

# TIDINGS

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of the Mississippi Headwaters

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## From the Director:

Some people think the Mississippi begins in St. Paul. On May 18, the Audubon Ark flotilla consisting of a group of 10 canoes, 1 kayak and about 22 people set out to tour the Upper Mississippi River. I am referring to

the first 400 miles or the "real" upper Mississippi River, from Lake Itasca to Royalton, MN (River Trail maps available).

Here one canoes through pristine woods. Land uses are forestry and recreational. Half are publicly owned. Canoes maneuvered through screens of fallen trees, eagles nests, wild flowers, and beaver ponds to Gulsvig Landing. Guide Terry Larson welcomed the group to the landing donated in memory of his grandfather. Terry blessed the River with tobacco (allowed by medicine man Larry Aitken) and we joined them. Crystal clear water enhanced the sparkle of shells and darting minnows.

Lunch was at Wanagan named for the floating log kitchen of lumberjacks. When one burned, another would be quickly assembled. Coffee was provided at Allen Kringle's reconstructed, hand hewn, log home. It was furnished in turn of the century antiques, some rescued from landfills.

We portaged Vekin's dam (appropriately marked with an upside down canoe). Mississippi Headwaters Canoe Club members Barry Babcock and Tony McKeown gave instructions for negotiating the upcoming rapids. Springs were marked by rust spots in the soil where hard groundwater bubbled to the surface. The kayak was taking on water from abrasions, so the ever-resourceful Terry pulled out his duct tape for repairs.

Bagley High School Teacher, Cynthia Ward and River Watch students met us on the bridge over County Road 37, as they returned from a water quality monitoring event. Monitoring is done voluntarily after school and weekends. Their dedication is obvious in their monitoring and in their award winning science projects. Students' work is made

possible with the partnership between school administration, the Clearwater County water planners, their community, retired teacher Jim Cairns and MHB.

The drop in elevation and rapids took us through the most untouched part of the Mississippi River. Grouse thumped like ancient drummers on logs. Red winged black birds chirped. Unseen birds twittered. Eagles watched and flew. The further we went the bigger the mosquitoes.

Tall black spruce loomed ahead surrounded by flat floating bogs and upland forest.

The main channel was often hard to determine. Wild rice seedlings marked the direction of current. Here many skilled people have lost their way. For us, the sun shone. Vegetation was immature enough that we could see. Flatter terrain was incised by meanders so tight that canoes over-ran the curves. A swath of civilized grass through the upland forest indicated the location of one of the pipelines that transcends the River corridor.

Discoverer Henry Rowe Schoolcraft and his Ojibwe guide Oza-win-dib or Yellow Hair (Scandinavian descent?) must have seen it thus in 1832. Schoolcraft documented the flora and fauna of the Mississippi Headwaters. His memoirs were the basis for the fictional poem "Song of Hiawatha"

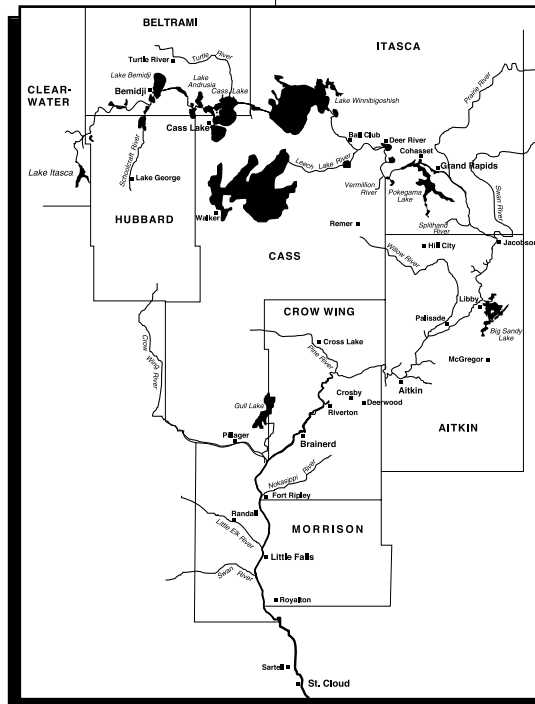
authored by his cousin, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

Camp was made at Coffee Pot Landing, the lumberjack's coffee spot. Terry Larson made supper, choke cherry jelly (made by his wife Mary) and crackers with three kinds of smoked fish. The wild rice and a Spam casserole tasted wonderful!

Reluctantly, I returned home. My experience was equal to that of hiking Haleakala', the largest crater in the world on Maui, or flying over Denali in Alaska in May at 11PM and seeing the sun rise on one side of the earth and setting on the other side. This truly is one of the most marvelous places! That's why I'm...

