



Postcard, "Lanesboro Waterfall," about 1908 (MHS COLLECTIONS)

## Stone Dam, Lanesboro

 LANESBORO in southern Minnesota's Fillmore County was established adjacent to the south branch of the Root River in 1868, the same year the Southern Minnesota Railroad reached the community. The town's founders wished to make Lanesboro an agricultural center by milling wheat, the region's cash crop. The railroad would carry the product to market but, first, mills were needed to grind the grain; more accurately, turbines to turn millstones in the mills were required. The power to drive the turbines would come from water diverted from the Root River into a canal feeding the mills.

In summer 1868, Lanesboro began building a dam across the river to redirect flow into the canal. The

dam was composed of stone tiers, each set slightly back from the tier just below, like steps of a stairway. Before it was completed, the river pushed it over.

The town immediately began a new dam, this time built on an arc that curved upstream. It was a challenging design; arch dams are more difficult to erect than others. Most dams are of the gravity type—the weight of the dam is so great that it cannot be pushed out of the way by a river. An arch dam is more elegant; the hard rock walls at either end resist the load of the river pushing against it, allowing the dam to push back against the flow of the river. Engineering such a dam must have been difficult for tiny Lanesboro in

1868. Yet those who designed and built the structure did such a fine job that after more than 140 years, the dam continues to resist the push of the river. One of the oldest remaining masonry arch dams in the country, the Lanesboro Stone Dam is included in the National Register of Historic Places.

*Sources:* Robert M. Frame III, "Lanesboro Historic District," Feb. 1981, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, State Historic Preservation Office, Minnesota Historical Society (MHS); M. G. Fellows, *Historic Lanesboro from its Beginning Until 1902* (1902; repr., Lanesboro Historical Preservation Assn., 1992).

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