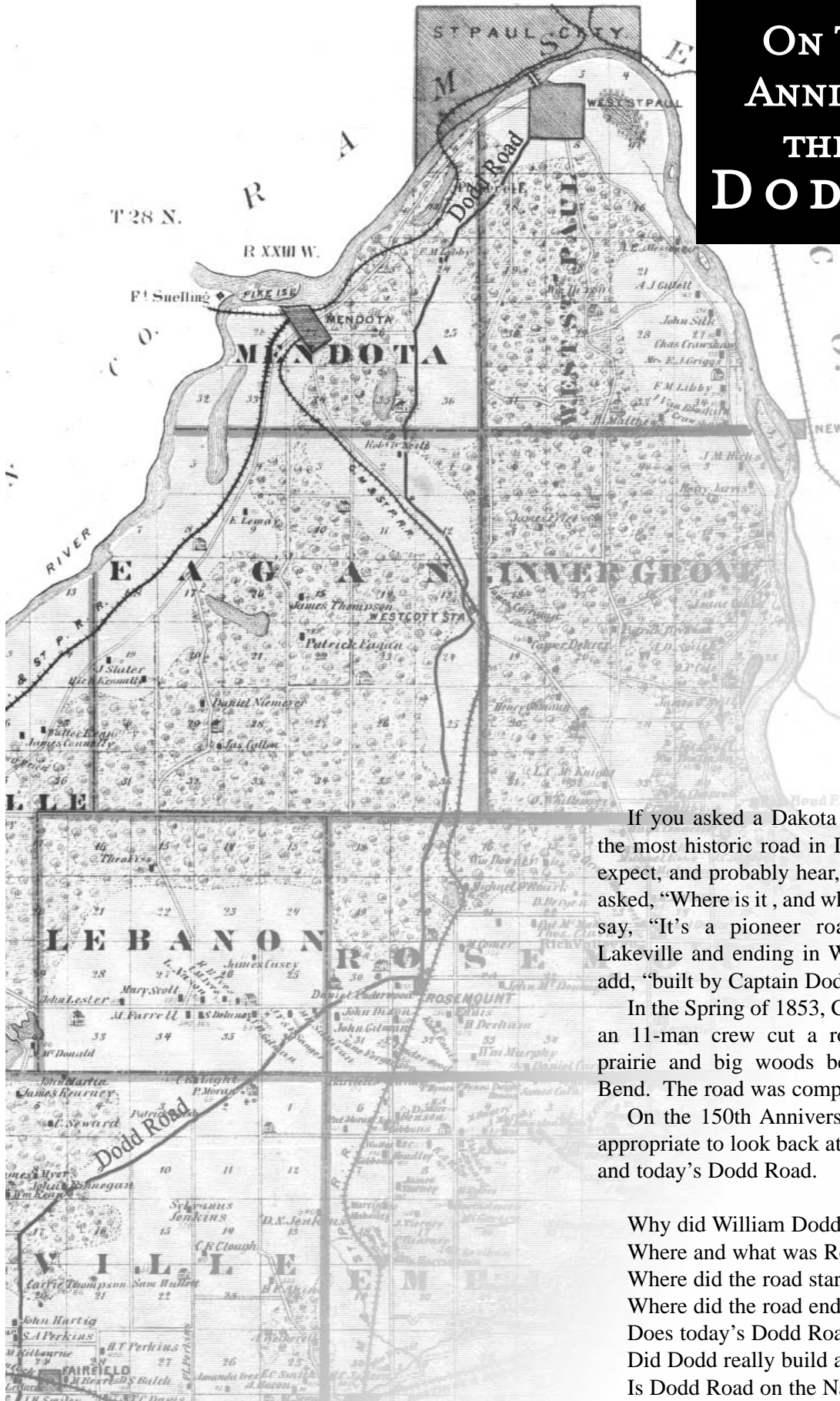


ON THE 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ELUSIVE DODD ROAD

by Bill Wolston



If you asked a Dakota County old-timer, “What is the most historic road in Dakota County?” you would expect, and probably hear, “Dodd Road.” Then if you asked, “Where is it, and why is it historic?” most would say, “It’s a pioneer road running north through Lakeville and ending in West St. Paul.” Some might add, “built by Captain Dodd.”

