

**BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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**A Story About Island Lake — Part 6**



**Tom Leith's house on Island Lake**

Word was out, March 1922, Mr. Tom Leith was in touch with Governor Groesbeck regarding the state leasing (for five years) the Michigan Military Academy site for a state park. A month later Brighton is buzzing with the news the governor was expected to arrive soon to close the deal.

Harvey S. Jacobs, the Argus editor, could hardly contain his enthusiasm about the possibilities of growth for Brighton City with a state park at Island Lake in its proximity. May 10, 1922, Governor Groesbeck saw to the signing of the papers making the deal official. Jacobs continued that included in the agreement are "The athletic field of the Michigan Military Academy" (to include a quarter mile track with a 220 foot straightaway with a football field in the center. Two baseball fields will be laid out and nine tennis courts) "...three acres of grove...and 65 lots on the south side of the lake near the ice houses...the buildings of the Academy...are to be used and the state has authorized Tom Leith to complete them immediately." (In anticipation of 2000 bathers and 5000 picnickers.) The main house, later call the Casino, will be decorated and painted on the interior, porches built, a gymnasium on the first level, the lower level will be a bath house.) "Mr. Leith can continue to use the building for his purposes." The reporter pointed out "Mr. Tom Leith was instrumental bringing about this deal with the state. The state is expected to build a gravel road from Grand River to the park." June 14, 1922, "Charlie Conely has the contract for building the piece of state road ... into the state park at Island Lake." That same year

Robert Park of Brighton was appointed superintendent of construction at the State Park site. August 4, 1922, the local press reported that the state is erecting barracks at the park for the purpose of giving Lansing Industrial School's boys a short outing.

From Tom Leith the governor purchased lake frontage on which to build his personal summer home.

Taking heed of his admonitions to local merchants to be mindful of business acuity and possibilities, the first edition of the Island Lake Souvenir is published June 7, 1922, by Argus editor Jacobs, at no charge to property owners and campers. He also notes the governor, the J.O. Hearn Company, photographers, etc., all encourage the publication. The Souvenir provided news of weekly happenings at the lake. Fishing news, sports events, a listing of guests at the Island Lake Hotel, etc. Local merchants: the Stricks Store, ladies merchandise; P.G. Hartman Meat Market; Cline-Boylan, clothiers; Caleb Collett, plumber; F.T. Hyne & Son, lumber; Charles Goucher, realtor; M.L. Pitkin, furniture; all bought space in the new publication. Well diggers, builders, bakers and others also placed ads. The Island Lake Repair Shop at the Lakeview Garage had Sinclair hi-test kerosene for lamps and stoves. News included "...less getting stuck in loose gravel...since the roller and chemicals have been applied."

The state park received 600 park benches, electricity was supplied to cottage owners on the west shore of the lake. "A public drinking fountain is installed in front of the Michigan Military Academy building. The water is pure well water, and the power is from an electric motor."

"Auto Accidents Increase" read the August 25, 1922 issue. "It has been noticed that every Sunday when the traffic was heavier there has been a series of accidents. ...A Ford sedan owned by Detroit parties skidded from the road (Grand River) in the loose gravel near Briggs Lake and started down the steep bank." The car hit a tree "...wrecking the machine" and noting it was the same tree hit the week before. *(To be Continued)*

(Compiled by Marieanna Bair from the Island Lake Souvenir. Additions/corrections requested 810-229-6402.)