

An Environmental History of Oldenburg Point

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Few children from small towns in northern Minnesota grow up without a potent sense of place, and I am no exception. I grew up loving the land. In one of my seminal adolescent memories, my sixteen-year-old self perches on the swinging bridge over the St. Louis River in Jay Cooke State Park. It is early spring—April, probably, as thick slabs of ice still grip the shore—and seething currents of frigid snowmelt surge beneath me. The waters, tea-stained with tannins seeping from the extensive thawing wetlands to the north, rush toward the river’s mouth at Lake Superior. There they will wait hundreds of years before continuing their journey to the Atlantic. A spring snow flurry swirls about me, and as I look beyond the jutting rocks and roaring falls into the thick forest of hardwoods, spruce, and pine, I can palpably sense the ancient Canadian Shield emerging beneath my feet and expanding far into the north. In my mind, this swathe of rugged land and dynamic water in southeast Carlton County seems to embody completely the wild nature of northern Minnesota.

In fact, Jay Cooke State Park lies near several transitions that characterize the regional environment. The gradational boundary between deciduous and coniferous forests passes through central Minnesota a short distance to the south. Likewise, just to the south sedimentary rocks disappear from the surface and more ancient igneous and metamorphic rocks are exposed to the north. The park also is located near important hydrologic divides. The St. Louis River, which empties into Lake Superior, drains the westernmost watershed in the Great Lakes basin. Yet rain falling twenty miles west or south of Jay Cooke flows down the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico. And to the north, precipitation enters the extensive system of glacial lakes and juvenile streams at the southern edge of the Hudson Bay watershed. In my formative experience on the swinging bridge, I remember feeling fascinated by the park’s physiography. I still am. But that is not why I love the land.

I love Jay Cooke State Park because I have gone there every year of my life with people I love. So perhaps I should say I grew up loving the environment’s function rather than the landscape’s simple existence. Over time my perceptions of the ostensibly inhuman environment have become suffused with human emotional significance, so that meaning imbued in the park’s landscape stems from the important role it has played in my life. I cannot remember a time when I did not know the park, and as I have grown my conception of its physical landscape and the meanings I have ascribed to it have changed. Several park facilities and trails have been locales for family outings since before my birth. Other trails are hiking routes, ski areas, and places to run. The woods, streams, and rocks functioned as science classrooms. Pools in the St. Louis were swimming holes in summers during my adolescence. The swinging bridge area is a hangout spot, a romantic getaway, a

place for meditation. Finally, the park in its entirety will always be a fascinating place to go exploring.

Yet, in a sense, only one idea underlies all my disparate uses of the park: Jay Cooke is a place I go “to be in nature.” Regardless of the specific activities humans engage in there, it is the appeal of wild nature in the park that draws more than 220,000 visitors each year.<sup>1</sup> But Jay Cooke State Park is not a place to experience wilderness. The land is preserved due to its aesthetic value and the dramatic power displayed by the St. Louis River. But it is not wild in the sense of a pristine land unsullied by human activities. Rather, the park is clearly a place modified for a specific human use—recreation. Yet modern alterations to facilitate leisure activities only comprise the topmost layer of human writing on the park’s palimpsest landscape, and traces of the area’s diverse land-use history remain etched upon the earth. Many of these vestiges converge at one location within the park. So it is there, at Oldenburg Point, that I will interpret historic human activities and attempt to convey a more holistic understanding of the land.

When one enters Oldenburg Point’s packed gravel parking lot, neatly bordered with trapezoidal concrete barriers, a splash of lush meadow opens to the north. Orderly rows of white spruce trees flank the thick lawn of hardy introduced grasses and white clover, and numerous pellets of dry and decaying dung testify that this prime grazing habitat does not go unnoticed by the park’s abundant deer population. In fact, the whitetail deer that frequent this forest edge seldom respond to—let alone flee from—the sights and sounds of thousands of automobiles that come to Oldenburg Point each year. The deer have no need to flee. Park regulations proscribe hunting, and ranger-led wildlife viewing excursions encourage deer to regard humans as innocuous spectators. And the deer are apt performers. Indeed, a grazing whitetail gracefully framed against the dense forest composes a beautiful picture. But should that deer unknowingly stray beyond park boundaries during November, its conditioned quiescence might spell its demise.

