Shaping Our Community

“A book like no other”

Enjoy photos you’ve never seen and stories you’ve never heard.
Discover the People and Events that Shaped Deephaven, Excelsior, Greenwood, Shorewood & Tonka Bay
This early fall photo provides a glimpse of the Congregational Church Steeple and pleasure boats moored at the Excelsior Bay Gables on Excelsior Bay. The first Congregational Church was built in 1871 and demolished in 1970 and the steeple you see belongs to the new church built on the same site. The Gables were built in 1981 on the site of the original Excelsior Amusement Park.

This photo represents the warmth and beauty of Excelsior and all of the Communities that surround the magical Lake Minnetonka on its South West Shores.
In Memory of:

James Roger Olds. (May 17, 1939 – February 9, 2013) Jim, Jimmy, “Tiger” or Mr. Olds. No matter how you addressed him, he would be the same gentle man with a “bitingly,” quick wit and wonderful, dry sense of humor. He was an intelligent man who quietly went about his business and got things done. My guess is that at this very moment, he’s sailing his X boat away into some misty lake in heaven because he doesn’t want the attention this dedication may bring him. His passing was much too soon but it was, in a sense, monumental as it generated the momentum needed to begin the writing of this book for the South Shore Communities it represents.

Debra Shanet (Lindert) Hart “Debbie.” (1956 – April 9, 2013) Debbie Hart, owner of Artworks, might have been a resident of Delano, but she was also a longtime Excelsior business owner and community member. Hart began Artworks in Excelsior in 1978 and has been dedicated to the community ever since. Debbie established the Art on the Lake art show with her brother in 1970. She was like a quiet summer rain. You never noticed it coming, but once it was finished, it left you a beautiful, sunny day for everyone to enjoy. An accident took her from this community sooner than anyone wanted but it brought attention to a life story that needs to be known and remembered.

These two individuals represent all the wonderful things that these communities are all about. Their lives, like the lives of so many others, have impacted the personality, character and quality of life in this South Lake Area.

Their passing, abruptly woke us up, at a time when we could still remember the stories that need to be shared with our present population.

Hopefully this Legacy will grow from here and continue to manifest itself to future generations of Deephaven, Excelsior, Greenwood, Shorewood and Tonka Bay.

The Amazing History of Our Community
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Summary:
This book was authored by the Excelsior - Lake Minnetonka Chamber of Commerce and The Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society and written by the community at large. This includes the people and businesses from Deephaven, Excelsior, Greenwood, Shorewood & Tonka Bay as well as many who have moved to other parts of the country. Thank you to everyone.

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The Amazing History of Our Community
Dedication

This book is dedicated to you.

You are very much like many of the people this book is about. People were born here or moved here from some distant place. Things that happened to you, or that you have done, they did too.

Like them, you were a kid at one time with hopes and dreams. You did silly things and made mistakes. You were adventuresome, swam in the lake, made a lot of friends and lost your dad’s tools or broke your mom’s favorite bowl.

You kissed someone, went to a dance, you finished school and went to work.

You went sailing under the stars and made a name for yourself, married your sweetheart and raised a family.

You started a business in this community or became involved in some way. You helped when you could, gave of your time, donated clothes, food or money.

You love this community for its charm, its people, the lake and its past. It’s a place you hold dear and want to share with your children so it will be as special for them as it has been for you.

Like the people and the events in the book, you have left your mark. You’ve made a difference. You are important to this place and so are the things you did.

Some day you may be mentioned in a future edition of this book because you, like those that came before you, helped in your own way that gave this community its strength, personality and the assurance that it will continue to thrive as it has for over 160 years.

The Amazing History of Our Community
The Story

The history of our Lake Minnetonka Communities, the people, businesses, successes, failures and stories—whether funny, curious or amazing.

“The farther back we can look, the farther forward we are likely to see.”

– Winston Churchill

You will discover what the people were made of. Where they were born, what they did as kids, how and why they started the businesses that they did and what likely made it successful or why it failed.

But, you’ll also discover just how much like you and me they all were. What they were frightened of. What made them laugh. The pranks they pulled and silly things they did.

Whom did they date, or marry, whom did they love and what were their hobbies, what did they eat and where did they shop.

This book is like visiting with your neighbor or your mom or aunt Jenny and uncle Jack, or sitting having coffee with your dad or your brother-in-law and hearing all the stories and jokes no one has ever heard before.

And, because it’s created and written by so many people, there is no one agenda or viewpoint to color the information that often dilutes the flavor of the stories and destroys the fabric from which the tales are made.

To our knowledge, there has never been a book written in this fashion before.

The above photo, circa 1920s. 35 Water Street. It happens to be the very corner where the Chamber of Commerce offices moved to in 2013.

The building to the right of the Corner Drug Store was home to the Minnetonka State Bank. The building is still there and once again is owned and operated as a bank. As of 2015 it is the Excelsior office of Beacon Bank. It is the North East corner of Water Street and Second street in downtown Excelsior.

This photo is looking north east. Across Second Street to the south and along the west side of Water Street, L.F. Sampson owned about half the city block in 1880. On the east side of Water Street, Eliza Thompson owned a similar amount of property.
Table of Contents

Thank you to our Sponsors

Our Community Organizations

Chapter I The Five Cities of the South Lake Area

Chapter II What Our Legacy Is Built Upon
  • Lake Minnetonka
  • Discovering The Lake
  • The Excelsior Pioneer Association

Chapter III Landmarks, Lakes, Bays of Lake Minnetonka, Streets, Cities and Businesses
  • What Is The Origin Of The Names?

Chapter IV The Years Up To The Early 1900s
  • The People Of The First 50 Years
  • The Boats, Streetcars and Historical Events
  • What Else Was Happening In The Middle 1800s?
  • Churches, Schools, Boats and Businesses
  • Annual Community Events and Traditions

Chapter V Early 1900s Through The Middle 1900s
  • The People Of The Second 50 Years
  • The Churches, Schools, Boats, Businesses and Events
  • What Else Was Happening During Our “Heydays?”
  • Annual Community Events and Traditions
  • Personal Relections On The Times

Chapter VI Early 1940s and 1950s To The Present
  • The People Of The Last 70 Years
  • The Lake and The Cities
  • The Churches, Schools, Businesses and Events
  • Music, Segregation, Assassinations, Man On The Moon
  • Entertainment
  • Annual Community Events and Traditions
  • Personal Reflections On The Times

Chapter VII The History of Water Skiing In and Around Lake Minnetonka

Chapter VIII Our Community Today – 2015
  • List of Benefactors & Collaborators
  • Production Collaboration

The Amazing History of Our Community
Each of the five cities that make up the South Lake Community, have fascinating histories of their own. The Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Chamber of Commerce, The Excelsior- Lake Minnetonka Historical Society, Ucahoot and everyone participating in the creation and production of The Living Legacy Project, wish to thank all the sponsors who made a commitment to assuring that this tribute to our Exciting and Colorful past became a reality. It is our past that has helped determine who and what we are today. Being a part of any community requires that you have a love for and a commitment to whatever is necessary for that community to thrive.

Founding Sponsors

At TCF, our employees work hard to demonstrate their dedication to serve our customers. TCF and its employees are also dedicated to doing their part to make a difference in the community with their generous contributions of monetary and volunteer support to charitable organizations. We are committed to building a financially stronger community through our financial education programs. Continued investment in our customers and employees helps to improve the quality of life in the communities we serve.

It is an honor to participate in recognizing courageous individuals from the past that contributed to making a difference in their community.

Ambassador Sponsors – Business:

Excelsior Title was founded February 1st, 2000 by Beverly Holtze. (Basically she needed her own company because she wanted to bring her Golden Retriever to work.) Beverly grew up in this community and truly enjoys working in her hometown. She cares a great deal for the people and loves working with and getting to know them. Whether they’re buying, selling or simply have questions, Beverly is anxious and ready to help.

Pezigns is a local Excelsior business owned and managed by Andrew Lopez. It is a full scale, graphic design studio, creating designs for print, web, brand Identity or even social media.

State Farm Excelsior

The goal for my business is to be an upstanding member of the Excelsior/Lake Minnetonka community. I want to give back what the area has given to me. Hopefully, I can leave my mark like so many before me have already done.

Jake O’Connor’s gastro pub has brought a little piece of Ireland to Excelsior. Whether you’re in the mood for a great meal or the perfect pint of Guinness, we promise you a great experience. Young and old alike feel as this is their home away from home; Please consider yourself invited.

Excelsior Animal Hospital has been your trusted partner in veterinary care in the South Lake Minnetonka area since 1955. We proudly provide “Warm Hearts for Cold Noses” and quality medical care for your family pets. Come join our family…we’re happy to see you!

Located in the heart of Excelsior, MN- Excelsior Brewing Company proudly supports and represents lake life right. You can find us locally on tap and shelves. Our taproom is open weekly and often features live music and always a delicious cold beer!

Maximize your Lake Minnetonka fun at the Harbor, featuring 93 boat slips to accommodate boats 18-50 feet. Since 2000, the facility offers a waterfront clubhouse as well as boating services with our affiliate Bayside Marine. The Harbor also features office leases with views of beautiful Lake Minnetonka. Visit our website to see why we should be your Lake Minnetonka Marina.

Since 1985, we have provided the enchantment behind thousands of events on Lake Minnetonka... from intimate weddings to lavish corporate parties. We offer Daily Public Cruise Tours and Private Charters while accommodating groups from 10-150!

Located in Excelsior, MN, Bean’s Greenwood Marina is the only marina on Lake Minnetonka to provide covered slips. St. Alban’s Bay. 21945 Minnetonka Boulevard, Excelsior. 952-474-7942

We are a family owned and operating facility of over 40 years, and the only marina on Lake Minnetonka to provide covered slips. St. Alban’s Bay, 21945 Minnetonka Boulevard, Excelsior.   952-474-7942

A friendly, warm environment serving appetizers, pizza, subs, sandwiches, pasta, salads, desserts and we have a kid’s menu. We also provide catering for any occasion.

Located in the heart of Excelsior, MN- Excelsior Brewing Company proudly supports and represents lake life right. You can find us locally on tap and shelves. Our taproom is open weekly and often features live music and always a delicious cold beer!
Beacon Bank was founded in 1990 by Bob Weiss, Dave Peterka and Dean Friesen. It is a community-focused business bank with the finances, know-how and technology to accomplish any customer goal. Beacon’s size—not too big, not too small—and commitment to understanding its customers gives it a unique ability to make goals realities through close-to-home decisions and relentless resourcefulness.

Niccum Docks is Lake Minnetonka’s locally owned and operated manufacturing and service provider for all your lakeshore needs. The Niccum Docks team has provided unrivaled service to our customers since 1969. Contact us for a quote on your next project for fun in the sun. www.niccumdocks.com Owners Bret Niccum & Tony Schmidt

Since 1990, Bayside Marine Service offers premier boat repair and inside storage services. Being a full-service provider, we offer the resources needed to maximize boating fun. The Marina is conveniently located on Excelsior Bay, in the beautiful communities of Greenwood and Excelsior. We value our customers and ensure our customers are our Number 1 priority!

Dunn Bros Coffee of Excelsior, 11 Water Street—a stone’s throw from Lake Minnetonka. It was founded in 2003 as one of the few franchises located in the historic district, chosen because it is a local brand that espouses freshness, as evidenced by roasting coffee beans in the store everyday. It has since become what many call the “nerve center” of Excelsior, and has been owned by Joe Schwartz since 2010.

Since 1978, Gary has been involved in home building, additions and remodeling. Now semi-retired, he still enjoys remodeling for former customers and referrals.

The Sitting Room is a full service interior design studio and retail boutique. We work closely with our clients, taking the time to get to know them and their lifestyle so each project is truly meaningful and one of a kind—designed for the way our clients live. 380 Second Street. 952-473-4440

Southwest Eye Care strives to make your eye care experience exceptional. We offer comprehensive care to all ages in Minnetonka and surrounding communities we call home. We have offices in Chaska, Norwood Young America, Glencoe, and Minnetonka.
**Founding Sponsors – Residents:**

**Gray, John and Jan**  
John Gray has lived in Greenwood and Shorewood all his life. He and his wife, Jan, raised their three children here. The Grays have been and remain active in the community through volunteer activities such as the Excelsior Rotary, Trinity Episcopal Church, the local schools and the SouthShore Center to mention a few.

**Ruehl, Nick and Kathy**  
Nick & Kathy have enjoyed the city of Excelsior, the lake and the community for over 50 years. Kathy is a flight attendant with Delta Airlines and Nick is a leadership and strategy Consultant with a 40+ year career in architecture. They have raised 2 children, Brianna and Dan, and Nick serves the community in many ways through his involvement in church, Rotary, and other organizations. Nick was a 4-term Mayor of the City of Excelsior, serving from 2005 - 2012.

**Tollefson, Adam, Stephanie, Luke and Sandler**  
Adam was born in Excelsior in 1969. He and his wife Stephanie have remained residents of the area and are raising twin boys, Luke and Sandler. Adam and the boys have all gone through the Minnetonka School System. Adam was the Chamber President for two years in 0000 and 0000. The family remains involved in the community and the boys remain active in sports and academics.

**Tollefson, Alan and Martha**  
Alan was born and raised in the Minnewashta area. Martha was born in Excelsior. Her father Anson Mase owned the dredging company, was mayor in 1960 and 1961. Martha’s Great Grandfather was Captain John R. Jonson. Al & Martha have raised four sons and this community is their home to this day.
Tollefson, Andrew, Deborah, Regan, Tori, Jordan and Susie

Andrew was born in Excelsior in 1970. He went to school at Excelsior, Minnewashta, Minnetonka Middle School East and graduated from Minnetonka High School. He and his wife Deb are raising their children in the Chanhassen area, but remain staunch enthusiasts of the South Lake Minnetonka area.

Lord, Priscilla

Priscilla is the daughter of Miles and Maxine Lord from Christmas Lake located in Excelsior. She graduated from Minnetonka High School and then graduated from the University of Minnesota. The summer after her third year in college, Priscilla worked for Senator Hubert Humphrey in Washington D.C. as an intern. After graduation, Priscilla worked as an Area Director for Young Life in Washington D.C., and two years later she taught third grade, and special education. After the birth of her third child, she attended Hamline University School of Law and went on to open her own practice in 1993 litigating in Personal Injury and Family Law. Her teenaged son was killed by a drunk driver in 1989. She lobbied for MADD at the state legislature to pass more restrictive bills against drunk driving. Priscilla continues to practice law with the passion for justice and fairness she learned from her father who was a lawyer and a federal judge.

McGlasson, Ross and Martie

As of 2014, Ross & Martie live in Tonka Bay on Lake Minnetonka. They have raised three children over the years. Ross devotes a great deal of time to the community while Martie, who was Person of The Year in 2014, volunteers for the Chamber of Commerce and has been influential in numerous city events.
McFarland, Joyce and Dick
Joyce Howard McFarland and husband, Richard, have lived in the area since 1970. Raising their four children, they purchased Joyce’s family homestead in 1970 when her father died. Their children attended the Excelsior elementary and middle school, then the high school. Both Dick and Joyce are heavily involved in community efforts both locally but also in Minneapolis. Dick served in many capacities with Junior Achievement, United Way, and several key foundation responsibilities.

Uphoff, Lucy (Savage)
Lucy Uphoff (Savage) is a great granddaughter of Marion Willis Savage, the last owner of the great pacer, Dan Patch (1896 – 1916). She and her four sisters and one brother grew up in Deephaven on Robinsons Bay. She is now an artist whose lake paintings can be found at Navarre Gallery, and when she is not traveling, which she often does, lives in an 1880s home in Excelsior, which is on the historic record, and loves to entertain anyone who loves to talk about Excelsior and its history. She also wrote a book, illustrated by her water colors, Minnetonka’s Hope which you can buy by contacting her or going on Blurb.com as of 2015.

Naegele, Bob and Ellis
Bob and Ellis grew up in Birch Bluff and Murray Hill respectively. They were baptized at Trinity Episcopal Church in Excelsior and were childhood sweethearts. They married, stayed in Shorewood and raised four children. They are both second generation residents and though they have retired elsewhere, they still come back often and call Excelsior their home.

Gibney, Christopher, Jackie, Tommy, Grace and Matthew
The Gibney family lives in Shorewood. The children are thoroughly enjoying the Minnetonka Schools. The family is very involved socially and enjoys many events and sports activities in their community. They’ve found the lake area to be rich in history and a healthy, positive place to raise their family.

Anonymous – Dedicated to Jim Olds
One donor/sponsor stated that he wished to remain anonymous but more importantly, he wanted the donation to be given in the name of James Roger Olds (1939 – 2013). He wanted to be assured that this book will be dedicated to Jim, “Jimmy” Olds, a good friend and considerately quiet but generous member of the community of Excelsior. This book is, in fact, dedicated to Jim. It was his life and his death on February 9, 2013 that prompted certain people to realize that it was necessary to create a history book about the people who, in this South Lake area, worked hard, enjoyed the lake so much and gave so much to ensure that all of us in the future would be able to enjoy what they did.
Honorary Sponsors – Residents and Businesses:

Draayer, Dr. Donald – Excelsior, MN
Rosati, Mary (Colby) – Excelsior, MN
Darke, John – Punta Gorda, FL
Ahlstrom, Sandra (Beehrle) - Excelsior, MN
Seamans, Leslie (Hughes) - Excelsior, MN

Tonka Bay – The Peter M. Gideon home in Shorewood.

Gideon, Peter Miller (1820-1899) was a farmer in Tonka Bay. He was responsible for breeding apples that could withstand Minnesota’s climate. Gideon’s farmhouse, now within the boundaries of Shorewood, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. There is a memorial plaque near County Road 19 in Manitou on the property where this house, though remodeled, still stands.

Gideon purchased 160 acres of land in Tonka Bay for his orchards.
Our Communities and Their Organizations

Our community, not unlike many others, is made up of organizations that have contributed greatly to our churches, businesses and residents. Adults and children alike. It is our responsibility as custodians of this great community, to make sure that these wonderful organization are recognized for all that they do.

Chapter I
The Five Cities of the South Lake Area

Rotary Club of Excelsior
The oldest of two Rotary Clubs in Excelsior. As of 2014, they met on Tuesdays at 12:00 p.m. at BayView Event Center. 687 Excelsior Boulevard.

Rotary Club of Lake Minnetonka-Excelsior
The second of two Rotary clubs in Excelsior. As of 2014, they met at 7:00 a.m. at Maynard’s Restaurant on the lake. 685 Excelsior, Boulevard.

Rotary
Rotary is 1.2 million neighbors, friends, and community leaders who come together to create positive, lasting change in our communities and around the world.

We provide help abroad and in our own local area. We have provided funds for the purpose of eradicating polio throughout the world. We have assisted programs through medical and technical support. We sponsor exchange students going to and coming from other countries by providing funding and families to live with.

Locally we help food shelf programs, teen clubs, teachers in local schools, clothing and furniture for those in need and many other programs through such things as auctions and fund raising golf tournaments.

American Legion Post 259 (The Clarence G. Clofer Post)
Clarence G. Clofer graduated from Excelsior High School in 1914. He was a chief machinist’s mate on a submarine and killed in an explosion at Key West in 1919. Clarence was the first member of this community to lose his life in World War I.

The American Legion is the primary point of contact for veterans and their families who seek assistance with local, state and federal veterans benefits. The Legion collaborates with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs and Veterans Service Organizations in securing benefits for veterans. Disseminating information on veterans benefits. Assisting in the application for State and Federal benefits. Facilitating the referral process to appropriate outside agencies and we help obtain relevant military records. 24450 Smithtown Road · Excelsior, Minnesota 55331.

Independent Order of Odd Fellows
In 18th century England, it was odd to find people organized for the purpose of giving aid to those in need and of pursuing projects for the benefit of all mankind. Those who belonged to such an organization were called “Odd Fellows.” Odd Fellowship became the first fraternity in the US to include both men and women. 252 Water Street, Excelsior, Minnesota 55331.

Independent Order of Odd Fellows

Knights of Columbus
The secondary name for the Knights of Columbus in Excelsior is the Father Thomas Cushen Council 5260. The purpose of Knights of Columbus was to unite men of Catholic faith and to provide for the families of deceased members. The Knights of Columbus was born on February 6, 1882, when the first members chose Columbus as their patron. The Vatican first acknowledged the Knights in 1895. Then as now, the Knights are One Christian Family providing assistance regularly to a wide variety of needy people. 600 Mill St, Excelsior, Minnesota 55331-3272.

Excelsior – Lake Minnetonka Historical Society
Founded in 1972, the Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society serves the communities of Deephaven, Excelsior, Greenwood, Shorewood, and Tonka Bay. The Society’s museum and archives are free and open to the public, and hold the largest collection of historic artifacts and documents in the area.

In the development of this book, we recognize the value of this historical society and have established a channel of funds to assist in the maintenance of the ever important historical archives of this great community. 305 Water Street, Excelsior, Minnesota 55331.

Excelsior – Lake Minnetonka Chamber of Commerce
The Chamber is made up of five communities in this south lake Minnetonka area. Deephaven, Excelsior, Greenwood, Shorewood and Tonka Bay. 35 Water Street, Excelsior, Minnesota 55331.

Deephaven Historical Society
Created in 2000, today the society is centered on organizing and implementing quarterly historical events ranging from field trips to the Historical Center in St. Paul, MN to inviting area historians to give lectures on the historic paddle boats of Deephaven. The society also publishes a quarterly newsletter with updates on their events. 20225 Cottagewood Road, Deephaven, Minnesota 55331.

The Amazing History of Our Community
Each of the five cities that make up this South Lake Community have fascinating histories of their own.

**Deephaven:**
The Post office was first called Northome. Named by Charles S. Gibson, 1877 who built a home and called it “Northome” as it was his north home. He was from St. Louis, Missouri and lived and had his law offices there.

Hazen J. Burton lived on Carson’s Bay. Mrs. Burton named the Minneapolis and St. Louis Railroad station at the foot of their hill Deephaven after the title of a book by her favorite New England author, Sarah Orne Jewett. Deephaven is the site of the Haralson Brothers nursery where the Haralson Apple was developed.

Mahala Dutton-Douglas (1864 –1945), survivor of the Titanic disaster as a first class passenger, lived in Deephaven. Walter Donald Douglas and his wife Mahala Dutton-Douglas built a twenty-seven room estate in 1910 in the location of the former Hotel Saint Louis. Walter Donald Douglas perished in 1912 in the Titanic disaster but Mahala Dutton-Douglas and her French maid Berthe Leroy were survivors. The Douglas family founded the Quaker Oats Company, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa

**Excelsior:**
The Excelsior Pioneer Association. Formed in New York City on November 12, 1852, it was platted in 1855 and organized in 1858. The name Excelsior may come from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s poem “Excelsior,” meaning “Ever Upward.” Excelsior was incorporated June 14, 1878. It is the oldest community on the lake.

Charles Galpin was the first Postmaster. His brother George built the first Hotel in 1854. Back in the heyday of Lake Minnetonka (1880 - 1890s) there were over 90 steamboats and 60 hotels along its 125-mile shoreline.

Excelsior’s Water Street has been the home of the Roaring Twenties, Apple Days, Crazy Days, Girls Night out, All Class Reunions for Minnetonka High School and as of 2013, The Farmer’s Market.
Greenwood:

Greenwood was part of Excelsior until 1956. Greenwood is made up of .36 square miles of land and .25 square miles of water. Today, 2014, a regional trail runs through Greenwood for bikers and hikers alike. Greenwood is also home to the famous Old Log Theater that began in 1940.

Shorewood:

Shorewood was also part of Excelsior until 1956. It is the largest of all the communities and like the other four, is part of the Minnetonka School District. It meanders through thirteen square miles of beautiful shorelines and landscapes and is home to over seven thousand residents. It also includes a number of islands as it reaches beyond the mainland of Woodside and Howard’s Point to include part of Enchanted Island, Shady Island and Spray Island.

Schools, restaurants, fitness centers, garden centers, banks and gas stations. Grocery stores, yacht clubs, liquor stores, big box and neighborhood coffee shops welcome anyone and everyone with warm greetings and a fun and friendly atmosphere. You’ll feel at home just about anywhere.

Tonka Bay:

Tonka Bay was incorporated in 1901. The name is abbreviated from the word Minnetonka. In 1879 on Echo Bay, the first of Minnetonka’s great hotels was built. The Lake Park Hotel, later named the Tonka Bay Hotel, contained 200 rooms. A railroad from Minneapolis brought visitors to the hotel for summer visits.

The village was, and still is, an assortment of neighborhoods widely varied in aspect and marketable real estate value, and contained several large estates at the turn of the century. Clay Cliffe, located across from City Hall, was built in 1890 and consisted of 28 acres. “Old Orchard,” another historic home, was built about 1887 by John F. Wilcox, the first mayor of Tonka Bay.

Once the heyday of steam boating died and the tourists left, a more stable population of residents began to fill the village. In 1909, the school building was constructed. Today (2015) that building is the City Hall.
Deephaven, Excelsior, Greenwood, Shorewood and Tonka Bay are the five cities that are the Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Area Chamber of Commerce.

Each of these five communities was described over the last few pages. Together they are represented by the South Lake Minnetonka Area covering a total of 13 square miles.

The Fire Department, located in Shorewood, serves the five communities of the South Lake Minnetonka area.

Fire Protection Services are contracted with the Mound Fire Department for all Island residents.

The South Lake Minnetonka Police Department serves the communities of Excelsior, Greenwood, Shorewood and Tonka Bay.

The Deephaven Police Department serves Deephaven, Cottagewood and Woodland.

The Idea of the Excelsior Volunteer Fire Company was discussed amongst residents as early as 1886. Numerous times the idea was mentioned and finally in 1893, a Hook and Ladder Truck and equipment was purchased and employed.
Lake Minnetonka – once called Peninsula Lake

This area has attracted men, women and children of courage, character and an entrepreneurial spirit. They all share the common bond of loving these communities and Lake Minnetonka.

Its Beginning. 11,000 years ago, large blocks of ice were left in the wake of the retreating glacier. These blocks of ice which were buried in soil and rock. Some eventually melted to form Lake Minnetonka.

Dakota (Dahkotah) Sioux, Cheyenne, Iowas and Ojibwa people all occupied the area around Lake Minnetonka at some point. The woodland areas surrounding the lake were used as burial grounds and were highly revered as a place of great spiritual importance.

The first known people of European descent to have visited the Lake were two seventeen-year-old boys named Joe Brown and Will Snelling, who canoed up Minnehaha Creek from Fort St. Anthony (later renamed Fort Snelling) in 1822. For the following three decades, few others visited the Lake or even knew it existed.

Lake Minnetonka was given its name “officially” by Minnesota’s territorial governor, Alexander Ramsey, in 1852. He had been informed that American Indians in the area used a phrase sounding like Minn-ni-tanka, meaning “Big Water,” to refer to the Lake. That same year, the first settlements were established along its shores and in 1853 the first hotel was constructed.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote an epic poem, The Song of Hiawatha, in 1855, which referred to Minnesota and landmarks of the area such as Minnehaha Falls.

In the poem, though Nokomis warns her daughter Wenonah that the West Wind may seduce her, Wenonah ignores her and becomes pregnant and bears Hiawatha. When Hiawatha grows up he meets a beautiful maiden named Minnehah and marries her.

Another version of the story has it that Hiawatha was a skilled Indian hunter and a leader of the Iroquois Nation though he was considered a member of the Mohawk Tribe. He had a daughter Minnehah (Laughing Water) who was a very beautiful maiden.

No matter what, Longfellow’s poem gained the area national and international interest.

The names Wenonah, Minnehaha, Nokomis and Hiawatha all impacted the area.

1861 saw the introduction of steamboats on Lake Minnetonka, the first of which being the Governor Ramsey, a small side-wheel steamer named in honor of the man who gave the Lake its name. Following the Civil War, a rail line operated by the St. Paul & Pacific Co. was extended to the area in 1867, running through the town of Wayzata.

Statistics. Lake Minnetonka is a 14,528-acre lake in the state of Minnesota. It is located west-southwest of the Twin Cities of Minneapolis/Saint Paul. The lake is irregularly shaped with numerous bays, peninsulas, and islands that form approximately 125 miles of shoreline. The lake is located almost entirely within Hennepin County; however, its southernmost extension, Smithtown Bay, reaches into the City of Victoria, which lies within northeastern Carver County. Lake Minnetonka is divided into two separate sections, the Upper Lake and Lower Lake (which refer to the flow of water from west to east, not geographical location).

The Legacy of the Native American. From early inns and boarding houses to the magnificent eight-hundred-room Hotel Lafayette, during the last decades of the nineteenth century, Lake Minnetonka was transformed into one of the resort capitals of America. In the 1870s and 1880s, tourists from across the nation came to stay at the resort hotels that prospered on the shores of one of Minnesota’s most famous lakes.

Long before it became a nationally-recognized vacation destination and when Lake Minnetonka was home to the Mdewakanton Dakota, the Dakota language gave the lake its name, meaning “big water.” The lush, wooded area was an excellent hunting and fishing ground. In 1851, however, Lake Minnetonka and the woods surrounding it were ceded to the United States as a part of the Treaty of Traverse des Sioux.

Euro-American Immigration. Following the treaty, Euro-American immigration proceeded rapidly. The communities of Wayzata and Excelsior were founded in the 1850s. Around 1853, James and Susan Shaver built the first inn at Minnetonka Mills. The small business catered to mill workers and was less luxurious than the hotels that would be built in the decades to come. Over the next twenty years, small inns and hotels established themselves along the shore of Lake Minnetonka. These early hotels offered their guests a relaxing atmosphere in the wilderness.

The hotel industry at Lake Minnetonka grew dramatically in the years following the Civil War. As railroads were built, it became easier to travel to the growing hotels.

By 1867, several branch lines traveled to the lake from Minneapolis. In summer, a train ran to Wayzata twice a day along with a network of steamboats.

Hotels like the Excelsior House and Minnetonka House served as summer homes for thousands. Minneapolis newspapers published lists of the rich and famous who were guests at the hotels. The area was particularly popular among wealthy Southerners who would leave the heat of Missouri or Louisiana to spend the entire summer in Minnesota.
Railroads and steamboats linked the lakeshore communities of Lake Minnetonka. They also spurred the building of three of the largest and most luxurious Minnetonka resort hotels. All were designed by famous Minnesota architect Leroy Buffington. St. Louis attorney Charles Gibson set out to build a large hotel to cater to his fellow southerners who were eager to escape the hot summer. His Hotel St. Louis opened in Deephaven in 1879.

The largest of the Minnetonka resort hotels was the Hotel Lafayette. Built by James J. Hill to capitalize on the increase in railroad traffic, the hotel was situated on a ridge facing two bays. This arrangement gave each of its eight hundred guest rooms a lake view.

The Hotel Lafayette opened for its first season on July 2, 1882. It quickly became the center of Lake Minnetonka’s summer social life. Visitors to the luxurious Lafayette included many celebrities as well as two presidents, Chester A. Arthur and Ulysses S. Grant.

Visitors to Lake Minnetonka took advantage of its accessible woodland setting. Though they could enjoy their rustic surroundings, their hotels boasted the latest modern conveniences, including electric lights, call bells, and plumbing. The breezy lakeside hotels provided a welcome alternative to crowded nineteenth-century cities.

The shore of Lake Minnetonka was increasingly dominated by small cottages and year-round residents. Thomas Lowry’s Twin Cities Rapid Transit (TCRT) built a streetcar line from Lake Harriet to Excelsior in 1905. The company also operated a fleet of streetcar boats on the lake. Increasing numbers of tourists were able to come to Lake Minnetonka for the day.

The rise of automobiles and increasing suburbanization of the Lake Minnetonka area led fewer people to choose it as a vacation destination. During the early decades of the twentieth century, the remaining hotels gradually fell into disrepair, burned, or were torn down to make way for other development.

The Golden Years. The 1880s The first inland steamboat ever to be equipped with electric lights, the City of St. Louis, was built in Wayzata in 1881 and began servicing lakeshore communities and resorts later that year. In the following year of 1882, the largest vessel ever to operate on Lake Minnetonka was launched and began similar service; the Belle of Minnetonka was 300 feet long and could carry 2500 passengers.

The 1880s also saw the rise of grand hotels on Lake Minnetonka, the first of which was the Hotel St. Louis in Deephaven, Minnesota. The Lake Park Hotel in Tonka Bay, Minnesota and the largest hotel ever built on the shores of Lake Minnetonka, the Hotel Lafayette in Minnetonka Beach, Minnesota, soon followed. Affluent visitors from around the world, but particularly from the Deep South, came to spend summer-long vacations on the Lake for its beauty and temperate climate.

As the railroad expanded westward throughout the 1890s, many of Lake Minnetonka’s visitors began finding new places to spend their summers, such as Glacier National Park and Yellowstone National Park, as well as North America’s West Coast. This caused most of the hotels and steamboats on Lake Minnetonka to cease operations. During this same period of time, however, an increasing number of families began to own private summer cottages and permanent homes in the Lake’s vicinity as the metropolitan area of Minneapolis–St. Paul expanded outward.

Lake Minnetonka continued

The Amazing History of Our Community
Discovering The Lake

I’m certain any of us can imagine the excitement these boys must have felt. The adventure, the anxiety and then the joy, once they spied such a spectacular, sparkling body of water through the trees.

Joe Brown and Will Snelling, two young boys from Saint Paul, took off one afternoon on a trip west with hopes of discovering Mini Tanka, the lake they had only heard about. They found it glistening and inviting. They camped on Big Island overnight before they knew its name. Will Snellings father was so mad that the boys did this, he punished them both and never let any of the story leak out. It was 30 more years before Lake Minnetonka was once again discovered.

Fort Saint Anthony – 1819:
Lieutenant Zebulon Pike in 1805 acquired Pike’s Purchase, 100,000 acres of land in the area. Significant settlement began in the late 1810s. Following the War of 1812, the federal War Department built a chain of forts and installed Indian agents between Lake Michigan and the Missouri River. These forts primarily protected the northwestern territories from Canadian and British encroachment. The Army founded Fort Saint Anthony in 1819, later to be named Fort Snelling after construction was complete in 1825 in honor of its commander, Colonel Josiah Snelling who died in 1828.

The post surgeon began recording meteorological observations at Fort Saint Anthony in January 1820, beginning one of the longest near-continuous weather records in the country.

William Joseph Snelling (Will or Joe) – 1822:
Joe was born in Boston. He moved to live with relatives when his mother died when he was six years old. At 14, Joe entered West Point but two years later he left school and headed west.

In 1821, Snelling reached his father’s military post at Fort St. Anthony (later Fort Snelling) in Minnesota. William Joseph Snelling stayed there for five years, trading in furs and exploring the surrounding area.

Joseph Renshaw Brown – 1822:
Joe Brown was born in Hartford County, Maryland, and was the same age as Will Snelling. In 1822, when they were both 17, the two canoed up Minnehaha Creek to Lake Minnetonka.

They were considered to be the first people of European descent to have visited the lake. For the following three decades, few others came to the lake, or even knew it existed. When Joe Brown died in 1870, he was buried in Henderson, Minnesota.

The Amazing History of Our Community
In 1852, tailor George Bertram traveled from upstate New York in search of prime western land to purchase and develop.

In 1853, George Bertram wrote:

“I have selected a site for a village and farming country, that for healthfulness of climate, fertility of soil, beauty of scenery and nearness to markets cannot be surpassed by any other locality in the country, being within twelve or fifteen miles of two of the most important towns in the territory, and having a front on a lake navigable for steam and other boats over forty-one miles, its waters clear as crystal and abounding with fish. The land around the lake is also supplied with natural meadow, the country is gently rolling and interspersed with the most beautiful growth of timber that the eye could wish to look upon, consisting of sugar maple, black walnut, butternut, white and red oak and a variety of others; also with wild fruit, grapes and berries of almost every kind; the whole country, in fact, possessing almost everything that the heart of man could wish for.”

– George

The Excelsior Pioneer Association

If you ever have gone seeking a place to live or while canoeing, looked for that perfect camp site, you can imagine how Bertram may have felt as he experienced the beauty of this area first hand.

In 1853 George Bertram, his recently formed “Excelsior Pioneer Association,” and builder Robert McGrath, began to construct homes and businesses in what is now the city of Excelsior. The origin of the city’s name is thought to come either from Longfellow’s popular poem “Excelsior,” or New York State’s motto “Excelsior” – meaning “Ever Upward.” In either case, the name suggested the optimistic, striving nature of the community the settlers from the East hoped to build.

How George Bertram and Robert McGrath met:

It all began in 1852 at the St. Charles Hotel in St. Paul. A large man in hunting clothes, carrying a gun and a huge bird entered the room. He said, “I have been traveling about 20 miles west of here and visited a lake the Indians call Minnetonka. The area is beautiful and open to settlers. I’m going back east to encourage friends to come here and join me in the spring. I have designated a town site and selected a lot of my own.”

A young man stepped forward and said “If you succeed with this enterprise, I would like to be one of the party and become a lake dweller myself. My name is Robert McGrath.”

“My name is George Bertram,” the hunter replied. They exchanged addresses and parted.

