



Deephaven Historical Society Newsletter Summer Report 2009

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The History
of St. Louis
Bay, Part 7 2
—by Barb
Sykora

Deephaven Historical Society Booth at Deephaven Days!

A reminder—Deephaven Days are scheduled for this *Saturday, August 8th*. We intend to have a booth and invite all residents to stop by!

There will be a cinematic presentation of the personal memories of several of our longtime citizens. We encourage everyone to drop by the Deephaven Historical Society booth and enjoy this presentation. We also encourage everyone to meet some of our older residents and exchange memories.

We are always looking for pictures from the past of your older home or of your neighbor's older home, to add them to our collection.

We will have information available at our booth to help those of you who are interested in researching the history of your Deephaven home.



The picnic cruise of Spring 2009



Harry Allen Talk on Lydia Ferguson a Hit!

The annual Deephaven Historical Society Cruise held Sunday, the 31st of May, was more than just a boat ride around Lake Minnetonka. The forty happy souls set voyage for the Isle of Big (Big Island) for a good old fashioned picnic. The crew embarked at 12:00 noon to the island where they trudged up the wooded hillside to the picnic

pavilion that overlooked the sparkling waters of gorgeous Lake Minnetonka. On the way the group passed many old relics left over from the good old days of the Excelsior Big Island amusement park. The promenade steps are still intact as are the foundations of many of the old buildings that housed the rides and mysteries sought by so many thrill seekers of years gone by.

Upon arriving at our picnic sight, delicious boxed lunches of chicken and ham were distributed to the hungry guests. Picnic tables were arranged so our speaker, Harry Allen, could talk downwind. Yes, the wind, she was a blowing. Harry recently received a gift of the "Lydia Ferguson Diary" 1854-1886. Apparently, Harry was mesmerized by its contents and offered to share what he had learned. We are all glad he did. As we sat gazing out over the blue waters of Lake Minnetonka....looking directly at the homestead of the Ferguson clan as Harry recounted the adventures of one of Deephaven's earliest settlers...we could almost imagine being there with her during her many trials and tribulations.



Big Island

Lydia was what many may refer to as a "Hardy Woman"she was truly a pioneer...setting out from back East to find her place in the sun out West where the land was free. Although her life was rough by today's standards, and her family life was sometimes difficult...she endured. We all could envision her sitting on the shores of what is now Linwood gazing out into the beautiful blue waters while a gentle summer wind blew its warm breezes through her hair. Times like that are still experienced by those that share the same space on our lovely Lake Minnetonka...they more than offset the cold chill of the winter winds.

Thank you Harry for sharing.

Part 7--History of St. Louis Bay - by Barb Sykora

The experiences of one such houseboy at a Lake Minnetonka hotel was mentioned in his autobiography. His name was William Edward Burghardt DuBois, the famous black activist and sociologist. When he was twenty years old, he was asked to be the manager of the Fisk University Glee Club. Their plan was to sing at one of the lake hotels (he fail to mention which hotel he worked at) and then also to earn money waiting tables and being bus boys. Having no experience, he decided to go west with this group of young men. Giving concerts to the hotel guests was fairly successful but he was fairly disillusioned by the whole bus boy experience. DuBois wrote that he thought the crowds at the lake were noisy and not very well bred. They spent a lot of money on liquor. He wrote of how the guests were fairly respectable during the day but at night and during the weekends it was a different story. His job was to stand around the edge of the dining room and carry loads of dirty dishes to the kitchen. DuBois also mentions that the workers at the hotel stole food on a regular basis. He confessed that he personally did not steal food but ate from those who did.



W.E. Burghardt DuBois

The Hotel St. Louis had their own black employees who also entertained hotel guests. They were known as The St. Louis Minstrels. The August 21, 1880 edition of "The Tourist" gave a brief mention of this. "The colored gentlemen connected with the Hotel St. Louis have prepared an entertainment which will be given in the dining hall of that house tonight. It promises to be very interesting"

1881 was expected to be another great season because of the advanced bookings. In 1880 the Minneapolis and St. Louis Railroad brought the line in from Hopkins and now it passed near the hotel on Carson's Bay. The carriage road from Minneapolis had also been greatly improved. The season opened at the hotel on June 15 with the arrival of Charles Eginton. The head cashier had been there the past month to ready the hotel for the summer season. A billiard hall with two tables was to be added to the bowling alley. Also a new addition at the hotel was a newsstand in the rotunda, which would sell local and national newspapers.

1881 was also the year W.D. Washburn launched the grandest side-wheeler on Lake Minnetonka called "The City of St. Louis". It was also the largest at 160 feet long. It was built in Jefferson, Indiana and shipped to Wayzata where William Crump finished the boat. It was the first inland boat to have electricity and the interior was lined in mahogany. It could hold 1000 people. One of the nicest ways to see the lake was by steamer on Lake Minnetonka.



