



A HISTORY OF LAKE LENAPE.

With the lake level down as it has been this fall and winter of 1984-85, and with the tree stumps and stonerows dividing the land visible once again, it is not difficult to picture the snowy Sunday morning in 1921 which brought Mr. Joseph Ayres, Mr. Harvey Snook and Mr. William Hardin to the Potter Farm. They arrived in the storm to run necessary levels to determine whether a sizeable lake could be formed there. The results indicated that it was feasible. Snook and Hardin was an engineering firm in Newton with previous experience in such site work, having surveyed the land later developed by the Crane Company known as Lake Mohawk.

The three men formed a partnership in 1922 and began to purchase property surrounding the Potter Farm from various estates and families. This took a long two years. The dam was completed on December 23, 1926. Their original intention was to establish a lake and then sell the whole property at a reasonable profit. They did not plan to become developers. However, after holding the lake for some time, they had to begin selling lots to meet obligations incurred during the land purchasing and dam construction.

They built the log cabin on Route 517 now owned by the Greggs as an office and started in the real estate business. In the 1940's the real estate office was the log cabin presently owned by the Maxwells. The island was first purchased by Mr. Newman Drake, the President of Drakes Cakes, and Mr. Edward MacKay, Vice President of the National Biscuit Co., purchased land and built the log cabin on Elm Avenue now owned by the Millers. The Tukey family was one of the first to buy land and build a home on the lake. They still own that spot and are still active, interested members of our lake community.

The Lake Lenape Corporation was formed with the three stockholders being Ayers, Hardin and Snook. Mr. Hardin resided at the farm on Route 517 now owned by the Brauns and later moved to Potter Avenue. Mr. Snook built and resided in the log cabin across from the beach now owned by the Bastians. These same men organized and financed the Lenape Water Company as more homes were built. The development progressed slowly, the ultimate intention being that when substantial lands were sold, the lake and common property would become the responsibility of the property owners. Until that time the Corporation managed the lake, collecting a sum in the form of dues to offset the costs. These dues, as they do now, permitted owners and renters use of the facilities. Management then included all that it does now plus road maintenance and the collection of garbage. Mr. George Bradshaw was employed by the Corporation as a general caretaker and his son, Elmer, joined him in later years and still resides at the lake. A list of their duties is a tribute to their versatility and their willingness to work. *

Lenape was, at that time, a community largely composed of summer residents and seasonal renters. Development became static during World War II but an active Lake Lenape Community Club was formed in the 1940s. They made the improvements to the building that is now our clubhouse. They built the large meeting room we now use and the concrete addition to the rear. This was accomplished through donations made from members looking toward the future. In the late 1940s the Corporation approached the residents and offered the lake to them at a price that on today's market was a real bargain. The offer was rejected and the lake development rights were sold to Mr. and Mrs. William LaVigne in 1951. The Corporation then became Lake Lenape Properties and the LaVignes took over the management of the lake. During the years that followed, the lake gradually became a more permanent year round development. The roads were taken over by the township; the water company was sold; and due to good planning, the developer maintained the lovely character of our lake. We need to remember that there were no zoning ordinances at that time and someone else might have encouraged a hodge podge of small lots to be sold thus crowding the lakefront. Mr. LaVigne had the foresight to prevent this and keep our lake as we see it today in all its natural beauty, and absent of the monumental water problems that would have resulted from over development.

By the late 1950s some dissension occurred between the lake developers and some residents. This resulted in a court action and a judgment that outlined the rights and responsibilities of the developers of the lake, Class A Members of the Association, and the rights and responsibilities of the Property Owners, Class B Members of the Association. By 1964 the developers of the lake expressed their desire to divest themselves of the lake properties by holding an auction on July 29, 1964. No one apparently was interested. Our lake still remained a lovely spot; property was sold and new lots developed. As the 1960s

