

## LAKE ORION—BEGINNINGS

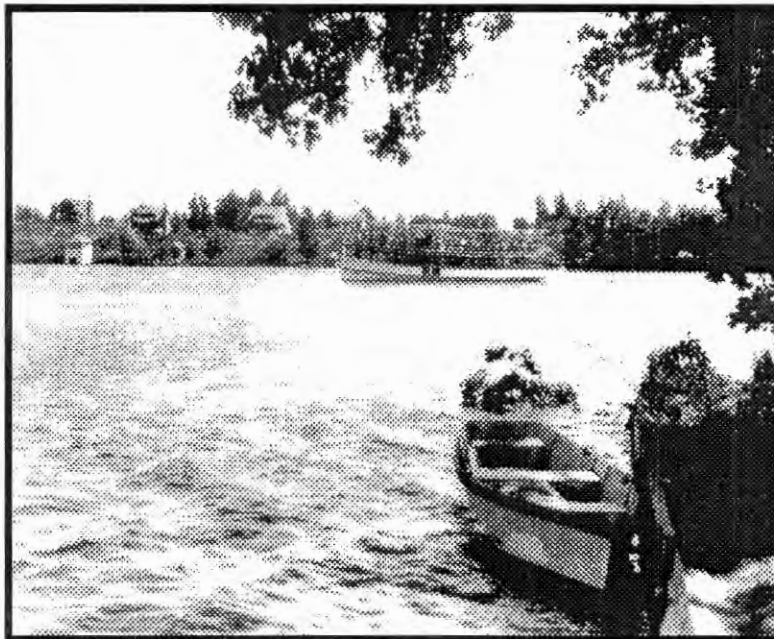
Some of the first settlers in Lake Orion were Needham Hemingway, Jesse Decker and Philip Bigler. In 1829 they built a saw mill and dammed up Paint Creek to power it—located near the dam as it exists today by Lapeer Rd. This turned six small lakes with Paint Creek flowing through them into one big lake.

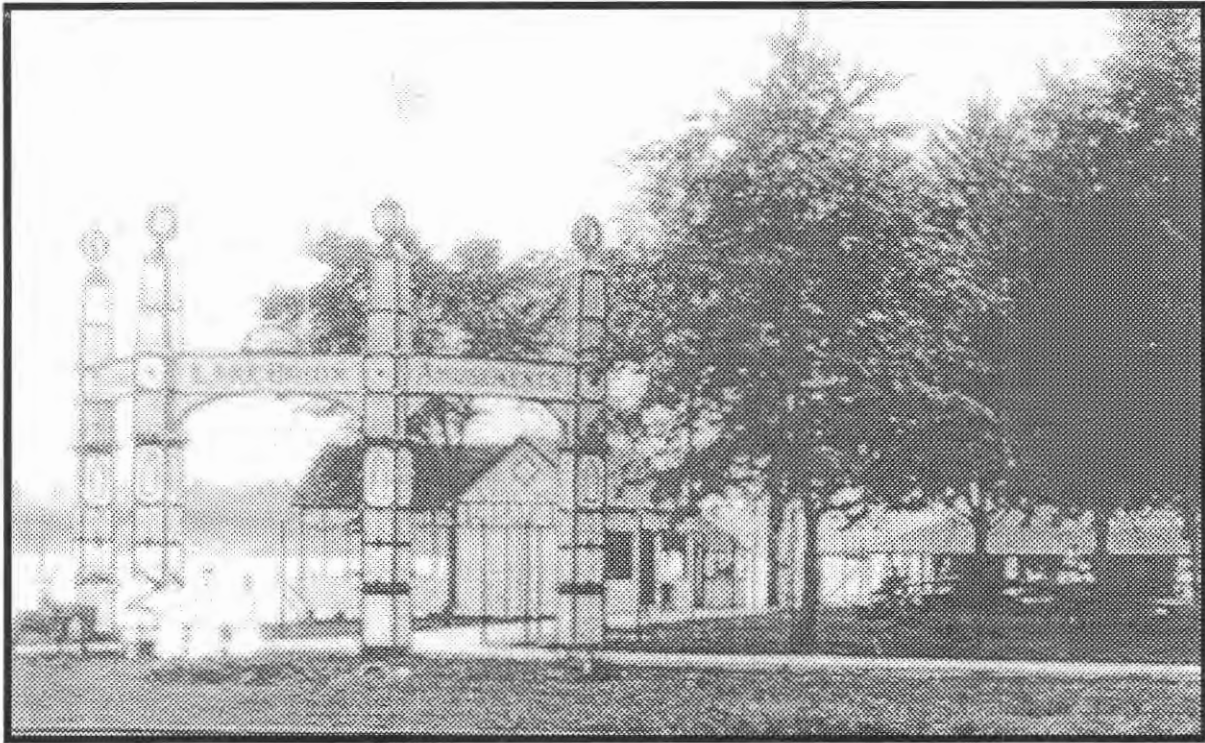
Needham Hemingway later raised the height of the dam in 1837 to 12 feet to power a large grist mill he built below the saw mill. This further enlarged Lake Orion to the size we know today.

As the Village of Lake Orion became busy with commerce in the early 1880's, the more well to do began to build cottages and a few year-around homes on the east side of the lake (the village side). As the resort era picked up steam in the early 1900's, more were built and some were scattered to the western side of the lake.

## UP NORTH

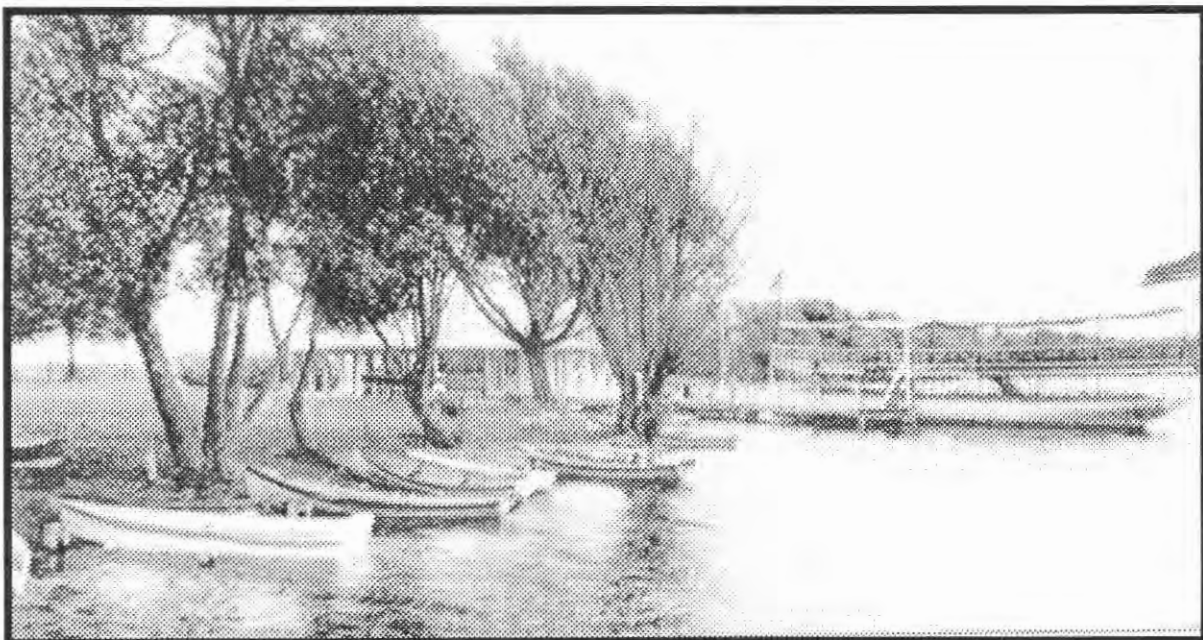
Lake Orion enjoyed about 30 years as a popular vacation destination. Detroiters traveled north by rail to spend the summer at cottages they either owned or rented, just as many travel to Traverse City or Petoskey today. Others would come by day to enjoy Greens Park, rent a canoe or take a "launch" to Park Island for a day of fun.

