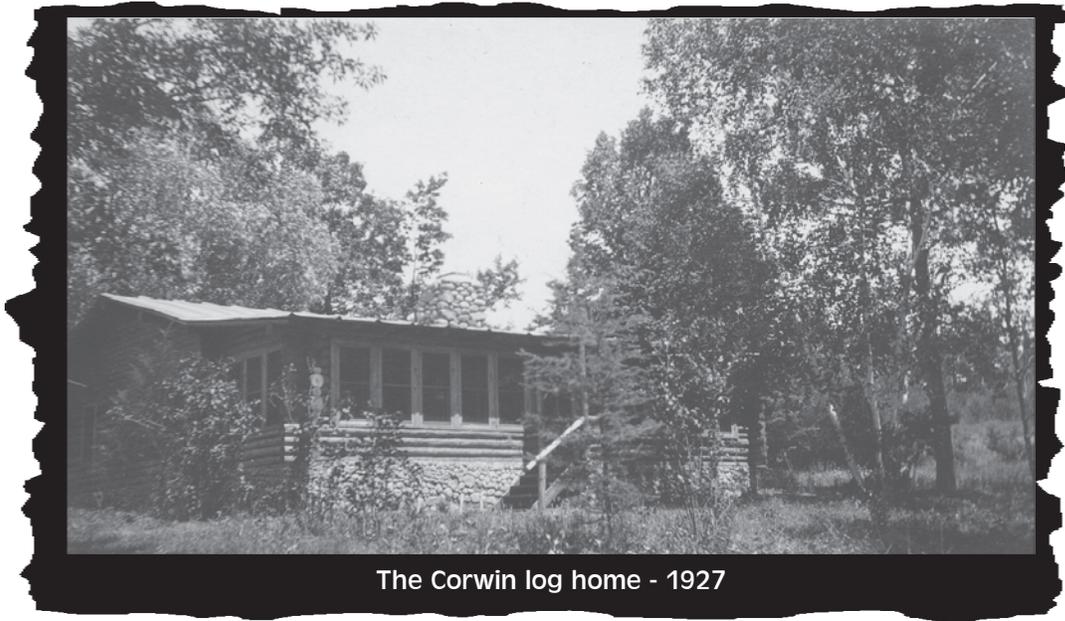


# *Big Sand Memoirs*



The Corwin log home - 1927

*A Story of Big Sand  
by Charles H. Corwin...*

*...with contributions by  
Dr. Jerome Hilger and  
Mrs. Mary Sue Zelle Lindsay*





## Preface

*For many years, I spoke with family and friends about writing my memories of what my wife, Betty, lovingly refers to as “my precious Big Sand.” Finally, in the winter of 1997, Betty, my family, and friends suggested that I stop talking about it and put my thoughts on paper before I forgot them!*

*I contacted two longtime friends, Jerry Hilger and Mary Sue Zelle Lindsay, and asked if they, too, would be willing to share their recollections. Thus, this book contains a record of events from several sources. Surprisingly, our stories coincide as we recall the many years we have spent capturing the mystery and beauty of Big Sand.*

*The first section of the book — “Big Sand...the Families and Places” — was written by me and primarily deals with the period from 1925 until World War II. This is from my own memories, things told by my mother and other people. My times and dates in this story are not all exact. Time does dull one’s memory, but the facts are quite accurate.*

*The second section — “Big Sand...the Lake and its History” — offers Jerry Hilger’s account of the lake’s history, particularly from an ecological perspective.*

*I would like to thank Jerry and Mary Sue for taking the time to assist me with this project. My thanks also to MiMi Long for photos and historical documents; Karl Dyer and all those who took the time to talk with me while I was gathering information; Cynthia Jones for her assistance in publishing the book; the Big Sand Lake Area Association for their support; and last, but certainly not least, my family, and all the families and people that, through the years, have made Big Sand such a special place.*

*Charlie Corwin*

MANTRAP VALLEY-ITASCA PARK REGION  
"Where Fishing's Always Good"



See  
Hurd's Acres  
First

Telephone  
Park Rapids  
6-F-20

DORSET, MINNESOTA

Nov. 8 1933.

Dr. & Mrs. J. H. Kennedy  
Dixon, Ill.

Dear Friends:-

Your cabin was occupied only 3  
nights after you left for which we received  
\$8.55 deducting our 10% commission leaves a  
credit in your favor of \$7.70.

The following statement will show  
the amount due in interest due on the cabin to  
Aug 4 1933 and the extra 22 feet to Nov 1 1933.  
and the \$40.00 due on principal on the 22 feet  
making \$61.10 which is due at the present time.

Interest of \$400.00 to Aug 24 1933	\$24.00	- Int 4/10.00-credit
Payment on 22 feet of Land	40.00	Payment
Interest of \$80.00 of 22 feet to 11/1/33	6.80	Int-Nov-1-Jan
Commission on rental of cabin 10% on \$8.55	.85	Commission
	<u>69.65</u>	

Credit due 3 nights at \$2.85 per night (Cabin rent)	<u>8.55</u>
Total due	\$ 61.10

Owing to my present financial condition  
I hope you can see your way to send me a check for  
this at an early date, it will certainly be appreciated  
if you can do so.

It looks like our winter has started  
in pretty early our first snow came October 14th  
and there was about six inches of it, which melted  
but during the past week we have gotten about 6 or  
7 inches more and it is coming down thick and fast  
at the present moment.

The Anderson's and some guests were here for a  
few days last week and left for home Saturday, the Corwins  
are here now and expect to remain for a few days more.  
Ducks have been coming over quite regularly and there has  
been some very nice bags made.

You may be interested in knowing that the other  
day Mason shot 3 shunks and I had the pleasure of skinning  
them out and now have the hides out curing.

With kindest regards, I am,

Yours very truly,

P. S.

Mother says to tell you to write us a letter and  
tell us all about yourselves and what you are  
all doing.

HURD'S ACRES is a  
sub-division containing  
two miles of wooded  
Lake Shore between  
Lower Bottle, Big Sand  
and Lake Emma lakes.  
A most picturesque set-  
ting in about the Geo-  
graphical center of the  
Nationally known Man-  
trap Chain of Lakes.

These waters are the  
home of the Fighting  
Tiger Muscall on g  
America's Gamest fresh  
water fish, also the  
home of the Large and  
Small Mouth Black Bass

The Cycle of Time;  
Wheel of Fortune, or  
possibly some other  
Phenomenon has brot  
Minnesota's Ten Thou-  
sand Lakes to the eyes  
of the Nation.

The Best is being se-  
lected, we cannot plant  
another Crop of Lakes.  
Have you selected your  
plot in this, The Na-  
tion's Summer Play-  
ground? We are offer-  
ing choice selections at  
nominal prices. Indeli-  
sion and delay spells  
higher prices and se-  
cond class shore line.

