

Lake Beulah:

Pioneer Days to the Present . . .

Not many centenarians are as sprightly as the Lake Beulah Yacht Club which celebrates its 100th anniversary in 1993. This vibrant organization looks back with pride on decades of steady growth and meaningful accomplishments.

Notable among these are the encouragement of competitive sailing, good sportsmanship, and the opportunities for recreation and socializing for countless families who have enjoyed membership throughout the years.

Today's mylar sails and fiber-glass hulls are a far cry from the birchbark canoes of the early 19th century. What is hard to believe is the fact that before 1830 there is no mention of any white man in what later would become Walworth County.

No records exist describing the region inland between the foot of Lake Michigan and the mouth of the Milwaukee River. This would suggest that it was unknown to the explorers of the 17th and 18th centuries.

TRANSFER BY TREATY

On September 26, 1833, the United States Government signed a treaty with the Potawatomics, Chippewas and Ottawas by which those nations "ceded all lands from the shores of Lake Michigan westward to land ceded by the Winnebagos the year before. The northern boundary met lands ceded by the Menomonees (north and east of the Milwaukee River) and the southern was defined by lands ceded by the same tribe in 1829 in northwestern Illinois."

In return for the land, John Kinzie of Chicago, United States agent, agreed to make annual payments to the Indians in coin, guns, blankets and other necessities. The Government also agreed to protect them in occupancy of the soil they now held until 1835 and then transfer them to other lands west of the Mississippi River.

The territory thus acquired "extinguished Indian title to 5,000,000 acres of land and included all of southeastern Wisconsin." Tribes were to remain in peaceable possession of the lands for two years until moving west.

However, the treaty was not signed until late the following year, so evacuation was delayed until 1836. Before that date, the Government could give no clear title.

LAND OF THE POTAWATOMIE

The leading tribe in the territory was the Potawatomie who were curious about another culture and peaceful in disposition. They were said to show "little deceit or treachery and, among their fellow tribes, managed to cement friendships that remained unbroken."

Having migrated south from Green Bay, their largest village at this time was Mukwonago, "the meeting place of the bears." The principal trail in the area started at the head of Big Foot Lake (Geneva) and led through LaFayette and East Troy to Mukwonago. Known as Army Trail, it had been the "route taken by a regiment of soldiers on a march from Fort Dearborn (Chicago) to Fort Howard (Green Bay) in 1836."

Early records reveal that Mrs. John Kinzie, the U.S. agent's wife, crossed Walworth County in the fall of 1832 as she accompanied her husband to Fort Winnebago (Portage). Her memoirs relate her delight in seeing the waters of Lake Geneva. Her party is believed to be the first whites to view lake.

As a result of early conflicts, Wisconsin passed from French to English to American possession. It was included in the old Northwest Territory until 1800 when it became part of Indian Territory. In 1809 the land was joined to the Illinois Territory, and in 1818 to the Michigan Territory.

On July 3, 1836, Wisconsin became part of a territory which included Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota and a part of the Dakotas. Walworth was one of the first counties approved during the same year. It was named for Chancellor Reuben H. Walworth of New York, an "outstanding character in temperance work and other moral movements."

Wisconsin became the 30th state on May 29, 1848 with Nelson Dewey its first governor. Christopher Payne was the first settler in Walworth county in 1836.

A land sale of 100 townships in southeastern Wisconsin was advertised by the land office at Milwaukee to begin November 19, 1838. Since most of the settlers were unprepared to pay at that time they asked for and gained a delay until February 18, 1839.

Sales began with Townships 1 to 10, ranging from Lake Michigan westward and amounted to 4 to 5 townships daily. The lands of Walworth County were sold between February 25 and March 5.

Sales were made to the highest bidder on each tract, starting with the Government's minimum price of \$1.25 per acre. Agents were empowered to buy for non-attending neighbors and might bid as high as \$20.

If payment were not made that day, the same land was started the next day at the lowest rate and was usually sold at that price without further bids from previous competitors.

