

American Settlement, Exploitation & Conservation

AMERICAN SETTLEMENT, DEVELOPMENT, AND LIFE OF THE HORICON MARSH AREA (1829-PRESENT)

What was Horicon Marsh like in the 1800s?

Early settlers found an almost impenetrable wilderness. The marsh was a bog land covered with an extremely thick growth of rice, flag, can, grass, reed, weed, and infinite vegetation. The bottom of the marsh was naturally shaped to be gradually shallower on the north end, four feet deeper on the southern end. With the small streams of the east and west branches of the Rock River meandering through and meeting in the marsh, it was known as the headwaters of the Rock River. Tree-covered islands dotted the marsh. There was a bottomless, oozy quality to the soil and bottom of the marsh. Emerson Hough wrote in the late 1800s that "No one can fathom the mud on Horicon marsh...There are two kinds of mud on Horicon, the kind that floats and the kind that sinks. If you break through the bog while wading through the wild rice, you may sink up to your hips, or up to your waist. You may strike *terra firma* in a layer of sunken peat, or in one of the solid ledges which underlie portions of the marsh; or then again you may sink a thousand feet into the soft mud, the kind which doesn't float."

Wild fires, the Rock River, and Lake Winnebago separated forests to the east from the open lands of small prairies and oak savannas to the west of Horicon Marsh. Passenger pigeons were a nuisance to farmers who were determined to exterminate them by shooting. Pigeon pie was a popular dish. In 1857, every species of waterfowl was plentiful at the marsh, as well as prairie chicken, ruffed grouse, muskrat, and mink. Waterfowl was most certainly used as a cash crop by early settlers but also for scarce commodities like down for bedclothes, grease for medicines, and goose quills for writing pens.

The first recorded mail delivery through the Horicon Marsh area was before 1829 – carrier Joseph Crele made the trip on snowshoes from Fort Winnebago (Portage) to Fort Howard (Fond du Lac) in the howling prairie winds. In 1847, delivery cost 25 cents, paid in cash on the receiving end.

James Doty, territorial governor in 1836, lists Horicon as Doty's grove on an 1838 map. In 1838, located just northwest of the marsh, Waupun was the first city to form near the marsh. "Waupun" is said to be an Indian word that means "break of day." The first settlement at the south end of the marsh included a population of 10 people in 1845. J.H. Warren and his family named the location Warren Springs, located in a maple stand at the foot of Raasch's Hill where old Highway 28 turns north to Mayville today. Upon finding the there, Warren bathed his face, quenched his thirst, and proclaimed: "This is where I located." About one month later, Bear Hollow settlement was formed by James Andrew of Green Bay and was located two miles east of Horicon. It was these early settlers, plus a small group at Hubbard's Rapids (Horicon), who founded, what is known today as the city of Horicon in 1846.

William Larabee, a settler from Lake George, New York, was amongst that group who debated about the name for the new settlement of Hubbard's Rapids. (Lake George was originally dubbed Horicon by the Mohican Indians who once lived there. "Horicon" is a Mohican word meaning "pure, clean water.") The name "Forest City" was also considered because of the lovely forests growing east of the marsh. In the end, Larabee won the debate, and the name Horicon has reigned ever since. Horicon Marsh, therefore, is named after the city of Horicon. The somewhat complete skein of names is: Maunk-shal-kah, Hochorunga, Parachera, Elk Village, Indian Ford, Doty's Grove, Habbard's Rapids, and Horicon. Settlers used a variety of names and nicknames for the marsh itself, including Winnebago Marsh, Great Winnebago Marsh, Great Marsh, Cranberry Lake, and Lake Misery. Westbound settlers often brought names with them. About six villages in Fond du Lac and Dodge Counties share the names of about six villages east of Niagara Falls in New York. Both localities are, ironically, situated on the Ledge or Niagara Escarpment.

In the early 1840s, Asahel Lukens is believed to be the first or one of the early settlers to found Mayville. A band of hearty New Englanders, his family came from Pennsylvania, four boys and one daughter, Marie. Word of the area's red earth could have been carried back to Pennsylvania in previous years, motivating them to find the land in Wisconsin. They traveled by oxen along the Ohio River and then up the Rock River to the site of Mayville. The family Bible fell into the river during the crossing but has been passed down through the generations and is still in family hands, with the water marks still showing. Asahel's grave is located in the Graceland Cemetery in Mayville.

John Tidyman came from Manchester, England in 1841 and purchased 79 acres of land just east of the marsh and built a log cabin. There was no furniture, but cut logs became benches. In 1842, the remainder of his family arrived at a cost of 15 pounds in English money. John's cousin donated an acre of his own land adjacent to John's to the north for a cemetery, on the west end of both farms. John donated one acre for a school house, which became known as the Kohli School and later became a private home. School was in session for three months in spring. John died in 1858, and both he and his son John are buried in the cemetery. It was when John Sr. was 36 years old that he met Brigham Young.

In 1844, Brigham Young, leader of the Mormon Church, journeyed through this area with the Mormon people who were traveling from Vermont westward through Illinois and Wisconsin, ultimately to Salt Lake City, Utah, where they settled. In those days, Mormons had more than one wife and were consequently forced out of Vermont. In Carthage, Illinois, their leader Joseph Smith was martyred, and Brigham Young replaced him. In Wisconsin, they followed the Rock River as they needed a water supply for the cattle they brought with them. They camped along the banks of the river, a short distance south of Kekoskee, just east of Horicon Marsh. His second wife, Marion Wood, became ill in Illinois. Her condition deteriorated here, and she died shortly after. She was buried in the John Tidyman, Sr. cemetery on the edge of the marsh as there were no other cemeteries. It is located just north of County Z on County YY on the east side of the road. John's granddaughter, Mrs. Armin Kantin, cared for her grave. The stone which marked her name and date of death was knocked over by vandals along with other stones in the cemetery and has since been replaced. Kantin Road, located across the road from the southeast part of the refuge, bears this family's name.

A tide of German settlers arrived beginning in 1847, and the City of Mayville was founded that year. The location was chosen by Chester and E.P. May and William and Alvin Foster as the site for a dam in 1845 to power a saw mill they built the same year. Asahel Lukens sold the water rights to the Fosters and Mays, who had arrived from Fort Atkinson. But Chester May found ore beds several miles south of Mayville at present-day Neda, just south of Iron Ridge. Because of a plentiful water supply and water power potential, the first blast furnace, the Northwestern Iron Company, was built in 1848 and the iron mines and blast furnace operated until 1927, all in Mayville. Mining and manufacturing of that ore was extensive. The mines are now closed to mining and protected as habitat for hibernating bats.

John and Eliza Burleton (born Sarah Eliza York) and their children Hugh (born in 1843) and Emma came to Oakfield from England in the late 1840s. Eliza passed away and John remarried to Rachel Newson Blodgett. When his second wife, Rachel Newson Blodgett, took ill, Dehlia Foster (born in 1869) was hired to help with the housework. Hugh and Dehlia therefore met, married in 1885, and moved to a small farm of about 80 acres which Hugh had purchased in 1884 on the east side of the marsh (including what is now the Environmental Education Barn on Horicon National Wildlife Refuge.) Family rumors say that Hugh bought the farm from Chief Nesakee who could not write and had someone else sign for him. But the deeds show Hugh purchased the land from Sally Young in 1884, and that the Youngs lived in the area since 1873. The Youngs in all likelihood built the house and large barn.

John and Rachel Burleton moved, too, and lived with them for about one year before moving to live with another son, Joseph Burleton. Joseph Burleton, son of John and Rachel Burleton, is the grandfather of Marian (Burleton) Cook of Oakfield. As Donna Boelk and Barian Cook were always told – they were third cousins. But a nephew who worked on a family tree has informed them, they are 2 ½ cousins since they

both have the same great grandfather, John Burleton. Marian Cook is an active volunteer at Horicon National Wildlife Refuge. Her distinguished 40-year teaching careers began in 1940 at four different rural, one-room school houses located just north of Horicon Marsh.

From 1888 to 1911, Dehlia and Hugh Burleton had 15 children, and the first 11 were born at their home on Smut's Point, including Minnie, whose daughter is Donna Boelk, currently of Oakfield. Minnie related many stories to Donna about living on the edge of the marsh. They enjoyed great fishing, hunting, and trapping. They kept a few cows for milk and butchered one hog per year for meat for special occasions. They used to say that "every part was used except the tail and the squeal!" Cake was a luxury, and the children liked cake batter better than cake because it was moister. Dehlia and Hugh went monthly to Zoellner's Mill on Oak Center Road to get supplies and news, leaving the children on the farm with their grandparents. Upon departing, they warned their children not to dig in the Indian mounds on or very close to the farm, because they assumed they were burial mounds and therefore feared they could get sick from what the Indians died from. Of course as soon as their parents left, the kids headed for the mounds but only found pottery and beads.

The older children enjoyed socializing at the dance hall on Smut's Point (possibly the Horicon Hunting club house), a little island in the marsh accessed from the farm by a dirt road. The catch was that they had to get the little kids to bed first or take them along. The kids were educated in a one-room school house about one or two miles east of the farm and had Christmas programs there. Most of the kids there were Burletons, Colliens, and Jesses. (Gary Jesse still lives on the family farm today, and many Colliens live in the Mayville area.) On the farm, for play they made dandelion necklaces and flower bouquets; these were their toys.

The Burletons moved back to Oakfield in 1904 or 1905, and the remainder of their four children, were born there. Hugh dies and Dehlia operated a boarding house by the brickyard in Oakfield. She remarried at least twice and moved to a chicken farm in Wyoming with at least the four youngest children. She also lived on a sheep ranch in South Dakota.

Hugh sold the farm in 1910 to William Strook, who eventually operated the well-known Horicon Shooting Club in the marsh from the south side of Ledge Road or Strook's Ditch. Strook sold it to Lawrence and Theresa Noll in 1925. It is likely that the old stone barn now on the property (the Environmental Education Barn) was constructed in 1925. In 1926, the property was auctioned at \$5,000 to Amanda Koepsell, William Strook, B.J. Husting, Edward C. Rehfeld, and Horicon State Bank. Electricity came to the area the following year. In 1950, the federal government purchased the farm from a single man, August Krueger (born between 1900 and 1902) of Mayville. Krueger farmed the land and lived there with his housekeeper, Mary Sperger. The 80-tract included a dwelling, barn, and equipment shed. He purchased the property from the Horicon State Bank in 1948. The house was moved to Leroy presumably by the federal government and is now a rental property. At one point in time, Roman Eilbes owned the house. Then his nephew Duane and Shelley Cook/Eilbes bought the house and after working on it, rented it out. The large barn was possibly dismantled by the federal government but was located behind the house. The equipment shed is likely what we refer to as the Environmental Education Barn today and which was previously used since federal ownership as the east side deer check in station for several years. Now the EE barn is used for educational programs, field trips, teacher workshops, and as a rustic site for meetings. A separate vault toilet has more recently been added to the site.

Once the farm was included in the refuge, Minnie often visited the marsh with her children, including Donna, to see the geese, or if the pussy willows were out, to see the sunset and gather a few cattails. They often stopped at the farm at the end of the road (West Point Rd) to reminisce. Minnie had a love of the marsh which stayed with her for the rest of her life and was passed onto her children: Donna says, "What a great heritage she left us! An inheritance I will treasure more than gold the rest of my life!"