*In Public Service,*

**Jane E. Van Hunnik, MS,  
MHB Director**



## The Humble Beginnings of Highway 371

Annie Tidrick has lived at the edge of Camp Ripley near the Mississippi River all her life. On May 13, 2000 she gave the following interview to Patty Oliver of the Mississippi Headwaters Oral History Project. Mrs. Tidrick is 81 years old. [Camp Ripley is the land in the Camp Ripley Military Reservation in Morrison County surrounding Mrs. Tidrick's home. Fort Ripley is a town on Highway 371 on the east side of the river. The old 1800s fort is on the west side of the river and about a mile south of the "pink bridge" that was located at the confluence of the Nokasippi and the Mississippi Rivers.]

"I can remember being at my Grandpa's house and I don't remember what I had done but my mother was going to get after me for it. I decided I could run to the River and jump in and she couldn't get me. I was going pretty fast but she could go faster, so I didn't make it. But I'd a jumped in where the eddies are at Fort Ripley. That's where I was headed. They would have never gotten me out!"

"I can remember as a little girl, he [Uncle Emery] run a steamboat up and down the River. I don't know how far they went ... and I remember seeing him come down from the north on the River because I was just a little girl then, four or five years old. ... my mother would show us the steamboat was coming ..." [approx. 1923]

"The old fort ... That's what they called it, the old Fort Grounds and then there was this powder house that was built there out of some kind of stone or something, ... but it was tumbling down the way I remember it. My mother used to take us across the River and we'd walk about a mile down to where the old powder house was and then we'd go in and look it over. That still sticks in my mind! ..."

"It was a bridge just a mile north of Fort Ripley that from #371 went over on the west side of the river. That's how we came up into this section. It was a wooden bridge. We called it the Pink Bridge because it was painted pink. ... it had been

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## River Watch Report *by Tamie Fairbanks*

I'd like to start with a big thank-you to all who worked so hard to help plan the March 28, 2001 Youth Congress - Bob Becker, Lisa Jokela, Margaret Sherman, John Weber, Marlin Roedel, Theresa Eclov, LaDonna Scott and Jane Van Hunnik. Everyone helped from the first raw ideas to the cleanup at the end of the event. Thanks!

The atmosphere was perfect for the Youth Congress held at the Long Lake Conservation Center, northeast of Aitkin. Students from Bagley, Clearbrook-Gonvick, Hill City, Walker, Crosby-Ironton, Pierz-Healy, and Aitkin High Schools arrived early and each received a new River Watch t-shirt. Jane Van Hunnik, MHB Director, opened with the theme "Where is the Balance?" between conservation and economics in our world today. Tom Waters, Minnesota's foremost author on rivers and streams presented "The Stream Ecosystem", and his latest book, *Wildstream*. Dave Anderson along with R.J. Renquist played music, games, and inspired us with their upbeat motivational techniques.

The teachers attended a session about macroinvertebrate identification with Tim Reese, Coordinator of the extensive River Watch Macroinvertebrate Monitoring Program for Hennepin Conservation District. Students attended three real-world education sessions:

- 1. The Ancient Art of Flint-knapping with Terry Larson, MHB Advisory Committee.** Each student took home an arrowhead they made themselves.
- 2. Water Quality and Golf Course Development with Duwayne Konewko, Aitkin County Environmental Services, and Tom Beaver, Crow Wing County Board of Adjustment.** Students learned about Environmental Impact Statements and using wetlands as buffers, and

were surprised to find that it takes as much water to maintain a golf course in a day as it does to service a city of 10,000 people.

- 3. The River Corridor with Dan McGuinness, Director of the Upper Mississippi River Campaign for the National Audubon Society.** He talked about the supply of water, the invasion of exotic species, upstream/ downstream cause and effect, the species that rely on the river corridor for existence, and the Audubon Ark Flotilla.

The final event of the Youth Congress was "Your Chance to Shine!" We asked the students to present something about their program, allowing them to choose what they wanted to say, in whatever format of communication. Prizes were awarded based on originality, creativity, and communication. The students were so good that two schools tied for first place — Bagley and Pierz-Healy. Each student, teacher, and bus driver, received two tickets to the Science Museum of Minnesota, and the Omni Theater. Bagley students performed a skit that introduced their River Watch Program, involving music, humor, and a power-point presentation, which displayed pictures of the students and each monitoring site. Pierz-Healy students sang a song called "The Elements". No one knew how poetic and romantic the elements of the periodic table could be! Each school was also recognized with an award for being a part of the Youth Congress. Congratulations to all of the participants, everyone has raved about you guys!

The winter went by fast, spring was a bit temperamental, and now summer is at our front door. May each and every monitoring event bring forth clear and sunny weather. I'd like to close with the words to the song that was written by the students of Crosby-Ironton High School for the Youth Congress.

