

Cedar Lake Historical Association – *Educator Introduction*

Overview of Cedar Lake, Indiana

Creation of Cedar Lake, ca. 14,000 BC

Cedar Lake is a naturally-formed, glacial lake. At about 14,000 BC, the Wisconsin Period ice sheet began to melt. The melt-waters carved an irregularly-shaped, clay-lined basin which would become Cedar Lake. This was part of a north-south channel that was dug by the melt-waters that reached down to the Kankakee River.

Indian Period ca. 12,000 BC-A.D. 1840

Various groups of aboriginal peoples first occupied the area around Cedar Lake with the Paleo-Indians about 12,000 BC. Large, stone spear points are their only artifacts discovered in the area. They hunted Ice Age mammals like mastodons. The Paleo-Indians remained until about 8,000 BC. The Archaic period followed until about 1,000 BC. The environment warmed and Archaic peoples began making a variety of tools from stone, bone, wood, antler and ivory. The Glacial Kame people of the Late Archaic period (ca. 1,500-800 BC) used hill-like features called kames to place their deceased in. Another Late Archaic group called Red Ocher have some graves in the vicinity also. They derive the name from the practice of placing powdered red ocher into graves of their people.

The Woodland Period began about 1,000 BC and lasted up until about AD 1,000. Woodland peoples began the practice of building burial mounds. Some of these mounds are in and around Cedar Lake. One burial mound was discovered at the east side of Cedar Lake in 1880. The Upper Mississippian began about AD 1000 and lasted until about AD 1650. In this area, these peoples continued a Woodland lifestyle with the introduction of Mississippian elements.

The French recorded the earliest historic groups in the area surrounding Cedar Lake as the Illinois and Miami in the mid-to-late seventeenth century. However, the area is best known for the Potawatomi, who were originally from land between Lake Superior and Lake Huron. They migrated south beginning in 1500 and arrived at the Michigan/Indiana border by 1600. There were various Potawatomi camps around Cedar Lake in the 1830s, including a summer village at the east side. The Potawatomi called the lake, “Mes-kwah-ock-bis,” meaning Lake of the Red Cedars, due to the native red cedar trees (*Juniperus virginiana*, eastern red cedar). Potawatomi are part of the Central Algonquian group. They lived in wigwams, hunted, gathered, and planted corn, beans and squash in their gardens. They prayed to “Gitchemanido,” or the “Great Spirit.” By about 1840, most of the historic Indian groups were gone.

Pioneer Period 1834-1870

As the historic Indians were removed, the white settlers began to arrive at Cedar Lake in the 1830s. The earliest land claims at Cedar Lake date to 1834. In that year, the Wilson, Wilkinson and Fancher party settled at Cedar Lake. Richard Fancher went on to Crown Point, where a lake in the Lake County Fairgrounds still bears his name. The following year, the Brown and Horner party arrived from Attica, Indiana (on the Wabash River) and settled on the west side of the lake. They built cabins and put up hay. Then, in 1836, they returned with their families.

In 1837, Lake County was organized. It was the same year that the Hervey Ball family arrived. Hervey purchased the Brown claim on the west side and built a log home there. In 1838, Hervey built the first school building in the county. In 1839, the Ball School was opened and Hervey’s wife, Jane, taught there. It was a private school that drew students as far as Porter and La Porte Counties. Classes included botany, Greek, Latin and art. Hervey along with other settlers organized the Cedar Lake Church and Sunday School and the Cedar Lake Lyceum. Jane formed the Belles Lettres Society. Their son, Timothy, became well-known as an educator and a Baptist minister. He is best known as the first historian of Lake County, Indiana.



Early Industry 1830s to 1880

In 1836, Dr. Calvin Lilley and David Reed established a mill on the east side of Cedar Lake, at the mouth of Cedar Creek. In the following year Adonijah Taylor joined as a partner of this grist and sawmill. In 1836, Wilson Harrison also had a sawmill on Cedar Creek downstream from the Taylors. Records show he charged \$15 to cut 1,000 board feet of oak. In 1839, the Lilley/Taylor mill was purchased by Benjamin McCarty and sent downstream to Lake Dalecarlia. In about 1860, the millstones were changed to grind wheat. Another mill on the east side was the Foley Mill. From 1854-1858, William, Israel and Obadiah Taylor established a steam-powered mill at the mouth of Cedar Creek. At about 1855, a Mr. Lepin set up a gristmill in Brunswick, which was later moved to Crete, Illinois. Around this same time, a Mr. Brockman set up his sawmill in that area. Probably closer to 1880, Emil Ruge set up a sawmill north of the Hanover Center/Cook area. Many of these early mills had undershot wheels.