The Milwaukee and Horicon Railroad Company was chartered in 1852, and construction began. Operating by 1855, it transported logs by the thousands from Fond du Lac to Minnesota Junction to Horicon. From there, they were dumped into the Rock River and driven by raftsmen to southern markets. This was the first railway in the area. By 1878, other railroad tracks crisscrossed the county and skirted the marsh. The Northwestern Railway ran north from Watertown to Minnesota Junction, Burnett, Chester Station, Oakfield, and Fond du Lac. You can ride along most of that bed today on a bicycle, as it has since become the Wild Goose State Trail, and part of it borders the west side of the marsh. Another Northwestern line ran from Horicon to Burnett, Atwater, Waupun, and beyond. The Chicago-Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad ran from Hartford, Rubicon, Horicon, Beaver Dam, Fox Lake, and Randolph. The Fond du Lac line ran from Iron Ridge to Mayville and on north. In addition, from the late 1800s through the turn of the century, the Hollenstein Wagon and Carriage Factory at Bridge and North German Streets in Mayville manufactured wagons, carriages, and buggies. Today, the factory is preserved as a museum operated by the Mayville Historical Society which you can visit.

In 1878, Dodge County was considered the most agriculturally wealthy county and the second or third most populated county in the state. With no major cities, most of the population was rural and agricultural, producing wheat, cheese, corn, and stock primarily but also fruits from orchards and small vegetables. The majority of people were German, while the rest were Scandinavian, Polish, Hungarian, Irish, Welsh, and American. By 1878, manufacturing of farm implements was well established in Horicon at the Van Brunt Manufacturing Company (eventually became John-Deere-Horicon Works), and the city became an important shipping point on the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railway.

While hiking the Red Fox Nature Trail on Horicon National Wildlife Refuge, you may notice a stone foundation, remnants of early settlers who lived there. Sometimes between 1873 and 1880, an older man by the last name of Peterson bought a 40-acre parcel and began farming the area. He was a widower and had one daughter. He sold his farm in 1880 to William Vanderkin, which included a house, barn, and tool shed. The Vanderkins lived there until 1899 and then built a new house, presumably on the same site. It is the foundation for the barn that you can see from the Red Fox Trail, plus a lilac bush under a basswood tree.

About two years later, they moved the new house west, closer to the Chester Bridge, and also on the Vanderkin property. This location meant a shorter walk for their young son Elmer to Chester School, about one mile away. The move took one week with help from family and hired movers, who they boarded during the move. The house was moved by means of rollers and pulled by a horse and capstan. The movers claimed the clock would never stop while the move was underway, and they proved right.

The Vanderkin farm produced 10 acre fields of oats, hay, and corn. They milked about six cows. Mrs. Vanderkin churned milk into butter and delivered it to customers in Waupun. Their water source for cattle was 15'x3' watering tank, the water being pumped into the tank by a dog that walked a treadmill. The family water source was a tall 12' tall Althouse and Wheeler windmill manufactured in Waupun. Peddlers frequently visited settlers in this area. One peddler driving a horse drawn wagon demonstrated an early Singer treadle sewing machine to Mrs. Vanderkin, who then placed an order despite protests from Mr. Vanderkin. He thought it was a frivolous contraption. Elmer Sr. grew up in the home at the Chester Bridge location. He married and brought his wife to the house, and they raised a large family, including a son, Elmer Jr., or Ted, who currently lives in Waupun, Elmer Sr. found that the farm produced inconsistently, so he developed a large dairy farm to compensate. The federal government purchased the tract in 1947 from William Vanderkin. In 1952, the house was again moved, this time to its present location on County I. A lilac bush also remains at the river site.

The Peachy's once lived not too far from what we call Peachy road today. South of Old Marsh Road and east of the Vanderkin property was 87 acres owned by Mrs. Esther Peachy. The house was two stories in size, a wooden structure with four rooms and oil lamps used for lighting. The barn sat next to the house. At the base of the driveway was a tar paper shack where it is believed that Cecil Peachy and his family

lived for several years. Esther Peachy eventually moved to another farm within the village of Chester. The homestead was rented to the parents of Eleanor Peachy Pattee, who was born on the homestead in 1929. Not long after that, the Pattees moved out and the Martin Koehler family lived in the home until it was sold to the government to be included in the Horicon National Wildlife Refuge. Today no signs remain of the farmstead and on the top of the knoll overlooking a good portion of the refuge. The foundations have either been removed by the government or plowed under by local farmers who leased the area from the government for a number of years. The drive way has grown over with tall vegetation.

Around 1906, "medicine men" made one of their visits to a Mayville park, selling eye glasses for \$1.00 per pair from one wagon display, and from others, miracle cures for tapeworms, Swiss alpine herbal remedies, and Lydia Pinkham pills, guaranteed to make a woman's blood increase and make it redder! Other common at-home remedies included plantain mulch for sores, goose grease for frostbitten, blistered toes (a more common ailment back then without the warm apparel we have today), horse liniment for a sore throat, and a horse manure soak for warty feet!

LOVELY LAKE HORICON (1838-1869)



In 1838, Job Parry and Solomon Juneau were land-cruising this area and selected the present location of the dam on the Rock River in Horicon. They placed a surveyor's mark on a large oak tree just west of the dam near the railroad tracks and had the authority to build the dam, but did not build it after all.

In 1839, David Giddings of Green Bay and Albert Ellis purchased 324 acres, one-mile stretch on both sides of the Rock River, including the rapids below Horicon Marsh.

The partnership of Ellis, Giddings, and Moses Strong obtained an act of the territorial legislature authorizing the erection of a dam at any point on their property. The dam would include a lock that must always be kept open and free for navigation purposes and must include a side chute for fish to swim around the dam. "The Rock River is hereby declared to be a public highway and forever free for the passage of boats, barges, canoes, rafts, or other crafts capable of navigating said river, as high up said river as township fourteen in range fifteen," or up to Dodge County line (current State Highway 49). The men did not build the dam.

Strong, acting for U.S. Senator Henry Hubbard of New Hampshire, bought Ellis' land, taking title for Hubbard, who paid for it. Hubbard later offered to sell the property to Strong. Strong drew up papers of an association for a prospective Dodge County Hydraulic Company and tried to obtain signers, but since he overvalued the land, none of his friends participated. It is believed that the next owner was possibly

Henry Hubbard Jr. The name of the ford at the rapids was changed from Indian Ford to Hubbard's Rapids.

It was during this time that Hubbard's Rapids would become the county seat within one to two years of further settlement east of the marsh. The government planned to build a road from Lake Michigan west to Horicon, with a permanent bridge over the river, and continue the road all the way to the Wisconsin River at Portage. Another road would extend from Horicon northwest to Fox Lake where it would intercept the Fort Howard-Fort Winnebago military road. In addition, the government planned to build a canal connecting Lake Winnebago with the Rock River. Interestingly, a slight amount of excavating would have linked Horicon Marsh to Lake Winnebago, as the marsh is positioned 100 feet above the lake.

In 1845, Hubbard Jr. or Sr. contracted with John Preston, William Larabee, and Martin Rich from the east to pay \$2,000 in installments for Hubbard's Rapids site and to construct the dam and saw mill in 15 month's time. Grass was burned off the marsh in preparation for the lake which would result.

The first of several permanent alterations to the marsh was the construction of the dam in 1846 to power a saw mill, a grist mill, and the first iron works. It was made of brush, stone, mud, hay, and logs and covered with a few feet of gravel. It spanned the river just north of the current St. Malachy Church and was nearly completed by 1847. The water level rose behind the dam 21 inches in 12 days, up to the flumes. Winnebago Marsh forever disappeared from the face of the earth and Lake Horicon resulted. At 50 square miles in size, it was known as the largest artificial lake in the world at the time, and similar in expanse to post-glacial Lake Horicon. Three years passed before the lake was filled with water. But high water loosened reedy bottom patches that floated up, leaving the lake bed sandy, hard, and gravelly. Hundreds of acres of sod mats floated up from the bottom of the marsh and down the river and out of the marsh, sometimes clogging up at the dam.

The dam troubled the Indians who now carried their light canoes around the obstruction. Here, horse and wagon teams still had to ford across the river as there was no bridge, only a foot path, across the top of the dam. The city of Horicon took shape following damming of the river and marsh, with construction and operation of the saw mill (on present day Mill Street, about where Blue Heron Landing is located today), blacksmith shop, chair maker, wagon maker, religious services, and a public meeting place (William Larabee's lively cabin).



Flooding the marsh into a lake appeared to benefit wildlife, at least initially. People enjoyed remarkable fishing and waterfowl hunting. In winter, the marsh held hundreds of fish shanties on the ice. One settler, Hackmetack, wrote: "when I first came West in 1864, Lake Horicon was then the paradise of the seeker after wildlife fowl; during August and September the water would not be to exaggerate...miles of this lake was only covered with water enough to allow a boat to be pushed over the water and ooze, there not being depth of water to allow of the use of oars. This broad margin was grown full of weeds, wildrice, rushes, cat-tails, flags, etc with here and there a muskrat house. There was also quite a number of islands, making fine points to shoot from. Here ducks of all kinds bred and hatched their young; wild geese

also bred and hatched here...But ducks bred here by the thousands as with such cover they could not be disturbed...Here snipes, plovers and all kinds of aquatic birds were to be found. I saw a pair of large white pelican killed on this lake in 1866."

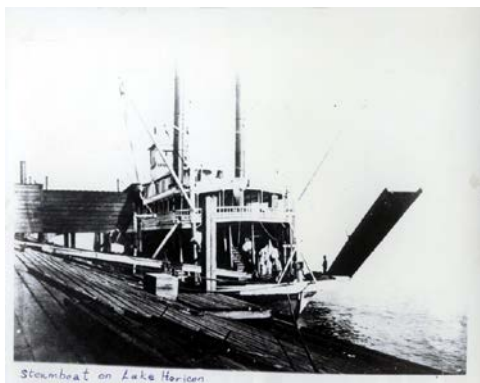
The marsh became a famous hunting and fishing paradise. Bass, pike, pickerel, bullheads, and muskies were abundant in 1857, and 140 tons of pickerel and pike were shipped to eastern markets. Both migrant and resident Canada geese were present. It was a beautiful lake with many islands, bays, peninsulas, and coves. An early settler, Mrs. George H. Beers, wrote, "The fish that this river and lake contained would astonish a stranger. No one who had not witnessed the spectacle would believe the truth, but called it a Horicon fish story. We have seen farmers load their wagons with fish in a short time by dipping with a basket. They fed their swine with them and in later years used them to fertilize their lands. We packed some of the larger ones in ice and sent them East to our friends."

Since 1860, the legendary Kekoskee fish story has circulated among locals and visitors alike. That year, apparently, the lake froze down to the bottom, and bullheads swam up the Rock River to Kekoskee in need of oxygen. At first, people saw them in an open hole 50 feet across and 12 feet high. An eruption of great pressure developed behind it as more and more fish pushed toward the opening. They could not get into the water and slid out over the ice six inches to tow feet deep, hundreds of yards across. A strange, low, murmuring sound was heard up to a mile away, drawing settlers to investigate some mysterious disaster. Dogs and children ran across the open hole on the backs of the fish. One man slipped on the ice, fell on the fish in the hole, and could not get in the water because of them! Mrs. Sneider, who lived one mile away in the country, claims to have counted 900 wagon loads of bullheads removed from the dam in only one morning with the run lasting two weeks, representing only a portion of the take as other roads were used as well. People would charge 25cents per wagon load which paid for the labor of shoveling only. One man bought a farm with the money he earned. Farmers used the fish mainly for manure and hog feed and food for people all winter long. Bullhead-fed bigs tasted like fish! A layer of bass and pickerel were later found down below the bullheads, providing much sport. One horse fed that whole winter on bullheads – Santa Ana, an old horse which dated back to the Mexican War.



Apparently, a Horicon Lake Association was incorporated in Horicon in 1868 and provided a certificate of membership offering privileges of the Association subject to its constitution and bylaws. Little else is known about this organization.

Lake Horicon became popular for tourism and commerce. White pine logs from the Wolf River pinery were brought by rail to Chester from Fond du Lac then rafted or boated from Chester Bridge down the Rock River to Horicon and sawed into lumber at the mill. In 1857, a storm hit that struck lightning on a barge. Two men were killed instantly and a dozen or more were injured. One of the survivors, William Chisolm, was literally roasted in parts, and his recovery was considered miraculous. Both cargo and excursion boats were numerous. Five steamboats traveled the lake by the 1860s as well as other craft.



