

Chippewa Lake: Booming resort town of years past

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The small village of Chippewa Lake was once a prosperous resort town.

Located in the northeast corner of Mecosta County, Chippewa Lake itself covers 790 acres and hails as the county's largest lake.

The early residents of the village were those employed by the lumber companies which used the lake to help ignite the lumber industry in the area.

As early as 1870, logs were floated down the south branch of the Chippewa River to mills in Saginaw. Before the first mills were built in the area, dams were built in Chippewa Lake Creek to make it easier to run the logs down.

When the lake froze over in the winter, logs were transported across by sleigh teams.

Logging had opened up other opportunities for residents in the small community. At its height, the village had eight saloons, four hotels, boarding houses, three grocery stores, two hardware stores, a skating rink, shingle mill and a creamery depot.

The lake itself played important economic and entertainment roles as the resort community began to grow in the 1920s.

The lake of sparkling open water covered nearly 800 acres and offered numerous activities for the entire family throughout the year. The village gained popularity for the festive activities which took place at night.

Plenty of entertainment was readily available for the younger crowd. It offered dance halls and a skating rink.

Young people from all over

Michigan came to Chippewa Lake to enjoy the nightly activities.

During the warm summer nights in hopes of catching a cool breeze, the doors of the dance halls or skating rink were propped open. Music from the dance halls or skating rink could be heard throughout the town and even across the lake.

Village residents remember Darling's Dance Hall. When it burned to the ground the Sweet Note replaced it.

The first Sweet Note burned to the ground and a second one was built.

People remember seeing lines of cars throughout town as young people gathered to listen to music and dance.

In the summer, residents and tourists came to the lake for boating, swimming, fishing or picnicking.

In the early days of the resort town, a steamboat named Reveille could be seen on the lake during the summertime.

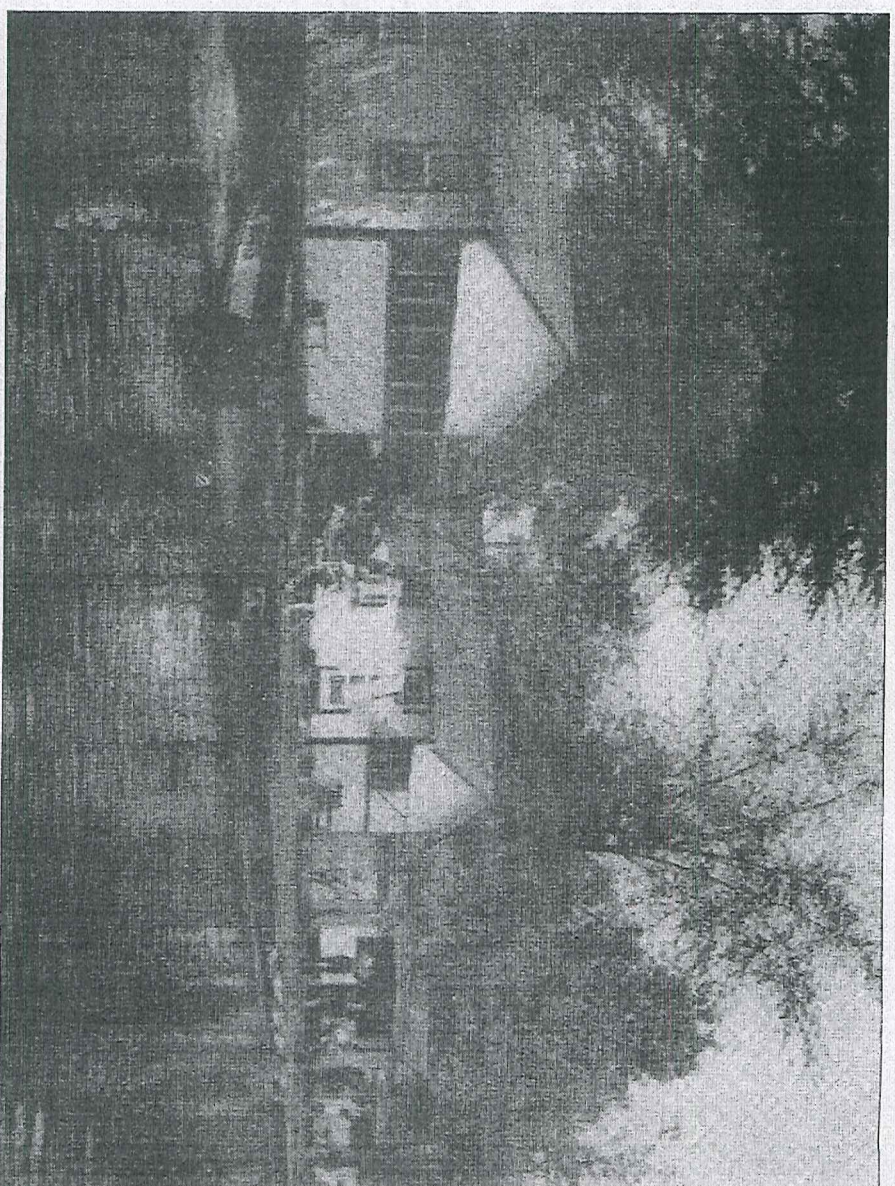
The owner of the boat would haul supplies and people from Evans Lake to Chippewa Lake. Riding on the boat became a popular social activity for locals and tourists on the weekends.

Tourists would ride the boat to the small community for a day of shopping or spend the day having a picnic at the lake with their family.

At night, young and old alike would enjoy dancing or skating.

In the fall, people gathered at the lake to celebrate the holidays together.

During the winter, residents and locals would spend their time ice fishing while the kids would ice skate. Area farmers would use ice from the lake to keep their storage barns cool in the summer months.



The Cedars: Stan and Virginia Ball offered resorters cottages, boats and a clean, sandy beach at the Cedars on Chippewa Lake. (Pioneer file photo)

Many families owned or rented cabins located on or near the lake. Some would spend their weekends enjoying the lake while others lived in their cabins during the summer months.

There was once a rumor that the infamous gangster Al Capone owned a cottage on Chippewa Lake.

Although the relaxing days of the early 20th Century are over, tourists and residents still gather at Chippewa Lake for summer and win-

ter activities.

Jet skis, boats and fishing provide family fun all over the lake, while swimmers take to the water to keep cool during the hot summer days.

During the winter months, ice fishing shanties and vehicles are scattered throughout the lake in search of a great day's catch.

Although the times have changes around the small village of Chippewa Lake, residents tourists and families

still gather to enjoy the time spent there.

(Information for this article was taken from "A Short History of Chippewa Township and Chippewa Lake" by Cindy Hull, Ph.D., Professor of Anthropology, Grand Valley State University, Lauren Bostic and Elizabeth (Libby) Michel, also of Grand Valley State University.)