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2018

## Before the Benedictines: The Peoples Here First

Peggy L. Roske

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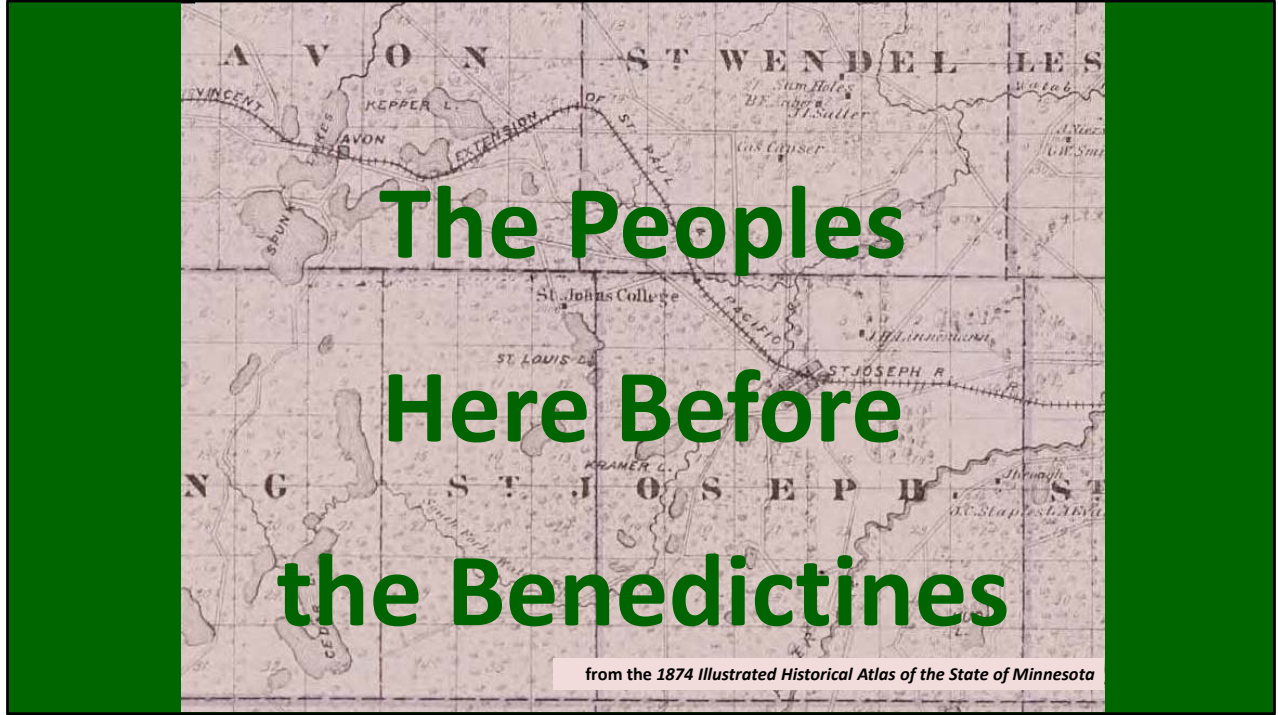
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1874 *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Minnesota* –Stearns County, p. 155  
<http://reflections.mndigital.org/cdm/ref/collection/mhs/id/1020>

Relatively little is documented in the SJU or CSB Archives about the people here before the Benedictines, the Native Americans.



An old Indian  
who used to hunt in the  
woods around St. John's  
in the late '70's

ARCHIVES  
ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGEVILLE, MN. 56321

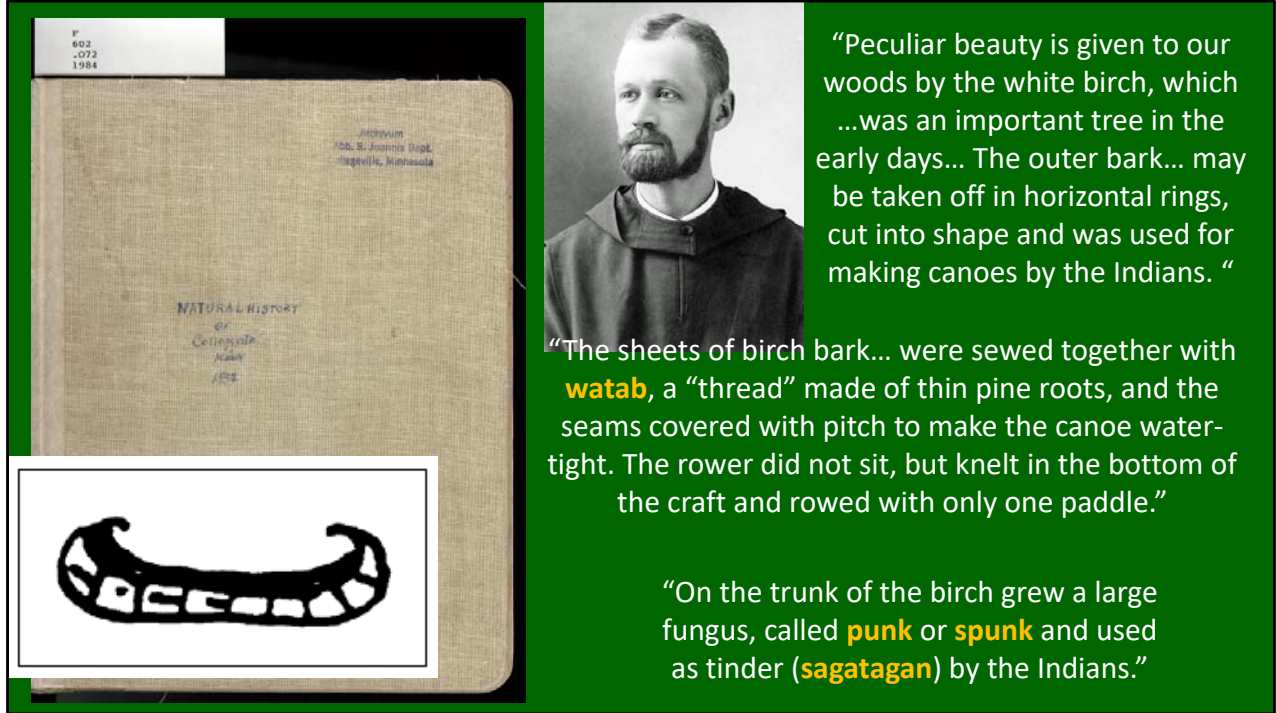
O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Digital Archives\Abbey documents scanned 2016\SJAA Old Indian card front.jpg  
(and back)

**Alexius Hoffmann, OSB, 1863-1940**

One source of information, in the Abbey Archives

[Natural History of Collegetown, Minnesota](#)  
by Alexius Hoffmann, O.S.B. (originally written in 1926, finished in 1934). 38 pages.  
The entire work is online.

From the Abbey Archives.



