### Heron Lake Farms

# Heron Lake Jackson County



image furnished by Mike Mooney and Jerry Raedeke  $\, {\mathbb G} \,$  Jerry Raedeke  $\,$  All rights reserved

This image depicts the Heron Lake Lodge and the Dalziel farm site currently known as Heron Lake Farms. The image is a wonderful original oil painting by Minnesota artist Jerry Raedeke and commissioned by Mike Mooney. It features decoys made by prominent Heron Lake guide Abe Nelson.

Brief History—
Camp Names:
Miller's Point
Dalziel's Club
Heron Lake Lodge
Heron Lake Farms
Start Date: 1883
End Date: Still active

### Miller's/Dalziel's Hunting Camp – Begins 1883 One of Minnesota's Most Historic Duck Camps

Thomas (Tom) Miller (1845-1899) and brother John Miller (1836-1917) were born in Scotland and emigrated to America, living in South Dakota before coming to Heron Lake. They were miners in South Dakota, handling and setting off dynamite charges. Morton W. Smith, an early Heron Lake resident, related how Tom Miller described the following mining event that resulted in the Miller brothers arriving in Heron Lake. After setting ten dynamite charges in a rock face and those charges being set off, the foreman counted each charge

as it went off and only counted nine. He asked Tom what happened to number ten? As Tom turned to go and check on the tenth charge, it went off with a great explosion. At this point Tom Miller decided to seek a different occupation.

They had heard of the great hunting available on Heron Lake and headed to the area. Upon arrival they were told of some land that was available on the lake that had an excellent hunting point. Due to flooding of the farm in previous years, the owner Anders (or Andrew)

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Lommeland was anxious to sell and in March 1883 the Millers purchased the property in John Miller's name. On 64 acres they farmed, trapped, hunted for the market and raised harness racing horses (Heron Lake had a local racetrack).

Later in 1883, the bachelor Miller brothers sent for their sister and her family. Sister Jane Dalziel and her children James (Jim), John, and Jenny were also born in Scotland and may have spent time in South Dakota with the Miller brothers prior to coming to Heron Lake. The Dalziel family moved in with the Miller brothers in the small house on the property. The house had a living room and kitchen on one side and sleeping quarters on the other side and two small bedrooms upstairs.

It has been reported that the Miller brothers began lodging and feeding hunters in 1883. With the six members of the Miller/Dalziel family living in the small house it seems unlikely hunters would be lodging there. So it may be that the Miller brothers built a cabin or lodge that first year to accommodate hunters. As the Miller farm was fairly close to town, hunters would also have the option of hunting at Miller's and lodging in one of the hotels in Heron Lake.

Morton W. Smith stated "I used to hang around the farm and in the day when John and Tom Miller lived there, during the hunting season, there were always two to six hunters from the Twin Cities, also Sioux City who hunted on the lake." The time when both John and Tom Miller lived on the farm would have been 1899 or earlier as Tom Miller died in 1899.

## 1893 Visit by Dr. Thomas S. Roberts

Tom Miller had written ornithologist Dr. Thomas S. Roberts about Heron Lake and Dr. Roberts decided to visit in May of 1893. Tom Miller became one of Dr. Robert's chief observers over the years and they corresponded often. Dr. Roberts would make several trips over many years to Heron Lake to collect specimens and take photos. Tom Miller would often accompany Roberts on these trips on and around Heron Lake. When reading



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Dr. Thomas S. Roberts, noted ornithologist, visited the Miller/Dalziel farm many times. Dr. Roberts is seated on the left next to Mrs. Jane Dalziel who is standing. Jim Dalziel is shown standing. This photo was taken in 1916 in front of the large, brick farmhouse.

some of Miller's letters to Roberts it is obvious Miller was a very intelligent and well read man regardless of his level of formal education.

#### 1902 New House Built

In 1902 there was a mechanic's lien recorded against the property by local carpenters, the McLin Brothers, in the amount of \$517. This was for a brick building presumed to be the large brick residence that still stands today. The 1905 census shows mother Jane Dalziel and son Jim listed as farmers and son John is listed as a brick-layer. John Dalziel was well known in the area as an excellent brick-layer. Many of the fireplaces in hunting clubs on Heron Lake had Dalziel fireplaces (e.g. the Ranch/Hokamde club house and the Dalziel/Heron Lake Lodge hunting cabin).