The Amazing History of Our Community
George Bertram visited Lake Minnetonka in the summer of 1852. He selected the site for the present village of Excelsior. He then returned to New York to organize the Association. About May 1, 1853, McGrath, who had met Bertram in St. Paul the previous year, headed for Minnetonka ahead of Bertram and the remainder of the company. While in St. Anthony, McGrath met John H. Stevens, the acting agent for the colony. From Stevens, he received instructions to proceed to a site selected and build a house to be ready for Bertram upon his arrival. McGrath and R. C. Wiley set out with a few others but only got as far as Lake Christmas. The others left McGrath and Wiley there and headed back to St. Anthony. A severe snow storm arose and they suffered much from exposure. But soon after the storm, they met Stephen Hull who brought them to the site selected by Bertram. The commenced to build a two story house out of basswood logs and roofing from St. Anthony. Many prospectors came by before Bertram arrived and McGrath and Wiley provided supplies for them. One of the first colonists to arrive was Reverend Charles Galpin. Bertram soon arrived in June with a number of other families.

The township of Excelsior was organized in 1858 and originally included land in what is now Excelsior, Greenwood, Shorewood, Tonka Bay and parts of Deephaven and Orono. Minnesota became a state in 1858.

Early area pioneers include the families of Rev. Charles Galpin (Excelsior), Lydia and William Ferguson (Deephaven), Peter M. Gideon (Tonka Bay).

Those pioneers gave our community their names. Galpin Lake, Ferguson Point (photo next page) and Gideon Bay. Reverend Charles Galpin built and launched the steam ship Governor Ramsey. His brother George Galpin built the first hotel The Excelsior House. Peter Gideon created the Wealthy apple and William Ferguson lived in a home that was an Indian resort – Ferguson Point.
Tonka Bay (The area of water west of Excelsior) became Gideon Bay.

Gideon Bay is named after Peter M. Gideon who owned 160 acres and numerous apple orchards throughout Tonka Bay. Peter created the Wealthy apple which he named for his wife, Wealthy Hull, the sister of Stephen Hull.

There were many more acres of orchards throughout Tonka Bay along what is now County Road 19 and much of that land was owned by Stephen Hull, most likely the wielder of the first ax in the forests throughout the area. Hull came to the area in 1853. He left his name on the first cut through the land between the Upper and Lower Lakes then called “Hull’s Narrows” and located about eighty feet north of West Point Road near County Road 19. Later, a shorter and deeper connection between the upper and lower lakes was dredged about a mile further west on the northern boundary of Tonka Bay. The first bridge was built across that channel in 1911.

The House On The Hill designed and built by Robert McGrath:
The house was originally built in 1853 by New York architect Robert McGrath when Excelsior was emerging as a resort community, and the list of past owners includes Dr. Hugh & Mable Aery, Hugh was one of the town’s former mayors. Its history and setting atop a small hill gives this classic lake cottage a prominent location.

The Treaty of Traverse des Sioux and Mendota, 1851, protected hunting lands in the area for the Dakota Indians. The Dakota tried to get Lake Minnetonka included in the treaty but the request was denied.

The earliest indication of human activity in and around South Lake Minnetonka is evidenced by the burial mounds of ancient peoples located in the area. A hunting and camping ground for many years, Lake Minnetonka and its surrounding woods boasted sites considered by the Dakota Indians to be sacred, many of them figuring prominently in their legends.

As pioneers moved west across the Mississippi in the mid-19th century, the Dakota feared increased encroachment. Tribal leaders asked the national government in Washington to have the Lake Minnetonka area included in the lands reserved for them in the 1851 Treaties of Traverse des Sioux and Mendota. This request was denied, and so the Dakota became silent bystanders as their hunting grounds were opened to settlement.

The 1851 Treaties did not grant ownership of their reservations to the Dakota. The 1858 treaties granted them ownership of their reservations on the south side of the Minnesota River.
Indian Agent Joseph R. Brown said that the treaties of 1851 provided for agricultural and educational improvement among the Dakota to gradually withdraw them from their wandering mode of life and lead to the adoption of agriculture as the prominent means of subsistence among them.

Blessed with scenic beauty, plentiful game, rich soil, and the immense expanse of water, the town flourished. Early on, when the town was first platted, the lakeside “Excelsior Commons” were set aside by the settlers as a “public pleasure ground,” to be owned and enjoyed by the citizens of Excelsior in perpetuity. Now over 150 years old, this expanse of green running along the shore is one of the few pieces of publicly controlled land continuing to serve such a purpose today.

Excelsior incorporated in 1877, and soon became an international tourist mecca, complete with deluxe hotels and luxury excursion steamboats. Summer homes and cottages sprouted up along the shores of Lake Minnetonka, their owners often making the daily commute from Minneapolis by streetcar, swelling the population during the summer months.

Although tourism was the area’s largest industry, many residents were employed in agriculture, growing berries, apples and other fruits which were then shipped by rail to markets across the country. Lyman Lumber Company also employed many in Excelsior, beginning as a small lumber yard in 1897.

From 1925-1973 Excelsior was home to the popular Excelsior Amusement Park attracting hundreds of thousands to the area each summer. The park’s ballroom hosted musical acts like Tommy Dorsey, Perry Como, Lawrence Welk and in later years, the Beach Boys (1963) and the Rolling Stones (1964). The Old Log Theater in Greenwood opened in 1940 and continues today, having entertained over six million people over the years.

As the years passed, some areas began to break away from Excelsior Township – Orono became a township in 1889, and Deephaven incorporated in 1900, Tonka Bay in 1901, and Greenwood and Shorewood in 1956.

As of 2013, Excelsior and all but Orono, make up the Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Area Chamber of Commerce.
The names for streets, ponds, landmarks, boats . . . . What is the origin of those names?

**Within the five cities and beyond, there are names of parcels of land, streets, lakes, ponds and numerous other landmarks . . .

. . . . what is the origin of all those names?**

**Names like:**

Yellowstone Trail, Galpin Lake, Halsted Bay, the cities of Mound, Deephaven. Excelsior or Enchanted Island.

Names from books, names of people, names from the Cree, Dakota Sioux and Ojibwa Indians.

Our Native Americans had a lot to do with many of the wonderful words we use to this day.

Many are the names of the pioneers who lived here or worked in the area.

The names of numerous people in this photograph will undoubtedly sound familiar. They founded this area and there are streets, buildings or sections of town named for them.

**Photo above right: Civil War Veterans on Memorial Day 1892 getting ready for a parade. This is looking at the west side of Water Street from about where the Masonic Temple was in 2014.**

Civil War Veterans in Excelsior on Memorial Day at the GAR Parade. All the buildings in the picture were destroyed by fire in 1895 (1894). Left to right: Unknown, Shuck & Jones Groceries and Feed, unknown, Walter Phillips Tinware, I.O.O.F., unknown. On the back of one of the photos it was stated that the 3rd building on the right was owned by J.A. Wilson with Willis Wilson standing in the window (the child). Some of the people in the picture were, Left to Right: LeRoy Francis Sampson, James Harvey Clark, Edwin Aldritt, James Aspden, Thomas Ohm, Harvey Scott, Carlisle Pierce, Oscar O. Jaquith (Jacquith), George White, Unidentified man, Moses (Mose) Bickford, Oscar C. DeGroodt, Unidentified, Unidentified, Robert B. McGrath, John Weir Murray, Dr.

More names of early settlers whose names have meaning today.

Leroy Francis Sampson, (The Sampson House) Edwin Aldritt (Had three daughters, Hazel, Florence and Marietta and they lived in the Bird House.), Robert B. McGrath (cofounder of Excelsior) John Weir Murray (Murray Hill) Major George Blight Halstead (brother of Captain Frank William Halsted - Halsted’s Bay on Lake Minnetonka’s Southwest end). The two brothers Halstead and Halsted established what was called the “Hermitage.” Their complete story appears later in the book – No one knows why the spelling of their last name varies. James I. Wyer (Wyer Pearce House)

The names of areas, streets, lakes, ponds, even businesses. The names have been passed down for the past and came mostly from our early settlers. Which ones and where are they?

Names like Deephaven and Excelsior, Minnewashta and Chanhassen, Halsted, Lafayette and Big Island.

Mrs. Hazen J. Burton named the Minneapolis and St. Louis Railroad station at the foot of their hill, Deephaven, after the title of a book by her favorite New England author, Sarah Orne Jewett. Excelsior, which means “Ever Upward” was the title of a poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

Minnewashta comes from the Dakota Indians and it means “Water-Good.” Chanhassen is another word from the Dakota meaning “Sugar-Maple.”

The history of this area is rich with stories of tragedy and success but the names and their origin become a story all in themselves.

Water Street

During a time as depicted in the photo in the upper left of this page which is Water Street looking south, water would flow at times from Galpin Lake, College Lake and Mitten Pond down the street into Lake Minnetonka. Because that was a fairly common occurrence, the name became “Water Street.”
Landmarks, Cities & Businesses (continued)

Each photo was taken from nearly the same vantage point.

Water Street bottom left: This scene is approximately the same area as the top right photo. In that photo, the railroad track is just this side of the large tree on the right. The period of the lower left photo is around 1930 and shows a group of people on motorbikes traveling south on Water Street. Water Street appears to still be a gravel road.

Water Street top right: The photo here shows Water Street in 1952 looking north from about George Street in front of what is now Gray Gardens on the west side of the street and on the east side, The Yarn Shop and Artworks. Artworks is owned by Terry Hart and his late wife Debbie. (2014)

Water Street bottom right: This photo was taken in 2014. It shows approximately the same area as the other two photos. Note however, the new Library building at right. The library was finished in early August of 2014. On the left in this photo is the Excelsior Mill which is host to DB & Company, Farrington’s, Something Safari, 318 Cafe and Provisions.

Photo property of the Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society.

Water Street looking north from George Street. There were more gas stations than you could count. Standard Oil, Pure Oil and Mobil Oil on the corners of Third and Water Street. Lampert Lumber, in the foreground on the left, today is “The Old Mill” accommodating numerous retail shops. Lyman Lumber on the right is the new library.
Landmarks, Cities & Businesses (continued)

Arey, Dr. Hugh C. Memorial: The dedication of the Dr. Hugh C. Arey Memorial Garden took place in July of 1934. To this day, 2015, the garden is maintained by the men’s garden club. In the photo at right, the house in the background was owned by John Williams’ parents. Ray Mason and his wife Enge purchased the land and leveled it for the future Mason Motors. The earth from the property was moved to the Excelsior school property so there could be a ball field. Mason Motors was located there for almost 70 years. Kowalski’s grocery store moved into a new construction there in 2015.

Alligator Alley (The Drake): The Drake is a channel, sometimes referred to as Alligator Alley, that cuts through a portion of Big Island at the south end. The recent dredging was begun in 1970 and completed in 1974. The original channel was commissioned around 1903 by Olaf A. Searle. A good job was done but not without a few exciting mishaps. Dick Geyen was operating a dredging company at the time. Dick and employees, Dan Larson, and Jim Mase, who happened to be his brother-in-law and the son of Anson R. Mase (deceased – 1963) the previous owner of Lake Minnetonka Dredging, completed the project. The earth from Big Island was in the process of being taken from there to Goose Island when there was an accident.

The barges that consisted of three sections bolted together, broke apart. The crane in the middle section sank into about 12 feet of water. The outside sections that were still floating then came together squishing the crane cab with Jim Mase, the operator, still inside. By this time, the cab was under water but luckily the boom on the crane which was listing to one side, stopped the barges from coming further together. Jim received a crushed pelvis and numerous cuts and bruises but was able to get free and swim to the surface. If Jim hadn’t been the strong man that he was, his injuries likely would have been much worse as he was able to keep the cab from collapsing completely.

Bechrle Avenue: Bechrle Avenue is the namesake for the mayor (1964 – 1971), owner of Roy’s Bait and visionary, LeRoy C. “Roy” Bechrle. It connects George Street to Oak Street (County Road 19) just north of Studer Pond.

Big Island: In the 1800’s, the island was inhabited by Dakota Indians. The island was first known as Meeker’s Island for Judge Bradley B. Meeker.

In 1856 the Island was acquired by brothers W.B. and John Morse. In 1891 Olaf Searle purchased 125 acres on Big Island and built a 21 room mansion. He was a banker, emigration officer and entrepreneur from Minneapolis.

Big Island, Orono’s Big Island Nature Park property, like much of Lake Minnetonka’s shoreline, has undergone a series of transformations over the past century. The Park property has a rich history of recreational use that today’s casual passerby might never have imagined.

It was home to a thriving amusement park in the early 1900s. The Big Island Amusement Park included a water tower near the center of the Park with a 186 foot high electric beacon that could be seen from all points on the lake. Other buildings included a music casino that featured many of the famous bands of the time, a number of picnic kitchens, and a variety of amusement rides including a roller coaster and a carousel. Remnants of the grandeur of the Big Island Amusement Park can still be found on the site.

Big Island History by key dates:

1800’s – The Island was inhabited by the Dakota (Dahcotah) Indians.

1822 – Two young boys (one a drummer boy at Ft. Snelling) paddle up Minnehaha Creek, discovered Lake Minnetonka and camped on the Island.

1852 – Settlers Simon Stevens and Calvin Tuttle re-discover Lake Minnetonka. They built a dam and sawmill at Minnetonka Mills. Gov Ramsey named the lake, “Minnetonka.” The Island becomes known as Owens Island, then
The Island was acquired by brothers W.B. and John Morse. They platted, developed and sold lots.

1869 – Following the Civil War, many southerners made the lake their favorite vacation spot, coming up the Mississippi by steamboat and via rail which had come to Wayzata in 1867.

1880s – Many of the Morse Island (Big Island) lots were sold and several families built cottages. Tenting on the Island was popular as well. Morse rented tents to campers.

1891 – Olaf A. Searle bought about 125 acres on the Island and built a three story, 21 room mansion. He hired laborers to dig a channel separating his portion of the Island from the rest.

1900 – By the end of the 1800s, the wealthy tourists who had helped turn Lake Minnetonka into one of the regions premier resort destinations, were vacationing elsewhere. It appeared that Lake Minnetonka was on its way to becoming just another affluent suburb. Minnetonka was sleeping, but not for long!

1905 – Excelsior residents awoke early one morning to the rumble of streetcars. A new kind of tourist was coming to the lake. They were coming just for the day, they were excited, they were looking for summer fun. It was the dawn of a new era. The Twin City Rapid Transit Company purchased 65 acres of land on Big Island.

1906 – An Amusement Park was built and operated on Big Island. It was an ambitious undertaking. A 200 foot high electric beacon and water tower was near the center of the park. After the opening of the Amusement Park the Island became known simply as Big Island.

1907 – The Twin City Rapid Transit Company launched six Streetcar Boats to cater to lake residents and transport visitors to the Amusement Park on Big Island.

1907 – A 1,500 seat music casino was built which featured a number of local bands. A large dock was built for three 1000 passenger ferry boats. A long dock was available on the east end of the Island for private boats. Other features of the Amusement Park were a large Roller Coaster, the “Old Mill Ride,” the “Scenic Ride to Yellowstone” and a Carousel.

1911 – Big Island Amusement Park was closed at the end of August.

1917 – By this time most of the buildings and rides had been dismantled.

1920s – Earlier, the state acquired the property and established a vacation camp for WWI veterans and their families. The remaining buildings became part of the Veteran’s Camp. The camp operated for the next eighty years.

2006 – January 5th - The City of Orono and the Minnehaha Creek Watershed bought the Big Island Campground from the Veteran’s organizations that owned it. Local officials and volunteers developed a plan to clear debris from the Island and open it as a public park.

2008 – On June 25, 2008 the Orono Big Island Park officially re-opened to the public.

**Big Reggie’s Danceland:** In 1920, the Cassino that was part of The Lake Park Hotel in Tonka Bay was transported across the ice to Excelsior and set down on a new foundation across the street from the Excelsior Amusement Park. There is speculation that it was not moved across the ice as there was no mention of anything like that in the local papers. Big Reggie was Ray Colihan who took the name based on Jackie Gleason’s Reginald Van Gleason character. Jackie Gleason was a well known TV and movie personality. Movies like “Smokey and the Bandit” and “The Hustler” with Paul Newman.

**Big Woods:** The Lake Minnetonka Area in the 1800s was considered part of a mammoth tract of land containing deciduous forests. Many settlers from the cast had been in the lumber business and this area was very attractive and provided the opportunity to continue in their lumber trade.

**Birch Bluff:** An area in Shorewood along the south shore of the Upper Lake on a relatively high rise of land originally supporting an abundance of birch trees.

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The Amazing History of Our Community
Breezy Point Road: Breezy Point Road heads west from Highway 101 towards Breezy Point which juts out into Wayzata Bay towards the west from Woodland. In 1869, Samuel Gale built the Maplewood Inn just east of Breezy Point so when driving through the area you’ll come upon Maplewood Road and Gale Road as well. Spirit Knob once marked the end of the point.

Bug Island: The island was created from the mud dredged to make parts of St. Louis Bay deeper and was originally named Tahtu after Charles Gibson’s launch. (Ward Burton called it Tahoe Island) In 1899 the Ice Boat Yacht Club began on what is now Bug Island. The Club House was also known as the Wetmore House named after Theodore Wetmore one of the commodores of the club. The house was destroyed by fire in 1904.

Carman Bay: Named for John Carman who, along with Mathias Cook, moved into and settled in the Cook’s Bay area in 1854. This is about the same time Captain Frank Halsted built his cabin. Residents had a meeting at Mathias Cook’s cabin in 1859 where they chose the name Minnetrista for the area in which they lived.

Carson’s Bay: Pig Inlet was the name of the bay prior to renaming it. Carson’s Bay has been home to Arthur Dyer’s Boat Works in 1900, Bug Island, the Ice Boat Island in the early 1900s and Lighthouse Island, the present Minnetonka Yacht Club. Grandview Point, the point of Cottagewood is the far right point of land in this photo. Supposedly it the namesake of Kit Carson’s brother Elijah. Kit Carson was an was an American frontiersman.

Carson Road & Carsonwood: The names for both these roads originate indirectly from Elijah Carson as well as they were named because of the name of the Bay.

Casco Point: A point of land between Carman Bay and Spring Park Bay. Possibly named by a settler from Casco Bay, Maine.

Cedarhurst: Cedarhurst is the name Russell M. Bennett gave to the old estate of Charles Gibson, called Northome, after he bought it in 1901. Bennett began building his new home that year. Cedar is a type of tree and Hurst means “a wooded rise” hence the name “Cedarhurst.”

Cedarhurst Street: Cedarhurst Street is only a few blocks long. It heads cast from Northome Road in Deephaven and heads towards Gibson Point. Cedarhurst is the name given the property once owned by Russell M. Bennett in the late 1800s, which was previously the Northome property once owned by Sir Charles Gibson. Cedarhurst is in Woodland.

Chanhassen: The Chanhassen Village Hall was built in 1898. In the 1930s, much of the land around Chanhassen was owned by the Kerber families who owned dairy and crop farms. (Kerber Boulevard) The name Lyman is another familiar name in Chanhassen. Richard and Burt Lyman raised turkeys. Some of the farm buildings still exist on the west side of Galpin Boulevard as it approaches West 78th Street (2014). Chanhassen is located along Highway Five just east and south of Excelsior. The origin of the name comes from the Dakota word Chanhassen meaning “sugar-maple tree.” The city has a total area of 22.88 square miles, of which 20.44 square miles is land and 2.44 square miles is water. Chanhassen is not part of the south lake community but the people had much to do with Excelsior and the border of Chanhassen seeps into the community of Excelsior.

Chimo: Chimo is the name given the original Burton estate overlooking Carson’s Bay. In the Sioux language, Chimo means “friendly.” The Burton Estate is located on the hill on the northeast side of Carson’s Bay.

Chowen’s Corner: In the early 1850s, three Chowen brothers, William, George and Joseph, came from New York to Deephaven and joined their sisters Susan and Sarah. William Chowen established a farm at what is now the corner of Highway 101 and Minnetonka Boulevard. His brother Joseph built a farm where Minnetonka Boulevard
is heading west and abruptly turns south at Maplewood Road and Northome Boulevard. Joseph raised a daughter Annie and the corner is officially Annie Chowen’s corner though it is popularly referred to as just Chowen’s Corner.

**Christmas Lake:** Christmas Lake is a spring-fed lake covering approximately 265 acres in Shorewood. It was named for Charles W. Christmas (1796 – 1884) the first county surveyor who platted the original town site of Minneapolis for John H. Stevens and Franklin Steele. He also surveyed much of the land around Excelsior and Christmas Lake. His measurements were so accurate, they never had to be questioned.

**Clay Cliffe:** In 1900, Fred B. Snyder purchased Locke Point which later became Clay Cliffe. The furthest out point of land is, in fact, a large clay cliff. Snyder’s daughter, Mary Stuart Snyder married Crawford T. Johnson of Birmingham, Alabama. Crawford Johnson Sr. had purchased the exclusive franchise rights, in 1902, to bottle and distribute Coca-Cola in Birmingham, Alabama.

For many years during the summer, the Johnson’s enjoyed Clay Cliffe. Crawford’s son Fred Johnson came often to stay and boat on the Lake during the 1950s and 1960s. In 1977, Robert O. Naegele purchased Clay Cliffe and developed the land for upscale lake homes.

**Cottagewood:** Cottagewood is a small 95 acre municipality within Deephaven that is a peninsula of land with the Lower Lake and Big Island to the west and Carson’s Bay to the east. Brothers Samuel and Harlow Gale arrived in Minneapolis in the late 1850s. In 1860, Harlow purchased the Island that has become Gale’s Island for $2.40. Then Samuel Gale purchased the land that became Cottagewood in 1873. In 1882 he re-platted Cottagewood (Once called “Cottage Wood”) into numbered lots that are still used to this day (2014). Cottagewood is home to the famous “Cottagewood Store” and is known as a sailing community.

**Crane Island:** Crane Island, an island on the western side of the lake, was organized as a summer cottage retreat in 1907. The Crane Island Association platted a number of lots around the perimeter of the island and dedicated a commons area at its center. Crane Island had originally been a heron rookery until a storm blew down many of its trees in 1906. Crane Island is now a historic district listed on the National Register of Historic Places. *Barefoot On Crane Island* is a wonderful book written by Marjorie Meyers Douglas. She recounts times she had growing up in the 1920s on Crane Island. Marjorie passed away in December of 2014 at the age of 103.

**Crescent Beach:** This beach is on Birch Bluff Road and is jointly operated by the City of Shorewood and Tonka Bay. It is quite possible that the beach was named Crescent Beach due to it’s shape – Much like the shape of a crescent moon.

**Crystal Bay:** This bay is so named because of the crystalline transparency of the water.

**Deephaven:** The city of Deephaven has a total area of 2.43 square miles, of which 2.37 square miles is land and 0.06 square miles is water. Minnetonka Boulevard serves as a main route through the city. Deephaven is home to the Minnetonka Yacht Club and Cottagewood. Hazen Burton was the first Mayor once the city was incorporated in 1900. Alice Burton was Hazen’s wife and it was she that named Deephaven for a book by that name written by her favorite poet.

**- The Book: Deephaven.** Written by Sarah Orne Jewett, was published in 1877. *Deephaven* is a prolonged study of some New-England seaside port, like New-Bedford or Portsmouth, which has had former glories of West Indian or whaling trade, and now abounds in women, old sailors, and boys. The book is about two young girls who were not actually going to Europe for the summer but to “Deephaven” to observe the habits of young seaside boys, angular country folk, and decrepit old fishermen.
Excelsior Boulevard: Named such as it was the direct route to Excelsior around 1900.

Excelsior: Excelsior, organized May 11, 1858, owes its name and settlement to a colony, under the title of the “Excelsior Pioneer Association,” which was formed in New York City, November 12, 1852. The colony was lead by George M. Bertram who arrived in the summer of 1853. The colony adopted this name in allusion to Henry W. Longfellow’s world-famous short poem “Excelsior,” which was written September 28, 1841, and was published a few days later. There is speculation however, that Bertram could have taken the word Excelsior from the motto used as part of the New York State Seal on which it is used to mean “Ever Upward.” Bertram was from New York.

The city of Excelsior was incorporated as a village on June 14, 1878; the oldest of the Lake Minnetonka communities, it was settled in the early 1850s and platted in 1855;
its post office began in 1854.

The first mill was erected in 1855 by a stock company comprised of Excelsior citizens. It was a steam saw mill on the property where Charles May’s Grist Mill was built in 1876. (A grist mill grinds grain into flour.) The first election in town was held April 16, 1877. Officers were: President Charles May; Trustees, L.F. Sampson, Eli Small, Jr. and James Letson; Recorder, A. Millner; Treasurer, E. H. Page. At that time, Excelsior had only three stores. Rev. Charles Galpin, first a minister in Chanhassen, moved to Excelsior in 1853 and became the first postmaster; his brother, George Galpin, built the town’s first hotel, a log cabin, in 1854. The village was the site of many resort hotels with pavilions and yacht marinas and of two amusement parks: the Big Island Amusement Park, 1906–1911, was a major attraction for those who came from the Twin Cities; the second, Excelsior Amusement Park, opened in 1925 and was closed and demolished in 1974.

**Ferguson’s Point:** William and Lydia Ferguson came to Minnesota in 1854. After arriving in Saint Paul, William came out to Lake Minnetonka to look for property. After looking in Excelsior, Lake Christmas, Saint Alban and Long Lake, he was shown a home and property on Lake Minnetonka that became Ferguson’s Point. They loved the location and bought it for $225.

**Frog Island:** In the early 1900s, Captain John R. Johnson established and owned the Minnetonka Dredging Company which eventually was located on Gideon Bay at the southwest end of what is now known as West Lake Street. As he dredged out the southeast corner of Gideon Bay to access the property, he unloaded the mud from the bottom of the bay in the shallows about 100 yards from shore which created Frog Island. Much of what he dredged out of the bay also became the property the dredging company was built upon as well as the bed that the railroad and light rail utilized. In 2014, it was the Lake Minnetonka LRT Regional Trail.

**Gale Island:** 1850–1895 – Samuel and Harlow Gale came out from Minneapolis 1850. Harlow bought a small Island for $2.40. He later built a summer house on it and called it “Brightwood.” Today it is called “Gale Island.” It is located due south of Big Island in the middle of Echo Bay.

**Gale Road:** Gale Road travels southwest from Maplewood Road in Woodland and was named for Samuel Gale.

**Galpin Lake:** The Reverend Charles Galpin, first a minister in Chanhassen in 1853, then moved to Excelsior to join George Bertram and others in what became the Congregational Church. Charles was also the first postmaster. His brother, Reverend George Galpin, built the town’s first hotel in 1854 which was essentially a log cabin. Charles Galpin and his wife Samantha had a farm on the lake that was named after them (Galpin Lake). Across the lake they could see the construction of the new school house being built for them. It became known as the Excelsior Institute.
It’s interesting how streets were named over the years. Similar criteria was used when naming places, bays on the lake and of course businesses.

**The origin of street names:** In the earliest days of urban development in what’s now the United States, streets tended to be named for landmarks, like Church, Market, Monument, Canal, Wall, Court, Dock, etc., obvious topographic or hydrological features like Hill or Water, or references to the street’s position like East or Middle.

Often major streets would be named for symbols of power and authority, like State or King or Queen. After the American Revolution, the names of heroes and leaders like Washington and Jefferson were popular as were the names of people who were leaders in towns or those who were the earliest settler on that street.

Even as rural life was idealized, urbanization was proceeding rapidly. New cities were being laid out from Maine to California and older ones were expanding. But the new aesthetic had an impact on what all those new streets were called. It was at this time that the names of tree species suddenly became the dominant choices for street names; the leader among streets named in the 1850s is Oak, followed closely by others such as Elm, Maple, Pine, Walnut, etc.

Streets were starting to be replaced by Avenues after the 1880s. During the late 1800s, Boulevard, Park and Court were starting to be used. Once the automobile became more commonplace, these roads in many subdivisions were called “drives.” Then suburbia really became prevalent and suffixes like “woods” or “land” were popular.

The names of many of the Bays of Lake Minnetonka and certain parcels of land have been named after people or families. Gideon Bay, Grays Bay, Carsons Bay, Howards Point and Murray Hill to name a few.

**George Street:** George Street runs east and west from Water Street to Gideon Bay. George Bacon Gould lived on George Street and George Bertram established the Excelsior Pioneer Association in 1853. George Street could have been named for either of the two though it is most likely that it was named for George Bertram (1827 – 1886) as he was more-or-less Excelsior’s founding father.

**Gideon Bay:** Gideon Bay was named after Peter M. Gideon (1820 – 1899) who owned 160 acres of land in Tonka Bay and was responsible for breeding apples that could withstand Minnesota’s climate.

**Gluck’s Point:** A Point in Cottagewood named for three Gluck brothers, John, Louis and Charles. This point was earlier called Ferguson’s Point.

**Goose Island:** Goose Island is actually Wild Goose Islands. Goose Island is located just out from (south of) Spring Park Bay.

**Grant Lorenz Road:** Grant Lorenz Road is the namesake for a World War I soldier, Grant Lorenz who was killed in action. It is a road in Shorewood that connects the present day (2015) Smithtown Road and Edgewood Road.

**Grays Bay:** Once called Lake Browning and Gray’s Lake, It was named Lake Browning for the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Grays Bay is named after Amos Gray (1824 – 1902). Amos moved to Minnesota from Pennsylvania after marrying Susan Chowen in 1847 and became one of the original land owners on the shores of Lake Minnetonka. The Bay carries his name. Susan’s brothers William, George and Joseph Chowen homesteaded farms nearby. William Chowen actually purchased many 160 acre parcels of land and sold or deeded them to his relatives, Amos being one of them. The above photo is of the Amos Gray family at their home on what became Gray’s Bay around the mid 1870s.

Grays Bay is located at the furthermore north point of Lake Minnetonka. It resides in Hennepin County and is the outlet of the lake as it travels as Minnehah Creek to the Mississippi River.

**Grays Bay Tavern:**

**Greenwood:** The city of Greenwood has a total area of 0.61 square miles of which 0.36 square miles is land and 0.25 square miles is water. It was founded in 1956. A regional trail winds along the west side of the city and is a favorite of bikers and walkers. Greenwood also is home to the famous Old Log Theatre. Greenwood is a “statutory city” with a weak-mayor / council form of government. As of 2014, Deb Kind is the mayor.

**Groveland:** Groveland had its beginning in 1902. This twelve acre parcel of land on the shores of Lake Minnetonka’s Wayzata Bay was originally owned by Mr. Samuel Bartow, a farmer who was deeded the property from the U.S. Government in 1857. In 1902, articles of incorporation record this land to the Methodist Young People’s Lakeside
Harrison Bay. Captain N. H. Harrison (1822) in Petersburg, Virginia, arrived at Lake Minnetonka in 1855 and settled in what became “Harrison’s Bay.” He was a ship carpenter and built the “Mary,” “May Queen,” the “City of Minneapolis” and the Coquette.” He was one of the first white settlers on the Upper Lake.

Howard’s Point. Howard’s Point is located in Shorewood near Edgewood and south and east of Spring Park. It is a point of land that reaches out towards Spray Island. Silas Howard was born in Providence County Rhode Island in 1804. He worked in coal and wood until coming to Minnesota in 1858. He married Lydia Reed and homesteaded about eleven acres of what became their namesake, Howard’s Point. Silas died in 1887 and Lydia died in 1903. This is a photo of their son Simeon and his wife Addie (far right) and their daughters, Lettie (Leach) and her son Maurice, Ellenor (Johnston) and Alice (Knowlton) in their yard at Howard’s Point in 1895.

Hummingbird Road: Hummingbird Road meets Minnetonka Boulevard about half a mile south of Northome Boulevard and happens to be the Road that George Haralson (the Haralson Apple) lived on in the early 1900s.

Humbermeyer’s Bar: A bar located in Excelsior on Lake Street across from the Amusement Park. Pee Wecs & Humplemyer’s were “Beer Joints” popular in the 1950s.


Highway Seven: Highway Seven, from Excelsior to Smithtown Bay in Minnetrista, used to follow what is now county road 19, then continued beyond the corner of 19 and Country Club Lane on Smithtown Road to Smithtown Bay. About 1950 - 1953, Highway Seven was straightened from Excelsior to Smithtown Bay. In this photo, the first road entering from the left is Galpin Lake Road. Beyond the pine trees is Chaska Road. A large hill used to separate the two roads that continued into Excelsior before 1950. (The hill at the top of the pines on the left continued down to the right.) The dirt from the hill was used to fill in Galpin Lake so Highway Seven could continue on straight to the west. The foreground of this photo would have been in Galpin Lake.

Hennepin County: Hennepin County and Hennepin Avenue are named for – Father Louis Hennepin (1626 – 1705), a Roman Catholic discovered Saint Anthony Falls. In May 1675, Hennepin was accompanied by René Robert Cavelier, Sieur de la Salle. They went together to explore the unknown West.

Hasty Tasty: This little restaurant was in business at the south end of Water Street during the late 1940s through the late 1950s. In the opinion of numerous people, their pancakes and mashed potatoes and gravy were the best in town. The Hasty Tasty was across the street from Melba’s Cafe and next door to Kochen’s Standard Oil station on the corner.

Harbor, Excelsior: This photo . . .

Hastly Tasty: This little restaurant was in business at the south end of Water Street during the late 1940s through the late 1950s. In the opinion of numerous people, their pancakes and mashed potatoes and gravy were the best in town. The Hasty Tasty was across the street from Melba’s Cafe and next door to Kochen’s Standard Oil station on the corner.

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Janette Merrill Park: Much of Janette Merrill Park was located on Howard’s Point overlooking the Upper Lake to the South West. Eugene and Adelaide “Addie” Merrill decided in 1920 to donate their acreage and buildings to the WCA (Women’s Christian Association). Eugene named the Park after his late Mother.

Jefferson Street: Jefferson Street is about two football fields long in Cottagewood. It connects Cottagewood Avenue and Lakeview Avenue just east of the Cottagewood Store.

Lafayette Avenue: Lafayette Avenue is about 600 feet long and located at the west side of Excelsior on Gideon Bay. It begins at George Street and ends on the point of land just south of Frog Island.

Lafayette Bay: This bay in the lower lake is the bay you enter if you travel northwest out of the Narrows. It was named after James J. Hill’s fabulous Lafayette Club.

Lafayette Club: Lafayette Club’s roots go back to the original hotel which was built by railroad magnate James J. Hill and opened on July 4, 1882. It was a grand opening, indeed. Billed as “the finest hotel west of New York City,” its hallways were 10 feet wide, there were three grand staircases, 300 guest rooms, and a staff of 150 people. In 1897 the Hotel Lafayette was destroyed by fire and Mr. Hill deeded the land to the founders of the Lafayette Club. For more than 20 years, Lafayette’s facilities were again the center of social activities on Lake Minnetonka.
Lafayette’s original clubhouse hosted General Ulysses S. Grant, Vice President Adlai Stevenson, President Chester Arthur, President William Howard Taft, and many governors of the State of Minnesota. Adlai Stevenson lived in one of the cottages on the grounds. Chester Arthur used the Lafayette Club for a summer White House. The Lafayette Club evolved from a majestic hotel to a distinguished gathering place for families and friends to enjoy the rewards of life.

Today, the club continue to preserve its long-standing history while providing a comfortable atmosphere where members and guests can savor the timeless beauty that surrounds them. The Club was visited by members and guests for two decades before it, too, burned down in 1922. But this beautiful hilltop was never destined to remain empty for long. Lafayette Club, rebuilt in 1925 is still grand in every respect.

Lake Louise: Lake Louise is about eight acres and it is located near Northome boardered by Northome Boulevard and Deephaven Avenue in Deephaven.

Lake Lucy: Lake Lucy is an 86 acre lake in a residential area just 2 miles south of Excelsior. The origin of it’s name has not yet been determined.

Lake Street: Lake Street extends all the way out to Excelsior from Minneapolis. I travels past Lake Of The Isles, Lake Calhoun, then on to Christmas Lake and Lake Minnetonka at Excelsior. It had been the road to travel, from early in the last century, to make your way to the “Lake” from Minneapolis.

Lakeview Avenue: Lakeview Avenue is in Tonka Bay. It leaves Tonka Bay Road and heads out to Sunrise Point. Originally it went past the Tonka Bay Hotel. Today it takes you past the Caribbean Marina.
**Lotus Lake:** Lotus Lake is located just south and east of Excelsior. Its surface area is 247 acres with a maximum lake depth of 29 feet. Common fish species are bluegill, yellow perch and walleye. The lotus flower, shown at right, is primarily white or pink and quite prevalent in Lotus Lake. The lake is named for the beautiful Lotus Lilly that you’ll find throughout the lake.

**Lake Marion:** Lake Marion is an 11 acre lake along Robinson Bay Road. It is less than a quarter mile west of Shaver Lake within the City of Woodland. It’s a stones throw from the east side of Robinson Bay.

**Lake William:** Lake William is a small, 74 acre lake just south of Ferguson Point and Cottagewood. It is across Minnetonka Boulevard from the property that used to be the Lyman Lodge YWCA Camp. The area is considered Linwood. Around 1880, Lydia Ferguson’s son William (Willie), came back to the area and built a small cabin on his favorite lake which today is his namesake. Lake William.

**Light-House Island:** The Minnetonka Yacht Club (MYC) is located on Lighthouse Island near the entrance to St. Louis Bay and Carson’s Bay within the city of Deephaven on the east shore of Lake Minnetonka. The island has been the home to the yacht club and numerous constructions of the building since 1882. The Minnetonka Yacht Club was a founding member of the United States Sailing Association.