In the Spring of 1853, Captain William B. Dodd and an 11-man crew cut a road through the Minnesota prairie and big woods between Mendota and Rock Bend. The road was completed in 109 days.

On the 150th Anniversary of Dodd Road it seems appropriate to look back at Captain Dodd’s Dodd Road and today’s Dodd Road.

Why did William Dodd build the road?

Where and what was Rock Bend?

Where did the road start?

Where did the road end?

Does today’s Dodd Road follow the same route?

Did Dodd really build a road in West St. Paul?

Is Dodd Road on the National Register?

The Traders' Road

When Minnesota became a Territory in 1849, several ungraded roads and Indian trails had been used for years by fur traders between waterways.

Lt. James L. Thompson's 1839 map shows the St. Croix and traders' roads departing southeast from Mendota. These roads aided the routing of the Mendota-Wabashaw and Captain Dodd's Roads.

1850 Military Roads

In 1850, Henry Sibley, representative from the new Territory of Minnesota, introduced a bill in the U.S. Congress authorizing military roads in the new territory. At the time, Minnesota east of the Mississippi was open to settlement but south and west was still Indian territory.

Four roads were funded including one in southern Minnesota, the Mendota-Wabashaw Road. Col. John J. Abert, U.S. Corps of Engineers, hired John S. Potter to survey the roads. On November 19, 1850, he started to survey the 75-mile Wabashaw Road. He departed Mendota following the "Traders route" to the intersection of today's Wescott and Highway 149 before continuing southeast.

Initially, an authorized fifth road, the Mendota-Big Sioux River Road, awaited additional funding. This 260-mile road was intended as a supply route connecting Mendota and the Missouri River. When funded, the northern portion of its route could and did follow Dodd's route.

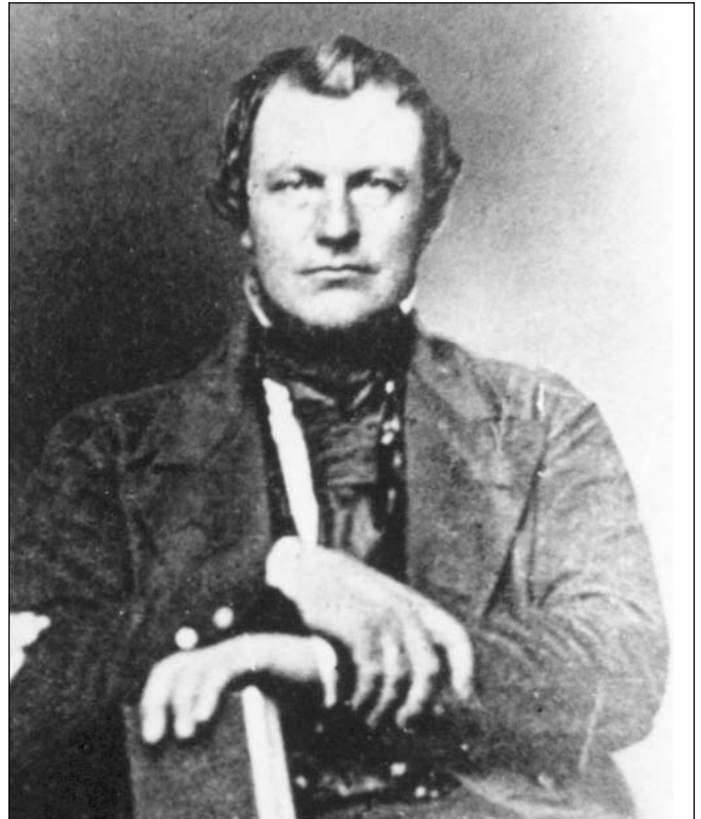
While described as military roads to connect forts, the roads were acknowledged settler pathways.