A deer’s transformation from hair-trigger wariness to placid complacency symbolizes a dramatic human ecological transformation. The deer of Jay Cooke State Park are living documents that attest to the remarkable transformation of human activities in the lands now encapsulated within the park’s boundaries. Once, Ojibwa people would have hunted whitetail here to provide critical calories in their diets. Yet obtaining meat was far more than a purely materialistic venture. The hunt also had sacred ramifications. Every creature’s welfare depended on its manitou, a powerful guiding supernatural spirit. Therefore, a hunter entreated the manitou of a deer to permit a successful hunt, expressing the need for food and acknowledging the solemn responsibility involved in taking life. Basil Johnson writes that after the kill a hunter “offered tobacco in

thanksgiving to the manitou of the victim and...to Kitchi-Manitou, the Master of Life, for sanctioning the taking of life.”<sup>2</sup> Deer and humans were thus bound in a sacred cycle of gift giving. To view a deer in this place is not simply to see a biological entity, but it is to see in stark relief how modern humans’ desire to extract profit from the land eventually eradicated a lifestyle and culture dependent on nature’s largess for material subsistence and spiritual well-being.

A short walk from the trailhead at the Oldenburg Point parking lot quickly leads to the renowned Grand Portage of the St. Louis, a transportation route that played a key role in Indians’ way of life, and in irrevocably altering that way of life. Hikers setting out from Oldenburg Point to walk the portion of this trail preserved within the park may stroll along unaware of the historical significance of their path. But the Grand Portage Trail’s physical characteristics reveal its history. Most park trails are wide, grassy tracks kept passable by periodic mowing. Actual footpaths generally do not appear in these tracks, but utility vehicle tire scarring sometimes is evident. In contrast, the narrow Grand Portage Trail stretches through the forest as a packed dirt footpath, which needs no mowing to remain travelable. Where maintenance vehicles have devegetated a wide area, the old trail shows up as a thin strip of entrenched clay down the middle of the impacted area. Many thousands of human footfalls over hundreds of years are preserved there in the packed, barren earth.

Although local historian John Fritzen writes that the seven-mile route around the unnavigable dalles of the St. Louis River was “a difficult trail with steep hills to climb and wet swamps...to wade through,” it had been a major Indian thoroughfare for hundreds of years at the time of first contact with Europeans in the late seventeenth century. The St. Louis connected the open waters of Lake Superior with the interior of Minnesota and regions beyond, and for this reason the Ojibwa called it “‘Kitchigumizibi’ or Lake Superior River.” The watershed’s proximity to two major continental divides meant that the river could serve as a highway for early peoples to travel to and from the Hudson Bay drainage via the Pike River Portage, or the vast Mississippi River network via the Savanna Portage or the Prairie Portage.<sup>3</sup> Indians traveling to or from villages near the mouth of the St. Louis would have passed Oldenburg Point on their way to trade or to harvest foods like wild rice. In the winter these settlements broke into small family units that dispersed across the landscape, each managing its own hunting territory to insure some success for each family. The first running of sugar maple sap in the spring marked the end of winter’s solitude, as it summoned several small families to a traditionally shared grove to make sugar, thus initiating the movement back to communal village life in the summer.<sup>4</sup> These groups moved over the Grand Portage past Oldenburg Point during their seasonal migrations, and the abundant sugar maples

and deer at Oldenburg Point suggest that some Ojibwa could have occupied this place and utilized its resources for winter and spring subsistence.

During migrations, gender dictated how families moved over the Grand Portage. Women took a different route than their male relatives, disembarking at the Women's Portage farther downstream and joining the main trail after several miles. Men also disembarked at the Women's Portage and used ropes to tow canoes up the passable rapids, thus taking advantage of the greater efficiency of water transportation. In return, men had to carry all their belongings and canoes up a treacherous clay bank near the mouth of the Little River to access the Grand Portage.<sup>5</sup> The Lake Superior Ojibwa also passed Oldenburg Point on the Grand Portage on their way to war. North-central Minnesota hosted an intermittent struggle between the Ojibwa and the Dakota,<sup>6</sup> and musters of Ojibwa warriors from around Lake Superior would meet at Fond du Lac and travel by canoe up the St. Louis River. According to early Ojibwa historian William W. Warren, around 1740 "a train of warriors...so long as they marched single file that a person standing on a hill could not see from one extremity to the other...marched against the Sioux at Sandy Lake" over the Grand Portage.<sup>7</sup> An observer could have watched from one of Oldenburg Point's panoramic overlooks.