**Linwood Road:**

**Locke’s Point:** Lock’s Point (In 2015 this is Clay Cliffe.) is located in Tonka Bay to the east of Carman Bay. The area was once the battleground between the Sioux and the Chippewas. William Lithgow was the first owner. W. H. Locke, who was from Cincinnati, was the second. Lithgow drowned in Minnetonka in 1854. Fred B. Snyder purchased the point in 1900. Snyder’s son-in-law, Crawford Johnson and his son Fred enjoyed the point for many years into the 1960s. The point was purchased in 1977 by R. O. Naegele and developed for upscale lake homes.

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**Mahpiyata Island:** (May-pi-ya-ta) Once part of Olaf Scarle’s estate. (See full story on page 68)

**Manitou:** Manitou is an area of land in Tonka Bay on County Road 19 about 500 yards beyond Smithtown Crossings. Manitou Road is the section of County 19 between Smithtown Road and The Narrows bridge. The word “manitou” (in both Cree and Ojibwe) means Spirit or Life Force.

**Manor Avenue:** Manor road is mostly in Greenwood. It travels 1.6 miles from Highway Seven to Vine Hill Road.

**Maxwell Bay:** Named for George and Delila Maxwell. George was a soldier in Maxwell’s army who settled on Maxwell Bay in Orono about 1854. The Civil War was one of the bloodiest conflicts of history and Dr. William Quentin Maxwell (no relation) lead the United States Sanitary Commission which was the forerunner to the American Red Cross.
**Maple Hill Drive:** Maple Hill Drive is about a 500’ long street in the heart of Tonka Bay.

**Mary Lake:** Mary Lake is a small neighborhood lake in Excelsior just off of Minnetonka Drive and Yellowstone Trail.

**Melba’s Cafe:** Melba’s Cafe was located at about 276 Water Street in Excelsior. Melba was the stepmother of John Maceachran, a 1958 graduate of Minnetonka High School. Belba’s Cafe later became Stans Color Center, one of the first complete paint and interior design stores in Excelsior. Owned by Paul Stans.

**Mill Street:** Mill Street is a section of Powers Boulevard that leaves Excelsior and heads toward Chanhassen. It was named Mill Street because it was the route to one of the first sawmills in the area. The first mill was erected in 1855 by a stock company comprised of Excelsior citizens. It was a steam saw mill on the property where May’s Grist Mill was built in 1876. (A grist mill grinds grain into flour.) May’s Grist Mill could produce fifty barrels per day. Next door was a stave mill that produced staves for the barrels.

**Minnetonka:** Minnetonka is a suburban city in Hennepin County, Minnesota, United States, eight miles west of Minneapolis. The population was 49,734 at the 2010 census. The word “Minnetonka” comes from the Dakota Indian mni tanka meaning “great water.” The city is home to Cargill, the country’s largest privately owned company and United Healthcare, the state’s largest publicly owned company.

Since the mid-19th century, Minnetonka has evolved from heavily wooded wilderness through extensive farming and thriving industrialization to its present primarily residential suburban character. The Dakota and Ojibwe Indians were the first people to settle in the area. They believed the land around Lake Minnetonka (mni meaning water and tonka meaning big) was the legendary home of an extinct race. The first

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**Minnesota:** The name Minnesota is from a Dakota Sioux Indian word that means “cloudy water” or “sky water” and refers to local rivers. Minnesota gained legal existence as the Minnesota Territory in 1849, and became the 32nd U.S. state on May 11, 1858. The earliest known settlers followed herds of large game to the region during the last glacial period. They preceded the Anishinaabe, the Dakota, and other Native American inhabitants.

The oldest known human remains in Minnesota, dating back about 9000 years ago, were discovered near Browns Valley in 1933. “Browns Valley Man” was found with tools of the Clovis and Folsom types. Some of the earliest evidence of a sustained presence in the area comes from a site known as Bradbury Brook near Mille Lacs Lake which was used around 7500 BC.

You will recognize names like: Father Louis Hennepin; Jonathan Carver, a shoemaker from Massachusetts; Joseph Nicollet scouted the area in the late 1830s; Colonel Josiah Snelling; With Alexander Ramsey as the first governor of Minnesota Territory and Henry Hastings Sibley as the territorial delegate to the United States Congress; Towns, counties and communities were named after these men.

The Dakota War of 1862: After 1880, a separate class of Dakota Sioux called the Loyal Mdewakanton, were allowed to live in Minnesota and did not participate in the Dakota War of 1862, since they were assimilated Christians and instead decided to help some of the missionaries escape the Sioux warriors who chose to fight.

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**The Amazing History of Our Community**

38
recorded exploration of the area by European settlers was in 1822, when a group from newly constructed Fort Snelling made its way up Minnehaha Creek (then known as Brown’s Creek or Falls Creek) to the lake. In 1851, the Dakota sold the area including Minnetonka to the United States with the Treaty of Traverse des Sioux. The first census, the Territorial Census of 1857, lists 41 households. Twenty-nine of the heads of households were listed as farmers. The occupations of the remaining twelve were associated with the operations of Minnetonka Mills and a nearby hotel.

Minnetrista: “Minne” in Sioux means water and “Trista” is Sioux for crooked. The name given to the area by the Indians refers to the two lakes within it’s boundaries, Dutch and Langdon. You’ll find these lakes within the city limits of Mound.

Minnewashta: Minnewashta is the name of a lake which the village got its name from. The name minnewashta comes from two words of the Dakota language. Minne – which means water, and washta – which means good. The area called Minnewashta is spread out between Highway 5 and 41, County Road 19 and The Upper Lake (Minnetonka) and includes Howard’s Point Edgewood and Birch Bluff. Lake Minnewashta, from whence it gets its name, boasts of a Regional Park on the East side of the Northern half of the lake. The park land was once owned by Robert O. Naegele who was planning on developing the land but finally made arrangements to give it to the county.

Mitten Pond: Mitten Pond is in Excelsior on the south side of County Road 19, just east of Water Street. It is believed that it was given the name mitten pond because it is shaped like a mitten.

Murray Hill: A colony was formed in New York in 1852 and the group adopted the name Excelsior. In 1853 settlers began to arrive no matter how tough it was on everyone. Robert McGrath and Reverend Charles Galpin were directing the building of homes and stores as covered wagons brought lumber in. Dr. and Mrs. Ebenezer Snell, Elmer Hyatt, Mr. and Mrs. John E. Cathcart, James, Jane and Mary Murray and others add to the colony. The Murrays established their property at the base of Murray Hill.

Mud Lake: This lake/pond is located by Morse Avenue and Highway Seven just east of the Excelsior Elementary School. Origin of its name? Do you suppose it’s muddy? It was at one time part of Galpin Lake. It extended almost all the way to what became Water Street where Lyman Lumber was eventually built. Water Street was named such due to the water that would flow from that point down the street to Lake Minnetonka after heavy rains or in the spring.

Navarre: Orono’s corporate history dates to 1858 when Minnesota became a state, and western Hennepin County was surveyed and divided into townships. Orono Township once included areas now part of neighboring cities. Minnetonka Beach was incorporated out of Medina Township in 1884. Long Lake was incorporated from Orono Township in 1906. Long Lake expanded, Wayzata grew westward, and then Spring Park was incorporated in 1952.

The separate Township of Orono was created out of the southern half of Medina on April 9, 1889. The name Orono was brought to the area by Major George Brackett, a native of Orono, Maine, who first used it to designate the area now known as Brackett’s Point.

Navarre, once a stop on the Great Northern, was named by Sam J. Witherall who loved flowers and like the plumed worn by the Knights of Navarre.

Navarre is a sleepy little town nestled between the southwest corner of the Upper Lake and the northeast corner of the Lower Lake. In other words, it’s surrounded by water. It’s conveniently located along Highway 19, with easy access to Excelsior and Wayzata. There is a nice little shopping district with terrific waterfront dining and great views of the lake.

The highlight of Navarre back in the 1950s, 60s and 70s was the Navarre Drive-In Theater. Today (2015), if you travel west on County Road 15 (Shoreline Drive) from Navarre, you’ll travel about 200 yards and come to the top of a hill. The entrance to the Drive-In was on you right where there are homes today.
**Northome Boulevard:** This road leaves Minnetonka Boulevard at Chowen’s Corner and heads straight west towards Northome.

**Robinson Bay:** Robinson Bay is the namesake for A. B. Robinson and early Wayzata settler. He and O. E. Garrison surveyed land that became known as Wayzata. A Sioux word meaning “North Shore.”

**Rocky Beach:** This is a small swimming beach in Cottagewood off of Lakeview Avenue and Kewadin Street.

**Saint Alban Bay:** Saint Alban was a summer village platted on the southeast shore of the bay. It soon failed but the name was given to the bay of Lake Minnetonka that it was on – Saint Alban’s Bay. Saint Alban was a British Christian martyr. Also, a gentleman by the name of Enos Day who married his third wife Lucinda Simonds and moved to Excelsior in 1856. Enos was from St. Alban, Vermont. It is likely that the name St. Alban, given to this village, was a direct influence of the Vermont St. Alban. In 1856, two men by the name Morris and Hargin platted the village on Saint Alban’s Bay and called it Saint Alban. John McKenzie built a hotel there and Morris and Hargin also built a saw-mill which burned in 1859. The village of Saint Alban flourished for a while but the financial crisis of 1857 proved too much for the village and it disappeared from the scene.

**Saint Louis Bay:** Saint Louis Bay is the small bay that is down the hill from and just west of where the Saint Louis Hotel was. It was named by Charles Gibson. Lighthouse Island, Bug Island, Sunset Point and Deephaven Beach surround the bay.

**Sandy Beach:** This is a small swimming beach in Cottagewood off of Lakeview Avenue at the end of Northern Road which leads to the lake from the Cottagewood Store.

**Shady Island, Shorewood:** Shady Island, once a separate island in itself, is today attached to Enchanted Island on its southwest end by a small bridge. The island is somewhat less than an eighth of a mile square and does host year 'round homes today in 2015.

**Shaver Lake:** Shaver Lake is located just west and north of the intersection of Highway 101 and Minnetonka Boulevard. It is named for James and Sarah (Chowen) Shaver. James came to the area to start a mill. Sarah joined him in 1852 with their son. There were five Chowen siblings that came to the area. William Chowen purchased numerous 160 acre parcels (The maximum you could buy at that time at $1.25 per acre) on behalf of his family members. Descendants of James and Sarah Shaver still live in the area.

**Shorewood:** The official name for Shorewood is the City of Shorewood. It encompasses a land area of 5.34 square miles and a water area of 7.00 square miles. 3,600 acres. It includes three islands; Enchanted, Shady and Spray. It became a Village in 1956 and became a statutory city in 1974. It presently has a population of close to 7,000 plus. In the 1950s, a group of residents gathered together to form Shorewood so as to avoid annexation with Excelsior or Deephaven. Likely, due to the Miles of shoreline and beautifully wooded acreage, hence comes the name Shorewood.

**Solberg’s Point:** Solberg’s Point is the point of land between St. Alban Bay and Excelsior Bay that included a large hill at one time and was not connected to Excelsior. Captain John R. Johnson located his home on the hill and his business near by on the point. Today it doesn’t appear to be a point at all, as the two hills have been leveled and further dredging produced land that now connects the point with Excelsior to its south. It allowed for Minnetonka Boulevard and the railroad to be built. The railroad is now the LRT Regional Trail – 2014.

There has been confusion over the years about Solberg’s Point and actually where and what it was but John Gray, who lives in Meadville, happened to look at a map a little differently recently and noticed what this map shows – that it clearly was a point and not connected to Excelsior proper at one time. Numerous photos show that most of what connected the point to Excelsior at one time was all bridges. The point of land in Meadville jutting out towards Echo Bay has been mistakenly referred to as Soleberg’s Point. In the photo at left, note the hills on either side of the road in the distance and the long bridge for the road to the right of the railroad or streetcar tressel.
Smiths Bay: Named after Elliot and Almyra Smith. —

Smithtown Bay: Smithtown Bay was likely named for three Smith brothers who staked claims just west of there in Cooks Bay in 1854.

Spirit Island: Spirit Island was named such because it was the place where the Dakota Indians were sent to have their feasts and dances around the medicine stone on the island upon which the Indian braves would deposit their scalps. An Indian maiden was supposed to have been sacrificed on the island to appease the spirit of a Dakota Warrior from whom she fled to join an Ojibway Chief. Spirit Island is located off Lookout Point in the Ferndale area of Wayzata. Breezy Point is just to the north and east and was also a location Indians utilized for dances and was considered sacred.

Spirit Knob: Woodland is a residential community on the shores of Lake Minnetonka, with over a century of occupancy since the land was purchased from the Native Americans. The knob which once existed at the end of Breezy Point Road was a center for Indian rites and a landmark known as Spirit Knob. This photo is of Breezy Point jutting out into Wayzata Bay and east of Spirit Island.

Spray Island, Shorewood: Spray Island is a small, 18 acre island in the Upper Lake near Shady Island and Howard’s Point. In the late 1930s, you could almost walk to Spray Island because of the drought. On the southwest side of the island there is a small cove where one may find some sunfish biting.

Spring Park: Spring Park is a city on Lake Minnetonka in Hennepin County, Minnesota. It has over 4 miles of shoreline while being less than 0.5 square miles in area. It was incorporated in 1951. It is surrounded on three sides by water. West - Seton Lake. South - Black Lake & Spring Park Bay. North - North Arm. William Byers laid claim to the area in 1850. The bay was originally named Byers Bay. John Carman bought Spring Park and Casco Point in 1853. In 1880, Spring Park boundaries were officially laid out. It was so named because the area was known as a spa. To this day (2014) there is a hand water pump well at the boat launch on Spring Park Bay.

Sunrise Point:


The Blue Line Cafe: The Blue Line Cafe in Excelsior sat on the shore of Excelsior Bay immediately east of Water Street. It was a pleasant gathering place where people could visit and enjoy music from time to time and a meal. At right is the Motor Line Wharf and May’s Pavillion.

In 1910, the Blue Line was rebuilt and served the community until the 1950s. The photo at left is of the Blue Line in about 1915.

The Commons: The Excelsior Commons and Port of Excelsior are historic dating to the origins of the city and are widely recognized as Excelsior’s chief assets. The 13-acre park includes open recreation areas, picnic sites, playgrounds, two swimming beaches, t
The First Narrows: (Hulls Narrows)
Stephen Hull came to the area in 1853. Hull made the first channel from the upper lake to the lower lake which you can still see as of 2014 just west of present day West Point Road though it doesn’t connect the lower and upper lakes any longer. Stephen Hull’s daughter Wealthy, married Peter Gideon of Tonka Bay who created the Wealthy Apple. Hull’s Narrows was first called Crystal Creek.

The Later Narrows: (The Narrows 1902) Hull’s Narrows had been filled in and the new Narrows had been dredged out as of October of 1902. A draw bridge was constructed at the new Narrows by Captain John R. Johnson in 1911. Hull’s Narrows was originally a small creek.

In 1911 the Narrows Bridge, a steel span with concrete abutments built by the Minneapolis Steel and Machinery Company, was designed to rise 25 feet above the channel. This height was not sufficient to accommodate Class A and B yachts, vessels that carried 32-foot masts, and members of the Minnetonka Yacht Club objected to this restriction to the Board of County Commissioners. It was underscored that “it is customary, in building a bridge, to provide for the passage of all ordinary navigation. Neither of the three ferry boats [Minneapolis, Minnetonka, St. Paul] nor the Puritan could go under the proposed bridge, to say nothing of dredges, pile drivers, or larger sail boats.” After much discussion that included re-opening the Old Narrows channel and installing a draw bridge there - an idea not favored by yachtsmen due to poor wind at the old channel - no design changes were made to the new bridge because of the expense involved and certain vessels became trapped either in the Upper Lake or the Lower Lake. However, in the case of some sailboats, they could de-mast and go under the Narrows Bridge when necessary. In 1957, the last year of sailboats, Tommy’s Tonka Trolley is located west of the Port of Excelsior in a cozy, comfortable setting adjacent to the sidewalk and in the shade of some beautiful lake side trees. It serves ice cream and hot dogs throughout the summer months and also rents out Stand Up Paddleboards.

This area known as the Excelsior Commons was marked “Public Grounds” on the original 1854 Plat of Excelsior Village. It has been used as a public park ever since. It is thought that since most of the early settlers came from New England, they wanted to preserve the tradition of a common public land.

It is speculated that the Excelsior Commons and the Boston Commons are the only two designated “commons” in existence in the United States. The three black and white photos were taken in 2014.

At left is a view of the lake front where the Port of Excelsior exists today. (2015) The exact date of this photo is unknown but it likely was in the early 1860s as you can see that the lake front is void of docks. Gales Island shows at the upper right.
a young woman died trying to tip her sailboat slightly to get under the bridge but the guy-wires hit a power line.

On the previous page is a view of the Streetcar Boat Hopkins heading north east into the lower lake around 1922 just after it had gone under the Narrows Bridge. This newer bridge replaced the draw bridge in 1920.

Today’s Narrows: In the 40s and 50s, navigation through channels like this were always monitored to some extent and closed throttle was enforced but you would often find permanent ropes affixed to the bridge supports. Swimmers came by road or water and would spend hours diving from the bridges and swinging from the ropes making the most of what summer was like on Lake Minnetonka. The present bridge was built in 1998 and measured 18.25’ above the water.

Tonka Bay: Tonka Bay was incorporated in September of 1901. Peter Gideon made claim to 160 acres of what became Tonka Bay in 1853. This was about the same time as the Chowen family from New York were establishing themselves across the lake in Deephaven. Gideon planted and produced apples that could withstand the Minnesota winters. He married a woman by the name of Wealthy Hull and named the apple after her. The Wealthy Apple.

In 1879 the 200 room Lake Park Hotel was built on Echo Bay (the main part of the lake facing east north east) and was serviced by the railroad. About the same time, E.D. Newell opened the Lake Park Store to provide provisions to hotel patrons and local families. This photo is of a pasanger train parked in front of the Lake Park Hotel in 1886. The Minneapolis and St. Louis Railway built a line from Hopkins to the southern rim of Lake Minnetonka. The opening up of the trains to make the charm of the south shore know throughout the country. The Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad at one time owned the Lake Park Hotel.

Around the same time that the railroad began to draw more and more people to the area, local residents saw the need for catering to their every need. This little store provided numerous items to guests at the hotel.

Peter Gideon’s 160 acres also included Clay Cliffe and Old Orchard, another historic home built by John F. Wilcox in 1887. J. F. Wilcox was the first mayor on Tonka Bay. Gideon Bay which borders Tonka Bay to the south and east, though once called Tonka Bay was named after Peter Gideon.

Twin Cities Rapid Transit (TCRT): The shore of Lake Minnetonka was increasingly dominated by small cottages and year-round residents. Thomas Lowry’s Twin Cities Rapid Transit (TCRT) built a streetcar line from Lake Harriet to Excelsior in 1905. The company also operated a fleet of streetcar boats on the lake. Increasing numbers of tourists were able to come to Lake Minnetonka for the day.

Using their previous experience operating the Wildwood Amusement Park, TCRT opened Big Island Amusement Park in 1906. The company also took over the management of the Tonka Bay Hotel—the former Lake Park Hotel. However, declining business led to its closure in 1911.

The rise of automobiles and increasing suburbanization of the Lake Minnetonka area led fewer people to choose it as a vacation destination. During the early decades of the twentieth century, the remaining hotels gradually fell into disrepair, burned, or were torn down to make way for other development.

Vine Hill Road: Vine Hill Road is about 2.8 miles long and travels north and south from a point just north and east of Lotus Lake, north to Minnetonka Boulevard. As of this printing the origin of its name is unknown.
**Wawatasso Island:** Wawatasso Island sits between Enchanted Island and Crane and Eagle Islands on the western part of Lake Minnetonka just north of Smithtown Bay. It is approximately 60 acres in size and is also referred to as Boy Scout Island as it was utilized for years by older Boy Scouts for camping.

It has bays on the west and east side of the island giving it a shape somewhat like a large mushroom. The Island got the name Wawatasso from a very sad but romantic story about a maiden and an Indian brave.

The story - years ago, before the white man had disturbed the hunting grounds of the indians, a trapper built a cabin on the island. He had a beautiful daughter most of the indian braves referred to as White Swan. One brave in particular was named Wawatasso. He cared deeply for White Swan and brought her gifts often.

On a particularly beautiful morning after her father left to make the rounds of his traps, White Swan embarked on a trip up the lake in her birch bark canoe. But soon, as the morning turned to mid day, dark clouds began to form on the horizon in every direction. The peaceful lake became turbulent and gradually lashed itself in fury under the influence of the Storm. Anxiously, White Swan pointed her canoe towards home and with seemingly superhuman strength, paddled her way towards safety. But soon the power of the wind and waves became too much for her and suddenly the canoe overturned and threw White Swan into the water.

Though a fine swimmer, she was already exhausted from paddling, her clothes clung to her and gradually drew her down.

Wawatasso had seen the canoe approaching and when it overturned he recognized White Swan. With extraordinary power and speed, he threw himself into the water and quickly reached the place where White Swan had gone under.

Wawatasso found her, and with every bit of strength he had left, he finally got her to the Island but she was unconscious. At the top of his lungs he cried out to the Great Spirit in a plaintive Indian death song.

When White Swan’s father came home and didn’t find her, he ran through the underbrush towards where he heard the whaling song the Indian was singing.

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**Walden:** Mahala Dutton Douglas (1864 – 1945), survivor of the Titanic disaster of 1912, wife of Walter Donald Douglas who parished, lived in Deephaven. Walter and Mahala had built a twenty-seven room estate in 1910 in the location of the former Hotel Saint Louis. The property was named “Waldon.” is now the Fund Foundation[citation needed].

**Walden Beach:**

**Walden Road, Walden Trail, Walden Lane and Walden Shores Road:** These streets throughout the area in Deephaven where the original St. Louis Hotel had been and where the Douglas Mansion is, are short access streets to homes just west of Minnetonka Boulevard and east of St. Louis Bay. Named for the Douglas estate referred to as “Walden.”

**Water Street:** Water Street is the main street of Excelsior running north and south between Lake Street at the north and present Highway Seven to the south where it becomes Old Chaska Road. From Minneapolis, one took Lake Street to go to Lake Minnetonka. From Excelsior, one took Yellowstone Trail to go to Yellowstone National Park or Old Chaska Road to travel to Chaska, Minnesota.

Water Street got its name because from the time the street was first built until the late 1800s, after a rain or in the spring, water would run from Galpin Lake and College Lake down the main street into Lake Minnetonka, hence the name Water Street.
Yellowstone Trail: As its name reflects, Yellowstone Trail is a portion of the original wagon trail, which headed west to Yellowstone, Wyoming. What remains of the trail begins in Excelsior from the south end of Water Street near Highway Seven and continues west past the south side of the Minnetonka Country Club golf course until it meets Seamans Drive, again near Highway Seven.

A portion of the trail was usurped when Highway Seven was rebuilt in its current location in the 1950s. But if you travel on the present Highway Seven and continue west to what is now called Minnewashta Parkway, you would once again pick up the trail. You then follow it as you make your way along Minnewashta Parkway until you reach Highway Five. Then it follows Highway Five until it picks up Highway 212 in Young America and travels along 212 to the South Dakota border. Towns like Victoria, Waconia, Young America and Hector are all on the route.

Yellowstone Trail began in South Dakota near Big Stone City in 1912, but quickly expanded to run from the Twin Cities to Yellowstone National Park. In 1914 it was formally extended to the Idaho border in the west and to Chicago in 1915. By 1917 the entire route was firmly established.

Today, almost all of the route of the Yellowstone Trail is on slower, less traveled roads and extends from the East Coast all the way to Washington State. Some sections of the Trail, especially in the West, have remained little changed and are a delight to visit. Look for yellow highway signs that call out: Yellowstone Trail National Automobile Route.

Drive the first section of this road to recall what highways in the years before freeways were like. You likely had to dodge as many trees as cars.

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Story of Wawatasso continued

When he saw the Indian with his daughter he did not realize what was happening and in a moment of fear he raised his gun and shot the chieftain. Wawatasso fell with a loud cry that awakened White Swan. Overcome with grief, White Swan told her father of the daring rescue and how the brave Indian saved her from the turbulent waters.

Both White Swan and her father were grief stricken. They said a prayer of forgiveness and proceeded to lay the Indian Chief to rest on the Island. They both continued to live on the Island and named it Wawatasso after White Swan’s Indian lover.

– Internal Content Authoring

West Lake Street: West Lake Street in Excelsior is simply the far west end and last 1,500 feet of Lake Street that travels north east to south west along the south eastern shores of Gideon Bay.

West Point: Possibly named after George West. He and his son Ebenezer put together a small fleet of Lake Minnetonka craft and by 1891 they owned the propellers Twin City, West Point, and Why Not.

The photo here is of the first house built on the point around 1900. The home belonged to William and Margaret Atwood. This may have been their summer residence.

William Street: William Street is in the City of Excelsior. It is only one block long and connects Oak Street (County Road 19) with George Street near Mount Calvary Lutheran Church.

Photo courtesy of Jay Peirsol, West Point Road, Tonka Bay

The Amazing History of Our Community
The People Of The First 50 Years

Here is a glimpse of what was happening around the country in the middle 1800s, some of which had a direct effect on people arriving in the Lake Minnetonka area.

- 1850 – July 10, Millard Fillmore is sworn into office as the 13th President of the United States after the death of Zachary Taylor the day before.
- 1851 – The America’s Cup yachting race is inaugurated with the victor crowned in the yacht aptly named, “America.”
- 1854 – C. W. Post, American cereal manufacturer, is born.
- 1860 – Abraham Lincoln is Nominated President
- 1860 – The ‘Pony Express’ mail service used horseback riders in 157 Pony Express relay stations across the prairies.
- 1861 – The Beginning of the Civil War.
- 1861 – First United States Income Tax
- 1862 – The state of Virginia becomes two separate states.
- 1862 – The Homestead Act gave an applicant freehold title to up to 160 acres.
- 1863 – On January 1st, The Emancipation Proclamation was made. Freedom for certain Confederate slaves.
- 1863 – The Battle of Gettysburg. Some 23,000 Union soldiers and over 20,000 Confederate soldiers were killed by the end of the third day.
- 1864 – The first Use Of Submarine In Warfare
- 1865 – The end of the Civil War and Abraham Lincoln was assassinated.
- 1865 – February is the only month in history not to have a full moon.
- 1865 – Ku Klux Klan was formed. It was trying to ensure that local African American population did not gain civil and legal rights.
- 1866 – Jesse James, Jesse and his brother Frank James, who were Confederate guerrillas during the Civil War, turn to crime when they create the James-Younger Gang.
- 1866 – Dynamite was invented.
- 1868 – Ulysses S. Grant. Ulysses S. Grant was elected as the 18th President of the United States at the age of 46.
- 1869 – Wyoming allows women to vote.
- 1869 – The Cincinnati Red Stockings became the first professional baseball team.
- 1850 1900 1950 2000

We must not forget that all these people are not a whole lot different from you or me. They had hopes and dreams and gave what they could to make their communities better. As we set the stage for future generations, they did also. If we look hard and long enough, we can see and feel the influence they had on today.

Aldritt, John (1868 – 1953) John and Mary Aldritt and their family lived (address/area) and raised three boys and three girls. John worked (place, doing, for how long).

John fished for sport and also for food. The photo below shows John with numerous northerns that he would let freeze and then sit outside until he needed to clean and prepare them for a meal.

Bacon, Lloyd M. (0000 – 0000) Lloyd M. Bacon and his wife had one daughter, Idamae in 1928. Idamae graduated from Excelsior High School in 1946 and married Gene Bristol in 1949 and later married William F. Rebone. Her father, Lloyd, was the Post Master at Eureka in the 1920s through 1943.

Idamae B. Rebone, age 77, Minnetonka, MN, formerly of St. Cloud, MN died Sunday, May 29, 2005 at her home. Lloyd’s mail truck is pictured here in front of the post office.

Bechrle, Frank Harris (1885 – 1956)

Bennett, Russell Meridan. (1865 – 1934) Russell was a native of Minnesota, being born on a farm near St. Paul. His pioneering instincts were inherited from his father, Russell Hoadley Bennett who brought his family to Minnesota in the early days from New York State and was credited with introducing sheep to Minnesota. When young Russell was 13, his father died and Russell needed to find a job. He began working construction on the Standard Rock Light in Lake Superior. Then at 17, he and another young lad set out for Texas hoping to settle into the cattle business and start a ranch. He didn’t find the ranch there but came back north and began raising cattle near Mandan, North Dakota. From there it was the lumber business that lured him to northern Minnesota.

Russell was one of the early developers of the iron mining industry of northern Minnesota and later, a leader in the business and cultural life of Minneapolis. As a young timber cruiser, Russell was one of the first to comprehend the geological formation of the Mesabi Iron Range. In March of 1890, Russell signed a land contract with lumberman and ex-Governor of Minnesota, John S. Pillsbury, to explore vast tracts of their Northern Minnesota property for iron ore. It was agreed that Bennett would dig, on fragmentary evidence, for at least 10,000 tons of ore.
The Amazing History of Our Community

The contract stated that if Russell was successful, it would yield him title to one half of the minerals found on the optioned tracts. The work of exploring the lands under contract did not commence until the following summer in 1891, which was shortly after the famous Merritt brothers discovery of ore at the great Mountain Iron Mine in November, 1890. During that interim year, Russell hired a crew and a partner, John M. Longyear of Marquette, Michigan. Longyear was a successful timber and mineral explorer who signed on to help with the search in exchange for twenty-five percent of the minerals found on the optioned tracts.

If there had been in existence the tools and technology of the present day, the decision of where to drill could have been made within a week. In those days, they had to build access roads, camp in the wilderness, and endure extreme temperatures, flies, and other harsh conditions. In July, 1892, about one mile southwest of the present town of Chisholm, Russell and his crew dug a pit that contained at least 50,000 tons of the rich, high grade ore they had been seeking. This was the beginning of the Pillsbury-Bennett-Longyear partnership that is still in existence today. Russell’s interests in iron ore were expanded over the years to include properties in Michigan and Brazil. He served as a Director of Meriden Iron Company and the Brazilian Iron & Steel Company, and was frequently hired to consult on new discoveries of minerals all over the world.

In 1895, Russell married Helen Hunt Harrison. They had four sons, one of whom died as a child. Russell and Helen purchased several acres on Lake Minnetonka called Northome from the heirs of Charles Gibson. In 1901, along with famous architect W. Channing Whitney, they built the home pictured above and called it “Cedarhurst.” There were many acres of rolling lawn, greenhouses, tennis courts, stables, and cottages for the employees. Mrs. Bennett was long remembered for opening her home for tours of her numerous gardens. The Italian garden was the most dramatic, with white marble columns and statuary carved to order in Florence, Italy.

There also was a Japanese water garden with an island and pool, and a circular tea garden. Russell was active in many cultural and business enterprises in Minneapolis. He served as a director of the First National Bank of Minneapolis, the Soo Line Railway, and Munsingwear, Inc. He was also a trustee and benefactor of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, the Minneapolis Orchestral Association, the Y.M.C.A., Hamline University, and Hennepin Avenue Methodist church. Russell loved sailing on Lake Minnetonka and enjoyed serving as Commodore of the Minnetonka Yacht Club, a tradition carried on by his grandson, Russell M. Bennett, II.

Russell was deeply interested in the cultural development of the city. He at one time was a trustee and vice-president of the Minneapolis Orchestra and a trustee at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. He gave widely to charity as well.

– information provided by Great Granddaughter-in-law and her daughter

Bertram, George M. (1826 – 1887) George was one of four boys and six girls born to Andrew and Allison Bartram, immigrants from Glasgow, Scotland in 1812. (George at some time changed the spelling of his name)

George Bertram visited Lake Minnetonka in the summer of 1852. He selected the site for the present village of Excelsior. He then returned to New York to organize the Association. About May 1, 1853, McGrath, who had met Bertram in St. Paul the previous year, headed for Minnetonka ahead of Bertram and the remainder of the company. While in St. Anthony, McGrath met John H. Stevens, the acting agent for the In 1855, From Stevens, he received instructions on how to proceed to the site selected for Bertram and build the house to be ready for Bertram upon his arrival.

Wiley and McGrath set out on their journey only to be hit by a snow storm. They got as far as Lake Christmas when the storm started. Wiley headed for Minnetonka Mills and spent the night. McGrath however, settled in by a log and spent the night out doors. Wiley showed up the next day and both men were no worse for wear. They then set out to find Stephen Hull who John Stevens said would know where the building site would be. Hull brought them to the lot in Excelsior on the corner of what would later be First Street and Center Street.

The two first built a 5 foot by 7 foot, three sided building for storage and sleeping while building the main house. The two men then started on the two story house and finished the log structure in time for Bertram’s arrival.

Bertram arrived with a number of families in June. The association immediately took claim of 160 acres on the south shore of the lake. This claim was at once platted into
village lots and was the foundation of the present village of Excelsior. George spent several years as Sheriff of the newly formed County of Wright so it seemed right to him that at the outbreak of the Civil War he would volunteer to serve. He enlisted in the 3rd Regiment of Company H of the Minnesota Volunteer Infantry. Their duty took them south to Tennessee where they met the Confederates at Murfreesboro, Tennessee which is 40 miles southeast of Nashville. They were outnumbered 4-1 by southern volunteers and Texas Rangers yet they were still able to put up a valiant effort before being taken as prisoners. It was during this imprisonment that George Bertram suffered sunstroke that was to plague him the rest of his life. After being “paroled” by the rebels, he was transferred to the Invalid Corp and was assigned to “light” duty at Fort Snelling.

George Monilaws Bertram married Julia Hamilton on September 30, 1841. They had five children. Andrew, George, Marion, Julia and Thomas. Julia was the only white woman west of St. St.Anthony, Minnesota and was well thought of by the Sioux of the area. George and his wife Julia, moved to Monticello after spending a few years in Excelsior. In moving there in 1855, the only “roads” available were oxen trails that followed the paths of the natives of the area. Therefore, the only means of transportation was by wagon or on foot.

Julia and George were involved in the very early establishing of the town of Monticello, especially the faith community. The Congregational Church was born in their home with them both being charter members. It is interesting to note here that in most organizational listings of the time only men were listed. 1855 Wagon Train.

Julia’s life was always a busy one, whether in charitable endeavors, comforting the sick or aiding the needy, white or native. Due to her husband’s business and busyness, she did the majority of the raising of their 5 children (3 boys and 2 girls) while still maintaining an active involvement in the community.

Julia outlived George by 22 years and upon her death was interred beside her husband at Riverside Cemetery. As a testament to her life, on the day of her funeral all the schools and all the businesses were suspended in her memory.

Bertram Lake is just west and south of Monticello. Bertram Lake Regional Park was named for George and Julia Bertram.

Brackett, George Augustus (1836 – 1921) The Great Grandfather of David Brackett (Dianne) of Northome, was George Augustus Brackett. In the busy hive of workers, who have converted Minneapolis from a straggling settlement to a compact city, there are few who have wrought more industriously, or to better purpose, than George A. Brackett. George was born in 1836. The common school of Orono gave him fragmentary instruction in the rudiments of learning, the longest period of attendance being nine weeks.

George moved to Minnesota from Maine. With a ticket purchased on credit and a four pound Canada bank note in his pocket he set out, and arrived on the same train with one of his school boy acquaintances, W. D. Washburn. Arriving here April 30th, 1857, he accepted employment as a butcher boy through the summer, and during the winter worked on the dam of the Minneapolis Mill company. In the following spring he opened a meat market on First Street between Nicollet Avenue and Minnetonka Street, dressing his own beeves and standing over the block, and pursued that business with moderate success.

The domestic life of Mr. Brackett has been shared by a helpful and devoted wife. His marriage took place on the 19th of August, 1858, to Anna M., daughter of William Hoyt, who passed away in December, 1891. George and Anna had seven sons and one daughter. One son and two daughters died in childhood.

The civil war broke out in the spring of 1861. Many years passed as George was involved in the war and later in various activities in the Dakotas. After that he helped organize the Northern Pacific Railroad with William Washburn, Colonel William King, and Dorilus Morrison in 1869. He helped establish the Minneapolis Free Dispensary, which later became the University of Minnesota Medical School. He was also one of the founders of Lakewood Cemetery.

Mr. Brackett purchased the fine homestead of the late Col. Cyrus Aldrich on what was then “Starvation Point” on lake Minnetonka. He built an estate on the peninsula now known as Brackett’s Point.

It was said of George, no man in the city deserves better of his fellow-citizens than does George A. Brackett. Every inch a manly man, strong in his convictions and calm, wise and judicious in counsel. Enterprising, yet conservative.

George was also the first Commodore of the Minnetonka Yacht Club. George’s family
Burton, Hazen James (1841 –1915) The Burtons from Excelsior to what became Deephaven in 1892. Earlier, when the property they purchased was homesteaded during the 1850s and 1860s, most of the trees in had been harvested for lumber and floated down the lake and river to Minnetonka Mills. Consequently, most of the trees in early photos of the property had been recently planted.

And architect W.C. Whitney designed a boulder-and-shingle cottage called “Chimo” (which means “friendly” in Sioux) for the Burtons. Hazen J. Burton owned Plymouth Clothing in Minneapolis. Chimo was the first year-round residence for a Minneapolis commuter from Lake Minnetonka.