Not used to being topped, James J. Hill, railroad magnet and owner of the largest hotel on Lake Minnetonka, the Lafayette Hotel, commissioned his own boat to go in direct competition with the "City of St. Louis". He purchased a boat that was built in 1866 named the "Phil Sheridan" and moved it to Lake Minnetonka piece by piece. The 300 foot boat was rechristened, "Belle of Minnetonka" and launched on July 3, 1882 and was in immediate competition with the "City of St. Louis". Both boats vied for the same business and there was not enough income to have both boats.

In a letter written by W.D. Washburn to John Washburn on July 27, 1882, he wrote he was "obliged for the interest you take in my affairs, especially in the City of St. Louis. I am glad that she is at least doing some business. The early part of the season, business seemed to be very thin and unsatisfactory."

The local newspaper was important to the local citizens and the tourists of the Lake Minnetonka area. Much of the local news, social and cultural affairs were collected by the editor and publisher, Alfred Stewart Dimond. Born in 1835, he spent twenty-five years promoting Lake Minnetonka through his papers. His papers went under several names; "The Tourist and Sportsman," "The Northwestern Tourist," "The Tourist," then back again to the "Tourist and Sportsman" and finally to the "Excelsior Cottager." Two of his bylines for many years for his papers were "In The Interest of Tourists, Invalids, Sportsman and The General Public" and "Devoted to Sporting News, Society Matters and Summer Resort Gossip of the Northwest."

Containing local news of interest for the local and tourist trade, the paper was published during the spring and summer seasons. Tourist arrivals for the hotels were printed, parties and outings were announced and what all the ladies were wearing to these social gatherings was big news. It must have made a tourist's stay at the hotel to see their name in print.

Dimond's newspapers promoted Lake Minnetonka with vigor and gusto and also served local businesses with their advertisements. He died on Christmas Day, 1905 at his daughter's home in Los Angeles. Dimond was also part of his local stories on the lake. On July 1st, 1880, he was standing on the dock of the St. Louis Hotel and was waiting to board the steamer, "Mary", when the boiler blew up. Seven people died, including a waiter from the St. Louis Hotel, and Dimond was among the seven who were injured. He never entirely recovered from the injuries he received from the explosion. As it turns out the "Mary" was one of a fleet of boats that were owned by Charles May. His two other boats had also blown up. All of their boilers came from the same company: Ames Iron Works.

Continued ...Part 7—History of St. Louis Bay by Barb Sykora

On April 17, 1882 Charles Eginton, administrator for the deceased, Thomas Eginton, sold at a private sale The Hotel St. Louis to Charles Scudder (a successful owner of the Hotel Lindell in St. Louis, Missouri), Charles Gibson, Henry Ames and William F. Haines, all from St. Louis. The reason for the sale was that the hotel "needed enlargement and additions to provide for more people" which the owners did not care to give. The price was \$42,000. One third was to be paid in cash and the balance paid as follows: \$3000 paid on September 1st, 1882, \$2000 paid on March 1st, 1883, \$5000 paid on September 1, 1883, \$10,000 paid on September 1st, 1884 and the remaining \$8,000 paid on March 1st, 1885 with annual interest rate of 6%.

In April 1882, the partners took out their own mortgage on the Hotel for \$50,000, which included the hotel and another \$8,000 for improvements and an addition, which added another 40 rooms. With a third of the money given at closing, each of the partners was responsible for part of the mortgage. Scudder and Gibson were responsible for one third and Haines and Ames were responsible for one sixth. They were all to follow a schedule of payment: \$2,000 due September 1, 1885, \$10,000 due on September 1, 1886 and the final payment due on September 1, 1887. Charles Gibson was now co-owner of the Hotel St. Louis.

On May 28, 1883, the Hotel St. Louis Corporation was incorporated with 2000 shares equaling \$100,000 in the capital stock. Charles Scudder and Charles Gibson would each own one third and William F. Haines and Henry Ames had one sixth each. This would cover all the 108 acres except for 2.04 acres near the Excelsior Road that was now owned by Gibson's son, Preston. The hotel with all the furniture, stables, cottages, bowling alleys, boats and boathouses was now under control of the St. Louis Corporation. On December 6th, 1884, the Hotel Corporation sold 14.12 acres of land to Elias Anderson for \$55 an acre. Total sale was for \$776.50.