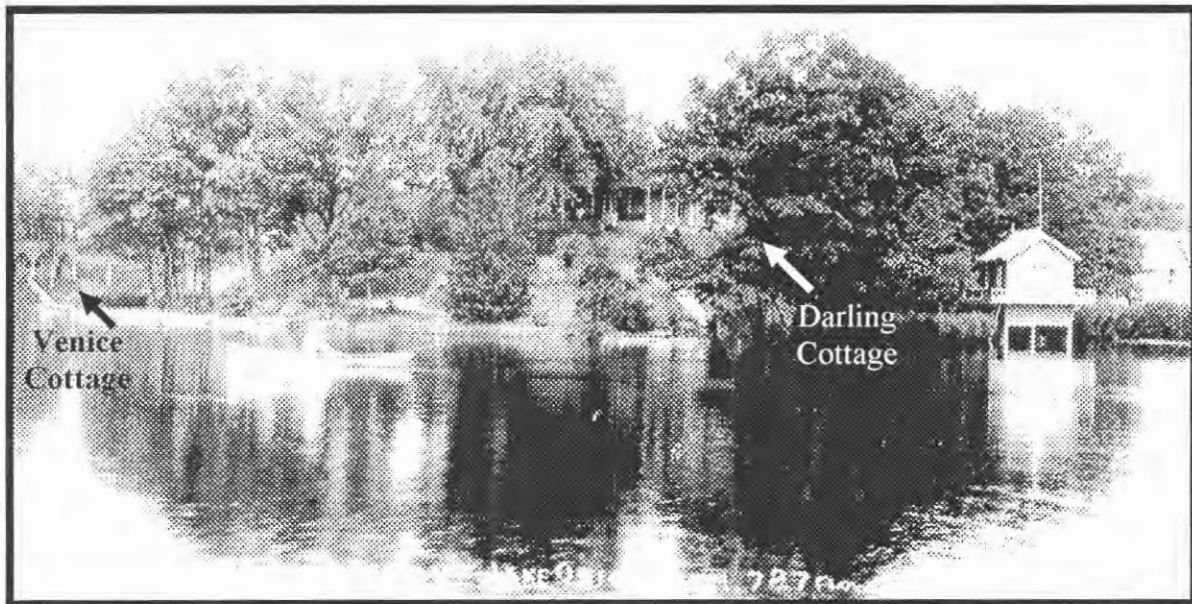




### **The Main Landing—Greens Park.**

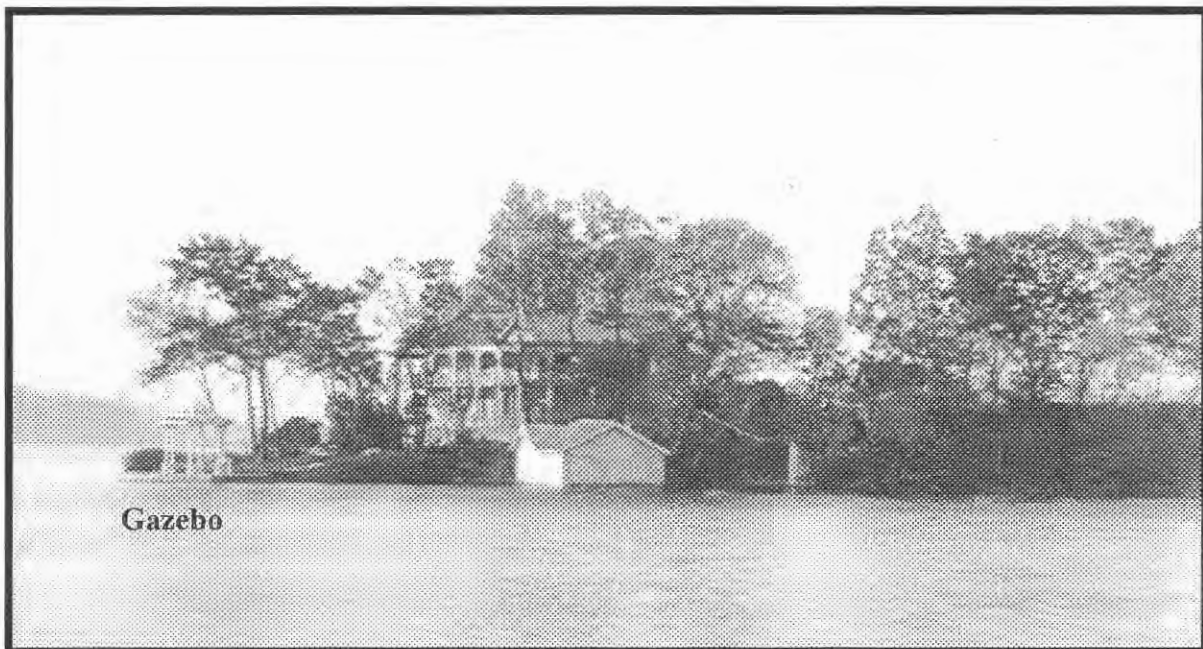
E. R. Emmons built Greens Park in 1872-1873. It was the "Main Landing" for passenger boats taking people to various destinations on the lake. It had large lighted arches marking the entrance. There was a small café, boat rental, picnic pavilion, and the Orion Summer Homes office operated by John Winter. The Village purchased the park from John Winter in 1930 for \$9,000.00. The Lakeside Hotel with a dining room was situated on the north end about where the two round park buildings are now. The owner's name was Green.





### **Darling & Venice Cottages**

The first cottages to be built were on this side of the lake, nearer to town. Darling Cottage and Venice Cottage look much as they did in the early 1880's when they were built.



