

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Crooked Lake

(Reprint of the article that appeared in the April 1985 Trails Tales Issue. This and other articles researched and compiled by Marieanna Bair can be found in the "Page Four" book. Contact the Society to purchase your copy.)

The history of Crooked Lake, along with that of all the SE section of Michigan, begins about 30,000 years ago when the last glacier slowly retreated, leaving in huge heaps the enormous amount of material it has scoured off the Laurentian Range in Canada. These heaps left hit or miss over this area, penned up water from the melted ice and formed the hundreds of lakes that dot the entire area of the county.

Thousands of years later these raw, barren heaps of rock material were covered with trees and other vegetation. The Sauk and Ojibway tribes had their permanent villages mostly in the forests of the Saginaw Valley, but came here in the summer to hunt and fish and plant some of their meager crops. Following their attack which completely wiped out these tribes, the Ojibways also came to the area in the summer. Crooked Lake was, as it is today, a summer resort.

In the eyes of early settlers any lake in the sections 'taken up' from the government was just worthless acreage. It could grow no wheat and could pasture no cattle or sheep. Its fish were appreciated for a change of diet, but there was little time for fishing and anyhow, one could fish anywhere without having to own the waters.

A lake was pretty to look at, but almost none of the early settlers built a home on the shores of the lake. Fever and ague were rife all through the newly settled regions. Settlers believed this sickness came from the miasma and vapors of the lakes and marshes, so early homes were built usually on high ground.

Around the turn of the century sparse frame structures called 'camps' began to be built by various owners of land around the lake. The train brought parties of young people for a week or so of camping. Duly chaperoned by their elders. By that time, the farms of Genoa were owned by second and third generation descendants of the pioneers. Many had married the offspring of the farmer whose land joined theirs. Everyone seemed to be related.

World War I, changing economic conditions, the auto industry, roads being graveled to meet the demands of the thousands of new auto owners who wanted to get out of the cities and go places at breakneck speeds of 25-30 mph; all created a tremendous interest in the lake as sites for summer homes. Lake frontage was platted and soon most of the property was sold to 'outsiders.' As shore property was sold, this meant the end of camping at the old swimming hole.

In 1927 the Burroughs Adding Machine Company purchased the property on Brighton Road as a place of recreation for their employees. This has since been purchased by a group which have continued the recreational appeal of the "Farms" and is planning construction of facilities which will enable hundreds more to take advantage of the pleasant surroundings of Crooked Lake.

(Condensed from "A Scrap Book of Michigan Memories" by William Pless. Additions/corrections requested 810-229-6402.)