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At the ferry crossing the Mississippi River near the Nokasippi confluence. July 19, 1950 (l to r) Edith Edenburn, Annie Tidrick and Katheryn Berstrom.

## Humble Beginnings ...continued from page 2

there for many years. Then I think it was about in 1940 that we had such high water and then the ice took it out. From then we had to go around by Camp Ripley

and come up here. There was no way to cross. They had a ferry after awhile, for quite a while across the Mississippi River there... It was kind of a hardship for people when that bridge went out... When we'd go to Fort Ripley to get groceries, why we'd take the wagon and the horses and cross the river and go into Fort Ripley and get our groceries and go back home

again. It took all day though... They had to go so far around to deliver our mail. For a long time, we only got mail three times a week because of that. Then later on, they got so they brought it six days a week and then they sent changes over to Cushing ..."

"Gene Abel, he's been dead a long time. He was an old, old fellow that run the ferry and whenever a car would come to one side or the other, he'd go to pick up the car and bring it back to the other side of the river. We rode the ferry a lot of times. ...They had a cable [that was strung up] across the river. I think he had a motor if I remember right. It was a kind of a motor deal. ... I don't remember just how... That's been a long time ago." Later Mrs. Tidrick explained, "There was a motor attached to the ferry bed for propelling the ferry. Then a long arm from the ferry up to the cable attached to both banks of the river guided the ferry across the river and kept the ferry from going downstream."

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**Director's Note:** At first read this student prose seemed unrealistic and negative. However, as I compared it with the very real changes that have taken place on Highway 371 over 50 years in Annie Tidrick's story, our youth may be too prophetic. What do you think?

**The year is 2050. Scientists are in fight against industrialists who have manipulated politics for their capitalistic gain. In the process, they destroyed our watersheds.....**

**Welcome to the Dead Zone**

**Ownership of wetland has shifted to industry  
The zoning game is played with money mad hypocrisy  
Growth and development makes watersheds a travesty  
Can't monitor the discharge.**

**Conservation is your responsibility  
Environmental destruction more than probability  
We have reached terminal turbidity  
What is water clarity?**

**With lethal limits of nitrogen and phosphorus  
Adapting to a human environment,  
The food chain is entirely parasitic  
Welcome to the dead zone.**

**The flow of the river no longer has velocity  
Overcrowding land use cause threats to water quantity  
Contamination at the site, can't monitor the quality  
So much for sustainability.**



1. Pierz-Healy students perform their song "The Elements" with teacher Gerry Palo (right)
2. Terry Larson and the ancient art of flint-knapping
3. Bagley students hi-five their teacher Cindy Ward
4. Keynote speaker, Tom Waters
5. Teacher Bob Kuschel (left) with the large contingent of students from Crosby Ironton.

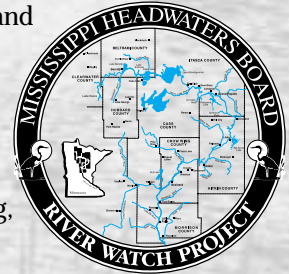


## This may be your last *Tidings*

*Tidings* is an educational and informational tool for interaction with citizens who care about the river. Due to increased costs and budget cuts, the Board has decided to reduce circulation. This will be the last full mailing to 8,000 landowners along the first 400 miles of the Mississippi River. You can check for *Tidings* at your local library. If you have access to a computer, the *Tidings* is on the MHB website. If you would like to be notified of when the *Tidings* is posted, please send us your e-mail address. If you want to continue receiving *Tidings* as a part of our reduced core mailing, please contact us, ASAP at 1-888-547-3301 ext.248. Thank you.

## River Watch t-shirts available

Thanks to the Shevlin Firemen's Relief Fund, all students attending the Youth Congress received free River Watch t-shirts. The shirts are a natural color with dark green and blue printing. They have the MHB logo on the front and a large map of the River Watch monitoring area on the back. Additional t-shirts are available for \$10.00 plus \$4.00 shipping, by calling the MHB Office.



**ROSSMAN WATER BOOKS ON-LINE:** With heavy April snows and above normal spring rain, water levels are high in the North again this year. People interested in weather and water levels in the Mississippi Headwaters region now have a new source of information. The new website is open to public use at < [www.minn-north.org](http://www.minn-north.org) > .

*The Mississippi Headwaters Board (MHB) is a joint powers board of Clearwater, Hubbard, Beltrami, Cass, Itasca, Aitkin, Crow Wing and Morrison counties, organized in 1980 to protect and preserve the natural, cultural, historical, scientific and recreational values of the Mississippi's first 400 miles. The Board protects the river by regulating land use on its shorelands; by monitoring water quality and taking actions to protect the health of the river, and by educating the river's users and neighbors on how to balance human uses with the river's ecology.*

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