

Time Tracs

By Jim Ingram

(Sixth in a series on Park Island)

As mentioned in previous columns the advent of the automobile and the great depression spelled the doom of Park Island and Lake Orion as a resort.

The passenger boats were being scuttled. Marie Shoup says she and her husband William took one of the last rides on the City of Orion in the summer of 1927.

The hotels were closing in the 1930s and eventually would be torn down. The various buildings and concessions on Park Island were coming under disrepair and likewise many were torn down during the 1930s.

By the early 1940s Carl Ruebelman had purchased Park Island. He leased some of the remaining buildings for various purposes including a penny arcade, roller skating rink, dodge-em-cars, dance hall and bar. With the exception of the dance hall and bar, these businesses operated only in the summer.

Skip and Jack Gedert worked for Stid Schaar, who operated the bar and dance hall in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Skip and Jack tell me it was a two story building with the dance hall and bar on the second level and another bar and food concession on the lower level.

The lower level walked out to a poured concrete terrace which ran to the water's edge. During the summer drinks and light meals were served on the terrace and boats could moor along its lakeside edge.

The Gedert brothers tell of boxing matches being held on the island in 1945-46. A Vic and Wanda Verpotten leased and operated the bar prior to Stid Schaar. A fellow by the name of Max operated all other concessions on the island in the 1940s.

By 1950 most of the buildings on the island had been torn down leaving the bar and perhaps two other buildings. I can remember the Lake Orion Boat Club operating out of a building on Park Island in the 1950s. They also ran both outboard and inboard boat races from the island at that time.

I can also recall winter sport car races with a course set up on the ice adjacent to Park Island. Tragedy struck in the summer of 1955 when Stid's bar burned to the ground. This ended Park Island's days as an entertainment center.

By the early 1960s Bill Davis had ownership of the island. Work began in the winter of 1964 to replace the wooden bridge to the island with a cement one. That winter the ice was cut and the sand fill put in for the new pilings. The cement bridge was completed in the summer of 1964.

At this point I want to review Marie Shoup's recollection about the geography of Park Island in the teens and twenties of this century.

She recalls it as being gently rolling with many trees and some bluffs on the north side overlooking the lake. Marie said the back or south side was natural with many oaks and was used for picnicking. The north side held the amusement park along its shore.

The bulldozers started their work on the island in 1964-65. Any topography over three feet was leveled and of course every tree cut and uprooted. The soil which composed the knolls and bluffs was dumped into the lake at the northwest end of the island to gain a few more lots for the oncoming subdivision.

Protests were made but to no avail. The damage was done and you can see the pancake shape of Park Island today.

The subdivision seems to be successful if your definition of success is to sell lots. There remains only one or two vacant, flat, treeless lots on Park Island today.

We need artifacts

The Orion Historical Society is very interested in the location, origin and ownership of Orion historical artifacts. These could include furniture, glassware, china, decorative objects, crafts, art, documents — any object that has historical roots in Lake Orion Village or Orion Township.

The group is seeking to compile an inventory of these goods. If you have any information concerning the above, contact the group's coordinator Mary Ellen Soroka at 391-0917.