

The Enchantment of the Lakes

A complete panoramic view of the physiographical features of Iowa would afford pleasant surprises. The wide and seemingly ever widening expanse of prairie is in fact frequently broken by gently flowing rivers, bordered maybe, with fringes of timber. Rich grain and harvest fields are ever now and again interspersed with groves and bits of woodland. Hills, too, are apparent — sometimes peaks, high, wooded, and beautiful. Deep-cut valleys, gorges, and ravines all add variety and splendor. And as for lakes and ponds, reflecting the beauties of a summer sunset, they are far more numerous and varied than one would suspect. Indeed, a panoramic view would reveal the presence of three score and ten beautiful, enchanting Iowa lakes.

There are four Silver lakes in as many different counties. There are two Clear lakes, a Blue lake, a Crystal lake, and a Diamond lake. There are three Swan lakes, two Goose lakes, an Eagle lake, and a Duck lake. There is a Prairie lake and a Lost Island lake, a Big lake and a Medium lake. There are two Wall lakes and a Little Wall lake. There is a Spirit lake and a Little Spirit lake. There is a Pleasant lake and a Storm lake, Pickerel lake and Lizard lake, Elm lake and Wood lake. There are three pairs of Twin lakes

— North Twin and South Twin, East Twin and West Twin, and two beautiful little lakes very closely joined, sometimes called Gertrude and Ida, but more commonly known as Twin Sisters.

In recent years, through the development of a State-wide conservation and park program, an increased interest has been shown in the preservation of inland waters. In accordance with this plan ten State parks have now been established on the margins of Iowa lakes.

Iowa lakes are of two kinds — bayou lakes formed by the shifting of river beds, and glacial lakes formed by the great ice sheets which came down from the north and, receding, left basins here and there which are filled with water.

Blue Lake in Monona County is the only example in western Iowa of a bayou lake which has become a State park. Sometime within the last century and a quarter the bed of the Missouri River shifted to the westward leaving a great horseshoe shaped channel. On the banks of this meandered lake has been established a State park of about three hundred acres — a splendid hunting, fishing, and camping ground, a wild life preserve. It is not only a lake park but an historic spot as well. In honor of the early explorers who camped on its shore it has been dedicated as the Lewis and Clark State Park.

Five times during its geological history Iowa was

invaded by glaciers. Great ice sheets pushed down from the north, wiping out the previously existing drainage lines, overriding the hills, filling up the valleys, and converting the land into a region somewhat resembling modern Greenland. The last glacial ice sheet—the Wisconsin — was in the form of a great lobe projecting into Iowa from the north, covering the land from Worth to Osceola counties and extending southward to the present city of Des Moines. Its outline may be traced to-day by low irregular chains of morainic hills and knobs which were heaped up along the edge of the ice. With the exception of Silver Lake in Delaware County all of Iowa's glacial lakes are found in this area.

Silver Lake is geographically and geologically unique. It lies in the Iowan glacial deposit, beyond the eastern limits of the Wisconsin drift, and is, therefore, much older than any other Iowa lake. Moreover, with the exception of the Mississippi River bayou lakes in Allamakee County, it is the only lake in northeastern Iowa. Silver Lake contains about forty acres within its meandered lines. Its banks are well defined, grass-covered slopes. On the margin of this lake a fifteen-acre tract, purchased mainly with the generous contributions made by the citizens of Delhi, has been christened Silver Lake State Park.

Common native herbaceous plants are numerous and varied in this area. Shrubs and vines such as sumac,

New Jersey tea, wild grape, bittersweet, choke-cherry, and prickly ash are widespread. Oak, elm, and bass-wood trees are also numerous. Migrating ducks and geese use this region as a haven of rest, while the robin, the bluejay, the mourning dove, and the whip-poor-will make it their home.

Four of Iowa's lake parks — Lake Okamanpedan, Storm Lake, Lost Island Lake, and Twin Lakes — are located in the Wisconsin drift sheet of northwestern Iowa. The four remaining lake parks — Clear Lake, Rice Lake, Eagle Lake, and Wall Lake are in the north central part of the State.

On early maps of Iowa and Minnesota a large inland lake was indicated on the boundary line between the two States. On some maps, it was designated as Tuttle Lake, while other cartographers labeled it Turtle Lake. In the early part of the nineteenth century the lake was surrounded by an extensive and beautiful woodland, which served as a rookery for herons and other gregarious birds, and as an Indian rendezvous. When Jean Nicholas Nicollet visited the place in 1838 the Sioux Indians referred to it as Okamanpedan — “the nesting place of the herons”. This euphonious Indian name appealed to the fancy of the government explorer and on his maps and reports the Indian name appears.

