

# Time Tracs

By Jim Ingram

## (Group cottages on the lake)

Lake Orion has a long history of young men and women coming together either formally or informally to enjoy the lake in the summer. Some were organized around religion and the arts; others were interested in just plain having fun.

The most pictured of the group cottages is Grace Cottage, which was the YWCA (Young Womens Christian Association) cottage built in 1903. It still exists today in recognizable form at 230 Bellevue on the west side just before the bridge to the island.

It was a large cottage of three floors, rather elaborate with leaded glass bay windows, wide porches and a large gazebo of logs built on the lake shore. It could probably accommodate 20 to 25 women comfortably.

Grace Cottage gave young women of that era a place to spend their summer vacation in a wholesome Christian atmosphere. I think the experience of Grace Cottage is best expressed by the message on a Grace Cottage postcard I have written by a unnamed lady in 1913 to her sister H. Nugent in Houston, Texas.

"This is the YWCA cottage on the island. It's so nice for the working women from the city when they take their vacation for the rates are cheap enough for them to have a good outing and not cost them so much. It is such a pretty place I think. Any woman over 16 I think can go here. So glad about cottage. My! isn't it fine? Lots of love, Sis."

Mrs George DeRoso wrote her reminiscences of Lake Orion in the Lake Orion Review in 1975. Among them was this on Grace Cottage: "I remember one misty day the girls from Grace Cottage on Assembly Island were out in their long rowboat singing in the rain. Nothing stopped them as they were here on a short vacation. You couldn't get the blues if you wanted to."

There seems to be some confusion as to the location of Grace Cottage. Perhaps it being so close to Bellevue Island (at one point called Assembly Island), but on the mainland, being the reason for it.

The Epworth League Cottage was located in the very center of Bellevue Island at the highest point. It had a commanding view of the lake. It still exists today, but has been added on to and doesn't at all resemble the original. It has been converted into several apartments.

The Epworth League was an organization of the Methodist church and the cottage was probably used for church youth activities. The Methodist church was very dominant in Lake Orion's summer community. Many Methodist ministers had summer cottages around the lake, especially along Andrews Street (known as Parsons Shore) and Longpointe on Bellevue Island.

Individual churches rented cottages in the vicinity of Bellevue Island to allow their youth groups to participate in the chautauquas each summer.

Marie Miller Shoup tells of the local Methodist church renting a cottage in the early 1920s. She and other Methodist youth would enjoy the lake while attending church services classes in religion, music, elocution and theater.

After World War I in the late teens was the advent of the "boys' clubs" (young men) having and continuing their comradeship after the war was over.

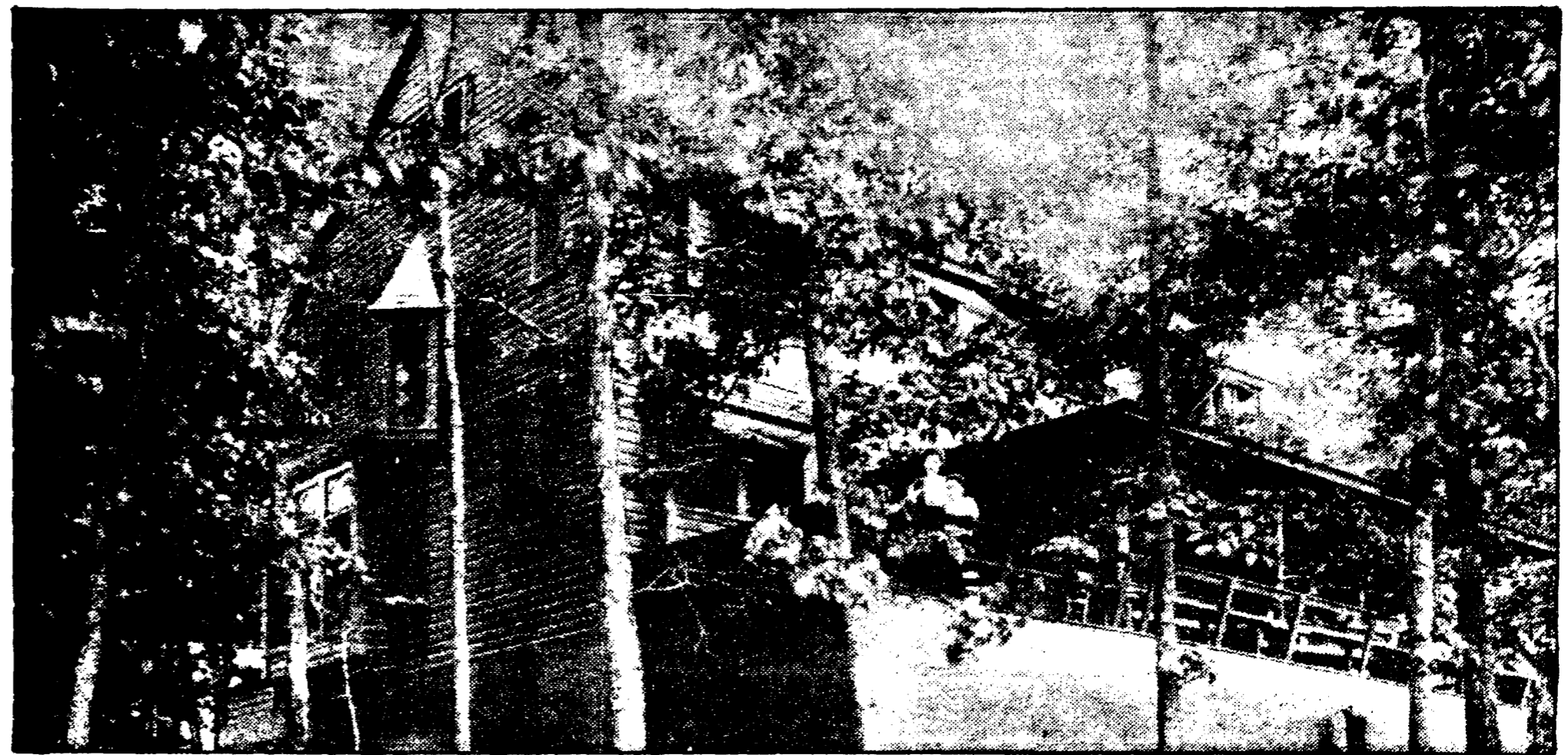
Harold Weimeister, a long-time Lake Orion resident, reminisces in the Lake Orion Review in

1975: "After World War I many cottages were occupied by young men's clubs from Detroit and Flint. These young guys drank nothing but beer and whiskey and ate nothing much but bread over the weekend."

And again DeRoso recalls, "A lot of cottages were rented for the summer by boy's clubs and they only came out on the weekends. We let them have the town. The village was wide open on Saturday nights."

Bill O'Brien tells of these groups renting the second floor of boathouses from the cottage owners. These usually consisted of two guest bedrooms and Bill said they would cram in 10 to room for the weekend.

My neighbor Judy Brady tells me Spring Lake Bay was a popular spot for fraternities and sororities from area colleges in the 1940s and 50s. She says in the morning after a night of partying you would see young collapsed bodies in various states of dress and undress, scattered about the premises. Makes Lake Orion seem pretty tame today, doesn't it?



The Grace Cottage on Bellevue Island.

*Karyn Dozeman*  
of Rochester

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