

Lure of the Lake

AT FIRST GLANCE, this carefully composed scene appears to be a bid for bragging rights after a successful fishing expedition. At least that is how I perceived this photo, one of my favorites in the Minnesota Historical Society collection. I often wondered about these well-dressed folk who took a train to go fishing.

The back of the photo, dated 1896, helpfully identified the travelers (on the train car, left to right): C. W. Scott; Patrick H. McGarry, founder and mayor of Walker, Minnesota; unidentified; Edward A. Bromley, in front with his finger in a fish's mouth; William Edwin Haskell, bearded behind Bromley; Mrs. W. E. Haskell, in the center with a fishing pole; Benjamin Franklin Nelson; Mrs. Lucian Swift Jr.; and Lucian Swift Jr. The original caption reads: Leech Lake, result of an hour and a half fishing trip, Edward A. Bromley, staff photographer, *Minneapolis Times*.

Benjamin Nelson was a lumberman and capitalist, William Haskell owned the *Minneapolis Times*, and Lucian Swift Jr. was the owner of the *Minneapolis Journal*. Edward Bromley was Minnesota's first photojournalist and a phenomenal photo collector whose archive provides a strong basis for the Minnesota Historical Society's photo collection.

To me, it was curious that three prominent Minneapolis newspapermen went on a fishing trip all the way up to Leech Lake. Thus I began my own fishing expedition in the 1896 issues of the *Minneapolis Times*. A browse through the May 24 edition led to a prize catch of information about this expedition. Business mag-



This posed fishing party photo is an early publicity promotion for Leech Lake and the glories of northern Minnesota, 1896. (MNHS COLLECTIONS)

nate Nelson organized the trip to promote the newly founded town of Walker and the Brainerd and Northern Railroad that brought tourists there. This photo is the centerpiece of a two-page illustrated article on the glories of vacationing and settling in Walker, accompanied by a full-page ad for the new railroad. The article by Bromley stated, "The experience of the five individuals who were the guests of B. F. Nelson about a week ago at Walker may be duplicated by any party of anglers, but it is doubtful if their record of two hundred pounds of fish, most of them wall eyed pike,

as the result of an hour and a half's fishing with six lines can be excelled."

So, the fish tale is really an early publicity promotion for Leech Lake and the glories of northern Minnesota. We have been using fish to promote the state ever since!

—Bonnie Wilson

BONNIE WILSON, former photo curator for the Minnesota Historical Society, is a photo historian, beekeeper, and boating enthusiast. She enjoys writing for *Eyewitness* whenever possible.



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