The region around this lake appealed not only to the Indians but to the white men as well, for as early as

1856 settlers began to stake their claims on the margin of the lake. One of the earliest squatters was Calvin Tuttle. Later pioneers naturally associated his name with the body of water near which he lived, and on the maps of that period the name Tuttle Lake may be found. If this name were not clearly written it might easily appear to be Turtle. Moreover, there is nothing particularly incongruous in thinking of turtle in connection with a body of water. Hence the name Turtle Lake erroneously appears on some of the early maps. In more recent years, however, the former Indian name has gained favor, and so on the modern maps the name again appears as Okamanpedan.

Lake Okamanpedan contains more than twenty-eight hundred acres, only about one-third of which is in Iowa. A small tract of beautiful woodland adjacent to the lake on the Iowa side has been set aside as a recreation plot. On July 4, 1926, in the presence of a large number of visitors from both Iowa and Minnesota, this area was dedicated as Okamanpedan State Park.

Somewhat south and west of Lake Okamanpedan on the boundary line between Clay and Palo Alto counties is one of Iowa's favored fishing and hunting resorts — Lost Island Lake. Early settlers in this region were informed by the Indians that at one time a large and beautiful wooded island was located in the middle of Lost Island Lake, and that it was inhabited by savages and desperadoes. One morning, as the story goes, the

Indians were amazed, upon waking, to find that the island had disappeared beneath the placid waters of the lake, leaving in its stead a beautiful expanse of water, which, from that day to this, has been a delight to the fisherman. On the margin of this lake is an attractive little resort, which, in accordance with this Indian legend, has been given the name Lost Island State Park.

Lost Island Lake contains some twelve hundred acres, and has an average depth of about twelve feet. The park adjacent to the lake contains twenty-seven acres of timber land. A wide variety of native plants such as iris, arrowhead, reed grass, New England aster, and goldenrod flourish there. Shrubs such as sumac, wild rose, wild indigo, and New Jersey tea also appear, while bur oak, elm, basswood, and ash trees are common. The park is situated almost equidistant from Emmetsburg and Spencer and is near the town of Ruthven. There, on the margin of one of Iowa's enchanted lakes, where once "the red man and the buffalo reigned supreme", the voices of the youth of Iowa now mingle with the songs of the wild birds, while the cottagers and campers enjoy the sport of fishing.

Storm Lake in Buena Vista County is not normally stormy and rough as the name might seem to indicate. Indeed, it is a delightful boating, swimming, and fishing resort. Situated almost exactly on the divide, the normal outlet of the lake is to the southeast into the

Raccoon River, thence into the Mississippi. But within the memory of the early settlers flood waters have gone southwestward into the Boyer River and thence to the Missouri. Indeed, at a very early date it was thought that Boyer River was the normal outlet and the lake itself was known as Boyer Lake.

In 1855 a party of United States surveyors was encamped on the shore of the lake, when an old trapper appeared and wanted to remain for the night. The surveyors had just discovered that the lake was not the source of the Boyer River, and that Boyer was not an appropriate name for the lake. Accordingly, when the trapper asked the name of the lake they told him that it had no name, and that the privilege of naming it would be reserved to old settlers, hunters, or trappers. That night a furious storm blew down the tent in which the old trapper was sleeping. The next morning he suggested Storm Lake as an appropriate name, which was thereupon adopted by the surveying party.

The lake has an area of a thousand and eighty acres, and varies in depth from seven to nine feet. Here and there along the shore are areas of woodland — slippery and American elm, basswood, green ash, bur oak, sandbar willow, and cottonwood trees. A wooded area of eighteen acres has been set aside by the State as Storm Lake State Park. The city of Storm Lake borders the north bank of the lake.

