

Some SILVER LAKE bits  
from Kingsbury County newspapers

April 1880: C.P. Ingalls shot a large white swan on Silver Lake one day last week. It measured six feet eight inches from tip to tip.

April 1883: The De Smet Leader... howls for a creamery; a money order office; carp in Silver Lake and some concerted action to induce immigration into this country.

November 1883: Silver Lake affords excellent recreation and anyone who can muster a pair of skates takes advantage of the fine moonlit evenings to indulge in the exhilarating sport, regardless of zero weather.

December 1885: Several skaters improved the opportunity of having a skate on Silver Lake Thanksgiving.

January 1889: With as fine a site for a city as any in the territory, with as handsome substantial improvements as any, let us now take the pains to complete our work. As the town extends toward the east, grows in importance and wealth and a desire for a pleasant summer retreat, near at hand, enforces itself upon the attention of our people, the idea of making a park about our beautiful little Silver Lake, on the east, will make itself felt. We know of no other town in Dakota so highly favored. This miniature lake could be made most attractive at very little expense. And now, while the land surrounding it could be bought for a son, would be a good time for the city to make the investment. Then, instead of making the neighborhood a dumping ground for offal and litter—the site of slaughter houses and a burying ground for deceased quadrupeds—it could be gradually improved and beautified, with very little expense. Fathers of the city, “A thing of beauty is a joy forever.” Think of your children. Think of the advantages to the city of pleasant, shady bowers on the banks of Silver Lake—of the advertisement it would be for the town and of the blessings future generations would call down upon your heads. Think of “all these things,” and if in your mature judgment the idea is good and worthy, we pray you provide us with the privileges named.

November 1889: From thirty to forty young people enjoyed skating on Silver Lake on Thanksgiving Day.

September 1892: Our sporting editor shot a pelican at Silver Lake last Monday.

November 1892: Skating is excellent on Silver Lake.

December 1892: Several flocks of Canada geese were seen in Silver Lake last week.

September 1893: Silver Lake, just out of town, is said to have gone dry. This little lake has gone through all the dry weather and has never been dry before. We are in hopes it will fill up again.

November 1893: From Esmond. Several young men went to Silver Lake on a hunting trip last week. We were unable to learn what success they had.

November 1893: We are in hopes when a flow is struck at the artesian well, Silver Lake will be filled up, thereby furnishing a nice skating pond for the people of De Smet.

March 1894: Skating has been very good on Silver Lake of late, and those who indulge in that sport have taken advantage of the opportunity to have a good skate.

April 1896: Silver Lake is full to the brim once more for the first time in two years.



November 1901: The younger people are enjoying the beautiful moonlight evenings at Silver Lake. The skating is reported as being very good although not very plentiful.

December 1904: The young people are taking advantage of the fine skating on Silver Lake.

December 1912: Our young people are enjoying skating on Silver Lake. The ice is said to be very good.

February 1913: Mr. and Mrs. Roderick Cornwell of Pine Island, Minn., were over Sunday as guests of the Loftus family. Mr. Cornwell is a brother of Mrs. Loftus. Twenty years ago he visited De Smet, and while here assisted his brother, Bert, in planting the trees east of Silver Lake. He had not been here since, and naturally saw many improvements.

December 1920: The skating did not last long, as the snow Sunday night was proceeded by a rain, the combination being too much for good ice. Quite a number had been enjoying the ice at Silver Lake.

June 1921: The first religious service was held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. C.P. Ingalls, on the banks of Silver Lake, February 29, 1880. Twenty-five people were present at the meeting. De Smet was then in its infancy, with but two houses where the city now stands.

March 1922: Selection for site of city septic tank will be located on the Anson Wright property southeast of the city, not far from the side of Silver Lake, a choice made when the question of sewers first came up. The water supply tank will be on the hill in the west part of town.

February 1924: City Changes Dump -- The city dump grounds west of De Smet is being closed, and a new one opened a half mile east of the old creamery building, at the edge of Silver Lake, according to F. M. Andrews, mayor. The old grounds will be cleaned up as rapidly as possible and the land reclaimed for farming purposes. -- The action of the city will remove one of the eye-sores of the vicinity. The old dumping ground lies along the railroad track and near a road, and is offensive to the people living in the west end of the city. -- The new location is ideal -- if there can be an ideal dumping ground location. It is near the outlet of the sewer disposal pipe, over the rise of ground that slopes to Silver Lake, and not near to any dwelling. The grounds is out of sight of all roads and houses, and the old bed of the drained lake can gradually be filled up with refuse.

From the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of the De Smet News:

[Ingalls Was First Resident De Smet](#)

[Family of R.R. Timekeeper Lived At Silver Lake in 1879; Moved To Town](#)

A railroad timekeeper and clerk came to be the first resident of De Smet, and remained to take an active part in its development, he and his family making it their home through the remainder of the lives of the parents. This man was C.P. Ingalls.

