



BYWAY BUZZ

LAKE COUNTRY SCENIC BYWAY NEWSLETTER

June 2005

Historical Pageants-Itasca Park- by Frank J. Mitchell

Several historical pageants were presented at the headwaters of the Mississippi River from 1932 until 1938.

The theme of the first pageant was to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the discovery of Lake Itasca by Henry Rowe Schoolcraft on July 13, 1832.

The idea was conceived by Itasca Park Superintendent Earl Lang in 1931.

This was a huge undertaking to be achieved by park and forestry personnel. It was realized early on that the state could not finance such an undertaking. A group of concerned citizens came to the rescue. The Northwestern Minnesota Historical Association was formed to help raise money for the performances. Eleven towns around the park joined the association. They were Bagley, Bemidji, Brainerd, Cass Lake, Clearbrook, Detroit Lakes, Park Rapids, Red Lake Falls, Thief River Falls, Wadena and Walker. Each of these communities gave \$100.00 to help finance the pageants. Six performances were planned for each year. The first one was held on July 13, 1932. They continued on July 16, 1932 with an estimated 18,000 people who came to enjoy the performance. A total of 48,000 came that year.

The Division of Forestry was in charge of preparing the grounds. They filled low areas, prepared seating areas, parking and roads. They built a stockade and the various structures for the pageant.

The cast included about 50 white men from the park, forestry, university and boy scouts. Over 100 Indians were brought in from the Red Lake and Cass Lake reservations. About 40 Indians camped at the stockade. They were allowed to make and sell their craft items and souvenirs, and also charge when they put on their pow wows and war dances.

The first performance started at 2:30 in

the afternoon with about 2,500 people in attendance. It was narrated by "Hotan Tonka", an adopted Chippewa. Scenes depicted a Chippewa village, President Monroes Cabinet, a war party, trappers and traders, an Ojibway village, a wilderness romance and Schoolcrafts arrival at Lake Itasca. The Indians were well treated and very satisfied with the management. Most of them went home with money in their pockets. The Indians said it was the best summer they ever had. The ones that camped there received board, all the rest of the cast were paid and given transportation.

In 1933 the legislators passed a law allowing the park to charge .25 for each car and .25 for camping. No one was turned away even if they couldn't pay the fee. Also a souvenir booklet was sold for .50 each. The booklet was called "Schoolcraft Centennial of Discovering Lake Itasca, Source of the Mississippi River."

The subject of the pageant in 1933 was Minnesota Diamond Jubilee. It was commemorating the 75 years of statehood. This year about 200 Indians were brought from two reservations besides about 200 whites. This year the Civilian Conservation Core also was involved. The theme was "March to Statehood." It depicted the Indian period, arrival of early explorers, the building of Fort Snelling, discovery of Lake Itasca, admission of Minnesota as a state, and the Sioux Outbreak at Fort Rigidly. The show began at 2 p.m. with a band concert, each one had a 10 minute intermission and ended by singing "Hail to Minnesota."

One pageant was held at Whitewater State Park on August 20, 1933. Estimates ranged from 25,500 to 40,000 in attendance. The whole cast was transported to Whitewater in park and forestry trucks in a huge caravan.

When the Indians were asked if they enjoyed the Whitewater pageant, David

Boyd replied "Fine! We had a long ride, plenty eats, got drunk on the way home, had big fight, knocked out teeth. Gee!. We had good time!" The financial account showed-

Expenses-	
Salaries	\$3,253.00
Supplies	960.00
Travel	580.00
New equipment	722.00
18,911 meals served to Indians	<u>3,782.20</u>
and cast at .20 per meal	\$ 10,495.20
Receipts-	
Parking	\$ 695.00
Camping at Itasca	614.50
Camping at Whitewater, parking	1,066.20
Concessions	<u>87.30</u>
Total	2,465.65

This shows a loss, however with money from park forestry all expenses were paid.

From the office of Indian affairs in Cass Lake, in a letter from M.L. Burns to Earl Barker, President of the Northwestern Mn. Historical Association he stated. "During the time of the pageant, no Indians asked for any assistance of any kind." Much praise was given to the Association for a job well done.

Plans were made for the 1934 pageant. The dates chosen were- July 1, 15 and 29 Aug. 12 and 26 and Sept. 2.

The pageants were continued for several years. In 1934 and 1935 there were 6 performances, 1936 5 performances, "37" 4 performances and 1938 only one performance was held. In these years they charged .15 per person.

Every pageant ended by all singing "Hail Minnesota."

MINNESOTA, HAIL TO THEE!
HAIL TO THEE OUR STATE SO DEAR!
THY LIGHT SHALL EVER BE

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 2)

Historical Pageants Itasca State Park (continued) By Frank J. Mitchell

A BEACON BRIGHT AND CLEAR,
THY SONS AND DAUGHTERS TRUE
WILL PROCLAIM THEE NEAR AND
FAR.
THEY SHALL GUARD THY FAME
AND ADORE THY NAME;
THOU SHALT BE THEIR NORTHERN
STAR.

LIKE A STREAM THAT BENDS TO
SEA, LIKE A PINE THAT SEEKS THE
BLUE,
MINNESOTA, STILL FOR THEE,
THY SONS ARE STRONG AND
TRUE,
FROM THY WOODS AND WATERS
FAIR,
FROM THY PRAIRIES WAVING FAR,
AT THY CALL THEY THROG,
WITH THEIR SHOUT AND SONG,
HAILING THEE THEIR NORTHERN
STAR.



Attend The 2nd Annual Meeting
Of The Lake Country Scenic
Byway at
Itasca State Park



*Please join us for our Annual Meeting and Dinner
as we celebrate the Lake Country Scenic Byway*

***Douglas Lodge, Itasca State Park
Thursday, June 2, 2005
5:30 PM***

\$15.00 per person includes meal, beverage & tax

Please call Lezli to secure you reservation for the evening no later than

Friday, May 27, 2005

Contact Lezli: 218-732-4111 or 800-247-0054

Carpooling is suggested due to Park Entrance Fees

Become a Member of the Lake Country Scenic Byway

Become a Member of the Byway Today.

Benefits include:

- Stakeholder in sustainability of the Lake Country Scenic Byway
- Newsletter Subscription
- Input in Key Byway and Highway issues.
- Email announcements
- Opportunity to attend Association Meetings if desired
- Input in Key Byway and Highway issues.

Byway Membership Levels

88 Mile Benefactor.....\$88
 Scenic Sponsor.....\$25
 Friends.....\$10
 Ambassador.....\$5

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