About thirty miles southwest of Storm Lake in the

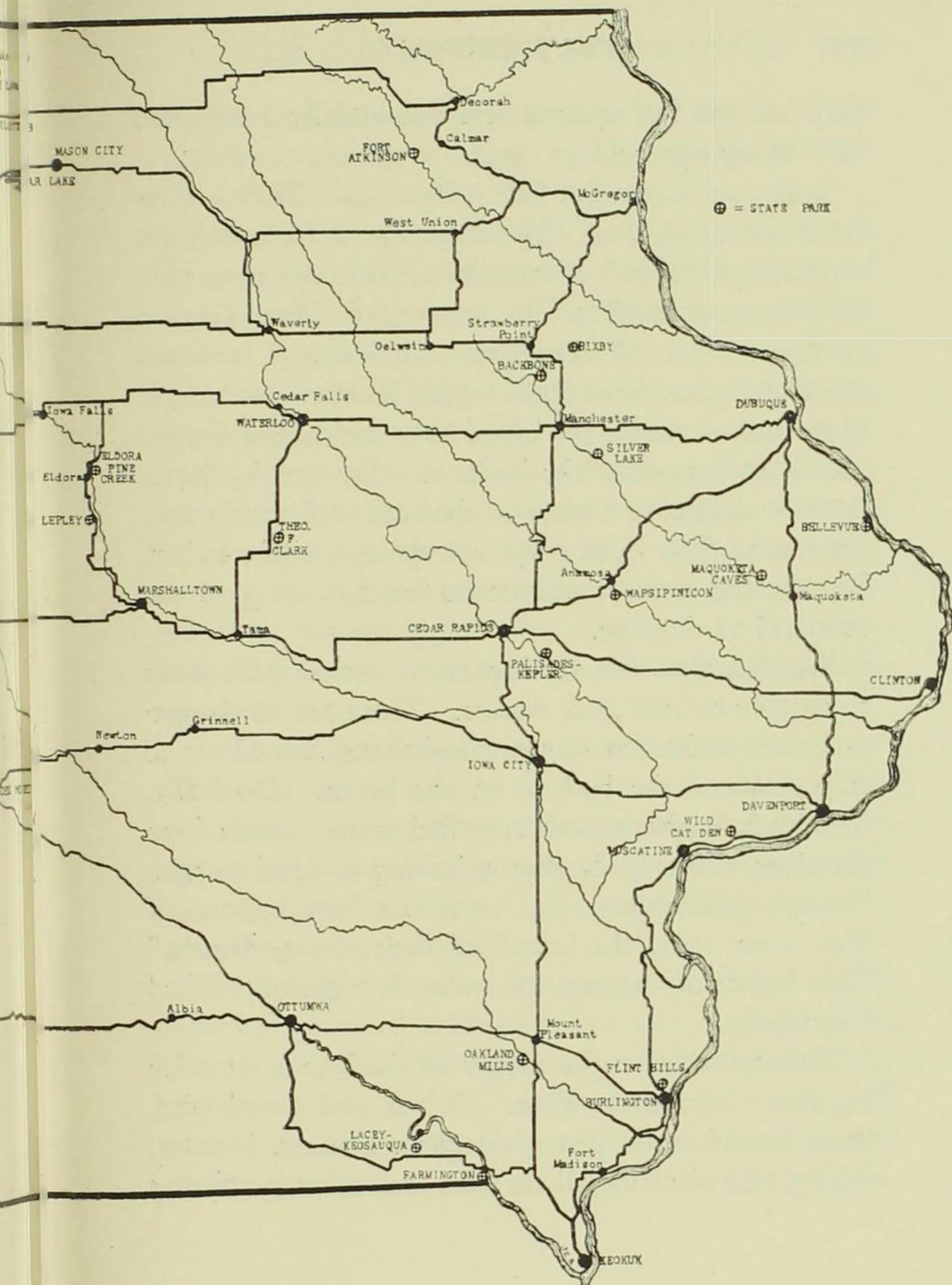
northern part of Calhoun County are two closely associated bodies of water commonly referred to as Twin Lakes. North Twin is somewhat longer and narrower, and has a little higher elevation than South Twin. Separating the two is a narrow neck of land ranging from five hundred to a thousand feet in width. A ditch cut through this narrow divide furnishes an outlet for the northern lake. Both bodies of water are shallow, the normal depth being only about five or six feet. Indeed, during extremely dry seasons the south lake has sometimes become quite dry and is in recent years nearly filled with a growth of reeds and water grasses that spoil the lake for boating or bathing but furnish a fine breeding and feeding place for game.

An area of twenty acres on the east shore of North Twin Lake has been set aside as a recreational center and given the name Twin Lakes State Park. The margin of this lake is not as heavily wooded as many of the Iowa lake regions are, yet a considerable number of native oak, maple, green ash, and cottonwood trees grow in and near the park. In addition to these, the State Board of Conservation has planted hundreds of trees of the native varieties. Shrubs and vines such as wild rose, wild indigo, sumac, wild grape, lead plant, Virginia creeper, and snowberry are numerous. The lake is well stocked with aquatic life, and migratory birds in this region are abundant. With the improvements which are being provided by the State, Twin

Lakes State Park is becoming one of the very fine recreation places in the northwest. A shelter house and bath-house are being built and will be ready for use this summer.

Just south of the Minnesota boundary and on the line between Winnebago and Worth counties is a very shallow basin of about two hundred acres known as Rice Lake. The waters of this lake surround a number of wooded islands, lifted several feet above the normal water level, which afford pleasant sites for summer cottages. The basin occupied by the lake embraces an area much larger than that actually inundated. Indeed, the major portion of the large depression is overspread with a heavy accumulation of peat in which rushes, wild rice, and other water plants are abundant. Because of this luxuriant growth of wild rice around its marshy borders pioneers adopted the name Rice Lake. This was formerly one of the most attractive lakes in Iowa, but a somewhat unsuccessful attempt to drain it has spoiled much of its beauty.