### **Simmons Point.**

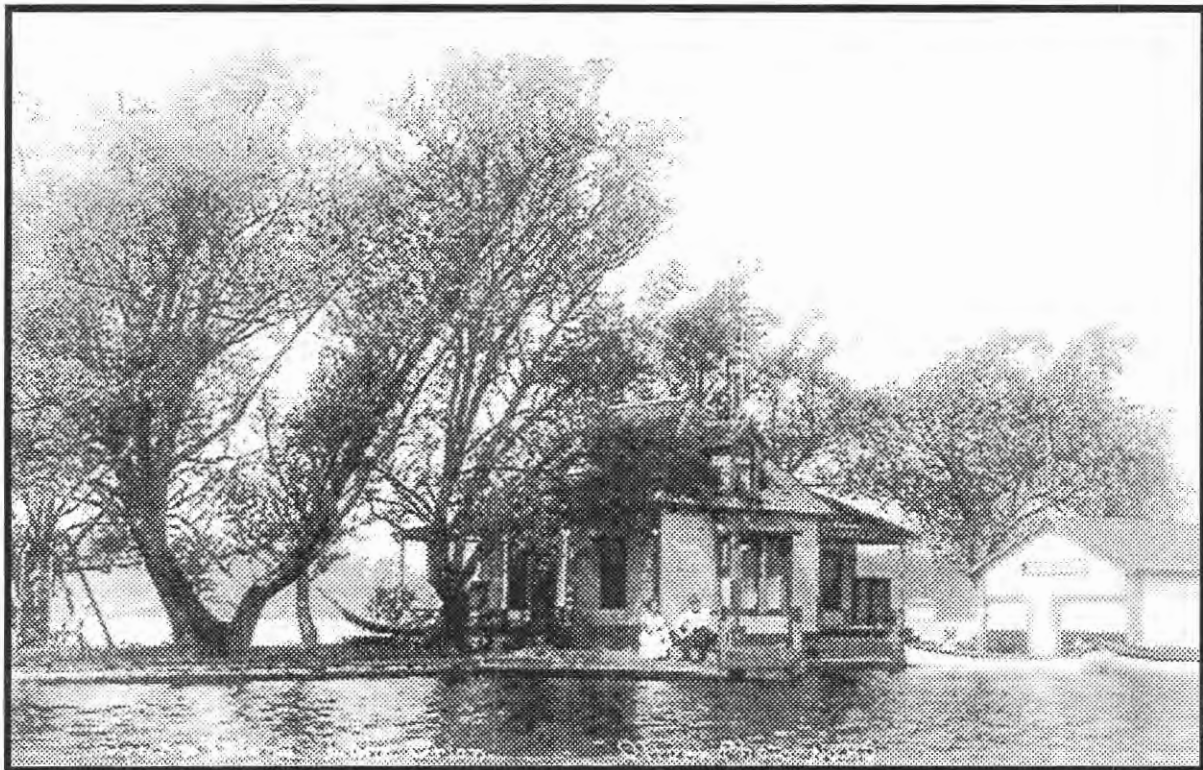
Built in 1881 by Fred & Emma Simmons on a peninsula then known as Sandy Hook. They summered here through 1920. The gazebo is all that remains today and has recently been restored.





### **Squaw Island**

When the island was still connected to the mainland in 1832 a group of Native Americans took off for a night of imbibing. Before they left, their squaws took their weapons and waited on this high ground overnight. The group ended up setting fire to the mill. Because the mill worker came out of it unscathed, he credited the squaws and named their temporary camping ground after them. Another legend has it that an Indian maiden sheltered and fed her white lover there and so was known as "Squaw Island". Erosion has left little of the original splendor of this island.





### **Milner Court**

Pete Milner, who was a principal operator of Park Island Amusement Park, and on John Winter's payroll, built his home around 1900 and built four additional cottages, three of which exist today here on South Andrews Street. Pete made his own cement block on site (one by one, on his lunch hour and after work) to build the cottages. His own house is behind the cottages up on Lake Street.



### **Sibley Hall**

Fredrick Sibley, a prominent Detroit lumber dealer, had this large cottage built on Livingstone Point in 1904. It's exterior is largely original. The large porch of 1,000 square feet was typical of this era in summer cottages as much of the living took place on the porch.

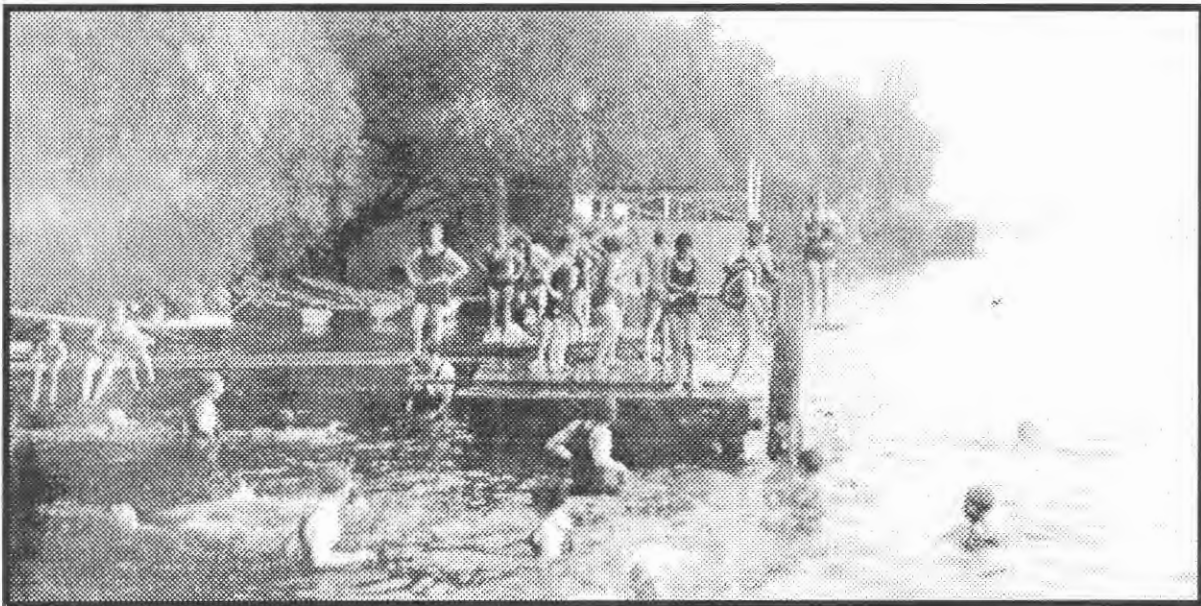
### **Josie A (North Shore Drive)**

This section of the lake was populated by Jewish owners and vacationers. The street was originally called Jossie A., named after the wife of Axford, one of Orion's early settlers.