If motoring come to  
Hurd's Tourist Camp,  
Under the Pines, on  
the Narrows between  
two lakes, also known  
as the Duck Pass Fly-  
away. Ideal Bathing  
Beach, Boats and Boat.

Sole owner of several  
miles of Wooded Lake  
Shore Acreage Not  
Platted

Will Quote Wholesale  
Prices on Plots of  
These Shore  
Acres

This letter was written by H.D. Hurd to Dr. & Mrs. J.H. Kennedy in 1933.  
The cabin referred to is still owned by a Kennedy daughter, Mary Sheldon,  
and her daughter, MiMi Long.

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## *Big Sand...The Families and Places*

In 1925, my parents purchased land on the East Shore of Big Sand Lake from developer and resort owner H.D. Hurd. It was one of the first lots he sold. They then built a cabin. This cabin was built by the Thomas brothers, owners of Pine Cone Resort. I was five years old.

Two years later, a Mrs. Wilbright sold them a homestead of approximately 160 acres on the North Shore. Here they built a log home contracted by Ben Quale of Dorset. His father-in-law, a Swedish immigrant, was the builder. My brother, Bill, my mother, and I spent our summers there from 1925 until World War II. We lived in Bismarck, North Dakota most of that time, moving to Fargo in 1937. Dad would come to the lake periodically but the depression and drought of the 1930s kept him attending to business in Bismarck.

After the war, I went into a car dealership in Fargo. From that time on until 1975, my wife, Betty, and I raised a family of four children and had a cottage in the Detroit Lakes area. Located only 50 miles from Fargo, the commute was much easier. Our time at Big Sand was limited to several weeks each year at my parent's cabin.

When I compare the early period on the lake with today, the change is tremendous. The only home on the shore of our first cabin was owned by the Kennedy family of Dixon, Illinois. They had four children, older than I, but they were very good to me and Bill. The cabin is still owned by a Kennedy daughter, Mary Sheldon, and her daughter, Mimi Long.

One of the more interesting locations in the area became Paulette's Place and later, Chateau Paulette. The site, between Lake Ida and Little Sand, had originally been home to a trading post opening in 1878 and owned by Buckskin Pearson. The Pearson family had immigrated from one of the Scandinavian countries. There are two different versions of how Mr. Pearson met his demise. My mother's story told that he and a son-in-law got drunk and in a fight. This younger man hit Pearson in the temple and killed him. The other version was told by Carl Olson of the Olson Resort on Mantrap Lake. Carl was a crusty old-timer who guided my parents to catch muskies on Mantrap in the early '20s — which they did and which was what attracted them to this area in the first place! His version puts Pearson in a fight with a guy from Boulder Lake. This guy picked up a board that had a nail in it. Hitting Pearson in the face, the nail went in an eye and killed him. Mrs. Pearson auctioned off most of her possessions. Our family purchased a deer head and moose horns that are still in our original log home, now owned by one of our daughters, Carolyn. Mother remembered Mrs. Pearson sitting on a pile of rummage during the auction. Apparently she could not speak English and was left with nothing and nowhere to go. A very sad story.

In 1926, a trio composed of H.D. Hurd, a banker in Dorset named Colby Hewitt, and Ben Quale, a lumber yard owner from Dorset, were planning to purchase the Pearson's land. This was not to be. Somehow Anna and Leo Paulette, a cab driver from St. Louis, beat them to it and acquired the land.

The history of  
Chateau  
Paulette is  
a story in  
itself...

The history of Chateau Paulette is a story in itself. The Paulettes started building and worked on it every winter. Anna even went out in the woods and worked with the men logging for the lumber for the all-log construction. The building kept expanding. The hardwood floor and the booths you now see were built by the Paulettes. Every week Anna would handwax and polish the dance floor. A fireplace was built on what was then the east wall, and as expansion went on it occupied the center of the dance hall. They advertised "*Dance Around the Fireplace.*" Unfortunately, one of the postwar operators tore it down and destroyed the charm it added.

Anna was the worker while Leo stayed behind the bar sucking on cigarettes and serving pop, etc. In the early '30s, prohibition was the law. The Paulettes ran a tight ship and allowed no rowdiness or drinking. My mother would say, until her dying days at the age of 98, that she didn't worry about us kids going there. "I know if there were any misbehaving with any of you, Anna would physically throw you out the door." She was right!

During the week in the late '30s and early '40s, Paulette's was open with a nickelodeon for music and 5 cent cokes. A great number of my friends in the area were old enough to drive and every evening 20 or 30 of us would congregate. I remember that was where I met Clyde Johnson, who is a businessman in Park Rapids today. Most of us learned to dance at Paulette's in the era of swing, big bands, etc.

The Paulettes sold "The Chateau" after World War II. They had run a very successful business through the Great Depression and were able to retire in Texas. Since they sold, a series of owners have operated the nightclub, most of them unsuccessfully. It had been vacant and for sale in recent years. During the summer of 1996, it was purchased and renovated by two brothers, Brian and Wayne Klitzke from the Twin Cities area. They started operating on a limited scale that fall. I wish them great success in their endeavor.

There were very few cabins on Big Sand in my early days. Seven-hundred feet to the west of us was a family from Minneapolis called Blackburn. The building is still there but unusable and about to fall down. To the east, bordering the Hurds, the Bliss family built a cabin. It was next owned by two sisters named Nelson, then Helen and Jack Schultz, and presently by the Henkelmeyers from St. Cloud.

My brother and I spent lots of time playing at Hurd's Acres. Hurd's Acres is now owned by Helen Billing and she lives in the original home of the Hurds. The Hurds had horses, cows and lots of cats. At that time, the Hurds

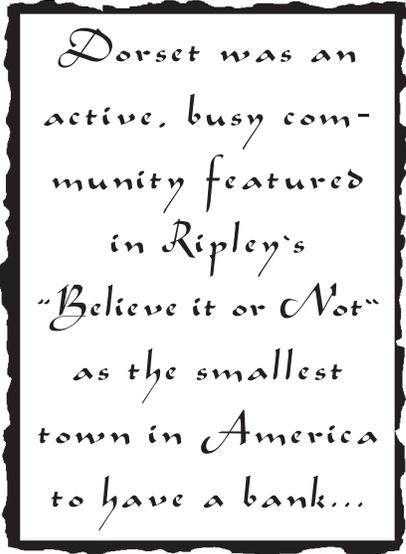
rented a small field from us that had been cleared by the homesteader, Wilbright. Hurd farmed the land raising oats and other grains to feed his livestock. They had a covered building in the thoroughfare between Lake Emma and Big Sand. There they sold minnows, frogs and pop. In the early days, the channels between lakes in the Mantrap chain were called thoroughfares. Brother Bill and I would catch green frogs for fishing, which were abundant then. Now they are very rare, as are frogs around the world. Probably pollution? We'd sell a dozen of them and Hurd would pay us with a bottle of pop. There is a small log barn on the north side of Highway 40, opposite the present Billing home. It had a small loft for hay. When it was being filled, I would get up there and stomp it down. Hurd would pay me with a bottle of pop per hour. My kids and grandchildren tell me I was a big sucker! For many years, they had a rental campsite on the west side of the creek plus several cabins. We also bought milk from them — unpasteurized. We drank a lot of it and all survived!

