

# **THE WATERS OF HISTORIC LAKE ORION**

## **A Historical Tour of the Lake Orion**

**Presented by the Orion Historical Society of Lake Orion**



### **INTRODUCTION**

In 1829 Needham Hemingway, Jesse Decker and Philip Gigler built a saw mill and a dam to power it, as well as a log house for the sawyer. This turned six small lakes with Paint Creek flowing through them into one irregularly shaped lake.

In 1837-38 Needham Hemingway raised the height of the dam to 12 feet to gain sufficient power for the large grist mill he built below the saw mill. This further enlarged Lake Orion to the size we know today. The dam was at the approximate site of the current dam.

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 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.

Lake Orion was a popular destination in the early 1900's for people who attended its very popular "chatauqua", an evangelistic summer-long event held on Bellevue Island. The first evangelists were brought here by Rev. Sweet 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.

John Winter, an already successful businessman, saw the response 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 and others operated passenger boats that ferried people from the various landings around the lake.

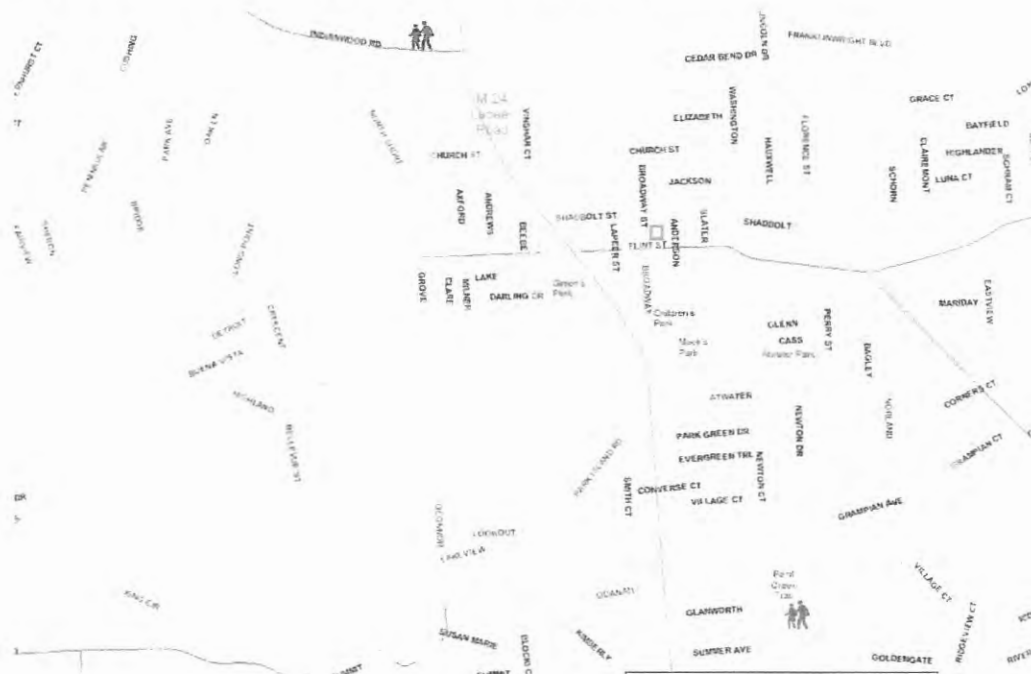


1. **Greens Park:** E.R. Emmons built Greens Park in 1872-1873. It was the Main Landing for passenger boats taking people to various destinations on the lake. It had large lighted arches marking the entrance. There was a small café, boat rental, picnic pavilion and the Orion Summer Homes office operated by John Winter. The Village purchased the park from John Winter in 1930 for \$9,000.00.

**Lakeside Hotel:** A small hotel was situated where you see the two round park buildings now. The dining room there was considered quite a nice place to eat. It was later owned by the Greens, thus the name Green's Park.



The Michigan Central Railroad depot for steam powered rail cars was on the southeast corner of M-24 and Flint Street. It was torn down to erect a building for the new A&P Food Market( now Auto Zone) in the 1960s. The Detroit United Railway passenger depot was located on the southwest corner of M-24 and Flint Street adjacent to the Main Landing ( the current location of Orion Marine.) The Detroit United Railway line ran from Rochester to Lake Orion and continued north to Flint and the thumb region of Michigan to Saginaw.