In giving credit to those who took part in the pioneering of Kingsbury county and De Smet, Mr. Ingalls had the honor of being the first in several distinctions. He was the first resident to have a family with him here, quite possibly first to establish a home on the townsite, first justice of the peace and first town clerk.

Mr. and Mrs. Ingalls and their family drove from Tracy, Minn., the end of the railroad, to where Brookings is now located, the husband and father being engaged as bookkeeper and timekeeper at the construction camp. This was early in 1879, and in the late summer, as construction moved west, they drove from Brookings to the camp on the banks of Silver Lake, then a pretty little body of water and the resting place for all kinds of wild water birds--ducks, swans, geese and pelicans.

In the Ingalls family there were: Mary, who died two years ago, Laura (Mrs. Manley Wilder), Mansfield, Mo., Grace (Mrs. Nate Dow), of Manchester, and Carrie (Mrs. D.N. Swanzey of Keystone).

Mrs. Swanzey recalls that the camp was a busy place, with many drivers and teams who returned to camp at night with clouds of dust, shouts of drivers and galloping horses. That was the signal for the children to run in for supper and bed. Meanwhile the men showed rivalry over their teams and their knowledge of how to handle a scraper. There were some good horses in that camp and Mrs. Swanzey says it is no wonder that occasionally a thief would pick out a good horse, and when there had been visitors about during the day the men would sleep by their horses that night.

In the fall the camp broke up, the surveyors and graders went back East, and the Ingalls family moved into the cabin that the engineers had built, Mr. Ingalls to spend the winter looking after things for the railroad company. They bought the food supply left at the company camp, this including some hardtack.

The winter of 1879-80 was a very mild one, and Mrs. Wilder, writing from Mansfield, Mo., to tell of those early days, reports that about Christmas time Mr. and Mrs. R.A. Boast arrived and lived in a little house within a few steps of the Ingalls. It was in that house that the Boasts entertained "the whole of De Smet and Lake Preston" on New Year's Day.

The two towns--neither of them yet in existence--were represented on that day by the Ingalls family and a bachelor named Walter Ogden, who lived near the site of Lake Preston. Mr Boast always described the day as a warm one--so mild that the doors were left open.

The Ingalls home was a stopping place for the early home-seekers, and they played host as best they could, their house being practically a hotel that first year. It was also the scene of the first religious service and the family played an important part in the early religious history of the community, described in another article in this paper.

Mrs. Swanzey describes the bird life of that first spring as the children recall it: "As it got warmer the wild ducks and geese began to come. Early one morning there was such a noise that we ran out of doors, to find the lake covered with wild geese, swimming and splashing--every goose talking. Our parents told us that they were choosing their mates, as it was St. Valentine's Day. Mornings we would watch the lake, and with the wind blowing the water in little waves and with wild ducks and geese and occasionally swans, it was a sight no child could forget."

Mrs. Swanzey continues: "Spring came, and with it the surveyors. Father used to go with them and one day he came home and said the town was all located. After dinner I went to the top of the hill, east of where the court house is, to see the town, and all I saw was a lot of stakes in the ground. I went back and told Mother there was nothing but a lot of sticks stuck in the ground and she told me that where they were would be houses, stores, a schoolhouse and a church."

Relieved of his railroad caretaker job Mr. Ingalls moved to town, building a small place where the Penny store now is, later selling it to E.H. Couse for a hardware store. He then built a small place diagonally across the corner and there the family lived. Mr. Ingalls was one of the first justices of the peace of the county and the first justice court was held in the front room of this small house. Church services were held there, too.

(Editor's note: From the official minutes of 1880 we read that E.W. Smith was appointed justice in April but moved away in May and Mr. Ingalls succeeded him.)

In her letter about the early history Mrs. Wilder tells of her husband's location on his homestead in 1879, but states that he went back to "civilization" for the winter and they did not meet until some time later. He spent the winter of 1880-81 in De Smet, as did the Ingalls family.

Mrs. Swanzey closes her letter: "Details slip my memory but impressions last, and the lives of the early pioneers were bound together in an effort to build for the future, not only a town but a good town. There are others who can tell you better of the Hard Winter, of grinding wheat in coffee mills for flour, of the snow and drifts and the spirit of comradeship in the little town."

The Ingalls family were to move later to their farm southeast of town and live there some years. Later they lived in De Smet on Third street, both parents passing away here.

## DAKOTA PRAIRIES

Ever I see them in my mental vision  
As first my eyes beheld them years ago,  
Clad all in brown with russet shades and golden  
Stretching away into the far unknown;

Never a break to mar their sweep of grandeur,  
From North to South, from East to West the same.  
Save that the East was full of purple shadows,  
The West with setting sun was all aflame;

Never a sign of human habitation  
To show that man's domain was begun;

The only marks the footpaths of the bison  
Made by the herds before their day was done.