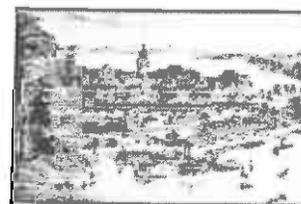
"The Northwestern Tourist", in the May 18, 1884 issue, listed the dollar value of hotel property around the Lake Minnetonka area. There were now twenty-eight hotels that surrounded the Lake Minnetonka area. Altogether there was \$1,164,150 worth of hotel property. The most expensive hotel at \$817,350, including the boat fleet, was the Lafayette Hotel, J.J. Hill's hotel. The second was the Park Lake Hotel, which was valued at \$95,000 and included the cottages, bathhouses, amusement hall, boathouse and boats. The third was the Hotel St. Louis at \$66,500, which included the grounds and the boat fleet. Charles Gibson's summer home, Northome, was also listed and was the most expensive home on the lake at \$10,000.

One of the most popular sports on Lake Minnetonka was yachting. There were many sailing families from Minneapolis who were now establishing homes on the lake. The Minnetonka Yacht Club was organized in 1882. It would meet in various places on the lake with no real home base. On May 15, 1889, the Minnetonka Yacht Club merged with the Excelsior Yacht Club. It was now time to find a permanent home. Charles Gibson offered the Minnetonka Yacht Club a small island that sat at the entry of St. Louis Bay known as Lighthouse Island. It was actually a man made island, made of sand and gravel when the Bay of St. Louis was dredged.

The board of officers accepted the island as their new location and a \$3,000 donation also from Gibson. The yacht club also accepted donations from Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad. Other donations amounted to \$2,250. The building was to cost \$6,000 but building estimates ran high and the cost came in at \$6,400. The first regatta was held on July 1, 1890 with a formal opening of the clubhouse on July 18th, 1890. Refreshments were served and a band played at the Hotel St. Louis with 263 members of the yacht club in attendance.

There is documentation that the season of 1885 was not a successful one. The secretary of the St. Louis Hotel Corporation, Preston Gibson, Charles Gibson's son, cleared up some debt that was owed to The First National Bank of Minneapolis in the sum of \$2,261.58 for money that was borrowed to pay the operation and other necessary expenses of the corporation. The corporation also owed Charles Gibson \$968.44 for cash he advanced to the corporation. The business operated at a loss and had no means to pay debts and expenses. \$20,000 was now due on the principle, which the corporation was unable to pay. The Corporation was without means to continue the business. It was agreed that Charles Gibson would buy the hotel property and because he paid off the debt of the hotel, he became full owner of the Hotel St. Louis. With the decline of the hotel business, Gibson wasted no time on planning the future of the land that he had just purchased. In 1887, Gibson and his wife had all 108.55 acres platted in lots to be sold for summer homes.

To be continued in our next newsletter.....



Renewed Memberships

Thanks to all who sent in their renewals for DHS membership! If you have friends that are interested in participation in the DHS please refer them to any officer of the DHS and we will make sure they get an enrollment form.

We appreciate your patronage!



**Acknowledgements -
Current members
Thank You!**

John Ahern
Harry Allen
Tim & Pat Alt
Tom & Nancy Anderson
Steven & Leah Barnacle
Marty Baskerville
John & Nan Beard
Mary Lou Bennis
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Bryan & Barbara Sykora
Robert & Nancy Woodburn
Dr. Gary & Vicki Wyard
George & Cynthia Yared

**Take advantage of the books that are available for sale at
City Hall!**

Picturesque Deephaven	\$15.95
The Excelsior Amusement Park	\$11.95
Life in the Early Days of CottageWood	\$ 6.25
A Post Card History	\$25.00
Lake Minnetonka 1850 - 2000	\$32.00
Lake Minnetonka 1905	\$20.00
The 1893 Handbook & Souvenir	\$10.00
Minnetonka Yacht Club Centennial 1882 - 1982	\$15.95
Tales of the Steamboat Minnehaha 1906—2006	\$20.00
Minnesota Vacation Days	\$34.95

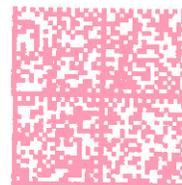
DHS Committee

Finance
Tom Anderson 952-474-3515
Publicity / Publ.
Bob Gerlicher 952-474-7248
Museum Development
Tim Alt 952-470-8889
Mark Read 952-474-4091
Newsletter
Bill Robinson 952-473-3130

Meetings held the last Saturday of each
month at 8.30 AM in the Deephaven City
Council Chambers.

All Members Welcome!

**DEEPAVEN HISTORICAL SOCIETY
20225 COTTAGEWOOD ROAD
DEEPAVEN, MN 55331**



017H15556410
HASLER \$0.440
08/04/2009
Mailed From 55331
US PO STAGE

Bryan & Barbara Sykora
19385 Azure Rd.
Deephaven, MN. 55391

