

**CELEBRATE WHITE LAKE
WHITE LAKE CAUSEWAY BOTANICAL HISTORICAL WALK**

Roger P. Scharmer
ASLA-AICP

Maps tell such interesting stories - stories of evolving land patterns, urban development; ownership names, power, influence, greed, money, marriage/family; all the human elements always present in the saga of life.

From Native American Indian times, the upper reaches of White Lake have had natural cultural importance. It's where the water ends in a confusing pattern of plant ecology and the land awaits footprints.

An early 1755 French shoreline map labels White Lake, La Riviere Blanche, or the White River. A more accurate map prepared by the Surveyor General's office at Cincinnati in 1839 shows the governmental grid imposed over the natural terrain and raises the question - where do the new settlers cross this upper portion of White Lake? Building a causeway connecting sections 28 with 29 across the White Lake water barrier seemed to be the choice location.

With the coming of the lumber age (Charles Mears first water powered sawmill was constructed at Whitehall's Mill Pond in 1837), the lumber era began. Gathering momentum in the 1840's and 1850's, the prosperous lumber economic boom time was in the 1860's, 70's and 80's. Money, equipment, labor and skills brought great changes to this northern tip of White Lake. The 1877 map of the White Lake causeway illustrates how Montague and Whitehall were connected by both a horse and carriage road and the Muskegon-Pentwater Railroad. The economic power positioning of the Ferry-Dowling Company office and the Staples and Covell Mill at the mouth of the White River was as occurred. The 1877 map also shows how the river has been realigned in a straight functional manner by the White River Log & Boom Company. C. D. Dowling was Superintendent and Treasurer. The landholding power names of Ferry, Dowling, Slocum, Covell, Dalton, Cook, Staples and Blodgett read out in the land ownership patterns connecting land to lumber sawmill names.

The 1880 birds eye views of Montague and Whitehall show the towns' structures down to the most minute correct detail. How these birds eye aerials were done so accurately before flight is always puzzling. Note how the upper reaches of White Lake are still connected with open flowing water. The natural lake

forms are being altered for industrial efficiency through the use of lumber by products such as slabs and saw dust landfills.

The Sanborn Fire Insurance maps of 1883 tell in fine detail the location of the many sawmills and other buildings of the time. The cluster of sawmills along the White Lake causeway and the upper reaches of lower White Lake near the river's boom yards show the connecting influences of lumber, shingle, basket and businesses with the steam engines built at the Wilson and Hendrie Machine Shop. The sequence of floating logs from the river to the boom yards for sorting on to the sawmill where the logs were cut into lumber to the newly formed shipping docks (labeled "Dock Built of Slabs") and then on to the lumber boats for shipping shows a highly creative, functional use of this new causeway land formation. For views of these developments, see the original Frederick Norman oil paintings in Whitehall's First of America Bank on Mears Avenue. The changing courses of natural waterways and streams is also observed. Montague's Buttermilk Creek is now placed in a culvert beneath the Wilson and Hendrie Foundry at Water and Spring Streets. Later during the 1960's, the creek would be culverted between Water and Ferry Streets.

With the complete harvesting or destruction of the native lumber lands, the 1892 Sanborn maps now label the once thriving E. P. Ferry "Red" and "Brown" mills as "Ruins of Mill". The lumber era is over. But mankind and nature have an outstanding relationship for continuing survival. The White Lake Businessman's Club map of 1910 now promotes "Beautiful White Lake" as a vacation paradise with the Goodrich Steamship Lines connecting White Lake to Chicago with an overnight voyage costing \$4.00 round trip. The era of White Lake the Beautiful" is born and further changes will alter the White Lake causeway.

Today, we'll observe how all the past and present changes are continuing to alter the look and physical form of the White Lake causeway. From a horse and buggy road and a parallel railroad track, the now present four land roadway speeds us between Montague and Whitehall at travel times unimagined by early settlers. The saga of the White Lake causeway continues

The White Lake Causeway A Historical Prospective

Back in the misty past, bands of Ottawa Indians traveling north through the White Lake area from the south would follow a trail that crossed what is now Division Street in Whitehall, and angle towards the present Oakhurst Cemetery at the Old Trading Post at the east end of Weesies Road in Montague Township. The crossing at that point was nearly three miles north east of the present Whitehall-Montague Causeway bridge.