### 1903 Start Date of Dalziel's Club as a Private Club

According to the Heron Lake Centennial book *Heron Lake 100 Years of Good Living*, Dalziel's Club was formed in 1903 by Charles W. Sexton, James Ford Bell, John D. McMillan, and Charles D. Velie. Harry Converse, who guided at Dalziel's from 1906 until 1922, indicated that in 1906 when he started at the club there were 15 members and Charles W. Sexton was the one who organized the club.

# Property Ownership Transfers to Jane Dalziel in 1905

In 1905, ownership of the Dalziel property was transferred from John Miller to his sister, Jane Dalziel.

### Heron Lake Lodge Incorporated 1907

The Heron Lake Lodge filed incorporation papers on December 19, 1907. At that time the officers of the club were:

 President Hovey Charles Clarke (1859-1931) of the Shevlin-Carpenter Lumber Company



image courtesy of University of Minnesota Archives

Tom Miller on the left, and likely brother John Miller on the right. The Millers farmed, raised horses, and hunted for the market as well as guiding and lodging hunters – Photo taken in 1899.

- Vice President Charles E. Blackwell
- Secretary/Treasurer Charles W. Sexton (1854-1920)

There were fifteen members of the Lodge. Dues were \$100 per year plus any additional assessments assigned by the membership.

#### 1907 Hunting Lease

On December 23,1907, there was a hunting lease signed between the Dalziels (Jane Dalziel and son James Dalziel) and the Heron Lake Lodge corporation. This lease provided for the "exclusive right of entering upon Heron Lake from said premises." The lease was for ten years from September 1, 1908. The lease payment was \$1,000 per year. As part of the lease agreement it was required that the Dalziels would keep and maintain twenty (20) hunting boats and five hundred (500) decoys.

The 1907 lease also required that the Dalziels would transport members of the Lodge from the train depot at Heron Lake to the Lodge for \$1.50 per person and transport members from the Lodge to the depot for \$1.00 per person. The livery charge to take members to and from the boat landing located at the south end of the property was 50 cents per day.

During the term of the lease, the lodge members would have the exclusive right to use the "so-called lodge now on the premises" and also had the exclusive right to erect additional buildings if desired.

The Dalziel's were also required to furnish ice to the members at no charge. Dalziels were required to furnish board and lodging for all members and guests at the rate of \$2.00 per day per person.

The 1907 lease agreement was signed by Jane Dalziel, James Dalziel, and Heron Lake Lodge (by Hovey C. Clarke, President, and Charles W. Sexton, secretary). This lease was extended in 1918 for another 10 years.

In September 1920, Jane Dalziel transferred ownership to her son James Dalziel.

#### Hunting Locations Used On Heron Lake

Harry Converse, who guided at Dalziel's/Heron Lake Lodge from 1906 to 1922, described several hunting locations used on and around the Dalziel property. He stated that they always built three or four blinds on the dry land pass that jutted out to the east from the farm building site into the marsh. Depending on water

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levels they would sometimes shoot on the marsh north or south of the dry land pass. They would also go out into the rushes along the shore of North Heron Lake. Three points formed by rushes at the open water line that they hunted were Mallard Point, which was located beyond the Dalziel boat landing/boat run near the south property line, Bullhead Point, which was the next point north of Mallard Point, and Bluebill Point. Refer to detailed maps to see the locations of Mallard and Bullhead Points. Bluebill Point is not shown on any maps and the location is not clear.

The Heron Lake Lodge club also leased property to the north of Dalziel's on the North Marsh starting in 1913. They leased land owned by Otto Hanson and his son Anker Hanson along the west shore of the marsh that included the point of land referred to as Anker's Point. They also leased land on the east shore across the marsh directly to the east of the Hanson property. The lease was for five years, \$200 for the first year and \$150 for remaining years and included the right to erect buildings.

The Dalziel/Heron Lake Lodge guest book/ledger listed members and guests, the days at the lodge, the number of meals, and also miscellaneous costs such as livery services, phone calls, etc. Along with this typical information is one entry of interest that was included with other guiding and hunting related expenses in the amount of \$2.00 for hauling lumber for "Tower." Obviously this is just a small bit of information but it does make one wonder if there may have been a duck tower built, possibly on the dry land point, to shoot at passing ducks.