Mail was delivered at the intersection of Highways 40 and 7. Highway 7 was called the Mantrap Road. What now is Highway 40 in those days was a sand trail that ran along the lake shore. My Dad made a deal with the county giving them land on the north side of our cottage to put in a new road. It is basically where Highway 40 is today.

One of the most delightful persons I ever knew was a man named August Lof. He did quite a bit of maintenance work for us in those times. Although he was by then an elderly man, he was as strong as a bull despite a logging injury to his back. He was a true lover of nature and a part-time lay minister. He always carried a magnifying glass and would have us look at things like the beauty of budding leaves unfolding in the spring. He lived on the north side of Highway 40 opposite George Nau's present home. There are still Lofs in the area. His son, Eddie, started Lof Lumber in Nevis which was sold a few years ago. Eddie, in his 90s, died several years ago.

August's home was then occupied by Carl Worke, another delightful man. He did maintenance work in the late '30s on the local roads. At that time both Highways 7 and 40 were sand roads — no gravel or hardtop. I can still see Mr. Worke driving a team of horses pulling a blade scraper, not accomplishing much but moving the sand around!

Dorset was an active, busy community then, in a completely different way from what it is today. There was the Hewitt's bank, featured in Ripley's "Believe it or Not" because Dorset was the smallest town in America to have a bank. The bank was where the gift shop is now and was successfully



*Dorset was an active, busy community featured in Ripley's "Believe it or Not" as the smallest town in America to have a bank...*

relocated to Park Rapids. Ben Quale's lumber yard, in the area of Rick and Laura's "Companeros" and the Avenson General Store and Post Office, in the Dorset House restaurant were other very active businesses. A guy named Warner lived in what is now the Dorset Store and LaPasta Cafe.

A branch line of the Great Northern Railroad ran from Park Rapids to Walker with a stop in Dorset. Of course, this is where the biking trail presently is. This branch line carried the mail for the Avenson's Post Office. A social event was going to Dorset and meeting the mail train.

Avenson's ran a well-supplied store. They also carried people on charge accounts and wouldn't send a bill until the end of the summer. We wondered how they could carry accounts for that many months. I'm sure that during the Depression, some of the accounts went unpaid. One of their sons, Leon, became owner of the Citizen's National Bank in Park Rapids. Twenty years ago when Betty and I were planning on building our home on Big Sand, I had a visit with Leon. I asked if any of his family was working with him and he said no. This led to a discussion about his selling the bank and retiring. He told me he had recently been offered a figure which to me was a big amount. Leon said it was worth more than that and he didn't accept the offer. Later he did sell it and one of the buyers was Clyde Johnson, my boyhood friend from Paulette's. Leon lived on Lake Ida and died a few years ago.

My acquaintances on Big Sand were broadened by two events, the first one when I was old enough to take out the motor

*My  
acquaintances  
on Big Sand  
were broadened  
by two events...*

boat. The boat was a wooden one built by Ole Lind's Boatworks in Detroit Lakes, powered by an Elto motor with a flywheel crank to start it. A dear friend of ours was Ed Wahl who owned the present Betty and Bob Rust cottage and was Betty's uncle. Ed was from a small community close to Bismarck. I always liked to visit with him. I remember a few years ago sitting looking over the lake with Ed. He took me by the arm and said, "Charlie, I can still see you out there in your boat going around in a big circle with your big dog in the prow!" Major was my big Chesapeake dog and my faithful companion.

The second event was being able to use the car, as this was when I met other kids living on different shores. A small sailboat that I went "visiting" with also bolstered the situation. The Iowa Beach area had been developed for several years. Most of the people were from Iowa. The Rachael and Heinie Saggause from Dennison, Iowa became my second family, and I always referred to Rachael as my second mother. Heinie owned a movie theater and a Buick-Chevrolet dealership in Dennison. They had four children: Jack the oldest; Bob, who was an all-state football and track athlete in high school and

went on to excel in Notre Dame; Fritzie, the only daughter, who was, and still is, one of my best friends; and Tom, the youngest. Tom was a contemporary of Mac McCallum who was a kid on Big Sand and, with his wife, Mary, continues to live there. (It was Mac, who in the summer of 1996, urged me to write this story. Blame it on him!) I continue to be in contact with Fritzie who lives in Richmond, Virginia, and Bob, who lives in Mequon, Wisconsin.

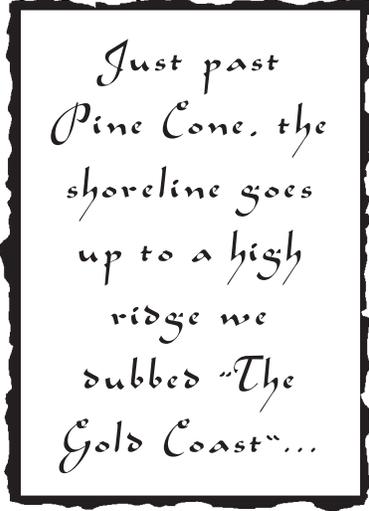
Beyond Iowa Beach, proceeding up the Southwest Shore of the bay, you come to a finely landscaped estate that at one time was owned by the Lundbergs. Sometime around World War II, it was purchased by Gertrude and Bill Boortz of Council Bluffs, Iowa. They enjoyed it for many years before selling it in 1996. The home is currently owned by Jim Wallace, an attorney in Park Rapids.

Past Pine Cone is a cabin owned by longtime residents, the Duers. From there the shoreline goes up to a high ridge. I had friends in the '30s and early '40s within several of the families. They all came from Chicago and built some fine homes. We were duly impressed and dubbed it "The Gold Coast," after the Chicago landmark. They all seemed to drive Buick Limiteds, Buick's top model.

First in line were the Haisleys, with a son and daughter our age. A tragic automobile accident east of Park Rapids on Highway 34 killed Mr. Haisley, and his son and my friend, Chuck, just after World War II. They are buried in the Park Rapids Cemetery. Evelyn and Dick Kvamme of Moorhead, Minnesota live in the cottage they built. The Conwells, next in line, also had a son and daughter our age. Their cottage currently is owned by the Hoodechecks. The cottage where the Pearson-Watsons now live was built by the Craigs, who had one son. The Barnums were their neighbors, and Bob and Diane Spolum of Fargo have their cottage. The last place on the ridge was the property of the Hess family. This was purchased by the John Carlisles of Valley City, North Dakota and their daughter Peggy is now in the process of adding a large addition to this. Thus ends the "Gold Coast" — all originally owned by families from Chicago.