2. Darling Cottage: This looks today much as it did in the early 1880's when it was built.

Hillside Edgewood Sunset Sunshine Lenox Bonnie Brae Bungalowwa Shady Side Tarry-Audile Hilltop Del Bonita Groves Inn Ben Venuto Travelers Inn Kenwood Edgewater Honey Haven Er-nest Evelynedale Bayview The Castel Comfort Hill Pointe Comfort Brighton Breezy Point Alpine Nokomis Ekedalen Kim-Bak Villa Regina Wee House Rube's Inn Lone Lancaster Grove's Inn Ko-Zee-Point Castle Rock Hill Haven Oak Glen Donna Mae Pinellas Jack and Phill High View Toy-Art Robin Call Whip-O-Will Sigma Phi Breezy Ridge Noah's Ark Smyrna Port Austin Villanette Fern-dale Vickie's View Woodcrest Neva's Nook Kenowah Arden Lorrie Newport Echo Top Notch Grace Cottage Briar Hill Wacousta Waldman Alpine Villa The Dutch House Crestwood Squirrel Inn Viola Shady Slope La Petite Shore View Mignonette Harmony Friendship Shamrock The Cricket The Bejou O'Conner Villa The Inzy The Weaver The Helena Aurora Brighton Almi Elmira Point-O-Pines Norvee Geneteen Wesley Lodge Nor-vey Sunny-B Oakland Nan-tucket Idle Haven Gregstone Arden Rex Villa Des Antels Tree Top Dew Drop Inn Ivy-at Sagamore Hill Shady Dell Shanty Sommers Cottage Sunny Patch Lo-retta Pine Haven Lu-May The Morgue Wee 3 Locust Point Swastiki Shielus This-L-Du Co-Ed Dream House Sun-Kist Twin-Pines Good Luck Jergues Spray Squirrel Chase Irvington The Houser McGregor Bay View Newport Alipen Golden Inn Whip-poor-Will

Spare Time Shady Point Marian All Well Wo-Lo-La Harmony Homrighaus Lone Oak Sagamore Hill Wilde Villa Cupids Garden Dun Workin Pleasant View House by the side of Road Overbrook Seven Oaks Step-Inn Babette Oak Hollow White Rock Olive locogoo-tee webbscliff Orionark Bon Air Teachers Inn Ed-Wal

Sans Souci Preston Lodge Patsy Bonnie View Oak Beach The Field Shady Slope Christiana Hof Del-Wood Royal Lodge Dawson Lodge Jo-Em Crescent Oriole's Nest Esperanto La-Gra-Jane Willsonian Allen Manor Hi-Vu Den-Mark Lee-Crest Cobweb Humoresque Northwood Oak Leaf Dor-Vie Old Warren All Well Shawnee Mengelwood Peter Pan Sparetime Lingerlonger Field Mona Lodge Rex Villa Oak Beach Agwam Journey's End Woodbine Roberta Point Elvenana Hill View Alpine Villa The Terry Lafalot Lawrence Villa The Clare Coopers Kim Inn Red Robin Willow Bay The Q Woodie's Wigwam Lynhurst Shady Groves Holland Bronson Rosemary Pollyanna Anette Lou-Lou Tea for Two Happy Ours The Sabos Idle Hours Bethesda Twin Oaks Pine Ridge The Willows The Vienna Ritzy Oseeze Burma Walkers Rest Le Al So Oak Shade Flo-Dell Hollocrest Lone Pine Cottage Grove Bond Street El Verno Little Shadows Clapmunks Chatter Cornwall Snuggle Inn Kenosha Paradise Castle Rock The Frog Club Idleheaven Lone Oak



