Alexandria Public Schools,

has been named grand marshal of the 38th annual Vikingland Band Festival.

The event will take place on Broadway Street in downtown Alexandria on Sunday, June 26, at 1:30 p.m.

DeGier was selected for the honor because of his positive impact on students as a music teacher, and also his 22 years of volunteer service on the Vikingland Band Festival committee.

Festival coordinator Rhonda Blaser said, “Greg is a respected and admired music educator, and he has played a big part in keeping the Vikingland Band Festival a top-notch event for Alex-

andria. We strive to recognize people who have made contributions to music, youth or the community, and Greg has impacted all three areas.”

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DOUGLAS COUNTY BOARD

Douglas County leaders work on tornado recovery

By Celeste Edenloff
Alexandria Echo Press

DOUGLAS COUNTY — As clean-up efforts continue after storms and tornadoes ripped through Douglas County May 12 and May 30, city, township, county and state officials are working on everything from securing

shoreline of Maple Lake and into the city of Forada. Douglas County commissioners held an emergency meeting Wednesday, June 8, which was attended by State Sen. Torrey Westrom, R-Alexandria and State Rep. Mary Franson, R-Alexandria.

Douglas County Emergency Management Director Julie Anderson provided an update to the commissioners, noting that the damage assessment for the May 12 tornado and storm has been completed and that it is

on track to meet the federal disaster declaration. She said a request will be made and then it will be up to the federal government to make the official declaration.

A determination has not been made on the May 30 storm and tornado, but is being worked on.

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