



The Katharine Ordway  
Natural History Study Area

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Inver Grove Heights, Minn. 55075 · · · · · ORDWAY BULLETIN  
(612) 455-6204 · · · · · No. 118

MACALESTER  
COLLEGE

located at 9550 Inver Grove Trail (Dakota County Road 77), Inver Grove Heights, Minn.

### HISTORY at ORDWAY.

As one looks at the place, lying along the west bank of the Mississippi, it captures his eye and appeals to his esthetic inner senses. Season follows season and each year replaces the others with differing sets of trappings at the Ordway setting. As the years advance one begins to detect changes which contrast with previous years' appearance. Such contrasts are inevitable - Ordway is acquiring history.

Actually Ordway already has a history - it is simply that one is not usually struck by that fact when he takes a casual look. Certainly there is nothing "old-looking" about the place, no ancient buildings or deep-rutted roads or canyon walls with pictographs. No, the human history of Ordway is not very noticeable to the casual observer.

The records at the Dakota County Courthouse in Hastings reveal some things: Government Lots No. 7 and 8 were a part of a government survey made just prior to 1855 and these two lots constitute most of the area of Ordway. Joseph Irish held a deed for 115 acres, dated 1855 and this was sold in 1872 to Henry Mettler and passed on to his unmarried daughter, Julia, in 1897. What we now refer to as River Lake was known as "Mettler's Slough" and there are a couple of elderly local citizens who still refer to it by that name. Mettler's Slough became River Lake when it grew deeper (by  $\frac{1}{2}$  meters) because of the closing of the gates of the newly-built Dam No. 2 at Hastings in 1931-32.

Farming and grazing, mostly by dairy cattle, were the primary uses for the land and most of the oak trees were removed before 1890. (The average age of the oak "patriarchs" presently standing has been determined to be about 90 years, which would correspond with the developing of the land for farming and grazing.) An interesting historical transformation is evident from some aerial photographs taken during the early 1930's and showing a considerable reversion to forestland since then. Under current management policies this is likely to increase although we intend to maintain the interesting and vital grassland areas as well.

About 1888 a developer, named Russell Dorr, appeared and had a portion of the land platted for a realty development. This appears to have been a speculative venture and its discontinuance may have been directly linked with some of the bank failures during the Jay Gould and J.P. Morgan era.

Around 1900 two railroads, the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Co. and the Chicago & Northwestern Co., appeared, their tracks passing approximately parallel to each other through the property. About 1914 an electric interurban line, linking the West Side of St. Paul with Hastings, ran through a portion of the property and its rail-bed is still evident in places. This (the St. Paul & Southern RR Co.) was discontinued about 1920. The automobile was nudging matters in other directions.

At some hazy time in the past there was a post-road which meandered through the property and out along a ridge to the Rochester Road and along this trace some local resident "carried the mail". While information is sketchy on this the traces of the road are still discernible, including a long-since-collapsed and rotted wooden bridge-culvert.

It is interesting and worthwhile to contemplate the foot-prints of time and the other marks of human activities and to speculate upon them but this all lies under the tranquil scene which greets one's gaze, winter or summer, at Ordway.



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Naturalist

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