Summer Cottages of Yesteryear on Lake Orion

Compiled by Mike Sweeney

3. **Venice Cottage:** Located on Andrews Cove and believed to have been built by Fred Lettes who owned E. S. Lettes & Sons the present-day Lake Orion Lumber, this cottage looks much as it did when it was built in around 1906.
4. a. **Simmons Point:** The cottage that originally occupied this point was built in the early 1880's and was torn down in 1995. The gazebo is original. Simmons was a liquor distributor in Detroit.  
 b. **Parsons Row:** Cottages along S. Andrews were occupied by Methodist ministers.  
 c. **Squaw Island:** Native American women("squaws") camped here in 1832. In 1887 A. P. Bacus of Detroit built a cottage, and in 1920 a boat house and sea wall were added. As late as 1955 a cottage remained here and was owned by Fred Caldwell.
5. **Milner Court:** Pete Milner, who was a principal operator of Park Island Amusement Park, and on John Winter's payroll, built his home here around 1900 and built four additional cottages, three of which exist today. Pete mad his own cement block on site to build the cottages. His own house is behind the cottages up on Lake Street.



6. Bannister Boat House: This is original to the Bannister family. One of the sons married a prominent stage actress in the 1920's.
7. 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. It was winterized in 1918 by the Stewarts who bought it from the Sibley's. 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. The carriage house on the northwest side is original. George Roberts, the current owner, added the 2,400 sq.ft. east wing in 2003.



8. Cole's Dock: This was the landing for passenger boats transporting people from and to the Main Landing near the train depot. It is located at the foot of West Flint Street. This was also a popular swimming area for those who did not live on the lake.

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 one of the early settlers of Oxford, Axford.

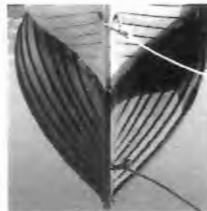
9. Orion Boat Club: Located just to the north of Cole's Dock, this was the original Orion Boat Club. It then became a dance hall owned by the Unger Family, and was the site of some of St. Joseph's masses before their church was built in 1914.
10. Echo Cottage: Otto Zoller lived here in the early 1900's using it as a summer residence and then living here year around.



11. Elmer Ewald House: This stone and brick home (currently owned by Harry Stephen) was built in the 1930's. Elmer Ewald was an official in the Bricklayer's Union.
12. Webbcliff: The cottage that was torn down in 2000 to make room for five new homes was built in the late 1900's by the prominent Detroit Webb family. The cottage stayed in the family's estate until the current developer bought it. The first home to go up in its place belongs to the vice president of Dietrich Furs.



13. Canal: Herte dredged this in the 1930's.
14. Pine Island: This cottage which burned in 2003 ( opposite the public access) is thought to be the original one built in the early 1900's by the Kunz family which had a jewelry business in Detroit. Their property on the mainland ran along Cushing all the way to Indianwood. Frank Dunaskiss, who bought it from Kunz in the 1940's, built the bridge and ran electricity and plumbing to the island.



15. Alpine Villa: Robert Ewald ( Elmer's father), lived here. He was a Detroit City Councilman, and president of the Bricklayers Unions. Ewald Circle in Detroit is named after Robert.
16. a. Kiwanis Summer Camp: The Kiwanis Club had a summer camp here.
- b. City of Orion: City of Orion is sunk here at the end of Central Drive. It was filled in over it.



17. **Burma Cottage:** This was built in the early 1900's or 1910's and looks much like it did then. Like most cottages around the lake, this one had a name.

**Venice Park Dock:** Located at Burma Cottage is another dock where launches stopped to drop off or pick up people around the lake.



18. **Galloway's Market:** The family lived upstairs and sold groceries and beer to boaters from the 1940s-1960s. There was a dockage for 8-10 boats.



19. **Kit Cottages:** Some of the cottages on this shore were precut and sold as a kit by Lake Orion Lumber. The lumber was hauled across the ice and constructed in the spring.

20. a. **Spring Lake:** Indianwood Golf Course backs up to this waterway. The canal waterway beyond Spring lake was dredged in the 1960s and 1970s. The Kelly family farm on Square Lake south of Heights Road extended all the way up here to Spring Lake and Dollar Bay. The are is now known as Marina Park and Marina Point subdivisions.



b. Rile House: Built for Detroit architect named Rile and inspired by his trip to Spain. The house was called Ten Oaks built in 1921. To its right is Point O Pines built in 1927.