There was a clay tennis court across the road from the Gold Coast, the first place I ever hit a tennis ball. The bay is a great place to swim. It is protected from some of the winds on the big lake. Much of the shoreline goes into a rapid drop-off that was great for swimming. One of the Gold Coast docks had a diving tower on the end.

Across the bay on the Northeast shore is a log cabin on a high ridge now owned by Nancy and Pat Ryan of Grand Forks, North Dakota. It was built in the '20s by the Will Lahrs of Bismarck, North Dakota. Lahr, like my father, was a car dealer in Bismarck. He sold Willy's Knights.



*Just past  
Pine Cone, the  
shoreline goes  
up to a high  
ridge we  
dubbed "The  
Gold Coast"...*

On a lower piece of the same shoreline, live Mary and Dave Bergman. I don't remember the original owner of their property. Ask Dave sometime when you are in his Country Store. Dave is a Park Rapids native and has been close to Big Sand all his life. Dave's first home on Big Sand was built by him in the '70s on the North Shore. About the same time, Jane and Ted Bair built just to the east of Dave. Dave's house burned down some years ago and he moved to the bay. Dave sold his north shore location to the Dick Koks. They built a new house on the location, doing a great deal of the work on the building themselves. A few years ago, the Bairs sold their cottage to Shirley and Chuck Bruggen from Chicago. Chuck and Shirley had been coming to the Bruggen family cottage on the East Shore of Big Sand for many years. The Kok and Bruggen cottages are approximately 1200 feet west of us.



Big Sand's North Shore in 1927.

I'm thinking now of some of the physical changes on the lake from my childhood days to now. We're all aware of the lake being built up so that very little buildable property remains. Last summer, Betty and I were out in our pontoon for the first time at night for several years. It is amazing how the number of lights from homes surround the lake. There was no electricity until REA came in the late '30s. Prior to that, the shoreline at night was black. I

would find our cabin by the dips and peaks of the treeline against the horizon. Another big change is the size and number of trees. This is apparent from our old-time photos. Mrs. Wilbright, who homesteaded our property, told us that before the clear-cut logging of the white and norway pines, the trees were so tall the lake looked like it was in a crater. I remember that the high ridgeline north of Cool Ridge was almost bare. Now the hill is filled with norways and whites.

The buoys that mark the rocky reefs on the South Shore are owned by the Big Sand Lake Association and are put in and taken out each year by Karl Dyre, owner of Evergreen Lodge. In the '30s, we kids put out markers we made with a wooden nail keg filled with cement imbedded with a tall 2 by 4. I like to swim off these reefs on a clear calm day. Recently I saw one of these kegs in about 10 feet of water on the drop-off. It's been there over half a century! Big Sand is a very deep glacial lake. Many areas are 90- to 115-feet deep. The deepest hole is 136 feet in the southwest area off one of these reefs.

Many people from states to the south of Minnesota spent summers there. Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma were all represented. I'm sure the heat of pre-air conditioning days sent them seeking cooler weather.

On the shore east of Hurd's Acres is a lovely two story log home. It was built by the Andersons in the early 1930s. He was the founder of the White Castle hamburger restaurants. They drove a Pierce-Arrow automobile, one of the premier automobiles of the time. Its distinctive marks were the two front headlights mounted on the fenders.

After the Andersons, the property belonged to Bev and Manny Stern of Fargo. I believe they built the cabin that is in front and closer to the water. This cabin has been owned by the Herman Allmaras of New Rockford, North Dakota for many years. Margaret and Morgan Ford purchased the property from the Sterns and Margaret continues to spend summers there. Next door are Betty and Bob Rust of Fargo. Betty is the niece of Ed Wahl as previously mentioned. This was the original cabin built by my parents and we used it for two years in the '20s. The original one was very humble in comparison to the present cottage. Mary and Mac McCallum live in the renovated cabin directly south, originally owned by Mac's grandparents and parents, longtime families on Big Sand. Mac and Bob Rust were the driving force in organizing our Big Sand Lake Association. Much of the credit goes to them.

*Mac McCallum  
and Bob Rust  
were two of the  
driving forces in  
the formation of  
our Big Sand  
Lake Area  
Association*

A point of land protrudes into the lake on the South Shore at the entrance into the bay where a ten-acre lot was purchased by August Balle of Dennison, Iowa from a man named Waite around 1916. The following story was told to me by Howard Fletcher in the fall of 1996. Howard is an old-timer on Big Sand and a grandson of the Balles. He and his wife Linda were living in the Heritage Nursing Home in Park Rapids at the time he told me the story.

Howard started spending summers with Grandpa Balle, who was renting on Iowa Beach in 1916. Howard was 14-years old. Mr. Balle and a Mr. Broderson, who were on Iowa Beach at one time, owned a department store in Dennison. My mother told me that Mr. Balle rowed a boat over to our first cabin to welcome us to Big Sand.

Howard Fletcher was an avid fisherman from boyhood. When he was 14-years old, the Thomas brothers, who owned Pine Cone Lodge, asked him to guide some of their guests. Howard said he was timid about this, but Grandpa said to go ahead and try it. He guided for them until he started college at the University of Iowa where he earned a law degree. They caught largemouth bass, musky and big panfish. There were no walleyes. During the early '40s my father, Ben Quale and Colby Hewitt developed a rearing pond for walleyes and started stocking Big Sand. That was the beginning of

April 29, 1997

Years ago—I suspect it must be a minimum of at least 75 — my grandfather, Dr. Louis Nippert of Minneapolis, and his brother, Dr. Henry Nippert (Arnie’s grandfather) of St. Paul, came to Big Sand to fish with Dr. Andrew Hilger (Jerome Hilger’s uncle). I’m not sure, but the Hilgers probably owned the cabin they still have in the family now. I do know it was a log cabin (now covered with stucco) and, I understand, had been owned previously by a man who went to languish in Leavenworth, or someplace like that, for the crime of being a bootlegger. In any case, the Mr. Nipperts and wives spent a little time on Big Sand and decided it was perfect! Uncle Henry built the first cottage (next to Hilgers) and my grandfather built his cottage 5 or 6 lots toward Evergreen from Uncle Henry. The mistake they made — for which we all bless them — is they invited their children, (my grandfather’s only living child, my mother, Lillian Nippert Zelle and Uncle Henry’s four living children, Carl Nippert, Sr., Louise Nippert Ueland, Florence Nippert Smith and Marion Nippert McGrath) up to see what they had “wrought”. The rest is history.

