

St. Paul – Heron Lake Gun Club

Heron Lake
Jackson County



photo by author

St. Paul – Heron Lake Gun Club

Brief History–

Camp Names:

Reeves' Gun Club

Slocum Club

SPHL Gun Club

Start Date: Circa 1901

End Date: Still active

Reeves' Gun Club – Begins Circa 1901

The Reeves farm, just off the western shoreline of North Heron Lake, is the original location of the Reeves' Gun Club and the two clubs that evolved from this club: the Slocum Club and the St. Paul – Heron Lake (SPHL) Gun Club. The Ranch Club (later known as the Hokamde Gun Club) was directly adjacent to the east edge of the Reeves' property. The L. C. Wood farm and hunting camp was directly adjacent to the south edge of the Reeves' farm. The Reeves' farm was in the middle of an

amazing amount of duck camp activity and is an integral part of that history.

In 1897, John L. and Emma Wood Reeves purchased this property from Emma's parents, L. C. and Hannah Wood, who owned the farm and hunting camp about 300 yards south of the Reeves' building site. The first page of the St. Paul – Heron Lake Gun Club guest book states that the Reeves' Gun Club started in 1901. This is the source we use for the assumed start date of the

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Reeves' Gun Club. While this is the date documented by that guest book as the start of the Reeves' Gun Club, it may be that the Reeves were hosting hunters at the farm prior to this date, possibly by 1897 when they purchased this farm, or shortly thereafter. In a letter written by Emma's cousin, Grace Wood Honeywell, who lived nearby, Grace mentions that the Woods always took in hunters in the fall up until the Reeves took over that business.

In 1898, Emma Reeves' father, L. C. Wood, purchased the one-half mile of Heron Lake shoreline that was located directly east of the L. C. Wood farm site. This shoreline property was adjacent to the southeast corner of the Reeves' farm. This shoreline property would have been one method to provide lake access for hunters using the Reeves Gun Club.

In 1905, George R. Slocum (Winona & St. Peter Land Company) purchased this shoreline property. Slocum was already a member of the Reeves' Gun Club. It is believed at this point in time that the Reeves' Club was also referred to as the Slocum Club.

Early Hunting Camp Life on Heron Lake

The following description provides insight into hunting camp life on Heron Lake in early times. It is from the perspective of a farm family that guided and provided food and lodging for the duck hunters using their farm and hunting camp. It is written by Georgia May Reeves Foote, who was the granddaughter of L. C. and Hannah Wood and the daughter of John and Emma Wood Reeves. Emma Wood Reeves grew up on her parents' (L. C. and Hannah Wood) farm which was located on Jack Creek south of the Reeves farm site. Emma Wood was involved with supporting and caring for hunters on Heron Lake starting from the 1880s at the Wood family farm and continuing after her marriage to John Reeves, at the Reeves' farm, for more than 50 years. During that time, Emma Reeves provided food and/or lodging services to the L. C. Wood Camp, the Reeves' Gun Club, the Slocum Club, the SPHL Gun Club and the neighboring Hokamde Gun Club. Based on Emma

Reeves' long-time involvement with hunting camp life on Heron Lake, this description by her daughter, who also lived this life, is truly a valuable and unique insight into early hunting camp life. While directly applicable to the hunting camps mentioned above, it is also an excellent example of how other area families would have provided care and support to hunters at Heron Lake hunting camps.

Hunting Season at Heron Lake, Minnesota in the Early 1900s

By Georgia May Reeves Foote

"Hunting Season- it held a special aura all of its own on our small farm on the edge of Heron Lake in Minnesota. It was a special three months out of the year that affected the members of our family and the other people who participated in making each fall a successful adventure for the members of the Hokamde and St. Paul [St. Paul – Heron Lake – ed.] Gun Clubs (composed of well-to-do business men from Minneapolis and St. Paul). It was also a financial venture on the part of my parents that made possible payments of farm mortgage, college education for three daughters, and that presented a way of life which involved much hard work – something my parents never shunned.