### **Boat Club**

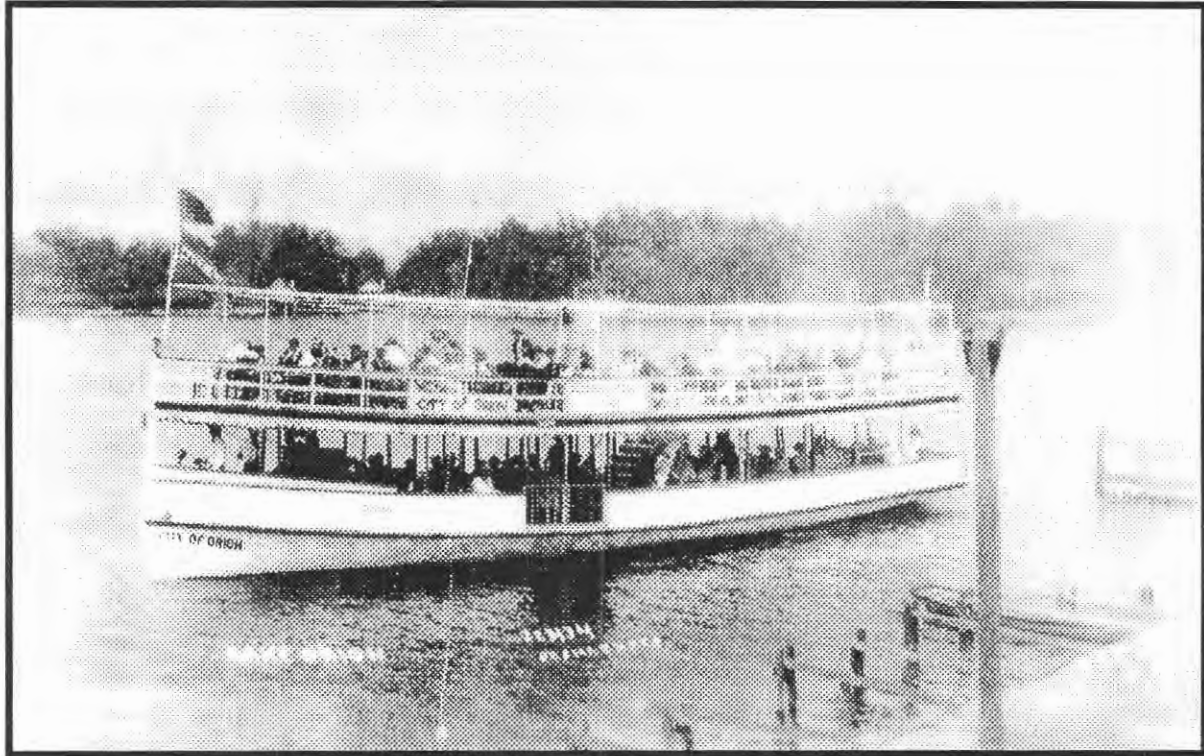
Located just to the north of the end of Lake Street, this was the original Orion Boat Club. It then became a dance hall owned by the Unger family, and was the site of some St. Joseph's masses before their church was built in 1914.



### **Landings**

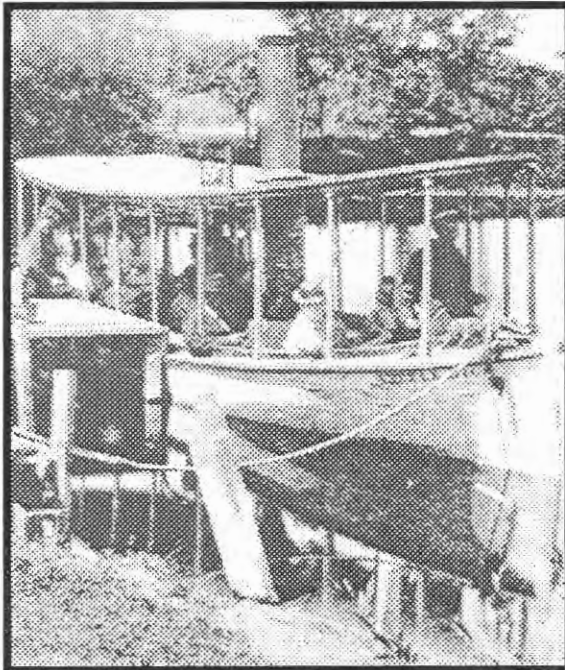
"Cole's Dock" near the end of Lake Street was one of the "landings" or docks where the various passenger launches stopped to transfer passengers to and from their cottages or hotels.



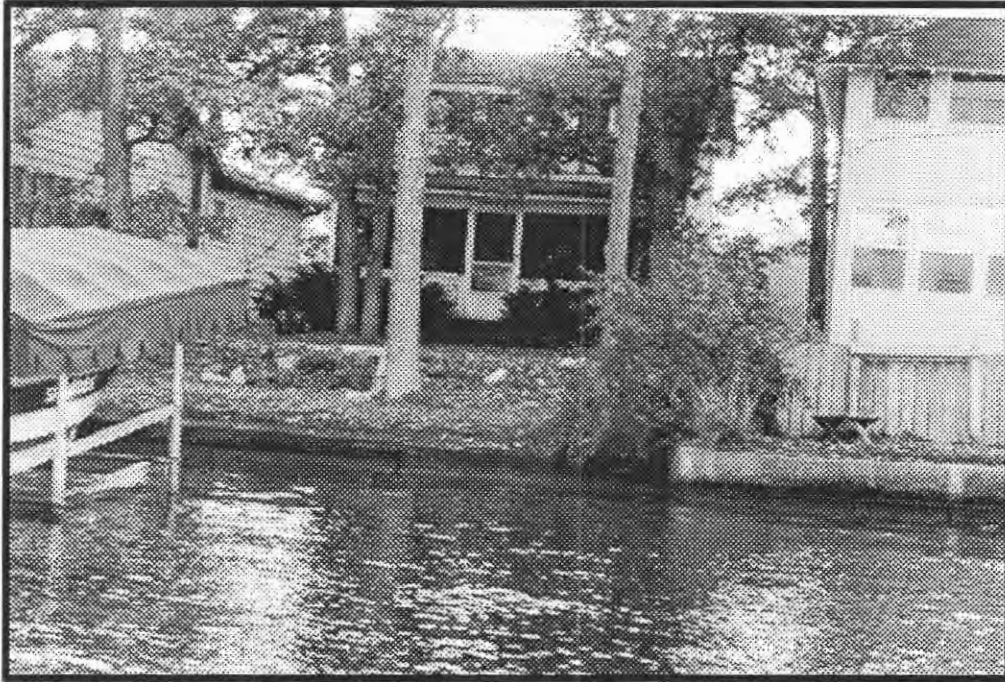


### Launches

Boats carried vacationers and residents as well as groceries, mail and other supplies from the main landing to many points on the lake, delivering travelers to their homes, cottages, hotels or to a day on Park Island. This is the "City of Orion". It was the largest launch on the lake



and could accommodate 300 passengers. On weekends an orchestra played while passengers danced. Originally named "Chautaugua", it was rebuilt with a broader beam and renamed after it capsized in a high wind. Some of the other boats were name "Little Dick" (shown left), "Rover", "Rosetta", "Pastime", "Park Island Queen", and "Silver Spray", "Pleasure", "Promise". After demand died down and there was no need for them anymore, many were scuttled and used for fill on the west shore of Oak Lane in the 1930's.