The largest steamer, the gallant *M. Winter* (pictured left), was built in the winter of 1859 and launched the following June. It was dedicated by 75 couples with an expedition around the lake and a dance in the evening. The *M. Winter* then made daily trips to Kekoskee, LeRoy, and Chester. Farmers brought their produce to two piers on the east shore to have it carried to Horicon and shipped by railroad. The *M. Winter* boiler blew up in 1859 when traveling from Chester with a load of stones. Two men were killed. Michael Winter, owner of the steamboat, was stunned and knocked overboard but rescued. They floated the boat down to Horicon where it was repaired and used again until about 1867. Sometime after that, the Van Brunt

and David Company (which later became John Deere-Horicon Works) used the broiler and engine in their early days as a means of power in their Mill Street plant. The present-day Horicon NWR headquarters site was one of the two east side steamboat landings, in this case, serving LeRoy. L.C. Keeley hunted the marsh from Eddie Lechner's farm just south of there, kept a boat there, and heard yarns from Eddie's father for many an hour on the front porch. Lechner's family originally settled there in 1862. The lake became an important social point not only for the village of Horicon, but also to Dodge County and the state.

In 1853, the Rock River Valley Union Railway laid a single rail line to Chester (called East Waupun today) from Fond du Lac, adding to the popularity of the marsh. Irish settlers then came with it and settled in the Chester area. They hoped the settlement at Waupun would be moved to Chester; Waupun-ites used this station to travel to Fond du Lac or north. The line was completed to Janesville in 1858, connecting Chester to Chicago, making Chester one of the largest shipping centers in the area with a history which parallels the history of Lake Horicon. Steamboats docked at Chester. Sportsmen from Chicago, New York, St. Louis came there, stayed in the hotel in town, and sometimes brought ladies with them for added social life. Chester had a hotel, railroad stations, grain elevator, store, and hotel. Hunters brought their own equipment, including boats, and shooting peaked in the 1870s. They traveled down the west branch of the Rock River into the marsh. The hotel in Chester was prosperous, filled to capacity at times, and also became a social center. In winter, parties would make sleigh rides there for an oyster supper and dancing. Only formal dress was allowed in the dining room at times. The hotel discontinued in mid-1890s when the second owner died. It later burned to the ground. Chester also had a lumber yard and general store, plus bus or stage coach service until the 1920s. The station came down in about 1944.

Access across Horicon Lake was limited to water travel or braving a natural winter ice bridge near Chester on the northwest portion of the refuge. An early road began after crossing the wooden Chester Bridge (built in 1872, later replaced by a bridge at Chester Station about 20 years later) on the Rock River and extended along the highlands up to the edge of the frozen lake. (Rumor has it that the Chester Station bridge was displayed at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair.) Waupun State Prison (the first one in Wisconsin, established in 1852) employees escorted timber cutting crews across this bridge in the winter to the east side of the lake. They needed to acquire wood for the prison's primary fuel source until coal use became more common. But this laid the groundwork for what we today call Old Marsh Road. With increased settlement an effort was made but not completed to extend the road onto the marsh. A pile of rocks remain reminders of this effort. With the dredging of the marsh in 1910, a ditch bank created the needed road across the marsh, and was leveled off with a team of horses. It was named Marsh Road. Early federal acquisition papers describe it as a Dodge County owned road. Because it was a dirt road, people could not drive vehicles across in spring, but left their cars in East Waupun and used horses instead.

West side settlers called the marsh Lake Misery, possibly because they crossed the Horicon Lake in the winter to procure their food supply. Each driver of a team in the caravan carried several heavy oak planks, because frequently the ice buckled and left spaces of open water which the men bridged with the planks.

In the spring of 1852, some sources indicate that snow melt and heavy or late rains raised the lake to an unusually high level. Others indicate that muskrat activity undermined the dam. In either case, in June the dam broke! Water 100 feet in width roared through in a torrent. Landowners on the east side of the lake got an injunction to prevent the owners of the dam from repairing it so the lake would subside and they could farm more acreage. The owners obliged, but everyone else did not! The whole town turned out to repair it, which took six weeks. They hauled in huge stones and dirt. It was their precious source of waterpower. By spring of 1853, lake levels were high again.

In 1854, an eastern engineer recommended the creation of a vast reservoir at the heads of the Wisconsin River to guarantee adequate flow for navigation in summer. A similar argument was made for Rock River, and the value of the lake was recognized as an important regulator of the river. The same year, the

height of the dam was increased as needed by the newly incorporated Horicon Iron and Manufacturing company (considered owners of the dam as chartered by the state legislature that year), flooding additional farmland and flaming opposition further north. Judge Charles Larabee and Martin Rich were among those on the original charter. Horicon's water power also sustained a sash and door factory, a large sawmill, and a couple of grist mills and was considered the very best water power in the state with a head of over nine feet and the volume of water being large, uniform, and reliable.

Next, we will see the beginning of a series of litigations which extend up through the recent history of the marsh, making it a lawyer's paradise. Very possibly Horicon Marsh has been in the courts more than any other tract of land in the state.

In 1858, news first spread of the dam being removed by schemers and promoters who were already fund-raising for the purpose. The first suit against the owners of the dam started in 1858 and reached the Wisconsin Supreme Court in 1861 which sided for the farmer claiming damages to his land due to creation of the lake. The court awarded the plaintiff \$860 in damages, which the company delayed paying, and it eventually decided to give up the dam and water power rather than set a precedent to then pay additional future damages from other landowners. However, in the case of Ackerman vs. the Horicon Iron and Manufacturing Company, Justice Cole ruled that the company must compensate landowners for damages or take down its dam.

Suits piled up, many years of litigation followed, some reaching the Supreme Court and Martin Rich beat each of them, but eventually he ran out of money. He ended up facing inflated damages that exceeded the value of the land, which he could not afford to pay. Plus, by court decree, they had not ever attained flowage rights. At last, the dam was condemned in 1868 and almost removed but for another delay that was secured. At last, in spring of 1869, the dam was finally removed. On January 22, 1869, supporters and promoters of removing the dam held a benefit ball at Manning's Hall in Kekoskee to celebrate, complete with live music from the Hutchins Quadrille Band from Waupun. Tickets included supper and music, free for those who helped remove the dam, but \$2.00 for all others. According to the invitation printed in the Waupun Leader Power Press, "A due portion of the Evening will be allotted to German Dances."

It took three years for the lake to drain, and the area returned to a marsh, but the original ecological character of Horicon Marsh was forever gone. Farmers along the margin could utilize their lands again especially for pasture and hay, but in times of drought suffered from a low water table causing them to deepen their wells. Factories that had depended upon water for power now substituted with steam. The Horicon village population fell into a decline at this time.

In the midst of this controversy, by 1867, the federal government planned to build a great canal from Fond du Lac to Rock Island, Illinois in and along the Rock River. The canal would be part of a through waterway from Green Bay to the Mississippi River. Lake Horicon would be used as part of the canal, and the main purpose of the project was to regulate water flow for the whole extent of the canal system, for a total cost of almost \$15 million. It would allow steamboats to travel from the Mississippi to Green Bay, and required raising Lake Horicon by an additional six feet requiring the purchase of additional farm lands around the border of the lake. The plan was never carried out, for reasons not specified, but possible due to a lack of funds. More than likely it was because the lake was drained away two years later in 1869.

The destruction of the dam had been expected for several years before it actually happened. In 1867, the state legislature, under leadership of Senator Satterlee Clark, passed "An Act to Incorporate the Union Mechanics Manufacturing Company." Clark himself was among the incorporators along with six others, and they were highly interested in the dam property. Strangely enough, the Act empowered them to do exactly what the Horicon Iron and Manufacturing Company and its predecessor had been doing for 20 years: buy the dam and water power, engage in associated manufacturing, and sell surplus power. However, one purpose of the Act may have been to create a reorganized company in order to free itself

from the numerous suits and damages against it. The Act provides that "the company hereby created shall not be liable for any damages or costs in the suit or proceedings now pending against the Horicon Iron and Manufacturing Company."

The Act also gave the Union Mechanics Manufacturing Company compensation for loss of water power should the dam be torn out; and then the preemptive right to purchase, within two years, any or all lands owned by the state which water flowed over by means of the dam at its present height. It provided the school land commissioners, who were in control of those swamp lands given to the state by Congress, should withdraw those lands from market, make a new appraisal by aboard they appoint, and the new appraisal would set the selling price at which the company would have the exclusive rights to purchase those lands. They sold almost 20,000 acres of the marshlands all in Dodge County in 1867 for the bargain price of just over nine cents per acre, or a total of \$1,836.37 (Other sources say five cents per acre for 24,000.) For a song, the state divested itself of the lake bed under positive legislative compulsion. In essence, although there was still some hope that the dam would remain, the intention of the act, then, was not to solely continue production of flour, lumber, woolens, paper, or iron ware, but to allow for options, specifically, to facilitate a legal and profitable land operation.

By about 1872, the lake had drained and gave the Union Mechanics Manufacturing Company the chance to parcel out their swamp land. Marshland was purchased by land speculators from 6-10 cents per acre.

In 1909, a well-organized effort was made to restore the lake by prominent business men from Horicon, Watertown, Janesville, Beloit, and as far south as Rockford, Illinois. They met with protest from drainage interests, and the plan was finally abandoned.

HAYING (STARTING AROUND 1870)



Since the dam was removed, there was a considerable industry in hay, and much was cut, baled, and shipped to cities in Wisconsin and out of state as well. Three hundred carloads of hay were shipped from Burnett Station in 1887. From 1880 until the time of drainage starting in 1910, landowners hayed, even with small dams in place on hunting club grounds, harvesting cooperatively over two or three weeks to put up their annual supply. Haying continued after drainage; land was used for pasturing and growing rotational crops as well.

As soon as the Horicon Mechanics owned their 20,000 acres of marsh, they sold much of it and leased the rest for a period of 25 years to two hunting clubs. The land was rented to Scanlyn, Shepard & Co. who cut hay from it for a short time, possibly only one year from about 1868-1869.

Peter Feucht's dad had the first hay baler on the marsh from the end of the 1800s to the turn of the century. Just south of the present Horicon NWR headquarters, the Lehner farm and house was located at the end of Lehner's Road/Ditch. (Bob Personius lived there while working as the refuge manager.) Feucht owned about 60 acres of marsh hay land but bought hay from others. He paid from 75 cents to \$2 per acre depending upon the quality. Feuchts sold hay to breweries in Milwaukee who looked for thick sweet, good hay for packing bottles into big cases for foreign shipment; they twisted hay around each bottle. Good Horicon Marsh hay had no sticks in it from goldenrod or black-eyed susans and measured 18 inches to two feet long. Breweries paid Feuchts \$5.50 per ton of hay. Shipped by carload, marsh hay was the best packing hay available, and Peter Feucht's dad baled most of it. They hayed in summer, stacked eight to ten tons of hay in a stack, then baled it later. They also sold wagon loads of hay to farmers or livery stables for two dollars per load. In 1910, there was a great demand as no one else east of the Rock River hayed that year. One hundred carloads were shipped out of Mayville that year to Milwaukee alone, and all of it went through Feucht's baler. Apparently, the Schlitz brewery in Milwaukee shipped that cargo of beer down to Teddy Roosevelt at San Juan Hill to meet the Rough Riders as they rode down.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, just north of Lehner's farm, Gerald Feucht lived in a house as a young boy which was located at the current Refuge maintenance shop. The Feuchts could hear the Lehner boys playing Hawaiian guitars. Gerald helped cut paths between the ponds below the house (which were made by pear fires) so they would be connected with trails for duck hunting. His father, Pete, would shoot more than 100 ducks per year from the front of the boat with a shotgun.

