

Time tracs

by Jim Ingram

(Last in a series on Lake Orion in the 1950s)

Many changes took place around the lake in 1955. The village laid a concrete boat ramp at the foot of Lake Street and a group of citizens organized the Lake Orion Improvement Association to treat the lake with anti-weed spray.

Much time and effort was spent in the 1950s by various civic groups to raise funds for a community center. Property was acquired on Orion Road at Kern Road and construction of the building began in 1958.

Max Wischman donated the band shell that was on New York Central property next to the train station and had it moved to the Orion Road site.

In Gingellville the community club's clubhouse was moving towards completion in 1955.

William E. Scripps, publisher of the Detroit News and founder of stations WWJ and WWJ-TV, died in 1952 at his Orion Township country estate, Wildwood Farms.

This 3,000 acre estate which he had owned since 1916 was sold in 1954 to a new corporation formed by Louis Savage of Detroit known as Village Acres Inc. This event would have important implications for Orion Township in the 1960s.

The Orion Masonic Lodge 46 F & AM celebrated its centennial in 1952.

Some new organizations formed in Lake Orion during the 1950s. The Merry Makers Square Dance Club held bimonthly dances, an annual hayride and an old-time barn dance.

The Lake Orion Saddle Club sponsored an annual horse show. The Gun Club organized to teach marksmanship and gun safety. It took over the old bowling alleys under the Wagon Wheel Tavern at 27 South Broadway for its shooting range.

Local postmaster Arthur Cotcher inaugurated house to house mail delivery in the village. In that year, 1952, Kenneth Bresett, John Pender and Gordon Brown were employed.



VILLA INN

Where Dining Is a Pleasant Adventure

Restaurants such as the Villa Inn (now the Orion House) began operating after the sale of liquor by the glass was approved by the village in 1950 and the township in 1951.

Previously you either got your mail general delivery at the post office or rented a post office box.

Local bar owners were delighted when the village approved liquor by the glass in 1950 and the township did likewise in 1951. It was after this that first class, full menu restaurants such as Gus'

Steakhouse and the Villa Inn began operating.

In 1956 signs were erected at all township access roads bearing the new slogan "Orion Township for Fun-Family-Fortune."

Homer J. Kelly resigned in 1957 as township clerk after more than 20 years of service.

Lake Orion got a direct long distance dialing system from Michigan Bell in 1958.

Remember Mr. Watkins, the retired jeweler who did clock and watch repair from a shop behind his home at 172 West Flint Street? In 1957 at age 80 he completed his tickless, one-wheel clock.

Orion Township was truly in transition from rural to suburban in the 1950s. There remained several full-time productive farms in the area.

One was the Ralph and Arthur Peters farm at 3700 Gunn Road. The brothers had lived there and maintained their farm for half a century and were among the last grain raisers who still used the old stationary separator thresher. Lew Spencer, owner of the threshing rig, did the threshing in 1955.

In the last year of the decade, Lake Orion celebrated its 100 birthday. Centennial events included a Friday night dance, a Sunday evening united church service, water battles for boys and girls conducted by the fire department, a parade through downtown streets and a venetian parade.

There was a kangaroo court to issue fines to men without beards and others without costumes. A jail was constructed and some saw the inside of it until their fines were paid.

And would you believe someone stole the jail! Fortunately it was later returned.

A 331-pound, five-tiered cake was prepared by Waltman's Bakery which took 40 hours of baking. Trophies were awarded for best beards and costumes.

Lake Orion's new post office at 146 South Broadway (west side next to Paint Creek) was dedicated as part of this historical event in July 1959.