

## **Pre-1900 Water Quality Observations of the Mississippi River from the Minnesota River to Lake Pepin.**

Compiled by John Sullivan, WDNR-La Crosse. June 2010.

Above Lake Pepin - *“The water of the Mississippi, since we passed Lake Pepin, has been remarkably red; and where it is deep, appears as black as ink. The waters of the St. Croix and St. Peters, appear blue and clear, for a considerable distance below their confluence.”* **Zebulon M. Pike, September 21, 1805**

Minnesota River - *“The river St. Peter’s enters the Mississippi behind a large island which is probably three miles in circumference, and is covered with the most luxuriant growth of sugar maple, elm, ash, oak, and walnut.- At the point of embouchure it is one hundred and fifty yards in width, with a depth of ten or fifteen feet. Its waters are transparent, and present a light blue tint on looking upon the stream. Hence the Indian name of Wate-paw-mene’-Sauta, or Clear-water-river...\_Henry R. Schoolcraft, July 31, 1820.*

Lake Pepin – *“There is no perceptible current in the lake, during calm weather, and the water partakes so little of the turbidity character of the lower Mississippi, that objects can be distinctly seen through it, at the depth of eight or ten feet.”* **Henry R. Schoolcraft, August 3, 1820.**

Minnesota River – *“The river is called in the Dakota language Watapan Men esota, which means, “the river of turbid water.” .... the Missouri is termed Watapan Mene Shosha, “the river of thick water.” ...The name given the St. Peter is derived from its turbid appearance, which distinguishes it from the Mississippi, whose waters are very clear at the confluence. It has erroneously stated by some authors to signify clear water. The Indians make a great difference, however, between the terms sota and shosa; one which means turbid, and the other muddy.”*

*“At the mouth of the St. Peter there is an island of considerable extent, separated from the main land by a slough of the Mississippi, into which the St. Peter discharges itself...It was probably, as Carver suggests, this island which, being thickly wooded and lying immediately opposite the mouth, concealed the St. Peter from Hennepin’s observation. No notice of this river is to be found in any of the authors anterior to the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.”* **William H. Keating, July 1823 (Maj. Stephen H. Long expedition)**

Minnesota River - *“The Indian name of the St. Peter’s is “Minnay Sotor,” or “Turbid Water;” the water, in fact, looking as if whitish clay had been dissolved in it.”* **George W. Featherstonhaugh, September 17, 1835.**

Lake Pepin – *“the water is clear, and very deep; and it yields the very best of fish in great abundance.”* **Charles Lanman, 1847.**

Above St. Croix River – “The water is clear as crystal, and its bosom is generally covered with water-fowl, from the graceful snow-white swan to the mallard and wood-duck.”  
**Charles Lanman, 1847.**

Minnesota River – “The river flowing through the land of the Dakotas, whose language abounds in pleasant sounds, and whose names of natural objects are often expressive of characteristic features, pleasing or otherwise to the senses of the the imagination, was named by them Minne-sota. Sota in their language means nearly clear of clouded. The whitish water of the Minnesota makes it appear very distinct from that of the Mississippi where the rivers join, the latter having an amber-tint and appearing quite dark where it is several feet deep.

The line where the two waters join and mingle is marked by little whirls and eddies, and by ascending and descending currents, imitative of gentle ebullition.

Here the whitish water rising through the amber-colored has the pleasing effect of thin, every-varying clouds or curling smoke. It is altogether probably that this optical effect gave origin the name Minnesota, Cloudy-water.

This pleasing effect is only seen during the low-water stages of both rivers, the amber-tint of the Mississippi being derived from the drainage of forests and lakes containing decaying vegetation, and the whitish tinge of the Minnesota probably from minute particles of clay obtained from the Cretaceous or Tertiary deposits along its southern branches.” **Gouverneur K. Warren, December 1874.**

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