

Lake View Farm and the Hillside Plow

I learned some things about our Otsego farm and why it was so eroded.

The first, greenish map was produced in 1874.

It is basically a reproduction of the original survey map.

It shows that our Lake View Farm was within the Big Woods.

It was totally forested with deciduous trees except for two areas of sandy floodplain in sections 15 and 17.

Lakeview Farm is located in section 35 of east Otsego township.

The second map light brown was produced in 1901. That map shows that the east end Otsego was predominately claimed by Frenchmen.

F. Carron claimed both the Lakeview Farm 80-acre parcel and an additional 80-acre parcel that would become part of Corbin's farm.

The third, somewhat lighter brown map, shows Geo. Cloutier in possession of Lakeview Farm in 1901. Notice that Croteau's owned three-80-acre parcel south and west of the future Lakeview Farm.

You should also locate on all three maps, Slabtown/Dayton on the bottom right, Elk River on the top center, part of the town of Otsego on the top left, and Foster Lake on the bottom center.

You should locate Lakeview Farm on the Schwab/Corbin Pond.

Before the 1930's the road ran on the south of that pond, mostly on Corbin's land, but partly on Lakeview Farm.

Between 1850 and 1920 Wright County was the Frontier in The Big Woods.

The Big Woods consisted mostly of elm, maple, oak, and basswood.

Dayton had at least three good markets for timber.

The Slabtown sawmill on the Crow River, the Dayton City Mill at the mouth of the Crow into the Mississippi, the Mississippi River Boom Company on Big Island in the Mississippi, and the Bouley Brickyard in west Dayton.

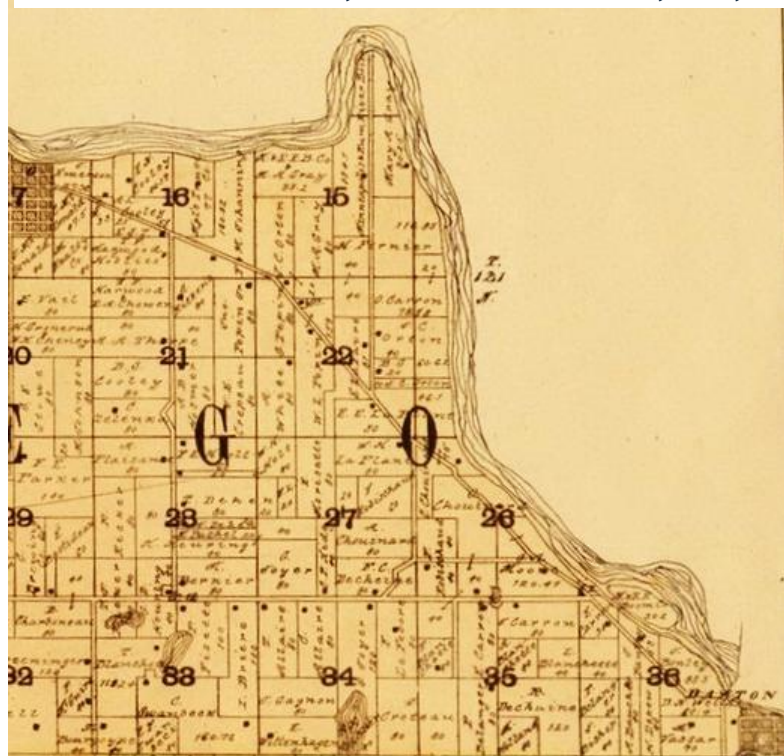
Brickyards needed three ingredients, suitable clay, which was uncommon, an abundant supply of firewood, and many workers.

The brickyard kilns were set up to use fuel in the form of charcoal.

Charcoal was such a crucial part of brick making that there was a charcoal plant on the site with every brickyard.



EAST OTSEGO MAP, WRIGHT COUNTY, MN, 1874.



EAST OTSEGO MAP, 1901.

No doubt many eastern Otsego homesteaders found employment at a brick factory and a ready cash market for their timber.

The St. Michael Church and Parsonage were built with this brick from the Dayton brickyard in 1890.

It is virtually certain that the logs from our farm were used to bake those bricks.

The first crop that the homesteader's of eastern Otsego harvested was timber. Their second crop was wheat.

The soil of the Big Woods was surprisingly fertile.

Soil that develops under trees normally has a thin and low organic topsoil.

But the Big Woods were only three hundred years old, they developed over prairie soils when Midwest climate became moister starting six hundred years ago.

In 1900 Minneapolis was the grain milling capital of the US.

A transcontinental railroad ran through Elk River, less than five miles from any farm in east Otsego.