Treaties and land claims

The treaties of Traverse des Sioux and Mendota, which opened Minnesota west of the Mississippi to settlement, were not signed until 1851. And, land claims could not be legally filed until 1854. Yet, between 1851 and 1853, close to 20,000 people crossed into Indian territory seeking and trying to hold claims. Captain Dodd attended the Traverse des Sioux treaty signing. He would hold a claim for 160 acres at Rock Bend and become a leader in the pioneer community.

Captain William B. Dodd

Dodd was aware the proposed Mendota-Big Sioux Road could be Rock Bend's roadway to Mendota. However, he also knew it was the last road on the "to-do" list, a 260-mile route which lacked financing, and might by-pass Rock Bend.



Captain William B. Dodd

Dodd prepares and starts the Dodd Road

In 1852 Dodd started soliciting funds for a road from Minnesota River settlers. Auguste Larpenteur, son of St. Paul merchant Charles Larpenteur, also solicited funds in St. Paul. Dodd had decided to build the road. In fact, there's a strong case the St. Paul businessmen may have initiated the idea.

Dodd wanted a reliable, all-weather route from the Rock Bend community to Mendota and St. Paul. For the businessmen, settlers meant more business.

Nicollet County organized on March 5, 1853. William Dodd's Rock Bend claim became the village of St. Peter and the county seat in 1854.

Captain Dodd departs Mendota

In late March or early April 1853, Captain Dodd, a surveyor, 10 men, and two teams departed Mendota, Dakota



County to build a road to Rock Bend, Nicollet County on the Minnesota River.

Dodd followed the traders' route and John Potter's recently surveyed Mendota-Wabashaw military road to Wescott about mid-way on the border between Eagan and Inver Grove. At Wescott Dodd turned south through today's Eagan.

They immediately entered a wilderness of thick woods, marshes and lakes. Marshes and lakes were avoided as much as possible by following the "high grounds," the ridges between water run-offs to the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers. Where necessary streams were bridged.

Going southwest through Lakeville they finally arrived at some open prairies. However, their dense woods experience would be repeated several times.

Departing Dakota County they crossed a corner of Scott County and all of Rice and LeSueur Counties before arriving at Lake Emily, which was a mile from their Rock Bend destination.

The road was completed in mid-July. In 109 days Captain Dodd and his men had covered 70 miles of very difficult territory. What Dodd and his men accomplished was soon to be visited by a man who appreciated and would recognize their achievement.

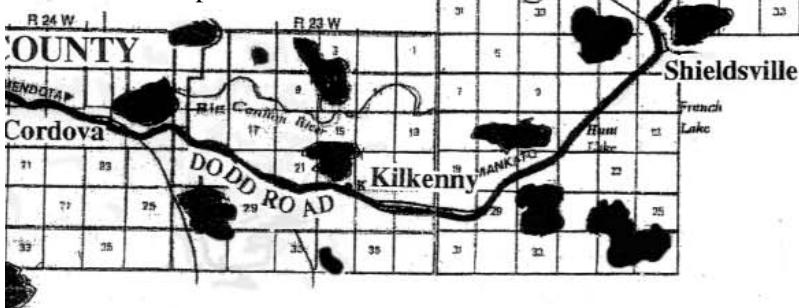
Mendota-Big Sioux Road meets the Dodd Road

A month before Dodd reached Lake Emily the Mendota-Big Sioux River Military Road survey commenced. Col. Abert had assigned Captain Jesse Lee Reno to survey the road.

Reno's route started on June 20, 1853 on the Missouri River at the mouth of the Big Sioux River, the site of today's Sioux City, Iowa. His northeast route covered mostly prairie to the Little Sioux River. Approaching the Des Moines River, the survey team turned north-northeast and continued crossing the Minnesota border.

When they reached the bluffs of the Minnesota River, they turned east to Mankato. Reno was pleased by the town he found, saying, "After passing over 180 miles of prairie unoccupied by a single white settler we were agreeably surprised to find at the mouth of the Mankato a flourishing settlement of 200 intelligent and energetic countrymen."