### **Kit Cottages**

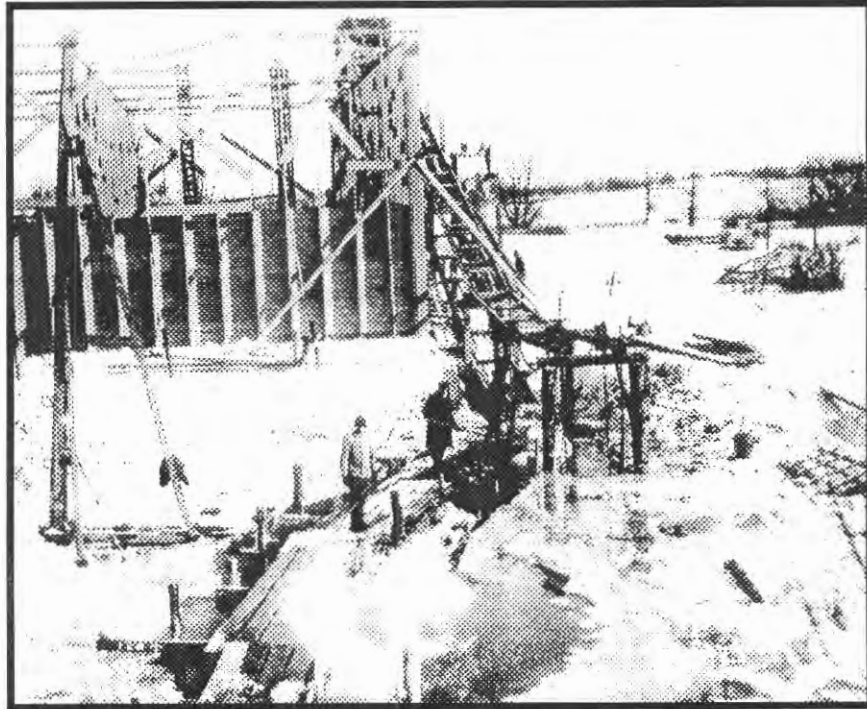
This kit cottage (since demolished) stood amongst others still standing on Bridge Street off of Central Drive. Kit cottages were precut and sold as a kit by Lake Orion Lumber. They were hauled across the ice by horses and constructed in the spring. Sears offered such kit cottages in their catalog at one time.





## Ice Harvesting

Besides providing a way to transport lumber and other supplies in the winter, ice also provided for a big industry in those days before electric refrigeration was available. Pittman & Dean on Long Lake northeast of here and Hacker & Mackrodt Co. on this lake took huge slabs of ice, conveyed them via horse-drawn sleds to an icehouse nearby, and transported the ice by rail for sale in Detroit year around.

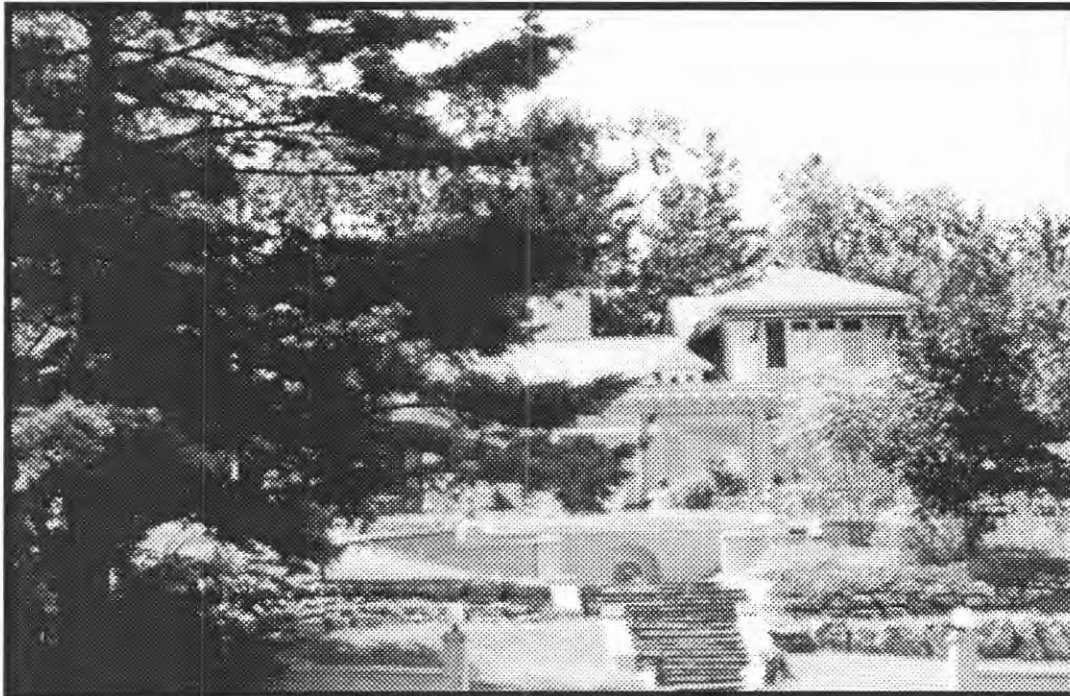


### **Western Shore**

The west side of Lake Orion was developed later—many in the 1930's and 1940's. One of the few remaining original cottages on the lake is Stumble Inn, built in 1926 on Dollar Bay Drive.

The end of Shady Oaks was once an island. Lucien Kelly of extensive Kelly Farm, built a causeway to connect it to the mainland. In the 1920's Kelly sold lake lots in this area for \$50.00.

Another old original, but greatly modified, is the Belle Family cottage on Dot Island, built in the late teens.