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Monvum  
Abb. S. Joannis Dept.  
Collegeville, Minnesota

NATURAL HISTORY  
OF  
COLLEGEVILLE  
MINN.  
1882

“Peculiar beauty is given to our woods by the white birch, which ...was an important tree in the early days... The outer bark... may be taken off in horizontal rings, cut into shape and was used for making canoes by the Indians. “

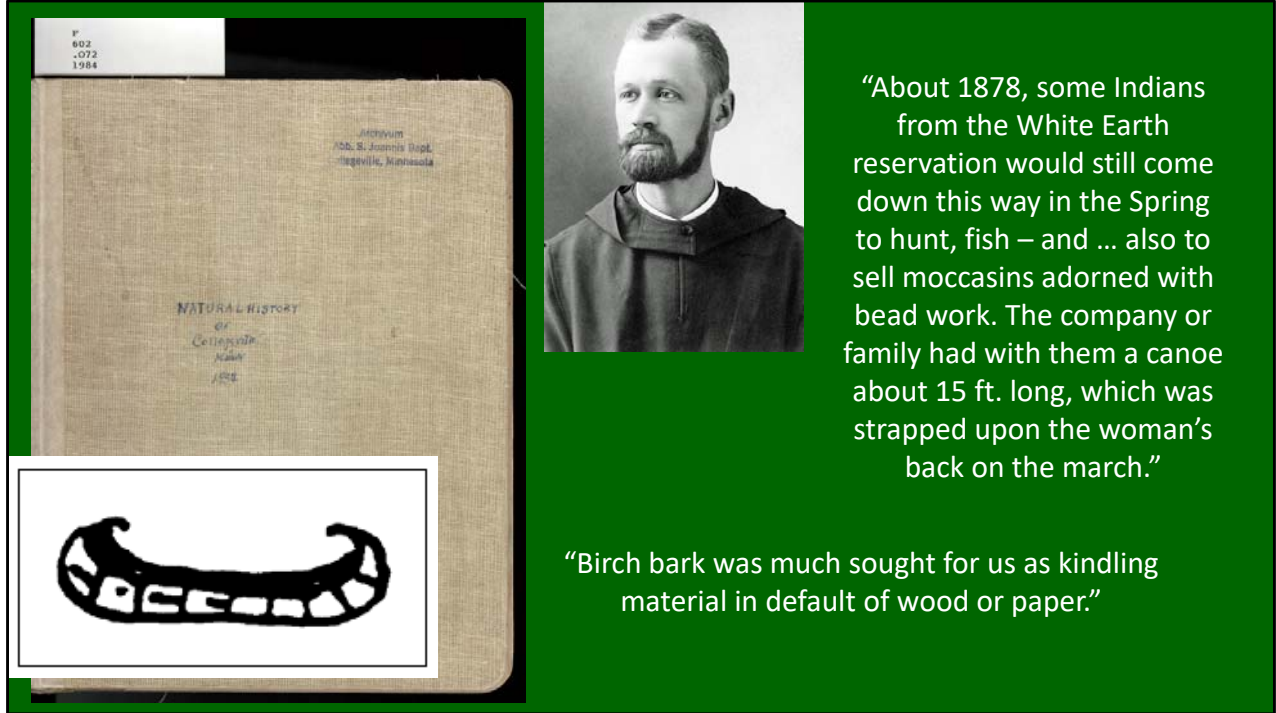
“The sheets of birch bark... were sewed together with **watab**, a “thread” made of thin pine roots, and the seams covered with pitch to make the canoe water-tight. The rower did not sit, but knelt in the bottom of the craft and rowed with only one paddle.”

“On the trunk of the birch grew a large fungus, called **punk** or **spunk** and used as tinder (**sagatagan**) by the Indians.”

From the Abbey Archives.

Text from Hoffmann’s *Natural History of Collegeville*, p. 24-25

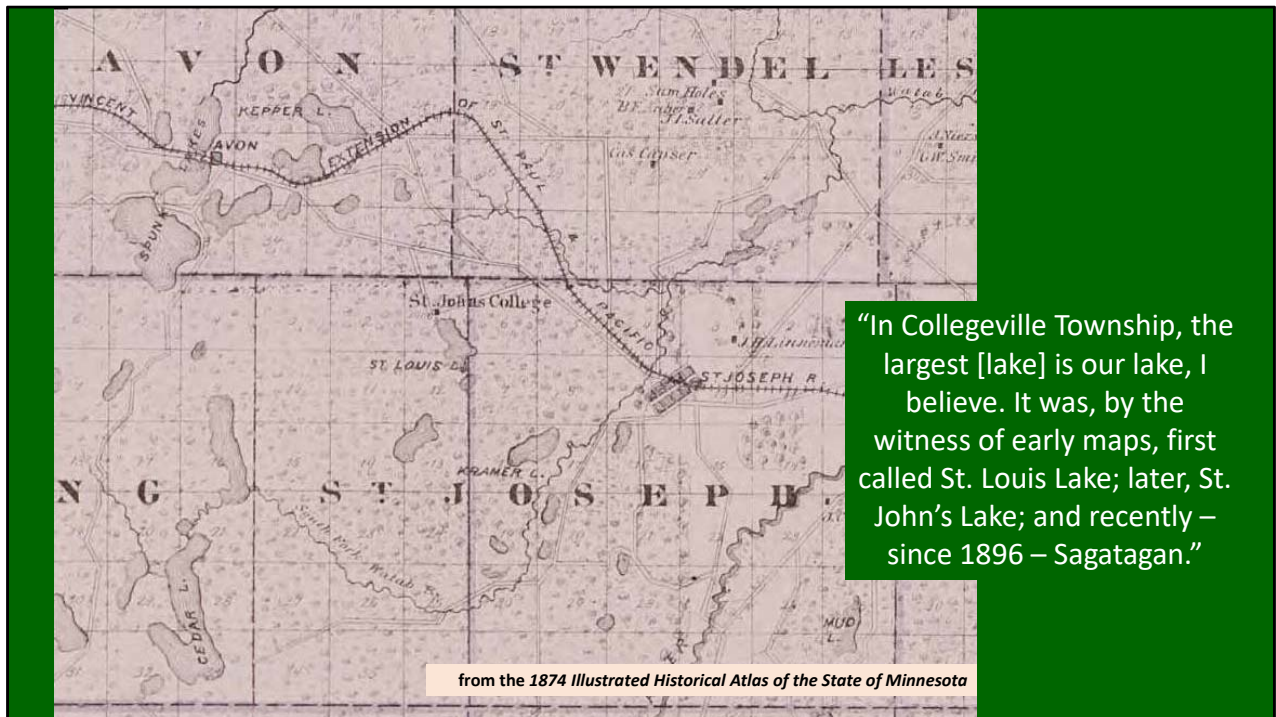
Canoe sketch from Hoffmann’s *Natural History of Collegeville*, p. 24