My mother's father, Lou Wood, had homesteaded land along the lake when my mother was very young. My grandfather had been one of the first to open his land and home to the city sportsmen for hunting, lodging, and meals. My mother had known this way of life since early childhood. When my parents married they settled on the adjoining land. My father had come up from Pringhar, Iowa with a hunting party and met my mother. He built a new farm house for my grandfather and remodeled a modest farm house for mother and himself. Later he built the St. Paul Gun Club Lodge next to our home and sold it to the members for \$500. Our farm was located a mile south and a mile east of the small village of Heron lake. I was born in 1911.

Among my most early recollections are the memories of the hustle and bustle necessary in preparation for opening

day of hunting season. The excitement for us in receiving word by mail (and in later years by phone) who of the club members would be coming, whether by train or car, and how long they would plan to stay. In the early years a negro couple took care of the Hokamde Lodge and its needs. My mother, Mrs. Reeves to the hunters, was the key person upon whom the St. Paul Club members depended to make their surroundings pleasant and comfortable. "Mrs. Reeves" endeared herself to many a hungry and tired sportsman with her famous chicken and baking powder biscuit dinners, fresh farm cooked foods, fresh linens, and warm beds which were not easy to secure in a place where there was no electricity and no running water. Mother washed by hand in tubs set up on the back porch or in the kitchen on the coldest days. Ironing was done using the heavy hand flat irons (also tucked in between cold sheets in the club house many a night to prevent the men from possibility of pneumonia) Many times we fed as many as twenty men in our modest farm dining room. Up at 3:30 a.m. to serve a hot 4 a.m. breakfast of stewed fruit, hot oatmeal with real cream, pancakes (sometimes the old self-rising buckwheat) maple syrup boiled from sap of our own sugar maples, and home-made farm sausage or home-cured ham. All meals were cooked on the old family cook stove stoked with cobs and wood from the grove. At 2 p.m. we were ready with a big dinner when the men came in off the lake usually with their limit of teal, mallard, red-heads, or canvass-back (the late flights from the north and the most prized). Sometimes there would be a few wood-duck, but they were not for the eyes of the game-warden. At 7 p.m. a light supper would be served for the men, usually a request for 4 minute eggs with toast, or rice with sugar and fresh farm whipped cream – this, after they had rested and had their game of poker and round of drinks (neither habit was ever acquired by my father or mother in all the years they were in the presence of such – they considered these the well-to-do man's way of life.)

Heron Lake in the late 1800s was a spot famous for duck hunting and a sportsman's delight. The lake which is 14 miles long and 2 miles wide is surrounded by a low marshy area. It was

a perfect spot for the natural breeding of wild life and had many kinds of small animal life, feathered species, and fish. Game of all kinds was plentiful. The wanton killing that went on in those years, however; and the cultivation of more and more land changed the picture considerably. I heard my parents and the guides tell of the good old days when prairie chicken and grouse were present in large flocks, ducks were hunted and taken out by wagon loads, geese always stopped in flight in the corn fields, and on the marsh lands and were killed by the hundreds. Trappers also found this area a paradise for muskrat, mink, otter, weasels, and fox. Fish were seined out by the thousands (mostly rough fish such as carp and bullheads, however). There were also many pickerel especially when they came to spawn in the spring at the mouth of Old Jack Creek. We had our share of the large snapping turtles and the land turtles too, to say nothing of the hundreds of garter snakes and frogs. In the years I observed and lived in this environment from about 1911 to 1933 game was plentiful, but rules had been set up and men used more strategy in gathering in the game. The prairie chicken and grouse were no more and the pheasant was introduced to the land by game enthusiasts. When the hunters came if they were disappointed in the duck season they entered into the pheasant season with a hopeful enthusiasm.

During this time the guides were busy in summer working on pot holes, building blinds out of marsh reeds, depositing shelled corn as bait and thus getting early flights started into certain hunting areas before the season opened. Paying the guides and feeding the ducks was expensive, but this was no deterrent to the well-to-do. (Those “city slickers,” as the local town people referred to the influx of hunting club members were mostly millionaires and had money to burn.)

