

# Lake Country Legends

Newsletter of the Lake Country Scenic Byway

www.lakecountryscenicbyway.com



EXPLORE THE ROAD TO ITASCA...AND BEYOND

## Red River Trails and Ox carts

In the early 1800's, the main mode of transportation for hauling freight and supplies was the ox-cart. Early in the 1800's, there was a trail established from the small village of St.



By Frank Mitchell,  
Byway Historian

Paul to the settlement of Selkirk in Manitoba. This was north of the present city of Winnipeg. The main reason for this trail was to get the furs that were

trapped to the markets of New Orleans and New York. The trading was done with the Northwest Fur Company and the Hudson Bay Company. The majority of the cargo was furs and

hides from mink, weasel, fishers, marten and muskrat, as well as, hundreds of buffalo hides. On the return trip the ox carts were loaded with food, clothing,

tobacco, liquor, ammunition and medicine.

The first ox carts were built around 1801. At first, the wheels were sawed from large tree trunks. It was said that these carts were worth four horses, as it could carry as much as five pack horses could carry. Then about 1827, a newly designed cart came into existence. It was said the Red River Ox cart looked

(Continued on back)

### CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- **JUNE 7, 2007**  
Monthly meeting at 4:00 pm at Itasca State Park, followed by 5:30 pm annual meeting

### Byway Briefs

#### Big Day for Frank

Congratulations to Frank Mitchell and Mona Nelson on their May 26 wedding in Park Rapids! Frank is a Lake Country Scenic Byway ambassador and historian.

#### Annual Meeting

The Byway board and members invite everyone to attend a relaxing evening of conversation and outstanding food at 5:30 pm on Thursday, June 7 at Douglas Lodge, Itasca State Park. Call Lezli with reservations by Monday, June 4, 218-732-4111.

## World's largest farm was near here

By Frank Mitchell,  
Historian

From the book,  
*Red River Runs North*  
by Vera Keisey

The largest farm in  
the world in 1874

was owned by Cass-Cheney-Dalrymple. The bonanza farm was 75,000 acres, 20 miles west of Fargo, North Dakota in the Red River Valley.

They used 150 gang plows, 150 self binders, and 12 extra large

steam-powered thrashers, attended by hundreds of men, horses and wagons. They harvested enough hard wheat to fill two trains daily taken to Minneapolis and one steam boat every other day to Du-

luth. They used John Deere plows and McCormick reapers.

These farms were popular in the late 1800's. The large farms began a decline around 1890; however, some were still in



# Oxcart trails (continued)

like "a ramshackle, squeaky affair." The cart was built for a wide variety of travel conditions. It was easy to pull through bogs, buoyant at river crossings and strong on rocky or stumpy forest trails. It was built with two squared poles, twelve feet long. The ox was placed between the poles and the cart was built on the remainder of the poles. The spoke wheels were dished outward from the hub to the wooden tires. At night, a buffalo hide or canvas could be thrown over the cart, making a tent for the driver.

The cart could be

used as a raft or the wheels could be detached and lashed together with a wooden frame built around them, then a waterproof buffalo hide was lashed to the frame. Carrying up to 800 pounds, this skin boat "floated like a duck."

The carts could be pulled by one ox or by a horse. The carts carried from 800 to 1000 pounds of freight. They were very noisy, as there was no grease used on the axles. A terrible squeaky sound could be heard as much as three miles away. The carts were the main means of hauling freight until

the first trains were put in service in 1882, going from St. Paul to Winnipeg.

The Red River Trail followed close to the Minnesota River and the Red River from St. Paul to Winnipeg. The Woods Trail was farther east, going from St. Paul to St. Cloud, where it branched at the fur post, with the east branch going just south of Baxter. The west branch following the Crow River through Pillager and Motley to Old Wadena, west to Otter Tail City, then north to Perham, Frazee and through Detroit, as it was called then. It then went north to Waubun, in to Manitoba and on up to Winnipeg.

The Middle Trail went between these two trails and was probably the most used of the three. However, it was also the most complex of all the trails, because there were so many trails branching off the main trail. If you look at a map of these three trails and all the branch trails, which went to various towns, and some trails were used at different times of the year, you would see it looked like a giant spider web.

After the trails were no longer used by the fur companies, they became government trails used for hauling troops during conflicts with Indians or other issues that arose from time to time.

## Why become a member of the Byway?

"Our scenic byway is an engine for added tourism, thus a component of economic development. The byway drives regionalization of tourism businesses. Locally, people are able to discover more about the area they call home with the byway map. The byway ties together a consistently great working relationship with our anchor partners—Walker, Detroit Lakes and Itasca State Park—to Park Rapids. Wonderful people!"

*Katie Magozzi*

*Exec. Director, Park Rapids Chamber*

## Membership Levels

- 88 Mile Benefactor .....\$88/year
- Scenic Sponsor .....\$25/year
- Friend .....\$10/year
- Ambassador .....\$5/year

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

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Mail to: Lake Country Scenic Byway Association  
PO Box 249, Park Rapids, MN 56470

## Benefits of Membership

- Newsletter subscription
- E-mail announcements
- Opportunity to attend monthly meetings
- Input in key Byway Association issues
- Stakeholder in sustainability of the Byway
- Opportunity to attend Annual banquet and State Byway meeting
- Stay abreast of latest Byway developments