In 1837, Charles Mears came to the White Lake area, dammed a small creek and built the first water powered sawmill in the area on South Shore Drive still called the Mill Pond. One of the first commercial vessels to ferry supplies from Chicago to Mears and others on White Lake was the sloop Ranger, captained by J.D. Hanson. Captain Hanson liked the area and in 1849 he acquired 810 acres of land on the south side of the lake. He built his farm home on the point of land we know as Goodrich Park and became a very successful farmer. The first steam powered sawmill was built by Hall and Whitaker on an acre of ground they leased from Hanson in what now is Covell Park. In 1860, Capt. Hanson decided to move his family to Claybanks and sold his entire 810 acres for \$5,000.00. The acreage would later become the city of Whitehall. Giles Slocum and Charles Mears purchased the land and platted the town which they called Mears. North/south streets were named after members of the Mears family and east/west streets were named for the Slocum family. They named the street which led to Capt. Hanson's farm after him. More and more people were moving into the area and the little village thrived.

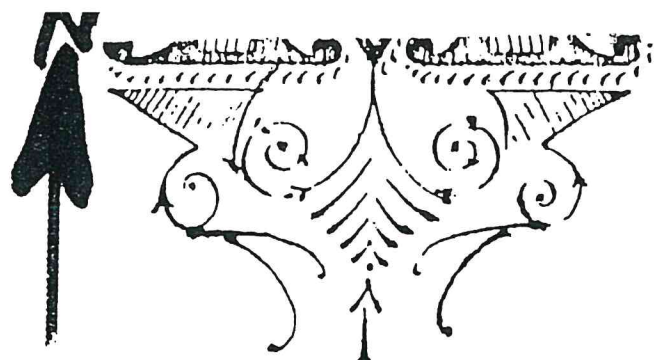
In the meantime, the north side of White Lake was not idle! In 1817, Job Sargent, a veteran of the War of 1812, began homesteading a tract of land given him by the government for his service in the war. That land grant was then part of the Northwest Territories. Today it is most of Montague and Montague Township. He built his home and raised his family of nine children at about the corner of Eilers and Sikkenga Roads. He

lived to be 89 years old and is buried at Montague Cemetery; the only known veteran of the 1812 War to be buried in Western Michigan. Jobs son, Nathan, later built his home and blacksmith shop near the present center of Montague.

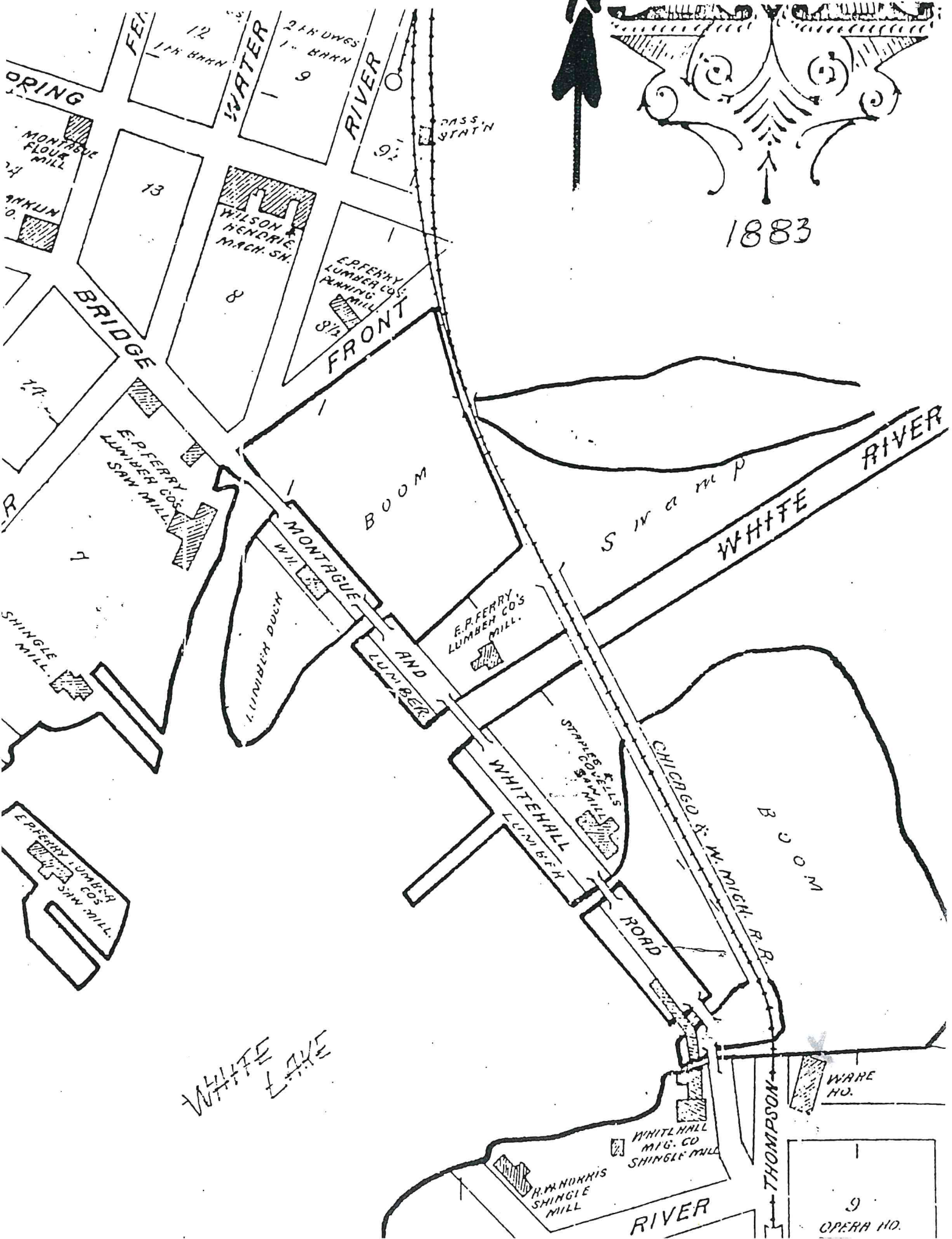
Rev. William Montague Ferry, of Mackinaw Island and Grand Haven, began buying up timber land on the north side of the lake and in 1850 built a water powered mill where White Lake empties into Lake Michigan, known as the Mouth. Many more mills were built around the lake and when all the easily accessible timber had been felled, the lumbermen began to look upriver for new forest stands. Steam powered mills replaced the water powered mills and lumbermen such as the Ferrys moved their operations nearer the supply.