However; those of us who worked for and with these men knew they were wonderful people who brought a special excitement and also challenge into our lives. Many of the men I remember fondly by name are known throughout the midwest for their ability and acumen in the business world: names such as



image courtesy of Maryanne Foote Law Sunde

Georgia May Reeves in front of the John and Emma Reeves farmhouse at Heron Lake. The St. Paul – Heron Lake Gun Club hunting lodge was also located on this farm site a short distance away – Photo is circa 1923.

St. John, Smith, Jaffray, Piper, Strong, Boalt, Slocum, Ordway, Joy, McCuray and others whose names slip my memory. The guides who worked in this locale also were men of special talent and the love of the out-of-doors called them into this type of life. Those whom I remember with a special nostalgia were Andy Olson, Guy Cornish, Abe Nelson, Seward Marks, Roy Wood, and last but not least “Old Charley Hamilton.” “Old Charley” who was no doubt just Charley Hamilton to many in the late 1800s and early 1900s lived in a shanty on our land as a hermit during my childhood. He was one of those rare individuals who truly lived next to nature. He knew all there was to know about the ways and habits of wild life in our locale. By the time I knew him he had passed his prime and was content to spin yarns, catch enough fish and trap enough game to feed himself, sell the furs for his incidental expenses and help keep the blackbirds out of our corn. He became a “character” much loved by our family. Many of our friends and relatives were entertained by his tales and his willingness to pass on to us as children his observations about nature and his knowledge about fishing, hunting, and trapping. “Old Charley” with his beloved gun and his short, stubby tailed airedale dog seemed to belong to the land and we were all saddened when his life on the land he loved was over. Many

of our clan remember how he taught us younguns to bait a hook, shoot a 12 gauge shot-gun, set a trap, skin a rabbit, tan a fur hide, clean a bull-head, catch bullfrogs for frog-legs, cook a squirrel stew, and help us catch tubs of pickerel for the local meat market. The end of his life time also seemed to mark the end of this particular era of gun clubs and hunting. My family is gone and times have changed. Only a few people remain to remember the past but there are still some in the area who live close to the land and enjoying the types of life so loved by the past generations.”

Reeves/Slocum Club Transitions to St. Paul – Heron Lake Gun Club in 1913

A document called the Articles of Association dated December 1, 1913, was the start of the voluntary association that formed the St. Paul – Heron Lake Gun Club. The document listed its assets as 338 acres of land, the current Reeves' club house with its furnishings, 10 boats (Dan Kidney boats), 100 decoys, and a five-year lease from the Reeves family for the ground where the clubhouse stood on the Reeves farm site. This association included several members of the former Reeves' Gun Club.

One of the founding members of the SPHL Gun Club, George Slocum, who

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was a member of the Reeves' Gun Club, owned the 338 acres of land mentioned in the Articles of Association. Part of those 338 acres included the club's present day holding of 58 acres located on the shore of Heron Lake. The new association purchased the land from Slocum for \$40,000, paid Reeves \$175 for the old lodge, and built and furnished a "new" main room that was added to the existing Reeves lodge, all accomplished by the beginning of the 1914 season. The club paid \$75 per year to the Reeves for renting the land where the clubhouse stood. John Reeves was an excellent carpenter and built the hunting lodge as well as the farmhouse the family lived in. The club house was located about twenty yards from the farmhouse.

The club members would take their meals at the Reeves' farmhouse where Mrs. Emma Reeves would feed them.

Hunting Points and Locations Hunted

The reed point named Old Stand was located on the edge of the open water out in front of the St. Paul – Heron Lake Gun Club lakeshore property and was hunted by the club. Two other reed points, Long Point and Thin Point, located farther east of Old Stand, were used at times by both the SPHL Gun Club and The Ranch/Hokamde Club. Other locations on and around Rat Bay were used as

well. In the club's logbook, references are made to hunting at Old Stand, Rat Bay, the Pothole, and "Hole in the Wall." There were also references to hunting on Winzer Bay.

