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## ISANTI COUNTY

Isanti County is a highly developed dairy farming district, advantageously located, from a marketing standpoint, 30 miles north of the Twin Cities of Minnesota.

Originally the county lay in the pine belt and it played a major role in the drama of Northwest lumbering. Logs cut for the erection of Fort Snelling in 1821 were taken from Dutchman's Grove, about three miles northwest of the present site of Cambridge. The first large lumbering operations in the State were started in 1847 on the Rum River at the time when this district was known as the Isanti Indian Territory. It took but a short time for the ruthless lumbermen to sweep across the county, but before the "thwack" of the double-bit ax was out of ear-shot settlers trickled in, staked their claims, grubbed out the stumps, and began to farm.

As the various grain crops proved their adaptability to Isanti soil and climate, a program of broad crop diversification developed and blossomed into a system of general farming. More recently has come the trend toward livestock farming with the accent on dairying. The sale of livestock products, of which dairy products comprise the bulk, now accounts for more than a third of the county's farm income. Recently, too, the raising of truck garden products has found favor with many Isanti farmers because of the demand for fresh vegetables in the metropolitan market.

### OPPORTUNITIES

In normal years the income from a farm of average size, about 120 acres, approaches the two thousand dollar mark, but with the general price decline land valuations have slumped to the level of 20 years ago. In 1935 the acreage valuation was \$39.79 on an average, or \$4,761 for an average farm. Financially the county is in a solvent condition for, while taxes are high, 73.86 mills, the

total county debt is only 10.73 percent of the taxable value of property, or \$28.61 per capita, much less than the State average.

#### PHYSICAL SETTING

Isanti County, located in the east central part of Minnesota, about 42 miles from the Minneapolis business district, has a land area of 442 square miles. Its boundaries are Kanabec County on the north; Anoka County on the south; Sherburne and Mille Lacs Counties on the west; and Chisago County on the east.

Topography While formerly the surface of this county was heavily timbered with virgin pine, now waving fields of grain and scantily-wooded pasture lands bear testimony to the physical transfiguration that has taken place.

The greater part of this district is an approximately level plain of gravel and sand dotted with numerous small lakes and traversed by several streams. It is moderately rolling with elevations from 10 to 25 feet above the depressions and lakes. The northern tier of townships has a rolling contour and rises in places, 40 to 75 feet above the lakes. The highest land in the county, in Maple Ridge and the northwest part of Wyanett township, is about 1,100 feet above sea level. The mean elevation of the county is about 1,007 feet above the sea.

Drainage Most of the county is drained by the Rum River, which empties into the Mississippi. The southeast section of the county is drained by the St. Croix River, which also reaches the Mississippi. The general slope of the land is to the south. Artificial drainage is unnecessary except in the marshy areas which make up 7 percent of the surface. Census figures show that in 1929 the county had only 4,869 acres unfit for farming, because of improper drainage. There are about 40 acres of irrigated land on 11 farms in the county.

Soil Much of the county's till area is covered by a fine dune sand which in some places is several feet deep. In the north and east are moraines, till plains, and small outwash gravel plains. Other moraines are found in the southwest corner. The lake clays, found chiefly in the northwest, were deposited by the ponded waters of the glacier. A few square miles along the northern edge are surfaced with bed



till. The gray till, which extends nearly to the northern limits of the county, shows considerable variation in the character of the soil, part being clayey and part loose-textured and sandy. In the sand dune area a considerable amount of truck farming has been developed. Because of its very fine texture the sand holds enough water to carry the crops through seasons of drought.

#### Isanti County Soils

Grey drift moraine, sandy or stony loam	40 square miles	9.05 percent
Grey drift moraine, pebbly clay loam	35 square miles	7.92 percent
Grey drift moraine, sandy to stony loam	35 square miles	7.92 percent
Grey drift till plain, pebbly clay loam	50 square miles	11.31 percent
Red drift till plain, pebbly clay loam	10 square miles	2.26 percent
Outwash gravel and sands	14 square miles	3.17 percent
Lake clays in glacially ponded waters	9 square miles	2.04 percent
Fine dune sand	218 square miles	49.32 percent
Marshes and swamps	31 square miles	7.01 percent

#### Climate and Rainfall

Isanti county has a growing season of 125 to 140 frost-free days. The last killing frost in the spring comes between May 11 and May 16, and the first fall frost between September 20 and 26. An average rainfall of from 27 inches provides sufficient moisture for the type of crops raised.