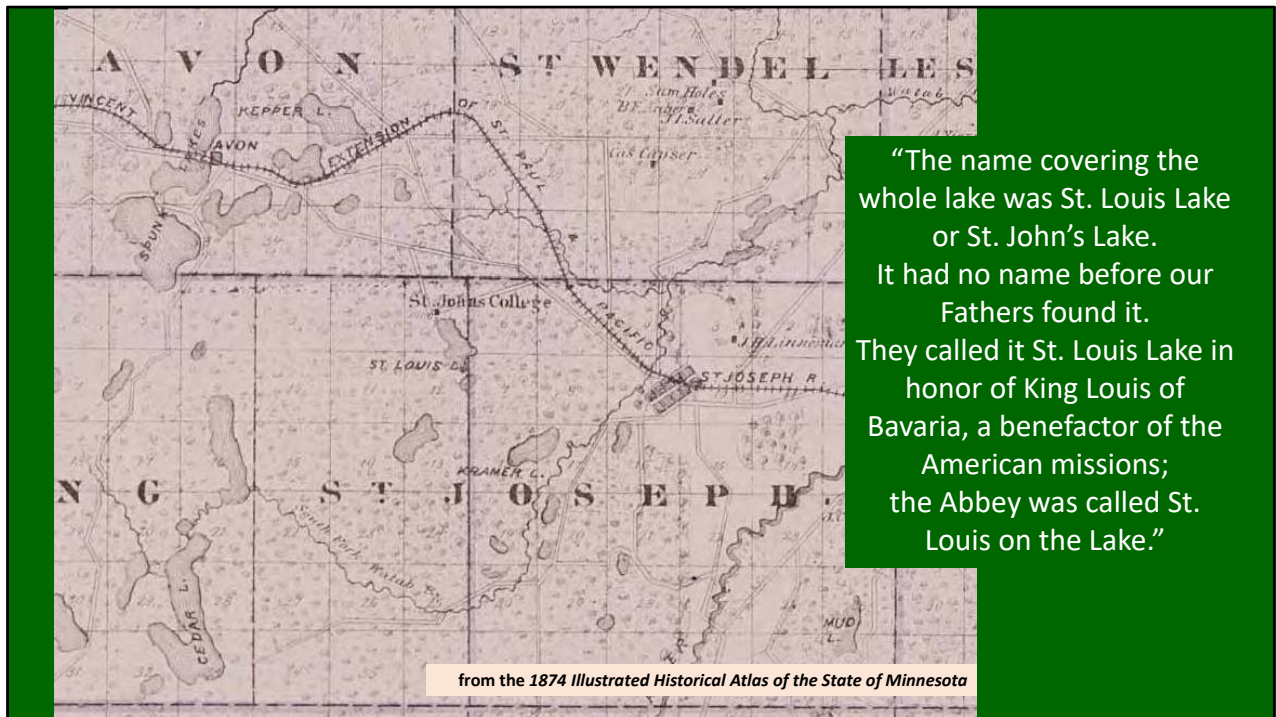
“About 1878, some Indians from the White Earth reservation would still come down this way in the Spring to hunt, fish – and ... also to sell moccasins adorned with bead work. The company or family had with them a canoe about 15 ft. long, which was strapped upon the woman’s back on the march.”

“Birch bark was much sought for us as kindling material in default of wood or paper.”

From the Abbey Archives.  
Text from Hoffmann’s *Natural History of Collegeville*, p. 24-25  
Canoe sketch from Hoffmann’s *Natural History of Collegeville*, p. 24



1874 *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Minnesota* –Stearns County, p. 155  
<http://reflections.mndigital.org/cdm/ref/collection/mhs/id/1020>  
Text from Hoffmann’s *Natural History of Collegetownship*, p. 14



1874 *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Minnesota* –Stearns County, p. 155  
<http://reflections.mndigital.org/cdm/ref/collection/mhs/id/1020>  
Text from Hoffmann’s *Natural History of Collegetville*, p. 14



## THE VISION OF THE ISLAND.

**W**HERE they dreams, those charming  
 stories  
 Told around the fitful embers,  
 Told by bent and sightless ancients  
 Till their children knew the legend,  
 And from age to age repeated?  
 Smothered are the wigwam fires.  
 Scattered wide the dancing ashes,  
 Like the tribes that roved and hunted  
 Through the forests, on the rivers,  
 On the lakes and endless prairies.  
 Yet the songs of long dead ages  
 Live today and cheer the fireside  
 Of the poor and wretched remnant  
 Of the dusky forest children.

In the valley of the north-land,  
 Where the winding Mississippi,  
 Father of the river waters,  
 Rolls his sun-lit billows southward,  
 Now in peaceful, wood-clad courses,  
 Now in leaping, rushing rapids,

Through the woods he loved to wander  
 While the little birds were singing,  
 And the noisy brooks were babbling  
 Where the berries grew in summer.  
 In the dreary winter evenings  
 Dashwa made him bow and arrows,  
 Taught him how to chase the wabos,  
 How to trap the mink and muskrat.  
 Patiently Memengwa listened  
 And when came the gentle summer,  
 Hunting went the boy Memengwa.

Dew hung on the drowsy grasses;  
 O'er the eastern hills in glory,  
 Lord of Light, the sun had risen  
 And the dreaming bird awakened,  
 When the bright-eyed boy Memengwa  
 Left his father's birch-bark wigwam  
 And into the fragrant forest  
 Ran to try his bow and arrows.  
 From among the dewy grasses  
 Fled a nimble little red squirrel,

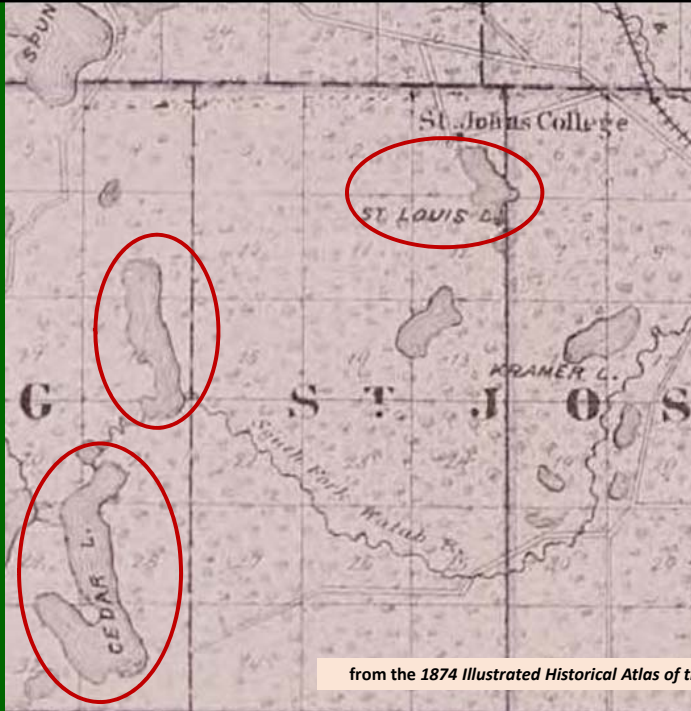
Hoffmann published a "Song of Hiawatha"-like poem in the June 1896 issue of the *St. John's Record*. In "Vision of the Island," he revived the lake's Indian name, which [he said] is **Sagatagan** – accented on the *tag*, and all the a's pronounced like the a in "all"....(or, like the a's in "Hiawatha"! )

*The Record* June 1896, p. 140-143

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/7741/rec/6>

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/7744/rec/6>

Hoffmann mentions the local lakes' names as given in the 1874 atlas...



“The map of 1874 shows only St. Louis Lake and Cedar Lake – now Big Fish Lake.

Big Watab Lake is indicated but not named.”