In May of 1928, there was a 10-year lease between E. L. Freemire and the St. Paul – Heron Lake Gun Club for property in section 4 of West Heron Lake Township. This land is just south of the land owned by the SPHL Gun Club. The lease was for \$200 per year.

Samples of Logbook Entries: Members, Guests, Results, Comments

- 1914 - Total bag for season 1,597
- 1914 September 7 - J. G. Ordway- 25 birds, L. P. Ordway Jr. - 25 birds, Frank Ottis - 25 birds
- 1914 October 17-19 - William D. Mitchell - 37 Redheads and Canvasbacks - 50 birds total
- 1914 October 28 - George Slocum- 18 Redheads and Canvasbacks - 30 birds total
- 1918 - Note: Very few hunters during this year of the Spanish Flu
- 1918 October 23 - Ottis - 6 Bluebills
- 1918 October 24 - Ottis- 7 Canvasbacks, 1 Mallard, 1 Pintail, 1 Spoonbill, 7 Bluebills
- 1918 October 25 - Ottis- 4 Canvasbacks, 1 Bluebill - Logbook indicated Ottis was hunting on "Old Stand." the reed point on the open water line in front of SPHL Gun Club shoreline.
- 1922 October 21 - William D. Mitchell & sons - 8 Mallards & 37 Green Winged Teal Hunting on Pothole near Rat Bay
- 1922 October 22 - William D. Mitchell & sons - 45 birds total Hunting on Winzer Bay
- 1922 October 23 - Montyheimer- 7 Hunting Winzer Bay
- 1922 November 14 - Butler- 45 Mallards Hunting Winzer Bay
- 1922 November 24 - Charles Fowler- 67 Mallards, 1 Redhead, 10 Mixed-Logbook indicated "lake froze on November 23, thousands of mallards sitting on ice."
- 1928 November 12 - Horace Irvine- Limit on mallards
- 1929 September 16 - Boalt, Christian- Limits on Teal , Mallards, & Pintails- off the lake by 6:45 a.m.
- 1930 September 18 - McGill - Limit by 8:15 a.m.
- 1930 September 19 - Beau Towle, E. P. Gillette, J. S. Strong, H. B. Christian, B. Boalt, R. Munger - 92 in 2 days
- 1930 September 26 - 5 hunters- Limits by 8:30 a.m.
- 1930 October 18 - Ordway- Limit Hunting "Hole in the Wall"
- 1931 October 2-3 - Joy, Ordway, Christian - 26 Pintail first day, 25 Pintail plus Teal and Mallards second day.
- 1931 After October 7 the logbook notes: "Remainder of year no good as Pothole & Rat Bay so dry you could drive a car across"
- 1932 Logbook notes: "Water in Rat Bay & shooting somewhat better but no records kept"
- 1939 October 1 - Harris, Gratz, Christian, W. E. Ward, Ordway, Louis W. Hill Jr., W. H. Foles Jr. - 87 ducks total mostly Teal with 2 Redheads and 1 Pelican



image courtesy of Maryanne Foote Law Sunde

J. L. Reeves in front of fireplace in the St. Paul – Heron Lake Club House



image courtesy of University of Minnesota Archives

John and Emma Reeves Farm. View looking southeast with Heron Lake to the left of buildings. Photo taken in 1899.

- 1940 October 14 - Bill Winfield, Fred Weyerhaeuser, C. C. Cook - 27 Mallards hunting in Rat Bay plus 3 Pheasant limits
- 1941 November 7 - G. N. Slade, Louis W. Hill Jr. - 1 Spoonbill - Logbook notes "About frozen out"
- 1941 November 18 - G. N. Slade, Harris, Cook - 27 Mallards

Club Incorporates

The SPHL Gun Club voluntary association was made more formal when it was incorporated in 1926. The original association in 1913 had 14 members, which was reduced to 11 in 1927. Currently there are seven members, a total that has remained about the same since 1990.