Geographer David Lanegran claims that to interpret Minnesota's environmental history accurately we must view the landscape in economic terms; we must see the commodified landscape.<sup>8</sup> Indians used the St. Louis River transportation corridor as part of their subsistence lifestyle. When white people came, however, they brought with them a vastly different conception of land economy. They came to exploit natural resources for profit. Consequently, fur trade historian Grace Lee Nute imagines "thousands of human feet" that dogtrotted over the Grand Portage and other trails, such as the Knife Falls portage upstream. They "packed the soils...so firmly that even yet traces of the trails are discernable."<sup>9</sup> French traders arrived first from the east in the late seventeenth century and took advantage of the St. Louis to access fur harvesting regions of the continental interior and to bring furs to market. These early explorers and traders utilized Indian guides to find their way up the St. Louis and to other waterway systems. Indians also provided much of the labor and skill in harvesting beaver and other furbearing animals during the fur trade.<sup>10</sup> But as a tourist display at Jay Cooke park headquarters quips, the goods and pelts of the fur trade "moved across northern North America on the backs of the voyageurs." These transport specialists used the Indian technology of the birch bark canoe to extend the reach of European demand for furs far into the continental interior. Carrying anywhere from 180 to over 400 pounds apiece, thousands of voyageurs struggled past Oldenburg Point on the Grand Portage "sweating,

panting, dark with mud, and covered with mosquito and fly bites,...punctuating the carriage with many a ‘sacre.’”<sup>11</sup>

The flow of diverse peoples and goods and an enormous number of pelts over the Grand Portage permanently altered traditional Indian lifestyles. In a pattern that repeated itself in many other times and places, Indians who had abandoned their traditional subsistence patterns and become dependent on the fur trade economy ended up destitute once the fur trade ground to a halt. A journalist with the 1820 Cass Expedition of the young United States government into the interior of Minnesota reported that “starvation, consumption, and hardships are gradually annihilating the Indians of this quarter.”<sup>12</sup> After ceding their land to the U.S. federal government in an 1854 treaty, the Fond du Lac area Ojibwa people were shuttled onto a much different path than their ancient route along the Grand Portage of the St. Louis.<sup>13</sup> Historian Walker D. Wyman argues that the exhaustion of hunting lands drove the Ojibwa to sell their lands to the United States. The Fond du Lac band incurred large debts to American fur traders which they could not pay due to dwindling fur harvests. Wyman suggests that once the Ojibwa became reliant on the fur trade economy that encouraged the undermining of its own resource base, they foresaw the inevitable loss of their lands. Trespassing settlers already had gained a foothold in northern Minnesota lands rich in timber and minerals by the mid-1800s, and the government seemed likely to force the removal of the Ojibwa to reservations far to the west in order to avoid imminent conflict. Thus, the Fond du Lac band ceded its territory to the U.S. federal government in return for debt forgiveness, annuity payments, and a reservation near the present-day town of Cloquet, Minnesota.<sup>14</sup> No longer would the Fond du Lac people travel past Oldenburg Point to and from their eponymous home at the head of the lake. Ironically, although today no Ojibwa live near Oldenburg Point, numerous pointed aspen stumps, matted grassy slides, and several conspicuous lodges along the river indicate that beaver have returned in force.

The fur trade cycled with the seasons. Indians and white traders trapped animals in the winter and voyageurs transported hides south and east in the spring and summer, following the breakup of the ice cover on lakes and streams. Other voyageurs brought supplies and trade goods west in the spring and summer from cities such as Montreal. The two groups met, exchanged goods, and traveled back to their winter stations, and the cycle began again.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the industry that next left its mark on the modern landscape at Oldenburg Point—logging—also cycled with the seasons, because the seasons control the cycling of water. Early logging required snow to transport logs by sledge to the riverbank. With the coming of spring floods, “river pigs”

utilized the flows to move these logs downstream to sawmills. This cycle occurred at Oldenburg Point.