The 32-year norms given below are taken from the Mora station (alt. 1,001 ft.) in Kanabec County, to the north, as being representative of climatic conditions that exist in Isanti:

MONTHS:	JAN.	FEB.	MAR.	APR.	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG.	SEPT.	OCT.	NOV.	DEC.
TOWNS: Mora Station (alt. 1,001 ft.) Precipitation in inches.	0.86	0.84	1.17	1.89	3.35	4.05	3.57	3.06	3.29	2.11	1.59	0.69
Temperature (Fahrenheit)	9.2°	13.8°	27.7°	43.3°	54.1°	64.3°	69.2°	66.6°	58.4°	45.8°	31.2°	16.1°
Annual Precipitation					26.47 inches							
Annual Temperature					41.6 degrees							

#### SETTLEMENT AND RACIAL ORIGINS

The early settlers were lumbermen of English Colonial ancestry some of

whom had lingered for a while in the lumber regions of the St. Croix valley. With them was a sprinkling of German lumberjacks many of whom had also followed the path of the lumbering industry from Maine to the St. Croix. After the pines of Isanti County were cut, some of these lumbermen and lumberjacks remained and established homes. They were joined by farmers from the eastern States and from Germany. Later Scandinavian immigrants came in great numbers. More than half of the 1930 population was foreign-born Swedish or of Swedish decent. In 1930 the population was 12,081, of which the foreign-born made up 21.4 percent. There were 27.3 persons per square mile, a decrease in density from 1920 when there were 30 persons per square mile and the total population was 13,278.

#### COUNTY ORGANIZATION AND SUBDIVISIONS

Isanti County, with its seat at Cambridge, was ~~established~~ <sup>organized</sup> on February 13, 1857. It bears the name of a large group of Sioux Indians, the Santees, who once lived along the banks of the Rum River. The county is divided into 13 townships and 3 incorporated villages, and there are 69 school districts. The three villages with their population are: Cambridge, the county seat, 1,183; Braham, 579; and Isanti, 371.

#### TAXES

In 1931, the total taxable value of property in the county was \$5,672,605, the total tax levy \$316,844, and the mill rate 55.29. In 1935, the taxable value had fallen to \$3,221,464, and though the mill rate was raised to 73.86 a reduction of 77,001.

Indebtedness The county's total debt, including that of its subdivisions, was \$345,592.06 in 1935, or 10.73 percent of the total taxable value. The per capita debt was \$28.61, compared to the average for the 87 counties of the State of \$82.86.

Delinquency Cumulative delinquent taxes to January 1936 amounted to \$278,919. Of the 1934 tax levy \$67,467, or 29.4 percent, was uncollected as compared with a State wide average of 18.8 percent.



## MARKETS AND TRADE CENTERS

Isanti County is about 42 miles from the Minneapolis Loop and about 68 miles from South St. Paul meat packing center. Good highways and direct rail transportation make the Twin City area easily accessible. Although slightly beyond the boundary of the Twin City milk shed much of Isanti's farm produce goes to metropolitan markets.

Cambridge, the county seat, offers both market and trade advantages to the Isanti County farmer, and supplies the immediate needs of the adjacent territory. Such trade centers as Mora, Pine City, Princeton, and Anoka, in the surrounding counties, are also popular.

## COOPERATIVES (and canneries)

Creameries and shipping associations are the principal agencies through which the Isanti farmer markets his products. Some of these agencies are independent but the cooperatives are in the majority. Listed among the cooperative enterprises are creameries, elevators, insurance companies, stores, produce shipping associations, livestock shipping associations, and telephone companies.

There are nine creameries in the county, six of which are cooperative and three independent, as follows:

Braham Co-op. Creamery	Co-op.	Braham
Cambridge Co-op. Creamery	Co-op.	Cambridge
Cloverdale Creamery Co.	Ind.	Grandy
Crown Farmers Co-op. Cry.	Co-op.	Bethel
Dalbo Cry. Association.	Ind.	Dalbo
Day Co-op. Cry.	Co-op.	Draham R. 1
Isanti Farmers Cry. Co.	Co-op.	Isanti
Pride of North Cry. Co.	Ind.	Cambridge
Spring Lake Co-op. Cry. Co.	Co-op.	North Branch
Stanchfield Creamery	Ind.	Stanchfield.

A large starch factory at Cambridge handles the excess potato crop.

## TRANSPORTATION

A network of good highways traverses Isanti County. State 65, a bituminous treated road, crosses from north to south and is paralleled by State 56. State 95 intersects these thoroughfares in crossing the county from east to west and passing through the county seat, where State 118 branches north to join State

65 in Kanabec County.