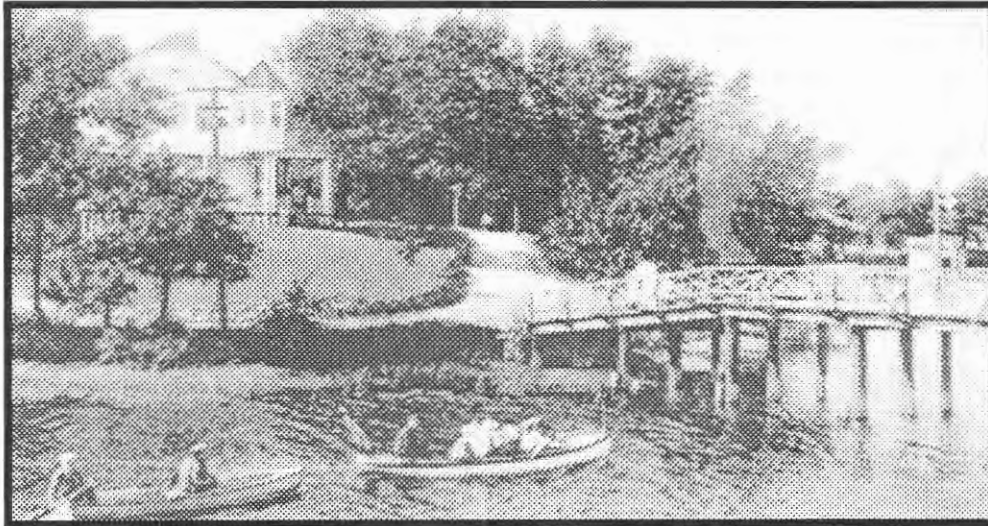


### **Leidich Mansion**

This house at 850 Heights Rd was built in the 1920's by Christian Leidich. They called their home "Hillorion". William Andrews owned it in the 1940's and manufactured his patented penny candy machine in the basement. This house is sometimes referred to as the Bubble Gum Mansion for this reason.

### **Isle of Babette**

Clare & Babette Evans were a husband and wife vaudeville team in the early 1920's. They bought this island and Clare named it after his 16-year-old wife. They built several cottages (none of which remain) and often entertained fellow showfolk here. Some still remember trying not to stare as these visitors strutted down the village streets of Lake Orion.



### **Bellevue Bridge**

The original wood bridge built in 1898 was replaced by a cement bridge in 1928. The well-known camelback bridge was then replaced in 1998 by the current bridge



### **Sunset Dock**

This was one of the landings used for summer tourists. This dock also served as a location for the Galilean Sunday evening church services. People would come by boat and sit to hear the service.

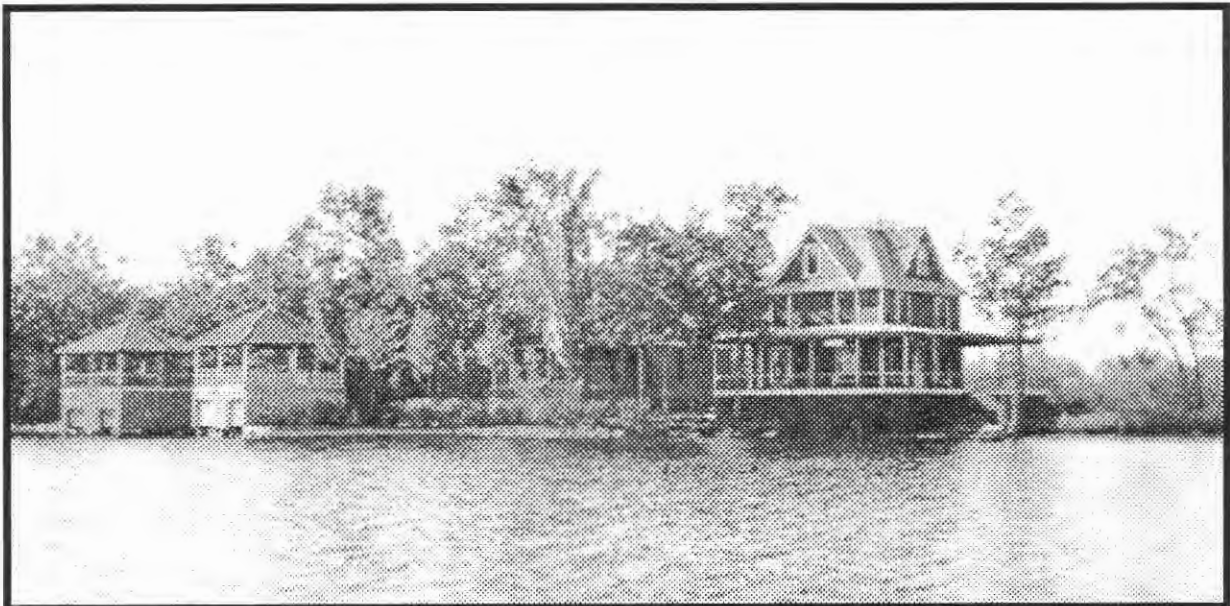


### **Purple Gang**

This house (gray with double porch) at 24 Highland was used by the Purple Gang in the 1930's. **The Purple Gang** was a mob of bootleggers and hijackers in the 1920s. Under the leadership of Abe Bernstein, the gang operated out of Detroit, running cached alcohol from Canada. Perhaps the most ruthless bootleggers of their time, they may have killed over 500 members of rival bootlegging gangs during Detroit's bootleg wars.

### **Bellevue Island**

The island was originally a peach orchard prior to the 1890's. The owners, Mr & Mrs. John Meyers, built the first hotel in 1897. We'll talk more about the island as we come around on the other side.



### **Long Point**

Many of the cottages on this point of Bellevue Island were built in the late 1880's and 1890's. On the northern tip, Wilson's Point, stood a home that burned in the 1970's and was rebuilt in similar architecture to the original.

## Bellevue Island

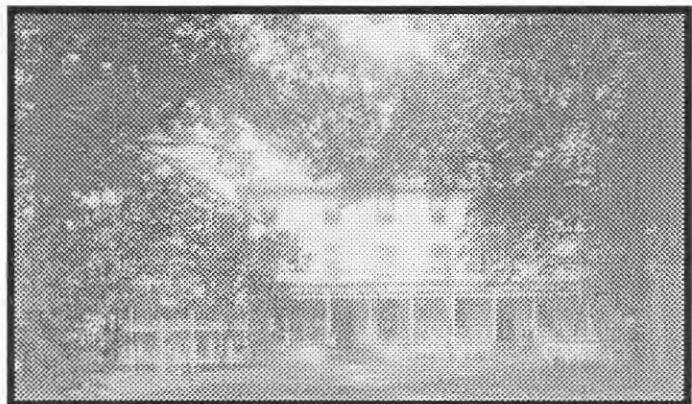
Lake Orion's popularity as a tourist destination began with the draw of its "Chautauqua", a cultural and religious summer-long event held on Bellevue Island. The Chautauqua was an adult education movement in the U.S., highly popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Chautauqua brought entertainment and culture for the whole community, with speakers, teachers, musicians, entertainers, preachers and specialists of the day. Theodore Roosevelt is quoted as saying that Chautauqua is "the most American thing in America."