- Hoffmann, p. 12

from the 1874 *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Minnesota*

1874 *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Minnesota* –Stearns County, p. 155  
<http://reflections.mndigital.org/cdm/ref/collection/mhs/id/1020>  
Text from Hoffmann’s *Natural History of Collegeville*, p. 12

...but he also explains the local names this way:



"I am inclined to think that **Sagatagan was a name for a group of lakes** near which the Indians gathered punk or spunk. Hence Spunk Lakes at Avon. They were named for an **old (minor) chief called Spunk** and known to early settlers. **In Indian his name was Sagatagan.** Our lake plausibly forms part of the group."

- Hoffmann, p. 14

1874 *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Minnesota* –Stearns County, p. 155

<http://reflections.mndigital.org/cdm/ref/collection/mhs/id/1020>

Text from Hoffmann's *Natural History of Collegeville*, p. 14

Abbot Peter Engel's diary lends some credence to Hoffmann's theory that the lake was named after an Indian named "Sagatagan":

Another story comes from the Diary of Abbot Peter Engel. We read under 16 July 1920: "Today 'John Smith' the oldest Chippewa Indian living (they say he is 130 years and his wrinkled face indicates it) was here on a short visit. He used to be around here before St John's was thought of. He said that our lake was called 'Sagatagan' not because there was a greater amount of punk-Sagatagan found around it but because an Indian by the name of Sagatagan was buried on its south shore."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Peter Engel, *Diary: 1916-1920*, SJAA.

1986 From "High Above the Sagatagan: a Landscape Paradise" by Vincent Tegeder, OSB in *Scriptorium* v. 25, 1986, p. 95-107.

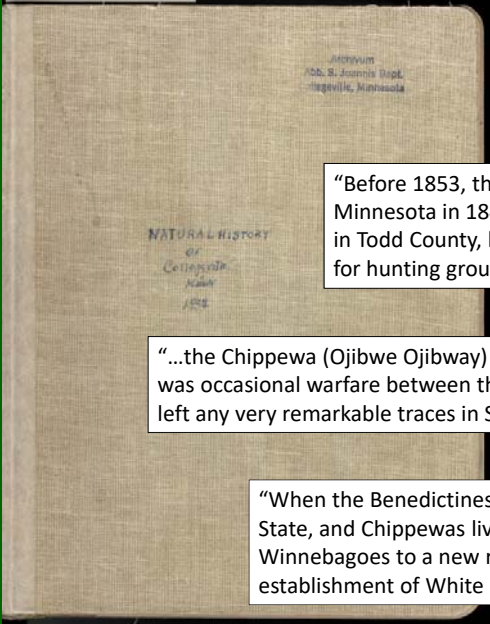
<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/41500> - from p. 96 [Peter Engel: 1856-1921]

## Chronology

- 1846:** Boniface Wimmer leaves Metten, Germany and goes to Pennsylvania
- 1854: Peter Loso arrives in what would later become St. Joseph
- 1855:** *The Indians cede their land in this vicinity to the United States*
- 1856: The settlers in St. Joseph build a log church
- 1856:** The monks leave Pennsylvania; arrive in St. Cloud
- 1857:** The sisters arrive in St. Cloud
- 1858:** The monks move to St. Joseph because of St. Cloud land litigation
- 1859:** The monks move back to St. Cloud
- 1861: Civil War breaks out
- 1862:** **Indian uprising; 38 Sioux men are hanged in Mankato**
- 1863:** The sisters move to St. Joseph
- 1864:** St. Cloud land litigation goes against St. John's; the monks move to Indianbush
- 1866:** The monks move to the shores of the lake later known as Lake Sagatagan

### Early Chronology

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Alexius Hoffmann, OSB  
1863-1940



“Before 1853, the Winnebago Indians, who had been brought up to Minnesota in 1849 and lived on a reservation at or near Long Prairie in Todd County, had used that country north of the (real) Watab river for hunting grounds...”

“...the Chippewa (Ojibwe Ojibway) Indians had been here before the Winnebagoes, and there was occasional warfare between the two tribes. Neither the Winnebagoes nor the Chippewas left any very remarkable traces in Stearns Co...”

“When the Benedictines came to Minnesota (1856), some Winnebagoes were still in the State, and Chippewas lived scattered in several bands in the north... After the transfer of the Winnebagoes to a new reservation near Mankato between 1854 and 1857, and the establishment of White Earth Reservation [in] 1867, we saw very few Indians around here.”

Hoffmann's *Natural History of Collegeville*, p.4 (top) & p. 6.

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Monivum  
Abb. S. Joannis Bapt.  
Collegeville, Minnesota

"The first inhabitants of our township were Indians, before they were confined in Reservations...Up to 1862 the Sioux roved as far north as Meeker County, and the Chippewas in the northern half of our State. They had few settlements. Usually near the lakes and rivers. They were a sort of Nomads, hanging their hats (if they had any) where they found the best fishing and hunting...

...they used to roam about in the northern part of our township and burnt some of the woods. We have no other tradition about them."

56

— APPENDIX I. —

INHABITANTS.

The first inhabitants of our township were Indians, before they were confined in Reservations, or Reserves. Up to 1862 the Sioux roved as far north as Meeker County; and the Chippewas in the northern half of our State they had few settlements. Usually near the lakes and rivers, they wore a sort of Moccasins, hanging their hats (if they had any) where they found the best fishing and hunting. The Winnebagoes were on a Reservation at Long Prairie 1849 to 1854, but they were so lazy and fastidious that the Government concluded to move them on till they finally landed in Kansas. But that goes beyond my scope. I only want to say that they used to roam about in the northern part of our township and burnt some of the woods. We have no other tradition about them. I had Abbé's sketchbook told me that in his boyhood at St. Cloud he had seen a drunken Winnebago shoot a white man in a place in that town. That may have been in 1855, not much later. Winnebago Prairie, some miles north of here perpetuates their memory.



From the Abbey Archives.

[Natural History of Collegeville, Minnesota](#)

by Alexius Hoffmann, O.S.B. (originally written in 1926, finished in 1934). 38 pages.

There were hints indicating that U.S. treaties with the Indians involved a border that crossed Saint John's land.

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <http://dc.library.okstate.edu/digital/collection/kapplers>. The page features the Oklahoma State University logo and a navigation bar with the text "Digital Collections @ OKSTATE Library". Below the navigation bar, the page title is "Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties". Underneath, there is a section titled "About this collection" which contains the following text: "Compiled and edited by Charles J. Kappler, this historically significant, seven volume compilation contains U.S. treaties, laws and executive orders pertaining to Native American Indian tribes. The volumes cover U.S. Government treaties with Native Americans from 1778-1883 (Volume II) and U.S. laws and executive orders concerning Native Americans from 1871-1970 (Volumes I, III-VII). This digitization project was made possible by significant gifts from the AMIGOS Bibliographic Council, the Atlanta-based Coca-Cola Foundation and the Angie Debo estate." Below this text, there are four entries: "Indian affairs: laws and treaties, Vol. 1 (Laws)", "Compiled to Dec. 1, 1902", "Indian affairs: laws and treaties, Vol. 2 (Treaties)", "1778-1883", "Indian affairs: laws and treaties, Vol. 3 (Laws)", "Compiled to Dec. 1, 1913", and "Indian affairs: laws and treaties, Vol. 4 (Laws)".

