

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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A Story About Island Lake — Part 3

Mr. and Mrs. George J. Williams were living on Fonda Lake when they built the Downing Hotel on the east side of Island Lake, December 3, 1895, on the high bank on the west side of Academy Road, the road between Briggs and Island Lakes.

The sleeping rooms were above, the dining room built below with a screened porch erected over the water. Chester Peach of Green Oak helped with the construction. Tables were always nicely set with white linen table cloths and white linen napkins. Lena Bales was in charge of the dining room.

Except for horse-drawn buggies and rigs, visitors to the lake arrived and left at the railroad station at Academy Road; a convenient and dependable source of transportation. The steamer, S.V. Hallek, purchased from A.G. Brown of the Spiritualists, was a wood-burning boat which met vacationers alighting from the train, transporting them to several hotels and other venues on the lake. It is said the boat burned one day and sank to the bottom of the lake. The year in which this occurred has not been ascertained. One presumes it was before 1901, when the new steamboat the James H. White was "christened." White was president of the Spiritualists' Island Lake Camp Association in 1895. The availability of a boat was a vital necessity. (Now the question arises — who piloted the boat?) A 1903 clipping noted "...the hotel at Island Lake is filled to capacity, the largest number of guests ever entertained at any (Spiritualist) encampment."

By 1915, land west of Academy Road and south of the railroad was owned by Fred L. Russell; purchased from Truman Vanderlip. Adam G. Brown is owner of land on the east side of Academy Road, south of the railroad; then north from the railroad to within a half-mile south of Grand River. At one time he owned 3/4 miles of lake frontage on Island Lake.

The Spiritualists' lease for their campsite on the northwest side of the lake was with the railroad through A.G. Brown. The rail-

road broke the lease c. 1918, and Brown acquired ownership. About that time the Spiritualists disbanded and the hotel structure, Brown's Island Lake House, was used to store grain (120 acres of corn and beans) for many years.

Early in the 20th century the automobile began to make its debut and brought with it many changes. Agriculture, for 65 years the economic mainstay, was challenged for that position by recreation. Improved mobility enabled visitors to more easily come to the area. Similarly, when the railroad arrived 50 years earlier, farmers, merchants, craftsmen, etc., had to reconsider their product and how to move it to market. Cattle now moved by rail, not on foot with the drover. Store bought bread, milk, meat, produce, fuel, clothing, etc., became the preferred purchase. In a comparable manner, Henry Ford's 'tin lizzy' was taking over.

In May, 1920, A.G. Brown sold the Island Lake House, the Spiritualists' campground, plus most of his lake frontage to the S.W. Burton Land Company of Detroit. Burton also purchased property on Fonda Lake, and after platting all this, advertised the desirability of owning a lot at Island Lake. By September of 1920, 3000 lots had been sold. The Kirby Sorge Felske Company of Detroit, in June 1920, advertised for salesmen for the Grand River Colony Lakes, land south of Grand River between Island and Fonda Lakes. An April 27, 1921 issue of the Brighton Argus predicted the coming season would be even bigger. *(To be Continued)*

(Compiled by Marieanna Bair from "From Settlement to City, Brighton, Michigan, 1832-1945" by Carol McMacken and "Yesteryears of Green Oak, 1830-1930"; donated photographs and clippings. Additions/corrections requested 810-229-6402.)