In November of 1913, the ledger showed that J. O. P. Wheelwright, J. D. McMillen, and C. W. Sexton were hunting at the Burkholz Club on Winzer Bay, which was located on the east shore (opposite side) of the lake. The comments stated "Not a duck" and "Nothing doing on Winzer Bay." This is perhaps a reassuring comment for present day hunters to know that even in these very early days of duck hunting on one of the premier hunting grounds in the country, there could be slow days! The fact that members were hunting at the Burkholz Club at Winzer's in 1913

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and also noted below in 1914, is quite possibly an indication that the Heron Lake Lodge Club was leasing hunting rights at the Winzer farm during this time. It has been noted elsewhere that for a period of time, the Winzers leased out hunting rights to other clubs until about 1917 when a hunting group once again was active at Winzer's.

In 1914, the ledger indicates "livery charges" (transportation by horse-drawn wagon in early days and automobile likely by this date) for some members (Bovey, McKnight, Wheelwright, Sexton) to The Ranch Club located south of the Heron Lake Lodge. Also in 1914, livery to the Burkholz Club, which was located on the east shore on Winzer's farm, for E. W. Decker. In 1915, there were livery charges to the Ranch for Crosby, McMillan, Rand, and Wheelwright. The trips to The Ranch (also known as the Hokamde Club) were likely to visit with friends from the Twin Cities or to hunt as guests at that club. Some Heron Lake Lodge members such as McKnight and Rand, who were listed as traveling to The Ranch, would later become members of the Ranch/ Hokamde/Rice Lake Syndicate Club, so they obviously were known to members of that club.

#### **Boat Landing and Boat Run**

The Dalziel/Heron Lake Lodge boat landing was located near the south border of the property about 600 yards south of the farm buildings. This is where the majority of boats would be launched and the boat run or channel provided a path from the landing out through the reeds into the open water of North Heron Lake.

#### **Hunting Blinds and Hunting Points**

As mentioned earlier, guide Harry Converse indicated that there were always three or four blinds built on the dry land point or pass that extended to the east from the building site out into the marsh. There were also three points referred to as Mallard Point, Bullhead Point, and Bluebill Point that were normally hunted and were located on the edge of the open water of North Heron Lake.

Other than when hunting on the dry land point near the Dalziel farm site, hunting was normally done from boats either at the points mentioned above or other locations in the reeds along the shore of the lake or in the marsh. Anyone who has ever hunted out of a boat knows it can be a challenge at times, especially if the boat is not stabilized in some manner. In 1907, Harry suggested building blinds on the three main hunting points mentioned that would be more permanent and stable. Mr. Sexton, who was considered the decision maker for the club, agreed to pay for this. Three blinds were built, one on each point. They were made in a semi-circle shape (described as a 1/3 circle), forty-five feet long (enough to hold three boats and all would face the decoys). They drove four-inch diameter posts eighteen inches apart into the solid lake bottom and made two rows of these posts that the boats fit between. They attached woven wire to the posts and filled the wire with hay and cane plus burned willow branches. They could then run three boats into each blind; Generally the guide had one boat and each hunter had his own boat. Once inside the blind, the boats could be fastened securely to the posts, making for a more stable

shooting platform. A common problem on the lake was that on windy days, the waves would push large mats of drift celery and other floating material into the reeds knocking them down and thus destroying "the points" or cover for the blinds. To prevent this problem on the points where these blinds were built, the guides also ran a string of the woven wire around the rushes that made up the point. This was extremely hard work. As Harry states "If you have never driven posts out of a duck boat in four feet of watter [sic] you have missed something." This blind building effort was done just as the Canvasbacks were arriving on the lake for the season. The hunters who came that weekend had excellent results, saying it was the best shoot they had ever had. This was due in large part to the fact that they could shoot out of the boats when they were stable and the hunters were well hidden by the excellent cover the blinds provided.

Abe Nelson, the main guide at the Ranch Club, would cut rushes with the Ranch Club's boat-mounted weed cutter to shape the points at Dalziel's (before the Dalziel Club got its own weed cutter).



image courtesy of University of Minnesota Archives

Heron Lake Lodge in background and Tom Miller's old cabin in foreground – Photo taken in 1916.

#### 1919 Heron Lake Lodge Group Pursues Hunting Opportunities in Other Portions of the State

The first entry for the Heron Lake Lodge guest book is for the year 1909. One of the members at the club during the 1909 to 1919 years was James Ford Bell. Bell was President of the Washburn-Crosby Milling Company which later became the General Mills Company where Bell was President and CEO. Along with Bell were several of his co-workers, friends, and family including Charles Cranston Bovey, Franklin Muzzy Crosby, and Richard Pillsbury Gale. Members of this group would continue hunting at Heron Lake Lodge for many years but also did a significant amount of their hunting activity after 1919 at Ten Mile Lake in Otter Tail County. On Ten Mile Lake they leased and later purchased a famous duck hunting pass known as the Whittaker Pass. See the McFarland Hotel entry in the Otter Tail County chapter for more information on this group hunting at that location.