We have the two cottages in the middle: #1 for living and eating in; #2, nothing but bedrooms. You, of all people, should remember all those years of “out houses” with appropriate libraries of books, of bedpans under the beds, etc., etc. I don’t think we thought it “roughing” it then. I do remember vividly still, how furious my grandmother was when she and I made our regular trip to the Hilger’s “ice house” where blocks of ice were stored under much sawdust so that what had been collected during the winter would last all summer. I decided it was easier to uncover the ice by leaning over and digging with my hands—very much as a dog would—and tossing the sawdust between my legs. Unfortunately, I covered my poor grandmother with sawdust from head to toe. She was NOT happy! There was also the lovely memorable time that Arnie and I tied Looie and Andrea up in a tree so they couldn’t follow us. We were reprimanded!

And then we met the Corwins, who appeared by boat one day as we were playing some feeble tennis on the “Katie Nippert Memorial Tennis Court” (a great aunt from Ohio who, I understand, died and left a certain amount of money to nieces and nephews which was used to build the court). That began a whole new world for us. There really was life on the other side of the lake. Well, you know all about that.

Evergreen, when we first came, was a small fishing resort, owned by the Brown family. They had come from another town in Minnesota and I don’t know if they built the 2 or 3 cabins and the old log house they lived in. Mr. Brown was a barber in town, but he cut my brother’s hair in the Brown’s kitchen.

I could go on at length but had better not! I’m so glad you’re doing that big job!!”

Mary Sue Zelle Lindsay

*Mary Sue Zelle Lindsay wrote this letter to Charlie Corwin in 1997.*

walleyes in Big Sand. The Moodys were the only people on Howard's shore in Howard's youth, and he talked about playing with some of the Moody children. Some of that family still owns a cottage there. The Balle's original cabin is now owned by the family of Betty Wetlaufer, another Iowa native, but I still refer to that area as Balle's Point. Howard's career was with the F.B.I., but he and Linda moved to Big Sand in 1963 when he retired. They continue to own property there.

The Fletchers sold a piece of land to the west of them to Dr. Larson of Fargo and he built a home there, doing a great deal of the work himself. He later sold it to Polly and Harry Forse. After doing extensive remodeling, the Forses made it their year-round home. Harry continues to work as an investment broker with an office in Walker. Three years ago, the Forses started construction on a new home on the westward side of their property. They now live in their beautiful new home. Debbie and Jerry Bowers, friends of the Forses from Minneapolis, purchased the original home.

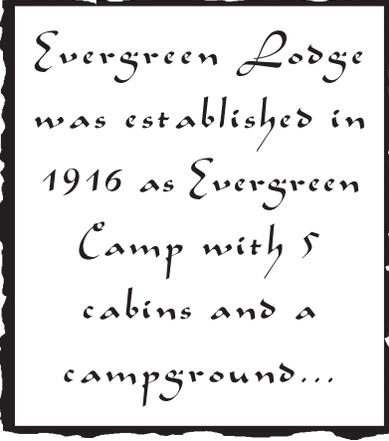
There were basically no cottages west of the Moodys at this period of time until you came to Dr. Jerry Hilger's property. All of the present cottages were added sometime after World War II.

Beyond Hilgers and just south of Evergreen is a group of cottages dating back to the '20s. This property is still owned by descendents of the original owners, three of them being Andrea Ueland Brainerd, Arnie Ueland and Mary Sue Zelle Lindsay. My friendship with them goes back to high school days in the 1930s.

One day, while in the midst of writing this story, I had a telephone conversation with Karl Dyre, owner of Evergreen Lodge. Incidentally it was noon, January 25, 1997 and he said it was windy and -18 degrees. Karl told me the following story.

The original owners of the land were Pillsbury and Weyerhauser who purchased the land in the 1880s to get timber rights. After clear-cutting most of the timber, they sold it to a Mr. Bailey in 1908. Included in this purchase was the property to the south of Evergreen called Pine Woods. During the winters of 1908 and '09, the Baileys built a log house that still stands. Karl said recently an elderly man stopped by. He was a Bailey and was born in that cabin.

In 1916, a Mr. McClure built five cabins, as well as having a campground to pitch tents, and started Evergreen Camp. He operated the camp while the Baileys owned the land. In the early '30s, Tom Brown purchased and ran the resort. About 1946, Hatch and Wearly bought it. In the late '40s, they changed the name to Evergreen Lodge and



*Evergreen Lodge  
was established in  
1916 as Evergreen  
Camp with 5  
cabins and a  
campground...*

more buildings were added. The public demands had changed from tents to cabins.

Kay and Karl Dyer have owned and successfully operated the Lodge since 1958. Karl said most of the original buildings have been replaced. They have about 1,000 feet of beautiful beach. From our side of the lake, it looks like the east coast of Florida! Dan, a son, is now involved in the operation.

Several cabins past Evergreen are the Fenton families from Litchfield, Minnesota. The following was told to me by Steve Fenton, who with his wife Tammy, own Modern Cleaners in Park Rapids. They live year-round in their Big Sand home. Hugh Fenton, a grandfather of Steve's, bought the land in 1946 from H.D. Hurd who owned and developed many lots on the lake. Dick Fenton, an uncle of Steve's, has a cabin there. Al, Steve's father, is deceased. Two of their sisters, Nancy and Barbara also have homes on Big Sand. Nancy's husband, John Wenzel, is a retired pediatrician from Dakota Clinic in Fargo.

Beyond the Fentons, on the north side of Highway 40 where some lots are now being sold in the woods, lived a kindly old bachelor named Mr. Douglas. He had a raspberry patch that yielded the biggest and most delicious berries we'd ever seen. Mother would buy the berries that Mr. Douglas would sell in extremely attractive birch bark baskets he had made. Some of these are still in our old log home. My mother was a very good looking lady and I think Mr. Douglas would like to visit with her.

To the east of this property on Big Sand, the Hays family arrived in the '30s. They operated a night club on Highway 34, east of Park Rapids. Mr. Hayes had been gassed in World War II and understandably was not in good health. Mrs. Hayes continued to live there until she died a few years ago at a very old age. Her family had the property platted and sold the lots. Most of them have had cabins built. Maynard Cumber, of Cumber Construction, Park Rapids, told me last summer he had purchased the woodland on the other side of Highway 40 from the Hayses.

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camp...*

On the east shore of the bay just north of Iowa Beach is a string of about six cottages very close to the lake. At one time this was a fishing camp. About thirty years ago it was purchased and the cottages were sold to individuals. Some of these owners today are Debbie and Dr. Neil Goltz, Lucille and Gunder Gunhus, Robbie and Andy Wimmer, and Arelyn and Sam Schimelfenig. The location of the cottages so close to the waterline show that they were constructed before the 100-foot setback was established. The owners have added two fine tennis courts and it is a very delightful location.