Approximately 15 miles north-east of Mankato, near Lake Emily, Reno came upon Captain Dodd's road. Reno's report stated:



The Dodd Road construction route started in Dakota County traveling south, crossing Scott County into Rice County, and then west through LeSueur County to the Minnesota River.

“Opposite Traverse des Sioux we struck a road, newly cut out, from Rock Bend to St. Paul, by Captain Dodd, of Minnesota. It materially assisted in our survey, and enabled us to get through the Big Woods several weeks sooner than we would otherwise have done without this – our only guide among the unexplored labyrinth of lakes and marshes.”

Reno also said Dodd’s men did just enough construction work along the way to permit the passage of the army wagons which made up the Reno train.

When Reno reached the prairie area of the Vermillion River he encountered Lakeville. He mentioned the town had been laid out as a result of Dodd’s work.

Reno praised Dodd for his roadway and arranged \$3,270 to be paid to Dodd and his party. Reno also stated the road was important to the prosperity of the Territory and settlers along the Minnesota River.

There might not be a Dodd Road . . . IF

The federal appropriation for the Mendota-Big Sioux Road was sent to Col. John Abert in January 1853, but instructions to proceed were not sent to Captain Reno until May 5, 1853. Also, the instructions Abert received called for the road to start in Mendota and terminate at the Missouri River. Abert’s instructions to Reno were just the opposite, starting at the Missouri. What was also strange is that Abert did not inform Reno about Captain Dodd’s road, which was in progress. Dodd was cutting the trail for a month before Abert sent orders to Reno.

Route of Dodd Road Today from St. Peter North

► *Nicollet County*

Dodd Road starts across the Minnesota River from St. Peter (Rock Bend) in LeSueur County.

► *LeSueur County*

Route goes east via Cleveland, Cordova and Kilkenny to Rice County.

► *Rice County*

Route travels northeast through Shieldsville, Millersburg, and Hazelwood to Scott County.

► *Scott County*

Route passes through south-east corner passing Eidswold to Eureka Township, Dakota County.

► *Dodd Road in Dakota County in Eureka*

Dodd Boulevard (Road) enters Eureka from Scott County at what would be 260th St. and travels north to Lakeville as CSAH 9.

► *In Lakeville*

Dodd, CSAH 9, enters Lakeville from Eureka south-west of Lakeville’s town center. It goes north to 185th St. and veers northeast, ending at Pilot Knob Rd.,

about a quarter mile from the Apple Valley border.

► *In Apple Valley*

Dodd Boulevard restarts on Pilot Knob Rd., traveling northeast to enter Rosemount at the intersection of County Road 42 and Diamond Path Road.

► *In Rosemount*

From Diamond Path, Dodd Boulevard continues northeast to 145th St. and Chippendale Ave. The road does not reappear until about one mile north of the city center on Highway 3. It departs Highway 3 as Dodd Road and travels north into Eagan. The original Dodd Road traveled through Rosemount and hosted some of the early businesses. It appears the road was too far from the Minnesota Central railroad tracks and depot in the 1860s.

► *In Eagan*

Dodd Road continues north about three miles ending at Wescott near Highway 149. This would be the starting point for Captain Dodd’s new road, cut to the south in 1853. However, today, Dodd Road reappears in Eagan following Highway 149 when it departs Highway 55 going north into Mendota Heights. Many people refer to the section of Highway 149 between Wescott and Highway 55 as Dodd Road but Eagan maps don’t.

► *In Mendota Heights*

Dodd Road and Highway 149 travel as one through Mendota Heights entering West St. Paul at Delaware Ave. The segment of the highway just prior to Delaware to Smith Ave. in West St. Paul was the first section of highway in Dakota County. It was Macadam, compacted and rolled crushed rock.

► *In West St. Paul*

Dodd Road follows Highway 149 until 149 turns north at Smith Ave. Dodd Road continues northeast through West St. Paul, bi-secting “40 acres” into St. Paul’s West Side.

In St. Paul, Dodd Road continues another three long blocks ending at Stryker Ave.



