White Lake History Cruise

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White Lake Area Historical Society

1 Cities of Montague and Whitehall

First named Mears, the City of Whitehall was platted in 1859 by Giles B. Slocum and Charles Mears.

The City of Montague was named for Reverend William Montague Ferry and was founded in the 1860s.

On the causeway between the two cities, the Ferry-Dowling Lumber Mills were on the Montague side and the Staples-Covell Mill was on the Whitehall side where Covell Park is now located.

2 Barteau Boat Works

The first marina in the area was built in 1922 by Edward Barteau and Sons. He built several boats for Al Pack and the Gold Cup motor boat races held in 1925. Others owned the marina, and it is now the Maple Beach Yacht Club.

3 Maple Grove

1854 Picture of Heald, Murphy & Crepin Saw Mill at Maple Grove

From Cook's Point, known as Ravenwsood, to the Narrows, this was the site of the Heald/Crepin/Murphy sawmills. Later the land was subdivided in 1900 by the Crepin, Harvey and Murphy families. The Narrows Goodrich steamship dock was known as Harvey's Dock.

4 The Tannery, White Lake Villa, Idlewild Resort and Lyon's Den

Built in 1866, the Eagle Tanning Works, later known as the Eagle Ottawa Leather Company, produced fine quality leather goods. The tannery became involved with pollution problems and closed in 2001. Final cleanup of the site was completed in 2014. Today, Tannery Bay-Eastbrook Homes has townhouses and condominiums available for purchase.

White Lake Villa was a resort started in 1906 by Charles W. Johnson and his wife Anna Larson Johnson. The resort was located in the original homestead that his father Carl Johnson built in 1862. In 1915, Charles W. Johnson's daughter Nora married Charles A. Svensson, a guest from Chicago who came to the resort. They took over the operations of the resort until 1966, when they sold some of the property to the White Lake Eagles. They retained the original homestead which is now occupied by the great-great granddaughter of Carl Johnson.

Idlewild Resort was started by Fred Schmidt in 1903. It was located across the street from the White Lake Villa. In 1920, Schmidt sold the resort to Elwood Shelhamer and his son-in-law W. R. Kemp. Shortly after the sale, Shelhamer suddenly died leaving Kemp to operate the resort. Kemp died in 1929 but his wife continued with the resort. In 1945, she sold the resort to her brother Samuel and his wife Ingrid Shelhamer, who continued running the resort until 1968. By 1975 the resort was up for sale. Eventually the property was sold and the buildings removed. Several new houses have since been built on the property.

Lyon's Den is the site of the first water-powered sawmill owned by Charles Mears in 1837. The spot was chosen because of the waterfall which remains today. In 1881 it became the site of the Wilcox mill until around 1888. In the 1890s Alfred Burland bought the former Mears boarding house and property. He renovated and enlarged the old boarding house and as well as several other buildings on the property. He established a resort there called Albumar Resort (which was a combination of his first and last name and that of his wife). Vern took over the operation of the resort in 1910 following the death of his father Alfred, and operated it until 1922 when it closed. Jack Lyons purchased the property in 1934 and turned it into a showplace, with a lighted waterfall, and beautiful landscaped grounds and it became known as "Lyon's Den", a name that it is still referred to today.

5 Short Point or Dowie's Point

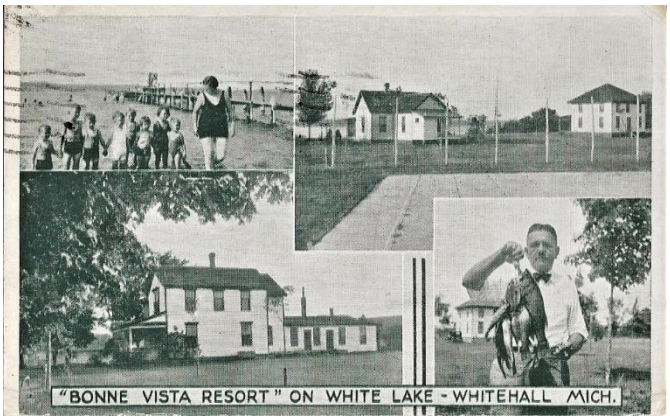
Short Point was the location of the Dalton Brothers' mill in 1857. Peter and James built a large house on top of the bluff. The mill burned in 1878. James died in 1885 but his widow remained there and operated a resort boarding house there. She sold the place to G. S. Grey and he named it "Grey Gables". In 1897, Rev. Alexander Dowie purchased the house and property and established it as a religious retreat. It was one of the most elaborate of the summer estates along the lake. After Dowie's death in 1907 the house and property were sold to other individuals. The house burned in 1948. Later a portion of the property became the Blueberry Ridge Subdivision, and the rest was purchased by Hooker Chemical Corporation.

The Painted Post was a large white house with a recreation building built by Al Pack. His support of the 1925 Gold Cup races led to the reorganization of the WLYC. His estate was also purchased by Hooker Chemical Company, and they use it as a retreat for their executives.