Pine Cone Lodge is also in the bay. I don't know when it was established, but I remember staying there in 1925 with my parents

while they were negotiating with Mr. Hurd for the purchase of our first property on Big Sand. At that time, Pine Cone was owned by the Thomas brothers who built our first cabin. They sold it in the '30s to people whose name I do not remember, but I do recall the wife was blonde and drove a yellow Cadillac! It is now owned by the Jeff Brand family and no longer operated as a resort, as they are selling off parcels of the property. One lot was bought by Ardeth and Dr. Everett Duthoy. They have constructed a lovely year-round home that they will occupy six or more months of the year. Dr. Duthoy practiced medicine with the Park Rapids Clinic early in his career and again part-time in more recent years.

Another resort, Cool Ridge, on the northeast point at the entrance to the bay, is no longer in operation as the cabins were sold to individuals several years ago. The high ridgeline to the north has also been sold in individual lots and there is now very little land left for sale on Big Sand.

I have a couple of stories about Big Mantrap Lake where a wealthy family from Chicago named Nokman bought a beautiful property on the south side of the lake. They built a huge log home and outbuilding and turned it into a true estate. As mentioned earlier, I was not at Big Sand very much following World War II but I've been told that Mr. Nokman would have his private railroad car transfer him from Chicago to a siding in Staples or Wadena, and then be driven to his estate. 3M Corporation bought this estate and turned it into a lodge for the use of employees and customers. They named it Wonewok. They have also acquired a huge amount of woodland to the north. 3M contributed to the expansion of the Park Rapids airport so it was capable of handling their company jets and have also contributed improvements to the Heartland Golf Course which they use quite regularly.

My other story is from the Park Rapids Enterprise printed Dec. 14, 1996. Paul Isaacson works for Wonewok and part of his job is spotting fishing holes for his guests. He was drilling ten-inch holes in the ice when something took his bait. He knew he had a big fish. When the fish was brought up, it was a muskie 47 1/2 inches long and weighing in at 40 pounds 8 ounces on a scale in Emmaville. It appears to be the largest muskie caught out of Big Mantrap in modern times. Maybe there is one just like it lurking in Big Sand!

Long before my mother died in 1991, she had given all of her lake property to me, my brother Bill, and our wives. Bill and his family were not interested in ever building or living on Big Sand. After many years of trying to divide the land between our two families, it was accomplished in the late 1980s. Bill

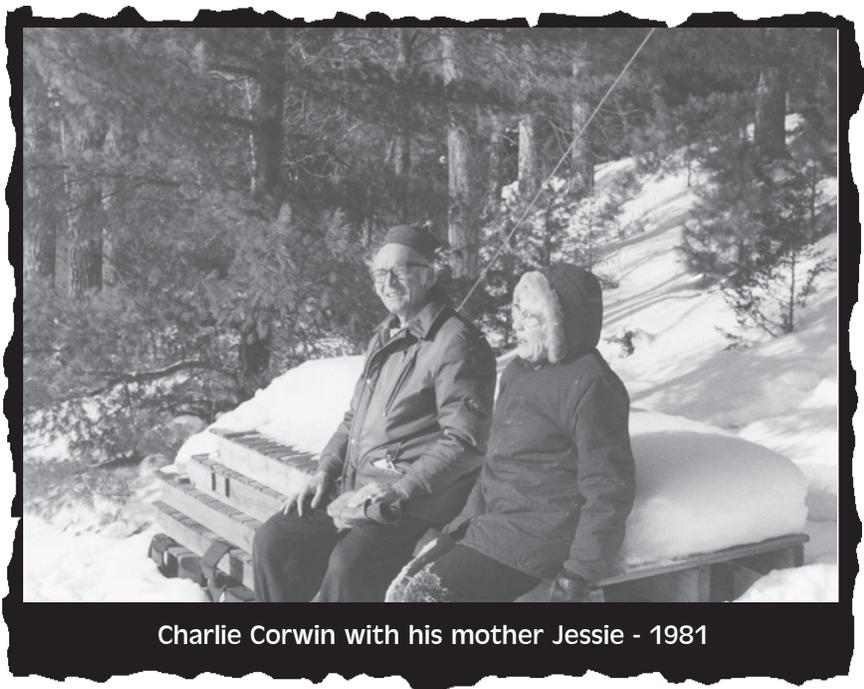
*With the exception  
of Evergreen  
Lodge and a few  
cabins for rent at  
Hurd's Acres, most  
of the property on  
the lake now is  
privately owned...*

was dead by that time but his kids acquired five lots on Big Sand and the west shoreline of Lake Emma. They immediately sold it all. All but one of these lots now have homes on them.

We retained the rest of the shoreline plus 100 acres of woodland on the north side of Highway 40. Our 18-acre tree farm, now owned by our son and his wife, Hollis, is on this land and has recently been christened "Hollywoods!" Wick and Holly built a new cottage just west of the original log home which is now owned by our daughter, Carolyn. My mother always hoped the log home which she loved so much would remain in the family and she was greatly relieved, before her death at the age of 98, to know that Carolyn would cherish it as she had.

All of our Big Sand property will belong to our four children when Betty and I leave this world, and it is our hope that our children's children will be here for years to come. My wife, Betty, has always referred to the lake as "my precious Big Sand" and, as usual, she's right. It *is* my precious Big Sand!

*My memories of Big Sand began in 1925 when my parents, Samuel Wickham and Jessie Corwin, purchased land on the East Shore. Mother died in 1991, at the age of 98.*



Charlie Corwin with his mother Jessie - 1981

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## *Big Sand...the Lake and its History*

Legend has it that during the logging era of the 1880s, there was a log skid route across the ice of Big Sand that resulted in all of the clean-cut logs that populated the lake's shallow waters when I first arrived on Big Sand in the early 1920s. Many of these logs were gathered over the years by "floating" them with a little effort and towing rafts of them to shore for building or fuel. Some still remain on the bottom as fish havens and lure traps.

The following recollections date from 1924. Then, as now, Big Sand was appreciated as the clearest of the regional lakes and continues to rank in the top fifty on the statewide "clarity of lakes" register. There were few dwellings on the lake. On the west end was Tom Brown's farm, now the site of Evergreen Lodge. At the end of a trail winding along the shore, approximately 1/4 mile south from the farm, was a fine log cabin said to have been built by the local bootlegger, but no longer occupied by the owner who was languishing in jail. This property was acquired in 1924 by Drs. David and Andrew Hilger of St. Paul. I acquired the surrounding and adjoining property in 1950, after returning from three years of overseas surgical service in a "MASH" hospital during World War II. All of these properties remain in the possession of our family today. Over the years, large tract holdings of early families have advantaged Big Sand Lake through reduced population density and great love and respect for this remarkable body of water.

My father's great friend and bass fishing companion, Dr. Henry Nippert of St. Paul, fell in love with Big Sand as they fished together here, and Henry and his family acquired the properties between ours and the Brown's farm through the early 1930s.