In 1892, Carson’s Bay workmen were finishing the Burton residence. He encouraged the railroad to come out to his area and so they put a train station at the base of Chimo, Burton’s home. In fact they built a station house at the base of the hill up to their residence. Mrs. Burton (Alice Cotton Whitney Burton) was asked by railway officials to name the new station on the M & S Line. She thought of a favorite book she had brought with her from New England. The book was entitled Deephaven so that is the name she chose.

As you look at the photo of the train station, focus on the white building in the distance to the right. That is the boat works that Arthur Dyer built in the early 1890s.

All the Burton family members were not only pioneers in the world of sailing but they also pursued many other athletic interests as well. Before Hazen and Alice bought the Chimo property, they lived on Courtland and Second Street in Excelsior. They got to know Sawin and Arthur Dyer quite well as they lived just down the street on Gideon Bay and Arthur took care of the Burton’s yard. It was after that they moved to the property that became Chimo.

Hazen Burton’s son Ward became a noted sailor with a keen interest and ability to not only sail, but win races here on Lake Minnetonka and on the east coast. Ward sailed the infamous Onawa to numerous first place finishes. Ward Cotton Burton married Ella Lindley and together they had sons John, Gale, Lindley and sisters Whitney, Elinor and Hazel.

Bidwell, Marcus (1821 – 1874) Marcus Bidwell arrived in Minneapolis from Connecticut in 1857, began a meat packing company and opened a meat market in downtown Minneapolis. He bought the cattle and kept them in pens in an area where today, 2015, you’d find Parade Stadium and the Sculpture Gardens. Marcus made his way to Excelsior, bought land on Gideon Bay at the junction of West Lake Street and Second Street. He, his wife, five girls and one boy spent summers in Excelsior for many years before the next generation of Bidwells made Excelsior their permanent home.

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And architect W.C. Whitney designed a boulder-and-shingle cottage called “Chimo” (which means “friendly” in Sioux) for the Burtons. Hazen J. Burton owned Plymouth Clothing in Minneapolis. Chimo was the first year-round residence for a Minneapolis commuter from Lake Minnetonka.

In 1892, Carson’s Bay workmen were finishing the Burton residence. He encouraged the railroad to come out to his area and so they put a train station at the base of Chimo, Burton’s home. In fact they built a station house at the base of the hill up to their residence. Mrs. Burton (Alice Cotton Whitney Burton) was asked by railway officials to name the new station on the M & S Line. She thought of a favorite book she had brought with her from New England. The book was entitled Deephaven so that is the name she chose.

As you look at the photo of the train station, focus on the white building in the distance to the right. That is the boat works that Arthur Dyer built in the early 1890s.

All the Burton family members were not only pioneers in the world of sailing but they also pursued many other athletic interests as well. Before Hazen and Alice bought the Chimo property, they lived on Courtland and Second Street in Excelsior. They got to know Sawin and Arthur Dyer quite well as they lived just down the street on Gideon Bay and Arthur took care of the Burton’s yard. It was after that they moved to the property that became Chimo.

Hazen Burton’s son Ward became a noted sailor with a keen interest and ability to not only sail, but win races here on Lake Minnetonka and on the east coast. Ward sailed the infamous Onawa to numerous first place finishes. Ward Cotton Burton married Ella Lindley and together they had sons John, Gale, Lindley and sisters Whitney, Elinor and Hazel.
Carman, John (0000 – 0000) John Carman was the first white settler in Orono Township. John bought a large portion of Spring Park and Casco Point around 1853.

Cathcart, John E. (0000 – 0000) John E. Cathcart was a guest of Reverend Galpin and his wife on Thanksgiving Day, 1853. Other guests were George Mayo Powers, Joshua Moore and his daughter Hanna, Henry M. Lyman, David Griffith, Robert B. McGrath, Mr. and Mrs. Petewr M. Gideon and their two children and hired man, Mr. and Mrs. Arb Cleveland and their four children, Mr. and Mrs. Buchannan and two sons, Mr. and Mrs. William Judd and Mr. and Mrs. George M. Bertram and their four children.

Chowen, George Washington (1825–1887) George Chown’s brother William purchased two parcels of land for him totalling 160 acres. George was living with William and his wife Mary at the time. The Gray’s Bay bridge wasn’t built until 1887 and the corner of Highway 101 and Minnetonka Boulevard took on the name of Chown’s Corner. George and Susan Chown farmed that land.

Chowen, Joseph (1831 – 1898) Joseph H. Chowen was born in Monroe, Wyoming County, Pennsylvania. He moved to Minnesota in 1855 at the age of 23 and located a farm in Minnetonka. He married Jane Fuller in 1859. Jane died in 1872. In 1873 he married Caroline E. Gunn. Joseph and Jane had four children and he had three with Caroline. In 1880, he established a nursery. The property he owned is know today as Chowen’s Corner or Anne Chowen’s Corner.

Chowen, William Streeter (1826 – 1912) “William S. Chown was born in Green county, New York. He moved to Wyoming county, Pennsylvania. At twenty years of age, he went to White Haven, and engaged in lumbering there for eight years and one year in Virginia. William came to St. Anthony, Minnesota in 1850, purchased land and located his farm in Minnetonka at what is now Highway 101 and Minnetonka Boulevard. In 1854, he donated land and helped build the first school house in the area which was across the street from the present Groveland school. He was elected to the first Legislature of the state, and introduced the Agricultural School bill and a memorial to Congress for an agricultural land grant, for college purposes. Both bills were passed while he was in the House. He was also chairman of town board several times. William enlisted, August, 1864, in Company F, the 11th Regiment Minnesota Infantry, with the rank of Sergeant. Stationed at Nashville and Gallatin, Tennessee. He was mustered out, (discharged) on the 26th of June, 1865 at Fort Snelling. He married Mary M. Frecar in Monroe, Pennsylvania in 1865 and they had six children.

William bought 160 acres of land for his brother Joseph, sister Mary and 103 acres in various locations for his brother George. It is also understood that he purchased land for his brothers-in-law, Amos N. Gray (Gray’s Bay) who married his sister Susan and James I. Shaver. (Shaver’s Lake) who married his sister Sarah. In that period, all you needed to do is agree to improve the land you were buying and then you were able to purchase up to 160 acres per parcel at $1.25 an acre.

William’s cousin George (Possibly George Washington Chowen, 1821 – 1889, may be the cousin) wrote William and told him of the wonderful opportunities in this area. George Washington Chowen was an Abstract Agent.

De Guise, Joseph (1866 – 1947) Joseph De Guise was of French Canadian and Chippewa ancestry. Joe was very familiar with the lake and captained various boats for Cap Johnson such as the Mayflower. Joe was also a partner of George B. Hopkins, the Captain of the “Minnetonka.” He was born September 22, 1866 in Detroit and died in Excelsior in 1947. He worked with Henry Ford in Dearborn at the Pot Bellied stove foundry before Henry went in the car business. He was a pilot on the great lakes, and a tall tree trimmer in Northern Minnesota before coming to Excelsior in the late 1880s. His wife Mary Teresa was from Shakopee and worked at the Sampson Hotel on Second Street where she met Joe. They had two children; Published Author, Margarette De Guise (1898) and Joseph Frank De Guise (1900) in Excelsior.

The Amazing History of Our Community

– contributed by grandson, Joe Lee De Guise
Douglas, Walter Donald (1861 – 1912) The Saint Louis Hotel was torn down in 1907. Shortly thereafter, Walter and his wife built the 17,000 sq. foot home on the property they called Walden. Walter was born in Waterloo, Iowa. His father, George Douglas was one of the founders of the Quaker Oats Company. After attending high school, Douglas attended the Shattuck Military Academy in Faribault, Minnesota.

Douglas was associated with several businesses, including the Canadian Elevator Company, the Monarch Lumber Company and the Saskatchewan Valley Land Company, among others. He was also a stockholder, executive board member, and one of the directors of the Empire Elevator Company, and was a member of the executive board of the Quaker Oats Company. He was also among the directors of the First National Bank of Minneapolis and in 1912, retired from Piper, Johnson & Case, a grain firm.

He married Lulu Camp on May 19, 1884, with whom he had two sons, Edward Bruce and George Camp. Lulu died in December, 1899, and eight years later, on November 6, 1907, Douglas was married to Mahala Dutton. In 1912, Walter, who was 50 years old, his wife Mahala and their maid Berthe Leroy, traveled to Europe to purchase French inspired furniture for their home. They gained passage on the maiden voyage of the Titanic. Walter, like so many others, went down with the ship but his wife survived and continued living in the home until her death in 1945. Walter’s body was recovered and brought to Cedar Rapids to be buried in the Douglas family mausoleum at Oak Hill Cemetery. After Mahala died, she was taken to Cedar Rapids and buried next to Walter.

After other sea adventures and an unsuccessful attempt to find gold at Pike’s Peak, he arrived in St. Paul, Minnesota by steamer and fell in love with Martha Terwal, the daughter of a Dutch Sea Captain. Sawin and Martha married and homesteaded a farm near Bloomington and later in Wright County after fighting in Hatches Battalion during the Civil War. It was after that he discovered again the call of the sea at Lake Minnetonka."

Captain Dyer built two rowboats, launched them in Stubb’s Bay and rowed to Excelsior and pitched a tent on the shore of Gideon’s Bay. He spent his first summer guiding fishing parties while making plans for his “miniature shipyard” he would build the following year on his present campsite. He also saw the need for a rowboat ferry to the Lake Park Hotel which he established with his boat works.

Happenings Around Excelsior by Ellen Meyer – He sailed around the Horn.

Dyer, Sawin Hunter (1832 – 1913) “In the 1840s, Captain Sawin H. Dyer built a schooner and rounded the Horn and sailed up the western coast as far as San Francisco where he sold it for a handsome profit.”

The following are newspaper articles from A.S. Dimond’s Excelsior Newspaper “Minnetonka Tourist”

July 11, 1885: (advertisement) Dyer’s Lake Park Ferry. From Gideon’s Bay shore to Lake Park, careful and trusty oarsmen, leave on call or signal. Large, safe and clean boats which are not entrusted to boys to handle. To go safely, be sure to take Dyer’s boats nearest The Commons. October 24, 1885: S.H. Dyer has, by filling in the marsh on his lakeshore lots at the end of First Street, made a very handsome site for a half dozen cottages, two of which are pictured above right.

– contributed by great grandson Rick Dyer

Arthur worked at his father’s boat building shop in Excelsior. In the 1890s while Arthur worked for his father, he also did yard work for the Burton family at this time living up on the hill of Courtland and 2nd street.

In 1892, after leaving Excelsior, Hazen Burton bought his Deephaven estate. Shortly thereafter, he came to visit Arthur with his son Ward. Hazen wanted a boat to compete in a “catboat” sailing event and asked Arthur to build him one.

So, Arthur, not using mathematics and physics but following a dream, finally built the Onawa which was a 24’ sailboat that changed sailing around the area forever. It sailed in its first race by Ward Burton. The Onawa soared into a win as did Arthur Dyers reputation. The boat won by quite a margin and that was Arthur’s beginning as a boat builder.

At the time that Arthur built the Onawa, he had established his own boat building business near Burton’s estate and Cottagewood in Deephaven. Dyer Lane that connects Cottagewood Road and Manor Road is named for Arthur Dyer.


Samuel C. and Susan Gale and Harlow Augustus and Elizabeth Gale were from Royalston, Worcester County, Massachusetts. They bought a small island on Lake Minnetonka in 1860. The sale price was $2.40. It was still a very good price, even for a very small island! They built a few cottages on the island and made them into summer homes.

The island, now called Gale’s Island, is just south of “Big Island,” The Gales called the home “Brightwood” so the island became known as “Brightwood Island” for a time. The photo at right is of Samual Gale rowing a boat around the year 1882, likely near Cottagewood.

Ferguson, William (1816 – 1857) William and Lydia Ferguson came to Minnesota in 1854. After arriving in Saint Paul, William came to Minnesota and Lake Minnetonka from Edinburgh, City of Edinburgh, Scotland, to look for property. After looking in Excelsior, Lake Christmas, Saint Alban and Long Lake, he was finally shown a home and property on Lake Minnetonka that they approved of that later became Ferguson’s Point. There was a small cabin on the property that the fixed up and by the next July of 1855 they were settled. They had two children.

Their troubles were just beginning however when they discovered that friends of Reverend Jacob S. Chamberlain, Morris and Hargin, from Saint Alban, had schemed to beat Fergusons to the land office and succeeded in claiming acreage that was supposed to belong to Fergusons. As time went on, they had more problems but the worst came on November 22, 1857 when William was walking home from church across Excelsior Bay when he broke through the ice and drowned. Lydia remarried W. Frederick Holtz five years later but soon he died of consumption. Her son William and daughter Alice grew up and had troubles of there own to add to Lydia’s frustration. Lydia finally died of exhaustion at the age of 69. Her daughter, after recovering from hospitalization and court appearances for her divorce from a horrible first marriage, married Charles Russell and built rental cabins on the Ferguson property now part of Linwood.

Lydia’s son William “Willie” always considered Linwood his home and after years of wandering about, returned home to build a cabin by a small lake named for him, Lake William.
It is currently called Gale Island. In 1869 the Gales purchased 95 acres of land on a peninsula nearby. This is the section of Deephaven which is currently called “Cottagewood.” The parcels were divided and sold for $100 dollars per acre. The original parcels were actually large enough to have fronts facing the Lake, and opposite sides facing Carson’s Bay. The parcels are small now,crowding house upon house next to each other for some Lakefront.

Galpin Lake & Galpin Boulevard

Galpin, Reverend Charles (1812 – 1872) Galpin Lake and Galpin Boulevard are named after The Reverend Charles Galpin. The Reverend Galpin established the first Protestant Church in Chanhassen. It is believed that the first church services were held in the home of Henry Lyman. (Lyman Boulevard) Later, in 1853, Charles Galpin began the Congregational Church in Excelsior and was the minister there until 1855.

Charles and Robert McGrath managed to build a home by October of 1853 as Reverend Galpin’s wife Semantha would soon arrive. Semantha came by boat to St. Paul then by stage coach to St. Anthony. Charles met her in St. Anthony with a partially broken yoke of oxen. As they made their way to Excelsior, they stayed to warm themselves in a settlers cabin at Lake Calhoun and then proceeded to Minnetonka Mills and stayed overnight. The next morning they followed an old Indian trail to Excelsior and stayed with the Bertrams until their floors, doors and windows were secured.

In 1858, Reverend Galpin, who had retired as the pastor of the Congregational Church in 1855, received the charter for the Excelsior Institute in 1857. In order to meet the financial demands of his Institute, in 1861, Reverend Galpin built the steamboat, Governor Ramsey, that was the first steamboat on Lake Minnetonka. Among other things, it carried mail into Grays Bay and down the creek into Minnetonka Mills that then went by stage to St. Anthony. It then brought mail back to Excelsior. The next year she loosed from her moorings in and sank. Later to be retrieved. The hull became a barge and the machinery powered the “Rambler.”

In 1872 in late November, Reverend Galpin went to help a crew recover a sunken barge but the exposure was too much for him. November 7, 1872, with severe congested lungs, at 60 years, 5 months and 17 days of age, Reverend Charles Galpin died.

Galpin was buried on the south side of Oak Hill Cemetery in Excelsior where his tombstone can still be seen in a beautiful woody setting.

Gardiner, Charles (0000 – 0000)

Sir. Charles Gibson was given the name, “Father of Lake Minnetonka.” He was a true pioneer.

When Deephaven was a wild woodland with nothing more than a twisty wagon trail winding under the maple trees, Charles Gibson visited and envisioned a grand hotel on the spot. Gibson claimed to be an English knight (many called him “Sir Charles”) and was a well-known attorney from St. Louis who owned other hotels in Missouri. He knew this pristine northern lake could attract southerners eager to escape the scorching southern heat. He put cash down to purchase a peninsula on the lake for his “north home” or “Northome” adjacent to what became Robinson Bay.

During the summer of 1874, many visitors vacationed at Lake Minnetonka, around 100 of them from St. Louis alone. Although lake hotels could, as yet, accommodate only 625 guests, Minnetonka was on the threshold of her Glamour days as a summer resort.

Gibson developed the first real resort on the lake, the Hotel St. Louis, and also gave the name to the bay it overlooked. Construction began in 1879 for a July 1880 opening. No expense was spared for his “Health and Pleasure Resort” that boasted not only indoor plumbing and electricity, but each floor had its own bathing room. Marble-topped dressers, elegant drapes and large brass beds filled the plush rooms that all had a large veranda overlooking either Carson’s Bay or St. Louis Bay. A five-mile system of electric bells helped the staff attend to the...
every need of the upper-crust guests. Evening entertainment included dances with live music, plays, musical revues and poetry readings. The hotel was three stories high with porches on three sides, and had accommodations for 350 guests.

Gibson knew that getting the guests to the front door was half the battle, so he had a horse-drawn carriage waiting at the Deephaven depot for any visitors who needed a lift. Most southerners took the Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway that stopped in Minneapolis, but soon a spur of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway (later the Milwaukee Road) took them right to the back door of the hotel.

During 1889, 1890, 1892 and 1894 and again in 1901, the Northwestern Lawn Tennis Championship was held on the courts north of the hotel.

A wealthy Mississippi aristocrat, Judge Weatherby reminisced about his days at the Hotel St. Louis: “Many a night I’ve stood on one of those hotel verandas watching the moon rise... Those Minnetonka nights made me feel downright religious.”

Soon, however, Gibson had competition from none other than James J. Hill with his enormous Lafayette Hotel that cost $815,000 in 1882. Gibson however, spent noter $4,000, four years after his hotel was constructed to update it in order to keep up with his high-class neighbors. Gibson’s hotel did outlast Hill’s however, which burned to the ground in 1897, but the St. Louis’s wooden structure eventually met the same fate and was torn down in 1907 and the land platted for residential homes.

On the site, Walter and Mahala Douglas built a French-revival country manor house he called Waldon that still survives to this day.

Peter was the son of George and Elizabeth (Miller) Gideon of Champaign County, Ohio who were of German and English-Welsh descent, respectively. Gideon was a self-educated horticulturist, spiritualist and a bit of an eccentric. He also was a livestock breeder and a pioneer in breeding and raising poultry in the 1850s and 1860s.

Gideon moved to Minnesota from Illinois in 1853, near Lake Minnetonka, and experimented with planting pear, plum, cherry, peach, and apple seeds. After ten years of experimentation, the harsh Minnesota winters had killed off all of his trees except for one seedling crab apple tree.

Instead of giving up, he sent back to Bangor, Maine for seeds and scions, and continued his experiments by grafting a scion onto the crab apple tree. From this experiment, in 1868 he successfully selected a variety of apple that he named the “Wealthy,” in honor of his wife.

Wealthy (Hull) Gideon was a direct descendant of Joseph Hull, founder of the town of Barnstable on Cape Cod, and niece of Isaac Hull, commander of the United States frigate “Constitution” (Old Ironsides) in the War of 1812.

In March 1878, Minnesota established a State Experimental Fruit Farm by act of the Legislature which Gideon ran for eleven years, planting many thousands of apple trees and distributing his best seeds across the state. The state farm was located near Gideon’s land on Lake Minnetonka, under the jurisdiction of the University of Minnesota. When the farm closed in February 1889 due to conflicts with the University, Gideon lost his job. Gideon later became the first superintendent of a University of Minnesota agricultural experiment station established in 1878. The station was abandoned in 1889, when he retired, but in 1907 the Minnesota Legislature established a fruit breeding farm between Excelsior and Chaska. The fruit breeding farm later became the Horticultural Research Center, which is now part of the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum. The center later developed the Haralson apple, introduced in 1922. The Wealthy apple is genetically related to the Haralson, though it took DNA testing to rediscover this fact after extensive hybridization.

Gideon continued to develop apples and originated others, some of which he bred to have tougher skin and others to be adapted to certain times of the year. Names he gave to his apples besides the “Wealthy” apple were, the August, September and October. Others were the Peter, the Gideon and three crab tree varieties – the Florence and the Martha named for two of his daughters and the Excelsior.

Gideon, Peter Miller (1820 – 1899) Gideon Bay is named after Peter M. Gideon who owned 160 acres and numerous apple orchards throughout Tonka Bay.

Gideon’s home near Manitou – remodeled
Goodwin, John T. (1866 – 1953) John Goodwin was an early resident of the Excelsior area. He married Mary A. Mason and had two sons, Leon and George who both died very young at 20 and 10 years old. He owned land on Howard’s Point on which he built a small house and a barn. I am not sure how much land he owned but it was out towards the point and he later sold it to Keith Aulden. He was John W. Colby Sr.’s uncle on John’s mother’s side. John W., as a young boy, lived with John and Mary Goodwin on Howard’s point, as John W.’s parents decided to move from Chaska to North Minneapolis once the brickyards closed.

Because John W. stayed in the area with Goodwins and got to like it so much, he decided to live in Excelsior when he grew up. John W. also said he could remember the Indians coming from Shakopee to Lake Minnetonka to harvest the rice. They would stop by Goodwin’s house for a meal. One day one of a brave gave a bow and arrow to John Colby which, as a young boy, I remember seeing but was not allowed to play with it.

Near Howard’s Point, just to the south and east, was a swamp that was known to produce a lot of wild rice during the 1700s and 1800s. The swamp still exists but it doesn’t appear to have wild rice any longer.

John Goodwin’s main line of work was moving houses with teams of horses. Many smaller homes on Lake Minnetonka were going to be demolished to make room for much large ones. So John would move them inland near Eureka and sell them. Eventually this kind of work went away so John eventually sold his property to Keith Aulden. John did move his own house and barn to Eureka off old highway seven at what was referred to the S curve in the road next to Gordon Diethelm’s farm. The S curve in those days was less than a quarter mile east of Minnewashta Elementary. The road has been straightened as of 2014. Anyway, this was right across the railroad tracks from John W. Colby’s house.

John kept his team of horses at the new location in Eureka. He started growing strawberries and raspberries, current apples and many different types of vegetables some of which he sold to the local stores and to residents. He even helped some of the local farmers in the fall with putting up their hay or shocking the grain with his team of horses. John never owned or drove a car.

Mary, his wife, made the best baked apples I have ever tasted. After she died, John Goodwin would come over to our house nearly every night for supper. We lived above John W. Colby’s house until 1954 when my dad built a house next door on property he bought from August Gearth who owned a farm on Eureka Road a half mile south of what was Highway 7 at the time.

– recollections from Butch Colby, John T. Goodwin’s great nephew

Gray, Amos (1824 – 1902) Amos Gray moved to Minnesota from Pennsylvania after marrying Susan Chowen (1828-1904) in 1847. He became one of the original land owners on the shores of Lake Minnetonka, and today the Bay carries his name. Susan’s brothers William Chowen had traveled to Saint Anthony and purchased a number of parcels of land and either sold them or deeded them over to relatives such as his brother-in-law Amos Gray. In the above photo, Amos is third from the left standing next to Susan to his right. The home was located at Highway 101 and Minnetonka Boulevard.

Halsteds Bay

Halsted, Captain Frank William. (1833 – 1876) The Hermitage was settled by two brothers, Captain Frank William Halsted and Major George Blight Halstead, and was a mecca for every Lake Minnetonka tourist.

Halstead, Major George Blight. (1820 – 1901) George was born in Elizabethtown, New Jersey. He studied law at Princeton and came to Lake Minnetonka in 1876. A visit to the Hermitage was all but mandatory. It was not the simple house which drew the tourist, rather it was its contents and the two Hermitsa themselves. Their mystery, intrigue, stories, and charm drew people to the house by the boat load. The appeal to tourists of the Hermits took on two major periods: the creation of mystery and intrigue during Captain Halsted’s life and the perpetuation of his life by his brother Major Halstead.

The Hermitage was owned, at different times, by the two brothers, Captain Frank W. Halsted and Major George B. Halstead. Captain Halsted, as Frank was commonly called, had settled in the Lake Minnetonka area in the late 1850s.

In 1861, during a visit to his family in Elizabeth, New Jersey, the Civil War broke out and he volunteered for the navy. George Halsted also joined the navy the day after war was declared. Later in life he would claim to be the first civilian to receive a commission during the war. For a short time they both served together on board the flag ship U.S.S Minnesota. Due to conflicts with their commanding officer, Frank requested a transfer and George resigned his commission and accepted an appointment as first lieutenant and “Aide de Camp” to Brigadier General Philip Kearny of the New Jersey Volunteers. By the end of the war, he had attained the rank of Major, hence George became known as Major Halstead.

When the war was over in 1866, George returned to his home in New Jersey and Frank went back to Lake Minnetonka. Upon returning to Lake Minnetonka, Captain Halsted bought some land on the Upper Lake near what is now Halstead’s Bay. The Hermitage was situated on about 40 acres in Minnetrista very near where the proposed Hennepin County Park is. The Hermitage, constructed by him in 1869, was situated opposite of Crane Island between Halsted Bay and the West Upper Lake. Halsted was the local Justice of the Peace and a well-known character around Lake Minnetonka. The Hermitage was a story and a half with a basement. Captain Halsted then set about his hermit-like ways.

The Tribune on July 6, 1876 described him like this: Captain Frank was the driving
force behind the Lake Minnetonka Improvement Commission. In 1876 he became the first Justice of the Peace. He agreed to the title “Hermit.” As time passed he grew to despise it. Captain Frank decided to build his boat the “Mary” in 1876 because another gentleman by the name of William Rockwell had a monopoly on the lake and raised prices. The cost to build the boat was running way over estimates and additionally, the boat wasn’t sea worthy. All of these reason appear to be the reason why Frank committed suicide. He borrowed a neighbors boat and rowed out into the bay in front of his home. He then tied a forty pound bag of rocks around his neck and threw himself overboard. People were a little concerned but as it wasn’t unlike him to disappear at time, no one was too concerned. Later however, some people out on the lake found his body that had floated to the surface near Crane Island. Captain Frank’s brother, Major George Blight Halstead came here in 1876 to join his brother Frank when he heard about his troubles but Frank had already died.

Captain Frank’s will made his brother Major George Halstead the executor of his estate. The Major came to his brother’s home and was so taken with it and with the lake that he decided to stay and made the Hermitage his permanent residence.

The Major was not a recluse like his brother. He was very refined and a social man. He loved to read and belonged to many societies. He was also industrious and loved the water.

In 1876 the propeller steamer Mary, owned, and mastered by Captain Frank W. Halsted, joined May Queen in this trade. Captain Halsted was a US Navy veteran of the American Civil War. In the summer of 1861, Halsted served on the flagship of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron, USS Minnesota, under Flag Officer Silas Horton Stringer. Major George Halstead rebuilt a boat called the “Mary” in 1881.

In 1901, somehow the Hermitage caught fire and it was totally destroyed along with Major Halstead and all his treasured belongings. His will stated that he was to be buried next to his brother and their grave was to be forever protected.

The spelling of their name in recorded files varied from Halstead to Halsted. Halsted has been accepted as the correct version.

Haralson Apples

Haralson, Charles (1863 – 1941) Charles Haralson lived at Hummingbird Road and Minnetonka Boulevard. He developed the Haralson apple. He was the superintendent of the University of Minnesota Fruit Breeding Farm.

Charles Haralson was the developer of Haralson Apple and Latham Raspberry. He had one son Helmer who continued working with the Fruit Growers Association.

In March 1878, the Minnesota State Horticultural Society, using state funds, started the Minnetonka Fruit Farm on 116 acres next to Peter Gideon’s farm. Gideon was in charge of the fruit farm until his retirement in 1889.

In 1907, the Horticultural Society successfully petitioned for a new fruit breeding and testing farm to be part of the University of Minnesota’s Horticulture Department. The farm began on seventy-eight acres purchased five miles west of Excelsior.

The Fruit Breeding Farm continued to grow and produce new hardier fruit varieties. Between 1919 and 1953, sixty-two new varieties came out. Among the better known were the “Fireside” and “Haralson” apples, the “Northstar” cherry, and the “Superior” plum. The “Haralson” was very successful. It has provided more income than any other Minnesota apple variety. In 2005 Haralsons made up over fifty percent of all Minnesota apple production.

Hardy, W.L.

Harrison, Captain N. H. (1822 – 0000) Harrison was born in Petersburg, Virginia. He moved to Hennepin County in 1855 and settled on Minnetonka’s Upper Lake on what is know today as Harrison Bay. He was one of the first white settlers in the area. He remained there for 11 years, spent two years in Excelsior and then returned the Upper Lake. He was a ship carpenter by trade.

He built the “Mary,” “May Queen,” “City of Minneapolis” and a sail boat named “Coquette.”
Holden, Arthur

Hopkins, George F. (1854 – 0000) George F. Hopkins married Francis L. (____) in about 1880. George owned the Del Otero Hotel and a boat named the Alert. George also captained the Saucy Kate in 1899 and the Mayflower in 1900. George Hopkins and Joseph DeGuise purchased Hopkins in . . .

Howard, Silas (1804 – 1887) Silas was born on November 15, 1804 in Rhode Island. He had worked in the lumber and coal business prior to coming to Minnesota. Silas, his wife Lydia Reed and their 13 year old son Simeon, came to Lake Minnetonka and homesteaded 11 acres of land on what became their namesake, Howard’s Point in 1858. Silas set up his home at the base of the point.

Their son Simeon married Adeline Kibby in 1870. They had four children but one died young. Lettie, Elinor and Alice. Lettie married George Leach, Elinor married James Johnston and Alice married John “Jack” Knowlton. Lettie and George had a son Maurice. Elinor and James had three sons, Howard, Edward and Donald. Alice and John had three children. Elinor, Mark and Burt who died in his teens from diptheria.

Howard and Edward “Ed” Johnston remained living near Howard’s Point. Howard ran the marina that he later sold to Wally Rachel before starting a hardware store in Excelsior with his cousin Maurice Leach. It was where Artworks is as of 2015. Howard and his wife Winona had three children. Ron, Judy and David and lived at the entrance to Howard’s point on the lake.

Ed Johnston started Minnetonka Glass just south of Howard’s Point in about 1960. Ed and his wife Adeline Derice Watts had three children, Elizabeth, James and Mary.

Donald married and moved to Hopkins.

John and Alice’s daughter Elinor married George O’Neil and moved to Fairbault. Their son son Mark married Grace Barnacle and moved to Excelsior. In the 1920’s the John and Alice bought the Clark house at 371 Water Street, now known as The Bird House Inn. This was a rooming, boarding house. They also owned the the cabin court next door where Wells Fargo Bank is now located (2015) until about 1948.

Hull, Reverend Stephen (0000 – 0000) Reverend Stephen Hull arrived here in 1853 and settled a farm in the Northeast portion of what became Tonka Bay. He established what was the first waterway to connect the Upper and Lower lake of Minnetonka so navigation by larger boats was possible. His daughter Wealthy married Peter M. Gideon who also arrived in 1853 from Champaign County, Ohio.

Johnson, Gustavus V. (1845 – 0000) Gustavus was born in Clayton County, New York and learned the trade of boat building. He enlisted in the Army in 1863 and was mustered in 1865. As a boat builder he then went to Chicago, Wisconsin, Winona, Minnesota, then White Bear Lake and finally arrived on Lake Minnetonka. He married Elizabeth Buflett in 1869.

G. V. Johnson and Royal C. Moore built a few boats together. Johnson and Moore also had separate boat building firms. Johnson was responsible for a number of Lake Minnetonka-constructed boats including the Lillic Reid (1878), Elsie (1879), Albatross (1880), Agnes (1881), Susie Belle (1880-1881), Dutchy (1881), Ariadne (1882), Kismet (1882), Margaret (1883), Rachel Hill (1883), barge Priscilla (1902), and John Alden (1905). Some of the vessels Johnson and Moore produced include the Kansas City (1883), Lazy Jane (1884), Rosander (1885), Woodland (1885), and Lizzie Gill (1886).
“Monday, Marcus and Jennie here Brought some fudge Kate & kid (Anson Mase) at Gertrude’s. Aug. 25, 08 Tuesday Dagmar & I went riding with Chuck & Dorothy. Aug. 30, 08 Sunday Hot, didn’t go S.S. Norwegian Danish singers outing at Big Island. Bumm’d around on Searles’ Island for awhile. Sept. 4, 08 Friday, Ma, Pa, Oscar (Ludvo) & I went to the State Fair to-day. Minneapolis day. Big crowd. Saw horse races all afternoon. Saw Milly Johnson at the fair. Left at 8 o’clock and came home at 10 o’clock. Tired as the dickens.”

THE “SEA DOG”

Johnson, John Ropstol. Captain (1859 – 1931) Captain Johnson came from Kristiansand, Norway in 1880 at the age of 21. He originally dreamt of settling in Australia but one day, after visiting his sister in Excelsior, he was waiting at the depot in Minneapolis before heading up to Duluth to set sail for the Atlantic. W. D. Washburn, who was waiting for the City of Saint Louis to be delivered, got talking to Johnson about staying on and coming back to Lake Minnetonka. Johnson obliged. Johnson eventually captained the smaller City of Saint Louis (1,000 people) and later the Belle of Minnetonka. The Belle could carry 2,500 passengers and its dining room could seat 200 persons. It has been said that it occasionally carried 3,000 plus people. These boats and many others were owned and operated by the Lake Minnetonka Navigation Company which John R. Johnson was manager and later owner.

The City of St. Louis, “The City,” was built in Jefferson, Indiana, then taken apart and brought to Minnetonka. It was always one of the most popular boats on the lake. In June of 1883, she steamed out from her dock on Solberg’s Point and was officered as follows: Captain, W. G. Telfer; pilot, Louis McDonald; mate, Charles Crump; second mate, John Johnson; clerk, Frank H. Bowen; assistant clerk, William H. Hungerford; steward, H. E. Kenelly; engineer, S. A. Crichtfield; second engineer, Walter Scott; third engineer, T. Crichtfield; head waiter, W. Manuel. By 1887, John R. Johnson was the captain.

Some of the boats Captain Johnson owned were the City of Saint Louis, the Belle of Minnetonka, the Alert, formerly the Nina, the Saucy Kate, the Buttnisky, the Tonka, formerly the Hattie May, the Lotus, the Minneapolis, the Rambler-a dredge boat, the Mayflower, the Plymouth, the Priscilla, the Northern Flyer, the John Alden, a passenger boat, was too top heavy so it was converted into a tug boat. The Miles Standish was another tug boat as was the Napoleon.

In 1887, The City, with 250 people on board, was caught in a terrible storm in the middle of the day near Big Island. Total control was lost when the anchors broke loose and the boat floated helplessly until it reached Summerville shore at Cottagewood.

The Belle was dismantled in 1897. It’s interesting how the machinery and other parts of these ships will continually be utilized. In the 1850s, the Belle’s engines and boilers were in the Mississippi steamboat Phil Sheridan. In the early 1900s they were transported to do service somewhere in the Yukon.

Years earlier while Johnson was a First Officer on the Belle of Minnetonka, the ship, with 1,700 passengers was heading into Cooks Bay past Hardscrabble Point when trouble started. The ship was suddenly heading towards some rocks in the shallows. It seems the rudder cable was broken or unraveled and the Captain lost control of the ship. Johnson discovered the problem and without hesitation, grabbed the cables and basically entwined himself in them while holding onto the rudder so that the ship could be controlled and the rocks would be avoided. Captain Zimmerman discovered Johnson who by this time was almost being torn apart. By then, the danger had passed and Zimmerman and the crew were able to release Johnson from the grips of the cables. This was all done with the safety of the 1,700 passengers in mind.

Capt. John R. Johnson worked on the new Narrows in October of 1902. The dredge boat he used, was the modified City of Saint Louis. He dredged the new channel and helped fill in the old channel known as Hulls Narrows. L. F. Sampson finished filling in Hulls Narrows in November. Besides the dredging, even in those days, a lot of time was spent weed cutting on the lake.

In 1913, the boats in service for the TCRT are the Hopkins, Como, Minnehaha, White Bear, Harriet, and Stillwater. Captain Johnson’s boats, the Plymouth, Puritan and Mayflower were held in reserve.

Captain Johnson and his wife Mina, had four daughters and lived on St. Alban’s Hill. Johnson’s boat building was done on the St. Alban’s Bay property on Solberg’s Point. The boats were all moored there as were the dredge boats.

In 1921, he had a new house built in Excelsior which his wife lived to enjoy only three years. Then, less
than two years after his wife’s death, his youngest daughter died unexpectedly. Yet he bore his sorrows without bitterness and his disappointments without malice, as he turned his attention to making others happy.

As a music lover with a fine singing voice himself, it was his pleasure to honor musical groups. He used to give the Excelsior band a tour of the lake after their last summer concert each year. And once he surprised a troop of Boy Scouts by meeting them at the Excelsior docks and piloting them across the lake to their island camp. As always, he led the singing and told his stories during the boat rides. Those good deeds exemplify the generosity of the owner of the Johnson Dredging Company, because he owned only barges and dredges at the time and had to charter the excursion boat himself for each occasion.

“Cap” Johnson’s abiding interest in sports reached a peak in 1927 when grandson Carl Hehl was captain of Excelsior’s basketball team that went to the state tournament. There, narrowly defeated in the finals, the team lost its chance to represent Minnesota in the National Basketball Championship games. But that didn’t stop Johnson. He himself took the whole team, plus the coach, plus a football-playing grandson Anson Mase, to see the National contest held in Chicago that year.