21. Locust Dock: Located on Locust Point, Locust Dock was one of the landings used by the passenger ferries on the lake. It is on the Pine Tree side of Dollar Bay.
22. Dollar Bay: Most of the homes on this western side of the lake were built later in the 1930's and 1940's. There are some cottages her in Dollar Bay that were built in the teens.
23. Stumble Inn: The eastern- most cottage on the south side of Dollar Bay (along Dollar Bay Drive) was built in 1926by the Groen family who owned a bar in Detroit. It is still owned by Thomas Groen and is one of the few original cottages tht remain on the lake.
24. Kelly's Island: The end of Shady Oaks was once an island. Lucien Kelly of Kelly Farm built a causeway to connect the island to the mainland. Another passenger landing ( Kelly's Landing) was here. In the 1920's, Kelly sold lake lots in this area for \$50.00.
25. Dot Island: Previously known as Belle Isle, the Belle family built the first cottage, which you now see modified in the late teens.



26. Leidich Mansion: This home (850 Heights) was built in the 1920s by Christian Leidich, a prominent travel agent who owned property out to the end of Shady Oaks. The Leidich's called their home "Hillorion" He built this house and several guesthouses along the shoreline on Shady Oaks. Later it was sold to William Andrews in the 1940s who patented the first penny candy machine and manufactured them in the basement of this house. There was a boat dock here called the Orion Heights dock that was used by the lake launches.
27. King Farm: The King family farm property ran from Clarkston Road all the way up to this lakeshore. King Circle is named after the King family. You can see what may have been the original farmhouse on the far side of the road. The main house was probably on Hemingway.





28. **Isle of Babette**: Clare and Babette Evans bought the island and built several cottages here in the early 1920s. Working in the Ziegfield Follies, they entertained showfolk here. The last of the five original cottages here is now replaced by a large home.
29. **Preston Island**: This island is adjacent to Lake Orion's popular sandbar visited on hot days by boats, swimmers and jet skiers. The Preston family sold their cottage on Bellevue Island to build two cottages here in the early 1920s.
30. **West Point**: This white house has been in the Gates family since it was built in the early 1900s. Ralph E. Johnson III of the Gates family lives there now. He is the fifth generation of this family to occupy this point.
31. **Grace Cottage**: Remodeled in 2000, the original lines of this 1903 cottage are lost. This was home to the YWCA in 1903.
32. **Bellevue Bridge**: The original wood bridge built in 1898 was replaced by a cement bridge in 1928. The well known camel back bridge was then replaced in 1998 by the current bridge. Briar Hill Cottage is pictured in the postcard with the bridge. It was owned by Dr. Brem and burned in 1949.



**Bellevue Island**: Prior to 1891, this island was known as Spencer Island, owned by Mr. and Mrs. John Meyers who had a peach orchard here. The Meyers built the first hotel on the island in the 1880's. It provided several rooms for rent and served light meals during the summer months. The first section of the hotel was built in 1899 on the east shore and doubled in size by 1903. Rooms rented for \$5 per day.

33. Lake View Hotel: Located on this west side of the island just behind the large white house north of the bridge in 1900. This large hotel ( no longer standing) was less expensive than the Bellevue Hotel and was built in 1899. Rooms rented here for \$2.50 per night.
34. Sunset Dock: Another landing for the summer tourists, this dock also served as a location for the Galilean Sunday evening church services. There is now a neighborhood beach here.



35. Purple Gang Cottage: This gray house with the porch up and down ( 24 Highland) was occupied by the Purple Gang in the 1930s. Other cities had bootlegging gangs in the '20s, but there were few American cities as "wet" as Detroit, which got a jump on the production and distribution of bootleg liquor when all nonmedicinal alcohol was banned in 1919, a year ahead of most states. Instead of prohibiting the flow of alcohol into Detroit, it instead opened up the floodgates and created a new sort of gangster to swagger around Hastings Street and Oakland Avenue on the city's east side.
- The young men who came to be known as the Purple Gang lived in the Jewish neighborhood near Eastern Market. They earned the nickname the "Third Avenue Navy" or the "Little Jewish Navy" from their nighttime excursions back and forth across the river carrying booze from Canada, or just as frequently, hijacking the booty of other bootleggers.