The duck pass lease on Ten Mile Lake appears to be an indication that the hunting on Heron Lake was not as attractive as it had been previously and that this hunting group was pursuing additional hunting options by 1919.

#### 1922 Historic Survey and Study of Heron Lake

In 1922, James Ford Bell commissioned Clyde B. Terrell, a well-known waterfowl specialist, to perform a survey and study of Heron Lake with the hope of restoring the lake to the fantastic waterfowl populations and hunting conditions of earlier years. Clyde B. Terrell's name is in the guest book November 7-12, 1922, indicating the time of the survey. The resulting study report and map of the lake by Terrell are one example of the valuable history and conservation legacy left by Mr. Bell.

In 1925, James Ford Bell purchased property at Delta Marsh in Manitoba, Canada, adding another option for his hunting as well as continuing his conservation efforts.



image courtesy of University of Minnesota Archives

Dalziel tool shop, note what appears to be a duck boat leaned up against the right side addition – Photo taken in 1916.

#### 1922 Description of Heron Lake

Perhaps the best, most detailed description of Heron Lake that we have, from relatively early days, is from the 1922 survey, study, and report performed by Clyde B. Terrell. This effort included a week-long on-site survey of the lake and a very detailed report on water conditions along with analysis and opinions on the reasons for the decline in waterfowl numbers in years leading up to the 1922 study. The report included recommendations on how to improve waterfowl conditions. It also contained a detailed map that is based on the 1909 Gove survey map but with many additional details. The combination of this information is a treasure trove of information that helps us understand the lake conditions, water depths, emergent plant growth, hunting "points," and hunting camp locations, all as they existed in the fall of 1922, as understood by Terrell.

#### 1927 Hunting Lease

In November 1927, a hunting lease between James Dalziel and the Heron Lake Lodge was signed that covered a period of 10 years from September 1,

1928. The lease payment was \$1,000 per year. This lease, in general, had the same terms as the previous leases although the rate for board and lodging was increased to \$4.00 per day per person. Another term of this lease is that all of the Dalziel's hunting equipment with the exception of one Green Bay Kidney Boat is turned over and transferred to the Heron Lake Lodge members. The lease includes the option of an additional ten-year extension under the same conditions, if the Heron Lake Lodge members decide to exercise that option. The agreement is signed by James Dalziel and George W. Harsh (president of Heron Lake Lodge and employed by the Charles Sexton Insurance Company) and L. E. Wakefield (secretary of Heron Lake Lodge).

#### **Notable Guests**

An October 25, 1910, guest book entry shows that well-known ornithologist, illustrator, and wildlife artist Louis Fuertes (1874-1927); Frank M. Chapman (1864-1945), an ornithologist at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City where he was Curator of Birds; and Dr. Thomas S. Roberts were

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guests of James Ford Bell at the hunting camp. Chapman was an avid duck hunter and was one of Dr. Roberts' good friends who would hunt with Roberts when traveling to Minnesota either at the Long Meadow Gun Club in Bloomington or at the Dalziel Club on Heron Lake. Louis Fuertes was considered to be one of America's most prolific bird artists, second only to John James Audobon. On this trip, Fuertes did a painting of Canvasbacks landing in decoys at the club's hunting property for Mr. Bell. This painting would hang on the wall of the Heron Lake Lodge for several years. The painting is also featured in Dr. Robert's book Birds of Minnesota. The original painting is now in the possession of the Bell Natural History Museum.

Fuertes and Chapman also hunted here on October 13, 1914, but Dr. Roberts was not able to hunt with them due to poor health. At this time, Fuertes and/or Chapman sketched Heron Lake for club members Franklin Crosby and Charles Bovey. Fuertes was commissioned at some point to do a painting of Heron Lake for club member Charles D. Velie. On this same trip there was a \$1.50 charge to Chapman shown in the ledger for hauling rushes, possibly for later use in painting and/or creating dioramas. In 1922, Bell commissioned a diorama of Heron Lake for the Bell Natural History Museum. Frank Chapman curated this diorama and Louis Fuertes was brought in to paint the waterfowl. Edward Brewer and H. W. Rubens painted the landscape. Edward Brewer was a famous Minnesota artist and was an avid duck hunter as well. Refer to the McFarland Hotel section in the Otter Tail County chapter of this book for more information on Brewer.

