

Rice Lake - Maple Grove Memories

by Dorothy Schoenmann

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Rice Lake is an historic lake. Indians found it suitable for establishing their mounds. Also, an encampment of these people was discovered and remains shown to raise corn and perhaps some root crops. It seems to have been a village site. When the freeway was planned and some excavating was done for a roadbed, artifacts were unearthed. That led to more discoveries, such as the Indian mound at the rest area as well as the yard at Woodland Mounds apartment building.

In the year 1913 Rice Lake was drained for farm land. Several farms were abutting the east shoreline. During the dry years of 1929 and in the 1930's it was possible to walk the dry lake bed. In 1963 the Village Council decided to build a dam at the north end to restore the lake to its original level approximately 40 to 60 acres of water area. This would be replacing it from marshy overgrown vegetation to its original state.

A public meeting was called on August 9, 1965 for the purpose of restoring or raising Rice Lake and to discuss a dam at the north end to flow into Elm Creek. A map was presented by Arnold Cook, Robert Herit and Richard Conlin that included the property owners around the lake. They had the privilege of discussing pro or con for the project.

The Council suggested that the Parks Department have some access to the shoreline for recreational purposes. All the City officials voted in favor of the project. The following resolution was presented that the village approve the restoration of the lake by means of placing a dam in Elm Creek to be in the best interests of the village. It created recreational facilities, controlled drainage runoff, eliminated insect breeding areas, and improved the tax base of the Village.

The purpose of restoring the level of the lake to that of Fish Lake, being an elevation of 891 feet the same as sea level. The Village Engineer was to determine the location, its estimated cost and get the approval of the Department of Conservation. This estimated cost of acquiring the dam site, flowage easements and construction, legal and engineering expenses would be borne by the benefiting properties. Hurley Construction was selected to construct the dam.

What beautiful homes are there today. The east shore has a cemetery, namely Maple Knoll, but at one time sported the name "Old Fish Lake Cemetery". A tiny white church also once occupied a space on the edge of the cemetery.

Many thanks to Dick Reimer for saving these items of history pertaining to our City.