Some Notable Guests & Members

- Horace H. Irvine (1878-1947), lumber magnate, donated home to state of Minnesota which is now the governors' mansion.
- During the 1915-1937 time frame, Lucius Pond Ordway (Owner of Crane and Ordway Plumbing Supply Company and

an early, major investor in the 3M corporation) hunted at the club.

- Frank B. Kellogg (1856-1937), Minnesota Senator, United States Secretary of State, ambassador, Nobel Peace Prize recipient.
- William D. Mitchell (1874-1955), United States Attorney General.
- Fred Weyerhaeuser (1872-1945), head of Weyerhaeuser timber empire.
- Louis Hill Jr. and G. N. Slade: descendants of James J. Hill (founder of Great Northern Railroad)

Armistice Day Blizzard November 11, 1940

The Armistice Day blizzard in 1940 is a historic event in Minnesota and surrounding states as it was an enormous storm in which many people lost their lives. Many of those who died were duck hunters, especially in the Mississippi River bottoms south of Minneapolis and St. Paul near the town of Red Wing. Fortunately, we are not aware of any hunters who died in the Heron Lake area during this storm, but the following brief

description in the SPHL Gun Club guest book provides some insight into the conditions.

Hunters' names shown for November 11, 1940, include Bill Gratz, Jack Foote, Ben Harris, and C. Cook.

November 11, 1940 guest book entry:
"Worst blizzard in years – turning colder-snowed in all day – 30 hours of snow with 50 mile an hour wind."
November 12 entry: *"The worst storm in years. Many lives lost. Below zero. 50 miles per hour wind. Terrible wind. Boy!! Was it ever windy."*

Oldest Existing Hunting Lodge on Heron Lake?

The SPHL Gun Club hunting lodge, or at least parts of it, may be the oldest hunting lodge building still in existence on Heron Lake. The Reeves' Gun Club start date is assumed to be about 1901. In 1913, when the SPHL Gun Club voluntary association document was created, the list of club assets included the "current Reeves' club house." It seems reasonable to assume a portion of

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the lodge was built sometime between 1901 and 1913.

Reeves family owns property from 1897 until 1964

The Reeves family owned the property that the SPHL Gun Club hunting lodge was situated on until 1964, when Willard “Red” Dalziel purchased the land.

Hunting Lodge Moved

In 1976, the SPHL Gun Club hunting lodge was moved from its original location on the Reeves’ farm to the club’s shoreline property where it resides today.

Guides

There were two guides that assisted club members in earlier times during the hunting season: Roy Wood (from 1913 to 1956) and Seward (Sievert) Marks (from 1925 to 1963).

Roy’s Shack

“Roy’s Shack” is where guide Roy Wood lived at various times, mainly during hunting and trapping seasons. In more recent times it was used as the main storage location for duck boats starting about 1980 on the current SPHL Gun Club property. Roy’s Shack is probably at least as old as the 1914 reorganization of the club according to one long-time club member’s recollection of camp history. When the club moved its hunting lodge from the Reeves farm to this location in 1976, Roy’s Shack was at the location where the lodge was to be placed. At that time, the shack was moved down near the shoreline where it was used as a boathouse.

Information from an August 2001 taped interview conducted by Mark Davis with Boyd Wood:

Boyd Wood’s father was Eugene Wood. Eugene was Emma Wood Reeves’ brother. Eugene and his family lived with John and Emma Reeves on their farm for quite some time. Boyd lived on the Reeves farm from 1933 to 1965. Mark Davis was a college professor who interviewed Boyd and others in the Heron Lake area for an excellent paper he authored titled “*Market Hunters vs. Sportsmen on the Prairie.*”

In this interview, Boyd recalled that his father Eugene told him that around 1900 they hauled a wagon load of ducks to town. The wagon was described as a “triple box wagon” that had three “boxes,” each about 4 feet wide, 6 feet long, and 1 foot deep, stacked on top of each other, all filled with ducks. Boyd described how the St. Paul – Heron Lake Gun Club leased ground (\$75/year) in the Reeves’ farm site for their own club house building. Boyd’s aunt (Emma Reeves) did the cooking and cleaning for the club. The members of the club ate at the Reeves’ farmhouse. According to Boyd, the club house was one big room with a big fireplace and three bedrooms, most with double deck beds.

