

Rockdale: the village that time forgot

By Janice Redford
Special to the Lakes Edition

The Koshkonong Prairie has many historical surprises and a visit to the Village of Rockdale can include its story.

One of the smallest incorporated villages in Wisconsin is Rockdale. It was not always so small. The founding date was 1836 when this area was only a territory. The village grew on the edge of Koshkonong Creek founded as a mill town and center of commerce with hotels, breweries, stores and a post office.

Once Wisconsin was in

the process of becoming a state in the 1840s, the legislators of the territory needed to decide the location of a capital. Tiny Rockdale (then called Clinton) had more population than any nearby village and the founders decided to bid for the chance to become chosen as the capital city. That was when the four lakes region was nearly unsettled. Land speculators decided to create a city on paper and the competition began.

Rockdale did not have developers of the caliber of those who created what became Madison, and so the village survives today

with less population than it had in the 1880s.

Visitors can still see the little village that time forgot. There is an auto body shop, Rockdale Bar and Grill, and a trail and bridge network that connects with the nearest village to the north: Cambridge. The Cam-Rock Park trails and four bridges are popular for skiing, hiking, biking, viewing nature and having a picnic at the three shelter houses.

In the fall of 2000, the Wisconsin DNR tore out the dam and drained the mill pond, but Koshkonong Creek still flows through the center of

Rockdale and is a lovely setting to canoe or kayak. Most people in the area will always miss the water falling over the dam that was part of the grist mill. The removal of the dam allowed the creek to flow free downstream into Lake Koshkonong and the old mill building was too far gone to repair, so the site is now part of the county park.

Right: The photo shows the scenic mill and water flowing over the dam that was built in 1846 and removed in 2000. (Photo submitted by Janice Redford)



Lakes of Dane County Lake Wingra

Lake Wingra is a small, shallow lake located within the City of Madison and connected to Lake Monona via Wingra Creek. The watershed is mostly urban but also includes the University of Wisconsin-Madison Arboretum. Because of its urban environment, the lake faces many challenges, including excess nutrients and road salt from urban runoff. More than 470 million gallons of stormwater pass through the Arboretum each year before making its way into Wingra Creek and Lake Wingra.

Lake Wingra summer water quality conditions are linked to the March 2008 removal of carp from the lake. After a period of improved conditions, water clarity appears to be declining (see opposite page).

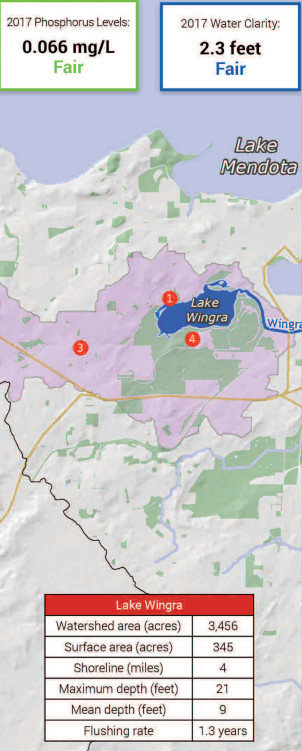
The following projects reported by partners in 2017 will help us meet our Yahara CLEAN water quality goals for Lake Wingra:

City of Madison, U.S. Geological Survey and Friends of Lake Wingra continued a four-year research study into the impact of leaves in the street on urban phosphorus loads (1). Results show that removing leaves from the street before it rains can reduce fall phosphorus concentrations in runoff by up to 80% in urban neighborhoods.

Dane County awarded the City of Madison a grant to put in an underground stormwater screen structure at Wingra Park (2) that will trap debris and phosphorus-laden sediment in an area that currently has little treatment. The structure will feature a butterfly garden and special viewing windows.

Friends of Lake Wingra, City of Madison and the Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District worked to reduce salt use in the watershed (3).

The University of Wisconsin Arboretum worked to restore the skunk cabbage stream corridor to wetland vegetation and upland oak savannah by removing invasives and conducting burns (4).



2017 Phosphorus Levels:
0.066 mg/L
Fair

2017 Water Clarity:
2.3 feet
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