Add to that the insatiable need for food of WWI, and every possible acre of Otsego was planted in wheat.

The Hillside Plow was invented in the 1800s, and perfected in the form shown by 1890.

It was used as its name implies to plow steep hillsides. The plow as sketched was pulled by three horses or mules.

A wooden pole, not shown in its entire length, ran between the draft animals and helped to stabilize the plow.

Although the plow had both right and left throwing bottoms, only one bottom was used at a time.

On steep slopes it is impossible to roll the furrow-slice up the hill. The Hillside Plow is used so as to always roll the furrow-slice down the hill.

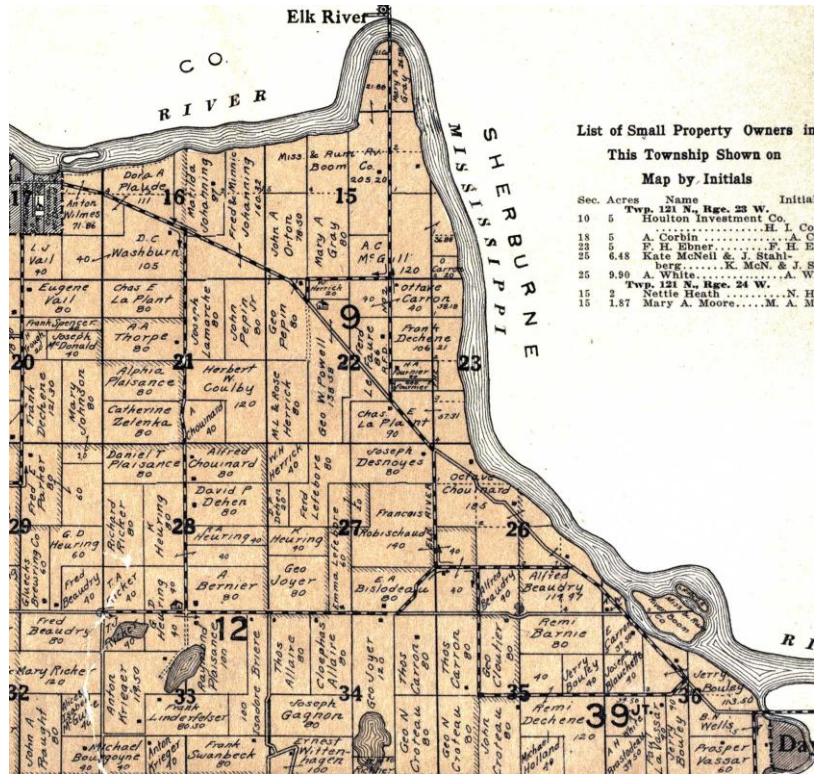
Hillside Plows literally moved an eight-inch-deep by sixteen-inch-wide layer of topsoil from the top of hill to the bottom every time the plow was used.

Hillside plows were also called two-way plows. Farmers had to hire Hillside Plowing.

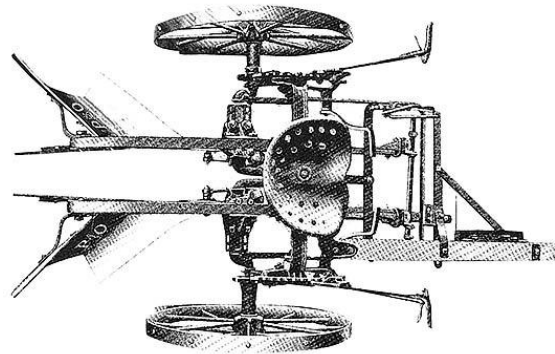
It required a unique and costly plow, plus three specially trained draft animals.

Plowing a steep slope with the Hillside Plow was an ecological sin every time it was used.

1. It removed topsoil from the crests of the hills.
2. It moved that topsoil and left it in deep banks at the base of the hill where it was useless.
3. It exposed the soil sheet rain erosion.
4. It exposed the soil sorting of light weight matter like humus and organic material which ended up in the ponds as muck.
5. It exposed the slopes to gullying.



EAST OTSEGO, 1915.



SKETCH OF THE MCMORMICK PLOW, 1900.

Only one bottom was used at a time.



RESTORED MCMORMICK HILLSIDE PLOW.

The aerial photograph to the right was taken of the north forty of Lakeview Farm in 1940.