Brick manufacturing was another early industry. In the area north of Cedar Point, Enoch McCarty burned the first brick kiln at the east side of Cedar Lake in 1840. In the 1850s, the Barman family began to produce bricks. They used the clay that the glaciers of the Wisconsin Period had deposited.

Another significant business in Cedar Lake was the Cedar Lake Handle Factory. It was established in 1870 at the northwest shore of the lake in the village known as Armour. Nicholas Geisen started this business and by about 1930, under the third owner, Nicholas Mager, it became the Cedar Lake Lumber Company. A portion of the factory sign hangs in the museum tool room.



“Golden Age” of Cedar Lake: The Monon Railroad and the Resort Boom, ca. 1880-1930

In 1877, John and Christopher Binyon established Binyon’s Resort on the east side of the lake. By 1881, the Monon Railroad (Louisville, New Albany and Chicago Railway) was completed, linking Cedar Lake to Chicago. Its tracks originally ran along the western shore of the lake. The Monon Railroad established its own park on the west side, drawing mainly working-class people from Chicago. From there, many hotels, restaurants and taverns sprouted up around the lake. At least 50 hotels served Cedar Lake throughout its history.

The Monon Railroad sparked the vast ice industry of Cedar Lake. Peter Howkinson of the National Ice Company of Chicago was one of the earliest harvesters in the late 1880s. He asked the railroad to have a spur placed at the southwest end of the lake. By 1890, Philip and Jonathan Armour established ice interests in the area known as Armour. They used ice for their meat-packing plant in Chicago so that their products remained fresh as they were shipped to various places in the country. Two other large harvesters were the Knickerbocker and Consumers’ Ice Companies.

Meanwhile, about 1900, the Lassen family of Chicago arrived in Cedar Lake. They owned a 20-acre complex known as Lassen’s Resort. At first, it only consisted of a dance pavilion built on piers over the lake water. By the end of World War I, Chris Lassen bought the Armour Bros. boarding house, had it gutted, and pulled it across the frozen lake during the winter of 1919-1920. Chris and his brothers, Harry and Tom, dismantled the Armour ice barn and used the lumber from it to build the lakefront section of what would become the Lassen Hotel, which opened in 1920. The hotel served its purpose until 1944.

Also about this same time, 16 year old William Scholl was making his way to Chicago from his father’s dairy farm in La Porte. He happened to stop at Armour, in Cedar Lake, where his grandfather, Peter Scholl, Sr., was residing at the time. Peter was working in the back of his son-in-law’s store, the Lauerman General Store, as a shoemaker. It was here where young Dr. Scholl would learn to make shoes, which he would apply to his future foot care business.

In June 1909, the first Cobe Cup Race took place, which ran through Crown Point, Cedar Lake and Lowell. This was the precursor to the Indianapolis 500, which began two years later. During the time of the race, Christopher Binyon of Binyon’s Resort, provided services for the Stoddard-Dayton cars and their drivers at his resort.

In 1914, there was an attempt to incorporate Cedar Lake as a town. The effort failed, mainly due to the issue of taxes.

Great Depression, 1930s

In 1929, the Great Depression began, and its toll on the nation was felt in Cedar Lake. The resort industry took a hard hit. Some survived, but had to decrease their fees to accommodate those who still patronized them. For example, Midway Ballroom began offering free days at least twice a week and Lassen's Resort offered tickets for five cents. All over Cedar Lake, citizens were hard on their luck. The township trustees provided minor relief by offering government aid: pork, beans and bread to those in need. Others began fishing from the lake to provide extra food. Some local farmers were able to get by and even gave surplus to others. Other common foods were cabbage, tomatoes, radishes, lettuce, turnips and potatoes. Because of the high unemployment rate, many were involved in the Works Progress Administration projects and the Civilian Conservation Corps.