MARKET HUNTING & HUNTING CLUBS (AROUND 1859-1920)



Lake Horicon became famous for its magnificent waterfowl hunting, not only for recreational pursuits but for unregulated commercial purposes as well. Sportsmen from other states were attracted to the marsh as the popularity of duck shooting grew. Drainage of the lake altered the marsh habitat to the benefit of waterfowl production. One count estimates that 500,000 ducks hatched annually. (This was thought to be a conservative count at the time, but today we think it was liberal.) More than 75,000 muskrat and mink pelts were taken annually by trappers. The Diana Shooting Club's "Old Man Miescke" killed 93 ducks with one shot, the all-time marsh record. A market hunter, he shot 3,000 ducks in one season. He began to shoot in spring when the ice came out and continued until fall when the lake froze up. Members of Caw

Caw Shooting Club would bring in 90-100 ducks in a single day. The birds were packed in wooden barrels with marsh hay and shipped by the hundreds to upscale restaurants and hotels in Milwaukee, Chicago, and New York in spring and fall. They sold for 10 cents a duck. In 1860, Wilhem (Bill) Kliefoth, a



professional hunter, hunted every day and shipped out 3,000 ducks that fall to Milwaukee. By 1874, if he brought in 25-30 ducks a day, he considered it poor hunting. More often, he got 50-60 per day or even more. He earned \$2 per dozen for mallards and redheads, \$1.25 per dozen teal and pintails, and \$0.35 per dozen of ruddy ducks. One day in 1882, Congressman Barwig asked him and Dr. Clark to shoot as many ducks as they could for his daughter's wedding. In two days, they shot 270 ducks.

In the late 1800s, not a single waterfowl sanctuary existed in Wisconsin, and there were few, if any federal or state waterfowl shooting laws to protect wildlife from this needless, greedy slaughter. There were no restrictions on shooting methods: hunters used double barrel guns, live decoys, bait, and shot year-round, day and night.

Enormous one- or two- gauge shot guns, called "punt guns" (pictured right), were like small cannons that had to rest on the ground, tripod-style to be shot. Smoke billowed out of the end, and 30 birds could be killed in one shot! Up until 1902, no bag or possession limit existed on any unprotected species. In 1905, spring hunting on all ducks was halted in state by law. It was not until 1942, when part of Horicon Marsh was closed for the first time by a government agency for waterfowl purposes. Few laws were established to protect waterfowl, and enforcement of those laws was inadequate, so market shooters continued to relentlessly harvest waterfowl every month the birds were available at the marsh. An adequate number of locals pursued market shooting. In 1886, shooters were killing other marsh birds, like great blue herons and meadow larks. They hunted ducks, passenger pigeons, and shorebirds without limit. In only 25-30 years, resource decline was evident. By 1900, the great clouds of passenger pigeons were no longer seen. Unlimited shooting reduced or eliminated ruffed grouse, plover, sandhill cranes, quail, and geese from the marsh. Market hunting persisted during the shooting club years and provided continuous shooting pressure on the marsh wildlife. However, it is obvious that ducks could have been obliterated from the marsh without the shooting clubs.



The shooting clubs represent a transition period between commercial exploitation and conservation. In 1892, 35 such clubs existed in Wisconsin. From 1883 to 1920, some of Horicon Marsh was leased by two shooting clubs for exclusive duck shooting rights, and remaining areas were open to market shooting. The Diana Shooting Club leased 4,000 acres on the south end of Horicon Marsh, and its members included eastern industrialists. The Horicon Shooting Club leased 9,000 acres on the north end of the marsh, and its members included eastern Wisconsin shooters. In 1883, when these clubs were incorporated, they each leased rights to these lands for \$100 per year for 25 years from the owners of the marsh, the Mechanics Union Manufacturing Company.

The clubs excluded the general public from shooting on their leased lands or from using their own club houses they built there or near the marsh. No one could shoot without permission, but some considered the Rock River navigable, and so they were entitled to shoot wherever they wished. Local residents resented club control and lack of access to which they were accustomed.

Although the clubs were initiated locally, members sometimes included famous, wealthy, or educated men from Fond du Lac, Milwaukee, Chicago, and even New York looking to escape the shooting crowds.

There were no women members. The only woman *guest* was the famous trick shooter, Annie Oakley, from Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show, at the Diana Shooting Club. Two Wisconsin governors and two senators were club members. Membership was limited to 110 men total for both clubs to prevent overcrowding. The Horicon Club totaled over 200 members over 37 years. Companionship prevailed over shooting and any other consideration. The clubs preserved waterfowl by restricted shooting to some extent, ensuring there would be something left to shoot.

The oldest and most celebrated of all Wisconsin shooting clubs got its start on the northwest corner of the present Horicon Marsh State Wildlife Area, east of Misling Island Road in 1866, the Caw-Caw Shooting Club. The name refers to a heron species that bred in a rookery of small trees on their island which they subsequently named Caw-Caw Island. The birds were named after their call, "quaqua," which may have been an Indian word. It was perverted into "Caw Caw" by the club. They bought the island, and with some effort drove off the herons (probably black-crowned night herons) and their filth, cleared the small trees and brush, and built a club house. This small club (of only about 10 members at first) was organized by a group of Milwaukee men. According to club records, they were guided to the spot by Harry Clark, son of Satterlee Clark – first American settler to the area – and by a chart which a friend "sketched on a blank leaf resting on a bale of buffalo robes." In their first season they shot 3,000 ducks and geese, a few sandhills, large numbers of snipe and golden plover, and a number of quail and ruffed grouse. They had "high old times at the Caw-Caw clubhouse when the shooting season was open – made up of some of the best shots and best fellows of the Cream City (Milwaukee), there was plenty of fun, as well as good sport, as the boys used to say; Nothing was too good for them." Members of Caw-Caw would bring in 90-100 ducks in one day. Their tenure at the marsh was short as they only stayed for two years before moving to the deeper Lake Puckaway in Marquette County due to removal of the Horicon dam in 1869. Lower water levels made water travel to the clubhouse impractical, plus they wanted to shift efforts to diving ducks rather than puddlers. It is possible they stayed until 1872 at Horicon Marsh, and then enjoyed a lengthy reign from 1872-1940 at Puckaway.

Note the reasons for establishing the Horicon Shooting Club in 1883, also called Upper Horicon or Fond du Lac Club: "The business and purposes of said corporation are the cultivation and practice of music; the refinement of both mental and bodily powers; the obtaining proficiency in sharp-shooting with rifle, pistol, and shotgun, the protection of wild game out of season; and the culture among its members of gallantry, sociality, temperance and morality." But of course, the primary reason was to obtain exclusive shooting rights on the marsh. "There is no hobbledehoy business about this club. The men you meet there are gentlemen who observe only quiet and sportsmanlike methods."

General offices were located at Fond du Lac, also the location of annual meetings. Their marsh territory comprised much of the present interior of the Horicon National Wildlife Refuge up to State Highway 49, but not quite all the way south to Dike Road. To the east it included up to the present Visitor Center and Environmental Education Barn and two sections north of Ledge Road. Their clubhouse was located on the end of Clubhouse Ditch, just southeast of the present Ledge Road fishing site. This site also had several boathouses, a bunk house, ice house, garage, shed, barn, house, and milk house. They may have also had a clubhouse on the west side of the marsh called Waupun Clubhouse off of Milligan Road, directly west of Clubhouse Ditch. Or, it is possible that a Waupun Shooters Club operated there.

Membership dues cost \$100 per person per year. Benefits to their 60 members included guides who also served as boat pushers or polers. Due to the shallow, mucky nature of the marsh, they navigated boats by poles rather than sails. With the used of DePere skiffs, the poles could be used to steady the boats for shooting because of holes made in the bow and stern. They abided by no spring shooting, law or no law, and imposed a season of September 1 through December 1 of each year. They did not allow baiting, night shooting, guns larger than ten gauge, and no guests on opening day. These were rules they imposed upon themselves at a time when state laws were not yet in place or enforced well.

Colliens Ditch, just south and parallel to Clubhouse Ditch, was likely named after the Collien family; Bill Collien was a pusher as was Arthur Collien. Likewise, Strooks Ditch was likely named after the Strook family. Ferdinand Strook was the farmer owning the clubhouse site and adjacent farm on the northeast side of the marsh. (He also did plowing for area Indians.) His parents, William Sr. and Augusta Strook, were original American owners of that farm. Ferdinand told tales about playing with Indian boys, and Augusta and her mother sold eggs and milk to the Indians. It was John Strook, Ferdinand's brother, who managed the club.

The Strook family lived at the farm and helped at the clubhouse with cleaning and cooking. They knew all the shooters by name. Fond du Lac members came to the clubhouse by horse and buggy through 1898 and kept the horses in their barn until it filled up, and then they put them outside. Others came by way of Lomira by buggy. Later they came by car and built a garage. Early on there was no electricity, but they used candles for light in the bedrooms and kerosene lamps in the hall. The bunk beds were accessible by ladder. Members played cards at nights and drew names for hunting places. They rose at 4:00am to hunt, then came back and cleaned their guns. Drinking water was available from a wooden pump with a tin cup hanging on it.



Ferdinand Strook

The Horicon Shooting Club voted to build a clubhouse and boarding house with telephone lines from Knowles to the clubhouse on Strook's Ditch in 1893. Two new lodges were built with an ice house. Two caretakers were employed in 1893 to prevent waterfowl shooting, and violators could be fined from \$10 to \$50 for each offense.

Emerson Hough, one member of the club, was an outdoor journalist for "Forest and Stream" journal. He wrote many an account about hunting the marsh..."The dawn was now barely beginning to show. A white mist hung over the marsh, streaked feebly by the lantern's yellow rays. The line of boats pushing out looked spectral, huge and unreal in the weird light and shade, and the trees about the clubhouse stood truncated and visible only above the curtain of hanging fog. I stopped my boat and looked back at the singular picture. Why have we no artists to paint such pictures – pictures new and of a sort to thrill one? Why do they all cling to the same worn-out conventionalities? No picture like this morning on the marsh was ever painted. It is valid subject for an American, and fit for the grand prize of America, when that shall be worth all the grand prizes of the earth. It will be painted some day, when some artist stands in the morning and watches the greys turn to pink, and sees the giant boatmen passing through the twisting fog, and feels the inspiration in the sharp air blowing from the marsh."

An 1894 excursion included sleeping overnight in the boats on their backs on the floor of the boats, drawn together closely for fellowship, sang "some of those Negro song." They watched a diversity of birds in the evening flight, game and non-game, and a red sunset. Hough wrote, "Have you, dear reader, ever spent a night in your boat upon a great ducking resort? Well, you should at the first opportunity...The only drawback to our enjoyment was the hot weather, which compelled us to a most liberal use of ice in order to preserve our game until such time as we could reach our respective homes." ... "Bags of 50, 60, or 70 snipe are easy at the marsh. Yellowlegs, sand snipe, and rail fairly swarm on the marsh." ... "It is a most remarkable breeding ground for all the water birds." According to Hough, in 1891 during the peak fall duck flight and after the first frosts, Dr. G.J. Clarke, president of the Horicon Club said, "...if you can lie down on your back and shoot you are apt to have some red hot fun."

The Diana Shooting Club was also incorporated in 1883, leasing the southern portion of Horicon Marsh for the annual rent of \$100. Their grounds included West Bay, Four Mile Island, Mahl Zahn's Bay, Miescke's Channel and Bay, and Big Lake, extending up into the current Horicon NWR about 1-1½ miles north of Main Dike Road and less than one mile east of the Main Ditch. Miescke's Bay was nearest to club grounds, and Miescke's Point was located 1-1¼ miles from the Diana railway crossing on Swan Road where club members flagged down trains. Club members dug a ditch north from Clubhouse Island to

Miescke's Channel for better access to Miescke's Bay and the rest of their grounds. Members arrived by train or horse and buggy. Those from Chicago and Milwaukee traveled by train to Burnett, then walked two miles to the marsh, and a buggy was sent for their equipment if no one met them. After 1894, a phone was installed to call for transportation from the depot to the clubhouse.