6 Birch Brook

The land was purchased by Thomas Gale and Walter Gerts in 1896 with plans to sell lots along the lake for cottages. In Chicago, the Gales were neighbors of Frank Lloyd Wright. They commissioned him to build their cottage. There are still six Frank Lloyd Wright cottages standing, including the Gertz Cooper "Bridge House", which was built across Birch Brook.

7 Potter's Flats



The Potter family has owned this property since 1888. It was called "the flats" because of a wide beach near the water's edge. The Potters opened the Bonne Vista Resort in 1895. In the 1950s, they built a miniature golf course, Potter's Putter, which operated until 1998.

8 Sturtevant and The Timbers

Henry D. Sturtevant purchased a large estate originally built by W. D. McKey in 1895 and known as "Ellergill by the Lake". The neo-classical style house was built atop a bluff on the north shore of White Lake. Sturtevant was instrumental in saving the WLYC clubhouse in the 1920s 1936 and the house was purchased by M. Keith Dunham, a Chicago resident and friend of Al Pack. In 1952 Frank E. Smith and his wife purchased the house and all the furnishings. At the time, the property included a pool, a tennis court and 3 guest houses. They developed a resort and opened the facility known as "The Timbers Resort". In 1973, the Joseph Kurland family, who were regular visitors to the resort, purchased it and continued to operate it as a resort until around 1983 when it once again became a private residence – which it remains today.

9 Irish Village & Strawberry Creek

This area was known as Irish Village because a number of summer families of Irish ancestry lived in the area. Harry J. Garner bought property in 1923 and built the Garner Cottage (now Rillema's) and a boat house over the creek in 1924.

10 San Juan Association

The San Juan Resort Association was established in 1902 by a group of families from St. Johns, Michigan. There were originally 12 lots, but now there are 23 houses in the association. At one time, most of the

cottage owners had a boathouse on the beach. Those were replaced in 1979 by a long building with storage lockers.

11 Crosby Point & Butterfield/Denison Cottages

The Butterfield Cottage was built in 1889 for $3,000 and the Denison Cottage was built in 1894 for $600. The Pulver Cottage, originally owned by Moses Taggart, is the oldest summer cottage on the lake.

12 White Lake Yacht Club

The White Lake Yacht Club was founded in 1903 at the Duskewrera Club located at Long Point on the north side of the lake. In 1906, the club was moved to the new clubhouse built on land purchased from George Mason. It thrived until about 1915, when the golf club took over the property and the new clubs were combined. In 1925, renewed interest in boating caused a new interest in the yacht club. The Sailing School began in 1926 with Loker Chittenden volunteering to be the first instructor. Successful candidates received their diplomas at the Pirate's Ball that ended the season that year, and the Yacht Club News began publication. In the 1960s, additional property was purchased from the Butterfields and the pool was built. The docks were replaced and put in a new location in the 1970s, and the clubhouse and property were purchased from the golf club in 1980. A number of families have been members for many generations, and all continue to enjoy the activities that make WLYC so special.

13 Steamships – Barry, Graham and Morton, People's Transit Company, and Goodrich Transit Company

By all accounts, the Mable Bradshaw was the first passenger vessel to establish a regularly scheduled route between Chicago and White Lake in 1897. She was owned by the Barry line, also known as the Chicago and Muskegon Transportation Company. She was a fairly small passenger ship, at just 145 feet in length, 25 feet wide and 16 feet in depth. She had 31 staterooms, 81 berths for passengers, and a crew of ten, including the captain.

People's Transit Company, established regular service between White Lake and Chicago in 1902 and operated until 1906. Their one and only boat was the Frontenac which was 178 feet in length, 26 feet wide, and 10 feet in depth. She was capable of carrying 100 passengers and 700 tons of freight. A one-way ticket cost $1.75 in 1903 while a round trip was $3.00.

In 1904 Graham and Morton line and its subsidiary People's Transit Company reached an agreement with the Montague Board of Trade to have exclusive use of Montague's docking facility for a minimum of ten years. In response, the village of Whitehall dredged its city dock at the foot of Colby and made it available to Goodrich Transportation Company which had run regularly scheduled routes from Chicago to destinations in Western Michigan including White Lake since 1900.

After People's transit went out of business, the Graham and Morton Company chose to drop out of competition for business on White Lake leaving the Goodrich Transportation Company as the only shipping company. The ships would leave Chicago on Friday at 7:00 p.m. and arrive at White Lake on Saturday morning. After stopping at Sylvan Beach and Michillinda docks, the ships would steam to the head of White Lake to the Whitehall City dock, Montague Pavillion and Harvey's Dock. On Sunday night, the ships would make the return trip leaving Montague at 8:00 p.m., arriving in Chicago at 6:00 a.m. on Monday morning. Ships included the Georgia, the Alabama, and the Virginia, but the favorite was the Carolina. The Goodrich Transportation Company filed for bankruptcy on December 20, 1932.