Oklahoma State has digitized the text of the U.S. treaties with the Native American Indian tribes

<http://dc.library.okstate.edu/digital/collection/kapplers>

<http://dc.library.okstate.edu/digital/collection/kapplers>



TREATY WITH THE SIOUX, ETC., 1825.

## 1825 Treaty

August 19, 1825 treaty at Prairie du Chien,  
"in the territory of Michigan"

ARTICLE 5.

It is agreed between the Sioux and the Chippewas, that the line dividing their respective countries shall commence at the Chippewa River, half a day's march below the falls; and from thence it shall run to Red Cedar River, immediately below the falls; from thence to the St. Croix River, which it strikes at a place called the standing cedar, about a day's paddle in a canoe, above the Lake at the mouth of that river; thence passing between two lakes called by the Chippewas "Green Lakes," and by the Sioux "the lakes they bury the Eagles in," and from thence to the standing cedar that "the Sioux Split;" thence to Rum River, crossing it at the mouth of a small creek called choaking creek, a long day's march from the Mississippi; thence to a point of woods that projects into the prairie, half a day's march from the Mississippi; thence in a straight line to the mouth of the first river which enters the Mississippi on its west side above the mouth of Sac river; thence ascending the said river (above the mouth of Sac river) to a small lake at its source; thence in a direct line to a lake at the head of Prairie river, which is supposed to enter the Crow Wing river on its South side; thence to Otter-tail lake Portage; thence to said Otter-tail lake, and down through the middle thereof, to its outlet; thence in a direct line, so as to strike Buffalo river, half way from its source to its mouth, and down the said river to Red River; thence descending Red river to the mouth of Outard or Goose creek: The eastern boundary of the Sioux commences opposite the mouth of Ioway river, on the Mississippi, runs back two or three miles to the bluffs, follows the bluffs, crossing Bad axe river, to the mouth of Black river, and from Black river to half a day's march below the Falls of the Chippewa River.

"...thence in a straight line to the mouth of  
**the first river which enters the  
Mississippi on its west side above the  
mouth of Sac river...**"

"...thence ascending the said river (above  
the mouth of Sac river) to a small lake at  
its source..."

<http://dc.library.okstate.edu/digital/collection/kapplers/id/17917/rec/1>

p. 250, Aug. 19 treaty at Prairie du Chien ("Prairie of the Dog")

<http://dc.library.okstate.edu/digital/collection/kapplers/id/17917/rec/1>

"The town's name apparently dates back to the 1730s when fur traders encountered a Mesquakie camp on the prairie. The Chief's name was Alim, which meant dog, so the French traders translated the word into its French counterpart: chien." <http://mississippivalleytraveler.com/prairie-du-chien/>

**TREATY WITH THE CHIPPEWA OF THE MISSISSIPPI AND LAKE SUPERIOR, 1847.**

**1847 Treaty**

ARTICLE 2. The Chippewa Indians of the Mississippi and Lake Superior cede and sell to the United States all the land within the following boundaries, viz: Beginning at the junction of the Crow Wing and Mississippi Rivers, thence up the Crow Wing River to the junction of that river with the Long Prairie River, thence up the Long Prairie River to the boundary-line between the Sioux and Chippewa Indians, thence southerly along the said boundary-line to a lake at the head of Long Prairie River, thence in a direct line to the sources of the Watab River, thence down the Watab to the Mississippi River, thence up the Mississippi to the place of beginning; and also all the interest and claim which the Indians, parties to this treaty, have in a tract of land lying upon and north of Long Prairie River, and called One-day's Hunt; but, as the boundary-line between the Indians, parties to this treaty, and the Chippewa Indians, commonly called "Pillagers," is indefinite, it is agreed that before the United States use or occupy the said tract of land north of Long Prairie River, the boundary-line between the said tract and the Pillager lands shall be defined and settled to the satisfaction of the Pillagers.

"The Chippewa...sell to the United States all the land within the following boundaries..."

...a direct line to the **sources of the Watab River**, thence down the Watab to the Mississippi..."

<http://dc.library.okstate.edu/digital/collection/kapplers/id/26408/rec/4>

***Indian affairs: laws and treaties, Vol. 2 (Treaties), Treaty with the Chippewa of the Mississippi and Lake Superior, 1847, Page 567***

TREATY WITH THE WINNEBAGO, 1855.

1855 Treaty

ARTICLE 1. The Winnebago Indians hereby cede, sell, and convey to the United States all their right, title, and interest in, and to, the tract of land granted to them pursuant to the third article of the treaty concluded with said tribe, at Washington City, on the thirteenth day of October, one thousand eight hundred and forty-six, lying north of St. Peter's River and west of the Mississippi River, in the Territory of Minnesota, and estimated to contain about eight hundred and ninety-seven thousand and nine hundred (897,900) acres; the boundary-lines of which are thus described, in the second article of the treaty concluded between the United States and the Chippewa Indians of the Mississippi and Lake Superior, on the second day of August, one thousand eight hundred and forty seven, viz: "Beginning at the junction of the Crow Wing and Mississippi Rivers; thence, up the Crow Wing River, to the junction of that river with the Long Prairie River; thence, up the Long Prairie River, to the boundary line between the Sioux and Chippewa Indians; thence, southerly, along the said boundary-line, to a lake at the head of Long Prairie River; thence, in a direct line, to the sources of the Watab River; thence, down the Watab to the Mississippi River; thence, up the Mississippi, to the place of beginning:" *Provided, however,* That the portions of said tract embracing the improved lands of the Indians, the grist and saw mill, and all other improvements made for or by them, shall be specially reserved from pre-emption, sale, or settlement until the said mills and improvements, including the improvements to the land, shall have been appraised and sold, at public sale, to the highest bidder, for the benefit of the Indians, but no sale thereof shall be made for less than the appraised value.

"The Winnebago Indians hereby cede, sell, and convey to the United States... 897,900 acres; the boundary-lines of which are thus described...