The sky down-turned a brazen bowl to me,  
And clanging with the calls of wild gray geese  
Winging their way unto the distant Southland  
To 'scape the coming storms and rest in peace.

Ever the winds went whispering o'er the prairies,  
Ever the grasses whispered back again,  
And then the sun dipped down below the skyline  
And stars lit just the outline of the plain.

--Laura Ingalls Wilder  
D.S. News 6/20/1930

August 1963: Tourists want to know where the Ingalls "store" stood, where the claim was, and where is Silver Lake? That is a disappointing report to make: That Silver Lake has been drained these many years and part of its bed is being filled in with refuse from the city.

March 1968: Just before 1 o'clock Friday, Penney slough was on fire at the west end, the dry grass and weeds already swept clear the length of the bank from the dump grounds to the rendering plant. Before it was all over, the lowland area was an expanse of black, the railroad bridge was burned and grassland north of the grade had been on fire but the De Smet Rendering Company was untouched, also the trees of the State Game, Fish & Parks De Smet Experimental Forest were safe. Burned black the ground extending along the slough bank from the city dump grounds—what was once Silver Lake—close to the railroad tracks. Sweep of the fire was east and north.

October 1970: Fire started in City Dump area and swept across acres of slough... swept south from dump grounds, across the bed of dry Silver Lake and into the northeast corner of De Smet Forest area, burning the grass and destroying several of the evergreens. Firebreaks were cut in Wendell Johnson farm to the southeast and James Penny farm to the northeast.

August 1973: Silver Lake bed proves problem rebuilding U.S. 14 across county. People often ask where it is... controversy... The Department of the Interior has the low area that includes what was Silver Lake classed as 4F, considered suitable for recreation and parks, and for this reason it could not allow a highway to cross. The State Department of Transportation and Department of Game, Fish & Parks endeavored to change the ruling. / Silver Lake, about a half mile long, one of the more shallow bodies of water of the South Dakota prairies, was a delightful body of water, long serving for boating, trapping, skating... even with a small swimming hole at the bridge at its east end. The press release of this week states it silted-in long ago, but drainage of the slough above and below the lake bed accounted for its going dry. / The Federal and state departments are not alone in involvement in the Silver Lake area. De Smet City has a problem in improving its sewage disposal, required by the extension of the city sewers and large flow into them and by the environmental restrictions. The city has long used an area to the north and west of the old lake bed for sewage disposal and cannot establish a new one until the highway location is determined and construction done. / Planned for the area once the highway is located and built, is landscaping to beautify the approach to the city from the east, the Soil Conservation District interested in such a project. / Then there's Silver Lake itself, with the Laura Ingalls Wilder Memorial Society having many suggestions of lovers of the Wilder books that a small Silver Lake be established near the new highway. Damming the outlet from the lake bed that was made in the drainage project of years ago and removing silt to deepen the area would result in a new body of water there. / Where was Silver Lake? It is difficult even for local persons who remember it to exactly identify the site. Its west edge was east of the small buildings in the pasture, its eastern border about where the drop-off is into Penney Slough. A road extended across the slough from this point and it was at a small bridge there that a swimming hole served local youth.



December 1975: Sewage of the city is now being lifted from the sump pits of long years just southeast of town, pumped the three-fourths of a mile to the expanse of the lagoon completed in the fall of 1974. / 600 gallons per minute of sewage is being lifted from the two pits, called wet wells, and deposited in the three-cell lagoon north of the railroad tracks on the 35 acre tract purchased and developed last year. Location of US 14 and work on the road delayed the accomplishment. / Located in the small structure erected near the one-time Silver Lake bed is the equipment that lifts and pumps the sewage from the large sump into which sewage from the city accumulates, and the smaller one, to the southeast, that receive that from the industrial area. Within the less-than-impressive structure with its blue paint are two electrically powered pumps and an auxiliary gasoline pump for duty on power failure. Completely automated, one pump serves unless the second is needed for the load of sewage. Plans are to add electric lights so that the city police can check the building on their rounds.

January 1976: A large restoration of Silver Lake proposed. At Chamber of Commerce meeting, President Myron Johnson proposed creation of a new Silver Lake to include areas of Big Slough above it and Penney's Slough to the east. Proposal by President Johnson is an extension of two earlier proposals to have a new Silver Lake to replace the body of water that served the community for 35 years. One of the earlier plans was for the upper area of the slough, east of the present US 14 and was dropped when the highway route was changed. The other was for the lower area and awaited the building of the new highway. Propose a much larger lake than the original, pursuing the plan a Bicentennial project for the community as a major development in the heritages of the Laura Ingalls Wilder books.

May 1976: Restoration of Silver Lake proposed. A restoration proposed in recent weeks for Silver Lake, the small body of water once a mile southeast of De Smet, made historic by the Laura Ingalls Wilder book... got a long step forward in a gathering held here Thursday afternoon at which representatives of state agencies that would be involved offered no objections as they described what would be involved in the project.