Also in the mid 1920s, Cap Johnson extended a helping hand to a Minneapolis artist he had known back in Norway. Because times were hard for Andreas Pedersen, Johnson commissioned three large paintings in as many years. The first was a replica of Hofmann’s “Christ at Gethsemane,” which he presented to the Congregational Church of Excelsior as a memorial to his beloved wife and daughter. Johnson’s daughter Ida was the principal of Chaska High School at the time of her death in 1925. She was 25 years old.

The second and third paintings, completed in 1927 and 1928, hang in Excelsior’s Masonic Temple. One is a life-size painting of George Washington as a Master Mason; the other a picture of “Ruth, the Gleaner” given to the Excelsior Chapter of the Eastern Star as a memorial to his daughter, Ida Johnson. They were seven-foot by nine-foot twin paintings.

Then in the autumn of his life, as a dredging contractor, Johnson shored up countless friendships among the young and old. More than ever, his acts of kindness won him widespread affection.

– contributed by Great Granddaughter Martha Tollefson (Mase) and Great Granddaughter-in-law Cindy Mase
Knowlton, John “Jack” Edgar (1874 - 1955) My grandfather, John (“Jack”) Knowlton married Alice Howard. Alice’s grandparents were the Silas Howard family who homesteaded Howard’s Point in the late 1850s. Her parents were Simeon and Addie Howard. John had a gasoline launch that measured approximately 24 feet in length. He operated the launch out of Edgewood, delivering people, laundry, packages and anything that needed moving from 1904 until at least 1912. They lived very close to the Edgewood Hotel. John also had a rural mail delivery route. The photo above was taken one snowy afternoon crossing the railroad tracks at Eureka. The Eureka Post Office was in business from 1892 until 1943.


John E. Knowlton and his father Mark purchased the James H. Clark House, (The Bird House in 2015) at 371 Water Street and operated it as a boarding house along with Knowlton’s Cabin Camp next door at 411 Water Street until 1948.

“I remember Friday evenings in the fall during the 1940s and early 1950s, the Excelsior High School football games would be held on the field behind the cabins.” The neighbors would bring blankets and chairs and we would watch the game from the hill. At the time they sold the property to the Aldritts, John and Alice built a smaller home at the rear of the 371 property. This smaller home was moved to 703 Second Avenue by Jerome Studer in the 1960s where Jerome and his wife lived until his death.

In 1948, J.E. Aldritt bought the boarding house they had been winter borders in for 18 years. The Aldritts, who had been farmers on Lake Minnewashta, had three daughters who eventually owned the home. Two ran businesses in Excelsior and one in Minneapolis.

– Recollections from Tom Knowlton, grandson

Knowlton, Mark L. (1836- 1929) My great-grandfather, Mark L. Knowlton was born in Liberty, Maine. He served as a drummer boy in the Civil War, and came to Minnesota early in the 1870s. He was the postmaster in Clear Lake and later to moved to Minneapolis where he worked for the Pillsbury Company. In the early 1900s his family was living in Edgewood at Lake Minnetonka. They built their home at 26915 Edgewood Road.

Mark would ride his motorbike from the Lake into Excelsior. (Anyone owning a motorized vehicle in those days was noticed) where he’d park during the day, and catch the train or streetcar into Minneapolis. The process was reversed in the evening. In later years the family remembered the good bread that “Grandpa” brought home from the testing kitchens at Pillsbury.

In 1921 Mark L. Knowlton, Sr. and his son, John E. Knowlton and family purchased the Clark house from the children of J. H. and Mrs. Clark.

Mark Knowlton, Sr. was the last GAR (Grand Army of the Republic) veteran living in Excelsior, and at the time of his death in 1929, the flag of the Captain Frank Halsted Post of the GAR was retired.

– Recollections from Tom Knowlton, great-grandson
Lyman, Elizabeth  Lyman Lodge. The Lyman Lodge YWCA Camp was named Elizabeth Lyman Lodge after Elizabeth Lyman, the wife of F. W. Lyman. YWCA of course stands for Young Women’s Christian Association.

Many of the girls arrived by train from the Great Northern station or rode the trolley car to Excelsior and then took a boat across the lake to Lyman Lodge. Room and board for two weeks was $12.00.

The lodge also hosted weekend camps for female office and factory workers. Activities included swimming, canoeing, hiking, tennis, baseball, arts and crafts and camp fires.

These were the eight (8) requirements for evaluation on the “Canoe Test.”

1. Rescue an (apparently) senseless person fifty feet from the dock.
2. Perform artificial respiration by the Schafer Method.
3. Demonstrate ability to paddle.
4. Swim one third of a mile.
5. Swim in good form.
6. Bring up cup from eight feet of water.
7. Undress in deep water and save all clothing.
8. Show good judgement, resourcefulness and leadership.

The following is a recent comment (2013) by one camper from 1973.

“The summer after fifth grade I went to Lyman Lodge YWCA camp in Excelsior, Minnesota. I stayed for two weeks and got to sleep in a cabin, do crafts and activities outside and for the first time learned how to swim. Well, in reality I just learned to dog paddle which probably doesn’t qualify as actual swimming.”

Lyman Lodge was located between Minnetonka Boulevard and Lake Minnetonka across from Lake William. Today you will find Lyman Lodge Lane circles through the original property. The Lodge closed in 1976 giving way to upscale homes.
Farming and Lumber and Lyman Boulevard

Lyman, Henry Martyn (1828 – 1902) Henry left home, which was Easthampton, Massachusetts in the spring of 1852 to head west. He wanted to find some land and file a claim. He traveled by train to Winona, Minnesota and then head up the Mississippi River to Saint Paul. When he arrived, he bought a team of oxen and some lumber and drove out to Lake Minnetonka.

His first night in the area he built a lean-to to sleep in and woke during the night just in time to move out of the way of one of the oxen about to lie down on top of him.

Henry found the site he wanted and began building a log cabin. The claim he filed was signed by President Buchanan. In the first two years, Henry got to know The Galpins and Robert McGrath as well as John E. Cathcart, Peter and Wealthy Gideon, The Clevelands, the Buchannans, Mr. and Mrs. William Judd and George Bertram and his wife along with numerous others who were all friends in Excelsior.

On Thanksgiving Day, 1853, Henry was one of the guests at the home of Reverend and Mrs. Charles Galpin. With him were George Mayo Powers, Joshua Moore and his daughter Miss Hanna Moore, John E. Cathcart, Robert B. McGrath, Mr. and Mrs Peter Gideon, Mr. and Mrs. William Judd and George and Julia Bertram and their four children and all would soon be members of the Congregational Church in Excelsior. In the meantime they congregated at Reverend Galpin’s home or Galpin’s brother’s hotel. The church was finally built in 1870 and 1871.

In 1854, Henry returned to Massachusetts to find a wife. He returned after a short while with a sweetheart from Easthampton, Martha Pomeroy who’s parents were heartbroken and so afraid for her heading into the Minnesota wilderness.

The Indians once came to ask Henry to head out with them to help find a deer. One came running back and Martha thought for sure they had killed Henry but he had only forgotten his bow and arrows.

Henry and Martha gave birth to eight children in that cabin (six boys and two girls) with no doctor near by. Only four boys, Ansel, Albert, Arthur and Frank, grew to adulthood. Diphtheria and scarlet fever took the other four children.

Henry died in 1902 and Martha died in 1911. Lyman Boulevard in Chanhassen, that travels cast from county road 41 to Highway 101 is named after Henry M. Lyman.

Arthur Burt Lyman (1871 – 1948) stayed on the farm and married Evelyn Brackett in 1903. Arthur, like his father, was very interested in horticulture. He stayed on to work the farm but taught school in Victoria through the winter. While there, he noted the alfalfa of Wendollen Grimm which led him to the discovery and development of “Grimm Hardy Alfalfa.” The government declared Grimm Alfalfa to be among the hardest cultivated plants ever grown. Arthur B. Lyman went on to build Grimm into a large, prosperous business distributing seed throughout the United States and many foreign countries.

Arthur and Evelyn had three children. Richard Brackett Lyman, Arthur Burt Lyman and Elizabeth Lyman. The Lyman’s were members of the Congregational Church in Excelsior and involved in various committees and boards. Arthur was on the Building Commission. Arthur and Evelyn’s son Richard was baptized in the new church on Children’s Day, June 25, 1905.

Albert and Frank left the farm to go into business. Albert didn’t go too far and started Lyman Lumber Company. The above photo is the local womens club celebrating an Indian Pageant at the Commons in Excelsior, 1918. The woman driving the car is Evelyn Brackett Lyman.

A. Burt Lyman and his wife were married in Colorado. The two of them loved the mountains and Burt was working in the mines. But when Arthur became ill and needed help on the farm, they realized they’d better head back home.

– contributed by Barbi Zorn (Lyman) Great Granddaughter of Henry Martyn Lyman

Arthur B. Lyman in 1928

– The Amazing History of Our Community

64
Merrill, Eugene (1847 – 1928) Eugene Merrill was born in 1847 in Byron, New York. The Merrill’s were a farming family. His grandfather Asa owned a farm in New York and his father had a farm in Illinois. Eugene did not want to farm so he utilized a scholarship set up by his grandfather and went to college. He graduated with a law degree in 1872.

Addie “Addie” Keith was born to Henry and Ruth Keith in the middle 1850s in St. Anthony. Her parents eventually bought property on Howard’s Point from Silas Howard in the 1870s and built a large home there that eventually became their boarding house.

Addie lived with her parents in the boarding house and Eugene Merrill moved in as a boarder in 1875. Addie and Eugene met and fell in love and married in 1876.

Eugene established a law firm in Minneapolis with a partner, Martin B. Koon along with Addie’s cousin Arthur M. Keith later on. The Merrills and the Koons shared a cottage on Howard’s Point for a number of years. Years later, they lived in Minneapolis but spent their summers on Howard’s Point.

Eugene’s law practice became increasingly involved in handling family and friends trusts and eventually he established a new company, Minnesota Loan & Trust with a partner, E. J. Phelps. Eugene had also formed the Brainerd and Northern Minnesota Railroad as the timber business continued to boom. The railroad was sold in 1901 and was absorbed into Burlington Northern and the Loan and Trust Company became a partner with Northwestern National Bank.

The Merrills eventually owned a mansion in Minneapolis as Eugene’s business holdings continued to thrive. They did, however, still enjoyed their home and property on Howard’s Point and they and their children would spend all summer their enjoying the beautiful summer weather and the lake. In 1920, as their family was grown and their activities were changing and because of their involvement with the WCA (Womens Christian Association), they donated their property to the WCA as a place for women to enjoy gathering for days, weekends or weeks on end singing, playing yard games and enjoying the lake. Eugene named the property Janette Merrill Park after his recently deceased mother.

Maxwell, George S. (1829 – 1895) Delilah Elizabeth Slane (1835 – 1920)

Maxwell Bay – George was born in Virginia. George and Delilah had two children, Francis McClellan who was born in 1861 and John Gilmore, born in 1863.

McGrath, Robert B. (1830 – 1906) Robert McGrath was originally from Maine. He had been living in Dubuque, Iowa prior to meeting up with George Bertram around 1853. He came to Excelsior ahead of Bertram with R. C. Wiley. Once they finally arrived after a severe snow storm, they met up with Stephen Hull who showed them the building site Bertram had selected. An architect and builder, McGrath built Bertram’s home in time for Bertram’s arrival, and then began to construct homes and businesses throughout what is now the city of Excelsior. The “House on the Hill,” 193 Second Street, was a home McGrath built for himself. Sarah S. McGrath, Robert’s wife, died soon after she and Robert arrived in Excelsior. Both are buried in the Oak Hill cemetery.

Dr. Hugh Arey was the second owner of the “House On The Hill.”

McGrath went on to build a carpenter shop which also used for town meetings. It was in 1853-54 that George Bertram, President of the Excelsior Association, called a meeting and the name Excelsior was officially and unanimously adopted. Years later, McGrath was elected to the State Legislature in 1863.

The township of Excelsior was organized in 1858 and originally included land in what is now Excelsior, Greenwood, Shorewood, Tonka Bay and parts of Deephaven and

– Excerpts from the book “Howard’s Point,”
  A Lake Minnetonka Story written by Mark Welty.
Orono.

Early area pioneers included the families of Rev. Charles Galpin (Excelsior), Lydia and William Ferguson (Deephaven and Greenwood), Henry Eddy (Shorewood), Peter M. Gideon (Shorewood), and Stephen Hull (Orono).

McKinney, Alice (1853 – 1944) Alice was the first settler on Lafayette Bay.

Morse, William Bradford (1829 – 1921) William and Anne Frances Morse (1834 – 1908) homesteaded Big Island in 1855. He and Anne also owned numerous parcels of land in Excelsior.

Morse, Herbert Anthony (1872 – 1951) Herbert Morse married Lydia Paulina. He had a thriving Ice business.

Pictured here is Jimmy Lees who worked for H. A. Morse. Jimmy is in front of the Ice storage barn that was located on St. Alban’s Bay.
Olds, Clifton Carol (1880–1931) married Jessie Estelle Arey, sister of Dr. Hugh Arey of Excelsior. Together they had a son, (James) Roger Olds. The three of them moved to a home in Excelsior in 1929. Clifton purchased a clothing store that became Excelsior Dry Goods and later, Olds Dry Goods. When Clifton died in 1931, young Roger dropped out of College to help his mother Jesse run the family business. The photo is of Roger in the store in the 1930s. Over the years they remodeled the interior, upstairs and down into one of the best clothing stores Excelsior has ever seen.

Roers, Martin

Sampson, L. (Leroy) F. (1843 – 1918) Sampson was born in Temple Mills, Franklin County, Maine. He came to St. Anthony in 1853 and then to Excelsior in 1864. Leroy’s family lineage descends from family of John Alden, Sr. and Priscilla Mullins. Alden was a sea captain who settled in the Plymouth Colony in 1620 after arriving on the Mayflower.

In 1861 he enlisted in the Company D, First Infantry but was wounded and honorably discharged while in the hospital in Pennsylvania. He served once again until 1865. He came home and married Eliza Spaulding who was from Chaska, that same year. He had bought land near Lake Minnewashta. After the wedding they planned to live in Excelsior but Leroy re-enlisted. He was finally discharged however, that September of 1865.

They eventually had six children. By 1876 he had established a mercantile business and was appointed Postmaster in 1878 at the age of 35. At one time Sampson owned two buildings on the west side of Water Street at about 200 and 212 which in 2014 would include Jake O’Connors Public House. In 1885, Leroy took possession of the property at 520 Second Street called the “Slater” House and ran it as a hotel. He kept the name for a while but in June of 1887 he changed the name to the “Sampson” House.

On a sad day in November of 1893, the “Sampson” House burned to the ground and Sampson wasn’t sure he would be able to rebuild as he only had a $4,000 insurance policy and his loss was close to $12,000. However, Mr. Sampson soon committed himself to rebuilding and planned to finish by 1894. The depression hit however so Sampson’s plans were tabled for a while. Finally in July of 1895, Lyman Lumber started delivering materials and the thirty-six room new Sampson House opened in November and Leroy also secured lumber from and old barn in Wisconsin which the railroad delivered free of charge.

Every room had a wood stove allowing the Sampsons to run a year round hotel. As time went on, the wood stoves were replaced by steam heat and gas lights by electric lights. There were dances every Saturday night and they offered row boats, bait and even guides on the lake. The ad above appeared in local papers and flyers of the day. Sampson turned the business over to his children and semiretired. He was wintering in St. Petersburg, Florida when he died. He was buried in Oak Hill Cemetery on May 23, 1918.

Savage, Marion Willis (1853–1916)) Marion W. Savage was the last owner of the pacer, Dan Patch. Marion is the Great Grandfather of Lucy Uphoff (Savage) who grew up on Robinson’s Bay in Deephaven and presently (2015) lives in Excelsior. Marion was married to Marietta L. Savage.
Simpson, William (1837 – 0000) William was born in New Brunswick. He moved to Minnesota in 1865 and settled in Excelsior. He opened the Excelsior House and ran it for two years. He then took ownership of the White House, enlarged it to accommodate about 90 guests. William married the daughter of Pardon Sherman in 1869.

Shaver, James (0000 – 0000) and Sarah C. (1824 – 0000) Sarah Chowen was born in Pennsylvania in 1824 and married James Shaver in 1849. In 1851, James came to Minnetonka “City” to start a mill. In 1852, James’ wife Sarah joined him with their son. Sarah had 3 brothers who followed her. William Chowen who settled at 101 & Minnetonka Blvd, George and Joseph, whose property became what is Chowens corner today. The Shavers had twin sons in 1853. Bayard and Bernard. They were the first white children born in the town of Minnetonka City. Bayard grew up and became a teacher at the Groveland school in the 1890s. Their home was located just north of Sarah’s sister Susan’s on Highway 101 and east of the road near their namesake, Shaver’s Lake.

Strate, Gerhard.

Olaf Searle’s Property

Searle, Olaf A. (1859 – 1926) Olaf Searle was a banker, emigration agent and entrepreneur from Minneapolis. He emigrated to America from Fredrikshald, Norway in 1881. He married Dagmar Johnson in 1887.

Olaf arrived penniless, then made a fortune selling steamship tickets and farmland to other immigrants.

He eventually owned a 1,500 acre farm in Devils Lake, North Dakota, a number of banks and spent his summers on Big Island.

In 1891 he purchased 100 acres on Big Island and built a 21 room Colonial Revival mansion in 1903. The mansion was on the North side of Big Island. He had a channel dug separating his property from the rest of the island. Mahpiyata Island, was a tiny spit of land that he connected to his mainland with a footbridge. It was discovered that in 1905, Olaf was planning to encourage the county to build a bridge between the Island and West Point by donating $100,000 but the bridge never happened. It was speculated that Searle wanted to develop his property. It was that same year that Dagmar died at the age of 38.

Later, Olaf married again but discovered the woman and her mother were after his money. By the time he got a divorce, they had cleaned him out. In addition, contributing to Searle’s demise, may have been his drinking but he was also struck hard by the depression of 1893. By 1920, Searle was broke and later died at the age of 67. The mansion burned to the ground in the 1930s.

Mahpiyata. Mahpiyata means "celestial peace maiden." She was a Dahecotah (Dakota) Indian maiden. There was a battle between the Dahecotah and the Ojibway on the part of Big Island in question in which Mahpiyata showed great courage. She was captured by the Ojibway chief and taken to North Dakota where they married. Years later she convinced her husband to come back to Big Island to make peace. They finally did when they were old and gray. After peace was achieved, the both died and were laid to rest on the north end of the island now named Mahpiyata in memory of this fair Indian maiden.

Stubbs, Henry (1806 – 1881) and Mary (1811 – 1902)
Studer, Edward Amandus. (1874 – 1948) Edward Studer was born in Hardin, Iowa just west of Mason City. Together with his first wife, they had two boys, Irvin and Ray. Unfortunately his wife died giving birth to their son Ray. It wasn’t too many years later that he met Mary V. Kaufman. They married in 1897 and together had seven more boys and one girl.

Ed Studer was in the construction business in Wesley, Iowa and around 1912, moved to Excelsior. The family photo was taken around 1927 in their home at 201 Second Street in Excelsior. Mary worked hard helping to raise all those boys while Ed was out on construction jobs. She died many years after Edward at the age of 94. Later in life she was a shrewd canasta player and had a fabulous flower garden.

Thompson, Augustin (1847 – 1922) and Jeanette (1852 – 1940)

Augustine was born in Somerset Maine in 1847. He came to Minnesota with his father Hiram and mother Eliza in 1863. Augustine married E. Jeannette “Nettie” Parker, the first white girl born in Minneapolis (St. Anthony) – the fifth white child. A Steam powered boat with a new Mercury Steam boiler was built specially for Augustine in 1874 in St. Louis under his supervision. He named it Jeannette after his wife. The boat was later sold and brought to Lake Pepin and renamed the Commodore. In May of 1879 he purchased the building and adjacent property on the south east corner of Water Street and Second Street opposite the Post Office. He opened a General Store on June 9, 1879. In July of 1881, his store had one of the first two telephones in Excelsior. The Excelsior House had the other.

In July 1881 he also started providing supplies to hotels, boarding houses, cottages, camps on both the upper and lower lake on Minnetonka. He called it the Minnetonka Supply Company. He and Jeannette carried an ample supply of staple groceries, vegetables and canned goods.

They hired a man to go to Minneapolis and St. Paul daily to pick up meat, vegetables, groceries, milk, eggs, butter, fruit, berries and ice. Everything needed to make tourists and campers happy.

Grandfather Edward Albce Thompson, son of Augustine & Jeannette, attended Excelsior grade school. In 1885, Augustine started a company to supply settlers in the Dakota territories.

The Excelsior Council met in April of 1880. It showed members to be A.E. Price, L.F. Marsh, O.S. Gates, C. May and Augustine Thompson.

Augustine’s brother Lewis Thompson was also active in business and politics in Excelsior. In 1856 he bought Section 4 in Chanhassen from Silas Seamans. He had married Harriet Moore in 1855. Lewis died in 1864 and is buried in the cemetery along Galpin Boulevard south of now highway 5.

Thompson, Edward Ollee

Thompson, Lewis

Umbahacher, Miss. Tom Knowlton’s story . . .
Washburn, C. C. (1818 – 1882) Cadwallader Colden Washburn

William Drew Washburn was born in Maine, studied law in Bangor, Maine and finally arrived in Minneapolis (St. Anthony) in 1857 on a train with friend George Brackett. He came to the area to practice law and work for his brother Cadwallader’s flour mill. Like all his distinguished brothers, he had a taste for politics. Three of his seven brothers became politicians. He was elected to the United States House of Representatives in 1864. Earlier, in 1861, Washburn started a saw mill and lumber company and later in 1873 he added flour milling. W. D., his brother Cadwallader and their brother-in-law John Crosby started the Washburn - Crosby Company later known as WCCO. Washburn launched the City of Saint Louis in 1881. The “City,” as it was called, later was purchased by Captain Johnson of the Lake Minnetonka Navigation Company.

In 1885, W. O. Winston bought 35 acres of land in Tonka Bay on what is called Round Point. He and his wife built a small cabin. In 1905, they moved the cabin a little north on the property and built a much larger red brick home where the cabin had been.

Following is a newspaper article from 1901:

"Mr. and Mrs. W. O. Winston came out Thursday and opened their summer home at Tonka Bay for the season. Walter Egerton will be at home at Tonka Bay July 2, for a week. He will have as his guest while at home, Arthur Birch. Mr. and Mrs. Frank Burdette, of Sioux Falls, S. D., are in Excelsior on their bridal trip. They are the guests of Mr. and Mrs. E. S. Martin, Mrs. Burdette’s grand parents. Julius F. Holmdale, who is attending the Iowa state college, will spend his vacation with his parents at the White House."

Winston, W. O. (0000 – 0000) In 1885, W. O. Winston bought 35 acres of land in Tonka Bay on what is called Round Point. He and his wife built a small cabin. In 1905, they moved the cabin a little north on the property and built a much larger red brick home where the cabin had been.

W. O. Winston

Winston Mansion built in 1905

Willcox, John Finley (1851 – 1939) John F. Wilcox was born in Ohio and was the first mayor of Tonka Bay. He married Sara Ann Grace from Coshocton, Ohio in 1872. The estate of John Wilcox was called “Old Orchard” as it was the site of the original State Fruit Farm. The estate was built around 1887.

W. O. Winston

W. D. Washburn

Winston Mansion built in 1905

W. O. Winston

The Winston Mansion built in 1905

Wright, Frank Lloyd (Lincoln) (1867 – 1959) Frank Lloyd Wright was an American architect, interior designer, writer, and educator, who designed more than 1,000 structures, 532 of which were completed. He was born in Richland Center, Wisconsin. His work includes original and innovative examples of many building types, including offices, churches, schools, skyscrapers, hotels, and museums. In 1885, Wright’s father, already divorced, left never to be seen again. At that time, Wright changed his middle name from Lincoln to Lloyd in honor of his mother’s family, the Lloyd Joneses. It was then that Wright assumed the responsibility of his mother and her welfare.

Wright designed a number of homes in this area. There were two in and around Northome. The Francis W. Little House at 3350 Northome Road in Deephaven, was one. Wright lived in Tonka Bay in 1926 when he and his lover, Miriam Noel were arrested and hauled of to jail and spent two nights behind bars. Charges, that had to do with a fire in 1914 that killed (considered murders) a mother and her children at his estate in Wisconsin in 1914, were eventually dropped. Apparently, a deranged servant...
started the fire. Wright and Miriam Noel married in 1928. While living in the area, Frank Lloyd Wright was a patient of Dr. Hugh Arey of Excelsior along with another well known individual, Sinclair Lewis who was from Sauk Centre, Minnesota.

Wyers in Excelsior

Wyer, James I. (1843 - 0000) James I. Wyer had various occupations after serving in the Civil War, including a clerk in New York and a banker/merchant in Red Lake Falls, Minneapolis, and Excelsior.

Grandfather Wyer moved his family from Kansas to Minneapolis in the late 1800s, and then to Excelsior where he purchased the Victorian House now part of the Wyer-Hill Condo complex. It was there that my father, born in 1880, grew up and attended Excelsior schools. As a child, I visited Grandfather who later became ill and moved to Florida in the early 1920s selling the house to Fred Pearce who become the owner of the Excelsior Amusement Park.

The Victorian home became a duplex to house the manager and the assistant manager of the park. The lawn, tennis court and waterfront becoming the Amusement park with all its rides and water activities.

Grandfather had a “thing” about nature; and he introduced a number of unusual trees and bushes to the property, now mostly gone, I suspect. One unexplained item in the old house causing speculation was a long tunnel leading from the basement to nowhere; and it was suggested that it was to be part of the “Underground Railway” used to help colored folk find freedom in Canada. My personal hunch is that it was dug to provide a cool even temperature in which to store the summer’s produce. ... or perhaps to house a still.

Living on the water, the Wyer kids took to aquatic sports, fishing, sailing, hunting as well as tennis. Father became adept with a fly rod and became an early conservationist who used a barbless hook and fished “catch and release.” Fishing remained a hobby all thru his life. As an active in the Izaak Walton League, each year he would bring thousands of bass and walleye fry from the League’s breeding pond and stock Lake Minnetonka. He is usually credited with the introduction of the walleye to Minnetonka where it was not a native fish. As a kid he would paddle over to Big Island (near where the Power Squadron’s encampment is today) to hunt ducks.

– Recollections from James I. Wyer III
The First Hotels

If you listen long and hard, you can hear their voices, their laughter and the music of a magnificent time gone by. These communities were a mecca for people from all over the country, traveling thousands of miles to vacation here.

Even in the early nineteen sixties, it was not uncommon to meet people from the east and west coast who weren’t exactly sure where Minnesota was, but had heard of Lake Minnetonka.

Excelsior Bay Hotel: 1920
Excelsior Bay Hotel faced Excelsior Bay with Water Street on the east, Lake Street in front and Second Street to the south. In various photos you can see a large entry arch on the north west corner of Water Street and Second Street. It had previously been the Goodrich Hotel-1918 and the LaPaul Hotel-1896.

Excelsior House: The hotel industry at Lake Minnetonka grew dramatically in the years following the Civil War. As railroads were built in the area, it became easier to travel to the growing hotels. By 1867, several branch lines traveled to the lake. In summer, a train ran to Wayzata twice a day along with a network of steamboats.

Hotels like the Excelsior House and Minnetonka House served as summer homes for thousands. Minneapolis newspapers published lists of the rich and famous who were guests at the hotels. The area was particularly popular among wealthy Southerners who would leave the heat of Missouri or Louisiana to spend the entire summer in Minnesota.

Railroads and steamboats linked the lakeshore communities of Lake Minnetonka. They also spurred the building of three of the largest and most luxurious Minnetonka resort hotels. All were designed by famous Minnesota architect Leroy Buffington. St. Louis attorney Charles Gibson set out to build a large hotel to cater to his fellow southerners who were eager to escape the hot summer. His Hotel St. Louis opened in Deephaven in 1879.

At the same time, the Northwestern Sunday School Association was building the Lake Park Hotel. Originally called the Minnetonka Park Hotel, it quickly became a resort for the health-conscious. The hotel’s owners boasted that every room had a veranda from which to view the lake.

Del Otero. Hotel (SpringPark) The historic Hotel Del Otero was built in 1887. It was located up on the hill where the Mist Apartments of Lake Minnetonka are as of 2014 on Shoreline Drive and Del Otero Avenue. The Del Otero cottages were on the property to the east of the that.

James J. Hill’s Great Northern Railroad was extended to Spring Park around 1882. During Minnetonka’s glory days in the 1880s, over fifteen trains a day pulled into Spring Park bringing hundreds of tourists so with the addition of the Hotel and the Casino, Spring Park became a very popular destination.

The name “Del Otero” means “Hotel of the Mound” in Spanish. The proprietor was G.F. Hopkins. Spring Park became a favorite lake resort area boasting a dancing pavilion, baseball park, and a playground that were unequaled at the time.

The hotel burned down in 1945.

The Casino was located where the Water Patrol property was as of 2014.

Bird House, The: Part of The Birdhouse Inn and Gardens at 371 Water Street was built in 1858 by early settler James H. Clark and became his home. It was subsequently added onto, possibly twice, by Clark. As early as 1876 the J. H. Clark Boarding House was advertised and in 1883 could handle 30 boarders. In 1921 Mark L. Knowlton, Sr. and his son, John E. Knowlton and family purchased the Clark house from the children of J. H. and Mrs. Clark. In 1948 the J. E. Aldritt family purchased the Clark House from the Knowltons. The Aldritt’s had three daughters who eventually lived in the house. They all ran businesses; two in Excelsior and one in Minneapolis.

Donaldson House: (274 Lake Street) This building faced the lake just west of the Casino at the end of Center Street. Construction was begun in 1884 and completed in 1885. George H. and L.B. Stetson built this, the Blue Line Hotel, on the west corner of Center and Lake Streets. In 1886 it became the Stetson House. The brothers also built the Blue Line docks at the end of Center Street in front of the hotel. The next owner was H.W. DeGroodt who bought it in 1891. The name was changed to the Hotel DeGroodt. In 1896 it was sold and became the Belle Alto with Mrs. E. J. Burton as proprietor. Within a couple of years it became the Donaldson House with Mrs. Ella Donaldson as owner. About 1908 it was called Hotel Bay View. In 1910 it was torn down and by 1929 the home of R.F. Gold stood on the site.

Edgewood Hotel, The: This hotel was located near but just east of Howard’s Point on the Upper Lake. It overlooked the Bay towards Casco Point and Spring Park and the Del Otero. The Edgewood area was a quieter area but was on the streetcar boat route. John Christian, who lived on Howard’s Point, owned the Hotel.

Keewaydin Hotel: The 23rd Annual Meeting of the Public Library Commission was held at the Keewaydin Hotel In Cottagewood on September 15 – 17, 1915. During Minnetonka’s gilded age (1870s and 1880s) the Hotel Keewaydin was built about 100 yards from shore with a beautiful view looking towards Browns Bay and Wayzata. It was first owned by Henry Schomberg and was still in existence into the early 1920s. The Hotel’s Water tower is still standing at this location. A number of times each day during the summer, ferries would dock at the shore to take local residents and hotel guest for excursions on the lake or out to the amusement park on Big Island. The street where it once stood is named Keewaydin Street. A walk along Lake Avenue in Cottagewood takes you past Keewaydin Avenue. “Keewaydin” (kiiwaydin) means “Northwest Wind” in Ojibway.
Lafayette, Hotel: The largest of the Minnetonka resort hotels was the Hotel Lafayette. Built by James J. Hill to capitalize on the increase in railroad traffic, the hotel was situated on a ridge facing two bays. This arrangement gave each of its eight hundred guest rooms a lake view.

The Hotel Lafayette opened for its first season on July 2, 1882. It quickly became the center of Lake Minnetonka’s summer social life. Visitors to the luxurious Lafayette included many celebrities as well as two presidents, Chester A. Arthur and Ulysses S. Grant.

Visitors to Lake Minnetonka took advantage of its accessible woodland setting. Though they could enjoy their rustic surroundings, their hotels boasted the latest modern conveniences, including electric lights, call bells, and plumbing. The breezy lakeside hotels provided a welcome alternative to crowded nineteenth-century cities.

Minnesota’s climate was also thought to be especially healthy. Many of the hotels proclaimed the value of the cool, clean Minnesota air as a cure for illness. Hotels including the Lake Park, Palmer House, and the La Paul billed themselves as places to recover from insomnia, hay fever, or even tuberculosis.

In its heyday, Lake Minnetonka resorts drew their clientele from across the southern and eastern states. Whether they came to enjoy recreation, the breezy wilderness, or the healthful benefits of Minnesota, however, those who came to stay at Lake Minnetonka were almost universally wealthy. The cost of spending the summer at the Hotel St. Louis or Lafayette was far too high for anyone but the elite. While lower-class Minnesotans might save their money to take a day trip to the lake, they could never afford to stay.

The Lake Park Hotel: (Later named the Tonka Bay Hotel) In 1879 on Echo Bay, the first of Minnetonka’s great hotels was built. The Lake Park Hotel, later named the Tonka Bay Hotel, contained 200 rooms. A railroad from Minneapolis brought visitors to the hotel for summer visits.

This beautiful hotel looked south from Tonka Bay out over Echo Bay at Gales and Big Island.

The four-story Lake Park Hotel, above right, with its 200 rooms and grand dining room, charges $2.50 to $3.50 a day. Boating, fishing, dining and tennis draw crowds, who travel by railroad to the popular site.

La Paul, Hotel: LaPaul Hotel – 1896: The La Paul Hotel was located at what would be 2 Water Street at the corner of Water and Lake on the west side overlooking Excelsior Bay. In 1918 it was the Goodrich Hotel. In 1920 it was the Excelsior Bay Hotel – it burned down in 1928. Prior to all that however, it had been the site of the Galpin Hotel built and managed by George Galpin, brother of Reverend Charles Galpin.
Radisson Inn, The (1906): The Radisson Inn was distinct from the other historic hotels in three respects—location, timing, and clientele. It was not located on Lake Minnetonka but on Christmas Lake. It was built in 1906 and destroyed by fire. With its ties to the Minneapolis hotel of the same name, it attracted celebrities and noted figures from the Twin Cities. Also, the last owner was a man from New York who ran the Inn like a night club, serving liquor and introducing gambling.

The first building on the site was the home of Charles J.A. Morris. Charles J. Morris was an early pioneer and a civil engineer with the Manitoba Railroad and an associate of the railroad magnate James J. Hill. By the mid-1880s, Morris owned 1,000 acres on Christmas Lake in Shorewood and 2,000 acres on St. Alban’s Bay in Greenwood and as far as Carson’s Bay in Deephaven.

In the late 1880s Morris built his two-story, year-round home on the northeastern shore of Christmas Lake and he named this residence Glen Morris. It was described in Diamond’s Tourist newspaper as, “One of the most beautiful estates in the area.” Charles Morris died in 1906 and his children, Tina and William, immediately added rooms to the main home and opened the same year as the Glen Morris Inn. Soon The Radisson Hotel Company owned it renaming it the Radisson Inn Remodeling it again in the 1920s. The Depression forced the sale of it to Lou Cohen in 1934 who ran it like a night club. It burned shortly thereafter in 1936.

Hotel St. Louis: (Deephaven) In 1879, the Hotel Saint Louis was built on the bluffs overlooking Saint Louis Bay. This luxurious Victorian getaway, perched high above the lake, offered a sweeping panorama with an unobstructed view of Ice Boat Club on Bug Island, the Yacht Club on Light-House Island and beyond to Big Island. A secluded beach was added nearby, and soon, charming waterfront cottages dotted the shoreline and wooded hills.

Charles Gibson built the St. Louis Hotel. It was torn down in 1907. Walter Douglas of Quaker Oats built their home on the Hotel property. In 1912, Walter and his wife traveled to Europe and gained passage on the maiden voyage of the Titanic. Unfortunately, Walter went down with the ship but his wife survived and continued living in the home for years.

Sampson House: Located at 520 Second Street, it was first called the Slater House. However in 1885 Leroy Sampson took possession and started running the hotel as the Sampson House. The building burned in November 1893. The hotel was rebuilt and finished in 1895 being built very thriftily using lumber from an old barn in Wisconsin. In 1945 after Hotel Del Otero burned, a city newspaper said that the Sampson House had the “distinction” of being the lone survivor of a group of hotels at Minnetonka that were famous in attracting sportsmen and vacationers from all parts of the country in the “Gay Nineties.” It continued to be family run until it closed in 1960. It was torn down in 1961.
in 1921 The Woman’s Club of Minnetonka bought it and called it their Community House and prepared one room for a public library. In 1929 the Minnetonka Woman’s Club donated the White House to the Minnesota Sunshine Society which converted it into a home for the aged they called it the “Sunshine Home.” In 1946 the building was razed. The hill it was on was also leveled for commercial buildings. In 2015, you’d be looking at Haskell’s and Dunn Brother’s Coffee in the photo above.

**Windsor Hotel, The:** On the south east corner of Water Street and Second Street (left side of this photo) you can see the name of the Windsor Hotel. This photo was taken in about 1904, possibly just before a fire that damaged the Hotel. Streetcar tracks can be seen on Water Street and turning onto Second Street. This is the same corner that Eliza Thompson owned 2 lots and buildings in 1880. It later became the Red Owl food store (207 Water Street) , V. G. Bacon Drug during the 60s through the 90s, Capers and Ming Wok from 2000 through 2012 and it is Victor’s Restaurant as of 2015. Named after Vic Bacon - V. G. Bacon Drug.
Almost 100 years of Hotels. 1866 – 1961

The music, the dancing, the weather; Lake Minnetonka would attract people from all over the world.