Surveyors working for the federal land survey in Minnesota began in the 1850s in the east-central portion of the state. Oldenburg Point therefore was surveyed relatively early compared to other regions to the north or west. Once the land was segmented into squares of a grid it could be sold efficiently and its resources extracted. The first plat map of the township that now includes Jay Cooke State Park, produced by three surveyors in the mid 1850s, illustrates favorable conditions for logging at High Landing, the land immediately south of the river at Oldenburg Point.<sup>16</sup> Today one can easily see that hills above High Landing slope much more gently than many other bluffs along the river. Also, few rapids that could cause dangerous logjams exist downstream from Oldenburg Point, so without major hindrances logs could float from this area to Fond du Lac. There, they were boomed and rafted to sawmills in Duluth.<sup>17</sup> In addition to the comparatively gentle topography and amenable hydrology that High Landing afforded loggers, by the 1850s a road connecting Fond du Lac to the St. Paul-to-Superior Military Road met the river at High Landing, meaning that heavy logging equipment had easy access to this site.<sup>18</sup> Thus, due in a large part to geographic constraints, logging that commenced in the region around 1870 focused on areas surrounding Oldenburg Point.<sup>19</sup> It is interesting to note that historical logging activities are nearly invisible in the modern landscape. No road is discernible today along the south bank, and no stumps dot the hillsides, which appear thickly forested. After a cursory look, all appears green and natural. But the key to reading the landscape at Oldenburg Point with respect to trees is not to ask: “What do I see, and why is it there?” Rather the crucial question is just the opposite: “What is missing here?”

The answer, unsurprisingly, is the same species Thoreau likened to “great harps on which the wind makes music,”<sup>20</sup> and which the British highly prized in New England for nearly perfect mast wood—white pine.<sup>21</sup> With the cutting of the Minnesota’s pines, the land of present day Jay Cooke State Park underwent a transformation ubiquitous on the northern Midwestern landscape. Today, the trees at Oldenburg Point include many species native to this region, where mature forests typically contain pine, spruce, fir and mixed hardwoods. White spruce and balsam fir thrive on the bluff at Oldenburg, and northern white cedars occupy wetter soils near the river. Many sugar maples provide abundant shade in a discontinuous low canopy, locally creating conditions ideal for shade-tolerant brush, such as maple and basswood seedlings. Where slightly more light reaches the forest floor, white and northern red oaks occasionally have gained a foothold. And paper birch, the hallmark northern deciduous species whose bark was widely used by the Ojibwa for canoes, cooking pots,

containers, and wigwams, grows in abundance at Oldenburg Point. Before logging, white pines would have soared above the spruce, fir, and hardwoods as a supercanopy species. According to conservation biologist Curt Meine, white pine historically rarely grew in contiguous stands but occupied gaps in the canopy caused by windfall or fire, and seldom comprised more than seven percent of a forest's trees.<sup>22</sup> But one is lucky to find a single white pine at Oldenburg Point. Instead, extensive stands of poplar and aspen native to northern Minnesota dominate the surrounding landscape. These fast-growing pioneer species thrive in areas that have been disturbed, and rapidly colonize burned or cut-over lands.<sup>23</sup> Due to historical logging, then, poplar has largely supplanted more mature forest species. Yet this generalization requires qualification. Elsewhere in the park one does find pockets or swathes of white or red pines, all similar in size, often evenly spaced. What accounts for these enigmatic reminders of pre-settlement forests? Interestingly, the park's forest composition may have as much to do with Depression-era socio-economics as ecology. But that part of the story comes later on.

In order to better understand the environmental context for anthropogenic changes still perceptible upon the land, it is worthwhile to briefly describe the area's geology and physical geography, which in turn will reveal a nearly inconspicuous record of human landscape modification. From Oldenburg Point's Picnic Trail overlook—a paved circular platform encased by a placard-studded stone wall—one can descend the steep bluff nearly 300 feet down to the river. One might conceptualize such a hike as a journey through turbulent geologic episodes. Further, one might guess that the impressive scenery at Oldenburg Point piqued the interest of early scientists. Indeed, modern interpretations of local landscape evolution follow closely the work of N.H. Winchell, the state geologist who surveyed Carlton County in the 1890s. As the vast continental glacier receded at the end of the Pleistocene, meltwater from the Superior Lobe inundated the St. Louis valley and formed a giant proglacial lake. Glacial Lake Duluth extended far to the southwest of modern Lake Superior, with shorelines up to 523 feet higher than current ones.<sup>24</sup> Hundreds of feet of glacial sediment poured from the ice sheet into gelid Lake Duluth, and rapidly built the thick deposits of red clay and silt, rich in oxidized iron from the north, that comprise the park's bluffs.<sup>25</sup> Subsequently, the St. Louis energetically dissected through these sediments down to bedrock. Winchell described the river at Oldenburg Point as “a rushing and foaming torrent, dashing from side to side of the channel, cut and parted by the jagged protrusions of the highly dipping slate which...forms troughs that alternate with sharp and angular ridges.”<sup>26</sup>