Roy Wood, who was Eugene Wood’s cousin, guided for the SPHL Gun Club. Roy Wood owned a farm in the area. Boyd Wood stated that most of the guides on the lake were locals that had other jobs besides guiding.

Boyd’s aunt, Emma Reeves, sold the Reeves’ land to Red Dalziel in 1964, who then sold the farm land to a family from Lakefield.

Boyd’s wife also cooked for the SPHL Gun Club, and around 1933

she was being paid \$1.00 a meal (this also included doing the laundry and cleaning).

Restored Dan Kidney Duck Boats

Over the years, the club has donated two “weathered” Dan Kidney boats that were subsequently restored. One is in Windom at the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service building and the other one was acquired by a gentleman named Bob Poel. Mr. Poel inquired if the club would have a boat he could restore because he had a bucket list dream of restoring a Dan Kidney boat. These two boats were the last survivors of an original group of ten that was transferred in 1913 when the St. Paul – Heron Lake Gun Club was created. Roy Wood kept the original ten boats in working order until his death around 1956.

Special thanks to Maryanne Foote Law Sunde and brother Larry Foote for providing valuable information on the Reeves’ family history. Special thanks to the Mark Davis family for providing the audio interview material. Special thanks to Christopher Ward and the members of the St. Paul – Heron Lake Gun Club for information on club history and assistance with this section.



photo by author

*Guide Roy Wood’s cabin at the St. Paul – Heron Lake Gun Club
Built circa 1914.*



image courtesy of Maryanne Foote Law Sunde

*Unknown hunter at the St. Paul – Heron Lake Gun Club
Early 1900s.*

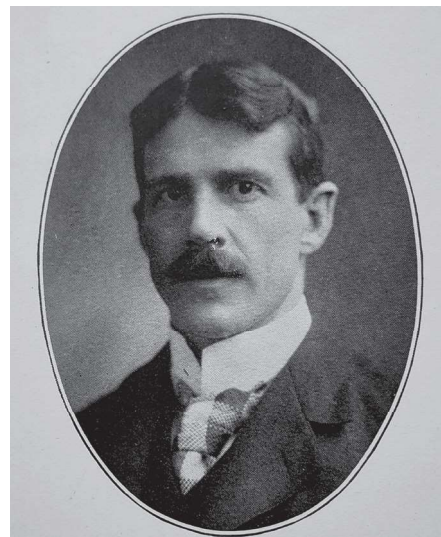


image from Men of Minnesota

*Lucius P. Ordway, vice president and
treasurer of Crane & Ordway Company
and St. Paul – Heron Lake Gun Club
member.*



photo by author

Decoy used at the St. Paul – Heron Lake Gun Club circa 1913.