A tract of wooded shoreland consisting of fifty-five acres has been acquired by the State for use as a State park. Trees grow there in abundance — fine black maple, basswood, black walnut, green ash, American ash, slippery-elm, and crab-apple trees. There are many interesting birds in this region — wild duck, the Canadian goose, red-winged blackbird, mourning dove, robin, meadow-lark, and bluejay. In the woods one



⊕ = STATE PARK

may see the fox squirrel and occasionally a raccoon, or a flying squirrel.

Lakes are somewhat like individuals. They are related one to another. The hundreds of lakes that dot northern Iowa and Minnesota are for the most part in groups or families. In this regard Clear Lake in northern Cerro Gordo County is unique. It stands alone and apart from other similar bodies of water. It is an orphan among the lakes. No underground channels lead from this lake basin to other near-by lakes: it owes naught to whimsical showers or fleeting snow. Its waters flow from perpetual springs, safely hidden beneath the surface, whence no one has yet gone and returned to describe.

Standing thus alone and apart, no restless spirit seems to trouble its still clear waters. There are no dangerous reefs or hidden shoals; no shelving shore lines to trap unaware the bathers on the beach. Gradually, inch by inch, the smooth unruffled waters recede from the clean white sandy shores, leaving an ideal margin, "where children may play as secure from harm as if they were upon the lawns of their cottage homes." This beautiful expanse of water is rightfully called Clear Lake.

Twenty acres on the margin of the lake is set aside as Clear Lake State Park. Drives and promenades, shady nooks, and open grass plots, boating, bathing, fishing, and picnicing all vie with each other in offering

the best diversion to the visitor. Thus at Clear Lake "exhausted vitality is coaxed back, if not in one way, then in another".

About fifteen miles west of Clear Lake, in Hancock County, lies another lake region which makes a special appeal to the ornithologist. The water is very shallow, and reeds and rushes are abundant. The woodland along the water's edge adds beauty and renders the whole region a secure and delightful nesting place. Birds come in great numbers — spring birds and summer birds, fall birds and winter birds; birds in pairs, in beavies, and in flocks; little birds twittering hither and yon among the reeds and the rushes; giant gregarious birds soaring high in the tree tops; birds on the nest, birds on the bough, birds on the wing; birds, birds, everywhere birds.

Pioneers in this region were not ornithologists nor were they able to classify all of the native birds. Accordingly, selecting the one bird that was familiar to all — the one which soars the highest and is emblematic of strength and swiftness — the eagle, they named this paradise for birds Eagle Lake.

An area of twenty-seven acres on the shores of the lake has been set aside and equipped as Eagle Lake State Park. It is provided with a rustic shelter house, quite in keeping with its surroundings. Groves of wild crab-apple trees make it in apple blossom time a very charming place.

One of the most interesting lakes in Iowa is located in Wright County and walled with great boulders. Many fascinating stories have been told of how the aboriginal inhabitants of this region — perhaps the mound builders or more recent Indians — built the walls of this lake. In point of fact, the same natural force that brought these boulders down from the north placed them in an orderly fashion upon the embankment of this lake. The expansive power of ice, working silently through the centuries, without the aid of human hands, piled up these walls of stones. Because of this curious phenomenon this little dot on the physiographical map of Iowa is widely known as Wall Lake.

The lake is very shallow and therefore frequently freezes solid. Thus it becomes a great body of ice frozen to the boulders on the bottom of the lake. As the water freezes it expands, moving the boulders slowly from the center to the circumference of the lake. This movement for a single season is very slight, but its repetition year after year throughout the ages has placed the boulders in a great wall about the lake. It has been observed, too, that the embankment opposite the prevailing wind is the largest. This is due in part to the fact that ice cakes laden with small boulders have frequently been picked up by the spring floods and floated shoreward. The whole process is intensely interesting, so interesting, in fact, that Wall Lake has become a geological laboratory.

Wall Lake State Park, an area of twelve acres on the shores of the lake, is a favorite resort for hunters, fishermen, and boating parties. This place is also widely known for the beauty of its white water lilies.

Iowa lakes are numerous and varied, charming and beautiful. Silver Lake, Clear Lake, and Rice Lake; Storm Lake, Eagle Lake, and Wall Lake, each has its special appeal. If one is interested in aquatic flora, in attractive groves and bits of woodland; if one would study geological formations, or the birds of a dozen climes; if one enjoys boating, swimming, or fishing let him visit one of Iowa's enchanted lakes.

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