Today, thanks to the steep trail painstakingly constructed by park laborers, tourists can experience up

close the river's dynamic power that Winchell so vividly depicted. A well-traveled stairway made from tree roots, split logs, railroad ties, and slate slabs descends the red clay slope to the cliffs at the river's edge. Here, a chaotic assemblage of uprooted trees, rounded boulders, plunging folds of serrated metagraywacke, and low islands colonized by riparian vegetation intersperse between the anastomosing channels. No vista could appear wilder than that between the trail's end and the south bank, a quarter mile distant. Yet High Landing on the south shore was a hotspot in the region's logging boom. Below the bank, the river at Oldenburg Point hides a different figment of historical human activity. A century of highly variable flows of the St. Louis have obscured a remarkable human past on this reach's mid-channel islands.

The lure of the river tempts visitors to ignore the interpretive placards posted at the Picnic Trail's observation platform and either gaze out across the gorge or charge down the stairway trail to the water's edge. But one bronze tablet forms a portal through which we may view a potent layer of history in the fluvial landscape below. Crucially, the second plaque clockwise from the river trailhead tells us that "one half mile south of this point lie three islands, known as numbers 1, 2, and 3, . . . which were settled by Josiah Boardman Scovell, original U.S. patentee, in 1881." Scovell's daughter gifted these islands to the park in 1944, nearly thirty years after its inception. In short, what initially seems a pristine stream is in fact the setting for an archaeological ruin. The rectilinear gridlines of the 1785 Land Ordinance extended even to the rugged St. Louis gorge, and beneath the sediment and debris of the ostensibly wildest location at Oldenburg Point lie buried the foundations of a home and the borders of a homestead. The fact that in recent history people have lived and worked in the middle of the unpredictable St. Louis River is in its own right astounding. But the facts conveyed by the commemorative placard beg numerous questions, some of which lead to significant changes in the land. To wit: Why did Scovell live on rocky islands in a nearly inaccessible gorge? What happened to the settlement, few obvious signs of which exist today? What connected a homestead in this isolated location with other regional settlements? Who owned the rest of the land that now comprises Jay Cooke State Park? How did Scovell's homestead cycle with the seasons?

These questions extend beyond the scope of this paper. But answering the first two questions becomes immensely easier after spending several hours exploring the geology around Scovell's islands. Over a billion years ago a swarm of dikes intruded into the metamorphic Thomson Formation, and concentrated numerous veins and pockets of milky quartz in the rocks of Jay Cooke State Park. Once one discovers such rocks in the area, a logical step is to consult the geological literature. There, an answer emerges. The quartz deposits

exposed along the St. Louis River were reputed to contain traces of silver and gold.<sup>27</sup> The township and range system provides the conclusive key to the question of Scovell's occupation. Winchell reports that "numerous veins of pyritiferous quartz have tempted many to expense in shallow shafting. [One] of these localities [is] as follows: ...section 10, township 48, range 16 (on the islands)."<sup>28</sup> The islands in section ten are the placard's Islands One, Two, and Three. Josiah Scovell was a miner. This stretch of river may appear wild, but ideas of unsullied land dissolve in light of this historical land use, now obscured by a century of floods.