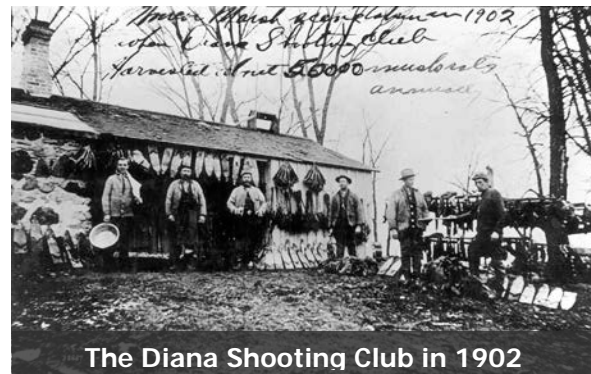
Memberships cost \$150 each and annual dues at \$15 per year. They sold only 25 memberships initially with five more for what became the Chicago Shooting Box and limited total membership to 50. Club members were mainly from Horicon, Milwaukee, and Chicago and touted that they were "business and professional gentlemen who shot for sport, not big bags." The club was headed by W.A. Van Brunt (of the Horicon Van Brunt Manufacturing, which later became John Deere-Horicon Works).

Clubhouse grounds included comfortable, ample accomodating: a commissary house, sleeping house, ice house and boat houses, plus the house boat. The Chicago group became a club within the club, known as the Chicago Shooting Box. While the Wisconsin group used the house boat, the Chicago members built an actual clubhouse of four rooms, bunks, and lockers. The atmosphere was more formal, with dinner in courses, and white caps on the chefs and waiters. Eventually they merged with the Wisconsin group to build a shared lodge six miles into the marsh from Burnett on Steamboat Island.

One of the more famous and charismatic members of the Diana Club was Wisconsin Governor George Peck. He was born in 1840 in New York and served his term from 1891 to 1895. Peck and Van Brunt were friends, and the governor was an avid sportsman who enjoyed the fellowship of the club. One day the club manager's daughter, Erma Kliefoth, and her sister were shooting bottles thrown into the marsh in front of the clubhouse, or they may have been shooting blackbirds. A stray shot hit Governor Peck on the cheek. Sharp-witted, he later wrote in the clubhouse log book that "Erma got 13 bottles and one governor."

The Diana Club was proud of their voluntarily imposed limit starting in 1884 of entirely no spring shooting, a first in the history of the marsh. Duck numbers increased dramatically. Although they did not allow shot guns over 10 guage, the shooting was still excellent. Other self-imposed rules were much the same as the Horicon Shooting Club's. Their open season went from September 1 to December 1. Baiting was not allowed, and neither was night hunting. Both clubs hired their own "watchmen" to enforce their own rules, access, or later state laws, and they did so relatively successfully.

The Diana Club (pictured right) also made money from harvesting muskrats; they leased trapping rights to "Old Man Miescke," a German farmer who slaughtered ducks with a four bore. He provided teams, pushers, milk, eggs, chickens, and other necessities to the club from his farm. In the 1880s and 1890s, fur trappers harvested 100,000 muskrats per year sold for up to 15 cents each, known to be the best quality except for Louisiana "rats."



The Diana Shooting Club in 1902

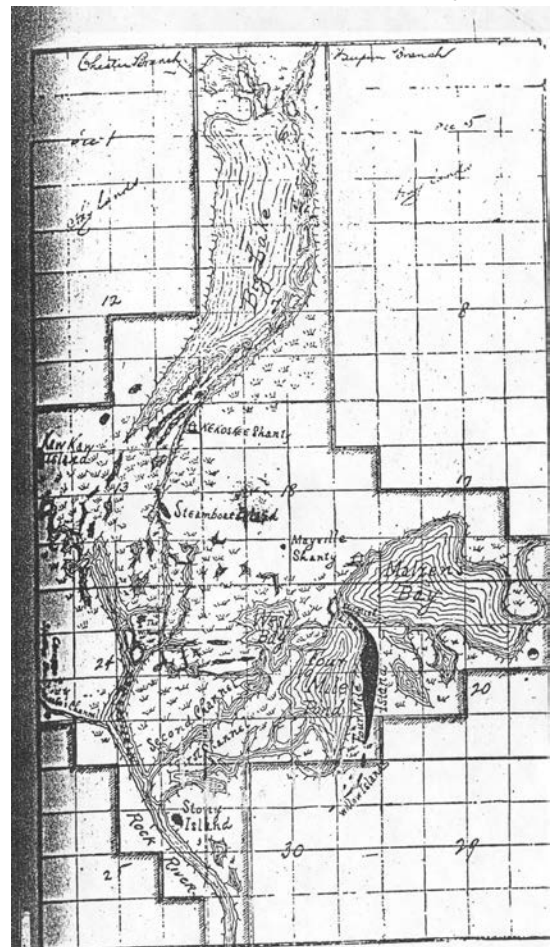
In 1898, Horicon Shooting Club paid \$50 per year to William Strook, their manager, for trapping muskrats for up to three years. Rat spearing through the ice was an old technique going back before 1900 possibly. In high water in spring, some trappers took shotguns and shot rats. Starting during World War I, the Horicon Shooting Club clubhouse area was used a fur buying center in spring after trapping. Buyers and trappers would meet there to make sales outdoors. Buyers took their rats to railroad stations and shipped them in gunny sacks. They paid in gold, paper, and silver money. Rat skin was worth more money in spring, so that was the biggest trapping period. Trappers caught males until females showed up in their catch in late spring; then they quit. During World War II, muskrat skins sold for up to \$4 each,

and 120,000 were trapped from the marsh in the fall of 1943, a better harvest than crops, making \$500,000.

Like most hunters today, club members probably enjoyed just being outdoors the most, as related in the Diana Club's by-laws: "One lost in the infinite intricacies of these morasses, at the gloaming just preceding nightfall, when the myriad animal life is momentarily silent, cannot fail to be deeply impressed with the sense of utter seclusion and desolation which everywhere pervades the place. But in a hazy autumn afternoon, when the fields and woodlands that fringe the great basin in which you stand are clothed in brown, and yellow, and crimson, and gold all around the horizon, and the western sky is bathes in the warm, soft tints of an October sunset, the desolate, uninviting *picture*, upon which a mere speck you are penciled, is lost and forgotten in the gorgeous beauty of the *frame* in which it is set."

Nonetheless, they shot more ducks than they could keep without refrigeration. They buried excess birds in the bushes. They bagged highs of about 100 birds per hunter per day, and average daily bags were about 25 opening day, declining after that. The Diana Club bagged a high of 800 birds. Hunters took 300 shotgun shells with them for a standard day of shooting, and boxes on skiffs contained live decoy ducks. But they would also use wooden decoys and shoot flying birds. One lost hunter kept himself alive overnight on the marsh in a blizzard by snuggling live decoys in his coat. In 1893, one hunter bagged 544 ducks in 19 days. Both clubs eventually self-imposed a daily bag limit of 50 birds, only half of which could be mallards. Hough called "anything more than that slaughter, no matter who did it, hunting clubs or market hunter (who did not hunt murderously as this)." From 1900 to 1908, there would be 300 boats on the marsh on opening day, September 1. (It is helpful to remember, though, that fewer people hunted the marsh then, than today.)

The clubs did more to manage the marsh for wildlife than anyone else had to that point, however. When the water was unusually high, the marsh was covered with one to three feet of water, and they noted that the source of feed snails for ducks was very high, plus one year they seeded 2,500 pounds of wild rice and other species as duck food. Clubs aimed to flood marshland in fall enough to float skiffs using low-head plank dams in the river channels which they maintained. Hough was adamant when he wrote: "The wildfowl would be swept from Horicon marsh in two years now if it were not protected...I have no confidence whatever in the public's ability to take care of shooting privileges. History shows the greed and carelessness of the public in such matters. Preserves we must have, or the game is gone. Since this is so, is fortunate that such rare privileges fall into the hands of men who appreciate and value them rightly and who will take care of them...The preserve system is the only salvation of the game."



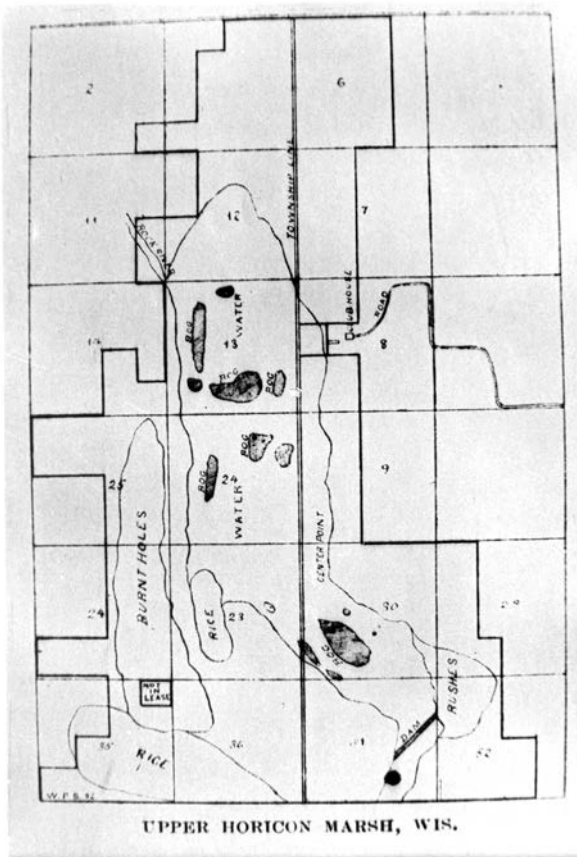
Diana Shooting Club Grounds in Horicon Marsh, 1891
Drawn by Percy F. Stone, 1891. From *Forest and Stream*,
37:200 (October 1, 1891).

In 1890, up to half of the 100 members dropped out of the club for not paying dues. Then Percy Stone of Chicago bought up all the shares he could and reorganized the club. Wilhelm Kliefoth was appointed manager. In 1893, both big clubs merged into one organization, controlling 18,000 acres of the marsh at the time. Wardens were hired to patrol, and trespassers were caught and tried in local court. Percy Stone

served as general manager and secretary of both clubs. The entire Kliefoth family helped in the work of the shooting club. Milly Kliefoth, another of Wilhelm's daughters, said, "Day after day we cleaned ducks and mudhens or coots. Day after day we prepared ducks, and they always cooked on top of the stoves in heavy pots. We had at least three stoves going constantly...Ma must have baked hundreds of apple pies and also grape pies. My sisters and I had the seemingly endless task of squeezing the seeds and skins from Concord grapes. The hunters never seemed to tire of eating and they always liked the menu which included red and green cabbage cole slaw. As the hunters came in with their ducks, one of my jobs was to stuff marsh hay in the body cavities and then put them in the ice house which didn't always have ice."

In 1894, the Lombard Investment Company of Kansas City, Missouri became owner of much of the marsh, which is purchased from U.S. Marshall Pratt that June, and the company was anxious to exploit the marsh. It disregarded the leases the clubs held with the prior owner and gave game preserve rights to W.R. Grady of Chicago, claiming the sale canceled previously held leases. Grady sold permits to locals for \$3 each to hunt on the marsh, which resulted in a disastrous opening day that year, the area swarming with permit hunters and willful trespassers. Arrests were made by newly sworn in county deputy sheriffs and marshals, and the courts filled up. Grady asked for an injunction to prioritize his claims, and the court rules in complete favor of the hunting clubs. This ruling also gave the clubs absolute control of the 18,000-acre duck preserve for the next 14 years.