WHITE SETTLERS ARRIVE

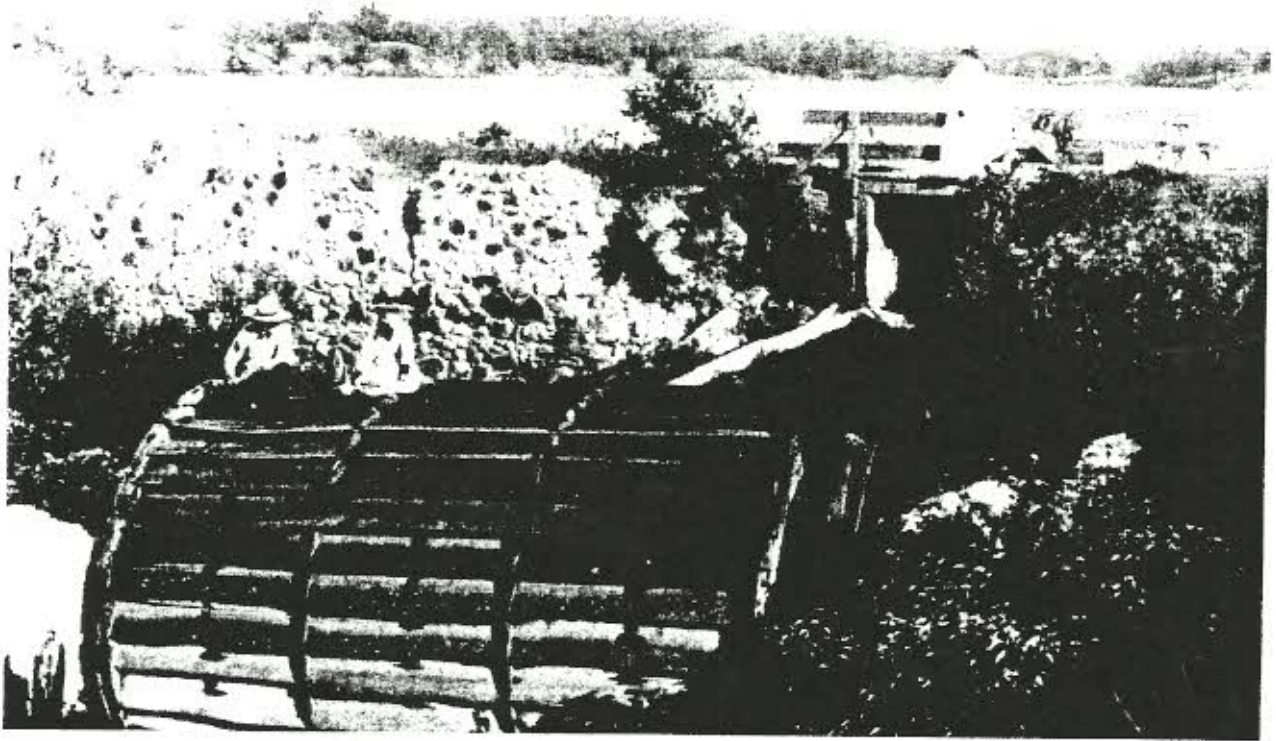
In 1838 Dr. James Tripp, a retired Army surgeon with an eye for engineering, purchased 151.79 acres from the Government and is presumed to be the first white settler in this area.

A native New Yorker, Dr. Tripp had practiced medicine in Mobile, Alabama, for several years before returning home. After 15 years of practice in the East, Dr. Tripp decided to try farming in Wisconsin Territory.

Although his stay here was brief, it was long enough to build and lend his name to a saw mill, Tripp's Mill, adjacent to Crooked Lake, the original name of Beulah. Tripp's Lake, later known as Mill Lake, was not connected at that time.

In 1839 he and his wife, Rosepha, moved farther west where they are credited with founding the village of Whitewater. Rosepha brought with her a "comfortable little fortune" and they became two of the largest property holders in the area.

There Dr. Tripp built a grist mill, which proved more profitable than a saw mill, and practiced medicine "only when called on in critical cases." He represented



Mill wheel at the dam with Mill Lake in the background, circa 1896

the area in the 4th Territorial Assembly in 1841-44.

Dr. Tripp died in 1844 at the age of 49 leaving his estate to Rosepha providing that she "remain a widow."

Tripp's saw mill was bought and sold frequently over the years. In 1852 Seymour Brooks was the owner for a short period. In the early 1870's, the mill was destroyed by fire, and for many years, only the wheel remained.

A local resident maintains that the only access to the mill in the early days was over a bridge from Beulah's East Shore to the Island. During the 1850's, the mill owner built the road, now a part of County Trunk J, to make the mill more accessible.

Huge rocks and wagon loads of dirt were hauled by oxen to build the road

which was seven feet beneath lake level (a fact recorded by Ripley's "Believe It or Not") until it was reconstructed and raised to its present height.

FARMING TAKES HOLD

In 1845, 24-year-old Homer and 22-year-old Seymour Brooks made their way from Ovid, N.Y., to Walworth County with the area's first threshing machine. They ran it in partnership the first season after their arrival and developed a profitable business.

After selling the machine to Seymour, Homer returned to New York where he purchased 2000 Merino ewes and drove them back to East Troy, a three-month operation. Their father sent them a Durham bull and three heifers which proved to be the first blooded cattle in Walworth County and perhaps in Wisconsin.

Homer purchased 160 acres in the Upper Lake region in 1848 and, in 1882, was said to own 218 acres valued at \$60 per acre. Both brothers were successful in farming and raising stock and Seymour had a bent for business as well.