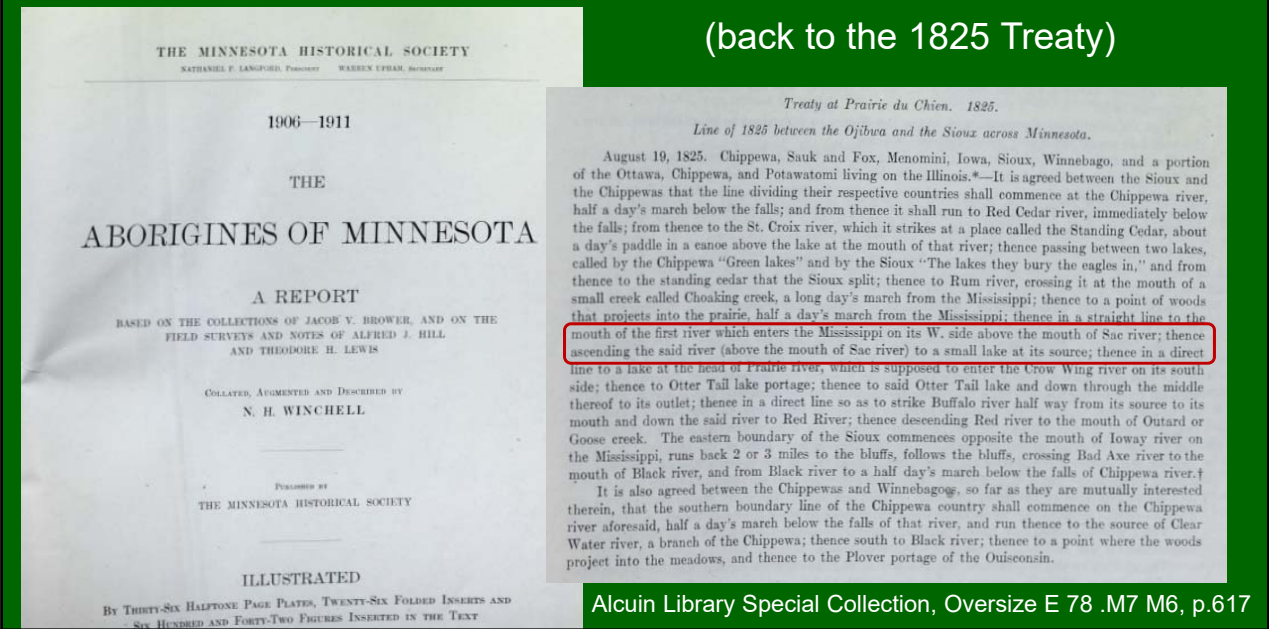
...in a direct line to the **sources of the Watab River**; thence down the Watab to the Mississippi..."

<http://dc.library.okstate.edu/digital/collection/kapplers/id/26532/rec/4>

<http://dc.library.okstate.edu/digital/collection/kapplers/id/26532/rec/4>

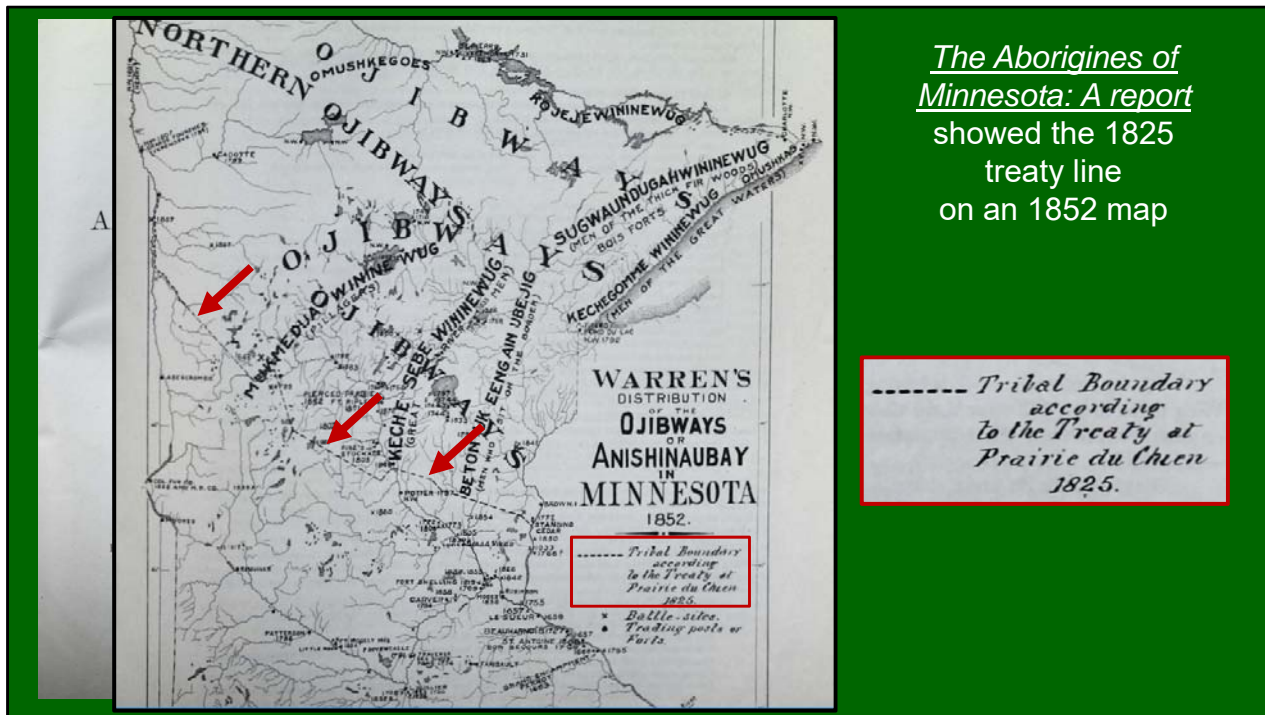
*Indian affairs: laws and treaties, Vol. 2 (Treaties)*, Treaty with the Winnebago, 1855, Article 1, Page 691

The Aborigines of Minnesota: A report based on the collections of Jacob V. Brower, and on the field surveys and notes of Alfred J. Hill and Theodore H. Lewis. MHS, 1911.



Alcuin Library Special Collection, Oversize E 78 .M7 M6, p.617

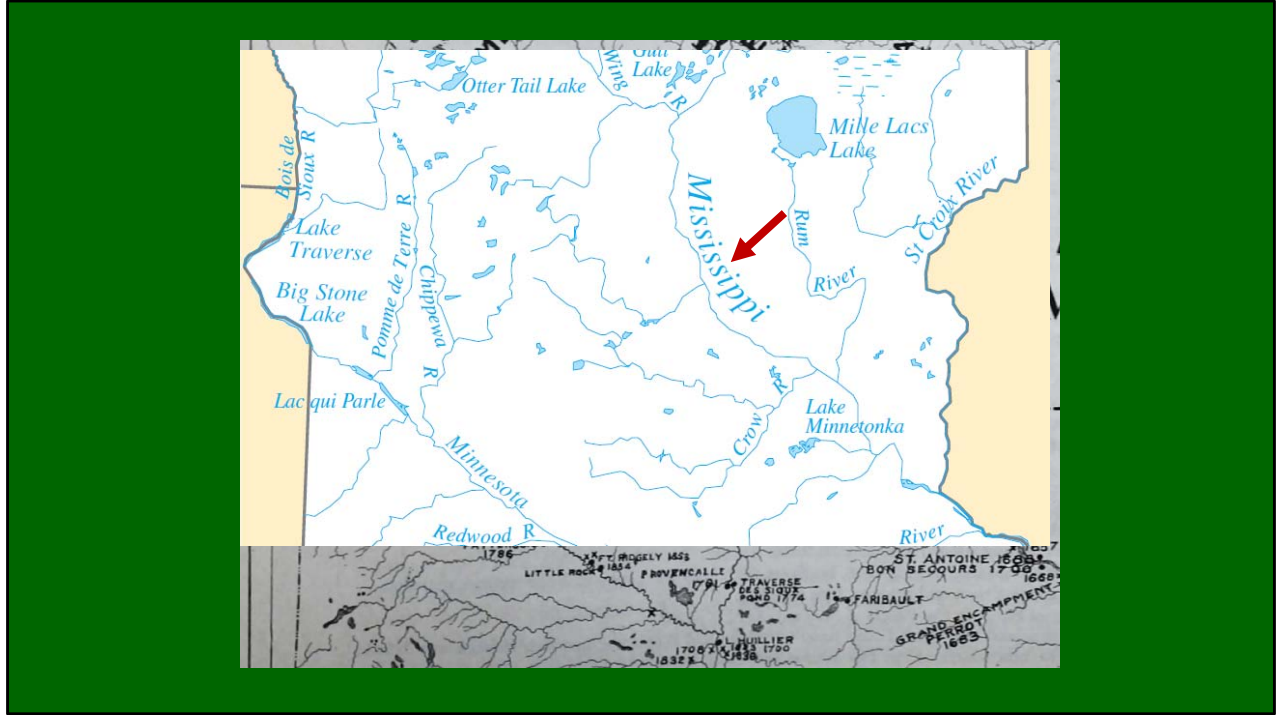
1906-1911 THE ABORIGINES OF MINNESOTA. Hill, Lewis, Brower, Winchell.  
Minnesota Historical Society, title page & p. 617  
SJU Library Oversize Special Collection E 78 .M7 M6 1911