The Bernstein brothers of the Purpel Gang: Abe, Ray and Izzy Bernstein; Harry Fleisher, Abe Axler and Phil Keywell were just a few of the names that became infamous to Detroiters during the years when most of America was forced by the 1919 Volstead Act to buy wine, beer and liquor from the underworld.



36. Romance Island: The island, then known as Dendel Island, was owned by the Dendel and Hartman families in the 1880's. When a castle-like cottage was built here in 1886 by Addie Dendel and Louis Hartman, the island's name became "Romance Island." The stone stairway is all that remains of the original cottage which burned in the 1970's.
37. Victoria island: Also called "Three Acre Island." A man named Stokes owned the largest cottage in 1915. It still stands on the west point of the island. He built a cement bridge ( now gone) to Bellevue Island. The two cottages to the east of that were owned by John Potter who was principal of Detroit's Northwestern High School and by Colonel Fred Cowley, one of Teddy Roosevelt's "Roughriders" and a custom furniture maker in Detroit.



38. Long Point: Many of the cottages on this point of Bellevue island were built in the late 1880s and 1890s.
39. Dendel House: This was built in the 1880's by the Dendel Family. Evelyn Dendel still lives there.

40. Wisner Cottage: Named "Ye Old Homestead" it was built in 1887 and has been in the Wisner family since 1913. Robert Wisner still summers there.
41. Wilson's Point: At the northern tip of Long Point on Bellevue Island stood a home built for Dr. Lau who was a partner to John Winter. It was later owned by General Guy Wilson of Flint from the early teens through the 1930s and stayed in the family into the 1950's. It burned in the 1970s and was rebuilt in similar architecture to the original.
42. Bellevue Hotel: This popular destination was built in 1891 and enlarged in 1902. A room was \$5.00 per night in the early 1900s. The dining room was frequented by the more affluent summer residents. The Bellevue Dock was located here. The hotel was torn down in 1933.



43. Point Comfort: Also known as Winter's Point, this home was built in 1901 by John Winter who developed Lake Orion as a resort. Originally there was a large gazebo on the point.



44. Auditorium: An auditorium in the center of the island seated 2,250 people who attend chatauquas and religious meetings. It was demolished in the mid 1940's. It was built on the lagoon ( now a park and parking lot). The lagoon was connected to the main lake by a canal so that people could attend events at the auditorium by boat.

45. Norwood Cottage: Just south of the Bellevue Bridge, this cottage and those near it to the south are from around 1900 to 1910. Some are near original.
46. Armada Island: A group of families from Armada, Michigan, camped on this island in the late 1800's. Cottages were built around 1900. Some are close to original. The Emlings' and Margurite Hengel have owned cottages here since the 1940s and 1950s.
47. Sweet's Island: Home to the Lake Orion Boat Club since 1961. It was known as Bradford's Island in 1855. It was purchased by Rev. Dr. John Sweet in 1897 who was a prominent Detroit minister. He began to develop the Lake Orion Chatauqua in 1899. The boathouse is original. The servants quarters and kitchen were on the mainland. The original dwelling can be recognized by the roofline similar to the island boathouse. Meals were prepared here and brought over by boat to the main house on the island. The original cottage was torn down to build the boat club.



48. South Shore dock: This was one of the main landings used by the ferries. It is located right on heights Road, opposite the Lake Orion Boat Club.
49. Avren Villa: Built around 1900 this home was host to some of the major evangelists who visited Bellevue Island in the early 1900's. Unfortunately the name sign has been removed from the cottage.





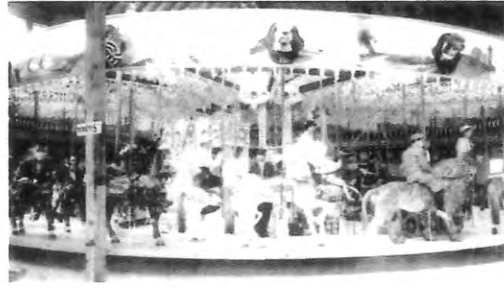
50. Waconda Cottage: This was built by the Fuller family in 1918 and is one of the few remaining summer cottages left on the lake. Most that are remaining are winterized now and used year round. The Fullers stayed in one of the many private homes that rented out rooms to summer tourists ( most of these were in the village until they built Waconda Cottage. They stayed in the Gay home which stands as the first house on the south side of West Flint Street. Helen Fuller Goerlich still summers here at Waconda.