The Northland Greyhound bus route is on State 65 and the Great Northern railroad runs the full length of the county, touching at Isanti, Cambridge, Stanchfield, and other shipping points.

#### SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS AND AGENCIES

Churches The 17 churches of Isanti County represent 5 Protestant denominations. There are 9 Swedish Baptist churches, 5 Lutheran, 1 Methodist, and 1 Congregational.

Schools In 1935 there were 2,098 elementary and 465 high school pupils in the 69 schools of Isanti, under the tutelage of 88 teachers. Cambridge has both graded elementary school and a high school.

Clubs and Organizations The Farm Bureau has several active units in Isanti County as does its youth auxiliary, the 4-H Clubs.

#### FAIR

A fair is held annually at Cambridge early in September. The sponsor, the Isanti County Agricultural Society, awards prizes for the best exhibits of livestock, crops, and handicraft.

#### FARM INCOME

Livestock products, made up largely of dairy products, brought in 36.2 percent or more than a third, of the \$3,719,508 farm income of 1929. Crops were not far behind with 35.55 percent; livestock sold on the hoof contributed 12.05 percent; forest products, once the chief stock in trade of Isanti County, yielded only 1.01 percent; and the remainder, 15.16 percent, was accounted for in products used by the farm families.

Segregated by types of farms, 39.3 percent of the income was produced on dairy farms; 30.8 percent on crop specialty farms, such as truck gardens; 25.1 percent on general farms; and 1.65 percent on poultry farms. The remainder was produced on specialized tracts such as institutions and estates.

#### CENSUS REPORTS

A statistically average farm in Isanti County would cost \$4,761 or \$39.79 for each of the 119.7 acres it would comprise. Each farm would have a team of horses and 11 head of cattle. Every other farm would have 3 or 4 hogs and every



16th farm would have a flock of 10 sheep. The crop acreage would be divided as follows; oats, 6.8 acres; rye, 3.6; corn, 8.3; hay, 16.2; potatoes, 7.1. There would be an occasional crop of barley, flax, and mixed grain. Its pastures would comprise about 43 acres, and the remainder of the 119.7 acres would be in woodlot and farmstead.



## AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS

Population, 1930 (County) -----12,081  
 Area -----442 square miles-----282,880 acres  
 Water area -----40.9 square miles or 9 percent of the land area.

County Seat - Cambridge

FARM VALUES

Average value per acre, 1935 -----\$39.79  
 Average value per acre, 1930 -----61.13  
 Average value per farm, 1935 -----4,761.00  
 Average value per farm, 1930 -----7,378.00

FARM DEVELOPMENT

Number of farms, 1935 -----2,168  
 Land in farms -----91.7 percent of the total land area or-----259,427 acres  
 Average size of farms -----119.7 acres

THE TAX PICTURE

Total taxable value (1935) -----\$3,221,464  
 Total General tax levy (1935) -----\$239,843  
 The average tax rate in 1935 was -----73.86 mills  
 Total debt of county and subdivisions -----\$345,592.06  
 Per capita debt -----\$28.61  
 County bonds -----\$212,001.08  
 The total debt was 10.73 percent of the tax value.

TENANCY AND MORTGAGE DEBT

Farm mortgage debt, 1930 (Farms operated by owners) -----\$1,866,223  
 Of farms operated by owners 47.6 percent were mortgaged in 1930.  
 Tenants occupied 27.1 percent of the farms in 1935.

FARM INCOME

Average farm income -----\$1,832

## Sources of Income

Crops -----	35.55 percent
Livestock sold -----	12.05
Livestock products -----	36.2
Forest Products -----	1.01
Products used by operator's family -----	15.16
	<u>99.97</u>

LIVESTOCK HOLDINGS - 1935

Horses and colts of all ages	1,854 farms reported	5,391 animals, a decrease of 9 percent over 1930.
Dairy Cows (not available)		
Cattle and calves of all ages	1,987 farms reported	23,155 animals, an increase of 1.7 percent over 1930.
Swine	1,266 farms reported	4,433 animals, a decrease of 22.4 percent from 1930.
Sheep	134 farms reported	1,836 animals, a decrease of 13.3 percent from 1930.