*The Aborigines of Minnesota: A report showed the 1825 treaty line on an 1852 map*

*----- Tribal Boundary according to the Treaty at Prairie du Chien 1825.*

1906-1911 THE ABORIGINES OF MINNESOTA. Hill, Lewis, Brower, Winchell. Minnesota Historical Society, p. 583  
 SJU Library Oversize Special Collection E 78 .M7 M6 1911

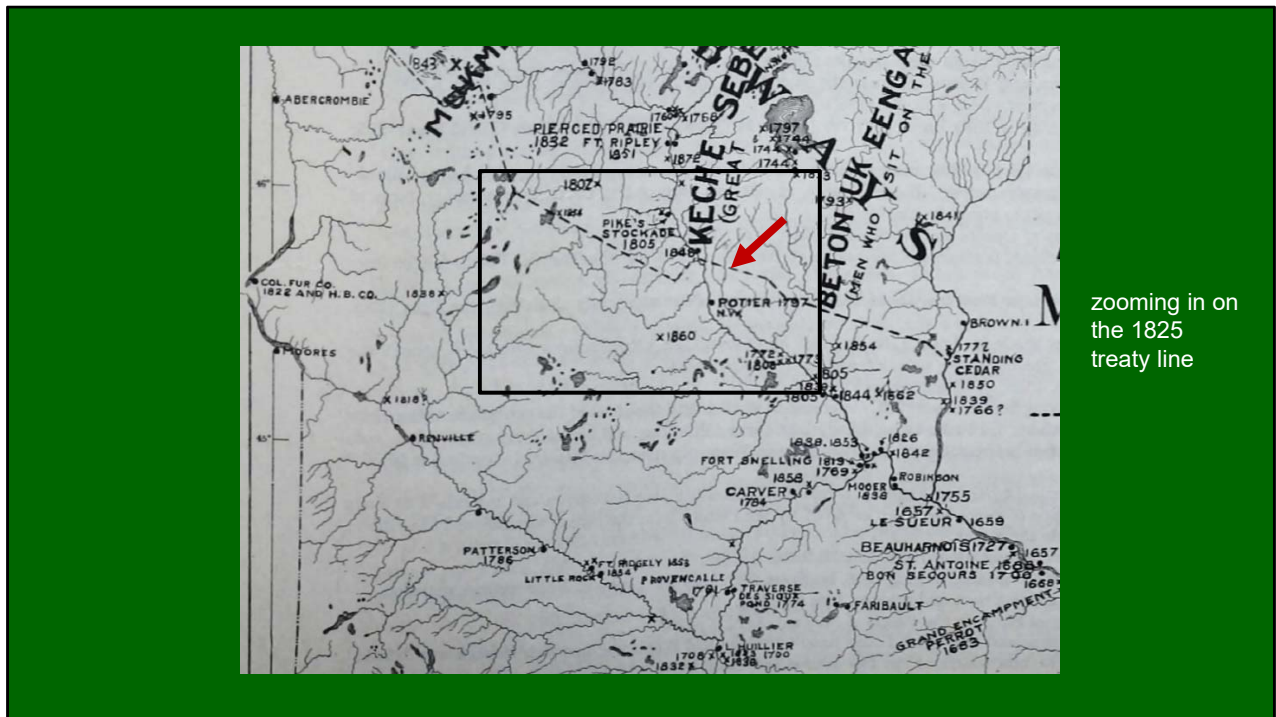


Color map from <http://www.freeprintable.com/print/free-printable-maps/us-map--minnesota-rivers-and-streams>

Black & white map from: 1906-1911 *THE ABORIGINES OF MINNESOTA*. Hill, Lewis, Brower, Winchell.

Minnesota Historical Society, p. 583

SJU Library Oversize Special Collection E 78 .M7 M6 1911



Color map from <http://www.freeprintable.com/print/free-printable-maps/us-map--minnesota-rivers-and-streams>

Black & white map from: 1906-1911 *THE ABORIGINES OF MINNESOTA*. Hill, Lewis, Brower, Winchell.

Minnesota Historical Society, p. 583

SJU Library Oversize Special Collection E 78 .M7 M6 1911



zooming in on the 1825  
treaty line –

– to the point where the  
Watab River enters the  
Mississippi

Color map from <http://www.freeprintable.com/print/free-printable-maps/us-map--minnesota-rivers-and-streams>

Black & white map from: 1906-1911 *THE ABORIGINES OF MINNESOTA*. Hill, Lewis, Brower, Winchell.

Minnesota Historical Society, p. 583

SJU Library Oversize Special Collection E 78 .M7 M6 1911



**BEFORE THE WHITES CAME.**

*Source: History of Stearns County, Minnesota, by William Bell Mitchell, Chicago 1915*

Stearns was for over a century in the frontier between the Dakotas and the Ojibways. An attempt was made by the treaty of Prairie du Chien in 1825 to stop the agelong feud between the Dakota and the Ojibway, and the United States, acting as a friendly conciliating and arbitrating power, got the hostile tribes to agree to a division of their territory.

The portion of the boundary between the Dakota and the Ojibway, extending from Chippewa river to Otter tail lake, was surveyed in 1835 by S. A. Bean. The line enters Stearns where the Watab empties into the Mississippi, and according to treaty, follows this stream to its source; but by this surveyor, according to Winchell in "The Aborgines of Minnesota," "the head of the Watab river was assumed to be a small lake located in the N. E. corner of T. 124 N., R. 30 W., which is in reality the head of a tributary to that stream, the actual main source of the river being a number of miles to the southwest." This lake chosen by the surveyor must be one of the lakes near St. John's college

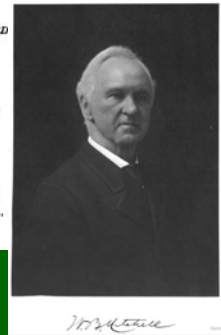
**HISTORY OF  
STEARNS COUNTY  
MINNESOTA**