In the 1870s, run-off and precipitation provided adequate water levels on the marsh for navigation once the dam was removed and the lake drained. Vegetation probably reverted to the grass reported before the flooding period. Habitat changes continued on land neighboring the marsh, such as wetland drainage, well-drilling, ditching, tiling, plowing, grazing, and deforestation. The marsh slowly became drier, especially in fall, eventually making it difficult to attract migrant ducks or to float boats. As early as 1877, the *Milwaukee Journal* reported poor fall hunting due to low water. The Horicon Shooting Club built a low-head plank damn to back up Long Lake, and it remained until the drainage ditches were dug. Likewise, the Diana Club maintained a dam until 1913 when drainage began. A second dam backed up Mahl Zahn's Bay.



In the fall of 1890, the dry north end of marsh burned over in wide strips and created openings in the peat called burnt holes two or three feet deep (possibly depicted in map at left), killing the vegetation, but one year later water flowed over the holes making a series of open ponds and providing very good duck habitat. In 1893, though, it was estimated that "the marsh bred 50,000 ducks," and if that is any comparison to the 500,000 ducks estimated after Lake Horicon was drained, the birds demise would only be stalled, not prevented, by the endeavors of the shooting clubs. Drought came in 1894 and 1895. In 1907, only about 2,080 acres of open water was found on Horicon Marsh. Hough wrote: "The ducks of the country are going. Horicon Marsh can be made a perpetual preserve. We have nothing like it in the country."

(Interestingly, the first national wildlife refuge was established in Wisconsin in 1913, Gravel and Spider Islands, in Door County. Today, that property is managed as a satellite refuge by the Horicon NWR staff.)

Local sportsmen challenged the right of just a few people to control the marsh on the basis that the Rock River was navigable, free and open to all. The state Supreme Court found the Rock River to be a navigable stream by the 1787 Northwest Ordinance and was part of the public domain. Citizen suits put an end to the monopoly. John Strook said he moved off the island in 1920, noting that the water level was lowered two feet by dredging.

DREDGE, DITCH, & DRAIN (1889-1934)



For 40 years prior to dredging and ditching, land uses changed and increased, and the marsh became drier. In 1889, the Dodge County Pioneer first reported on six Chicagoans surveying the marsh for agriculture. In 1893, the American Fiber Company planned to start a business on the marsh. They planned to buy the dam and mills, take down the dam, and drain the marsh. The company secretly conducted experiments on Rock River marshes, showing the land would be highly suitable for growing flax needed for making rope and cord. They planned to build paper mills, factories at Horicon, Hustisford, and Waupun, and pulp mills to use the waste flax to make superior wood and straw, estimating that its production will amount to more than half of that in the U.S. One scheme involved persuading the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad Company to build tracks from the Burnett Station into the marsh for three or four miles so cars could be loaded on the marsh, saving money. They abandoned their plans in 1894 but still planned to build a linen factory in Horicon.

In 1904, a petition was presented to a packed Dodge County Circuit Court to create the Horicon Drainage District, including all of Horicon Marsh, and an order was issued after the case to dredge the marsh in the interest of improving the marsh for agriculture, to make more sanitary living conditions, and to improve land value. Drainage would impact 35,000 acres of marsh and \$10 per acre for a total estimated cost of \$350,000 (or about \$3 per acre for the main ditch plus \$2 per acre to extend each one-quarter section of surface drainage). Effective drainage, they claimed, would only be achieved by also removing the Hustisford dam, thus laying stake to yet another drainage destruction project of yet another lake. They actually purchased the dam. In 1920, armed guards kept watch day and night at the Hustisford dam to keep the land owners from blowing it up. This saved the marsh from being completely drained.

The Horicon Marsh Game Protective Association was also formed to fight the draining of the marsh. (In 1923, this group became the Horicon Marsh Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America.) The issue made it to the State Supreme Court which overturned the county's decision, and sent it back to the county with the decree in 1908 that the Rock River was a navigable stream and that drainage districts did not have the authority to remove the dam, drain it, nor alter the course of the river. In 1908, the county

court dismissed the petition of the drainage interests and a rehearing was denied. Also it was separately determined by the state Supreme Court that the dam at Hustisford could not be legally removed since dams more than 20 years old were considered permanent. You would think, end of story, but no so. Developers figured they had the support of local farmers, the Horicon Advancement Association, and the city of Horicon, and a split vote on the court. The drainage interests went ahead and dredged anyhow from 1910 to 1918 without authority and in direct violation of the Supreme Court ruling, and after having already spent several hundred thousand dollars.

The turn of the century from the 1800s to the 1900s was a time when drainage interests watched for projects nationally where land could be exploited for investment, reclamation, and development. One company, the Rock River Land Company, included W.C. Norris, a wealthy Illinois land owner and banker, as well as G.A. McWilliams, who was at the time one of the largest dredging and drainage contractors and one of the foremost men in the U.S. interested in land reclamation. These two men purchased almost all of the stock in the Rock River Land Corporation, and because of their efforts, the next permanent alterations took place on the marsh: dredging, ditching, draining, and burning. Their company purchased 18,000 acres in the center of the marsh in 1904. In the summer of 1910, the G.A. McWilliams Drainage Company began to ditch and drain the marsh using a contraption called the dredge. You can still see those ditches today on the marsh by looking for the unnaturally straight channels which lay east to west or north to south on the marsh or on maps.

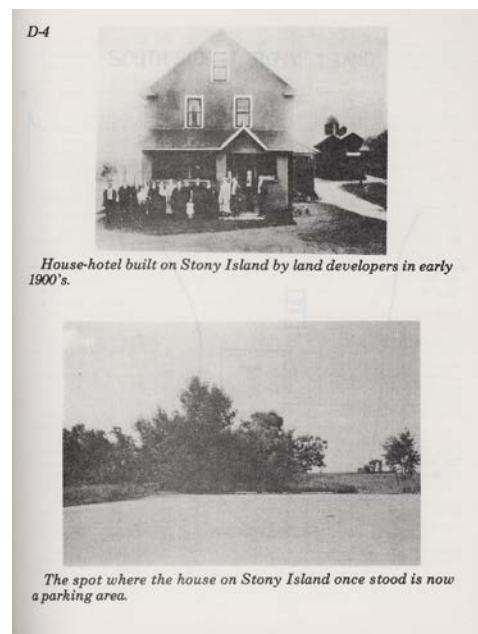
The dredge and ditching materials were made in Fort Wayne, Indiana by the American Steel Dredge Company and sent by rail to Oak Center Road on the northwest corner of the marsh. There was a road leading down into the marsh very close to where Oak Center Road crossed the railroad. The parts were assembled just east of there at Dennis Conners Point by digging a hole there in the marsh. (That site is now part of Horicon NWR.) The hole filled with water, and they built the floating dredge in that hole. The whole dredge was 70 feet long and 18 feet wide. It is pictured on the previous page, probably just after it was assembled but before the dredging began. The people pictured are likely local farmers who stood to benefit from the drainage and dressed up in celebration of the occasion.



Mounted on a barge, it was steam-powered and included a $\frac{3}{4}$ yard shovel bucket attached to the end of a long arm. They steam-shoveled their way out of the hole, creating the first ditch, Conners Ditch, and taking them to County Line Lateral Ditch (the ditch along the eastern half of Hwy 49 today), then out to the centerline of the marsh to begin digging the wider Main Ditch, following the range section line down the center of the marsh for 15 miles and through the city of Horicon. The dredge had spud arms to hold it into the banks while digging in front. When it was time to move ahead, the crew could float the dredge and reset the support arms.

John Huffman was the dredge engineer, earning \$150 per month. He came from an Illinois farming area and

brought his wife, two sons, and one daughter to live in a large frame house he found in Chester on the main corner. They later moved to a house (likely the former hotel) on Stony Island in 1917 (pictured right). The entire dredge crew was seven people plus John and included a cook, who was sometimes the wife of one of the men on the crew. They ate hearty meals of beef, pork, potatoes, gravy, hot biscuits, honey, sorghum, butter, and fruit pies. Not used to eating



House-hotel built on Stony Island by land developers in early 1900's.

The spot where the house on Stony Island once stood is now a parking area.

wild ducks, the crew was not interested in shooting wild game, which they considered "too rank."

A two-story houseboat (below, after its glory days) followed the dredge and included living quarters for the crew. (It may be possible that the dredge pulled two floating flat boats, one for sleeping and one for cooking and eating meals.)



Near Strook's ditch, Horicon Shooting Club members confronted the dredge at their boundary with loaded shotguns, threatening to shoot them all, to prevent drainage of their hunting grounds. John Huffman faced them down, saying he was hired to do a job, right or wrong, and he wouldn't stop! He stood on the bow of the dredge and dared them to start shooting, then went through. Club members and friends later plugged the Main Ditch after the dredge went through in 1912 in an effort to reflood their grounds (below). This and other small wooden dams helped keep the water high enough to attract ducks in the fall, but not nearly to the extent of their glory years.

The dredge continued south, digging the Main Ditch 60 feet wide and eight feet deep. In the late fall of 1912, when just north of the city of Horicon, they decided to bend the ditch southeast around One-Mile Island to avoid slicing through it and ended it at the Van Brunt Manufacturing Company railroad dock instead of the ice house. They may very well have used St. Stephan's church steeple as a visual guide on the landscape, because that landmark lies directly in the middle of the ditch as you come south on a boat or canoe today. That winter, the dredge was parked next to the Van Brunt factory land. That winter and the following spring, a second dredge was built near Bossman icehouse. A barge was also built which was rigged and used as a pile driver or to haul and dump excavated materials to places out of reach of the dredges' long arms and buckets.

That spring, both dredges traveled through the city, widening, straightening, and deepening the river to over 90 feet across and about eight feet deep and replacing bridges at no cost to the city. The second dredge threw up a bank of dirt about 30 feet wide and 10 feet high in about one hour. The area between the ice house and the Lake Street Bridge was low and marshy, so excavated dirt from this second dredge filled in the area and improved it for development. While digging under the Lake Street Bridge, the crew found a wagon bolster, neck yoke, and parts of a horse harness, remnants of an accident in 1864 when Joseph Daniels crashed through the bridge and drowned with a load of manure. The bodies were recovered downstream. Formerly a marshy area, the current Bowling Green Park was also created from dredge fill. Hubbard's Rapids was located at this bend in the river, but was removed by the dredge as the river bed was deepened. The action improved boating and encouraged launches, which still take place today. You may still see several large boulders more than six feet in diameter which could not be removed by the crew or their equipment. Next, the railroad bridge was taken out and replaced after the dredge dug through. They continued on to the Barstow Street Bridge, filling in the land on both sides of the river. St. Malachy's Church was constructed on the south side of the river on these dredgings within one year. A newer, safer bridge replaced the old Barstow Street Bridge, and it was moved slightly east to its present location probably for better street alignment. Just below or east of the bridge, the site and remaining material of the first dam and glacial dike were thoroughly dug out, including old logs – well-preserved timbers! Clyde Huffman,

Horicon Shooting Club members plugging the ditch



John's son, as a young boy, was one of the people who set the dynamite charges that blew it out in 1914. Martin Rich's brother was one of many curious on-lookers, and others were among those who helped roll those first timbers into place. The current Blue Heron Landing is located at the site of that first dam and mill. The river was naturally deeper next to the bluff along South Hubbard Street, and even more so due to water action from the dam. This had been an Indian encampment area. Next, the dredge turned south towards the main rail road bridge which was located just south of the current dam. Here the dredge operated day and night, even Sundays, to complete this phase. The river dredgings were used to fill in sloughs on the west part of the river which in part, makes up the Legion Park today. The dredge rested over the winter in town on the river east of Barstow Street.

