

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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A Story About Island Lake — Part 5



The purchase of the former site of the Spiritualists' campground May 1920, by C.W. Burton & Company from A.G. Brown, added more exciting evidence of growth and development in the Island Lake area. Located across the lake from William's Hillside Bathing Beach, Burton's new Island Lake Pavilion would have a 70x82 foot dance floor which would be among the best in the state and also extend out over the water. About 250 couples could be accommodated. J.O. Hearn of Detroit, the manager, announced a free radio concert each evening; but no Sunday dancing. In addition Burton plans to construct a "...12 foot gravel road all around the lake, with electric lights beside it. They will also build flat roads on all the cross streets of the property."

It should be noted that prior to Burton's purchase from Brown, when Brown's Island Lake Hotel was in operation, another dance hall, the Hamilton, was located on the hill overlooking Island Lake from the north. Dancing on Saturday nights to old -time music was enjoyed by many. Those having a good time, often found they had a hard time getting their cars out of the soft sand, or even the lake. Someone always forgot to pull up the brake lever and the car would be in the lake. Burton's plans for a better road was welcome news.

Calamity struck September 21, 1921, a month after George William's water slides were built; his Hillside Bathing Beach burned during the night. Only the fire fighting skill of Tom Leith and the Academy boys saved Williams' cottage across the street, and other nearby cottages. The Argus reported: "Mr. Williams is hard struck by the fire, but he declares that he will begin immediately to build a new pavilion; this time of fireproof material." By February, 1922, pamphlets were out advertising George Williams' new Island Lake Hotel to replace the pavilion which had burned the previous fall. Wilber Seger was the contractor. It was under the management of Alf Pelanden and Roy Downing. May 24, 1922, Williams advertises that the entrance to the finest bathing beach is through the Island Lake Hotel. Men and women would have separate bath houses and 500 wool bathing suits had been purchased. These would be in first class condition at all times. A full service dining room, music on the water and free radio concerts were provided.

As if the construction of places of entertainment, the Michigan Military Academy, and dozens of private cottages was insufficiently exciting, Williams had a special attraction. Babe Ruth the 'King of Swat' visited Island Lake when the Yankees played in Detroit; staying at Williams' Island Lake Hotel. His presence was advertised as a draw to Williams' Island Lake Hotel. Babe was known for entertaining children by hitting balls into the water for them to catch. June 14, 1922, "...he will knock a baseball from Island Lake Pavilion to the first island just to show the boys how it's done." A banquet that prominent people prepared for him in Detroit was minus its guest of honor when all was ready. Babe preferred dinner with Governor Groesbeck and George Williams at the Island Lake Hotel. He is quoted, "Best place I was ever at. I'll be back in July." *(To be Continued)*

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