CROP CENSUS

Wheat	610 farms reported	26,204 bushels	3,829 acres	
Oats	1,288 " "	274,738 "	14,957 "	
Barley	366 " "	32,620 "	2,174 "	
Rye	575 " "	49,824 "	7,978 "	
Mixed grains	128 " "	20,787 "	1,112 "	
Flax seed	2 " "	99 "	30 "	
Corn harvested				
for grain	512 " "	33,404 "	3,233 "	
All sorghums and				
hay cut for forage			35,322 "	24,982 tons
Sweet hay and hay				
cut for silage	25 " "		102 "	159 "
Alfalfa	424 " "		2,479 "	2,235 "
Potatoes	1,911 " "	1,095,797 "	15,462 "	



*Recd 6/4/37*

Duluth, Minn.  
June 3, 1937  
Helene Farle

*Wardage: 1830*

### HISTORY OF ISANTI COUNTY

Isanti County, located in the east-central part of the state, was established by a legislative act on February 13, 1857. It is bounded on the north by Kanabec and Pine Counties, on the east by Chisago County, on the south by Anoka County and on the west by Sherburne and Mille Lacs Counties. Before the organization of the Territory of Minnesota, in 1849 the area that is now Isanti County was a part of the Territory of Wisconsin, but in that year it became a part of Ramsey County.

There is much discussion as to the origin of the name of Isanti. Professor A.W. Williamson states that the word was taken from the Sioux meaning "knife," from the name of Knife Lake in Kanabec County, where the Santee tribes once lived. In the Sioux language "Isan" means "knife" and "ati" means "to dwell on or at." Hon. J.V. Brower, an early surveyor in that territory, says the name was derived from the first iron or steel knives given them by Radisson and Groseillier, early French explorers. Neill in his History of Minnesota believes it the name of a band of Dahkotahs, known as the Sissetons or Santees, who lived along the banks of the Rum River.

Men famous in the annals of the state's history have traversed the area that is Isanti County. A majority of them came while searching for the headwaters of the Mississippi River or while exploring that river and its tributaries. Among the men thought to have been in the area are Radisson and Groseillier, DuLuth, Hennepin, and many others. Pike, Cass, and Schoolcraft were probably here while exploring the Mississippi. It is known that they visited the trading posts at Sandy, Leech and Mille Lacs Lakes, and it is easy to infer that they may have been in Isanti County. Perhaps they were comparative latecomers, for among the Indians there are traditions of the visits of whitemen before the French and English trader became a common sight.

The Rum River, part of which flows through the county on its meandering course between Mille Lacs Lake and the Mississippi River, has played an important part in

the county's history. Not only was this river and its tributaries explored by many parties, but trade posts were established on it, and in the hey-day of the lumber industry millions of feet of timber were floated down it. Daniel Stanchfield, long associated with the lumber industry, made a trip into the area in 1847, in company with Pierre Bottineau, Severre Bottineau and Charles Manock and a crew of timber workers. Later in referring to this trip he said:

"This little exploring party's report, the money consequently supplied from the east, and Franklin Steele's perseverance and unlimited will, made it possible to make the improvements on unsurveyed government land. My written report secured the capital from Caleb Cushing and his associates; and his influence in Congress secured the survey of the government land adjoining the falls and including this claim. The discovery by the exploring party of the almost inexhaustible pine timber above the falls of St. Anthony, heralded throughout all the states and Canada, brought immigration from every state, and changed this part of the territory from barbarism to civilization."<sup>1</sup>

In describing the timber and land he wrote: "The pine on the main river reached from the shore, on each side, as far as the eye could see from the top of the highest tree, along all its extent of fifty miles or more from the mouth of the West Branch to Mille Lacs. I had seen far more pine than the company expected to find.

"Billions of feet of pine that grew upon the shores of Rum river and its tributaries belonged to the red men in 1847, but has since been cut and removed by the civilized paleface, whose capital and influence in Congress obtained from the Indian the title and possession of this land and timber. When once stripped of the pine forest which was its wealth, the land, formerly the hunting ground of the Indians, ought to revert to its original owners, as the inheritance given them by the Great Spirit. A large part of it is worthless for agriculture, but was a source of sustenance to the red man."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stanchfield, Daniel, "History of Pioneer Lumbering on the Upper Mississippi and its Tributaries," in Minnesota Historical Society Collections, Vol. IX., p. 329.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



The money derived from the sale of the timber was a great influence in hastening the advance of agriculture in the state, and in the area under discussion. The early farmers at first catered mainly to the lumbermen, but with the advance of the railroads they found they could reach the distant markets. Not only did this make farming a financial success, but other people hearing of it, came to take up the lands and raise crops. With the decrease of timber, farming as a big business was done in earnest and soon all the better farm sites, especially those bordering on the Rum River, were taken.