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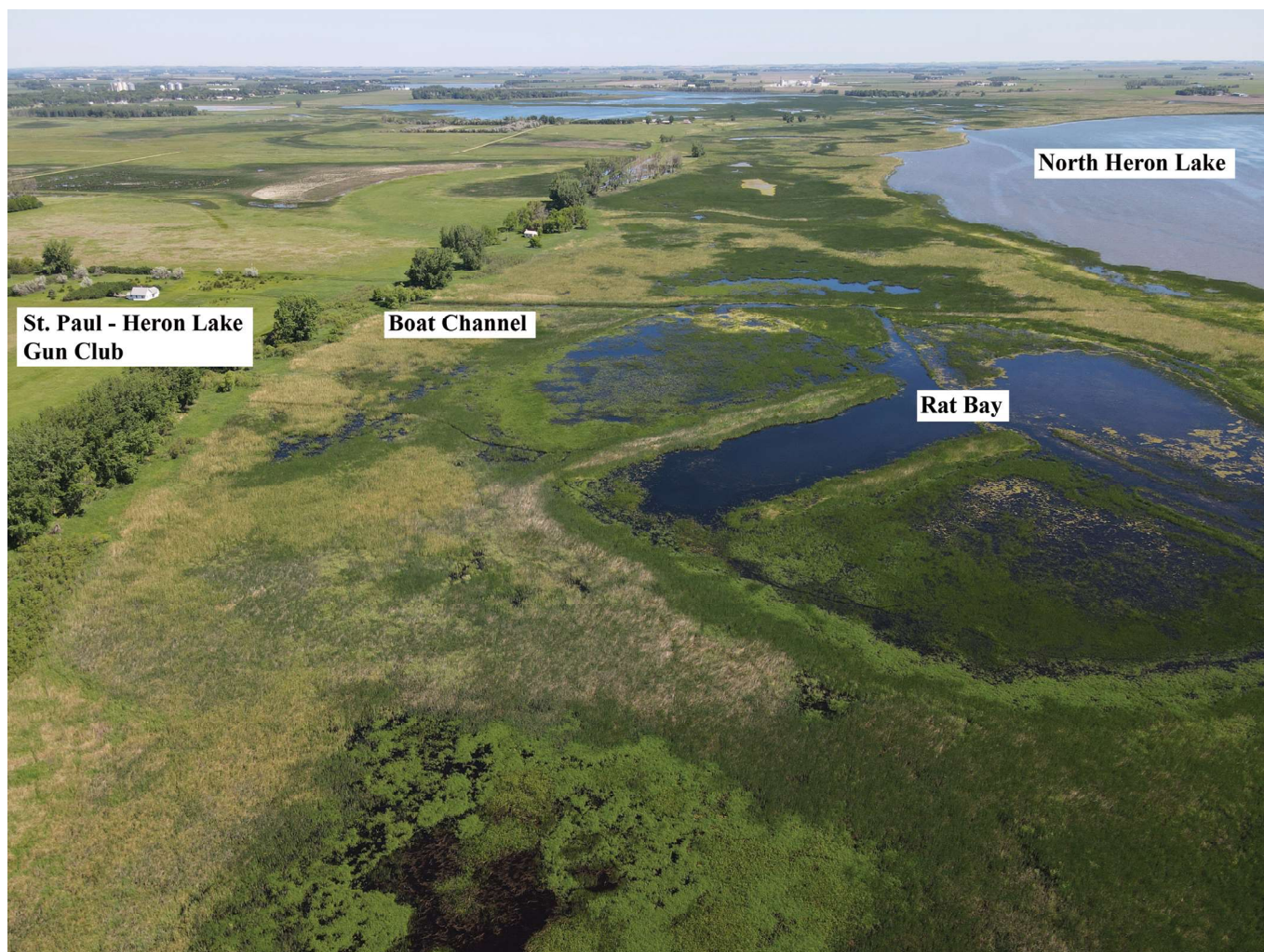


photo by author

View looking north. St. Paul – Heron Lake Gun Club building site on left. Note boat channel leading to Rat Bay and North Heron Lake.

