

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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A Story About Island Lake — Part 8

In the June 19, 1927 issue of the Brighton Argus, Jean Goldkette, manager of the Blue Lantern announced July 4 celebration plans— music!, dancing!, prizes for races and fireworks! The crowd at that event was estimated at 100,000. (By 1924, Grand River was paved from Detroit to points west, making a throng that size feasible.) That year also, June 26, the granting of a permit for the Island Lake Improvement Company to operate a dance hall at Island Lake was delayed until the township supervisor could see the Prosecuting Attorney about stopping the Sunday dances.

The spring of 1925 saw Tom Leith’s former Michigan Military Academy campus site, the Old Crystal Ice boarding house, remodeled and re-decorated. Now the Park Restaurant, it would be ready for Decoration Day per the proprietor, Peter Thoreau. By June 3, the Brighton Argus announced its opening with “State Park Dancing Pavilion with Red Curtiss and his band” and “New Park Restaurant with special chicken and steak dinners also lunches” was ready for the public.

In the 1920s, during the Great Depression, two stone bath houses and restrooms were built in the state park along with other infrastructure. Located west across the small bay from the Blue Lantern, they were built by the Civilian Conservation Corp. (CCC) boys. Most of the stone came from the Peter J. Leitz and Elmer Boice farms on Buno Road in Brighton Township. These were removed in 1996 by the park management.

May 29, 1929, the Argus noted the Corn Huskers Bona Fide Orchestra was playing at Roy Downing’s Island Lake Hotel on Academy Drive, every Friday. The next year the Island Lake Hotel burned. (This was on the same site as George Williams’ Hillside Bathing Beach which burned in 1921.) However, it also was rebuilt, again. The first dance was scheduled for May 23, 1931. May 2, 1941, Roy Downing’s Island Lake Hotel offered dancing every night, with food, beer and wine. In October 1942, the 43 room Island Lake Hotel burned again.

Henri Biagni’s 12-piece orchestra played for dancers at the Patrician Ball, August, 1931, held by St. Patrick’s Catholic Church at the Blue Lantern.

In 1930, Jim Seat opened the Lakeview Roller Rink, 6685 Academy Drive, across the lake from the Blue Lantern. Seat sold the roller rink to Mr. & Mrs. Daniel (Louise) Briggs c. 1952. Mr. & Mrs. Leonard Farmer owned the rink in May, 1961. Following a heavy snowfall, January 1967, the roof collapsed bringing the Lakeview Roller Rink to its demise. (At least it didn’t burn.)

Besides the Island Lake Hotel and Seat’s Roller Rink, a number of other merchants and businesses were located on Academy Drive. Among them was Ravillers Stand at 1714, serving German cooking, sandwiches, hot dogs, “good” coffee and buttermilk.

In June 1936, the Blue Lantern advertised the Ray Williams orchestra would be playing for dancing each Wednesday and Saturday night. During the 1930s money was often too tight to afford admission. However, to enjoy the ambiance and music, one did not have to be on site. One came in a row boat, or parked across the lake, or on a rise to the west to listen to the music across the water; the Fox Trot, Charleston, Jitterbug, Rag Time, waltzes, etc. On a clear still night, the music could be enjoyed by those living as far as Silver Lake.

In the effort to draw patrons into the Blue Lantern, owner Orville Godfrey had not been idle. June 22, 1941, he advertised major improvements including “...laid down a dancing floor in the restaurant” (music furnished by the Hammond electric organ) and “...deluxe roller skating facilities” (music furnished by the Magic sonovox). The rink could be rented for private parties. It was also noted that one should “Turn off Grand River at the big sign, Blue Lantern Roller Rink” at Superior Drive.

To be continued...