

Historical planks: This "floating bridge" in Chippewa Lake was built in the late 1800s, and it was abandoned after 1959. (Courtesy photo)

Bridge a floating memory

BY CHRIS MILLER
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CHIPPEWA LAKE — It had approximately 175 wooden planks, was 16 feet wide and was abandoned after 1959.

A "floating bridge" at Chippewa Lake was built in the late 1800s. For many years school buses, local residents and even cream trucks used the bridge.

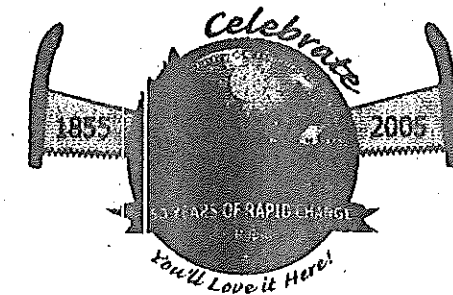
In an old Pioneer article, writer Lillian Palmer recalls a story sent in by Chippewa Lake resident and proclaimed area historian J. Stanley Ball.

"One of the old landmarks, at Chippewa Lake, is the old floating bridge. The bridge was anchored at each end. It dates back to the lumber days and was located on the west side of the lake," Ball said.

She added, it was considered something of a hazard by people who had to use it, but some of the summer visitors thought it was interesting and felt no vacation at Chippewa Lake was complete without a trip across the old floating bridge.

In 1906, a cottage — owned by the Rosander family — was built on that side of the lake. Ball said the family used the bridge on a regular basis.

"The Rosanders lived in Grand Rapids. Mr. Rosander invited one of his business associates and his wife to spend a weekend with



them at their cottage," she said.

"This man got as far as the old bridge. He took one look at it and said to his wife, 'If Andrew wants to live on the other side of that, it's all right with me, but I want no part of it,' and he turned around and went back to Grand Rapids," she added.

Ball told of the Hahns, another family who had to use the bridge on a regular basis.

"(Mrs.) Delmer Hahn tells of coming across the bridge with a horse and buggy. The bridge was covered with water and the pike were spawning.

"A big fish flopped right in front of her and frightened the horse," Ball said. "She had a bad few minutes getting across.

"If anyone had gone off the bridge, it would have been tragic, as the surface underneath was bottomless," she added.

While on a sabbatical from Grand Valley

State University, Chippewa Township resident Cindy Hull currently is researching the history of Chippewa Lake and the township, including the old floating bridge. Hull is writing a book on the local history.

For Chippewa Lake's centennial anniversary in 1983, Hull helped produce a special centennial newspaper printed by the Pioneer. An article in the edition featured an interview with Thomas Hahn.

"There was no way to pass on the bridge. People had to back up to let other cars through," Hahn said.

"I don't know how many cars we pulled out of the mire near the bridge. I can remember when my dad would harness up horses in the middle of the night to pull people out of the mire..."

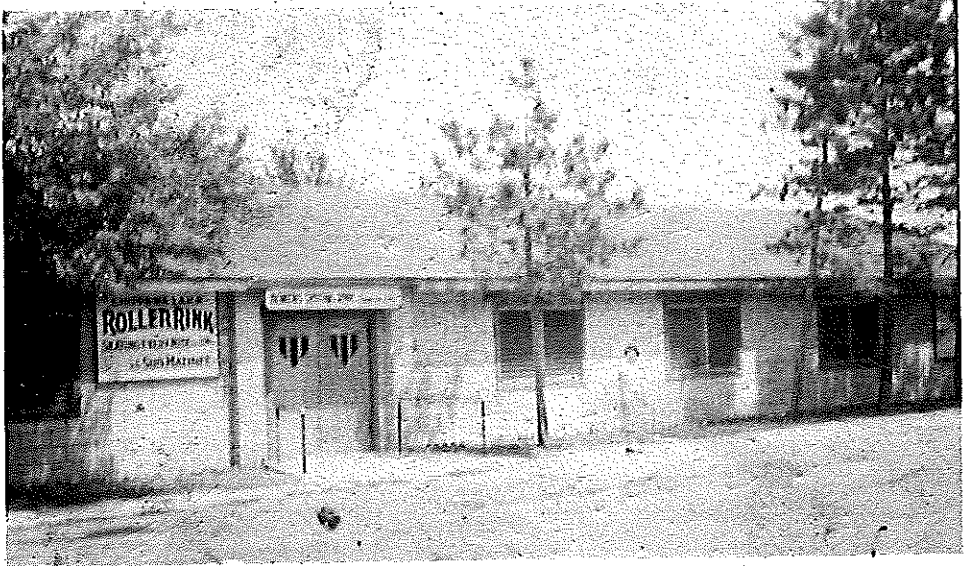
Hahn also said postal services were not allowed to cross the bridge to deliver mail, and the bridge was considered floating because parts of it did float.

"When one bridge sank deep into the mire, another would be built on top. Many of the poles and stumps from older bridges are still visible," he said.

Hahn added, "Originally, the township repaired and replaced the bridge. It was a problem for the county to keep it repaired."

The bridge was dismantled shortly after the construction of a road by-passing the historical site in 1959.





SOUVENIR OF CHIPPEWA LAKE

