

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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“50 LAKES IN A FIVE MILE RADIUS”

To build one’s home on the shores of a lake is the dream of many. This possibility has made the SE quarter of Livingston County the goal of residents of large nearby cities. The advent of hard surfaced roads and the availability of convenient transportation spurred many to dream in the early 1920s. While traveling on Grand River, one saw road signs reading “50 LAKES IN A 5 MILE RADIUS” on the approaches to Brighton City. These 50 lakes were soon the major destination for many. It wasn’t long before a number of man-made lakes came into being. Developers and entrepreneurs realized the possibilities.

These lakes owe their existence to several streams. Mann Creek rises in Oakland County, joining Woodruff Creek and on to the Huron River in Green Oak Township. Draining the NE part of Brighton Township, Mann Creek gains volume from Beach Lake. A dam on the creek, just north of Buno Road, provides the shore line of Lake Moraine.

From Hartland Township Ore Creek flows south through Brighton Township, through the city, then into Genoa and Hamburg Townships and the Huron River. July 27, 1927, the Brighton Argus noted that the Capitol Land Company of Detroit had purchased about 1400 acres of farm land a few miles north of town. A dam was installed on Ore Creek, just north of Hilton Road creating a large lake on which soon many homes were built. A golf course, hotel, club house, dancing pavilion, ball playing field and an airfield were all promised on the beautiful new Woodland Lake.

In Brighton, on the north side of Main Street, in the middle of town, is the earliest area lake, man-made, the Mill Pond. On the south side of the street Orson Quackenbush installed a dam and built a mill on Ore Creek in 1840, creating the pond. His mill was a major attraction in the area. Farmers brought wheat to be ground into

flour and other grains for livestock. By the mid 1920s store-bought flour, bread, rolls, etc., became preferred by the homemaker and the mill closed.

A Brighton Argus reporter broke the news that a new lake was coming to Brighton in November 1926. Charles Howell a land developer from Detroit recently purchased the 280 acre Herbst farm in Section 36 of Genoa Township. His vision was to create a new large lake with home sites from the existing spring fed pond and the waters of nearby Ore Creek. The waters of the new Brighton Lake would flood the surrounding lowland by the construction of a dam on Ore Creek.

Work continued on the site but as money availability stiffened due to the impending financial disaster of the depression, the purchase of home sites dried up. In September 1937, the Brighton Argus reported that the Boy Scouts of America had purchased this property for their new Charles Howell Scout Reservation.

Quackenbush and others (Woodruff, Maltby, Kelley) could be noted as being the first to exploit the many streams in the county. Giving no thought to residential/recreational development possibilities, the very earliest settlers dammed Mann Creek, Ore Creek, Woodruff Creek, etc., for the power available. Saw mills, grist mills, etc., provided the settlers with many of life’s necessities.

(Compiled by Marieanna Bair from: News clippings; 1880 History of Livingston County; “From Settlement to City, 1982-1945” by Carol McMacken; writings of Bill Pless. Additions/corrections requested. 810-229-6401.)