

DRAINAGE DITCHES

A drainage system was established in many counties in Minnesota, including Canosia Township, to reclaim low lying areas for agriculture and habitation.

A series of ditches were dug criss-crossing our Township north of the Ugstad Road and West of the LaVaque Road, (the north central part) in what is mostly the Canosia Wildlife Management Area now.

Local laborers, work farm prisoners, county surveyors (with help from monster steam shovels) scoped and dredged their way across miles of swamp lands. Landowners who were deemed to benefit by these ditches were assessed to cover some of the costs incurred by the government. These assessments were attached to their deeds.

When wagonloads of prisoners were transported through the land owned by my grandparents, my mother, a very young girl at the time, along with her brothers and sisters were forbidden to venture from the house until they passed.

Off the LaVaque Road, the McCumber Road was extended far into section 9 where a camp was set up to house the workers. The ditching machine had several boom and pulley arrangements protruding from the sides scooping muck into berms on each side of the six foot ditch, where birch trees would grow in the future.

Most ditching was done between 1913 to 1917 and abandoned in 1919. Much of the land proved worthless for agriculture and in no way became a resource for increased food production in the state.

An aerial photo taken in 1940 shows this area very plainly with precisely defined lines noted by trees growing on the ditch banks. The water drains from these ditches into a creek that flows into the Fish Lake Reservoir in section 8. All or portion of sections 3, 4, 9, 10, 15, 16 were ditched in Canosia Township and have never been suitable for farming. They have been logged over for white pine and tamarack, spruce and balsam, trapped for fur bearing animals, and hunted over for deer, moose, rabbit and grouse. Now there is duck hunting as well. Since large pools of water are forming from dams and ditches built by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), it enhances the management of wildlife, which covers

all of the previous ditch project.

So what was a fiasco by the state has become an asset for our Town with walking trails, snowmobile trails, cross country ski trails, bird watching open hunting in season and a tranquil beautiful area managed by the State of Minnesota through the DNR.

Contributed by Millicent O'Connell with help from Kathryn Adams and the Canosia Historical Society