The Bell Museum dioramas are world famous and are highly recommended to anyone who has not seen them. Unfortunately, although every effort was made to preserve all of the dioramas that were moved from the old museum to the new Bell Museum facility, the Heron Lake diorama did not survive in its entirety. This is due to the necessity of dismantling the original diorama to fit through limited size openings in the

older, original facility. Other newer dioramas were able to be dismantled and moved successfully to the new facility.

In 1908, while suffering from overwork, Frank Chapman brought his family with him for an extended visit and used the facilities at Dalziel's as a place to recover.

On November 4, 1946, famous sports writer Jimmy Robinson hunted at the camp.

#### **Daily Bag Limit Examples**

While detailed information on numbers of birds bagged and a breakdown of types of species was not always noted in the club's logbook, on some days this information was listed and we provide a few samples below. Unless otherwise described, the numbers shown are generally the number of birds taken home by an individual after a weekend of hunting.

- 1909 September 6 C.W. Sexton "50 birds, poor shooting"
- 1909 September 22 C.W. Sexton "49 birds, poor shooting"
- 1911 September 7 Hovey Clarke and J.O.P. Wheelwright both have a daily limit of 15
- 1916 October 18 Hovey Clarke, "45 Canvasbacks"
- 1917 September 22 C.W. Sexton "Shooting best ever, too many"
- 1918 September 15 C.W. Sexton "very poor"
- 1919 September 16 Hovey Clarke "Limit"
- 1920 October 20 William Dalrymple "29 cans"
- 1925 October 6 "60 ducks"
- 1925 October 20 Note: the following entries were separate hunters' notes all on this same date "63 ducks," "50," "2 cans 4 Reds," "119 ducks"
- 1925 November 13, "40 mallards,"
  "35 mallards"

Most of the bag limits shown would indicate excellent shooting to present day hunters and were likely considered good shooting by the hunters back in the day. Other daily entries in the logbook show very low numbers. Just as in modern times, some hunting days were excellent and some days were very slow. Some hunters were better shots than others and hunted more seriously. Some hunters allowed their guides to shoot for them or to back them up if they missed, which would affect the final daily bag taken. The information shown here on dates and quantities of ducks taken is not in any way a scientific survey, but rather a random sampling over time that is likely still quite interesting to present day hunters.

#### **Dalziel Dam**

Heron Lake water levels have varied significantly over the years due to both natural and man made causes. Dams have played a role in controlling these water levels. Depending on the overall water level in North Heron Lake, water flows north out of North Heron Lake through a channel that connects to the North Marsh where water then exits the lake and eventually ends up in the Des Moines River.

The channel between North Heron Lake and the North Marsh passes near the dry land point on the Heron Lake Farms property. According to local resident Herman Becker, in a September 2001 interview conducted by Mark Davis, this was the location of a dam that was used to control water levels on North Heron Lake. Becker indicated that this was originally a "flax straw bale" dam that spanned the 27-foot-wide channel. The dam was later replaced with a wooden structure in the 1960s and in 1982 a solid rock dam that was 77 feet long with a spillway of 36 feet was built. The dam was completely removed around the late 1990s.

A 1938 map shows a "temporary dam" at this location likely referring to the flax straw bale dam.

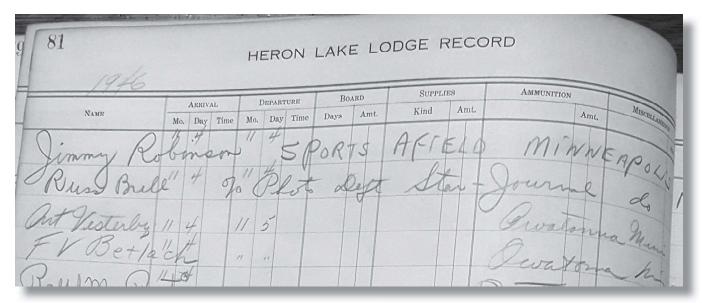


image courtesy of Jackson County Historical Society

Jimmy Robinson's entry in the Heron Lake Lodge/Dalziel's Guest Book – Circa 1946.