BY  
**WILLIAM BELL MITCHELL**

ILLUSTRATED

VOLUME I

CHICAGO  
H. C. COOPER, JR.,  
1915



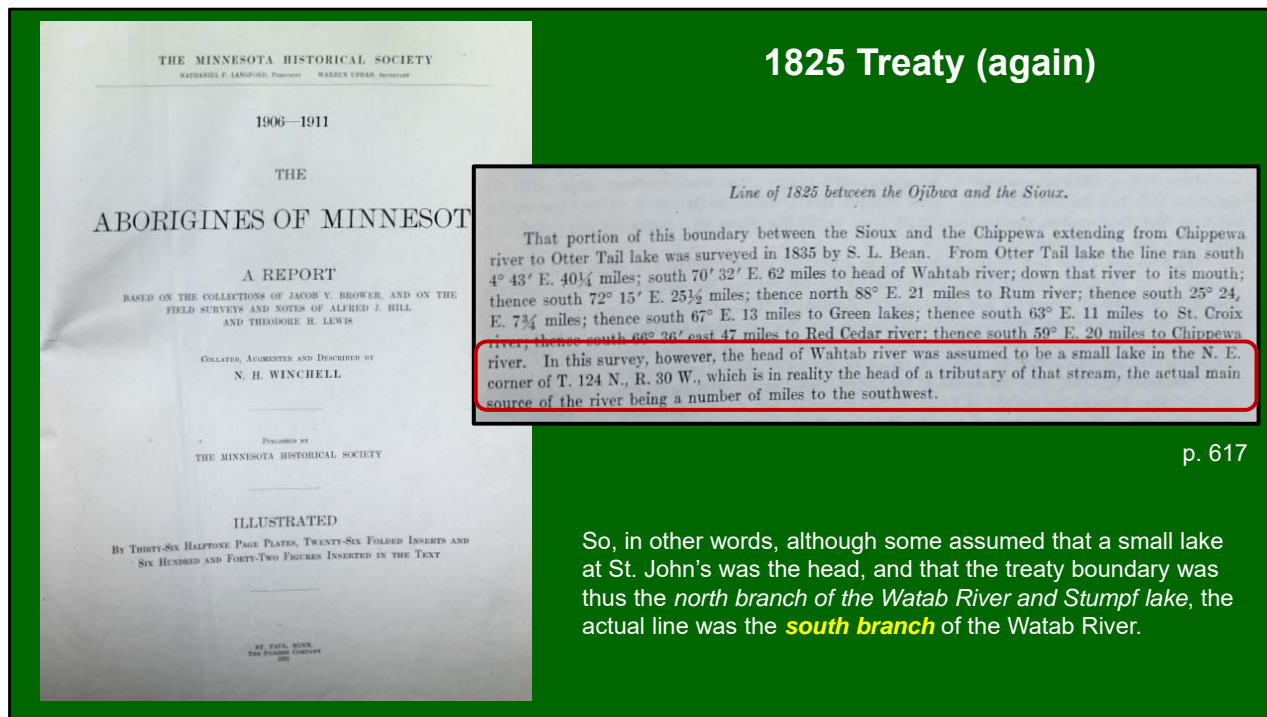
[http://genealogytrails.com/minn/stearns/history\\_early.html](http://genealogytrails.com/minn/stearns/history_early.html)

Text from [http://genealogytrails.com/minn/stearns/history\\_early.html](http://genealogytrails.com/minn/stearns/history_early.html), p. 22-23 of the book

Images from

[https://books.google.com/books?id=1J8yAQAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=william+bell+mitchell&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjRs\\_OY8ZfZAhWIk1kKHQZxA5IQ6wEIKDAA#v=onepage&q=william%20bell%20mitchell&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=1J8yAQAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=william+bell+mitchell&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjRs_OY8ZfZAhWIk1kKHQZxA5IQ6wEIKDAA#v=onepage&q=william%20bell%20mitchell&f=false)





1906-1911 THE ABORIGINES OF MINNESOTA. Hill, Lewis, Brower, Winchell.  
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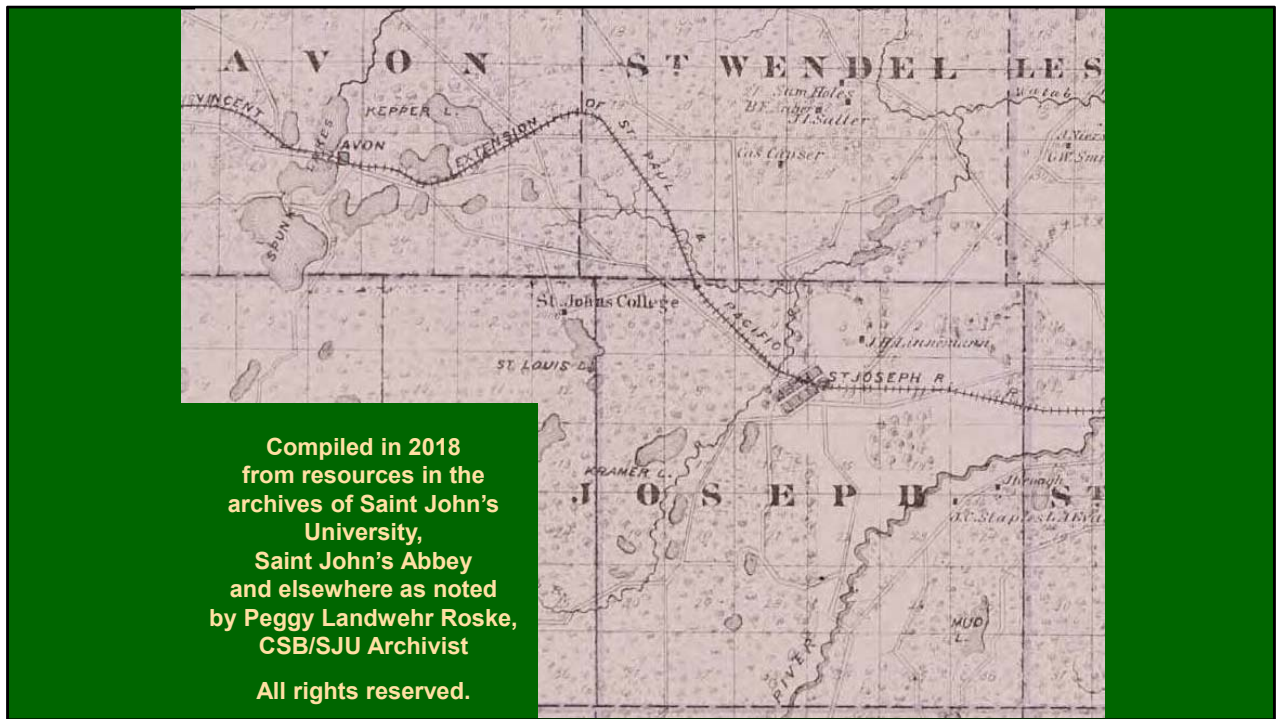


Color map from <http://www.freeprintable.com/print/free-printable-maps/us-map--minnesota-rivers-and-streams>

Black & white map from: 1906-1911 *THE ABORIGINES OF MINNESOTA*. Hill, Lewis, Brower, Winchell.

Minnesota Historical Society, p. 583

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1874 *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Minnesota* –Stearns County, p. 155  
<http://reflections.mndigital.org/cdm/ref/collection/mhs/id/1020>