National Register Nomination

Earlier this year, three segments of Dodd Road were nominated for the National Register of Historic Places. The application states:

“Dodd Road is an early road in Minnesota that runs from Mendota to St. Peter, a distance of approximately 73 miles. The road was constructed in the spring of 1853 by William B. Dodd of Rock Bend. Dodd was aided by Auguste Larpeur in obtaining private subscription financing for his project. The road’s route passed through present-day Dakota, Scott, Rice, and LeSueur Counties. Later in 1853, the road was subsumed in a federal military road from Sioux City, Iowa, to Mendota by the Bureau of Topographical Engineers.”

Only 13 of 73 miles and none in Dakota County

The Dodd Road National Register nomination includes only three segments, one 6.8-mile segment in Rice County, and 3.8-mile and 2.4-mile segments in LeSueur County. As presented in the nomination, each segment is an original road location retaining most of the road’s original character.

Other portions of the road were excluded from consideration due to road upgrades and/or relocation. The nominated segments retained their near-original character, in part, because they were by-passed by more direct routes.

Segment 1 – Rice County

The Rice County segment includes portions of Circle Lake Trail, 113th St. W., Falls Trail, 130th St. W., Garfield Ave., Groveland Trail, and Halstad Ave. The entire segment was known as County Road 61 until recently, when all but one mile of 61 was given to the road’s appropriate townships.

Segments 2 & 3 – LeSueur County

The entire route of Dodd Road through LeSueur County, eligible or not, is identified with brown signs. The sign inscription is “Dodd Road 1853.”

The eastern-most eligible segment of 3.8 miles begins 1.5 miles west of Kilkenny, where County Road 136 intersects with State Hwy 13. It runs west by northwest to the shore of Gorman Lake. This is the only eligible segment of Dodd Road retaining its original name. The original road continues around the lake and ends at County Rd 2.

The western segment in LeSueur County is 2.4 miles long. It starts where the west end of Cleveland’s main street becomes County Road 148 after crossing State Highway 99. At this point it is a 28-foot wide gravel road. It ends as it turns toward State Highway 99.

None in Dakota County?

The exclusion of Dodd Road and Boulevard in Dakota County stems primarily from upgrading to meet the needs of a growing population. For example, Lakeville’s Dodd

Road has become a major artery. In Rosemount and Eagan, Dodd became secondary to the original Capital-National Highway project from 1916-1930.

Why is Dodd Road in Mendota Heights and West St. Paul called Dodd Road?

The answer could be as simple as someone liked the name or wanted to extend the honor to William Dodd. Actually, the name Jefferson Highway was equally used for the northern road and Jefferson Highway was used as an address.

George Staples said emphatically the road in Mendota Township was named after John Dodd. Staples’ grandfather was a township pioneer who owned land at the north-east corner of Dodd Road and Highway 110 (then Mendota Road) and also the triangle of Dodd, Delaware and Emerson. George’s statement is in a paper at the Minnesota Historical Society.

Could it have been named honoring John Van Ingen Dodd?

This is all speculation, but the census shows only one John Dodd for the period in question, the late 1800s. He was a state representative from St. Paul’s West Side living on Prescott Street. George Staples’ brother, Charles, was also a state representative and active in local and state politics. Could Charles have proposed the Dodd Road name for John Van Ingen Dodd?

The only record we have of John Van Ingen Dodd is a newspaper article from the South St. Paul newspaper in the 1890s. It quotes former Judge Charles E. Flandrau, a friend of John and John’s father.

John V.I. Dodd is Dead

“The well known and popular attorney passed away last Saturday.

“John Van Ingen Dodd who died last Saturday at Pomona, California, was three years ago a prominent attorney in St. Paul. He had gained high standing as a member of the bar and was a man of great promise. He resided on the West Side for many years before his health began to fail. He was elected to the Minnesota House of Representatives in 1892. He is survived by his wife and eleven year old daughter.

“His father was a pioneer settler of Minnesota. John was given the names Van Ingen in honor of the rector of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in St. Peter. John Van Ingen was the son of William Dodd, a hero who lost his life at the Battle of New Ulm. His father rounded the city of St. Peter and in 1853 constructed the road that bears his name to Mendota.”