The Del Otero Hotel. (Spring Park) The historic Hotel Del Otero was built in 1887. The Edgewood Hotel. This Hotel was nestled in the trees near Howard’s Point. Hotel Lafayette. The largest of the Minnetonka resort hotels opened for business in 1882. The Lake Park Hotel. (Later named the Tonka Bay Hotel.) In 1879 on Echo Bay, the first of Minnetonka’s great hotels was built. Donaldson House. (274 Lake Street) In 1885 this Hotel faced the lake just west of the Casino at the end of Center Street. Excelsior Bay Hotel: 1920 Excelsior Bay Hotel faced Excelsior Bay. It had been the LaPaul Hotel earlier. Hotel LaPaul, 1896. The La Paul Hotel was located at what would be 2 Water Street at the corner of Water and Lake. It later became the Goodrich House and then the Excelsior House. The Bird House. Part of the Birdhouse Inn and Gardens at 371 Water Street was built in 1858. The Windsor Hotel. 1900. On the south east corner of Water Street and Second Street. The Sampson House. 1885. Located at 520 Second Street. The White House. Located on Lake Street on the east side of Water Street. The Radisson Inn. 1906. On Christmas Lake. The Keewaydin Hotel. Minnetonka’s gilded age 1870s through the 1880s. Hotel St. Louis. 1879. the Hotel Saint Louis was built on the bluffs overlooking Saint Louis Bay.

The Amazing History of Our Community
The Boats, Streetcars and Historical Events

Early in this period, the horse and buggy was common. Then came the steam locomotives and steam ships, most of which were paddle wheelers.

Shortly after Minnesota became a state in 1858, the railroad expanded into the area. James J. Hill and the Great Northern Railroad reached the West Coast. Lumber baron, W. D. Washburn became the first President of the Soo Line railroad in 1883.

In 1888, Minneapolis saw the first electric street cars which finally headed west around the turn of the century. In 1906, the Twin Cities Transit Line built the first Streetcar boats that existed on Lake Minnetonka until 1930.

Dugout Discovery 1934: During a severe drought, Helmer and Gustave Gunnarson, discovered a dugout canoe in 1934 near their family property on the North Arm of Lake Minnetonka. The canoe, made from a hollowed tree trunk by some of the earliest American Indians to live on the lake and in the state, was initially dated to about 1750. But recent radiocarbon testing (2014) now dates it to between 1025 and 1165 – making it one of the oldest watercraft finds in the state.

Steam Ships on Minnetonka during the Golden Years.

1855 was the beginning of the steamboat years on Lake Minnetonka with the launch of the first steamboat, the Governor Ramsey. This began the years of celebrating Lake Minnetonka, a one-of-a-kind, recreational, inland body of water. Even today, in 2014, boats of all different sizes are still entertaining people while they tour the beautiful bays and islands of this magnificent lake.

The Governor Ramsey. The first steamboat to navigate the beautiful waters of Lake Minnetonka was the Governor Ramsey in 1855. Reverend Charles Galpin built her. She remained in service until 1862 when she sunk after coming loose from her moorings during a storm. The Governor Ramsey was later recovered and her machinery was used on a ship named the Rambler. Her hull was rebuilt and used as a barge.

Governor Ramsey transported mail to Minnetonka Mills - a stage transfer point to Minneapolis - down the navigable Minnehaha Creek and also provided reliable transportation for lake inhabitants. Governor Ramsey remained the only self-propelled vessel on the lake until a Detroit-built 35-foot propeller steamer, brought to Lake Minnetonka by Charles Gardiner, was launched as the Sue Gardiner in either 1868 or 1871.

Charles May put together the first ‘fleets’ of steamers on Lake Minnetonka, beginning in 1874 near Excelsior, with the 65-foot propeller May Queen designed by Captain N. H. Harrison and mastered by Captain William Rockwell. May’s maritime commercial interests also included the sidewheeler Rambler in 1874 and the propellers Kate/Katie May/Saucy Kate in 1876, City of Minneapolis in 1880, and in 1882, Mary/Hiawatha/Scandinavian/Star.

Beginning in 1881, the Lake Minnetonka Transit Company (LMTC) began operations with the 160-foot sidewheeler City of St. Louis. In 1881, the company acquired or leased the propellers Saucy Kate, City of Minneapolis, Lotus, the sternwheeler Hattie May, and in 1883, the Star. The LMTC’s major stockholder was US Senator William D. Washburn, also of the Minneapolis and St. Louis Railway. James J. Hill of the St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Manitoba Railway launched the 300-foot Belle of Minnetonka to operate out of the Hotel Lafayette pier beginning in 1882. Competition between the two largest steamers on Lake Minnetonka ceased a year later when both vessels came under the control of the Lake Minnetonka Navigation Company (LMNC) in 1883.

George West and his son Ebenezzer put together a small ‘fleets’ of Lake Minnetonka craft and by 1891 they owned the propellers Twin City, West Point, and Why Not. Another small fleet owner was Captain James L. Hopkins, who operated the Alert, Hawkeye/Reindeer, Juno, and Nina beginning in 1892. However, the most prolific of steamboat owners on Lake Minnetonka was Captain John R. Johnson, founder of the Lake Minnetonka Transportation Company (LMTC) in 1897.

Under the leadership of Captain Johnson, the LMTC provided a variety of services to the lake, including mail delivery, sightseeing tours, and even military transport during times of war. The company continued to expand and improve its fleet, becoming one of the largest and most successful steamboat operations on Lake Minnetonka.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT:

The “City of Saint Louis” was reassembled in Wayzata in 1881. It was 160 feet long and was the first inland vessel to have electric lights. It had a capacity of 1,000 passengers.

The “Belle of Minnetonka” was the largest vessel ever launched on the lake and was first used on July 3, 1882. The Belle measured 300 feet in length and had a capacity for 2,500 passengers. Known to carry 3,300 people at times it’s been said.

Following these two magnificent ships were about 40 other steamers. Captain George Hopkins owned numerous boats on the lake. Captain John R. Johnson, who owned the Minnetonka Navigation Company, purchased a number of them from Mr. Hopkins.
FOLLOWING IS AN ALPHABETICAL LIST OF THE STEAM SHIPS: The ships and their stories – on Lake Minnetonka from 1861 through 1925.

Alert. In 1893 Captain John R. Johnson purchased the Alert from Captain James L. Hopkins to replace the Saucy Kate. The Alert was considered one of the best boats on the lake though not as large at the Kate. (See photo page 79.)

Belle of Minnetonka. Once the largest vessel on the lake. On August 25, 1897 the machinery was removed from the Belle and later that fall the rest of the ship was dismantled. By November the machinery was shipped to Saint Paul and the woodwork was given to the natives of the lake region for kindling.

Buttinsky. Captain Johnson’s fleet was increased in May of 1905 by the addition of a new gasoline launch which was built at Wayzata. The new launch carried 40 passengers. She was employed for small parties.

Calasayam. In 1904 Captain Johnson launched an aquatic, mowing machine. Everyone felt it was one of the queerest looking things that this lake has seen in all its history.

Charles Edward.

City of Saint Louis. On June 6, 1882 it was written that Captain W. G. Telfer; Clerk Burdette Hayford; Steward M. W. Mehan; Pilot Lew McDonald; Chief Engineer W. J. Fry; Second Engineer John Cleremont; First Mate Chas. Crump; Second Mate John Johnson would set sail later in June for the City’s first voyage of the season.

Excelsior. Was the sternwheeler George that was built in 1901.

Excelsior Second, Ewauna and Fresco.

George. Maurice Godfrey and George Day constructed the sternwheeler George in 1901. She measured 125 feet long and 22 feet in the beam and was re-designed in 1904 and re-named Excelsior.

Governor Ramsey. The first steamboat to navigate the beautiful waters of Lake Minnetonka was the Governor Ramsey in 1855. Reverend Charles Galpin built her.

Hattie May. In 1892 Charlie Johnson, brother of Capt. John Johnson, was the pilot of the Hattie May.

Hebe and Clyde.

Hercules. The Hercules was a 50’ tug belonging to the Minneapolis & Saint Paul Street Railway Company and was built in Excelsior. The engine of the Mayflower was installed in the Hercules in 1917.

Hiawatha and Hopkins.

Jeanette. A Steam powered boat with a new Mercury Steam boiler was built specially for Augustine in 1874 in St. Louis under his supervision. He named it Jeannette after his wife.

John Alden. The John Alden was built by G. V. Johnson and added to the fleet of Captain John R. Johnson in 1904. The Boat was top heavy so it was rebuilt into a tug in the same year and served in that capacity until about 1918 when it was dismantled and the hull was sunk in Saint Albans Bay.

Katie Lilliger and Kenosha.

Lake Minnetonka Transportation Company. In 1883, the LMTC’s major stockholder was US Senator William D. Washburn, also of the Minneapolis and St. Louis Railway.

Little Queen. This thirty-foot gasoline launch took fire and burned to the water’s edge before lying sunk on Monday at Hotel Bartlett dock. Two weeks later it was raised by Capt. J. R. Johnson with a crew of men and taken to the lower lake.

Lotus.

Mabel Lane.

Mary. The Mary became the Star in 1883.

May Queen. Captain Charles May later owned the Katie May, built at Hudson, Wis., and shipped to Minnetonka in the autumn of 1877. In the spring of 1878, Captain May rebuilt the superstructure into a closed cabin and placed a new boiler in the boat. The new boiler, made by the same concern as that of the May Queen, exploded off Robinson’s bay on the first trip made by the reconstructed craft, and several lives were lost in consequence. In the same year the remains of the Katie May went into the building of
the Saucy Kate, a slightly larger boat which ran continuously season after season from 1878 until 1900, when she burned at her dock at Solberg’s Point and the charred hull was towed to deep water off Gales’ Island and sunk.

The boat was dismantled in 1914 and its engine was installed three years later in the tug Hercules (2nd).

**Mayflower.** The Mayflower was a 70 foot propeller (A boat with a propeller.) built in 1898 by George Godfrey for Captain John R. Johnson. It had a capacity of 150 passengers.

**Mercury and Mermaid.**

**Me Too.** In September, 1900 the barge “Me Too” Burned to the water’s edge. The craft was the largest of its kind on Minnetonka. The origin of the blaze was unknown.

**Minneapolis Star, Minnetonka and The St. Paul.** Minneapolis, and her sisters Minnetonka and St. Paul, were constructed in 1906 by Captain John R. Johnson at Solberg Point for the Twin City Rapid Transit Company to act as a ferry for their customers traveling from Excelsior to the Big Island Amusement Park. The ferries were 109 feet long with a 35-foot beam, were double-ended with rudders at both bow and stern, and were propelled by sidewheel. After one season of disappointing performance, the ferries were lengthened to 142 feet long with a 39-foot beam, a design that was better suited to handling her heavy mechanical equipment.

With the closing of the amusement park, Minneapolis was redundant and it was planned for her to be set ablaze in the hopes to make some last profit from her, emulating the success of the George/Excelsior burning in 1909. She was burned on 8 August 1912, witnessed by a crowd that rivaled the 1909 show, with people traveling from the Twin Cities to watch.

**Muskegon.**

**Napoleon.** The Napoleon was a dredge boat owned by Captain John R. Johnson.

**Nautilus.**

**Nina.** The Nina is now the Alert and was formerly the Saucy Kate. Owned by the Minnetonka Navigation Company.

**Northern Flyer:** Commodore J. R. Johnson launched a new steamboat in 1906 that was fifteen feet longer than the largest boat of his present fleet and two feet wider. The new boat was the Northern Flyer and had 150-horse power engines. The new boat was designed by Andrew Peterson, who drew the plans for all the boats of Commodore Johnson’s fleet. She was 100 feet long and had a beam of 18 feet. She was equipped with a Scotch Marine boiler of the latest type and triple expansion engines. She had two decks and carried 400 passengers with safety and comfort.

**Plymouth.** In 1913 the Plymouth, Puritan and Mayflower were held in reserve for emergency and chartered runs when the Streetcar Boats, the Hopkins, Como, Minnehaha, White Bear, Harriet, and Stillwater were in service.

**Priscilla.** The 48 foot passenger barge Priscilla was constructed by G. V. Johnson in 1904 from the forward section of the City of Saint Louis for Captain John R. Johnson. It had a capacity of 500 passengers. The Priscilla was still in service in 1926.

**Puritan.** The Puritan was chartered with the Plymouth and Mayflower.

**Rambler.** In 1904 the Rambler was a tug used for towing the commodore’s mud scows.

**Saucy Kate:** In 1896 the Saucy Kate was used for charters for picnic parties or excursions. It was roomy, safe and swift. The Saucy Kate burned in 1899 and two men died but were never found. The “Saucy Kate,” was named for a prominent debutante of the period, Kate Seidel, daughter of the pioneer Minneapolis banker, J. K. Seidel

**Seventy-Six.**

**Signal and the Star – Barge**

**Sue Gardiner.** Charles Gardiner launched as the Sue Gardiner in either 1868 or 1871. It became the second, self propelled steamer on the lake. The first being the Governor Ramsey.
**Tonka.** The “Tonka” was the old Hattie May. In 1897 it was completely rebuilt from stem to stern and was regarded as one of the safest and best boats on Lake Minnetonka.

**Victor.**

**Why Not.** George West and his son Ebenezer put together a small fleet of Lake Minnetonka craft and by 1891 they owned the propellers Twin City, West Point, and Why Not.

**1883.** A detailed schedule for these steamboats indicated the Belle of Minnetonka, Saucy Kate, Lotus, and City of St. Louis regularly traveled between the Upper and Lower Lakes on a timetable. The number of steamboat excursionists that year totaled more than 90,000 people between 1 June and 1 October for both the Upper and Lower Lakes.

**There were other boats built here from 1878 through 1886.** They were the Lillie Reid, Elsie, Albatross, Agnes, Susie Belle, Dutchy, Ariadne, Kismet, Margaret, Rachel Hill, Kansas City, Lazy Jane, Rosander, Woodland and the Lizzie Gill.

**Streetcar Boats.** In 1905, the Twin Cities Rapid Transit (TCRT) company extended their streetcar lines to Excelsior. During the peak years, it is estimated that 12,000 people rode the streetcars to Excelsior on summer holidays. One year later, TCRT launched six 70-foot steamboats on Lake Minnetonka to provide transportation to lake residents and tourists.

At the time, it was said that Lake Minnetonka was the only place in the world where you could get off a streetcar and onto a streetcar boat. There were six boats all together. They were the Como, Harriet, Hopkins, Minnehaha, Stillwater and White Bear Lake. These were also the names of the stops on TCRT’s trolley route.

**The Belle of Minnetonka.** The Belle was originally the Phil Sheridan and was first owned by James J. Hill. It was launched in 1882. Captain John R. Johnson eventually purchased the Belle. After fifteen years in service, workmen began dismantling the Belle in 1897. The machinery was shipped to St. Paul and the woodwork was given to natives of the lake region for kindling. The Belle of Minnetonka managed to survive, in a way – the steamboat Susie, running between St. Michael and Dawson on the Lower Yukon delta in 1924, contains the engines and boilers which began their long career on the Ohio river.

**The City of Saint Louis.** The “City,” as it was called, was built in Jefferson, Indiana. It was then taken apart and moved to Lake Minnetonka and assembled in Wayzata in 1881. The photo at left was taken of the “City” when it was still on the river in Indiana. In 1887, the City was caught in a storm on the north side of Big Island and rendered helpless as the boilers and been jarred which broke all the steam lines. Beginning in 1889, it was operated for two years by the Lake Minnetonka Transportation Company. By 1891 the City was part of the Lake Minnetonka Navigation Company, LMNC. By 1899, the City was transformed into a freight Barge.

**The Man Who Built The Boats.** Loungers around the lake in the summer can’t help but notice the flashy yellow antique steamship with a triangular red flag proclaiming “Minnehaha” as its smokestack puffs away into the blue sky. The boat’s recent history begins with the tale of diver Jerry Provost discovering this sunken vessel in 60 feet of water after the boat had been scuttled in 1926. Then Bill Niccum raised the Minnehaha to the surface after groups of divers attached eight airbags that could lift 2,000 pounds each. A decade later, the Minnesota Transportation Museum began a complete restoration of the ship to sail another day.

(continued on page 84)
BEST WAY TO SEE
LAKE MINNETONKA
Is to get aboard a “Twin City Express
Boat” — New, Fast, Safe, Comfortable.

Trains to Take from Minneapolis to
Connect with Boats:

EXCELSIOR—WAYZATA EXPRESS
Round Trip—14 Miles—2 Hours—20 Cents
Leave Minneapolis at 6:33 a.m. and every
hour to 5:33 p.m. Sundays, 7:33 a.m. to
5:33 p.m. Trains connect with “Express”
at Excelsior Dock Station.

EXCELSIOR—BEACH EXPRESS
Round Trip—6 Miles—1 Hour—20 Cents
Leave Minneapolis at 6:03 a.m. and every
hour to 6:03 p.m. Sundays, 8:03 a.m. to
6:03 p.m. Trains connect with “Express”
at Excelsior Dock Station.

WILDHURST—ZUMBRA EXPRESS
Round Trip—10 Miles—1 Hour—20 Cents

WILDHURST—SPRING PARK EXPRESS
Round Trip—7 Miles—1 Hour—20 Cents
Take only Trains marked “Lake Minnetonka” to Wildhurst.
Leave Minneapolis at 6:03 a.m. and every
hour to 6:03 p.m. Sundays, 7:03 a.m. to
6:03 p.m. Trains connect with “Expresses”
for Spring Park and Zumbra at Wildhurst.

THE FLEET OF BOATS

COMO
HARRIET
HOPKINS
MAYFLOWER
MINNEAPOLIS
MINNEHAHA

MINNETONKA
PLYMOUTH
PURITAN
SAINT PAUL
STILLWATER
WHITE BEAR

ONE OF THE SIX FAST LAKE MINNETONKA “EXPRESS” BOATS
The Twin City Lines. The Twin City Rapid Transit Company (TCRT), also known as Twin City Lines (TCL), was a transportation company that operated streetcars, and buses in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area. Other types of transportation were tested including taxicabs and steamboats, along with the operation of some destination sites such as amusement parks. It existed under the TCRT name from a merger in the 1890s until it was purchased in 1962. At its height in the early 20th century, the company operated an intercity streetcar system that was believed to be one of the best in the United States. It is a predecessor of the current Metro Transit bus and light rail system that operates in the metro area.

Booklets, like the one shown at left, were printed regularly and handed out to customers who wished to reach destinations like Stillwater and the Saint Croix River, Whist Bear Lake, south to Invar Grove and Fort Snelling as well as St. Louis Park, Hopkins, Glen Lake Deephaven, Excelsior and Tonka Bay.

Once the passengers reached the various Lake Minnetonka cities of Deephaven, Excelsior and Tonka Bay, they needed access to destinations on the lake itself such as the Big Island Amusement Park, Wayzata, Spring Park and other smaller communities so Thomas Lowry, the “streetcar man, decided that he needed some new boats to do the job.

He gathered ideas from the speedy ferryboats on New York’s Hudson River as a base for the design of eight to 10 new “express boats” for Lake Minnetonka. (More on this story on page 81.)

There were many residents living on the lake that would commute from their homes to one of the cities for supplies or entertainment or for travel on to Minneapolis for business. The boats and trains had a regular schedule, seven days a week from early morning until night and from spring through the fall.

There were communities like Edgewood, Birch Bluff, Woodside, Zumbra and Minnetonka Beach. Linwood, Deephaven, Breezy Point and Wayzata. Places where individuals and families lived, mostly during the summer months, that needed supplies or transportation to and from the cities by the lake or Minneapolis and Saint Paul.

The cost was 10¢ to 25¢ one way or round trip depending on the destination. The electric lines connecting all the cities from Stillwater to Lake Minnetonka throughout the cities totalled 373 miles of track. The miles covered by the boats on Lake Minnetonka totalled 21 miles.

The Mayflower, Plymouth, Puritan, Saint Paul and Minnetonka were stand-by boats that were owned by Captain John R. Johnson and ready for service if needed.
But who originally built this boat? Lori Cherland-McCune made this discovery when her recently deceased mother passed on the family scrapbooks and photo albums with many old snapshots of the Moore Boat Works in Wayzata, which her great-grandfather founded. Fascinated by this history, she’s researched her family’s past and its links to the early days of the lake. Cherland-McCune has now published Royal C. Moore: The Man Who Built the Streetcar Boats, with numerous photos of Lake Minnetonka’s bygone days.

Streetcar Boats. Royal C. Moore hailed from Lake Champlain in upstate New York and moved to Minnesota at 19 years old. He had built rowboats since he was 14, and found work with Dingle Boat Works in St. Paul, soon plying his craft along White Bear Lake. Lake Minnetonka soon lured Moore to its waters, where he and Gustavus Johnson opened their own boat works on Wayzata’s north shore in 1879.

With three large buildings to construct boats, Moore’s business was booming until the wooden structures caught fire in 1902. All three buildings were destroyed. The Wayzata Fire Department couldn’t save the boat works, but Moore’s employees somehow managed to salvage all the finished wooden vessels inside, including 20 rowboats and 10 sailboats.

Moore planned on rebuilding his workshops immediately in Wayzata, but Excelsior tried to lure him to the south side of the lake. Moore’s business could mean jobs for nearly 100 men during the peak summer season. The village of Excelsior platted a stretch of land along the western edge of Gideon’s Bay for the new boat works. In the end, Moore opted to stay in Wayzata and built essentially the same plan he had for Excelsior. In spite of losing nearly all of the building materials, blueprints and tools, Moore produced new boats within weeks of the blaze.

One era was ending on Lake Minnetonka – that of the railroad boom bringing wealthy, often Southern, guests to grand tourist hotels with large verandas overlooking the lake. Trolley cars were the new rage that linked Lake Minnetonka to the Twin Cities, with lines extending all the way to Stillwater. Thomas Lowry, the “streetcar man,” brought the masses to Minnetonka aboard Twin Cities Rapid Transit (TCRT), but once there, these new visitors needed a speedy way to cross the lake.

Lowry looked to some of the established boat manufacturers for a slick new design rather than the cumbersome steamboats weighed down with hundreds of visitors. Lowry dreamed of efficient transportation on a regular schedule rather than just serving the tourist industry, so he sent his vice president to scout out other such boats out cast in...
1905. He gathered ideas from the speedy ferryboats on New York’s Hudson River as a base for the design of eight to 10 new “express boats” for Lake Minnetonka. R.C. Moore was tapped to design and build these new “streetcar boats.” Workers sawed the ribs in Wayzata and shipped them to the much larger streetcar shop of the TCRT at 31st Street and Nicollet Avenue in Minneapolis, where they were used to build the ships. These 70-foot boats could fit 135 commuters in their sheltered lower decks and on the upper decks with 13 benches for a wide but windy view. TCRT eventually mounted a canopy on top to protect the passengers. The steam engine would propel them around the lake thanks to the combustion power of more than six tons of coal a week.

As the streetcar boats neared completion in 1906, Moore realized he must have docking stations for these “yellow jackets,” as the streetcar boats were affectionately known. TCRT built a second dock at Wayzata that extended 60 feet into the lake to safely board passengers. TCRT launched just six streetcar boats in 1906 with names that evoke the area: Como, White Bear, Hopkins, Harriet, Stillwater and Minnehaha. For just 10 cents, visitors could hop on board one of these boats to travel over the waves, and for a total of 25 cents the fare would include streetcar travel to anywhere along the lines.

In her book, Cherland-McCune says, “a seventh nearly identical TCRT streetcar boat was built with the express boats’ designer and builder [Moore] conspicuously absent.” None of the original plans for Moore’s famous streetcar boats survives—which would have come in handy when the Minnesota Transportation Museum restored one—perhaps due to a spat between Moore Boat Works and TCRT that went clear up to the Minnesota Supreme Court.

Fortunately, we can still see Moore’s handiwork and even hop aboard the canary yellow Minnehaha for a trip back to Lake Minnetonka’s glory days.
In the middle 1800s, what else happened around the U.S. while these South Lake Communities were being established?

During the middle 1800s through 1900, much was happening in these Lake Minnetonka Communities while major events were taking place around the rest of the United States. Some of these events had a direct effect on these communities while others did not. No matter what year it is or was, while we are living it or reading about it, it helps to put things in perspective when we recognize what’s going on outside of our circle of activities at or around the same time.

And when looking at historical events, if for no other reason, it may help us understand and relate to the “how and why” about what people did.

So, while this community was growing, churches and schools were being built and people from all over the country were coming here to vacation, there was rejoicing and there were tragedies happening everywhere that influenced much of what we’ve become.

1860s – 1900:

The United States Civil War (1861 – 1865) February 9, 1861 - The Confederate States of America is formed with Jefferson Davis, a West Point graduate and former U.S. Army officer, as president. March 4, 1861 - Abraham Lincoln is sworn in as 16th President of the United States of America.

Fort Sumter Attacked: April 12, 1861 - At 4:30 a.m. Confederates under Gen. Pierre Beauregard open fire with 50 cannons upon Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina. The Civil War begins.

Shot on the 14th, on April 15, 1865 - President Abraham Lincoln dies at 7:22 in the morning. Vice President Andrew Johnson assumes the presidency. In May - Remaining Confederate forces surrender. The Nation is reunited as the Civil War ends. Over 620,000 Americans died in the war, with disease killing twice as many as those lost in battle. The United States was torn by the Civil War. President Lincoln was assassinated, John Muir arrived in Yosemite Valley, and the hero of the Civil War, Ulysses S. Grant, became president of the United States.

Standing at the podium only four years after Lincoln’s second inaugural address, Ulysses S. Grant may have had an impossible act to follow. Lincoln’s speech is widely considered the greatest inaugural address ever, so there isn’t much chance that Grant could have topped it. But seems that he barely even tried. Grant was actually succeeding President Andrew Johnson, who had been impeached while filling out the term of the murdered Abraham Lincoln.

And with the Civil War over, the nation was probably looking forward to better times. Grant could have come into office on March 4, 1869 offering some hope for the future. Instead, Grant struck an oddly unambitious tone, mentioning at the outset that the presidency “has come to me unsought.”

December 6, 1865. The Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, passed by Congress on January 31, 1865, is finally ratified. Slavery is abolished.

March 1, 1872 – Yellowstone National Park was established as the first National Park in the United States. Yellowstone Trail in Excelsior headed west to Yellowstone.

The Battle of Little Bighorn. June 25, 1876. General George Armstrong Custer, commander of the 7th Cavalry, is killed, along with more than 200 of his men, at the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

Taking positions on the hill and nearby Battle Ridge, Custer’s companies came under heavy attack from the Native Americans. Guided by Crazy Horse, they eliminated Custer’s troops forcing the survivors to a position on Last Stand Hill. Despite using their horses as breastworks, Custer and his men were overwhelmed and killed.

While this sequence is the traditional order of events, new scholarship suggests that Custer’s men may have been overwhelmed in a single charge.

The defeat at the Little Bighorn cost Custer his life as well as 267 others killed and 51 wounded. Native American casualties are estimated at between 36 and 300+. In the wake of the defeat, the US Army increased its presence in the region and began a series of campaigns which greatly increased the pressure on the Native Americans. This
ultimately led to many of the hostile bands surrendering. In the years after the battle, Custer’s widow, Elizabeth, relentlessly defended her husband’s reputation and his legend became embedded in American memory as a brave officer facing overwhelming odds.

Idaho and Wyoming become States, 1890

The Wounded Knee Massacre, December 29, 1890. General Nelson A. Miles sent this telegram from Rapid City to General John Schofield in Washington, D.C., on December 19, 1890:

“The difficult Indian problem cannot be solved permanently at this end of the line. It requires the fulfillment of Congress of the treaty obligations that the Indians were entreated and coerced into signing. They signed away a valuable portion of their reservation, and it is now occupied by white people, for which they have received nothing.”

General Miles was trying to explain that the Indians were being treated unfairly.

Then, on the morning of December 29, the troops went into the camp to disarm the Lakota. One version of events claims that during the process of disarming the Lakota, a deaf tribesman named Black Coyote was reluctant to give up his rifle, claiming he had paid a lot for it. A scuffle over Black Coyote’s rifle escalated and a shot was fired which resulted in the 7th Cavalry’s opening fire indiscriminately from all sides, killing men, women, and children, as well as some of their own fellow soldiers. The Lakota warriors who still had weapons began shooting back at the attacking soldiers, who quickly suppressed the Lakota fire. The surviving Lakota fled, but U.S. cavalrymen pursued and killed many who were unarmed.

The massacre occurred on December 29, 1890, near Wounded Knee Creek on the Lakota Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota.

By the time it was over, more than 200 men, women, and children of the Lakota had been killed and 51 were wounded (4 men, 47 women and children, some of whom died later); some estimates placed the number of dead at 300.

The photo at right is of some of the Wounded Knee Survivors; Miniconjou Lakota Brothers, (left to right) White Lance, Joseph Horn Cloud, and Dewey Beard.

The Spanish–American War (1898) This War was a conflict in 1898 between Spain and the United States. It was the result of American intervention in the Cuban War of Independence. American attacks on Spain’s Pacific possessions led to involvement in the Philippine Revolution and ultimately to the Philippine–American War.

Revolts against Spanish rule had occurred for some years in Cuba. There had been war scares before, as in the Virginius Affair in 1873. In the late 1890s, American public opinion was agitated by anti-Spanish propaganda led by journalists such as Joseph Pulitzer and William Hearst which used yellow journalism to criticize Spanish administration of Cuba. After the mysterious sinking of the American battleship Maine in Havana harbor, political pressures from the Democratic Party and certain industrialists pushed the administration of Republican President William McKinley into a war he had wished to avoid. Compromise was sought by Spain, but rejected by the United States which sent an ultimatum to Spain demanding it surrender control of Cuba. First Madrid, then Washington, formally declared war.
Much like our schools in the early years of this nation, the churches had a great influence on and, in fact, were solely responsible for education, in many instances.

Early school terms in the north were generally 2 months in the fall and 2 months in late spring as winter made travel and heating any building rather difficult.

Excelsior Congregational Church: (1853 – 1970) Rebuilt. 371 Third Street, Excelsior. (Today, 2014, it is 471 Third Street) The Church was founded in July 1853 by ten members of the Excelsior Pioneer Association, which had been organized in New York City the preceding November for the purpose of migrating as a body to Minnesota Territory to establish a settlement on the southern shore of Lake Minnetonka. Reverend Charles Galpin would organize the church and be its pastor from 1853 to 1855. It was then that Reverend Charles B. Sheldon arrived. C. B. Sheldon was the pastor from 1855 until 1882.

The founding members, who represented four different Christian denominations, named the church the First Independent Church of Excelsior and Chanhassen (in its early years the church served not only the Excelsior settlement but also one in nearby Chanhassen Township in Carver County). The church was renamed the First Congregational Church of Excelsior when it was incorporated in 1869. It has been known as the Congregational Church of Excelsior since 1906.

A Sunday School was begun in 1854. By November of 1855, Excelsior had six frame houses, one log house and one steam saw mill and in the newly formed church, it had a congregation of 37 and two ministers.

Church services were held at the home of Reverend Charles Galpin, his brother Georges Hotel and at times at the home of Henry M. Lyman and George Bertram. Though the congregation used two crude structures for a school and a church early on, the first major church building was constructed during 1870 – 1871. The First Congregational Church of Excelsior was incorporated in 1869.

Samantha Ball Galpin had been well educated and taught school but she was hoping that a new member of the church, Jane Wolcott, would stay and teach. Jane did agree but by

fall as winter approached, she decided she had to leave for warmer conditions.

The painting of “Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane” was commissioned by Captain John R. Johnson and donated to the church in memory of Mrs. John R. Johnson (Mina) and Ida F. Johnson, a daughter of Captain Johnson’s that died in her early twenties.

Additionally, Frank W. Halsted, donated the spire for the new church, the knowledge of which was not discovered until everyone read his obituary in 1876. Today, the church boasts of hundreds of members and more than 15 ministries that do good works in the community.

English Lutheran Church of Our Savior – Second and Center

Excelsior Methodist Episcopal Church on George Street 1884. Excelsior Methodist was established on All Saint’s Day, November 1, 1884. Reverend David Jordan Higgins was the pastor.

A few of the charter members were C. O. Woodruff, John Sampson and his wife, Louis Hansen and his wife and Miner Ball.

The church building was finished in 1885. Improvised pews were fashioned of planks laid across saw horses and nail kegs. On October 5, 1885, a fine organ was installed. A church bell was purchased for $90. Reverend James Gibson Teter came in 1886. During the 1890s, there were numerous baptisms as usual but there were some who wanted to be “immersed” which took place in Christmas Lake.

Twenty more pastors Blessed the pulpit until Reverend Edward W. Gebhard came in 1954. The construction of the new church had already begun.

Excelsior Methodist Episcopal became the Methodist Church in 1939. And after Reverend Gebhard arrived in 1954, there were four more pastors until 1968 when the
He named the park Janette Merrill Park after his late mother who had died at the young age of 51.

As the 1950s were approaching, the Merrill family was considering taking the property back but decided to let it go. It was at that time, in 1951 that Al and Virginia Ridinger purchased the property. The Ridingers owned the home until 1985. A number of different owners enjoyed the property over the years since until Mark and Kimberly Welty bought it in 2003. The Welts raised two children and still live there. 5330 Howard’s Point Road is the second property on the west facing lakeshore of Howard’s Point. Mark Welty was intrigued with the history of the property and all of Howard’s Point and has written a wonderful book about what he discovered.

– Excerpts from the book “Howard’s Point,”
A Lake Minnetonka Story written by Mark Welty.

Minnewashta Union Congregational: The Minnewashta Church began as a simple Sunday School in 1901. Mrs. Jean E. Hobart established the school and later Mr. William J. Aldritt became the superintendent. Around 1920 (photo at right) the old Eddy School House built around 1869, and about two acres of land, were purchased from the school district. The original chapel was moved onto the new property and the two building were combined.

What prompted the community to establish a church in those busy early days, was the fact that so many felt strongly about the need for a more Spiritual life. In 1908, the Ladies’ Aid Society was organized. Some of the Charter members were, Mrs. Edwin Aldritt, Mrs. R. T. Mann, Mrs. John E. Aldritt, Mrs. H. L. Moody, Mrs. John Miller, Mrs. Joh Christian, and Mrs. George Leach and others.

Rev. Luther M. Tesh resided from 1918 until 1927. There were 14 other ministers until Reverend Doug Koper in 1978 and Reverend Kevin Ryherd in 2002. Pastor Harlan Seri is presiding in 2015.

Saint John’s Catholic Church: Excelsior caught the eye of the Archdiocese as early as 1895. In 1897, the Archdiocese sent Father Christie to conduct mass in the Excelsior Town Hall. Father Joseph Busch was chosen to be the first priest in the new church in 1903.
Brighter and so the construction of a new chapel in Excelsior was begun in 1862 and completed in 1864. It was consecrated by Bishop Whipple, the first Bishop of Minnesota, on Ascension Day in 1864.

The little mission parish had good times and bad through the rest of the 1800s. By the turn of the century, things looked brighter, and in the late twenties, Trinity had a new parish hall and had become a major part of Excelsior village life. It still had mission status, however, meaning that it was dependent upon the diocese for its support.

In 1940, after relying on the diocese for nearly 80 years, Trinity became an independent parish and a full-fledged member of the Episcopal Diocese of Minnesota. Plans for a new church building were discontinued during World War II, but in 1949 the Chapel was expanded to meet the needs of the growing parish.

A new and larger sanctuary for Trinity parish was consecrated in 1970 but the historic Chapel has remained an important part in the life of the parish. It is the only original church building standing in Excelsior and the oldest Episcopal church in Minnesota still in use.

Prior to that, Archbishop John Ireland had been instrumental in encouraging the Archdiocese to become interested in Excelsior.

Father Busch stated that there was a growing popularity in the lake as well as a growing population. A church building, that was built in 1889 by the Universalist Society, became available in 1903. The building was located on 200 First Street. The Mission House for the priests was built and completed in 1905. It was and still is, located at 217 First Street directly across from the original church which was enlarged in 1933. (Above photo) Father Busch left in 1910 and Father James Reardon took over for six months until Father Thomas Cushen came and remained Pastor until 1960.

Saint John’s School and Convent were built in 1952. The most important was the building of the new church at 680 Mill Street, Excelsior (the present worship building) and its completion in 1960.


Deephaven School: The first Deephaven school house was built in 1894 and opened with 9 students. The school thrived for nearly ten years before a new school house was built. Then, in 1916, a second floor was added and it became the first High school in Deephaven. Later in 1920, the High School was added onto to accomodate the growing population of school children.

Deephaven Milwaukee Railroad Station: This station existed up until around 1902 when this photo was taken. Soon thereafter, the railroad discontinued service and the station was dismantled.
The Milwaukee Railroad and later the streetcar ran through the southern part of Woodland, once called the Village of Maplewoods. The station still stands at Maplewood Road. Woodland was established in 1882 and incorporated in 1948. Woodland is bordered by Hwy. 101 to the east, Minnetonka Boulevard to the south and Lake Minnetonka to the west and north.

**Excelsior Lakeshore Businesses:**

During the late 1800s into the early 1900s, the lakeshore of the Commons, 2,600 feet of lakeshore boasted of numerous businesses that catered to lake activities.

