

Time Tracs

by Jim Ingram

(This is the seventh in a series on Orion history from 1800 through the 1920s)

Associated with the lake is the story of the famous Lake Orion dragon. The hair-raising tale began in 1894 when two ladies first spotted the monster while fishing from a dock. As the weeks went by, it was seen again and again. As the story grew so did the sea serpent.

As legend has it, the dragon was the idea of "Tut" Miller who decided to build and launch the dragon to add some excitement to this resort community. His family lived in the house at 312 South Broadway (currently the Georgetown Professional Building) and he repeatedly launched the weighted dragon, controlled by attached wires and a series of pulleys, from the boathouse on the lakeshore.

It was the object of several search and destroy missions but to no avail. The Detroit newspapers suggested the citizens of Lake Orion drink more well water and lay off the hard stuff.

Beginning in 1941-42, the Lake Orion High School sports teams have been named "Dragons" after the monster of the lake.

The ice industry has been an important factor in Lake Orion's history. In 1906, Pittman & Dean erected their ice houses on Long Lake on the Franklin Settlement property and in 1911, those in the center of town near the lake and Paint Creek were built by Hacker & Mackrohd Company of Detroit.

George Cole also had ice houses on Buckhorn Lake. Slabs of ice would be cut from the lake and stored in these ice storage sheds. The ice would then be transported by rail to Detroit to be used in the "ice box." This industry provided employment during the slow winter months. These ice houses were torn down in the early 1930s.

The US Post Office in 1905 designated Lake Orion as the site of the first Marine Postal Service in the US. Mail was delivered by boat to over 300 cottages on the lake. This service continued into the mid 1940s.

The Detroit Edison Company purchased the plant of Orion Light & Power Company in 1912. Edison built its sub-station on Church Street in 1926.

The first movie was brought to Lake Orion by Jerry Bartholomew in 1913 to the Lincoln Theater at 11 South Broadway (east side of Broadway, just south of Flint Street).

Until 1915, the village had no waterworks. The system with the water tower on Atwater Street was installed at that time. A new well for more adequate fire protection was added in 1939.

The original road from Lake Orion to Pontiac took the route of what we call Bald Mountain Road. Part of this road is still in use off East Clarkston Road and another section off East Silverbell. Part of the original roadbed can still be seen at the end of Scripps Road, east of M-24.

The Orion-Pontiac Road (M-24) became a trunk line and was graveled in 1916. The condition of the road became almost impassable in the winter and spring of the year. In the 1920s, teams of horses had to pull the automobiles through the mud over Bald Mountain.

Broadway was first paved in 1919 and Flint Street in 1926. In 1939, M-24 was rerouted around the village by-passing the business district. Until that time, M-24 had passed through the village on Broadway, exiting on Elizabeth Street, for its northward path to Oxford.

In 1956, it was widened from Pontiac to Lake Orion to the four lane divided highway we know today.