In those days, a well built lake shore home with fine interior and sound exterior construction cost \$3,000. Fine local artisans were paid 25 cents per hour and the master craftsman contractor and on-the-job designer priced at 35 cents per hour.

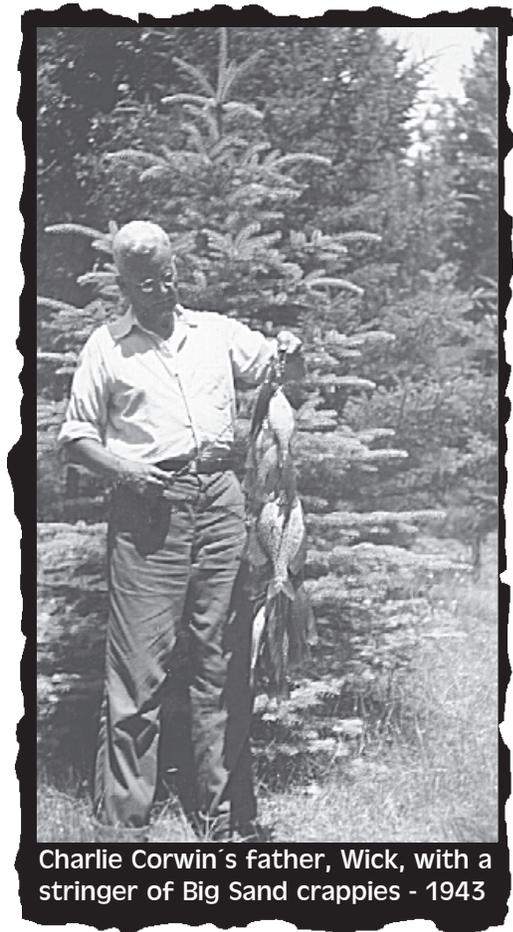
The Brown farm was offered for \$6,000. A major tract on the South Shore, now occupied by 10 homes, was acquired for \$6,000 after World War II. One beautifully developed homesite, with home, in that locale was offered for \$3,500. Will Rogers had two things to say about those times, "Them were the days" and "They ain't making much of that fine stuff anymore!"

Looking across Big Sand from the western side in 1924, one could sometimes visualize, at night, an occasional gasoline lantern light. These spelled "habitations." Toward the northwest corner were the Corwins — a great pioneer Big Sand family from Fargo. As was usual for early arrivals, their "holdings" were large and beautifully located.

During these early days, folks from Iowa populated the south end of the eastern arm of Big Sand. Pine Cone Lodge was developed by the Sloan family. They advertised its availability in the *Wall Street Journal*. The Sunday brunch at Pine Cone was a seasonal feature. Many of the lovely homesites on each side of the eastern arm of the lake were built in the '20s and '30s, high on the hilltops which are a feature of Big Sand's shoreline.

At the inlet stream was Hurd's Acres, a most beautifully elevated stretch of one of the great fresh-water beaches of the North Country. The inlet stream provided a beautiful traverse to Lake Emma and from thence through the delightful wandering stream to the Bottle Lakes. In the early spring, the bridge over the Big Sand inlet stream afforded a spectacular spawning sight.

The spectacular one-day picnic trip to the Bottle Lakes was a must in those early days. We first rowed the distance in the 1920s. Then came the "one-lung" Elto outboard motor — a shade faster than rowing.



Charlie Corwin's father, Wick, with a stringer of Big Sand crappies - 1943

These old "one-lungers" became familiar to the lake in the '20s. Old-time muskie fishermen took their one or two week vacations to Big Sand and putt-putted the lake day-after-day, trolling 10-inch, buck-tailed spoons with fearsome gang hooks. They were well rewarded with 30- to 40-pound muskies and northerns. These territorial fish often staked out an area of their own in the lake. Five-pound, largemouth bass were routine. The best and preferred bait were live frogs "kicked-up" along the shore. The best sites were the bay and the sharp "drop-off" shore lines. Native walleyes were rare. Large sunfish were routine. Crappies were scarce, then increased sharply in the '40s and '50s, only to decrease thereafter.

In the bay, inside the protection of the great rock and sandy bar projecting from the South Shore of Big Sand, there is a small "rill" of a stream connecting Big Sand to a small shallow rice bed. Up this rill, in the early spring each year, the very large northern pike and muskel-

lunge struggled, often with back out of water, to spawn in the rice pond. There was fabulous large northern and muskie fishing in the Mantrap Chain — largely

Mantrap and Big Sand Lakes — in those days. It was often said to be the best in the state and was undoubtedly due to the reproduction in this pond and a similar location along the northern peninsular road projecting deep into Mantrap from the north side. These spawning ponds had similar problems. Spring fish spearing was common at both sites. Much worse, was the occasion of a dry June and summer. The fry were trapped as the outlet streams — particularly the more shallow Big Sand stream — dried and locked the fry and some late adults “in” for death in the winter freeze.

In those days (1900-1940) of reduced shore population and fewer outboard motors, lake spawning was under remarkably less pressure and fish populations were far higher with natural maintenance. Striving for a return to those conditions should be worthy of trial. Posting of natural spawning sites for appropriate period of the season is a given, without cost, if lake association volunteers are mobilized to the cause.

Minnesota’s fixation on the walleye does us little credit. This large perch is not our finest sporting fish. Panfishing with proper gear can be more exciting, and certainly bass, northern pike and muskellunge made Big Sand Lake’s reputation as the prime fishing lake in the first half of the 1900s. With an assured channel for the escape to Big Sand and Mantrap of the northern pike and muskie fry produced in the two ponds I mentioned earlier, together with enhanced natural bay and shore reproduction of bass and panfish, a return of real populations of sport fish can be envisioned. This is particularly true because Big Sand Lake has a unique forage fish supply in the cisco minnow to supply a large sport fish population than most lakes its size. This large minnow, the cisco, has always abounded in Big Sand in incredible numbers. On a quiet evening in late summer and early fall, hordes of ciscos have always surfaced on the lake and noisily churned the waters. They rise from the deep, cold waters. It is they that fatten Big Sand’s walleyes. Their numbers can support a larger sport fish population if reproduction is enhanced.

The D.N.R. were raising walleye fry in quart jars at the old Park Rapids Fish Hatchery in the 1920s and 1930s. As they progressively filled the Minnesota lakes with these oversize perch, the D.N.R. changed the fish ecology and the fishermen turned from sport fishing to “food fishing” with fishermen becoming mosquito bait in order to catch the “big ones” at night!

In the 1940s, for a period of 10 years or more, a small pond near Lake Ida was stocked with walleye fry in the spring. It was a Big Sand Lake “community effort” financed by a small number of lake owners who periodically contributed

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to the project fund. The pond was cleaned of all snags so that it could be netted in the fall. The D.N.R. loaned their nets. By fall, the fry were sizable fingerlings for transfer to Big Sand. Literally tens of millions of walleyes were introduced into Big Sand by this volunteer action.