Note that these businesses existed on the Lake front a number of years after the lagoon, about where the Excelsior Yacht Club is shown, was filled in.

The photo below is most likely the Motor Line Wharf and May’s Pavilion.

**Excelsior School in 1896:** In 1856, the first group of students entered the doors of Excelsiors first school which was a log cabin. But by 1857, Excelsior had this two story school house. However, in 1899, the school burned to the ground. A new brick building was constructed that same year. Then in 1915, the present building was begun in 1915 facing Galpin Lake.

**Groveland Schools:** Around 1856, William Streeter Chowen, a mostly self-educated man, donated land for the first school house in the area. His dream was that his children and other like them would have the opportunity for the education he hadn’t had.

The first school was a one room log structure.

In 1871, the next school house was built near the present (2015) Groveland cemetery. The hand water pump for the school can still be seen in the cemetery. The school was 24´ x 30´ and held 60 children. By the early 1890s, one of the twins, Bayard Shaver, born to pioneer parents James and Sarah (Chowen) Shaver, became a school teacher there.

In 1915, the third Groveland school was built. The top floor was one large room used as a gymnasium, lunch room and meeting place. The second floor consisted of two class rooms and the basement contained, lockers, lavatories, showers and an industrial arts classroom. The old school was demolished and the land was used as a playground. Russell M. Bennett donated the playground equipment.

An addition was added in 1929 and in 1958, the one level elementary school was built next door.

Earlier, in 1952, Minnetonka High school was established and the old brick school house became the Junior High.

Before all this, there was another school that was begun by Reverend Galpin. The location of this school was on the property that later belonged to E. B. Schwartz.
Annual Community Events and Traditions

Each of the five cities in the South Lake Area, has annual events that started back in the 1800s. Many of those traditional events have continued to present day 2015.

These events represent local or national celebrations. In the early years, the Fourth of July of course was celebrating our independence.

Apple Days: The apple has been grown for thousands of years. It was well known to Ancient China and Egypt. Apples were also known to the Greeks and Romans and they have been popular through all the centuries to the present day. The growing of apples and other fruits in this area during the middle to late 1800s was very popular as well and a number of individuals spent their lives breeding the hardiest or best tasting fruits. John A. Wilson, Gene Carr, Peter Gideon and Charles Haralson were just a few.

The land was fertile and the deciduous forests were abundant so the lumber business thrived as did cattle farming and fruit growing. Gideon once said, “the true road to success was in crossing the Siberian Crab with the common apple.” It took him seven years to grow the Wealthy Apple but that’s what these men were made of. Patience and persistence.

The University of Minnesota has spread it’s wings throughout the area with a professor of agriculture, Daniel A. Robertson, establishing the Minnesota Horticultural Society in 1867, which was the offspring of the Fruit Growers Association established in 1860 at the State Fair held in Rochester, Minnesota that year. Later, in 1873, it changed it’s name to the present, Minnesota State Horticultural Society. Though the arboretum established a Horticultural Research Center in 1907, the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum wasn’t established until 1958 when it was founded by Leon C. Snyder. At that time it was 160 acres. Today it is the largest and most complete horticulture site in Minnesota approaching 1,200 acres.

With this kind of culture in and around the South Lake area of Lake Minnetonka, it’s no wonder that the tradition of celebrating Apple Days began. The photo here is of a display provided by the Zachariasen family and may have been taken at the first Apple Days celebration in Excelsior in 1929. The tradition has continued to present day 2015.

Lawn Tennis Championships: The photo below is of the Northwest Lawn Tennis Tournament doubles match being played in 1920 on Burton Courts at Chimo in Deephaven. Carsons Bay is in background. Chimo was the Hazen James Burton Estate. The site shown was also known as the “Cow Bowl.” This tournament was a fixture at Chimo and part of the yacht club’s calendar for many years.

The Amazing History of Our Community
Resort Life: Vacationing in and around Lake Minnetonka was world renowned. From the 1860s to the present time, touring the lake and frequenting the numerous hotels up through the 1930s and the many restaurants today (2015), is a very popular activity.

In the 1800s through the 1920s, sailing, steamships and magnificent hotels numbering upwards of twenty or more, drew people from the south and east and as more people came to visit, more people came and stayed to provide services for the tourist industry.

In it’s Heyday (Origin – “festival Day” or even “Holy Day” meaning success or popularity.), celebrities, dignitaries and prominent people from Europe, Washington, the south (Due often to the heat.) and the east coast spent time here often.

Hotels popped up everywhere. They burned down often but were often rebuilt quickly. These hotels would boast of 150 to 400 rooms. There were hundreds of steamships on the lake throughout this period taking people to Big Island or on tours from one point on the lake to another as well as servicing residents who were mostly here only for the summer.

It wasn’t until the 1930s and 1940s that new numbers of residents began living here year around.

There was music, gambling, food and drink but the main attraction was the water and the weather. The area attracted US Presidents and military officers, movie stars, authors, musicians and the railroad grew because of the lake’s popularity as well as the lumber and mining opportunities throughout the state.

In addition, mass transit, in a sense, grew from the popularity of Lake Minnetonka. Street cars brought people from Minneapolis and St. Paul, then buses, and today the urban rail transit system is moving further and further out into the country in order to move people to and around the cities.

Sailing Regattas:

Sugar Camps: The Dakota Indians at one time had their Sugar Camps on Big Island. In the spring, the Dakota set up sugar camps, where they boiled maple sap into syrup. They stirred the syrup as it cooled, turning it into maple sugar.

One of the sweetest lessons the Native Americans taught the pioneers was how to boil down maple sap to make syrup. In 1853, Hezekiah Brake set up troughs under 500 maple trees to collect the sap along Lake Minnetonka. He didn’t have big enough containers, so he used the canoes that he’d bought from Chief Shakopee and sold a canoe of syrup in St. Anthony, Minn., for $200.

The settlers held “sugaring parties,” which consisted of boiling down the sap, and were festive occasions where no participant escaped the party without a layer of black soot dusting their skin and clothes. With snow still on the ground, settlers made an early form of ice cream by caramelizing syrup: They mixed snow with drops of syrup and then beat the sweet mixture until it turned white.

Sugar Camps was an annual event at the Hazen Burton Sugar Camp in 1898 at the Burton’s Chimo estate.
Personal Reflections On The Times

Each of us can recall what a wonderful, fresh early summer morning smells like while standing at the waters edge engaged in a captivating view. Or how the snow feels on our face as we walk down main street in the middle of winter.

You visit a friend in the morning or go to church on a rainy afternoon and stop at the cemetery afterword. What was it like at the beach? How much were tickets at the Amusement Park? Did you see any of the Yacht Club races that day? Do you remember when they built the new stretch of highway seven from Excelsior to Smithtown Bay?

Every generation has these kinds of memories. Here are a few . . .

Mid 1800 – early 1900

A visit to Oak Hill Cemetery. Today I climbed to near the peak of Oak Hill Cemetery in Excelsior and stood beside the highest stone in that spot where sleep pioneers. I read on that stone: Charles Galpin, June 25, 1812 – November 7, 1872. Charles Galpin, pioneer preacher of the gospel, organized the Excelsior Congregational Church. Leader in all enterprises for the advancement of the Pioneer Community.

– Reverend Charles B. Sheldon, Excelsior Congregational Church

Daisy Dillman wrote this as the Preface to her book “100 Years In Excelsior.”

The Congregational Church. Open this book with me as if you were invited in to chat with old friends. That is how they have appeared to me. For nearly two years I have been pouring over old records and historical data to try and visualize how one hundred years have been lived in one church and in one community. As I have read, my circle of friends has grown in number and has increased in importance. There used to be a saying that “one must summer and winter with a person to know him.” I have summered and wintered with these individuals for so long now that I feel they are my friends. Sometimes they have awakened me at night to remind me of events that have taken place. I have had to leave out so many of their experiences and I always feel guilty in doing so, as if I had offended a friend. Really, I’m not growing snobbish, but I have been sharing such delightful experiences with those who have walked or have ridden up here during these past one hundred years. The Galpins, the McGraths, the Sheldons, “They are not dead; they do but sleep.”

The Amazing History of Our Community

Dakota War of 1862. The 1851 Treaties between the Dakota Indians and the United States set aside two reservations in Minnesota: the Lower Reservation for the Mdewakanton and Wahpekute bands (Tribes) and the Upper Reservation for the Sisseton and Wahpeton bands. The Dakota Indians were supposed to be confined to their reservations but they often left.

Why would they leave their reservations? During the period 1853-1862, they frequently left their reservations because there wasn’t enough food available. Also, Indians liked to hunt and wanted to live like they did before the treaty. Warfare with the Chippewa was an important part of their culture and the whites would not let them go to war against their enemies.

The Dakota may have been committing depredations on whites but many “Bad Whites” committed depredation on other whites and blamed it on the Indians.

Though the whites were not always responsible for the shortage of food on the reservations, the Indians finally realized that they were going to starve living only within the reservations and simply had finally had enough.

On August 17, 1862, four Dakota men, who had separated from a larger Dakota hunting party, killed 3 men, a woman and a young girl in Acton Township, Meeker County. This event was the primary cause of the Dakota War of 1862.
The Amusement Park and The Pavilion. Excelsior Amusement Park, the site of many a school picnic and provider of Free Rides for Good Grades, opened on May 30, 1925. The park was owned by the streetcar company, opened to create ridership on the line. Fred W. Pearce, Sr., of Detroit, was brought in to run it. Pearce soon purchased the park.

The Pavilion

Most of the following information came from articles in the Minnetonka Record newspaper.

Was Danceland . . .

the Tonka Bay Roller Skating Pavilion - moved - near dock station in Excelsior - opened May 1923
the Excelsior Casino - built 1902, torn down December 1922.
the Tonka Bay Casino - Razed 1922, lumber used for new casino in Excelsior
Excelsior Commons Pavilion - constructed at the end of the 1923 season

Following is conflicting information gathered regarding the structure in question most of which appeared in the newspaper.

On January 23, 1920: Horace Lowry, president of the Twin City Lines (streetcar), offered the Tonka Bay roller skating pavilion as a gift to the Excelsior park board for use on the Excelsior commons. Bonds would have to be voted on to raise funds to move the building from Tonka Bay to Excelsior. “It would serve as a center for housing summer concerts and entertainments and would afford shelter to picnic crowds in case of sudden storm.”

On May 8, 2020, there was an ad for the first dance of the season at the Casino in Excelsior. Music by Squires’ Orchestra tickets were $1.00 per Couple. Extra Lady 25 cents. The Casino pavilion was doing a thriving weekend business as well as Saturday night hops (May 28, 1920).

On October 13, 1922: Eber Armagost and J. E. McNiece of Excelsior had purchased the Tonka Bay Casino and were having it razed. “The lumber will be used to build a new casino at the street railway dock station in Excelsior. It will be 100 x 150 feet and will be completed by spring. J. E. Weinholz has the contract.” Armagost worked for the trolley company.

On December 1, 1922: The Excelsior Park Board had purchased the ground upon which the Casino stands. “By this action the park again comes into possession of the shore which was laid aside for it by the original settlers. In 1903 the village vacated the land. The Park Board bought it from its present owner, R. Golden, for $6,000.

The Casino lease expires January 1, 1923, and the building is to be removed by March 1. The Park Board plans to beautify the shore and maintain it for the use of the public.”

On December 15, 1922: “The Excelsior Casino, which was built in 1902, will soon be no more. A wrecking crew started work on it this week and the building will be razed to the ground. The work is in charge of Elmer Carlson and Oskar Carlson.”

Legend has it that the porches were removed and the building was towed across the frozen Lake Minnetonka from Tonka Bay to Excelsior. It seems that if that had happened it would have certainly been sensational enough to be in the newspaper, but no such report has been found. Further confusing the matter is an article from July 1953:

1953: Joe Weinholz, an Excelsior contractor, told the story of how he and his crew moved the 66 x 140-foot structure from Tonka Bay:

“First we took apart the roof boards and took down the trusses. Then off came the porches. The walls were sawed into 14 x 22-foot sections and carried down to the shore and slid over the bank on to a barge. From there, they were carried across the lake to the shore of what is now the Amusement Park and then rolled across the road to the present site of the ballroom. The timbers and underwork of the building, and the floor sheeting were all loaded on trucks and brought over to Excelsior.”

This may be the Dock Station talked about in this article.
The “Schuman Place.” This home, built in 1869, is Number 0000 on the list of Historical Homes in the area. It sits high on a hill just off of Pleasant Avenue. It was once part of a 200 acre farm which included the main two story house with screened porches overlooking Lotus Lake to the south and two other buildings, one of which was the horse barn with stalls on the lower level.

The property was given to General XXX XXXXXX after the Civil War in about 1867. General XXXXX served as a XXXXXXX in the war and this was his XXXXXXX.

The George M. and Anna Reichert family lived there from 1939 to 1948 and all three children, Georgianna, Wulliam and Robert, graduated from Excelsior High School. At that time there were only 60 acres left. (Robert “Bob” Reichert is highlighted later in the book as the author of the book “Hit It” about water skiing.)

Anna made an unwise decision right off the bat. She decided to buy a few chickens for the “Farm.” Actually, not just a few, 1,000 to be exact. When the early spring freeze caused the chickens to bunch up for warmth, most of the small chickens died.

Bob and his brother William, “Bill,” had the job of burying all these wet, smelly chickens. The dug deep holes so the skunks couldn’t dig them up but the smell was so bad, that Bob couldn’t eat chicken for ten years after that.

The house became the Osgood Place after the Reicherts left. The owner was Bud Osgood who formed the S.M. Osgood Company in 1960. S.M. Osgood Company was a Marine & RV Manufacturer’s Representative that sold products throughout Minnesota and the surrounding states.

Today, 2015, the “Shuman Place” is owned by Beverly Holtze who happens to be one of the sponsors of this book through her company, Excelsior Title. The home is still a beautiful place. The proches are gone and have been converted into year-round living space. The horse barn is now a modern home with a large basement and three plus stall garage for automobiles instead of horses.
The Amazing History of Our Community

Chapter V
Early 1900s Through The Middle 1900s

The People Of The Second 50 Years

Many of these men and women were the parents to many of us presently alive in 2015 when the first edition of this book was published. The others – we knew most of them. We frequented their businesses, listened to their jokes or they took care of us when we were sick.

They built our homes, sold our homes, preached to us and filled our gas tanks when gas was 20 cents a gallon. They told fishing and hunting stories (lies) and performed note-worthy feats on the basketball courts, football fields, on the water and at the shooting ranges.

This area, then and now, can boast of some very talented people. Industrious, creative, inventive, but most of all just hard working men and women with a common love for the area and the lake.

Before we explore the early 1900s in these communities, let’s take a look at what conditions were like in the early 1900s.

- The average life expectancy for men was 47 years.
- Fuel for cars was sold in drug stores only.
- 14 percent of the homes had a bathtub.
- 8 percent of the homes had a telephone.
- There were 8,000 cars and 144 miles of paved roads.
- The maximum speed limit in most cities was 10 mph.
- The tallest structure in the world was the Eiffel Tower.
- The average US wage in 1910 was 22 cents per hour.
- The average US worker made between $200 and $400 per year.
- A competent accountant could expect to earn $2000 per year. A dentist $2,500 per year, a veterinarian between $1,500 and $4,000 per year, and a mechanical engineer about $5,000 per year.
- More than 95 percent of all births took place at home.
- Ninety percent of all Doctors had no college education.
- Sugar cost four cents a pound.
- Eggs were fourteen cents a dozen.
- Coffee was fifteen cents a pound.
- Most women only washed their hair once a month, and used Borax or egg yolks for shampoo.
- Canada passed a law that prohibited poor people from entering into their country for any reason.
- The American flag had 45 stars.
- The population of Las Vegas, Nevada was only 30.
- Crossword puzzles, canned beer, and iced tea hadn’t been invented yet.
- Marijuana, heroin, and morphine were all available over the counter at the local corner drugstores.
- 1930s – Saw the worst drought in American history. 2.5 million American abandoned their farms and moved to California.
- 1932 – The winter was so cold that Niagara Falls froze completely solid.
- 1932 – Americans elected a new president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Abel, Vernon (1920 – 2000) Abel Heating & Air Conditioning. Vernon “Vern” was born in West Concord, Minnesota. Vernon and Carmen (1921-2007) Abel were married in 1941, moved to the Excelsior area in 1943 and bought a small cottage on Lake Minnetonka in Excelsior on Gideons Bay. Vernon attended Dunwoody Industrial Institute in Minneapolis and then opened Abel Heating Co. in downtown Excelsior. His business was at the same Excelsior’s Water Street location for 27 years and Carmen, having attended Minneapolis Business college, was his part time secretary for many of those years.

They raised two children, Barbara and Bob, who also had Mrs. Umbahacher the first grade teacher, and they both graduated from Minnetonka High School. Vernon and Carmen were active in many community affairs and attended the Excelsior Congregational Church. Carmen was also a Girl Scout leader, active in church activities, was on a bowling league, and enjoyed many water activities including water skiing,
floating on her air mattress and ice skating! She became quite a good artist too in her later years after retirement, her favorite being oil painting. Vernon was active in the Lions Club, Boy Scout Troop 424, enjoyed fishing and hunting, playing his trombone and telling good stories! He was also quite the craftsman and built several boats including a small cabin cruiser from just a set of plans he had ordered.

The cottage they bought had a number of remodeling projects through the years as the family grew of which Vern designed and did most of the work. Together they enjoyed dancing, boating, and entertaining. They truly enjoyed living and raising their children in Excelsior until finally selling their home in 1986. Retiring to Phoenix, Arizona they again found themselves remodeling their home. Having free time they enjoyed entertaining new friends, playing golf, traveling, and having their children and four grandchildren visit whenever possible.

– contributed by Barbara (Abel) Piesel daughter

Local Carpenter and Trap Shooting Champion

Aldritt, Horace G. (1895 – 0000) Horace Aldritt and his wife Olga lived on the tip of Howard’s Point for many years. Horace was one of the best, most meticulous carpenters in the area.

In 1918, before Horace was married, Horace was in the service, Company B, in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He had always been an excellent marksman and while in camp, many men were having a tough time shooting and hitting their targets. Horace was asked to shoot to determine if it was the men or the guns. He was shooting a rifle at 100, 200, 300 and 500 yards. These were rapid fire shots and at 500 yards he would get 6 bullseyes and four close shots and determined that both the other men and the guns were the problem. In later years back home, he enjoyed the sport of clay pidgeon shooting and won many championships.

On one of Horace’s favorite hunting trips, he was injured and that accident cost him the site in his right eye – his shooting eye. He was determined to shoot again so he went to Victoria and visited with Mr. Storms who was a welding shop. The two of them devised a way of attaching and angling the barrel onto the firing mechanism so that Horace was accurate using his left eye to aim the gun. Many people from all over the country called him to find out how they could do the same. Horace’s name, gun and photo appear in the Trap Shooting Hall of Fame in Vandalia, Ohio.

Aldritt, Lincoln Edwin (1903 – 1997) Lincoln “Linc” Aldritt, brother of Horace Aldritt, was born in Chanhassen. Linc grew up and met Harriette Patricia Morse from Excelsior. Harriette’s father was Herbert A. Morse who was a member of the Morse family that owned the ice businesses over the years. Linc and Harriette married, lived in Tonka Bay and raised two daughters, Nancy and Donna.

Linc and Harriette owned and operated a hardware store in Excelsior during the 1940s, through the 1960s. Their first store was located on the west side of Water Street near where Ooh La La was (2015) and later, during the 1950s, they moved across the street to 239 Water Street. They were members of the Congregational Church in Excelsior.
Arnold, Vic (0000 – 0000)
Vic Arnold owned the drug store at 200 Water Street. Kitty-corner at 35 Water Street was the first Drugstore in town owned by Augustus Thompson.

The photo at right is the fountain in the interior of Arnold’s Drug Store. Until recently, most drug stores in the mid twentieth century had soda fountains that served up coffee, ice cream treats, breakfast and lunch. The young lady in the photo is Lorraine (Mase) Studer.

Bacon, Victor G. (1907 – 1996) Vic and his wife Doris moved to Tonka Bay in the early 1940s. Vic was a pharmacist and opened the V.G. Bacon Drug at 200 Water Street where Vic Arnold had previously owned and managed his drug store. Shortly after opening the store, Vic and Doris moved from Tonka Bay to Meadville to a home on Excelsior Bay. In 1949, the Red Owl store (205 Water Street) which was across the street, burned to the ground. As it was being rebuilt, Vic was talked into buying it. In 1950 Vic purchased the building which was much larger and gave him a lot more space. The new store had its pharmacy and soda fountain and it also had a wide array of cosmetics, toiletry items, magazines and gifts of all kinds. The soda fountain also served breakfasts and lunches. Doris worked with Vic for many years.

The breakfast area became the meeting place for everyone who worked in town. It gave them and their friends a place right in the heart of Excelsior to gather and plan their day, catch up on what was happening in town or just share ideas and tell a few jokes.

Victor Bacon and his wife, Doris, were fixtures in the Excelsior community for decades. Vic was involved with the Rotary and the Men’s Garden Club, among other community organizations and the two of them were very social and were fabulous entertainers.

The drugstore was open on Friday nights indefinitely. The reason being, that many people were taking the bus to Minneapolis in the 1950s either working or shopping and often the last bus wouldn’t arrive until quite late. With the bus stop out in front of the store, Vic felt that they would need safe harbor once they arrived before heading home or for their cars or being picked up by someone. They had an opportunity to get out of the elements and make a phone call if need be.

Vic was known well by many people in town and greatly respected for his generosity and willingness to extend credit to those who needed it. He was also interested in everything that was happening in town whether it had to do with his “buddies,” Doris and his friends or the younger people in town such as the Jr. Chamber of Commerce. Vic always had a twinkle in his eye, a ready smile and a funny joke to tell.

In 2015, on that same corner in Excelsior, 205 Water Street, is a wonderful new Italian restaurant that calls itself Victor’s On Water, named for Mr. Victor Bacon.

Beddor, Frank (1924 – 2007) Frank was born in Minneapolis to Frank Beddor, Sr., and Genevieve Nolan Beddor. In 1957, he married Marilyn Branchaud. Frank was an entrepreneur and loved adventure. One of his many pursuits was a traveling water-ski show called the Ski Antics. (Featuring ice-follies girls, a one-legged boy and a death-defying jump through fire.) Among other feats of derring-do, Frank was known for having set a world record skiing the length of the Mississippi River dressed as Paul Bunyan (to promote Minneapolis’ Paul Bunyan Land) and motorcycling to South America with his 150-lb. Great Dane riding in a specially outfitted box mounted above the rear wheel.

Frank led a life of adventure, hard work, and generosity, with a strong commitment to faith, family and values. Frank built an illustrious career in the printing industry. An eternal optimist who found promise in obstacle, Frank built and ran more than 20 businesses in his lifetime. Frank was a Knight of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem. He felt very blessed by God, and gave back to others.

Frank, Marilyn and their family, lived on Christmas lake.
The next day, go to work in your wet clothes, and repeat. That will give you some idea of the adventure he had. Yet Russell loved the adventure enough to plan a second trans-Atlantic crossing in his late sixties. This time it was a solo crossing from Maine to the Azores in his custom trimaran, “White Wings.” Beth often joked that sailing is the most expensive way there is to travel third class.

Russell served as a board member for forty years of Meriden Engineering Corporation and Sargeant Land Company in support of the Pillsbury-Bennett-Longyear iron ore partnership that was begun by his grandfather, Russell Meriden Bennett, in 1890, and that still exists today under the name Superior Mineral Resources.

Russell also served as Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Lakewood Cemetery, the University of Minnesota Foundation and Blake School. He was also past President of Woodhill Country Club and the Minneapolis Club.

Russell completed 54 annual retreats at the Jesuit Retreat House, Demontreville, and he believed that his faith, family and serving others were the most important things in life. He devoted countless volunteer hours in an effort to improve his community.

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Roy was born on his parents farm near Ord, Nebraska. Ord is straight north of Kearney. His mother died when he was very young. He eventually moved to the Lake Minnetonka area from Marshalltown, Iowa where he had played steel guitar with Gene Autry and the “Sons of the Pioneers.

“I came out here in 1932,” he said. “When Clara and I got off the train at Eureka, we had $10 and two suitcases to our name. I went to work at Bill’s Café, here in Excelsior, for $10 a week and my cigarettes.” Roy and Clara (maiden) raised four daughters, Sandra, Susan, Stephanie and Shelley.

During the early days, Roy was a professional wrestler, coached walk-a-thons and dance-a-thons. As time went on, he took a job with the village shoveling leaves and cleaning gutters. He was paid 30 cents an hour. He also helped dredge much of Lake Minnetonka when he worked for Anson Mase for 15 years. Anson owned Minnetonka Dredging and offered Roy $30 a day which was a big jump from 30¢ an hour. During that time, Bechrle became familiar with every bay on Lake Minnetonka, painting and posting buoys and dredging channels.
After struggling through the depression, Roy went to work for Minneapolis Moline during WWII. Once he quit the dredging company, he went to work as a mechanic at the Skelly station in downtown Excelsior. Eventually, he purchased his own service station at the intersection of Christmas Lake Road and Highway 7, where he built a thriving business. “It opened at 6 a.m. and closed at 10 p.m.,” he recalled. “I made 13 cents profit the first day on a quart of oil. That’s all.”

Soon business picked up for Roy and he started selling minnows to fishermen, hence the beginning of Roy’s Live Bait. “But Pure Oil came and told me they were building a super-station...that I couldn’t sell minnows anymore.” In the meantime, Roy had purchased some property and when Pure Oil handed down the ultimatum on selling bait, he decided to start a new store. “I called Jerome Studer,” Roy said. “He came over and leveled out the property.”

In November 1952, Roy opened the bait store, which was smaller and closer to the highway than the structure did later on. Roy managed the service station while his wife tended the bait store. But Roy was forced to sell the gas station when the bait business boomed and became too much for his wife.

The original Roy’s Live Bait was torn down in 1961 when Roy struck a deal with the Phillips Petroleum Co. They wanted to build a service station on land west of the bait store. But in order to gain clearance for a drive, the shop had to be moved back from Highway 7. The terms reached then give Roy full ownership of the gas station by 1981. A new bait shop was built and expanded at least twice after that. “All four girls helped out. They learned how to deal with the public.” It was a 24 - 7 operation. Roy installed a bell that rang in his bedroom for late night fishermen. “Our business grew to where we had 30,000 paid customers in three months,” Roy said. “On a busy day, we’d go through 20 gallons of minnows. My special was always crappie minnows.”

He also sold fishing licenses, which was a phenomenal business on New Year’s Day. “Of course we only got a small percentage for each license but we also sold coffee and doughnuts,” he said. “They were plenty hung over and that glass of beer or cup of coffee would stimulate them while they stood in line.”

Beehrle’s entry into politics began abruptly one day when he walked into the Skipper Cafe to have coffee with his friends from the business community. “I was greeted by Ray Mason, longtime owner of Mason Motors, who said, “Hi, your Honor.” Then everybody else got up and hollered “Your Honor.” They said I was the new mayor of Excelsior.

“Later, I went up to file for election, after arguing with Clara for awhile about it, and I was greeted by Anson Mase, my old boss, who’d already filed for mayor. When he saw that I was going to run, he said, ‘Roy, I’ll withdraw and leave the filing fees for your campaign fund.’ Roy won the election and took office in 1964. He then embarked on a series of projects to revitalize downtown Excelsior. He sent the city manager to Washington, D.C., to talk directly to Housing and Urban Development (HUD) officials. Securing redevelopment money, the city condemned dilapidated buildings such as the corner drugstore, which then became Nygren’s clothing store and eventually the Chamber of Commerce office in 2013.

In addition, Beehrle met every month with the mayors of Greenwood, Tonka Bay and Shorewood to discuss local issues. At one of those meetings, he said the communities needed a new library. The other mayors agreed and, together, they spearheaded the drive to build a new library, which was dedicated in 1966. A new city hall and fire station were also added during Beehrle’s terms as mayor. In addition to his duties at the helm of Excelsior city politics, Roy was an active member of the fire department from 1937 to 1973. Roy took pride in everything he did. Whether he was judging a dance-a-thon, wrestling, selling bait or building a new library, he left his mark on a lot of Excelsior. Beehrle Avenue, that connects with George Street and Oak Street (County Road 19) was named in honor of Roy. Roy was the mayor of Excelsior from 1964 until 1971.

The following is from a Sailor Newspaper article in 1987 – forward thinking:

They still call him “Your Honor” by Tom Ratzloff Sailor Newspaper 1987.

It’s been 16 years since he climbed the stairs above the fire hall to preside over a Monday night city council meeting. Gone are evenings filled with
wrangling over ordinances, sideyard setbacks and other municipal matters. Today, his walnut gavel rests quietly in a box next to a blue and white nameplate that reads “Mayor Roy Beehrle.”

But there are lots of people in Excelsior who still call Beehrle “Your Honor.” As mayor during one of the city’s most vibrant periods (1964–71), he is remembered for spearheading construction of a new library, city hall and fire department, along with other revitalization projects.

Beehrle, 76, climbed those stairs to the council chambers once again last week to voice his concerns about Excelsior’s future. He implored council members to work hard to make the city the hub of Lake Minnetonka.

“Let’s be part of the picture instead of fading out of the picture,” he said. “We’ve got to make changes to make this village the prospective stopping-off place for shoppers. I worked pretty hard when I was mayor to make additions to Excelsior, and I’d hate to see it go down the drain.”

Beehrle supports the hotel complex proposed for the city and hopes that highway and light-rail transit (LRT) projects will improve access to Excelsior.

Since many commuters, already use Excelsior’s municipal parking lots, he believes a parking ramp is needed in the downtown business district.

“The parking lots are already used by outsiders, and I think we should put up a ramp for commuters who could park on the upper floors,” he said. “The bottom floor could be reserved for free 90-minute parking and the commuters would pay to park above. You’d get a return from that not only in parking fees but in downtown business because they’d shop here before going home.”

Although he values Excelsior’s historical landmarks, such as the Christopher Inn, Beehrle said some buildings should be razed to bring in new businesses.

“Let’s tear up some of these old buildings to make way for new ones,” he said. “We can’t look at old-fashioned ways for solutions. We’ve got to look to the future.”

Bidwell, Clarenc W. (0000 – 0000) Clarence and Ruth moved into the home after Marcus passed away and rebuilt it to what it is today. He and his wife had two children, Edward and Evelyn. On the block where they lived, there were numerous families whose children all played together. Some are shown and named below.

1935 – The back row, left to right: Bob Flink, Dave Headla, Bill Flink, John Flink, Rich Odell, Anne Bisbee and George DuToit. The irregular front row: John Palmer, Sukey DuToit, Dave Odell (hiding behind Sukey), Tom Flink, Mary DuToit, Genie DuToit and Chuck Flink.

Carr, William Thomas “Bill” (1909 – 2010) Bill was born in Ironton, Minnesota which is part of the Brainard Lakes area.
Clauson, Everett (1910 - 2007) Everett and Helen Clauson moved to Excelsior in 1945. They had four children, Everett Jr. who died at birth, Susan, Jon and Patty.

Everett went into business as the Excelsior Farm and Garden Store which he purchased from Cargill, Inc. Cargill started the store in the early 1940s and somewhat disenchanted with the first manager and asked Ev if he would like to take over. He had worked for Cargill after graduating from the University of Minnesota School of Agriculture.

Dad had two store locations on Water Street and one final location on Second Street. The photo below is 239 Water Street. There had been a grocery store there until Cargill moved in around 1946. Linc and Harriet Aldritt had their hardware store there after Ev left. Darel and Laverna Leipold are in that location today – 2014. Tony’s Barber Shop is still next door to this day managed by Tony’s son Edward Zembrycki (2014).

Besides the store, one of the first things my mother and dad did was join the Lutheran church which at the time was just the basement with a leaky roof. Their church affiliation meant a great deal to both of them. Over the years, dad had the privilege of serving on the board and as the treasurer. The Lutheran church became Mount Calvary and dad was a member for 58 years.

Ev was a charter member of the Excelsior Rotary Club in 1949. Rotary met at either the Sampson House or Bill’s Cafe in those days. Ev, who lived at 35 Center Street with his family, would head home at noon, change clothes and walk to Rotary. Ev was also a member of the Minnetonka Men’s Garden Club which started in 1949. Today there are two municipal flower plots they maintain. The Arey Memorial at Water Street and County 19 and the Johnson Memorial at the junction of Second Street, Excelsior Boulevard and Lake Street.

My mother and dad loved Excelsior and besides their family and dad’s business, they were very much involved in the town and their church.

Clyborne, Peg (0000 – 0000) Peg (Knowlton) Clyborne lived on the corner of Eureka Road and Birch Bluff Road with her husband Robert Archibald Sr. The had a son Robert Archibald “Bob” Jr. and a daughter Gayle. For many years Peg delivered papers to everyone in western Shorewood and Tonka Bay. Peg was a caring person with a deep, husky voice and a wonderful commitment to what’s right and a very special sense of humor. She also knew everyone in the area.

In about 1952, there were two young boys who were trying to pull a prank on passers by as they used ketchup, their bikes and a broken fence to pretend that they had crashed into the fence and hurt themselves. Peg came by and stopped. She was frightened that, in fact, the boys were hurt.

There is a story I must tell since it punctuates what this town and its people are all about. Back in the early 1950s, The Boutelle family who owned the department store by that name, lived on Lake Minnewashta in a large brick mansion along Yellowstone trail and eventually the new Highway Seven.

Mrs. Boutelle would come into Excelsior every Christmas season to support the local merchants by purchasing a toy from a store to give to a child. Dad told me the story which certainly wasn’t lost on this five year old boy that loved toys. Now keep in mind, I’m perhaps seven or eight years old now and I was standing outside dad’s store on a cold winter December day when I saw this heavy set women in a big fur coat walking down Water Street right towards my dad’s store. I turned to look intently at the display of toys in my dads store window when all of a sudden I heard Mrs. Boutelle say “Young man, do you see something in the window that you would like?” The next thing I knew, I was in the store listening to her saying, “I don’t care if he is your son, I want him to have any toy he wants. Just put it on my bill.”

Well, I never told anyone about my clever little plan but it all turned out okay. Mrs. Boutelle felt good about her generosity, dad made a little profit, and a seven year old boy was very happy.
Well, they boys, not wanting to get caught, grabbed their bikes and rode away thinking that they hadn’t been recognized.

Later that evening, a man called each of the boy’s homes asking for them by name. He said he was the Hennepin County Sheriff and wanted to speak to them in person. That man turned out to be Peg, making the most of her deep voice. She picked up each of the boys in her car and drove them around while she lectured them on the ramifications of pulling stunts like they had and talked about the dangers of scaring people and possibly causing a real accident and injury to someone just trying to help.

The boys never did anything like that again nor did they ever forget the lesson she taught them.

— Recollections by one of those boys

**Colby, Albert (1904 – 1990)**

“Al” Colby was born in Excelsior. Al met Alice through Jim Eddy who married Alice’s sister. When courting Alice, Al would walk the trail from Eureka to Excelsior and take the streetcar to Minneapolis and back home again. They married and lived at Eureka where they raised two daughters. Al had two brothers and numerous friends that lived for fishing and knew the lake as well or better than anyone. Johnny Colby, Frank Colby, brother-in-law Jim Eddy and good friend, Bart Baker spent a lot of time together.

The Colby boys and their friends rarely told anyone where the good fishing spots were. In the winter, they even went so far as to cover up all their caught fish so others wouldn’t have any idea if they were catching them or not. When asked, they’d all say “Not yet.”

One daughter, Mary Rosati, to this day will still head up to Cass lake to fish as she remembered doing with her parents and their friends. On the menu for any of those weekends was (rooms were $5.00 a night) always, catching a lot of fish, eating great food and laughing at everything or anything.

“I’m pretty sure that mom and dad thought about some great grandchildren some day, enjoying the lake as much as they did and would quietly smile as they did, until the bobber went down. Then is was all business.”

Because of her mom and dad, Mary’s favorite thing to this day, is still to sit on the dock and throw out a line. Mary’s 7 year old granddaughter Annabelle loves to join her. “Thanks mom and dad.”

— Recollections from Mary Colby Rosati

**Colby, Frank (1912 – 2006)**

Colby, Francis “Frank” Colby was born in Excelsior.

As a young man he delivered newspapers in Minnetonka, Minnewashta and Eureka. With his money he bought traps and ran a trap line in Minnetonka around Spray, Shady and Enchanted islands mostly in the winter. Mostly he got weasel, mink, muskrat, and skunk, which he sold the furs to the Northwestern Fur Company in Minneapolis. With this extra money he bought a 16 foot Tom canoe, kodak camera, rifle and shotgun.

He worked for Art Townsturm mowing grass in the Minnetonka area. He also worked for Edward Johnson getting blocks of ice out of Lake Minnetonka in the winter so they could deliver ice to people in the summer. He drove Clark Peck’s truck to haul ice.

With this money he bought a 1932 ford roadster. Art Townsturm, Roy Wassum and my dad with his canoe on top of the car took a 50 mile canoe trip in the boundary area near Ely and the Gun Flint Trail.

Dad also joined the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), and worked for two years near Casson Minnesota near Ord. The camp had about 250 people in Company No. 725. Dad worked out a deal with the Mess Sgt to supply fish and deer meat for the camp. One day he speared over 200 LB of northern pike and one weekend he shot 5 deer. They would give dad 10 cents a pound for the meat.