The first evangelists were brought here by Rev. Sweet around 1900 who recognized the potential attraction the lake had. His programs were an immediate success and the event grew quickly, attracting people from Detroit and surrounding areas. A sizeable auditorium seating 2250 people was built on a lagoon (now filled in) which was connected to the main lake so that people could attend events at the auditorium by boat.



The Bellevue Hotel (left) was built in 1899 on this east side of the island. The rooms were expensive at \$5.00 per night. The dining room with linen, crystal and china provided fine dining.

The Lake View Hotel, built in 1900, stood on the other side (west side) of the island. It was less expensive than the Bellevue with rooms for \$2.50 per night.





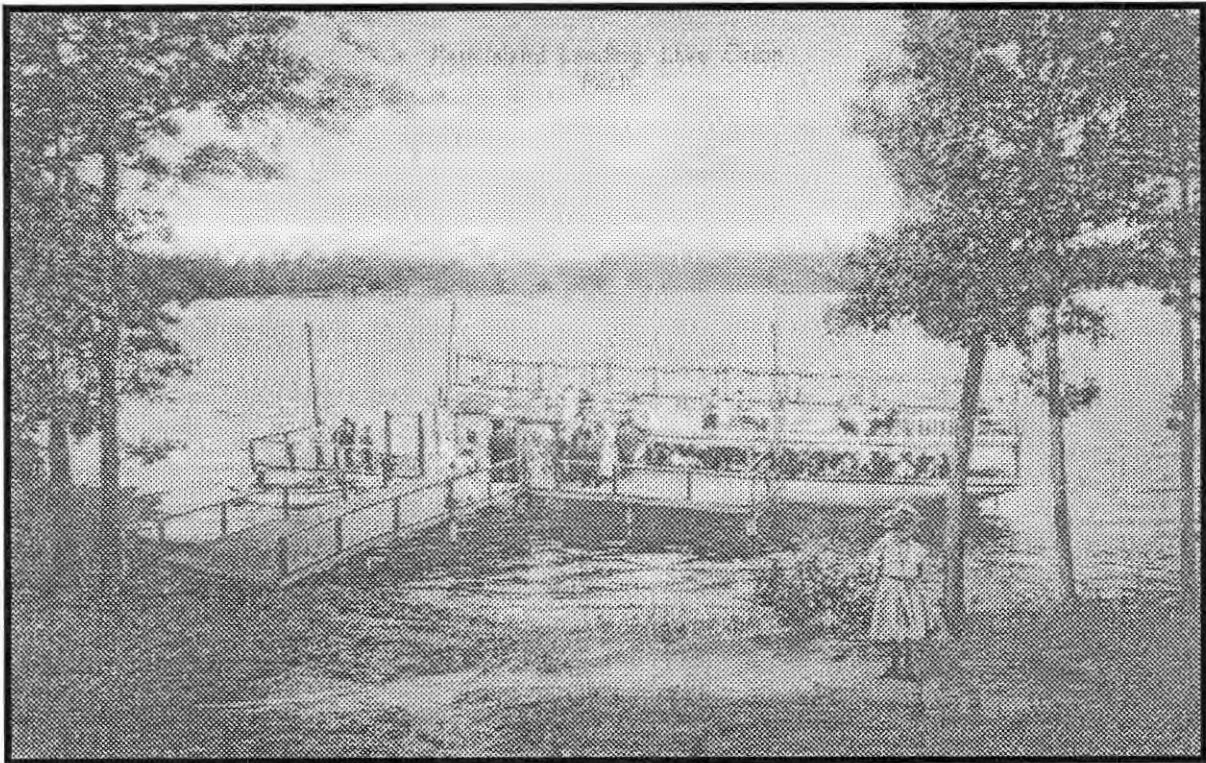
### **Point Comfort**

John Winter, a successful businessman, saw the response to Rev. Sweet's summer camps and quickly bought large portions of land around the eastern side of the lake and on Park Island. He built summer homes, developed Park Island into an amusement park, and partnered in many other enterprises as more and more were attracted to "up north" in Lake Orion. He built his home here on Point Comfort in 1901.

### **Lake Orion**

While we motor toward the next point of interest, it might be a good time to point out a few geographical facts and figures. Lake Orion is 470 acres including 32 acres of islands. It has a maximum depth of 80 feet and an average depth of 17 feet. It has 10.6 miles of shoreline, not counting the islands. The lake flushes once every 142 days on the average. We are at 985 feet above sea level.