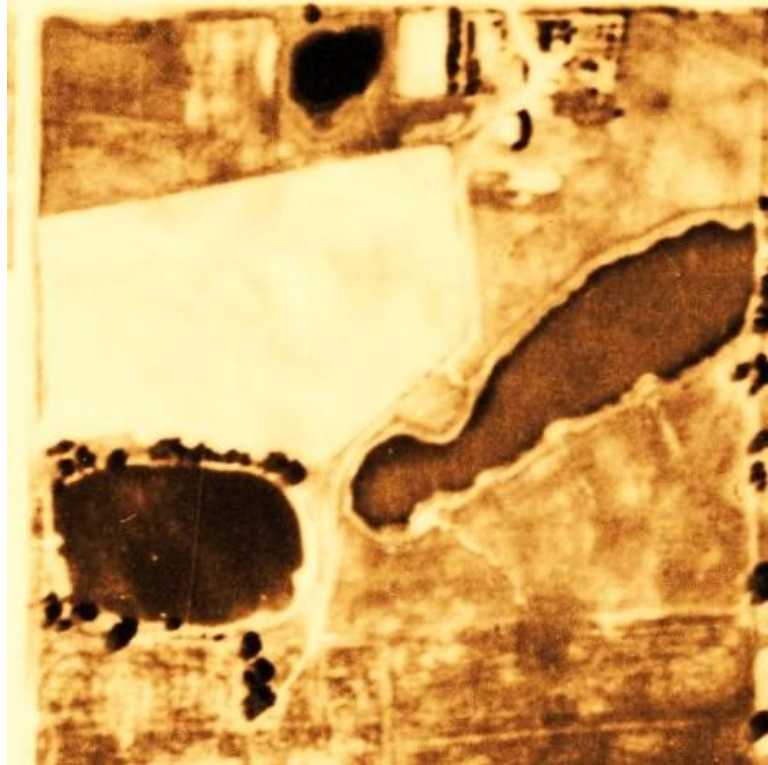
The price of wheat rose to extremely high levels during WWI but collapsed by 1922.

That would have ended use of the costly Hillside Plow.

Eighteen years after the use of the disastrous practice ended you can easily see the bad effects.

This picture was made sometime in the mid-summer.

The large light field toward the center appears to be ripening wheat. Notice the horizontal crop rows or plow traces east to west.



**NE1/4 of the NW1/4 of Section 35 East,
Otsego Township, Wright County, Minnesota.**

Except along the south side of the long pond.

There the plow lines follow the major axis of long pond.

That is where the Hillside Plow did the greatest damage.

It is easy to see four alluvial fans and the accompanying gulleys.

Three of the gulleys grassed over by the late 1940s.

The fourth, which had a much larger drainage area, remained open and growing into the 1980s.

The south bank of the long pond also had the steep four-foot ledge of rich topsoil at the water's edge, characteristic of the Hillside Plow.

Both the north and south shores of round pond had similar ledges.

The south slope of the round pond had fewer gulleys than the south slope of the long pond because it was less steep.

Nevertheless, it had two alluvial fans in the southeast corner.

One was caused by a gulley that was treed by 1940, the other was caused by the field road to south forty of Lakeview Farm.

The north bank of the round pond did not have any gulleys, although the Hillside Plow was used there.

It was less steep and with less height, hence insufficient drainage area.

The Hillside Plow was not used on the north bank of the long pond, because it was neither steep nor high.

That was plowed up and down the slope with a conventional team and plow.

Nevertheless, it has small alluvial fans, one prominent fan at the east end, most likely from the dead furrow nearest to the property line.

It was here that the glacial Crow River, that made our ponds, took a hard turn and headed north to the Mississippi, but that is a different story. Tom Barthel.

BRICKTON.

The town of Brickton was two miles directly north of Princeton on the railroad that ran north from Elk River.

Brick making began there in 1889 and ceased in 1928.

At the peak in 1902, five brick companies had yards there.

In that year alone, twenty million bricks were shipped from Brickton.

It at least two hundred men and two hundred horses were employed at the peak.

Brick making in Minnesota was seasonal work so many of the men most of the horses found work in lumber industry in northern Minnesota in the winter.

Brickton's charcoal plants drew firewood to feed its kilns from 30 to 50 miles.

Brickton had its own Post Office from 1901 until 1928.

The Town produced four million bricks in 1928, but that was the last full season of operation.

The clay suitable for bricks ran low, wood for the kilns was hard to find and market for bricks collapsed with the Depression.

No doubt the machinery was moved to other brick-clay deposits, the hundreds of wooden were either moved away, torn down, or allowed to rot into the earth.

There is a small sign marking the location of Brickton but to memorialize the decades of feverish work that was done there by men, horses, and machines. Tom



E1/2 of the NW1/4 of Section 35 East, Otsego Township, Wright County, Minnesota. 1940.