

Christmas Lake History Book Project Update

As we begin the new year, we wanted to give you an update on the progress of the Christmas Lake History Book. Working as both volunteers and novices, our progress has been a bit slower than expected, however, we have become both more familiar and more intrigued with the available resources of recorded history in land documents, maps, and archived articles about our lake. We now hope to bring the history of life on the lake alive through the words of the people who once visited, settled, and grew up here.

We have been scouring history societies for diaries and letters of the pioneer settlers particularly searching for first-person accounts. In addition, we would like to find any information that might exist about life for Native Americans here and the special significance of Christmas Lake to them. If you have any ideas about sources, please be in touch since we are hoping to begin the writing of the pioneer chapter in March.

Moving into more recent history, we have gathered records and stories about life around the lake through interviews, history walks, and materials that past and present residents have provided for us. It isn't too late to contribute from your family history. Interview your grandparents, search through your attic. Do you have any old post cards, love letters, scrapbooks, newspaper clippings, or old property abstracts saved in a trunk? We are still looking for additional leads that would provide names, dates, and locations that we can research through local history archives. We are trying to bring alive past days around our lake through first person accounts. A short, vivid anecdote of a couple of paragraphs can tell a lot. (Anybody remember an all-night prohibition-era joint at the SW corner of the lake known as Cocky Roach's Tavern?)

Here is a slice of life from the lake: In 1884, resident Edmund Reel started a vineyard on the lakefront that he kept enlarging until he had some 4,000 vines. (Do any of you on the east side of the lake wonder why you keep having grape vines show up on your property?) Imagine the days back then when Edmund made the trip to St. Paul to sell his grapes. He had to travel with a team of horses, left home at 1:00 AM and returned around midnight the following day. During harvest season, he made two or three trips a week. "In those days, there were a lot of holdups, and as I always carried considerably over \$100.00, I was scared stiff." He would tie the cash in his feed sack and toss it carelessly back in the wagon to "hide" it. Luckily, he was never stopped.

Your family stories may not be as complete as Edmund Reel's diary and letters, but each discovered document provides another piece of the puzzle and enriches the story of past life on Christmas Lake. Thank you to those of you who have already contributed to this project. For those of you who haven't yet, this winter is a perfect time to pull out your family treasures and add to our book. Do you know someone who lived here in the past but does not currently receive Christmas Lake e-mails? Please contact them and ask them to help. We can copy or scan your documents so that you don't have to give them up. Or, we will accept an audiotape of a conversation that you might be able to record for us. (Isn't this a great excuse to get your parents or grandparents to sit down and share their memories with you?) Contact the Christmas Lake History Book Project at:

Maureen Bruce: MaureenBruce@Christmaslake.net
Peter Brown: peter1@tbpi.com
Sherri West: swestfibers@aol.com

With your help finding the stories of Christmas Lake, we can bring to life its history and the rare privilege we have enjoyed living on and near its shores.