No environmental history of Oldenburg Point would be complete without some allusion to railroads, because the physical remains of an abandoned railroad bed that once passed across the Point lie just to the east of its picnic area. This tangible document's mere existence begs for an explanation. The Ogantz Trail begins at the Oldenburg picnic area. Walking east on the trail, one descends into a small ravine and immediately a steep, narrow ridge with a gently sloping flat top becomes evident to the south. This thin, high bank parallels the trail in a curving line running east and west, and disappears when the Ogantz Trail climbs out of the small drainage onto land adjacent and equal in elevation to the ridge top. The small ravine drops into the main river valley within several feet of the curvilinear ridge that impedes it, and where the apparently engineered earthwork is especially steep the susceptible clay-rich soils exhibit marked slumping. Apparently, ruins of a high wooden trestle in a similar topographic setting exist just to the east, beyond the reach of the Ogantz Trail.<sup>29</sup> Clearly, this linear ridge is a cut-and-fill railroad bed. Why would people build a railroad in such erodible terrain so close to the edge of the steep river bluff?

Trains played a crucial role in changing the logging and lumber milling industries in northern Minnesota, but little incentive existed to build a logging railroad through the dissected gullies on the east side of Oldenburg Point because transporting logs to the river with the help of gravity presented a much more efficient option. In fact, the reason for the earthwork lies only half a mile to the east of the picnic area at the hydroelectric generating facility for the Thomson dam, which impounds a sizeable reservoir upstream of the park. Just before visitors driving to Oldenburg Point from Duluth arrive at the picnic area parking lot, they pass over three linear mounds running straight down to the river. These dipping lineations are giant wooden tunnels carrying water from Thomson reservoir to the powerhouse. Interestingly, the industrial importance of this landscape did not end with the inception of the park. Hydrologic development of the St. Louis was born in the mind of eastern financier Jay Cooke when he visited the area in the late 1860s to examine the proposed route for the Northern Pacific Railroad. Impressed by the power potential of the St. Louis, he began acquiring

property rights along the river in the 1880s. Eventually, in the year of his death, 1905, Cooke sold some of these lands to the Northern Power and Light Company, which completed the impressively engineered Thomson hydroelectric project in 1907.<sup>30</sup> The peculiar arrangement of a powerhouse several miles from the dam required the power company to build a railroad track across Oldenburg Point to connect the two facilities. In fact, the company built the small town of Forbay near the powerhouse, and residents traveled to and from the isolated settlement in a gas railway car that Forbay resident Gloria Murto said “slowed for the grades and raced down the other side, leaning for curves, coming to a screeching halt with a perfumed smell of exhaust.”<sup>31</sup> Reading the landscape of Oldenburg Point and asking “How did things come to be this way?” thus yields surprisingly illuminating answers about both railroads and hydropower development.

A central tenet of environmental history states that characteristics of the non-human environment effectively restrict the range of possible human activities, and within these constraints humans choose behaviors that in turn help shape the environment. Visibly, the picnic area at Oldenburg Point embodies this idea. At first, the site’s physiography seems ideal for its current use as a picnic area. The point is a bluff-capped cusped peninsula that juts south into a U-shaped bend in the St. Louis River. The peculiar arrangement of high land surrounded on three sides by dramatic water affords spectacular vistas. But location alone does not provide beautiful views. At some point humans elected to modify intensively the site in order to showcase the scenery of the river valley. Accordingly, the modern infrastructure of the picnic area channels visitors to the edge of the bluff, to several judiciously cleared viewpoints from which dramatic panoramas extend across the deep valley to the thickly wooded horizon. Because of human choices, the picnic area’s architecture frames the landscape like a carefully composed Romantic painting replete with Claudian compositional elements. South of the parking lot, a curved path wraps around a gentle swale in the cultivated lawn toward the bluff’s edge and the gorge beyond, thus linking a humanized foreground and a sublime background. Large oaks and maples frame views of a picnic shelter and a utility building, both built of roughly quarried local gabbro and whole peeled logs in the Rustic Style, which sit on the fringes of the pastoral field.<sup>32</sup> Physical attributes alone did not dictate that this place should serve as a place for picturesque picnics.