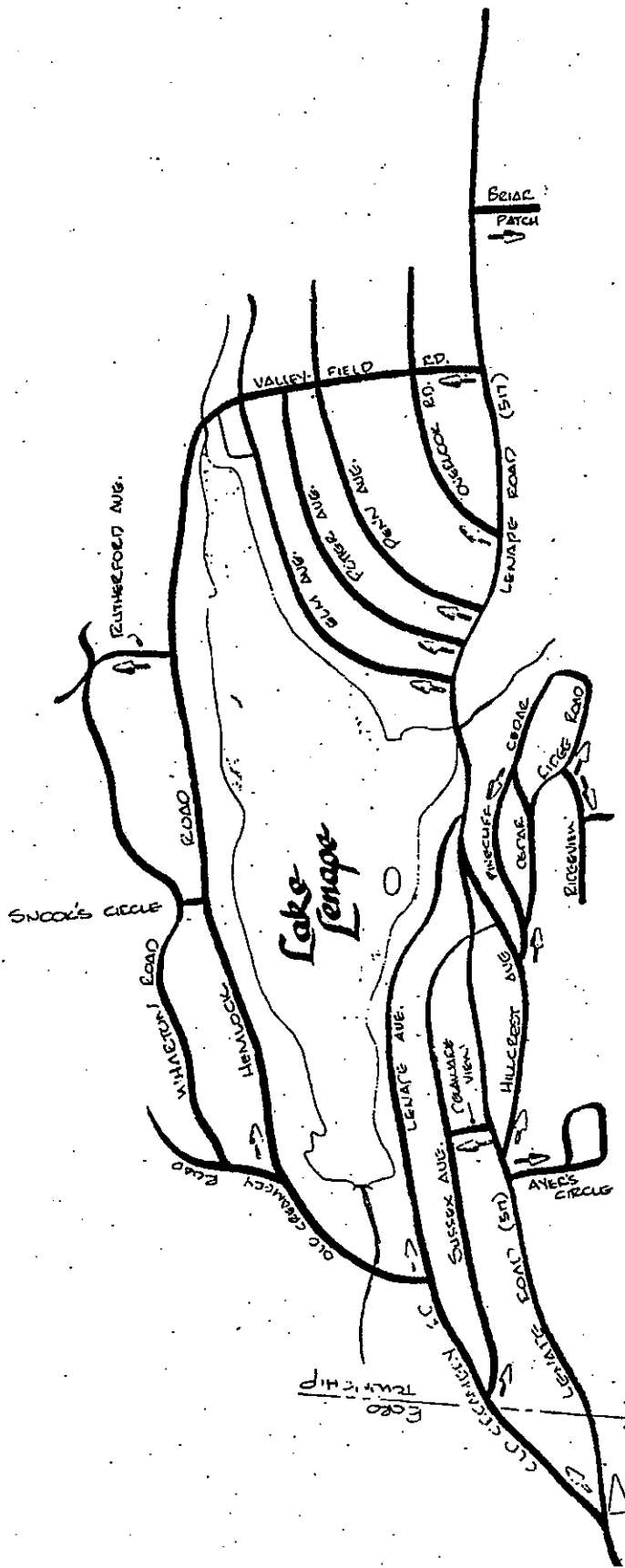
ended, more questions occurred as to the management of the lake. Class B Members were seeing less done while Class A Members tried unsuccessfully to raise the dues attributing the lessening in maintenance to the static dues level.

A committee of Class B Members was formed to seek a reasonable solution. This began in 1971 and negotiations started. Years passed with little movement but a small nucleus of residents was formed and those few faced a long, tedious struggle. Their goal was one that most observers thought was impossible: That being the ownership of the lake by the Lake Lenape Association. During the next six years there were a few highs and many lows. All weed control of the lake eventually ceased, the lawn at the beach was not mowed and lifeguard coverage one summer disappeared. The Advisory Committee rallied the residents and mowed the lawn at the beach and arranged treatment of the lake and finally sought legal council when the threat of possible bankruptcy and conveyance of the lake outside the community occurred. A donation fund was established to defray legal costs and eventually a class action suit was brought by the Lake Lenape Association Class B Members Advisory Committee against the lake developers, Class A Members of the Association, trading as Lake Lenape Properties. A settlement was reached out of court in October 1976 with the actual signing and transfer of ownership occurring in March 1977. The lake became ours without any financial outlay except fees for legal council.

The Lake Lenape B Members Advisory Committee chaired the first organization meeting of the new owners, the Lake Lenape Association, on Sunday, March 20, 1977. Committees were formed and nominations were accepted for the Board of Trustees. By April 24, 1977 the Board was elected: President Ed. Raynor, Vice President Mary Reasoner, Treasurer Peter Bitel, Secretary Carol Poyer with Mary Stuart, Doug Leupen, Francis S. Sheehan, Mary Bowman, Paul Werkmeister, Robert Pfister and James Sinatra making up the remainder. By Laws and Rules and Regulations were written and accepted by the membership, a legal debt of \$8000 was assumed and repaid in two years, the challenge of rebuilding the membership in the Association which had decreased over the long haul was begun and the day to day management of the lake and properties took form. Fortunately, in spite of vastly different backgrounds, ages, personalities and years of residency these board members worked toward a common constructive objective, that being the improvement of Lake Lenape for all residents. Each successive board has accepted that same challenge and in general there has been continued forward movement. Occasionally an error occurs, but we have the knowledge and the maturity to learn from that and to accept and to move on toward tomorrow. There is a large and valuable investment here that belongs to each member family equally. When you are a member of the Association, you own the lake and the common property and share the responsibility of ownership.

Our past provides us the example of a people with vision and courage. We have been extremely fortunate in finding members who are movers and doers. And, when some like Larry Fitzgerald, Doug Leupen, Mary Bowman and Frank Sheehan have left us, someone else has stepped forward to pick up the cause. We have Shirley Russo who took on an enormous task regarding membership and then stepped aside only to pick it up again when asked. There are many others out there whose continued quiet support has never failed. It seems that that is how it has always been with our lake and we can see this continuing in our future. We need your advice, we need you to listen to our plans to improve our lake and we need you to vote.

This is your lake to keep, to improve and to pass along to our next generation. They too will then be able to enjoy the clean water, the good fishing, the colorful sails that skim the summer waters, their own children playing in the sands and those lovely sunsets that enchant us as they have for all these days since that snowy Sunday in 1921 when all this was made possible.



Lake Lenape
 Street Map
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 no scale by W. Ransower