The ditch along the current Old Marsh Road was also dredged in 1913 and an iron bridge built to span the Main Ditch by the Milwaukee firm Warder and Allen at a cost of \$2,450. The townships of Chester and LeRoy and area businesses split the cost.

Also in 1913, state law mandated the railroad commission to improve and maintain all navigable waters, dams, water flow and levels in the state for navigation and public safety purposes. That year, residents of Mayville and Horicon petitioned the railroad commission in opposition to the drainage project in the interests of ecology, navigation, hunting, and fishing, especially local membership of the Diana Shooting Club. After a hearing in Madison, the commission ruled in favor of the drainage project, the state gave its approval, and the petition was dismissed. This action certainly served as a decisive blow to the club, which, two years later, in 1915, sold their grounds back to Emil Miescke.

In the spring of 1914, they completed dredging under the main railroad bridge and continued a short distance beyond it near the present sewage treatment plant (then called "Second Bend"). Dredgings were used to fill in what is now Kiwanis Park, and this concluded dredge work within the city of Horicon. The dredge was later moved back up to finish work near Chester. In 1937, some dredge parts were found on Arndt's ditch bank, near Horicon, by Palmer, Merlin, and Floyd Miescke (brothers) and Chuck Williams. They broke up the cast iron pieces over several weeks time and boated them across the river to the Van Brunt factory where they sold them for scrap iron. They used the money to buy hip waders and shells for that fall's hunting season. That old dredge was reshaped into farm implements that may still be in used for creating yet another crop somewhere!



Most of the 17 lateral ditches were dug 30 feet wide and about four feet deep either at one-mile intervals or wherever landowners requested to intercept streams flowing into the marsh from their uplands. Many of the laterals were named after those landowners, e.g. Schaumburg's, Lehner's, Miescke's Ditch, etc.

Ditching and draining the marsh has certainly permanently impacted its ecology, and the main impact was not as successful as they would have lived but did serve to destroy some original marsh

vegetation, invite and increase weeds, and increase the risk and danger of fires. The Main Ditch straightened and lowered the Rock River channel, increasing the speed of flow and lowering the water table by one foot. According to the Izaak Walton League, "That huge ditch became a vampire stream, which bled white the famous Horicon Marsh." The beautiful Rock River which would through the marsh was shred to ribbons. The marsh changed from green to brown. Ditching and draining "succeeded in spoiling the best ducking ground in the whole country, as there is not water enough left to run a boat, and the mud is too soft and deep to walk over."

The Main Ditch has filled in some over the years and today is shallow, north of Old Marsh Road. South and west of the Main Ditch, the West Branch of the Rock River is diverted into the Main Ditch. The flowing water keeps the ditch deeper there.

MUCK FARMING & BURNING (1893-1951)



Talk of draining for farming started as early as 1893 with farming actually beginning in the summer and fall of 1914. The Rock River Land Company, the same company which ditched and drained the marsh, dissolved and distributed its assets, mainly 18,000 acres of Horicon Marsh lands, among its original investors according to the individual's percentage of investment. Mr. B.H. Tallmadge had purchased several thousand acres of marsh on the northern end, so in 1914, he and his wife moved to Horicon and endeavored to then farm these muck lands and ultimately to elaborately promote their land as an investment scheme for development and colonization. They established a 300-acre experimental farm near the Chester Bridge on the northwest part of the present Horicon NWR in order to work out practical production problems and demonstrate the marsh's productivity to prospective buyers. A big Rumley oil pull tractor engine (pictured above) and gang plow was unloaded in Waupun and started to plow the soil in fall, and the tilled 200 acres within one month until winter approached. The Horicon truck company planned to develop a model truck farm of up to 1,000 acres. International Harvester sent observers and decided to participate with their own equipment. A delegation from the Cook County Truck Growers Association arrived from Illinois to observe and reported pleasing comments but that the land would take several years to develop well. The Horicon Advancement Association hosted a large tour of 150 people included 60 people with the Milwaukee Real Estate Board. They all arrived by train from the Merchants and Manufacturers Association of Milwaukee and traveled in a shuttle of 30 cars out to Chester and the marsh. Quite impressed, they declared at the end of the day that the marsh and surrounding area would become one of the richest areas in Wisconsin.

Part of a wide-scale promotion of the Horicon Valley Land Company, Tallmadge presented his agriculture development plan in a sales booklet called "Onions and Independence," boasting that the marsh would become the "Garden Spot of the World." Written by Indiana farmer Ed Oliver, the leading onion grower in America, he wrote that the marsh muck was above average farm land which could be improved and would not flood. It suggested that you could become wealthy and independent in a few years if you spent up to \$400 an acre and planted onions, a total of 10 acres. Onions were to be planted by May 1 and harvested in September, only requiring a five months stay. Easy labor, even children could help, and after the first crop you would be able to pay for a small house and live on the farm the second year. Tallmadge promised to refund rail transportation to Horicon or Chester for all who bought land. Pictures depicted incredible crop yields, pictures that, it was later found, were not taken at the marsh but elsewhere in the U.S., and interestingly, not one ad appeared locally. Sportsmen firmly opposed this land

promotion because they believed wetlands would be drained causing wildlife and marsh vegetation to become victims of an outrageous scheme. By 1916, they planted root crops like onions, carrots, potatoes.

Dredging created a road across the marsh and across a high spot, Stony Island. Hopes were to draw people from across the U.S., so Norris and his promoters built a 14 room stucco exterior hotel on the island which included indoor plumbing, electricity, and a vapor heat furnace! "Onions and Independence" touted: "you can leave on the C & NW almost any time during the day, buy your ticket to Chester, Wisconsin, and get off at that station, which is within a mile of our big model farm. In case you go to Chester, don't go to a hotel, but come right out to our farm..." A company bus shuttled passengers to the hotel for free from Chester once they arrived by rail. John Shirley and his family first lived in the hotel (he was the carpenter who built it) as manager of the project.

The need for the hotel was overstated, few people actually used it, and it became a private residence for a number of families. The Moore family lived in the house as the manager of the experimental farm. As the hotel tenants had not moved, the Moores were forced to pull the idle dredge up from Horicon to Stony Island. The dredge (houseboat, presumably) was really their home until 1922. The remains of the dredge lie in the marsh one-half mile south of the island, although it is possible they may have been shipped out. On September 30, 1924, Elmer Vanderkin and Lulu Moore married at the house and had a wedding. Lulu moved to live with Elmer at this boyhood home on Old Marsh Road near the Chester Bridge/river. The Moores worked the farm until 1925, and the house was razed shortly after they moved out. The hotel/house was located right on the road where a paved parking lot sits now. A well was located to the west with tool shed behind it and a barn and silo behind that.

Several additional buildings were constructed. On the north side of Stony Island a large, high stone foundation remains that was possibly built by the scheme promoters and appeared sometime after 1910 after the ditch and road were built. Today, no one recalls anything more than a foundation. The land developers also built summer shanties on the north end of stony Island. Those who purchased the huts lived in them during the growing season and even grew gardens around the shacks for decorative landscaping.



Remains of the greenhouse foundation as viewed from Old Marsh Rd

East of stony Island at the Main Ditch and Old Marsh Road, the promoters arranged for the John C. Monniger Company of Chicago to construct a 20' by 30' greenhouse in 1915 mainly of steel and glass and with an engine room which would

pump heat via a gasoline engine. It would showcase the variety of crops which could be grown on the marsh. Turned out it was used for potato and onion storage, and the onions were about the size of apples and not at all sharp. However, one of the promoters suddenly declared bankruptcy and payment for the greenhouse was never received. The Moninger Company dismantled the building the next year and moved it away. All that remains today is a stone foundation (above, visible with low water levels from Old marsh Rd, when open to the public for hiking and biking). South of the greenhouse, an impoundment called Potato Lake today was planted with onions and root crops, and maybe, potatoes.

North of the greenhouse and on the east bank of the Main Ditch, a man named Shunk, purchased 40 acres of land in about 1922, bitten by the land bug fever. He brought his wife, son, and an older relative named Lout. When the venture proved a failure, he moved his family, minus Lout, to a farm on County I, just west of the marsh. About 5'10" and 70 years old, sporting a white beard, Old Lout became a famous character nicknamed "Santa Claus." He wrapped gunny sacks around his old legs for added warmth in winter. He made frequent visits to Waupun, passing the Vanderkin home near the Chester Bridge, to

collect rotten fruits for brewing his special hooch back at home. He died quietly in his shack, a peaceful smile on his face, with a batch of hooch bubbling under the table.

This was a model farm planted in 1916 with onions, celery, potatoes, rye, wheat, and barley and which produced a perfect crop the first year. An ideal amount of rain the first year brought impressive results and led to hundreds of purchases. But the second year, too much rain flooded the farm, and the project sank from there (pictured right, Marsh road flooded over in the late 1910s) Sales were very slow. A few 40s were sold, but no 80s, at \$250 per acre. Those that purchased quickly realized they bought a lemon, and by the early 1920s, they realized it wouldn't work. By 1925, the scheme had proved to be a failure, and the promoters pulled out. Dropping farm prices after World War I finished off the project. In wet years, the soil was simply too wet and peaty to plant and/or harvest, and the onions tasted like peat! These efforts were abandoned. In 1925, the Hustisford dam was raised 18" to help offset the drainage ditches, but probably with little real impact.



Water had been drained from the marsh, plant life plowed under, and peat tilled. The marsh began to dry and rot and became combustible!

Occasionally the peat caught fire spontaneously. During a 12-year period, peat fires raged continually for months at a time, creating a frightening but beautiful site. One farmer (Pete Freucht) said he could read his newspaper at midnight, the light was so bright. Rumor has it that the smoke could be seen from Milwaukee. Smoke drove neighboring farmers from their homes. In 1933, the worst fire lasted three weeks long and engulfed the whole marsh at a depth of 18 inches to five feet down in the peat. The marsh was not finally re-flooded until 1951, and fires cooked the marsh until then.

Once only viewed as wasteland, the marsh now really was a wasteland. Between 1914-1930, ducks almost disappeared. Fires destroyed remaining wild rice and cranberries. In the 1920s, the marsh, devoid of wildlife, had been ruined. It was impossible to go more than two miles north of Horicon up the Main Ditch due to a lack of water. With low water, there was no food for waterfowl, and it was unusable for transportation, recreation, industry, or agriculture. Drainage interests sold the Hustisford dam in 1925, plain indication that they were through with Horicon Marsh in terms of agriculture. Interestingly, people did not realize the value of the marsh for its wildlife until we nearly lost it. It was those who had hunted the marsh in the 1800s who remembered the bounty of wildlife which thrived here and set to bringing back the birds.

SAVING HORICON MARSH!



It only took 12 months for the issue of restoring Horicon Marsh to become one of the leading conservation topics in America. In 1923, the Izaak Walton League, led locally by the Horicon Chapter and Louis "Curly" Radke, began fighting to save the marsh and restore its wildlife. One month later, the Izaak Walton League of Wisconsin committed to making the marsh into a wildlife refuge. In 1924, the national Izaak Walton League committed as well, listing saving Horicon Marsh on all of its national literature as a goal of the organization. All conservation clubs and organizations of any weight supported it. In 1924 or later, the Horicon Marsh Farm Land Protective Association formed in an effort to kill legislation for restoring the marsh. In 1924, the President of the United States issued a Recreation and Outdoor Conference to be held in Washington, D.C. The Horicon Marsh project was presented there, and great interest was shown in giving the marsh the great conservation measures needed to save America's outdoors for posterity. It was and perhaps still is the largest contiguous wetland restoration project in the U.S.