Chicagoans sold their city homes and began to stay in Cedar Lake summer homes year-round. Before the Depression, the developers had restrictions on the cottages: two coats of paint on the outside and indoor plumbing was prohibited. Owners had to have chemical toilets. During the Depression, the developers waived these restrictions and owners began digging their own septic systems, sometimes using 55-gallon steel drums as a septic tank. Unfortunately, these drums could not contain all of the waste and rusted, resulting in the much of the sewage running into the lake.



In 1933 there was another attempt to incorporate Cedar Lake as a town, but it also failed because of the issue of taxes.

WWII and Recovery from the Great Depression, 1940-1950

By the 1940s, Cedar Lake began a recovery from the Great Depression, especially with the entry into World War II in 1941. The war helped spark the recovery by bringing the workforce back into the north Lake County steel industry. Although many of the men went off to war, the women would provide a great effort on the home front and in the steel mills. Victory gardens were grown to provide an ample supply of food at home, but also provided some for the soldiers overseas.

The businessmen of Cedar Lake organized all of the local efforts during the war, including civil defense. They also had a local businessmen's organization and a commercial club. Other notable events during this era:

- In 1942 the Cedar Lake Volunteer Fire Dept. was organized.
- About 1946, a third attempt to incorporate Cedar Lake failed.
- In 1949 Dr. Robert W. King came to Cedar Lake and began his medical practice.
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Town Incorporation of Cedar Lake and Sewer Work 1960-1990

Efforts to incorporate Cedar Lake as a town re-emerged in the 1960's. The "Father of Cedar Lake," Dr. Robert W. King, spearheaded the push with support and help from others including Charles Kouder, Sr. and Geraldine Kortokrax. In 1965 there was an election to decide incorporation. The outcome was overturned on a technicality in 1967 due to opposition by a group of citizens. On September 29, 1969, the Indiana State Legislature ruled that the Town of Cedar Lake was indeed officially incorporated in 1967. It has been said that the incorporation of the Town of Cedar Lake was the most expensive town incorporation in the nation. Once incorporation took place, a sewer system was established. In the early 1970's:

- The Police Department and Chamber of Commerce were organized.
- The postal service was improved when house numbers were introduced.

Revitalization and New Growth, 1990-Present

In the 1990s, the establishment of new development in Cedar Lake began with subdivisions such as Robin's Nest and Havenwood. In the 2000s, Winding Creek Estates, Monastery Woods, Lynnsway and Centennial subdivisions joined the community. The Sunset Harbor condominiums came in about this same time and prompted a rejuvenation of historic "Coleman's Corner" with a rebuild of Holiday Liquors and renovations to Lake Shore True Value. The west side of Town was revitalized from the addition of storefronts such as LaGaviota, CVS and Tom & Ed's Autobody, to the relocation and new construction of Cedar Lake Kitchen, BoBB Auto Group, Strack and Van Til's...and so many more!

In the 2010 U.S. Census, Cedar Lake’s population was at 11,560. With careful planning and re-development, the Town of Cedar will continue to grow and prosper. Bartlett Park, at the northeast side of the lake, has been expanded and re-named the Bartlett/Wahlberg Park to honor the contributions of the Wahlberg family to Cedar Lake through the years. Plans to restore the ecosystem of the lake are still underway with the Army Corps of Engineers, the Town of Cedar Lake, and Cedar Lake Enhancement Association leading the initiative.

About Cedar Lake Historical Association

In 1976, the Town of Cedar Lake purchased the Lake Region Christian Assembly grounds (formerly the Lassen Resort). With the inspiration of Beatrice Horner-Castrogiovanni, Cedar Lake’s first Town Historian, the Cedar Lake Historical Association leased the building to house diverse artifacts depicting the history of Cedar Lake. Museum renovation and restoration is continually undertaken by a tireless group of volunteers. The building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1981, and the Museum opened in spring 1986.



In 1991, the Association received the Albert B. Corey Award, given by the American Association for State and Local History. It is awarded to local history organizations in the United States and Canada that best display qualities of vigor, scholarship and imagination in their work.

The Association plans several special events each season. Find a current schedule online at www.cedarlakehistory.org

A more thorough, pictorial history of the Lassen Resort property where the museum resides can be obtained by contacting the Association at 219-390-9423 or clhamuseum@yahoo.com



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