In 1846, Seymour became an employee of Edward Ball, a New York merchant who had opened a store in East Troy. After clerking for three years, he became a partner for eight more years until 1855 when the building was destroyed by fire at a loss of \$14,000.

The store had acquired "Lake View," a 400-acre farm at the foot of Crooked Lake, which Seymour accepted to cover his investment in the destroyed business. This addition to his already sizable holdings purchased from the Government and located north and south of what is now Country Trunk J made him a major land holder.

Included in this property was a small island still known as "Buck Island," supposedly named because he kept his buck sheep there during the summer. It is presently the home site of Dan and Shirley Gawne.

JESUITS PURCHASE ISLAND

The larger island in his possession, later acquired by the Jesuit Order of the Missouri Province, consisted of 29 acres. This was sold initially to H. H. Rogers of East Troy, who built the first summer resort hotel on the lake in 1882 and operated it unsuccessfully for three years. In July, 1885, it was sold to Marquette College for \$11,500 through the efforts of a Milwaukee caterer, James Conroy, who acted as an agent in the transaction.



Crowley Spring, Mill Lake

A second deed dated September 10, 1908, records the sale of an additional portion of the Island from the Brooks' heirs to Marquette University for \$1500.

The old hotel on the island was used as a priests' retreat by members of the Jesuit Order whose headquarters was in St. Louis. Each summer young seminarians would vacation there, living in the two buildings which contained dormitories, kitchen, and dining and billiard rooms. A windmill provided water for general purposes while Crowley's Spring furnished drinking water.

A chapel was built later and lake residents were welcome to attend Mass on Sundays. It was a unique experience for many worshippers to arrive by boat rather than car, and to hear the birds through the chapel's open windows.

For football fans, the Island offers an interesting "first," as described in "The Story of Football."

In 1906, the St. Louis coach, appropriately named Eddie Cochems, brought his team to Lake Beulah to develop the forward pass. It was legal but risky, since if the ball were touched and not caught, it was a free ball.

Cochems developed the first passing combination. The forward pass was introduced in college competition - not by Notre Dame but by St. Louis - against Carroll College in a game played on the Island in September, 1906. St. Louis went on to win every game that season.

Included in Marquette's purchase of the Island was a flat-bottom pleasure steamer, the Lady Anna, which would accommodate 45 seminarians, all in good voice.

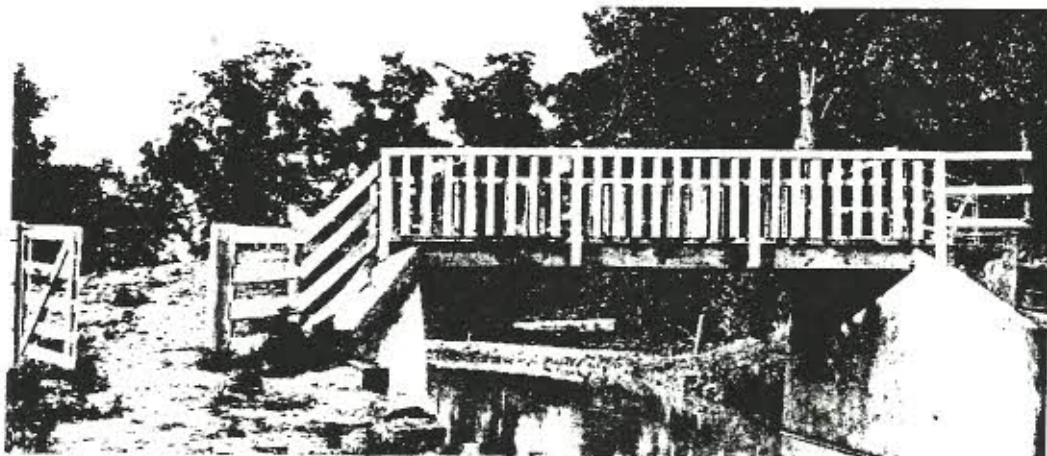
The Lady Anna proved a legend in herself. Not only did she provide pleasant recreation for the Jesuits, but also functioned as good will ambassador among some of the neighboring farmers, many of whom were staunch Protestants. The sale of their produce to the community, plus an invitation to cruise on the Lady Anna, is said to have done much to foster friendly neighbor relations.



