

100 Years: A Capsule History of the Lake Beulah Protective And Improvement Association

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On August 25, 1894, thirty-two lake Beulah residents gathered and adopted a Constitution and by-Laws to formally organize the Lake Beulah Protective and Improvement Association. The object of the new Association was the “general improvement and protection of Lake Beulah and the streams and waters adjacent thereto.”

The word “Improvement” characterizes the early work of the Association: strengthening of the Yonman-Johnson Dam in Mill Lake, having “the customary number of fish placed in the lake early in the spring,” and the “elimination of the dam under the bridge leading to Beulah Island and elevating the bridge so steamers can pass under the same.” In 1898, the Association approved the “necessary work on the channel between Upper and Lower Lakes.” By 1901, it is reported that the search for a game warden ended successfully with the appointment of Mr. Fred Carthedge as Game and Fish warden, and in 1904, Mr. Carthedge advised the Board that “he had stocked the lake with 25,000 wall eyed pike.” Safe boating became an issue, and a committee was appointed “to formulate naval regulations regarding lights and signals, and to send such regulations to owners of boats.” During this early formative and improvement era, names now familiar to Lake Beulah residents appear in Association records: Romadka, Wilmer, Gillette, Porter and Brown.



The Association began its “Protective” activity in 1907 when, at the membership meeting, “Dr. Pitts was requested to see Wesley Shephard and have the word Saloon effaced from a certain building.” Weeds had become a problem and in 1908 “Mr. Gillette reported that the experiment with chemicals was satisfactory under certain circumstances.”

The Dam issue was resolved by 1909 with the construction of the cement dam in Mill Lake, thereby ending what appears to have been an ongoing argument between the Association and the owners of a wooden dam, who apparently installed and then periodically removed the wood timbers so as to change the level of the lake.



In the next year, a weed cutter was purchased by the Association, to be rented to Association members at \$1.00 per day, or to nonmembers for \$2.00 per day. During the next several years, more improvement work included removing tree stumps from all channels around the lake, principally between Upper and Lower Lakes, and finally in 1920, the repairs to the bridge between Jesuit Island and the mainland were completed at the joint expense of the Island people, the Association, and the Boston Store.

With the Lake and its channels improved for navigation and annually stocked with fish, the Association seems to have “rested” from 1920 until 1936 and from 1939 to 1947, as there are no minutes of formal Board meetings during those periods.

After the Second World War, two events resulted in the reactivation of the Association: the advent of the “speed boat” in place of the old steam launches and the adoption in 1949 of a new zoning ordinance by the town of East Troy. The “Protective” phase of the Association’s activities began in earnest. The McGregor Subdivision Case evidenced the Association’s opposition to the practice of subdividing back lots with a small right-of-way to the lake and the old naval regulations were revised to become the “Code of Good Conduct” which was printed and distributed to all lake front property owners.

Over the next 45 years, the records of the Association reflect numerous instances of remarkable cooperation between the Association and the town board in protecting Lake Beulah as a single family residential community, with emphasis on the safe and reasonable use of our lake. Does anyone recall the first house boat which arrived on the lake on August 26, 1961? On August 29th the Association’s officers met officially with the town board, who promptly authorized their attorney to draw up an appropriate ordinance, which was duly adopted on September 11th and published three days later. The house boat was gone and the ordinance became the model for Burlington Township and many other Wisconsin lakes as well.

It is impossible in the space of this newsletter to recount all of the challenges residents have encountered over the 100 year history of our Association. It is, however, both interesting and useful to review a century’s worth of records, minutes of meetings, letters and the like; together they tell the story of individual and community investment in the affairs of our lake.

Just as the problems and issues which confront Lake Beulah property owners change over time, so also does the Association’s organization and method of operation. In the early years the nine person board functioned as a committee of the whole on all projects, with the president usually empowered to carry out the Board’s decisions. By the 1960’s, membership

had grown to 170 and the Board organized itself into committees, each with special responsibilities. A comparison of the committees then and now perhaps best illustrates the shift in focus of the Board's concerns:

1960's:

Membership
Public Relations
Legislative
Zoning
Building Code
Lake Affairs

1990's:

Membership
Education / Public Information
Legislative Liaison
Safety and Security
Water Quality / Weed Control
Fish and Wildlife

The Building and Zoning Wars over density and lake access are largely over, replaced by the Weed War against Eurasian Water Milfoil. Lake Affairs now means Safety and Security and the promotion of Fish and Wildlife. Restocking once again becomes an annual project. We are a member of the Wisconsin Association of Lakes, successor to the Federation of Wisconsin Lake Property Owners Association which Lake Beulah was instrumental in founding almost 40 years ago. We continue to join with and learn from other lakes in anticipating, and hopefully, solving problems before they become unmanageable.

Reading the recorded history of the Association, one cannot help but feel an expanding sense of gratitude for the foresight and vigilance of prior generations of Lake Beulah residents who founded and nurtured the Association. They built for us a solid foundation of Improvement and Protection. Now that we have grown to over 250 members, our task is to carry on, so that we may preserve this lake, as our forbears have left it for us, as a wonderful place to enjoy.

*Historical images courtesy of:
Club Life Anniversary Edition 1902-1928.
Wisconsin University Settlement: Milwaukee, 1928.*