14 Lakeside Inn & Michillinda Cove Sites

Originally purchased from the government in 1855, the land on which Lakeside Inn stood was first the Green, Kelsey & Co. sawmill begun by George Green. It was then sold to James and Peter Dalton in 1879. In 1898, George H. Mason acquired the property and converted one of the former mill buildings to a store and started the Michillinda Post office there. He also owned much of the property around the cove including the yacht club and golf club properties. Mason started the resort business in 1913 renting rooms over the store and built several rental cottages nearby, giving it the name Lakeside Inn. Mason's son, George D., ran the Inn for a time. In 1917 he sold it to Glen and Gertrude Tallant. They soon discovered the main building was on the verge of being compromised by the rising lake water, so they moved the building back from the lake in order to save it. They also increased the size of the main building, adding a lobby, dining room and kitchen. At that time there were seventeen rooms and three cottages. Louis and Ann Groessl bought the inn in 1939, and it remained in the Groessl family for four generations. In 2014, Buzz Kaehler and his wife Nan purchased the Inn which became known as Buzz's Lakeside Inn. They operated the Inn until June 2020 when the property was sold. In October 2020, the Inn was demolished in preparation for the construction of three new homes.

15 Sylvan Beach Resort Company

The Sylvan Beach Resort Company was formed in 1895. There are now 66 cottages, and some have been owned by the same families for seven generations. The first clubhouse was built on the shores of White Lake in 1906 and was called the Wabaningo Club. It was destroyed by fire in April 1979 following a wind and thunderstorm which brought down tree limbs and powerlines in the area. A new clubhouse was

built in 1980 and is the center of social activities. The area also has its own summer post office and zip code. The Wabaningo Post Office was first located in the Arcade, a shopping center with groceries, drug store, and gift shop located on the Goodrich Dock. The Arcade was demolished in 1944 and the post office was moved to its president location (the site of the old Wabaningo Club) in 1979.

16 Indian Point, Joseph Sadony, Max Lau

The name Indian Point came from a battle between the joined forces of Iroquois and Ottawa tribes against the Pottawatomi in 1642.

Prof. Joseph Sadony was thought to have special mental powers and had many famous visitors come and stay at his home called "The Valley of the Pines". His two sons, Joe and Art, were the dealers for the Palmer Scow Builders at their boathouse along the shore. Many sailors bought their C scows from the Sadonys.

Max Lau and his brother Willy were the first resorters on Indian Bay coming from Chicago around 1910. Both of their houses were inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright but were not designed by him. The homes were the only two on Indian Bay until after WWII. Max Lau was the WLYC Commodore in 1914.

17 Murray's Inn and Trails Meet Ferry

In 1910, William Murray married Captain Robinson's youngest daughter, Annabell. They built Murray's Inn, which became a resort with 88 rooms, two dining rooms, a recreation hall and coffee shop. Part of the property is still in the Murray/McGee family.

Bob Deyman operated a ferry from 1928 to 1942, which ran from the south side of the channel by Murray's Inn to the north side at the end of Lau Road. The ferry was operated by a steel cable that ran under the water and had a four-car capacity. In 1928 the cost per car and driver was 25 cents. The cost per individual passenger was 10 cents. (25 cents in 1928 would be about $3.75 in 2021.)

18 White River Light Station

The lighthouse was completed in 1875 at a cost of $8,109. Captain William Robinson had been an unofficial Keeper of the White River Pierhead light since 1872 and was officially appointed to the post in 1876. He and his wife lived at the lighthouse along with their 13 children. He was Keeper until 1910 when his grandson, William Bush, took over and Captain Robinson continued to assist until his death in 1919. The White River Light Station was deactivated in 1960. In 1966 a group from Sylvan Beach raised $6,250 which it gave to Fruitland Township for the purchase of the light station from the U.S. government. The museum, in the light station, has the original 1876 Fresnel lens as part of its great maritime history collection.

In 2012, the board of Sable Point Lighthouse Keepers Association signed an agreement with Fruitland Township to operate the gift shop and museum at the White River Light Station.

19 White River Lifesaving Station

Along the northern government channel wall, a lifesaving station was built in 1886. There was an opening in the wall that allowed for the lifesaving boats to be launched. Captain Charles Lysaght was the first to command the station in April 1887. He served until 1904. The station was closed in 1944. In 1946 it was put up for sale, sold, and moved to its new location on Life Guard Road by the old channel in June 1947.

20 Old Channel & Lloyd's Landing

Before the government channel was built in 1867-71, the water from White Lake flowed naturally through a small inlet to Lake Michigan. The old channel begins at the end of Lau Road in White Lake and ends near the Old Channel Inn. That area on Lake Michigan became known as Lloyd's Landing because the Lloyd Family owned a boarding house there at one time.