#### Private/Public Club

When the Miller brothers first started taking in hunters about 1883, the camp was open to the public and anyone could hunt. When the club made up of Charles Sexton, James Ford Bell, Hovey Clarke, and others was formed that eventually was known as the Heron Lake Lodge, the camp was a

private club for those members. The camp remained private through the 1945 season but in 1946 was once again open to the public and anyone could hunt. This changed in 1947 when the camp once again became a private club which continued through 1975 as shown by the last entries of the camp guest book.

The farm and hunting camp was purchased from the Dalziel family and is currently still active as a duck hunting camp known as Heron Lake Farms.

Special thanks to LeRoy Peterson and J. Wiley Smith for access to various Harry Converse documents. Special thanks to Jerry Raedeke, Mike Mooney, and Dennis Lange, as well as other former and current members of the Heron Lake Farms Camp for their assistance.



image courtesy of LeRoy Peterson

Dalziel Dam prior to removal – Circa 1990s.

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Left to right: guides Tom Palmer, Harry Converse, and Jim Dalziel at the Dalziel boat landing circa 1913.

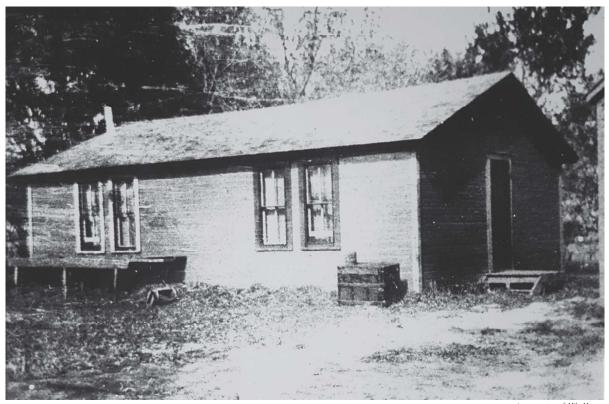


image courtesy of Mike Mooney

Early view of Heron Lake Lodge.



Present day view of Heron Lake Farms. Modern hunting lodge on the right is in the approximate location of the original Heron Lake Lodge. The circa 1902 Miller/Dalziel original brick farmhouse is shown in the background.



View looking east of Heron Lake Farms. North Heron Lake on the right and North Marsh on the left.

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James Ford Bell – Founder and president of General Mills, Heron Lake Lodge member, and well-known conservationist. Shown here in front of his York Lodge at Delta Marsh in Manitoba, 1940.



Charles C. Bovey, early member of Heron Lake Lodge.



Charles W. Sexton, one of the founders of the Heron Lake Lodge.



Richard P. Gale, early member of the Heron Lake Lodge.



image courtesy of Mike Mooney

Early hunters and guides at the Dalziel landing.



Dalziel guides – Abe Nelson, Jim Dalziel, Clifford Darr, Frank Green, Charlie Hamilton, and Frank Campbell. Circa 1900

#### **1909-1919 Club Members:**

Member Name	Occupation	Notes
James Ford Bell (1879-1961)	President of Washburn-Crosby Company, first president and later CEO of General Mills	Founder of Delta Waterfowl Foundation
Charles W. Sexton (1854-1920)	Insurance executive	
Hovey C. Clarke (1859-1931)	Shevlin-Carpenter Lumber Company	
John D. McMillan	President of Osborne-McMillan Grain Elevator Company	Cousin of John H. MacMillan (president of Cargill Corporation)
Ceylon Emory Lyman (1849-1934)	Lumber company	
Frederic B. Wells (1873-1953)	F. H. Peavey Company, eventually becoming president	His home was Ferndale on Lake Minnetonka which he sold to the Woodhill Country Club for its club house in 1943
George C. Christian (1873-1919)		Brother-in-law of Sumner T. McKnight
Sumner T. McKnight Jr. (1884-1959)	President of McKnight Company	
Henry G. Smith	Fire insurance executive	
Charles C. Bovey (1864-1955)	Washburn-Crosby Company	
J. E. Penney		
George Van Dusen	Stock broker/real estate broker	
David N. Winton (1870-1930)	In 1908, president of Prince Albert Lumber Company, Canada, president of Bemidji Lumber Company, Minnesota, vice president of Northwest Lumber Company, Kalispell, Montana, and secretary of Thief River Falls Lumber Company, Minnesota	
J. O. P. Wheelwright (1865-1927)	Attorney	
Edward W. Decker		
Charles Deere Velie (1861-1929)	Secretary/treasurer Deere & Webber Company, Minneapolis	Grandson of John Deere