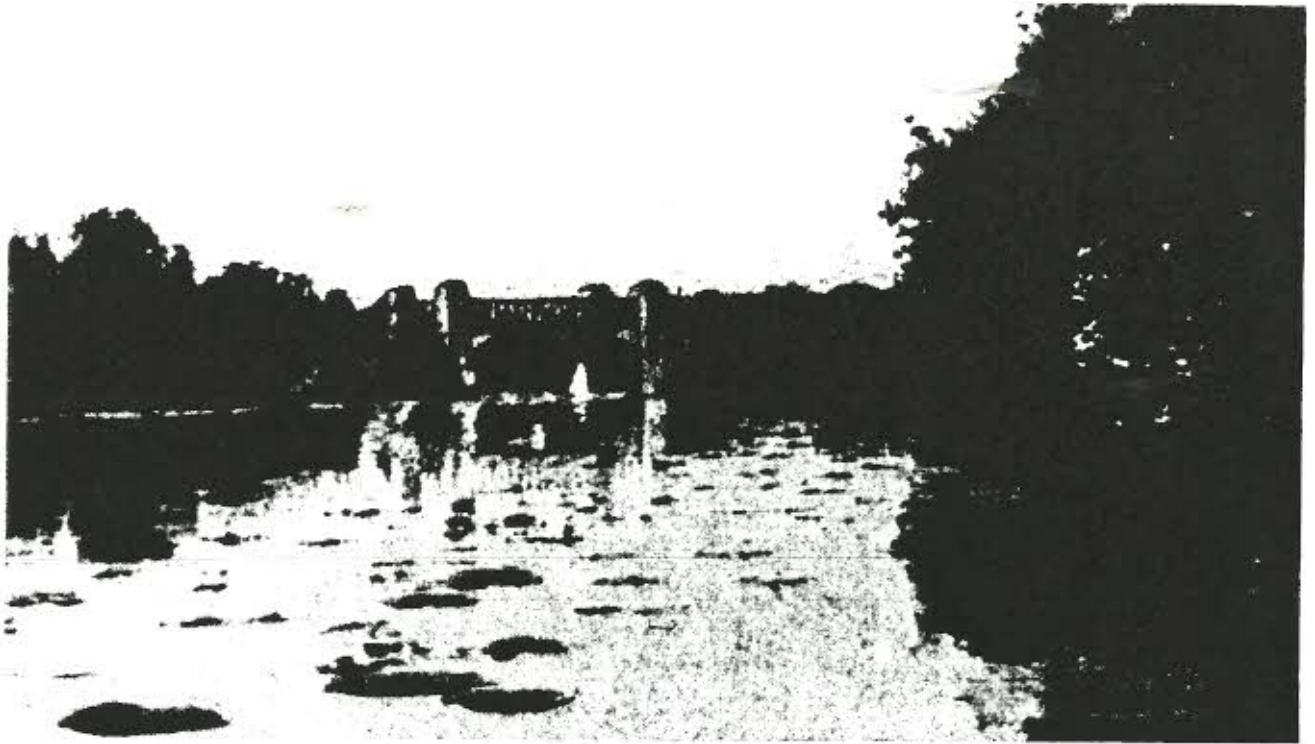
Jesuit residence hall and chapel on The Island

Most celebrated of the steamer's passengers was Vice President Thomas Hendricks, who served under President Grover Cleveland and who visited the Island during his term of office.

The Jesuits also initiated what has become known as Venetian Night, a parade of lighted boats decorated with Chinese lanterns. Many residents would light candles on the shore as the boats passed. Frequently, the procession would halt before the homes of friends who would join the boaters in song.



Canal separating The Island from the West Shore



Bridge connecting The Island and the East Shore

An 1894 story in the "Mukwonago Chief" describes an impressive parade of lighted boats that wound around Buck Island, ending with fireworks on Jesuit Island. Other newspaper articles report the visits of President Theodore Roosevelt and of Cardinal Samuel Stritch.

Jesuit Island was sold in 1971 to LaBonte Enterprises for \$250,000 and its buildings were burned. The property was subdivided into 17 lots. Presently it is the site of the homes of the following Yacht Club member families: J. Cullen Barr, Dr. James Bransfield, Dr. Daniel Collins, Ralph Gehrman, Michael Heiser, and Kevin Moore.

For many years there was a busily-travelled bridge from the East Shore to the Island. Opinion differs as to whether the Jesuits felt it was a deterrent to their privacy and removed it, or whether it fell into disrepair and was abandoned.

A FIRST-CLASS RESORT

The distinction of creating the most celebrated landmark on the East Shore, the Hotel Beulah, belongs to John Porter who was born on a farm in East Troy Township in 1856.

John's father, James, was born in Scotland in 1800, came to this country about 1820, married in Charleston, N.C., and brought his bride to East Troy Township in 1844. He purchased 200 acres, which eventually was increased to a single tract of 700 acres, and farmed the land until his death in 1881.

John, one of seven children, farmed his inherited land for seven years, spent a year in Whitewater, and then purchased a farm on the shores of the lake. In 1879, he married Mary McGraw, sister of Nicholas McGraw who owned adjoining land on the East Shore.