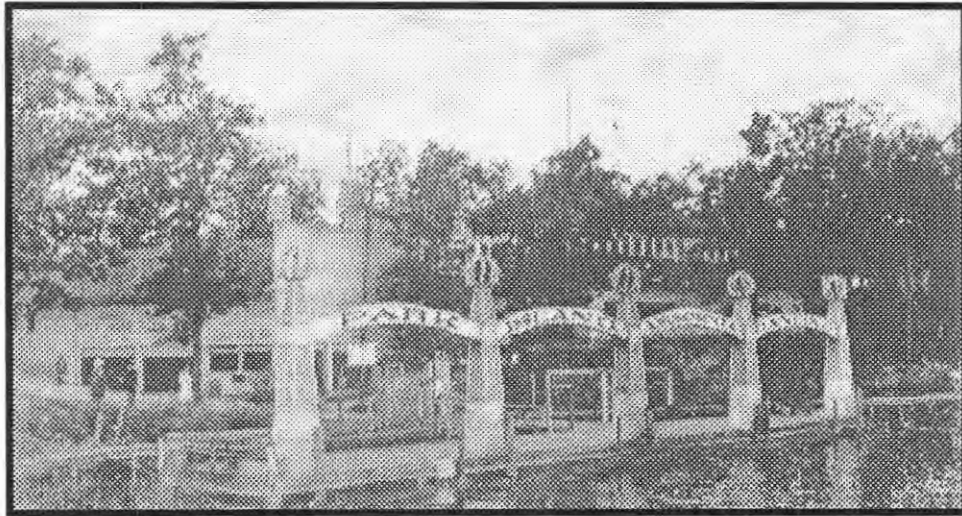




### **Park Island**

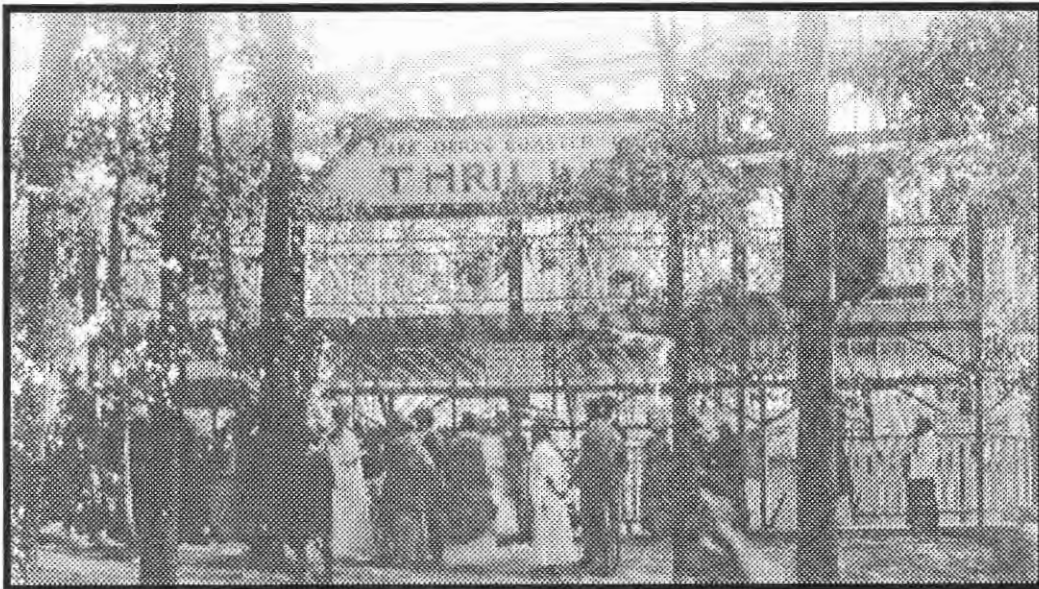
The Orion Park Association formed to develop the park that is now Greens Park in the late 1800's. The group bought Island Park (now Park Island) and built a social hall and an 80-foot high observation tower. The hilly landscape afforded a natural amphitheater where public speakers lectured to several hundred people. Here the first religious assemblies took place.





### **Park Island**

In 1911 John Winter bought the island and developed it, along with the mainland park, as a summer resort. He added amusements on the island including a penny arcade, games, a dance hall, an extensive bathing beach (with the largest waterslide in Michigan) and a towering roller coaster called "Thriller". He added entrance arches to both the Main Landing and the Park Island Landing and developed his own fleet of launches to carry summer visitors around the lake.



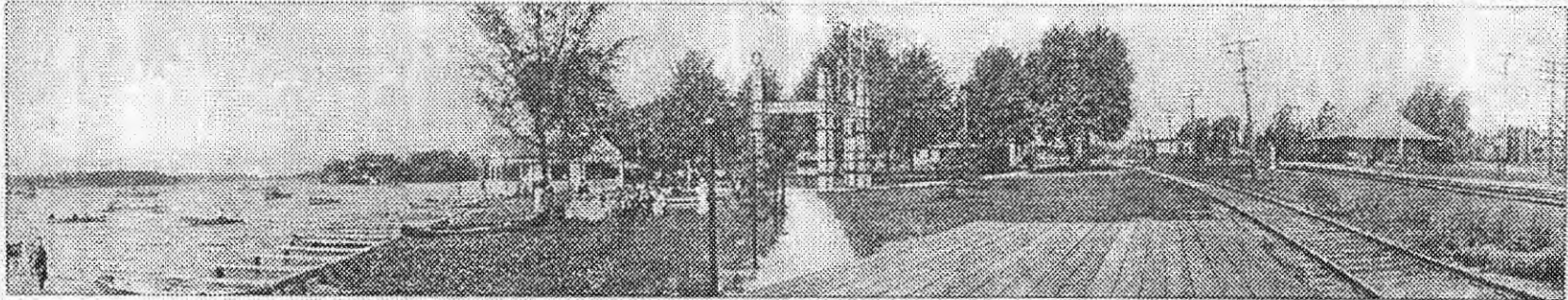
The depression and other circumstances brought most of the Park Island activity to a close and the rides and most buildings were taken down. The dance hall endured into the 1940's, as did a bar. A toboggan run was built from the thriller and installed on the north side of the island where some who dared it could slide almost all the way to Greens Park. In 1965 Bill Davis bought the island and developed it with residential homes.



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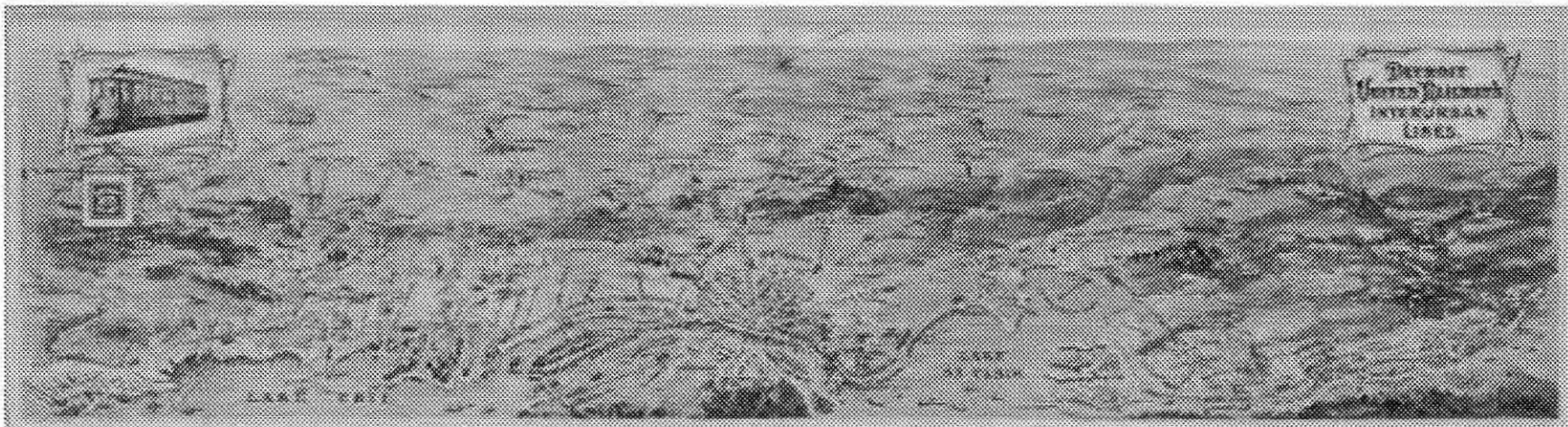
BEAUTIFUL LAKE ORION

*Easily Reached via Electric, Street, and Good Automobile Roads from all Points*



### **Rails to the North**

Visitors to Lake Orion could ride the Detroit United Railway (DUR) from Detroit. The DUR station was located on the southwest corner of M-24 and Flint Streets. On the opposite corner was the Michigan Central Railroad Depot (where today sits Auto Zone). Tracks for both trains ran up what is now M-24. In this photo from a 1910 travel brochure, you can see a footpath leading from the loading platform to the park entrance.



This is a route map of the DUR. It was an extensive electric network reaching from Detroit to many points including Port Huron, Flint, and Battle Creek. By 1900 the DUR boasted more miles than any other city in the U.S. Riders from Flint and Detroit could ride round trip to Lake Orion for 50 cents.