In 1864, the County Board of Supervisors approved funds to build a swing bridge over the White River, the bridge would be wide enough for a schooner to pass through. Old timers claim the water was 20 feet deep at the opening. The building of the bridge allowed the mill owners to better control the spring log drives. The meandering lower river was dredged into a canal; booming or separating yards were formed and extensive filling provided areas to build mills and other buildings where only water had been before. Five bridges in addition to the big swing bridge allowed water and logs to flow easily into White Lake. The big Red Mill of Ferry and Dowling operated about where Ellenwood Condominiums are now, and a second Ferry mill was built on fill at the Dog and Suds site. The huge Staples Covell mill was built on piles and fill at present Covell Park. Early maps refer to these area as "made-ground." The Staples Covell mill outlasted all the others, organizing the last White River log drive in 1903. It continued in operation until 1907 and burned in 1917. The small frame building that served as the office for the Staples Covell mill was eventually moved to 115 Hanson Street and now serves as a private residence.

Jean L. Mikkelsen,
White Lake Historical Society



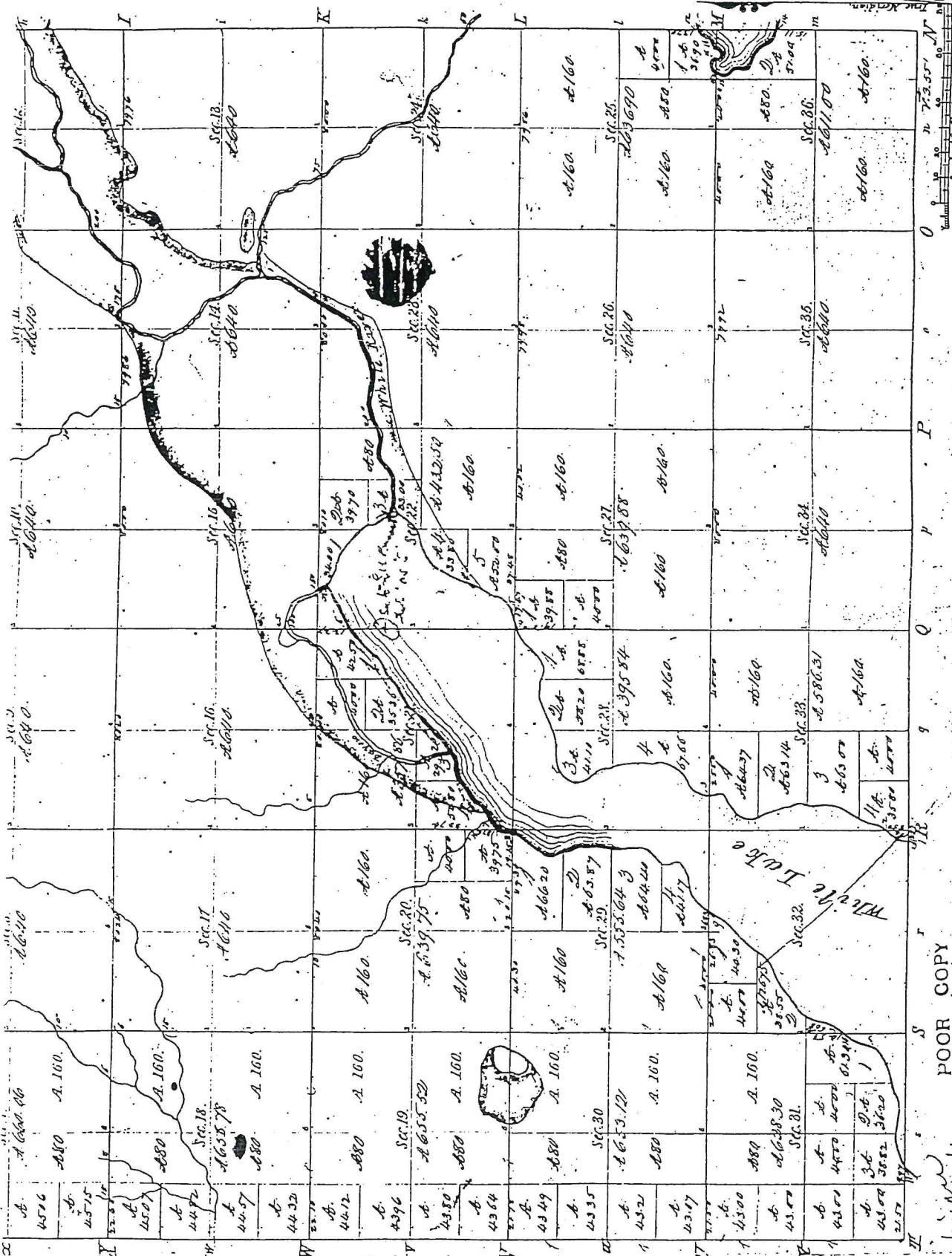
1883



WHITE LAKE

9
OPERA NO.

1	4576	A. 660.46	12.00	4.00	12.00	4.00
2	4577	A. 100.	10.00	4.00	10.00	4.00