Rather, as part of an initiative to develop park infrastructure for tourism and alleviate the devastating effects of rampant Depression-era unemployment, Civilian Conservation Corps laborers constructed the Oldenburg Point site in 1934 under the direction of National Park Service architect Edward Barber. The CCC also built the park’s headquarters and established the modern road to Oldenburg Point. By design, this road’s

many abrupt hills and sharp curves intentionally integrated it into the rugged landscape.<sup>33</sup> If the infrastructure the CCC built in the park (so “city dwellers...may enjoy the rugged beauty of the wilderness in comparative comfort,” as a newspaper commented) is the most obvious New Deal legacy apparent on the landscape today, it is only because evidence of the other important CCC activity hides everywhere in plain site.<sup>34</sup> The clusters of uniform pine trees also trace their origin to the mid-1930s, as one of the main conservation duties of the CCC in the park was reforestation. Many of the 124 million trees the CCC planted statewide grow today in Jay Cooke.<sup>35</sup> A local newspaper celebrated the arrival of the CCC, stating “there’s a hundred and one things these CCC boys can do and will do.”<sup>36</sup> Between 1933 and 1941, hundreds of young men from Kansas and Minnesota lived up to such hopeful predictions and produced the modern park landscape. In sum, although the inviting picnic area at Oldenburg Point seems like a “natural” place for modern recreation, its built environment intentionally embraces a Romantic vision of landscape which clearly separates the human and the wild, yet also comfortably connects them on the same canvas. Landscape architects composed many such picturesque scenes in state and national parks across the country in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. If Oldenburg Point is a canvas, the nation at large is the gallery.

To conclude, modern visitors may fail to grasp that the natural beauty of Oldenburg Point obscures the fact that for hundreds of years it has been a working landscape that only recently also became a landscape of leisure. Indians utilized many plants and animals living at Oldenburg Point, and migrated seasonally through the park to obtain the means for their subsistence. The St. Louis and its Grand Portage served as a vital transportation corridor for both Indians and fur traders. Miners and loggers sought wealth from the rocks and forest at Oldenburg Point. A railroad across the peninsula helped integrate the components of a hydroelectric project constructed in the years of burgeoning progressive conservation. Young men in the Depression supported thousands of impoverished family members through their physical labor in order to create a retreat for picturesque recreation. The progressive conservationist task of crafting a place of natural beauty within an industrial landscape began decades earlier, however, in the efforts of F. Rodney Paine, an early graduate of the Yale School of Forestry and the first park superintendent. Paine attempted to implement scientific forestry practices and also to provide all people access to what historian Roy Meyer calls “everyone’s country estate.”<sup>37</sup> That many disparate economic activities remain perceptible on the modern landscape clearly indicates that very little at Oldenburg Point is truly wild or natural. That a park to showcase nature exists at all resulted largely from completely unnatural human financial activities. By 1915 Jay Cooke’s heirs owed years of unpaid

taxes on their riparian property, land that brought them no financial benefit. Opportunistic local municipalities, realizing that tourism could provide area businesses with economic returns from the land, engaged Carlton lawyer Henry Oldenburg to broker a deal in which Cooke's riverfront property would become the central land parcel in a state park. In return, the local towns paid the estate's tax arrears.<sup>38</sup> The subject of this paper, Oldenburg Point, commemorates the lawyer whose efforts preserved the multifaceted landscape of the park in order to bolster the regional economy. While I fully understand that many calculated choices created the place that today I go "to be in nature," I still love Jay Cooke Park and in fact still think of it as "natural." The existence of a functioning hydroelectric plant several thousand feet from my favorite waterfall on Earth does not detract from my joy at the wild splendor of water. To love Jay Cooke State Park's style of nature is to reconcile my deep desire for the mythic purity of wilderness and the historical changes humans have wrought upon the land. And in meditating on what this place means to me after scrutinizing the human-induced changes at Oldenburg Point, I know I love the land all the more because of the revolutions it has passed through.