The Treaty of Traverse des Sioux and Mendota in 1851 afforded protection to and encouraged settlements in the upper Mississippi region. A web of settlements sprang up in Isanti County, some connected with other settlements by trails or roads.

By the time the county was established in 1857, there were already some small settlements in the county. It is interesting to note that notwithstanding the early occupation by the Indians, very few Isanti County place names are derived from them. Isanti Township is the only area named in honor of the Sioux who lived in that area.

Athens Township was so-called after Athens, Greece. However, since there are a number of towns with the same name in the United States, it is altogether possible that settlers coming from one of them may have suggested that name.

Bradford, a village in the west-central part of the county, was named for a pioneer, Rev. Charles Booth, who came from Bradford in Yorkshire, England.

Braham, a village in the northeast corner of the county, was named by officials of the Great Northern Railroad.

Dalbo township was named by settlers from the Swedish province of Dalarne or Dalecarlia.

Cambridge township was named by settlers who came from Cambridge, Maine.

Oxford township was also named by settlers from Maine.

Spencer Brook township was so named from the small stream flowing through it, which had been named for Judge Spencer, a pioneer who established a farm along its banks.

Stanchfield township was named in honor of Daniel Stanchfield, a Minnesota pioneer long identified with the lumber industry.

Stanford township was named for a township in New York.

Wyannett township was named from a village in northern Illinois.

Although no definite information is known about the earliest missionaries in the county, it is believed that such well-known men as Ayers, Spencer, Boutwell, and Ely visited this region. Later, religious services were held in private homes or in various public buildings until the churches could be built. Among the numerous denominations in the county at present, the Swedish Baptist, Lutheran, Catholic, Methodist and Congregational have the larger followings.

What little education the children of the fur traders or Indians were able to receive they gained from their parents or wandering missionaries. Only with the growth of communities did public school education develop. Today there are 67 ungraded elementary schools and the districts of Cambridge and Braham. The total enrollment of 2,098 elementary and 465 secondary pupils is instructed by 88 teachers.

The Great Northern is the only railroad serving the county. Other transportation facilities are offered by the Northland-Greyhound Bus Lines and various small truck lines. Most of the roads in the county are improved and include part of MSH #95, #56, #118, and #65.

Because of the fertility of the land and easy drainage, agriculture and dairying are the chief means of income in the county today. Land is drained by a ditch system, and the Rum and Mississippi Rivers. At the present time 91.7% of all the land in the county is in farms. The 1935 Census lists 2,168 farms in Isanti County.

In 1930, the county was made up of 13 townships, with a population of 12,081, or 27.3 persons per square mile. The U.S. Census for that year lists three villages and no cities in the county.

Very little is known about the first settlers in Isanti County, but David M. Clough is probably the most prominent. Arriving in 1857, his family took a homestead near the village of Spencer Brook. A few years later Clough established himself as a lumberman and received contracts from lumbering concerns at Stillwater and Minneapolis,



for the delivery of logs to their mills. These logs were cut in Isanti County and floated down the Rum and Mississippi Rivers. Later, he moved to Minneapolis, where he built a mill for the manufacture of lumber and lath. In 1895, he was made the governor of Minnesota.

Cambridge, the county seat, is located in the east-central part of the county, on the east bank of the Rum River, 30 miles north of the Twin Cities. In addition to being a grain and dairy center, it has a flour mill, creamery, starch factory, and woolen mill. Most of the products find a ready market in the adjoining counties, and surplus products are shipped to St. Paul and Duluth. It also has a good tourist trade in the summer season; for it is centrally located in a region of lakes and fine resorts, easily accessible over MSH #65, #95, and #118.

One of the most interesting educational institutions in the state is the Minnesota Colony for Epileptics, located at Cambridge. Built in 1925, it has two large buildings, with a 200-patient capacity and covers 323 acres, of which 111 are under cultivation and cared for by employees and patients.

In August, 1927, many of the patients of fair intelligence were transferred from the over-crowded school for the feeble-minded at Fairbault, to Cambridge, and at that time schools were established to teach the undergrade students. Patients are taught such trades as sewing, weaving baskets and rugs, brush-making, and manual training. In 1927, the institution maintained a staff of 48 employees, which included one principal, two literary teachers, one manual training, and one craft teacher. The value of the buildings was estimated at \$466,352, but since then, improvements have been made on the buildings and grounds.

SOURCES OF MATERIAL

Notes from the work file by David Slafer.

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