I, along with my three sons and three daughters, snorkeled daily throughout the summer months of the 1950s and early 1960s along the quarter mile of our shoreline. It was a daily experience to swim with one or two schools of large walleyes numbering from 30 to 100 fish. They moved in leisurely, unfrightened “cork screw” manner, scuffing their bellies on the light bottom sand sending forth a puff of sand at the bottom of the rotation. Out from the inlet stream, and also in the deep pool just before the outlet shallow, we could depend on finding similar schools whenever we would pontoon over with the family to “float” the streams and snorkel the pools.

Smallmouth bass seem to be more compatible with the walleye, as do crappies. Bass have become plentiful in Big Sand during the last 40 years. I do not recall catching them in Big Sand prior to World War II.

Both bass and panfish, however, have trouble getting their fry through a full spawning cycle in lakes rife with outboard motor “egg beaters” and no sacred shoreline in season. Volunteer lake association posting of the spawning areas of a lake, if initiated and organized by the D.N.R., could possibly change this in short order.

The drought of the 1930s that produced “Grapes of Wrath” scenarios all over the United States left an indelible “haunt” in my mind. Lake Belle Taine at the end of our necklace of lakes became a meadow. There was no floating down the Big Sand outlet stream — not enough water. Fortunately, there had never been motor traffic in the stream. If it had been cut as deeply as it is today due to motor traffic, a tragic spill of water out of Big Sand Lake would have resulted. Shallow shore residents all around the lake would have had docks standing on dry land going nowhere in a meadow as was the picture at Belle Taine. There will be another drought! That is why we cannot afford motors in our outlet stream!

The lake association movement has been a great boost for Minnesota lakes. The opportunity for organized “volunteerism” through these lake associations should be seized most avidly by the D.N.R. and others as a most economical extension of government “arms and legs.” Participation is a great force for good and the price is right!

Our great resource, *The Minnesota Lake*, is priceless. Shoreline owners appreciate and respect the fact that, “They ain’t makin’ many more of them.” Shoreline owners, and even others near to a lake and benefitting from the lake should be ashamed of themselves if they do not organize, belong to, and participate in a lake association. For many who do not belong, the example of the Big Sand Lake Association is a good one to follow.

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As the glacier created this remarkable lake, it is noteworthy that from lake bottom to shoreline hilltop on the east arm of the lake, the profile elevation is in the range of 150 feet while at the western end of the lake the range is up to 200 feet. A most remarkable glacial achievement. A most remarkable lake...Big Sand.



Morning mist on Big Sand

*According to the Minnesota Geological Survey, most of the lakes in our region were formed between 10,000 and 12,000 years ago at the end of the Ice Age. As the glaciers retreated north into Canada, water from the melting ice flooded the landscape and formed large glacial lakes. Eventually, these large lakes drained and the landscape was left much as we see it today.*

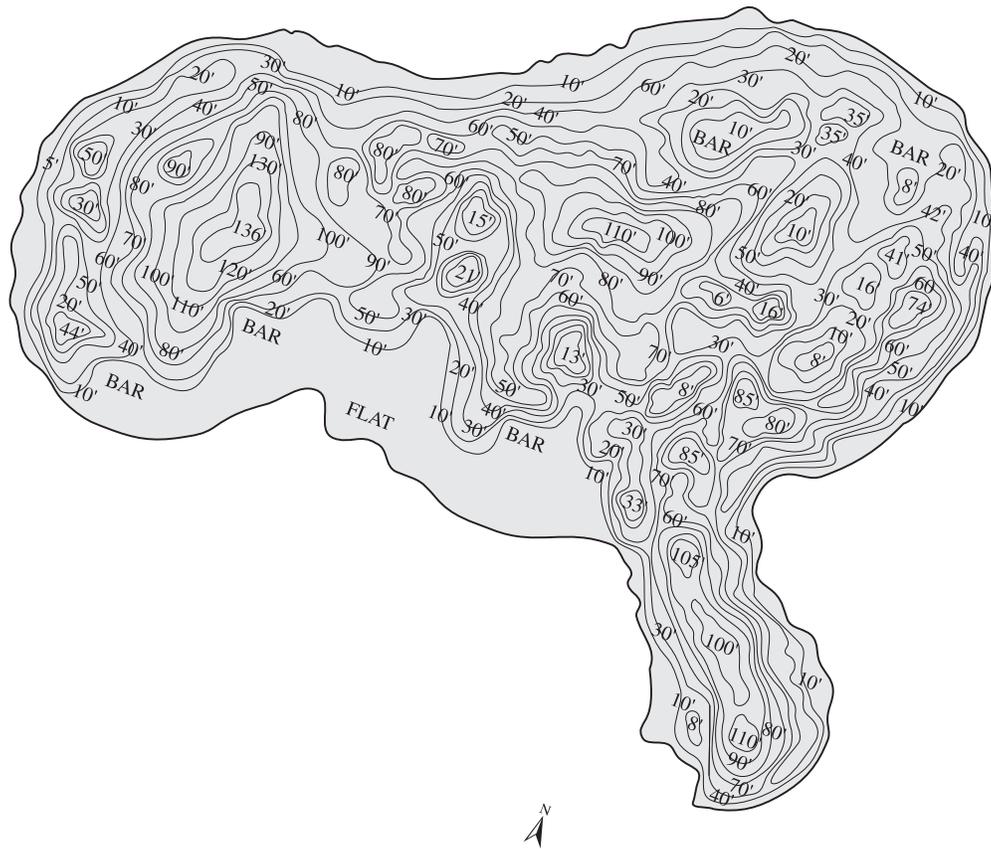


*Aldo Leopold on Land Ethic*

*...The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land.*

*This sounds simple: do we not already sing our love for and obligation to the land of the free and the home of the brave? Yes, but just what and whom do we love? Certainly not the soil, which we are sending helter-skelter downriver. Certainly not the waters, which we assume have no function except to turn turbines, float barges, and carry off sewage. Certainly not the plants, of which we exterminate whole communities without batting an eye. Certainly not the animals, of which we have already extirpated many of the largest and most beautiful species. A land ethic of course cannot prevent the alteration, management, and use of these "resources" but it does affirm their right to continued existence, and, at least in spots, their continued existence in a natural state.*

*Aldo Leopold: A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There.*



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## **Big Sand Lake**

*Surface Water Area: 1,659 Acres*

*Shorelength: 7.9 Miles*

*Water Color: Clear*

*Shoreland Zoning Classification: Recreational Development*

*Maximum Depth: 135 Feet*

*Dominant Forest/Soil Type: Conifer/Sand*



Sunrise on Big Sand