

Is it Van Etten with an 'E' or an 'A'? To put to rest the often asked question as to how our lake is spelled, I went to the local library to research the name and after several days of inquiry obtained the name of a living relative – Daniel Van Etten - who lives in Ohio. I contacted him and he and his wife came to meet with me here in Oscoda and shared a lot of family history, out of which came the following information: The lake was named after Levi Van Etten, who came here during the logging boom in 1836 and tried to build a sawmill near the location of the current dam on Van Etten Creek, but was unsuccessful. It seems the dam he built to furnish water power for his sawmill washed out and took the mill's foundation with it.

There is no exact information on why he was given the honor of having a lake named after him, but perhaps all his efforts and money put into this community made the officials want to repay him. Early records indicate the lake was formerly called Pine Lake before being given Levi's name. This pleased local folks as there were already several Cedar, Spruce, and Pine lakes in the area. Levi's last name originated in Holland and his ancestors settled mainly in the New York area where he was born in 1807, the 4th of 9 children fathered by Anthony Van Etten. He died in 1891 in New York. No records indicate he ever married.

A letter from Edward Loud of Oscoda dated 1940 states that he (Edward) came to Au Sable in 1866 at the age of 8, and remembers a few posts and pilings in the bottom of Van Etten creek which he was told were from the dam built by Van Etten. The Van Etten line began with Jacobus Jansen Van Etten in 1632 in Holland. When he came to New York in 1665 there were 3 men with the same name as his living in the same town. So when he married he dropped the middle name Jansen and became Jacob ~ from Etten ~ (his town in Holland) thus, Jacob Van Etten.

So if anyone asks, it's Van Etten with an ~ E".

Carole Plunkey
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