The goal was simple: to rebuild the dam for partial flooding of the marsh, not to restore it fully to a lake, but also not to let it lie a drained wasteland. Restoring the area back to natural marsh water levels by counteracting the draining effects of the ditches could be achieved by using a dam and/or blocking ditches and laterals. The Izaak Walton League worked extensively with the legislature in Madison for seven years to pass two bills, and a long legal battle ensued. Many hearings were held, and petitions were signed by 115,000 people in Wisconsin and presented to the governor. Personal investigations were made, and the marsh became a battle ground of national interest. Over the course of the fight, the Horicon Chapter and the Izaak Walton League also mailed 110,000 booklets, sponsored radio broadcasts, and received the support of 256 Wisconsin newspapers. Members made long and extensive appearances at hearings at the county court, state legislature, and Wisconsin Supreme Court.

A passionate, eloquent speaker, Radke implored: "A heritage has been stolen, a sacred trust has been trampled underfoot, a beauty spot has been crucified." At the end of one speech, he said, "There is no more to say – we fight not for the dollar, not for a name in the halls of fame, nor for the glory of man or state – but for the millions to come; the to-morrow of our boys and girls!"



Louis "Curly" Radke

Restoring wetlands was promoted as a way to protect agriculture from drought and flooding, an evident lesson of the Dust Bowl Days. In about 1925, an affidavit was signed by hundreds of area farmers from Hustisford, Lebanon, Ixonia, Watertown, and beyond. One affidavit, which was signed by Edward Goetsch, Dodge County treasurer, states: "That ever since the completion of said drainage ditches in Horicon Marsh, ordinary storms have worked great havoc and done tremendous damage to practically every farm bordering on Rock River between the village of Hustisford and the city of Watertown in Dodge County, Wisconsin, as well as farm lands above the city of Watertown in the county of Jefferson; that solely as a result of such drainage, thousands of acres of hay lands, and hundreds of acres of pasture and grain lands have been overflowed by the flood waters hurled down the channel of Rock River through the dredge ditches aforesaid: That all of the farmers above named and hundreds of other owners of lands affected by the flood waters of Rock River, in said vicinity will continue to be injured each year by reason of the hurling of storm waters down the channel of Rock river through the dredge ditches aforesaid, unless the said flood waters are held as in former years by a dam at Horicon; that such dam should be high enough to keep a reservoir of waters on Horicon Marsh at least four feet higher than under present conditions."



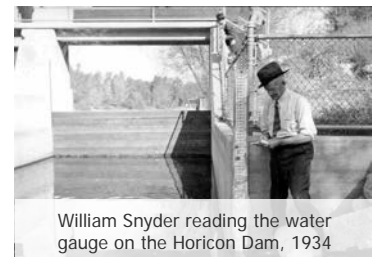
Legislative Inspection of the marsh, 1927

In April 1927, the entire state legislature made a personal inspection of the marsh (pictured left). The Wisconsin

Conservation Commission held an investigation meeting of the marsh that year as well and was impressed by the entire lack of wildlife and by the absence of agricultural activity in the drainage area.

Later in 1927, the state passed the Horicon Marsh Wildlife Refuge bill, and the governor signed it. This new law provided \$250,000 to buy the land for a fur farm, wildlife refuge, and game preserve and \$10,000 for the Conservation Commission to build and operate the dam which is still present and functioning today.

A small amount of land was initially purchased, and much later the bulk of the property was also acquired by condemnation proceedings. First, the state had to compensate landowners for damages to farming. Months of litigation, hearings, and postponements followed, slowing the actual restoration of the marsh. In 1929, drainage interests tried to nullify the Act, and the case was heard by the Supreme Court which declared the law constitutional. The Izaak Walton League and the Wisconsin Federation of Women's Clubs worked together to defeat their attempts. Construction for the new dam began in 1930 and was completed and gates closed in 1934 despite another legislative attack to repeal the Act from drainage interests in 1931, which delayed re-flooding with injunctions, controversy for nearly four years. Again, the Izaak Walton League and Wisconsin Federation of Women's Clubs partnered and successfully battled them. During this time, the Wisconsin Conservation Commission resolved remaining problems with land owners and farmers. Closing the dam in turn doused the smoldering peat fires. Conservationists hoped native plant life would re-grow and attract wildlife again. With the additional help of wildlife management, the marsh rebounded!



William Snyder reading the water gauge on the Horicon Dam, 1934

On April 20, 1935, the Izaak Walton League and its marsh chapter held a celebration of its victory! Duck Liberation Day was dedicated to "The Dawn of a New Day for Wild Life on Horicon Marsh" and was attended by 5,000 people. They released 1,300 domestic ducks in the marsh as live decoys to rebuild waterfowl numbers. The ducks were bought from near and as far as California, Mexico, Iowa, and Michigan. Joe Penner, the famous national radio star and supporter of restoring the marsh, personally sent 500 ducks from New York. The event received unanimous support from the media, sports, and civic clubs, Federated Women's clubs, educators, and all conservation-minded people. School bands from Beaver Dam, Waupun, Mayville, Juneau, Oconomowoc, Horicon, and the Boy's Tech School of Milwaukee performed. Local school children and teachers arrived, all bringing ducks! The governor and other officials gave speeches on the merits of conservation and the need of teaching it in schools.



Radke releasing geese at the ceremonies at Horicon Marsh, 1935

In 1936, protesters again brought the case to the Supreme Court. The 1939, Local Statutes of Wisconsin declared Horicon Marsh a public highway and forever free for the passage of boats, barges, canoes, rafts, and other crafts. Wisconsin statutes declared that the Rock River was navigable as far north as the north boundary of Dodge County. By 1939, the state had purchased only 1,000 acres. Also in 1939, the Supreme Court ruled that the Conservation Commission could not flood land which it did not own in order to restore the marsh unless it had gotten permission to do so or had compensated the farmer for the loss/damages. By 1940, because of state and national efforts from the

Izaak Walton League, the federal Pittman-Robertson act dedicated an eleven cents excise tax per dollar spent on sports equipment to the state to buy and protect the marsh.



By 1940, the federal government accepted the task to purchase the remainder of the marsh. The Migratory Bird Conservation Commission approved the establishment of the new Refuge with 12,569 acres forming its nucleus primarily with Duck Stamp funds but also with other migratory bird funds. In 1940, the state and federal government began purchasing Horicon Marsh lands. By 1941, the state owned enough land to keep the water level behind the dam at 80 feet. In 1941, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service began to purchase the remainder of the marsh for the Horicon National Wildlife refuge with federal duck stamp funds.



Two of the first properties purchased by the federal government were from:

- W.L. Jackman (attorney serving as trustee for the estate of Katherine K. Fowler of Chicago), who sold the largest parcel, 5,558 acres, mainly the eastern half of the Refuge's current wetland acreage.
- G.A. McWilliams, the drainage interest, who sold the second largest parcel, 4,756 acres mostly in one large tract (but including three smaller pieces) encompassing what is roughly the western half of the Refuge's wetland acreage today.

Together these two parcels cover about 1/2 of the Refuge's current total acreage. The southern property line of both of these two previous owners' lands is situated 1/4 of the section south of the current western half of Main Dike Road. Therefore it is likely that this geography helped determine the southern boundary of Horicon National Wildlife Refuge (and the northern boundary of Horicon Marsh State Wildlife Area) because that line falls in the same location.

The southern third of the marsh today is called the Horicon Marsh State Wildlife Area is managed by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

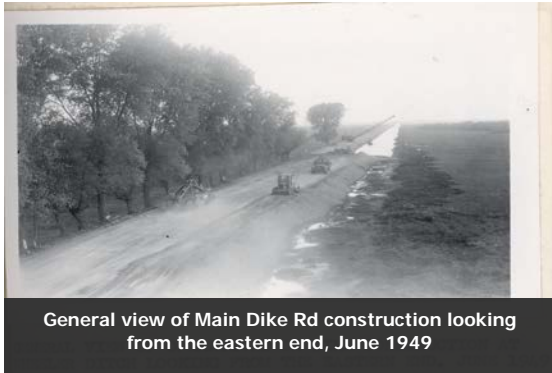
In 1947, the national Izaak Walton League stated its share of the restoration work was complete.

So the rough sequence of ownership (or management, in parenthesis) of the **marsh** would be: Native Americans; U.S. government (congress); State of Wisconsin (school land commissioners); Union Mechanics Manufacturing Company (Scanlyn, Shepard, and Company; Horicon and Diana Shooting Clubs, others); B.H. Tallmadge/Horicon Valley Land Company; many private landowners; U.S. government (Fish and Wildlife Service) and state government (Department of Natural Resources).

The rough sequence of ownerships) or management, in parenthesis) of the **dam** would be (Job Perry and Solomon Juneau); Albert Ellis, David Giddings, and Moses Strong; Henry Hubbard; Moses Strong?; Henry Hubbard, Jr.?; (John Preston, William Larabee, and Martin Rich); Horicon Iron and Manufacturing Company; Union Mechanics Manufacturing Company; Rock River Land Company; and others, ending with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

A total of 117 tracts were purchased from October 10, 1940 and March 11, 1977 to form the majority of the current Horicon National Wildlife Refuge, but by far most of those purchases were made by 1950. Only seven of them were made after that, between 1957 and 1977. Nineteen of the 117 tracts were purchased through condemnation proceedings. Most however were purchased from willing sellers, many of those who looked at selling as an opportunity to divest themselves of swamplands which would not produce crops. It must be stated, though, that many landowners made a personal sacrifice in selling their property to the U.S. Fish and wildlife Service to form the Horicon National Wildlife Refuge for benefit of wildlife and the American people. Some did so with resentment and felt the federal government was stealing their land and forcing them to sell. They expressed their resistance and/or desire to hold out for the best selling price possible through the vehicle of condemnation proceedings. In many cases, those negative memories and feelings have been passed down through the generations, to some of the current landowners who still own property neighboring the Refuge. As a result, the Refuge has a very favorable relationship with some neighbors, while others look disdainfully toward the Service.

EARLY REFUGE MANAGEMENT



General view of Main Dike Rd construction looking from the eastern end, June 1949



Radial gate construction in 1951

To raise water levels, provide greater water level control on the Refuge, and improve duck and goose nesting and resting areas, a dike or dam was built across the marsh just north of the state/federal boundary. It followed Wheeler Dike to the east of Main Ditch and Leubke Ditch to the west of the Main Ditch. The reason that today's Dike Road enters the Refuge on the east side from the west, then turning north, then finally shooting west all the way to the Main Ditch is because previous private property owners maintained their own driveway there. An unimproved road existing along one side of the Wheeler Ditch at least half way to the Main Ditch, probably just using the dredge spoil banks. Although one early map shows a proposed dam site running straight west across the Refuge between the southern property boundary and what is Main Dike Road today (as well as a spillway and control structure), it was probably much more economical to simply use the existing ditches and spoil banks to build Dike Road.

In 1948, construction of Main Dike Road began and was completed in 1952 to flood 12,500 acres of the resulting Main Pool to the north of it, costing several hundred thousand dollars. You may drive down into the heart of the marsh on that road seasonally to enjoy fishing, bird watching, or even hunting.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TODAY



Duck Release in 1935



Today, the two agencies, USFWS and WDNR, continue to manage the marsh together as one wetland ecosystem for the benefit of wildlife and for the enjoyment of people. Citizen participation is encouraged through the Rock River Headwaters, Inc., the Marsh Management Committee, the Friends of Horicon National Wildlife Refuge, or through the refuge's volunteer program.



Enjoy Horicon Marsh's Living History...

Historical Architecture Walking Tour, Waupun (920) 324.3491
Hollenstein Wagon and Carriage Factory, Mayville (920) 387.5530
Horicon Historic Preservation Commission Walking Tours
Maunk-shak-kah (historic tour of Horicon Marsh), (920) 387.2658 x24
Meandering Through Mayville Historic Homes, Mayville (920) 387.4892
Satterlee Clark House and School House, Horicon (920) 485-2006 / (920) 485.2011
Waupun Heritage Museum – Carnegie Library, Waupun (920) 324.7931
White Limestone School Museum, Mayville (920) 387.3474 / (920) 488.3395

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