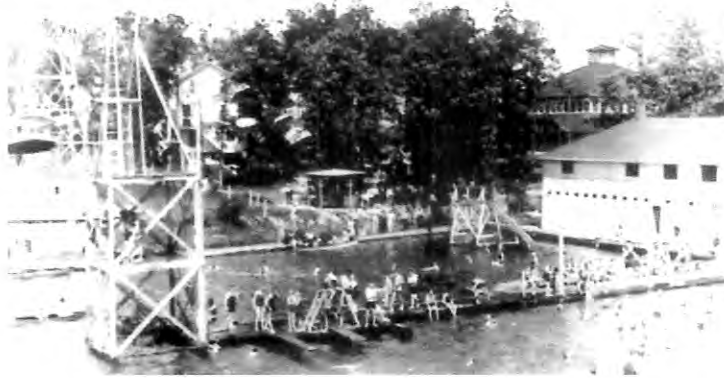
51. Park Island: In 1874 the island was used as a picnic ground. A bridge was built on the east side of the island along with a reception hall and an 84' tower. In 1911 an amusement park was started by John Winter. Major bands played here in the 1940s. Most of the amusements were closed in the 1930's, but Stid Schaar operated a bar into the early 1950's before it burned in 1955. In the early 1960s Bill Davis bought the island and developed it with housing.







52. Disappearing Island: This is the site of Lake Orion's famous disappearing island. It surfaces here from time to time.
53. First Lakeside Catholic Mass. This circa 1880's home was built by I. C. Farrell and owned by pat Slavin in the 1920's when one of the first lakeside Catholic masses was held on the lawn.



54. **Gingerbread House:** This was built in the 1880s and was the home to Captain Foisy from 1895 to 1907. He operated the City of Orion, a double decker launch that ferried passengers about the lake. His daughter, Alice, married J.C. Predmore, a prominent local businessman. Their house stands in near original condition on the southeast corner of Broadway and Church across from the Orion Senior Center and the Union Church complex.

Located at 244 N. Broadway Street it was listed on the National Register of Historic Sites in 1979. Joshua Predmore was a successful farmer who organized the Orion State Bank with Ira Carpenter in 1896. Predmore was the Orion Township clerk when he died in 1912. He was a Civil War veteran and was on guard duty the night that at the White House the night that Abraham Lincoln was assassinated.



*The Predmore House 244 N. Broadway*





55. Home of the Dragon: The ranch-style home was where the boat house stood that made famous by Tut Miller, a practical joker who built a dragon there that could be pulled in and out of the water to startle unsuspecting boaters. The dragon was eventually adopted by the Lake Orion Community Schools as its school spirit and sports mascot and logo.



56. Pelton's Point. This was originally called Tuttle Point.

57. Bunny Run and Long Lake

Bunny Run on Miller Road just east of downtown Lake Orion became another summer retreat for the residents of Lake Orion as a farmstead was turned into a subdivision and a country club. The 126 acre farm formerly owned by Jacob Schick extended to the east end of Long Lake. It was sold to Lake Homes Realty Company of Detroit in 1924. A beach, clubhouse, and nine hole golf course were constructed on the property. Bunny Run Beach on Long Lake was at the east end of the lake.

58. Downtown Lake Orion Historic District



59. The Letts/ Griggs House: This house located at 209 East Flint Street was built in 1884 by James M. Letts, who owned E. S. Letts and Son Lumber Company at 215 South Broadway Street. He had access to the skills and materials used for its ornate craftsmanship.



The Orion Historical Society thanks charter member Jim Ingram for providing the information for this tour. Additional updates were completed by Mike Sweeney, Sara VanPortfliet and Lisa Sokol ( all OHS members).

# *Orion Historical Society*