3	4578	A. 100.	10.00	4.00	10.00	4.00
4	4579	A. 100.	10.00	4.00	10.00	4.00
5	4580	A. 100.	10.00	4.00	10.00	4.00
6	4581	A. 100.	10.00	4.00	10.00	4.00
7	4582	A. 100.	10.00	4.00	10.00	4.00
8	4583	A. 100.	10.00	4.00	10.00	4.00
9	4584	A. 100.	10.00	4.00	10.00	4.00
10	4585	A. 100.	10.00	4.00	10.00	4.00
11	4586	A. 100.	10.00	4.00	10.00	4.00
12	4587	A. 100.	10.00	4.00	10.00	4.00
13	4588	A. 100.	10.00	4.00	10.00	4.00
14	4589	A. 100.	10.00	4.00	10.00	4.00
15	4590	A. 100.	10.00	4.00	10.00	4.00
16	4591	A. 100.	10.00	4.00	10.00	4.00
17	4592	A. 100.	10.00	4.00	10.00	4.00
18	4593	A. 100.	10.00	4.00	10.00	4.00
19	4594	A. 100.	10.00	4.00	10.00	4.00
20	4595	A. 100.	10.00	4.00	10.00	4.00
21	4596	A. 100.	10.00	4.00	10.00	4.00
22	4597	A. 100.	10.00	4.00	10.00	4.00
23	4598	A. 100.	10.00	4.00	10.00	4.00
24	4599	A. 100.	10.00	4.00	10.00	4.00
25	4600	A. 100.	10.00	4.00	10.00	4.00



The above Map of Township 10 N. 2. North of Range 10 W. 17 West
 Principal Meridian, Minnesota, is hereby conformable to the
 of the survey thereof prepared by this Office which have been examined and
 approved by the
 Commissioner of the
 General Land Office

Survey Designated	By Whom Surveyed	Date of Contract	Amount of Survey	When Surveyed	Total number of Acres
Township lines	Hall & Brothers	July 17 1837	116 3/4	1st 2d 1837	21 445.85
Subdivisions	John Mallett	28	64 5/8	1st 2d 1837	

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