

AN ANALYSIS OF NICOLLET’S REMARKS REGARDING THE COURSE OF HIS “INFANT MISSISSIPPI” – KNOWN NOWADAYS AS NICOLLET CREEK (WITH ITS DETACHED UPPER FORK).

References to “upper” “middle” and “lower” lakes are as Brower designated Nicollet’s three lakes.

JOURNAL (as translated by Bray)	REPORT (which accompanies his map)	PROBABLE INTERPRETATION
<p>The very first trickles that will form the Mississippi descend from the north flank of this bend [of a line of hills], springing forth at its base at a constant temperature no doubt oscillating between 43.5° and 44.2°.</p>	<p>. . . we found numberless streamlets oozing from the bases of the hills. The temperature obtained at a great number of places, by plunging the thermometer in the mud whence these springs arose, was always between 43°5' and 44°2' Fahrenheit; that of the air being between 63° and 70°. [Views on taking temperatures follow.]</p>	<p><u>Note 1:</u> Springs are coming out of the hills upstream from Nicollet’s first lake. If this is Whipple Lake, Nicollet possibly did not get as far as Hernando de Soto Lake, or perhaps he considered such southern lakes as being landlocked and/or part of a watershed going in another direction. Go to http://www.jlindquist.com/mapsupp6c.html for a sketch map of the area drawn May, 2011.</p>
<p>There already they gather into a small lake</p>	<p>As a further description of these head waters, I may add that they unite at a small distance from the hills whence they originate, and form a small lake,</p>	<p><u>Note 2:</u> Whipple Lake most likely corresponds to Nicollet’s first lake – i.e., what he considered as <u>his</u> upper lake. (Brower figured otherwise.)</p>
<p>from which flows the brook, Mississippi, one and a half feet deep. It then forms a second lake several hundred yards farther downstream, at the foot of the chain of hills, from which ooze forth other springs of the same temperature, heading for the second lake. The temperature of this lake is 48°. It increases the volume</p>	<p>from which the Mississippi flows with a breadth of a foot and a half, and a depth of one foot. At no great distance, however, this rivulet, uniting itself with other streamlets coming from other directions, supplies a second minor lake, the waters of which have already acquired a temperature of 48°. From this lake</p>	<p><u>Note 3:</u> Whipple Lake flows into the adjacent and swampy Floating Moss Lake through a beaver dam, so the latter could not be Nicollet’s second lake. Brower shows a connecting stream in his maps, and a modern-day topographical map shows a decrease in elevation from Whipple to Floating Moss. The Mississippi Springs is at a still lower elevation, but no surface connection has been shown by Brower (or in an August, 2010 visit) from Floating Moss Lake, indicating the likelihood of an underground connection which – along with the <i>other (such?) springs/streamlets</i> – feed Nicollet’s second lake whose geographical position is presently uncertain. This lake may have appeared just downstream from the Mississippi Springs, and it is described by Nicollet (in the next section) as having a substantial outlet which is certainly not the case for Floating Moss Lake – nor Brower’s “upper lake” for that matter.</p>

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<p>of the Mississippi which then flows out of it, boasting a width of three to four feet and a depth of one foot.</p> <p>From then on this infant stream already shows signs of the capricious and encroaching propensities that characterize its power and course along its various stages of growth all the way down to the Gulf of Mexico. It is testing its strength over a stretch of a quarter mile which it doubles in length by making a series of meanders before coming to rest</p>	<p>issues a rivulet, necessarily of increased importance – a cradled Hercules, giving promise of the strength of his maturity; for its velocity has increased; it transports the smaller branches of trees; it begins to form sand bars; its bends are more decided, until it subsides again</p>	<p><u>Note 4:</u> Here we are considering the stream flowing out of the second lake, wherever that lake might be in the general course of Nicollet’s “Infant Mississippi.” The description of meanders and sand bars corresponds to what we see today as the stream gets closer to the “upper lake” (again, Brower’s terminology) which is basically a swampy wide spot (more of a pond than a lake) where the water backs up. This pond presently appears like a smaller version of Floating Moss Lake.</p> <p><u>Note 5:</u> Do “coming to rest” and “subsides” have some double meaning that could be tied to the fact that – as definitively determined by Brower and easily seen today – the “upper lake” has no outlet and just seeps into the ground, being connected to Nicollet’s third lake in that manner? It is quite possible that Nicollet uses this terminology to couch the fact that the stream is no longer a continuous open channel at this point. (See Note 3 above regarding similar language regarding the first major “disconnect” in the stream.) However, the water does indeed get through, collecting on the other side of the ridge as the reconstituted “infant Mississippi.”</p>
<p>in a third lake that must cover a quarter of a mile square at certain times of the year. This lake is a composite of the Mississippi and other wild streams emptying into it from the surrounding swamps that fill the bottom of the valley opening into the southwestern bay of Lake La Biche.</p>	<p>into the basin of a third lake somewhat larger than the two preceding. Having here acquired renewed vigor,</p>	<p><u>Note 6:</u> As the third lake is described as larger than the others, this must be (Brower’s) middle lake, known as Nicollet Lake today. So, an observer in this area can surmise that the waters (“wild streams”) from Nicollet’s Springs provide “renewed vigor” in merging with the “Mississippi” (which, as discussed above, had seeped through the ground from “upstream”), and thusly has the third lake been fed. Apparently this lake is at the general level of Lake LaBiche.</p>

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As the Mississippi issues from this lake, it resumes its meandering across more marshes and two or three miles later enters	and tried its consequence upon an additional length of two or three miles , it finally empties into	<u>Note 7:</u> The phrase “two or three miles” (as the stream meanders, rather than a straight-line distance) helps to confirm that the third lake is Nicollet Lake. What Brower referred to as the “lower lake” (which is barely a mile from Lake Itasca) is probably just another wide, swampy spot in the course of the stream.
Lake La Biche, heads north, veers south and descends toward the Gulf of Mexico.	Itasca lake, which is the principal reservoir of all the sources to which it owes all its subsequent majesty.	<u>Note 8:</u> Lake La Biche (or Lac La Biche) was the generally accepted name of the lake at the time Schoolcraft renamed it Lake Itasca .

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Italics, red type, and the text of the third column are mine.

Comments in green type added in 2011.

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