

II. HISTORY

The City of Emily began in 1900 as the homestead of John Morris Lambert. Previously home to Native Americans, the area was settled by Europeans who lived by logging, farming, hunting and mining. Over the past 100 years, the City of Emily has experienced changes that have shaped it into the community it is today.

American Indians

Before Europeans settled in the City of Emily, the area had been home to numerous American Indian tribes including the Dakota and Ojibwe. Archeological digs at the Roosevelt Lake Narrows and Crooked Creek sites reveal Indian cultures were present in the area as early as 800 BC. The Ojibwe were the last tribe to inhabit the area in camps located at Ogema Beach on Roosevelt Lake, on the shores of Lake Dahler, and throughout the forest wilderness. Following the Treaty of 1855, American Indians were confined to small reservations. Land they had previously inhabited was opened to settlers. According to historical records, several American Indians lived in the area after the treaty, including an Indian woman and her six children, who all died of diphtheria and were buried along the shores of Lake Dahler. Another woman by the name of "Shinn" lived in a birch bark wigwam on the shore of Eagle Lake. Although relations between American Indians and European settlers were often strained, they united for festivals and celebrations of community.

European Settlement

The Homestead Act of 1862 allowed John Lambert to file for a quarter section of land (160 acres) from the United States government in what is now the City of Emily. Lambert had been drawn to the area following boyhood hunting trips



photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society

there with his father, and later working as a logger participating in lumber drives down the Little Pine River. Lambert moved his family to his Emily homestead from Silvercreek, Minnesota in 1899. Ernest Andrews, who settled in Fifty Lakes, and George Stirewalt, who settled in Fairfield Township, accompanied him on his journey. Once there, Lambert

established Emily's first post office and general store, which stocked groceries, farm machinery, hardware, and loggers' supplies. Soon, more homesteaders settled in the area and new logging camps were established. On December 4, 1900, Emily Township was organized with a total population of 70 people.¹ In 1905, Lambert's land was platted as the City of Emily town site. As Emily grew, Lambert donated land for the first school in 1900 and for the Emily Methodist Church in 1908.

Changes over Time

Early homesteaders drawn to the area supported themselves primarily by logging, farming, mining, and hunting. Heavy logging occurred as early as 1868 when Emily was known only as “Township 138, Range 26 of Cass County”. By 1887, when the township became part of Crow Wing County, most of Emily had been logged over. This period constituted “the golden era of lumbering in Minnesota.ⁱⁱ” Emily and the surrounding townships provided valuable pines for building construction in the Twin Cities and across the United States. As mature pine trees disappeared, however, the lumber industry in Minnesota declined and logging companies shifted operations to the Pacific Northwest and the South for timber. Today, small-scale logging operations persist in the City of Emily, primarily for pulp, paper, and manufactured building materials.ⁱⁱⁱ



photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society

Farming helped homesteaders provide food and income for their families. Since Emily has a short growing season and soils characterized by poor drainage and high acidity, crop farming never became a stronghold of the local economy. With state and nation-wide shifts away from small family-run farms to large commercial operations, agriculture continues to decline in the area.

Once covered by glaciers, the City of Emily has rich deposits of sand and gravel. These resources have been mined for a number of years. Today, several aggregate industries still operate in the area, providing gravel for road construction and residential developments. Peat is also mined from area wetlands. Initially the moss was used for chinking newly built cabins. Recently, it has been mined for use in landscaping. Located on the edge of the Cuyuna Iron Range, Emily also has rich iron deposits, including some of the purest manganese in the world.

At the time of settlement, homesteaders had many hunting and fishing opportunities. Deer, waterfowl, and other game species were bountiful, and “a fish dinner could be caught as fast as a hook could be lowered into the waters of any lake in the region.^{iv}” There were no limits or restrictions on the amount of game or fish that could be taken by early settlers. Settlers also harvested blueberries, raspberries, strawberries, cranberries, mushrooms, and wild rice that grew in abundance in area woods and wetlands. Wild rice was so plentiful that, in the 1950’s, a wild rice plant was established in Emily. Reportedly, it was “the best equipped and only completely modern, processing plant in the state of Minnesota.^v” Today these activities are done primarily for recreation than for subsistence. These activities, coupled with the scenic beauty of the area, have drawn visitors from far and wide to local resorts and campgrounds for nearly a century.