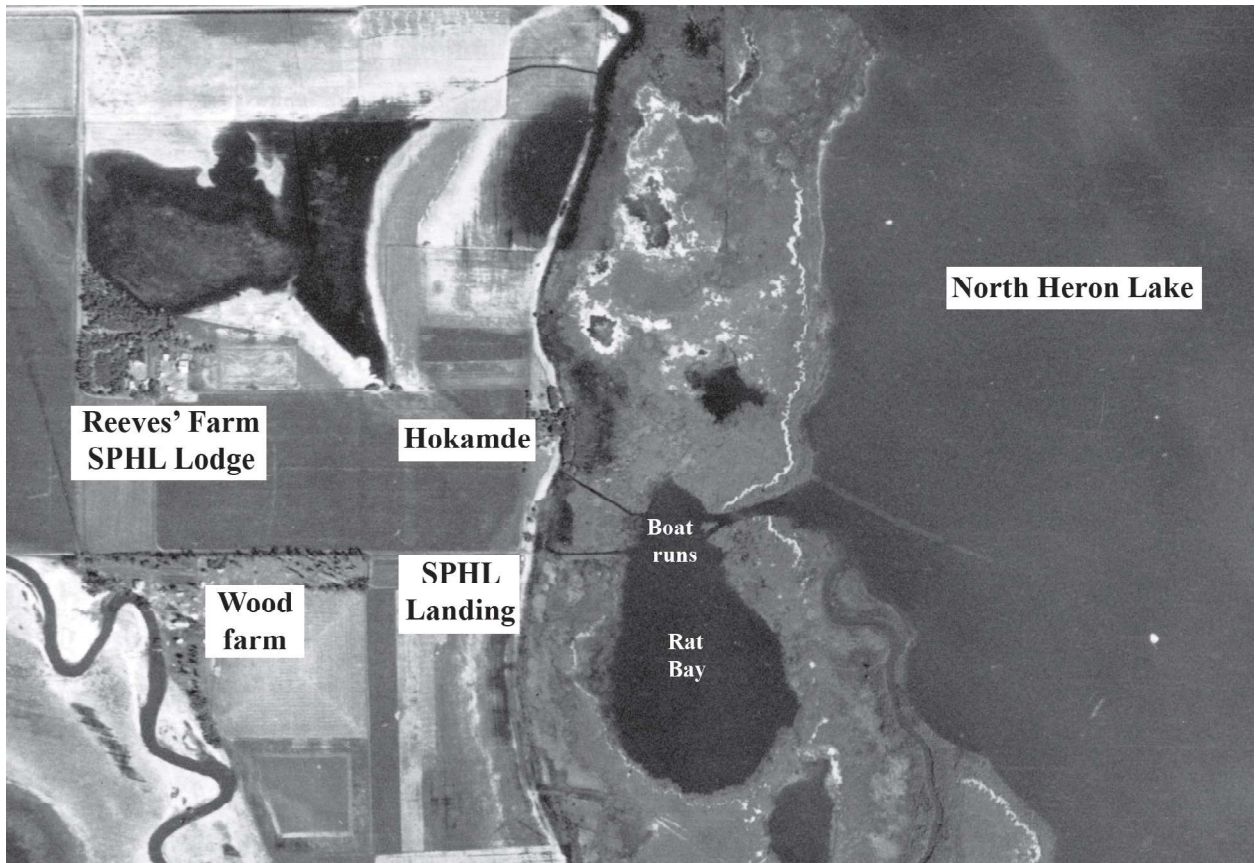


photo courtesy of the John R. Borchert Map Library at the University of Minnesota

1938 aerial view. In 1938, the St. Paul – Heron Lake Gun Club hunting lodge was still located at the Reeves' farm site. The boat landing site used by the SPHL Gun Club on the shore near Rat Bay is identified above. The L. C. Wood farm building site on Jack Creek is also shown. Note there are two boat runs or boat channels shown, one leading straight east from the SPHL Gun Club landing and one leading southeast from the Hokamde Gun Club. Both boat runs lead to Rat Bay and then out into North Heron Lake.

Hunters from 1914 entries in the SPHL Gun Club logbook:

Name	Occupation	Notes
Lucius Pond Ordway Jr.		
John Gilman Ordway		
Frank J. Ottis	Head of Northern Malleable Iron Company St. Paul	
W. S. McCundy		
Dr. A. E. Comstock	St. Paul physician	
Milton Griggs Jr.		
Gerald Livingstone		
F. W. Plant	President of Plant Rubber Company, Minneapolis	
C. S. Brackett	Distiller and wine wholesale business	
Dr. A. J. Gillette	Professor of orthopedic surgery	
George R. Slocum	General manager of the Wisconsin Land Company	
E. B. Holbert		
William D. Mitchell	U.S. Attorney General	
Sam J. Joy		
E. L. Patterson		
Dr. R. J. Schiffman	Medical doctor	Developed folk cure for asthma
C. A. Boalt		
Joe Woods		
William Butler		