

**BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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**A Story About Island Lake — Part 1**

The words Island Lake cause one to think of the state park, year round homes with lake frontage, recreation, fishing, swimming, etc. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century it (with Fonda and Briggs Lakes) was often home to Indians of the Chippewa and Ottawa tribes, among others. They tended gardens of corn. Their diet was supplemented with nuts, roots, etc., they shot game and fished in the lake.

With the dawning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century settlers from eastern states arrived to farm (often finding arrowheads when plowing), displacing the Indians, who were forcibly moved farther west on to reservations.

By 1834, much of the Island, Fonda and Briggs Lakes area was purchased by speculators, few of whom ever came to see their claim. By the mid 1800s the names John Sowle, James Coe and Lewis B. Fonda appear as landowners in the records. They were putting down roots.

The majority of farmers included an ice house with their other outbuildings. By the 1850s, ice began to be harvested commercially. An ice house for storing ice cut from Island Lake was located on the southwest side of the lake.

In 1872, the Detroit, Lansing and Northern (D.L.&N.) Railroad put down tracks around the south end of Island Lake on its way from the Green Oak Station on to Brighton and beyond. Where the tracks crossed Academy Drive, a station was constructed.

The arrival of the D. L. & N. Railroad improved the commercial aspect considerably. A special siding for shipping ice was installed. Refrigerated cars made the transport of ice to far markets viable. Crystal McFadden Ice Company often hired 30-40 men, usually farmers, during the winter months. With the invention of electric refrigeration near the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most people by the mid 1930s, had the source of ice in their

own homes. However, it was the mid 1950s before home delivery was discontinued.

Learning that the Michigan Militia was searching for a suitable training ground, B.T.O. Clark, a Brighton attorney, promoted the Island Lake site. Perhaps it was the proximity of the railroad with its depot and sidings, perhaps the water and ice from the lake, or perhaps the availability of suitable terrain, in any event the State Militia developed Camp Jerome in 1882 as a training site on the south side of the railroad at Academy Drive. The arrival of hundreds of men for training each summer assuredly improved the local economy. Militia from other states trained here also. When war was declared with Spain April 25, 1898, five National Guard regiments of over 5000 enlisted men and over 230 officers boarded the train at Island Lake for service, May 8/July 25, 1898. Thousands were on hand to watch and cheer on each day's departure. The training grounds were later used sporadically. Workers took down the buildings to be reconstructed at a camp in Manistee, June 1901.

With declaration of WWI, April 9, 1917, the Island Lake campground site was considered inadequate because of the huge numbers of men involved. *(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". Additions/corrections requested 810-229-6402.)

BAHS has a large number of old photos that are available for purchase from the Society. Contact Jim at 810-250-7276 or visit the Lyon School on Buno Road any Thursday morning from 9am—12nn.