## Notes to the text

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- <sup>1</sup> Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, "Minnesota State Parks: Jay Cooke," [http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state\\_parks/jay\\_cooke/narrative.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/jay_cooke/narrative.html).
- <sup>2</sup> Basil Johnston, *The Manitous: The Spiritual World of the Ojibway* (Toronto: Key Porter Books Limited, 1995), 118.
- <sup>3</sup> John Fritzen, *The History of Fond du Lac and Jay Cooke Park* (Duluth: St. Louis County Historical Society, 1978), 4-6.
- <sup>4</sup> Ruth Landes, *Ojibwa Religion and the Midéwiwin* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), 4-6.
- <sup>5</sup> Fritzen, *The History of Fond du Lac and Jay Cooke Park*, 5. I was unsuccessful in locating the clay bank travelers would climb to access the trail, as the eastern terminus of the Grand Portage today is drowned by a reservoir created by the Fond du Lac dam. Abundant steep red clay banks surround the shoreline of the reservoir, and frequent mass wasting is evident.
- <sup>6</sup> Harold Hickerson, *The Chippewa and Their Neighbors: A Study in Ethnohistory* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1970), 71-72.
- <sup>7</sup> William W. Warren, *History of the Ojibways, Vol. 5* (St. Paul: Minnesota History Collections), quoted in Fritzen, *The History of Fond du Lac and Jay Cooke Park*, 8.
- <sup>8</sup> *Minnesota: A History of the Land*, DVD, directed by John Whitehead (2005; St. Paul, MN: College of Natural Resources, University of Minnesota and Twin Cities Public Television, 2005).
- <sup>9</sup> Grace Lee Nute, *The Voyageur*, 1<sup>st</sup> Reprint ed. (Minnesota Historical Society, 1955), 63.
- <sup>10</sup> Fritzen, *The History of Fond du Lac and Jay Cooke Park*, 8.
- <sup>11</sup> Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, "Voyageurs," Interpretive placard at Jay Cooke State Park Headquarters.
- <sup>12</sup> James Duane Doty, quoted in Fritzen, *The History of Fond du Lac and Jay Cooke Park*, 29.
- <sup>13</sup> Helen E. Knuth, *Economic and Historical Background of Northeastern Minnesota Lands: Chippewa Indians of Lake Superior*, in *American Indian Ethnohistory: North Central and Northeastern Indians: Chippewa Indians III*, ed. David Agee Horr (New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1974), 290-291.
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- <sup>18</sup> Rey, Nye, and Burt, "Township No. 48 N. Range 46 W. 4<sup>th</sup> Mer.," Public Land Survey Plat Map.
- <sup>19</sup> Fritzen, *The History of Fond du Lac and Jay Cooke Park*, 25.
- <sup>20</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *The Journal of Henry David Thoreau*, ed. Bradford Torrey and Francis H. Allen (1906), 10:33 (September 16, 1857), quoted in William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1991), 151.
- <sup>21</sup> William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*, 1<sup>st</sup> Revised ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003) 109-110.
- <sup>22</sup> *Minnesota: A History of the Land*, DVD, directed by John Whitehead (2005; St. Paul, MN: College of Natural Resources, University of Minnesota and Twin Cities Public Television, 2005).
- <sup>23</sup> David M. Rathke, *Minnesota's Trees*, 4-17, 34, 50-71. St. Paul: University of Minnesota Extension Service, 1995.
- <sup>24</sup> Newton H. Winchell, "The Geology of Carlton County," in *The Geological and Natural History Survey of Minnesota, 1896-1898: Volume 4: Geology* (St. Paul: The Geological and Natural History Survey of Minnesota, 1899), 20.
- <sup>25</sup> Richard W. Ojakangas and Charles L. Matsch, *Minnesota's Geology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 163-165.
- <sup>26</sup> Winchell, "The Geology of Carlton County," 8.
- <sup>27</sup> Winchell, "The Geology of Carlton County," 23; Ojakangas and Matsch, *Minnesota's Geology*, 166.
- <sup>28</sup> Winchell, "The Geology of Carlton County," 23. Parentheses in the original.
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- <sup>30</sup> Francis M. Carroll, *Crossroads in Time: A History of Carlton County, Minnesota* (Cloquet, Minnesota: Carlton County Historical Society, 1987), 104-114, 194-195.
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- <sup>32</sup> Minnesota Historical Society, "Jay Cooke State Park," <http://www.mnhs.org/places/nationalregister/stateparks/JayCooke.html>.
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- <sup>34</sup> *Duluth Herald*, "St. Louis River, Swelled by Thawing Snow, Roars Majestically Through Jay Cooke Park," May 6, 1935.
- <sup>35</sup> Files of the Carlton County Historical Society, Cloquet, Minnesota, Civilian Conservation Corps files.
- <sup>36</sup> *Cloquet Pine Knot*, "Two Conservation Camps Established in Carlton County," June 30, 1933.
- <sup>37</sup> Roy W. Meyer, *Everyone's Country Estate: A History of Minnesota State Parks* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1991), 45-47.
- <sup>38</sup> Bill Beck, *Northern Lights: An Illustrated History of Minnesota Power* (Duluth: Minnesota Power, 1986), 97.