Frank met his wife, Elvira at Bills and Melba beer joint in Excelsior where she was a waitress. Dad had a 1932 ford roadster convertible with a rumble seat. Elvira said I wonder whose car that is, I sure would like to ride in the rumble seat. Well they were married in 1941. They first lived above his father’s house, John W. Colby in Eureka, because Frank was soon after drafted into the Army. They had three sons, Butch, Douglas, and Robert.
Frank became very close friends with Ike Martin and Jake Butts who were two butchers which lived in Eureka and supplied most of the meat for the Excelsior area. They also made wine which they sold to selected Excelsior residents. They both passed away when dad was in France and Germany during the war. When dad came home he found out they left their house and land to dad. He eventually sold this property and with this money bought five acres of land from August Gearth who had a very large farm next to dad’s father’s house on Eureka Road. This is where dad built his house with some help from his brothers and this is where the family lived until my mother died in 1980.

Frank and his brother Johnny became known as the guys who knew where to catch fish in Excelsior. They were very secretive on where and how they caught the fish and some morning’s guys would try to follow them out fishing and they would just go to Howards point where everyone fished. They would have fish fries at Melbas and the American Legion to raise money for a lot of different organizations in Excelsior and I can say Frank and Johnny would catch the majority of the fish. The game warden knew they were catching over there limits but would look the other way because it was for a good cause. I know because I used to go fishing with them.

Dad was a member of the Excelsior Berry Association which would take most any type of berry or fruit and resale it to markets and stores. So dad used about 3 acres of land to grow Strawberries and Raspberries. I can remember we would pick and bring to the Association in a very long trailer about 100 crates of strawberries a day. Each crate had 24 quart boxes so this was a lot of berries. Raspberries were in Pint boxes and I do not remember how many was in a crate, but we would bring about twenty crates a day of those. These berries ripen at different times of the summer so my summers were taken up with picking berries. I made 5 cent a box and if I stayed all summer (NO choice here), I would average over 100 to 120 boxes of strawberries a day.

When the Association closed down dad raised sweet corn to sell and then Christmas trees. So my dad was very good as making extra money when money was kind of tight in those days.

Our family vacation consisted of one to two weeks at Cass Lake with his brother Al and their family. This was the only vacation I ever had with mom and dad while I was home.

--- Recollections from Butch Colby (son) ---

Colihan, Ray “Big Reggie” (1928 – 1986) Raymond Joseph Colihan was born on July 24, 1928, probably in Minnesota, since his father Joe had worked as Superintendent at Excelsior Park from the mid 1920s. The family lived in a duplex on the grounds of the park. Young Ray was always around the park, and his first official job was sweeping the ballroom floor at age 12. Once he admitted to sneaking on state to play Gene Krupa’s drums when nobody was around.

Colihan served in World War II, returning to become the park’s public relations director. In 1956 park manager Rudy Shogran died and Ray took over some of his duties. When Ray’s father Joe died in 1961 Ray took over his job. By 1962 he had leased the ballroom and dubbed it “Big Reggie’s Dancecland.” His nickname Big Reggie was named for Jackie Gleason’s Reginald Van Gleason character. Reggie may have had his own dance band.

The Underbeats remembered that Big Reggie always wanted to sing “Cotton Fields” with them on stage - apparently he even made a record of his favorite song, which goes for big bucks today.

Big Reggie promoted other shows, notably the Beatles’ appearance at Met Stadium in 1965. He lost money on that, too. When the park closed in 1973, Colihan operated Reggie’s Bar in downtown St. Cloud for a year. He then returned to the Cities, buying and selling bars. In the late 1970s he owned and managed the Skyway Bar (by 1986 known as Reggie’s Downtown) at 8th and Hennepin. He purchased the Uptown Bar at Lake and Hennepin in 1984.

--- Recollections from Butch Colby (son) ---

The Amazing History of Our Community

102
**Cunningham, William Patrick (1909 – 2005)** Pat Cunningham, came to Excelsior when he was 2 weeks old. His father came from Ireland when he was 8 years old. Pat attended Excelsior High School and then worked as a lineman and wiring inspector for NSP (Northern States Power) for 16 years.

Pat is pictured below in about 1934 with other linemen from NSP. Pat is top left. During World War II, Pat wired tanker ships for the Navy in Savage, Minnesota.

At the end of the war in 1945, he opened Cunningham Electric in Excelsior. His company did wiring for residents, businesses, schools and the cities in the area. Pat and his wife Lyda, (Anderson – Anderson Lakes) had four children. The family lived on Pleasant Avenue about a quarter mile north of Mill Street (Powers Boulevard) just a mile east of Excelsior.

Pat was as Irish as they come and celebrated Saint Patrick’s Day every year. He’d send out a notice about the date, then send a poem which was the invitation and then there’d be the party. He’d invite just about everyone in town to a party with torches, a blarney stone to kiss and Irish sayings everywhere. He would even have to add on a room to the house just for this occasion.

**Daytons Department Store – Minneapolis**

**Dayton, The family**

**“Dilly” & the Minnetonka Record Newspaper**

**Dillman, Daisy Ellen (1880 – 1985)** Daisy Ellen Perry was born in a sod house in the Dakota Territories in 1880. As a young woman, she finished her teaching training and taught a few years. Daisy married George Hughes and moved to Glenwood, Minnesota, and raised two sons, Francis & Gordon. As a young man, Gordy excelled in jumping at the old Glenwood ski jump. Both boys graduated from Glenwood High School.

George Hughes was the co-owner of the First National Bank of Starbuck. In 1918, he went on to become the owner and president of the Bank of Glenwood. During the early 1920s, region-wide banking failures occurred leading to significant losses for many depositors. The Bank of Glenwood was affected by these failures, but, unlike so many other bank owners, George refunded all his customers’ savings using his own reserves.

Daisy and her son, Gordy, worked for Willard Dillman in his traveling pageantry company. Willard and his troupe would contract with Midwest towns, like Glenwood, to write and perform shows about the history of the area. During this time, Daisy became an honorary member of the Blackfoot Indian tribe when they befriended her in her travels. The home pictured below is a photo, taken in 2014, of the Dillman home at 175 First Street.

After the death of George Hughes, Daisy married Willard and became Mrs. Daisy Dillman, known affectionately by her close friends as “Dilly.” She moved to Excelsior, Minnesota, and helped Willard run his long-standing newspaper, The Minnetonka Record.


Daisy Dillman died in 1985 at the age of 104 and three-quarters. Daisy’s spirit continues, and the band plays on!

**Dayton, The family**
fought it might be best for the patient.

He was born into a French Catholic family and became a man of great faith. While in the war in France and Germany, he found a Rosary that he kept for the rest of his life often praying the Rosary on trips to and from St. Mary’s Hospital.

Joe was a partner in the Seifert/Dupont Clinic from 1945 through the 1960s. At right, is the home that Joe and Helen purchased on Lake Minnetonka in 1946. During the 1960s he was also the medical inspector for Deephaven. Years later he changed his occupation and became an Anesthesiologist.

Joe and Helen belonged to St. John The Baptist Church. Joe was a good friend to many including a lot of his long time patients. He always went beyond the call of duty when a friend was required. He was always ready with help and advice. His wisdom and humor touched many people throughout his life.

Joe Dupont was a modest and humble man of great faith. He grew up with those values and tried to instill that in his own family as well. He always maintained that he wasn’t the smartest guy in the world but hard work and perseverance always won out in the end.

He was speaking French before he was speaking English. The family would often start talking in English, switch to French and then back to English again. There were nine children in the family and the boys had one bedroom and the girls another. Joe spent time as a kid working as a carpenter with his dad.

During the time that Polio was prevalent, Joe noticed that many patients being treated had sewage problems. It was later discovered that Polio was caused from an infection caused by feces.

Joe was another one of the many doctors to make house calls in those days. He would even take some of us kids along just to get us out of mom’s hair. There were even times that Joe would visit patients late in the evening and end up staying over night when he felt it might be best for the patient.

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Dick W. Dyer

Dick Dyer died much too young at age 48 from cancer. He was without any doubt, one of the nicest, kindest most fun loving men I have ever known. His love for his family, a genuine interest in friends and life was something I’ve not seen since he died. I loved him like a father.

– Recollections from a friend - Alan Tollefson


Dick was born in Excelsior in 1921 and lived in the Minnewashta area most of his life. He grew up in Excelsior just south of the commons where Dyer’s Cabins were. He married Florence Roisum and lived in one of the cabins for a time after the war. Dick was tall and he kept on hitting the ceiling in the cabins so they moved to a larger home at 5865 Eureka Road.

After about five years, they built a home in Minnewashta, an area he and neighbor Ward Olmsted named the Minnewashta Lows to compete with the Minnewashta Heights.

He and Florence had three children, Rick, Gail and Jeanne. Dick and his brother Gordon owned and operated Penrith-Akers Manufacturing Company in Chaska, Minnesota.

Dick was a warm, kind and soft spoken husband and father with a sense of humor you would see growing in his eyes, on his face and then finally a little smile, then the quiet laugh. He always caught on quickly and could see and understand the lighter side of any situation.
His fondness for boats and the water and his love for hunting must have come from his father, uncles and grandfather.

– Recollections from Richard W. Dyer II

Eddy, Henry

Eddy, Jim

Fitzimons, John R. (1915 – 2008) John met and fell in love with Jean Westlake. They both were from Minneapolis. Jean attended the University of Minnesota School of Engineering for 2 years before she married John. (she was the only gal with some 200 male students) John served in the Army for 2 years. He received a Purple Heart because he kicked a hand grenade away from a fox hole where men were on alert.

John and Jean moved to Excelsior in 1947 into a home on Murray Hill. They bought their home from Dan Ross’ parents. At this time I was 7 years old and Michael (Mike) was almost 6. John was in the Premium and Incentive business at Montgomery Ward.

My dad worked hard and traveled everyday by bus to St. Paul. He loved his family terribly and truly enjoyed the Excelsior area. Mom made draperies and slipcovers. One time she made drapes in trade for our first horse Bud. Mom was a beautiful horsewoman and loved animals. We always had at least 2 dogs and we would name the dogs after our favorite people. One of my favorites was named (          ).

When I was in 7th grade, in Mrs. Beach’s Homeroom I met Robert Otto Naegle Jr. (Bob) and knew that he would be the one. Actually, we were baptized together in Minneapolis at 6 months old because our Mothers were close friends. Bob and I were married in 1961 at the Trinity Episcopal Church in Excelsior.

Barbi Lyman and I had such fun with our horses and dogs. They were our transportation. Many families only had one car at that time. It was a wonderful growing up time for Mike and me and our friends. Lake Minnetonka was our home away from home in the summer. Winters were spent on the ice skating rinks. School was very strict when it came to attire. I remember having to walk to school because of a bad snow storm and I was sent home because I was wearing pants!

I worked as a car hop for a couple of summers at Reed’s Drive-In. (Gary Reed’s parents Guy and Jenny) There was never anything better than Mrs. Reed’s homemade buns and her Strawberry Shortcake. Folks would come from all over for her food.

My best memories of Excelsior are the gals that I grew up with. I think of them still to this day as my best friends forever, always in my heart. There is nothing more precious than childhood memories. I know we had Angels surrounding us much of the time.

Dad died at the age of 93. Mom was born in 1918 and died in 1979.

– Recollections from Ellis Naegle (Fitzimons)
The Graco Company

Gray, Russell J. (1900–1983) Russell Jean Gray married Veronica Martha Mahoney “Babe” (1901–1982) Veronica was known as Babe almost all her life. She was named Babe as she was the youngest child in the Mahoney family. Russell graduated from Central High School. Russell spent some of his time growing up on the Mississippi river in a dwelling (pictured here) called Ben Hur. It was totally constructed out of driftwood.

Russell, a parking lot attendant, founded the Gray Company in 1926 with his brother Leil Gray to produce and sell Russell’s air-powered grease gun, invented in response to cold weather making hand-powered grease guns inoperable. The war helped them to expand and their company grew. Leil died in 1958 and the company went public in 1969 and at that time changed its name to Graco.

Russell and his brother Leil came to the lake to establish residence in the mid 1930s. Leil first owned the property at 5170 Meadville, Excelsior Township, but later moved to Wayzata.

Russell and Babe first lived in an old lake house on the hill looking northwest across Lake Minnetonka toward Big Island. It was here that Russell Jean Gray was born in 1929. A sister, Carol, who lived until she was three, died in 1934. John was born in 1935. It was the Depression. The old house was a poorly insulated summer cottage. It was sweltering in those blazing hot 1930 summers and frigid in winter. They had just one bathroom. When Leil moved to Wayzata, Russell, Babe and the kids moved in. The house had been moved from the vicinity of Minnetonka Boulevard and Ferncroft Drive in Shorewood. There were three identical houses in that area.

Joe and Helen Dupont were good friends and were establishing their family and business in town (Joe was a doctor and became a partner with his brother-in-law Milton Seifert). They lived just up the street but would move into a cottage next door to Grays on weekends during the summer while the kids stayed home and had their own fun.

Gabberts Furniture

Gabbert, Don (1917–1999) Don and his wife ( ) came to Excelsior in 1952. They bought a home near Howards Point in the Edgewood area of Shorewood. They had three children . . . .

Don started stocking furniture in his appliance store in 1954, and by 1959 had begun to concentrate on furniture, moving his operation to Edina, across 69th Street from the new Southdale Shopping Center. His son John, owner and president of Room & Board, a contemporary furniture store, said Gabbert could sense opportunity and had the courage to take risks.

Graef,

Grathwol, O’Neil Joseph (1906 – 1974) O’Neil was one of seven children.

Grathwol, James Norbert ( 
Russell’s business, the Graco Company, took up a lot of his time but Babe was always ready for that last minute call – Russell saying that he had four or five business associates or customers he was bringing home. They would arrive at the lake house and meet and dine on the lawn or on a boat ride around the lake.

They loved the lake and the view from their home. They looked across Excelsior Bay at the town of Excelsior and the Commons. After the sun would set and the town’s lights would come on, the sparkle on the water or the ice is magical.

Russell was the emcee of Excelsior Apple Days several years. It was a big event lasting two or three days. I can recall taking a perch on the embankment next to the White House Hotel where Haskell’s and Dunn Brothers are today to watch dad on a platform whipping up the crowd in front of the movie house. The parades always featured the large drum and bugle corps of Boy Scout Troop 40, marching war veterans, bands and more. The drum and bugle corps would deviate from the parade route and march blaring away through Bill’s Cafe about where Coalition is today. There were three drug stores at 2nd and Water with barrels of apples out front for the taking. Dad and his cronies, Ray Mason, Vic Bacon and Lee Laramie were great supporters of the town and masters of gin rummy. Where today we boast of many great cafes, in those years we had at least eight gas stations between Morse Avenue and George Street plus another at Highway 7 and Water.

Always a dare devil, family lore has it that dad and my godfather, Ray Mason, the Chrysler Plymouth dealer in the converted livery stable on 2nd Street, (now called Bennett Place, 432-438 Second Street) had automobile races from Excelsior around Lake Calhoun and back. Remember in those days the area between Excelsior and Minneapolis was mostly empty farm land. It didn’t hurt that Russell and Ray were also buddies of the motorcycle troopers of the State Patrol who used to show up at our old house on a hot summer afternoon, park their bikes in the drive, and amble in for refreshments and a break from the roads.

Russ and Babe often enjoyed dinner with friends at places like the Riviera Club located at the Minnetonka Country Club was until 2014 and the Belle Aire Yacht Club (Closed in 1982) next to Cochrane’s Boat Yard just down the street on the lake (The location today is Excelsior Bay Harbor and Bayside Marine). The neighborhood they lived in was very conducive to social engagements of all kinds and they were two of the best at getting people together.

They entertained at their home often. One of the highlights other than bridge parties was getting the gang together to play music. Russ played the organ and others like Vic Bacon, would step in and bang away on a base fiddle made from a wash basin, broom handle and attached rope or tambourines, drums and piano.

Russ and Babe were very generous with everything they owned as well as their time. A cute thing they did that became tradition for a while with the family was to open their garage on weekends and invite the neighborhood to bring their cars over to get a wash. Russ had numerous pressure washers that Graco manufactured installed in his garage.

Today, 2014, both of their sons, John and his wife and Jean, a retired FBI agent, live on the property in Meadville on the lake enjoying the beautiful view of Excelsior that Russ and Babe enjoyed during all those years from the 1930s to the 1980s.

– Recollections from John and Jan Gray

– R. Jean Gray

The Amazing History of Our Community
Greenhill, Ray (1913 – 0000) J. Raymond “Ray” Greenhill, his wife Mary Foster Greenhill and their two sons, Robert F. and Raymond M. Greenhill lived in the part of Shorewood called Woodside. Their home was high up on a bluff overlooking Wawatso Island just north of Smithtown Bay. Ray was born in Texas.

The property that they owned was part of the land once owned by Mary Foster Greenhill’s father, Robert Owen Foster.

The family loved to waterski and lived on Minnetonka from the early 1940s through about 1952.

Ray and one of his sons nick named Buddy, skied in the 1949 Waterski Nationals in Holland, Michigan. They kept a ski jump in front of their home during those years. Coincidently, a young, 7 year old Alan Tollefson lived next door and used to swim over and slide down their ski jump. Little did Alan know that one day he’d be flying over one.
Hennesey, Roger James (1922 – 1994) Roger and Bernell T. Hennessy grew up in Excelsior. They married and had six children. John, Mary, Patty, Jim, Bill and (?).

Roger was a lifetime resident of Excelsior, graduating from Excelsior High School in 1940. After graduating from St. Thomas college in 1943, Roger was commissioned as an Ensign in the U.S. Navy and served on an LST in the Pacific for three years. An Ensign is the same as a first Lieutenant and an LST is a Landing Ship-Tank. It’s a transport and landing ship for troops, supplies and tanks.

In the early 1950s, Roger was an assistant cashier at Minnetonka State Bank. In December of 1952, he announced that he was going to open his own general insurance and real estate office on January 2, 1953.

The offices were located on the main floor of the Barnett building in downtown Excelsior.

Roger’s father John Harold Hennessy was born in Excelsior in 1892. Harold married Margaret.

Huber, John (1927 – 2012) John Huber was born in 1927 to Frank & Katherine Huber and raised in Buffalo, Minnesota. During his youth, John worked in the soda fountain of his parents hotel, the Huber Hotel in Buffalo, Minnesota. He had one brother and five sisters.

John and Pat (Patricia Malerich) started the Huber Funeral Homes in 1950. John was an active Rotarian, member of the Chamber of Commerce, served on the Minneapolis Aquatennial Committee for several years and was awarded the WCCO Good Neighbor Award in 1983.

John is one of the reasons why we have the public parking lots behind the businesses in Excelsior. He was also a member of the Minnetonka School Board and cofounder of the Skipper Booster Club.

John was a very kind and thoughtful man. Always a reassuring demeanor which was especially of value in the funeral business. Always had a twinkle in his eye and something complimentary to say.

– Recollections from Paul Huber

(Hubers continued)

I remember my mother, Patricia Huber doing many kind things for people. She was involved in many organizations like befrienders, too many to list. She was instrumental in starting the friends of the library.

Mom was organized and worked very hard. She did things like wash the altar linens for church for years with little fan fair, or recognition. Her love beyond measure was given to my Dad and the 5 of us.

She loved bridge and played often. women in her bridge club were dear friends. She played golf and tennis and bowled. She was a travel guide for a couple European trips for Hennessy travel. She loved the Panama Canal. My folks had a chance to meet Pope
John Paul and that was a thrill for both.

My father John Huber also served on many organizations around excelsior and professionally. As a small town funeral director he was well known in town. He had a wonderful sense of humor, which he exercised most every day when he met Kenny Kochnen, Vic bacon and others for daily morning soda or coffee.

Dad met the “guys for coffee” every weekday that he could. I remember my father as being strong and active and loving.

Though I could write about all his accomplishments what I think is his finest tribute is that when he died we received hundreds of cards and I believe all of them said what a kind man he was. What an example for his children, Mary, John, Marguerite, Paul, and Jane.

– Recollections from Mary Pat Huber

Hughes, Gordon Wallace (1910 – 1990) Gordy (Gordo) was born in Starbuck, Minnesota on the shores of Lake Minnewaska. Gordy’s parents were George Washington Hughes (1860) and the former Daisy Ellen Perry “Daisy Dillman” (1880).

Gordy’s father George was in banking in Glenwood and Daisy was on a town committee that procured the services of a Mr. Willard Dillman to write a town pageant. At that time, Willard had started a Newspaper called the Minnetonka Record in Excelsior, Minnesota. Part of Daisy and Willard’s involvement went on to develop historical pageants in other towns. After learning everything they could about the town, they would then present the pageant on stage and it was in those pageants that young Gordy, who handled the lighting and electrical, also learned to do some American Indian dances that he would do on stage.

Gordy had an interest in anything electrical or mechanical. He even helped build a television in the mid 1930s. He also loved photography and filmmaking.

In 1938, Mr. Dillman’s wife passed away and Gordy, Daisy and George Hughes moved into Mr. Dillman’s home at 175 First Street where Gordy lived when he met Jean MacKenzie whom he eventually married. They were married in the Trinity Episcopal Church on Second Street in Excelsior in 1940.

George Hughes died in 1947 at the age of 86. In 1948, Daisy married Willard Dillman and together sold the Minnetonka Record to George DuToit. Willard was being honored in 1949 at the newly formed Rotary Club when he collapsed and died while at the Sampson House.

Upon news of the death of Mr. Dillman, Gordy, Jean and their family moved back to Excelsior and rented a home on St. Alban’s Bay while Gordy began building homes in the area. He built a home for themselves in Cottagewood and lived there until 1952 when they purchased a larger home at the end of Third Street on the Lake in Excelsior. Gordy was a very talented individual who could master just about anything he touched or learned about. He eventually became fascinated with glues and started Hughes Associates and manufactured Epoxy Glue products in downtown Excelsior.

Gordy and Jean had five children; Ron, John, Bonnie, Ken and Lesely. Jean died in 1986. Gordy continued living within the city of Excelsior. He retired after selling the Epoxy business but continued to spend much of his time at the Tonka Printing Shop or
visiting with friends at Bacon Drug.

Many people over the years, brought their broken items to Gordy at the shop where he would repair them almost always at no charge. If you couldn’t figure out how to make it or fix it, Gordy would find a way.

In this part of the world you could find any number of people with that kind of attitude and temperament in those days. That’s what life was all about in this community.

– Recollections from children Lesely Hughes-Seamans and Ron Hughes

Johnston, Howard J. (1904 – ) Howard lived near Howard’s Point on Lake Minnetonka. He and his wife had three children, Ronnie, Judy and Dave. Howard operated a marina at Howard’s Point until the 1940s and after he sold it to Wally Rachel, he opened and operated a hardware store in Excelsior in the building at 345 Water Street where Artworks is as of 2015.

Howard Johnston’s mother Elinor was the daughter of Silas Howard who homesteaded his namesake, Howard’s Point. Howard’s partner and cousin, Maurice Leach, lived in the house just to the south of the store. Maurice had a daughter Betty. Betty Leach was a close friend all through high school of Joyce McFarland (Howard – no relation to the Howard’s on Howard’s Point).

Kanan, George H. (1914 – 1991) George and his brother Sam were originally from Stark, North Dakota.

Kanan, Sam Vincent (1912 – 2000) Sam owned the Belle Aire Yacht Club and the Marine Bar & Skipper Cafe. Sam’s brother George was also involved in the Belle Aire.

The Belle Aire Bottle Club and Skipper Cafe

Kelly, William Francis “Frank.” (1922 – 1995) Frank and his wife Margaret Wayne Kelly (1927 – 2004) had two sons, Adam and Mark. Frank grew up in St. Paul, went to William & Mary College of Law and became a private practice lawyer in Excelsior. Their residence was at 25000 Yellowstone Trail & Pleasant Avenue. Kelly Law Offices were located at 331 Second Street in Excelsior. Frank was the City Attorney for (?) years.
**Kerbers & Kerber Farms.** Kerber Boulevard is named for the farm of Leopold “Ole” & Mary Kerber. The Chanhassen Dinner Theater now occupies the land that “Ole” and Mary Kerber’s farm once stood. William H. Kerber and his four brothers, Frank, John, Al and Charlie and sisters Anne and Meme, all farmed in the Chanhassen area. Though William farmed in Chanhassen, he did all of his business in Excelsior at Lundston’s Bank, Bacon Drug, Hart’s Hardware and the family Doctors were Milton Seifert and Joe Dupont. William’s children Bill, Cyril “Cy” and Alice Kerber are all Excelsior residents. In addition there were relatives Jake, Harold and Owen and cousin Dan. The early Kerber clan farmed much of the Chanhassen area as did the Lymans. (Lyman Boulevard)

--- Recollections from William “Bill” Kerber

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**Gas stations**

**Koehnen, Kenneth “Kenney” Martin (1924 – 2008) Nancy.**

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**Knowlton, Grace (Barnacle) (1912 – 2009)** Grace was born in Winona, Minnesota to Harvey C. Barnacle Sr. and his wife Maybelle. Grace Barnacle was married to Mark Knowlton (in 1933) for 41 years. Mark died in 1974 of lung cancer. Mark was born in 1909. Grace and Mark had four children, Tom (1936), John (1939), Jean (1942) and Patrick (1953). Jean, nicknamed “Torch” because of her blazing red hair, died of kidney failure in 1962.

My mother, Grace Barnacle, graduated from Excelsior High School in 1931 and her best friend during that time was Lucille “Cille” Luther. They both lived in to their 90s and wrote to each other often until Lucille passed away about 2007 in Arizona.

About 1931-32 Lucille and Grace were at a dance upstairs at the IOOF Hall. Pat Cunningham came up to Lucille and asked her to dance. Lucille said, “If you find someone to dance with Grace, I will dance with you.” Pat proceeded up to his best friend’s house at 371 Water Street and got Mark Knowlton out of bed and brought him back to the party . . . the first date of my mother and father.

In 1936 Mark and Grace moved in to the duplex at 238–240 Third Street. The Seamans family were their neighbors in the other half of the building for decades. Mark and Grace lived at 240 the rest of their lives.

Grace was a long standing member of The Congregational Church of Excelsior. She was also the “Premiere” local historian.

--- Recollections from Tom Knowlton, eldest son

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“I would like to say at this time that I was very blessed to be raised by such a great family. Both my dad’s family, the Knowltons and my mom’s family, the Barnacles were and are good people . . . grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, children, grandchildren and siblings. I am thankful to both sets of grandparents for moving in to this great town of Excelsior.”

--- Tom Knowlton

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*The Amazing History of Our Community*
Knowlton, Mark L. (1908 – 1974) Mark Knowlton married Grace Barnacle in 1933. Mark Knowlton’s mother, Alice Howard, was born in 1879 and raised on Howard’s Point. Alice’s grandfather was Silas Howard who homesteaded his namesake, Howard’s Point. Alice’s nephew, Howard Johnston, operated the marina at Howard’s Point until the 1940s and then a hardware store next to Lyman Lumber on Water Street.

Mark’s father, John “Jack” Knowlton, had grown up near Howard’s Point after his father and family moved there around 1900.

– Recollections from Tom Knowlton, eldest son

Kragness, I.O. (1890 – 1991) Minnetonka State Bank was incorporated April 16, 1906. On July 25, 1917, George A. DuToit was the president, George P. Dickenson was the Vice President and I.O. Kragness was a cashier. At the time, The Statement of Conditions listed Resources at $260,293.55. Loans amounted to $145,987.25 and Cash on hand was $9,754.21. On June 30, 1919, O.W. Lundsten was the President and D.B. Lundsten the Vice President. A.H. Lyman and F.E. Bardwell were among the Directors. I.O., at the age of 29, was still a cashier. I.O. worked at the bank for 70 years and lived to be 101 years old.

Ladwig, Thelma M. (Kes) (1913 – 1998) In May of 1945, Thelma Ladwig brought her four children; James E. (b. 1932), Cyril R. (b. 1933), Barbara J. (b. 1938) and Douglas H. (b. 1939) to Excelsior, from Minneapolis. The four children were thrilled they had arrived too late in the school year to begin classes and enjoyed two or three weeks of summer vacation more than their new classmates.

The new Ladwig home was a bungalow on Center Street, the third house up from Lake Street (Later to be 19 Center Street,). There were no street addresses at the time and Thelma and her older boys would gather mail from Box 223 in the Post Office on Water Street.

The small bungalow was between the nearly identical home of Joe DeGuise, painter and expert fishing guide, and the two-story home of Vernon West, partner in West & Headla Plumbing and across the street from the Grathwols. All four houses shared a driveway from Lake Street, part of the 66-foot lot depth of the first three homes. Next to the driveway was a tall row of overgrown lilac bushes, marking the lot line of the home of Paul Farrell (the Game Warden) and his wife and his hunting dogs.

Soon after moving to Excelsior Thelma found need to once again find employment. She taught sewing at the Singer Sewing Center on the Minneapolis side of 50th and France, commuting by bus, often with Excelsior’s Chet Norman as the driver.

Thelma then started sewing out of her Excelsior home, once again doing tailoring and alterations. She made an arrangement with Vic Arnold to add cuffs to the men’s trousers he sold in his men’s wear store in the Tonka Building. The times were such that more than once the gentlemen would come to the house wearing their new trousers with the cuffs turned up, go into the family bathroom and pass the trousers out the door and wait
there while the cuffs were done.

She made ladies dresses and bought the equipment to make covered buttons from the
dress scraps, providing a consistent appearance to the garment. She made a display
board with samples and placed it in Olds Dry Goods. Her young daughter Barbara
learned to fill the resulting button orders.

In the Fall of 1947 Thelma conducted a sewing class in her home for about six of the
(female) teachers of Excelsior High School. Thelma took another class and, in addition
to custom slip covers for furniture, began making high quality lined, pleated drapes and
installing traverse rods for them in residences around the Lake Minnetonka area.

Years later, with her bookkeeping skills, she began working for Ecklund and Swedlund
Construction. There she met carpenter Joseph Kes from Prior Lake and they married
on the last day of 1959.

That marriage began a period of reconstruction for the house on Center Street. The
glazed front porch was incorporated into the living room and the kitchen remodeled,
within the limitations of space available. Eventually the roof was removed and a new
second story added, with a master bedroom and a large sewing room and a huge storage
closet for all the patterns and fabrics and materials a sewing lady accumulates.

In July of 1997 Thelma sold the house to then-neighbor Jack Uran and moved with her
daughter Barbara and grandchildren to a country place in Pierce, Wisconsin, some miles
east of River Falls. She passed away suddenly there on February 11, 1998.

— Recollections from son, James Ladwig

Leipold, Darel & Laverna (1933 – ) Darel John and Laverna E. (Brown) Leipold are
husband and wife and have owned and managed Leipold’s Gifts & Antiques at 239
Water Street since 1985. Darel is originally from Le Sueur, Minnesota.

If you’re looking for a one of a kind item, anything unique or old or something truly
special and haven’t found it anywhere else, Leipold’s will likely have it and/or can fix
whatever you have that might be broken.

They are known also for their interest and love of Excelsior and its rich heritage. They
are both walking volumes of a local encyclopedia and have maintained a keen interest
in the community and given of their time and talents whenever possible.

— Internal Content Authoring

Few knew the lake better

Lindbo, Oscar (1891 – 1987) Oscar was born in Norway. He and
his wife Mabel had three daughters, Kathryn, Adeline and Dorothy.
Oscar was only 14 and living on an island off the coast of Norway when
his uncle, the legendary Lake Minnetonka steamboat captain, John
R. Johnson, came for a visit and asked him if he would come and work
at his dredging company. Oscar said no. He felt a responsibility to
stay home to help his mother, as his father was often gone fishing, and
she thought he was too young anyway.

Soon however, Captain Johnson sent him passage to the United States and Oscar finally
came to Excelsior. It was 1907. Oscar thought he’d return home after a while but
instead he decided to stay. Oscar worked for Cap Johnson’s dredging company, often
times more than 100 hours a week. Oscar stayed with the dredging company for more
than 60 years eventually working with Anson Mase, Cap Johnson’s grandson.

Divers began searching for scuttled steamboats on the floor of Lake Minnetonka in the
late 1970s. They consulted Oscar in the nursing home for his insight on the location.
He had, after all, known the bottom of the lake better than anyone. He had actually
witnessed the sinking of these boats in 1926. Lindbo said that thousands of people had
come from Minneapolis and lined the shores to watch as they filled the boats with rocks,
set them on fire, and sank them in 60-80 feet of water off the northeast end of Big Island.
One of the streetcar boats, the Minnehaha, was raised in 1980.
Long, M. J. “Bud” (1920 – 1989) Bud Long and his wife Ellic moved to Excelsior in 1955. In a previous marriage, Bud had one child.

Bud was born in Iowa. Bud and his brother moved to Minneapolis with their mother when they were both still quite young. At one time in order to earn money to help out at home, Bud shined shoes at the Golden Valley Country Club. He did finally get a college education through correspondence courses.

Bud was a man of strong values and hard work. The kind of values that committed him to taking a personal interest in each of his business accounts. His friends became clients and his clients became friends. Bud chose Excelsior because it was an exciting community on the verge of new growth. He was also a true sportsman and loved the outdoors.

Paul and Dorothy Stannard, who owned a food distributorship and later the Minnetonka Mist in Spring Park, were clients from the beginning. Bud and Paul were hunting buddies and then Paul and Dorothy became clients.

John Huber of Huber Funeral Homes became a customer early on as well primarily because Ray Mason of Mason Chrysler Plymouth told John, "Why should Bud Long be your accountant? Because you'll sleep better."

The M. J. Long Company opened its doors in 1946. Bud felt very strongly about becoming a business advisor to each client rather than just an accounting firm. This concern for each individual took them beyond the business and into their personal lives.

Joe Froeling joined Bud in 1956 and became a partner in 1962. Joe recognized the priorities, the values and the commitment Bud and the M. J. Long Company had and, as Joe was a man of similar qualities, he made sure that the new company, Froeling Anderson, maintained the same standards and business practices after Bud’s retirement.

Both he and his wife Jeanie were in the “Befriender” program at St. John’s Church and volunteered in Hospice programs and at the Carver County School for the Mentally Handicapped. Bud, Joe and Jeanie typify the solid, quality and compassionate kinds of people that these South Shore Communities are mad of.

A lot has changed since 1946 when the minimum wage was 75¢ and a new car cost $1,125 except for the business practices of a very good accountant and good friend, Bud Long.

Lundsten, Robert S. “Bob” (1927 – 2008) In 1906, Minnetonka State Bank was incorporated. O.W. Lundsten, Bob Lundsten’s Grandfather was the president and D.B. Lundsten, Bob’s father, was the Vice President. In those early days, there wasn’t enough money to support many people in a local bank so Bob’s dad left to work for a bank in Minneapolis. Bob’s dad died in 1929 at the age of 48.

Bob worked at the bank early on as a cashier. Bob married Anne Bisbee in 0000. Anne is a long time resident of Excelsior. She grew up along West Lake Street on Gideon Bay. As a young girl, she hung out with the O’Dell, Dutoit, Palmer and Bidwell kids.

Bob eventually took ownership of the bank around the time that the bank bought the Nelson Cabins in 1959. The cabins had previously been owned by the Knowlton family. (Today, 2015, Wells Fargo operates it’s bank on the same piece of property)

Bob felt that banking in a small town in the early days was a very special. Long before computers began taking the personal, one-on-one relationship, out of banking. The bank would stay open late on Friday nights just to visit with customers or anyone else who wanted to stop in the bank.

Bob recounted once that in 1925 there was a robbery at the bank when it was located at 409 Second Street. They caught the robbers a few hours later but after that, the Minneapolis police might call and alert the bank to a possible robbery. When that happened, O.W. would tell the cashiers to place most of the cash in waste baskets and cover it with crumpled up paper limiting the amount they might lose if the robbery actually happened.
Although Anson was a friendly soul, he was often called upon to physically handle troublemakers who came to town. People said that with his strength he could lift up the rear end of a pickup truck with his bare hands.

Dad was an avid sportsman all his life. A champion trap shooter, he and Horace Aldritt often competed together. Ans also loved deer hunting and would usually shoot down our family Christmas tree every fall besides getting his deer. Anson ran the dredging company until his death on Christmas Eve, 1963. The story below by Tom Knowlton is typical of something my dad would do.

-- contributed by Martha Tollefson (Mase)

Minnetonka Dredging Company

Mase, Anson R. “Ans” (1908 – 1963) Anson Ropstol Mase was born at his Grandfather’s home on St. Alban’s Bay and raised in Excelsior. Anson was 6’4” and weighed 285 pounds in High School and was a star football player. He and his neighbors, the Studer boys, made quite a team and went unbeaten for a number of years. Eddie & Donald Studer, Bruce Johnstone, Mel Colby, Carl Hehl, Steve Eddy, Paul Barnett, John Colby and Louis Eddy were some of the boys on the team. Their team of 1926 not only kept every other team scoreless, they never let them cross the 50 yard line and rolled up a total of 168 points for their winning season. Ans is holding the ball in this photo.

Ans was Captain John Ropstol Johnson’s grandson. So, though Anson wanted to join the FBI and did work for Elliot Ness for a short while, he went to work for his Grandfather, Cap Johnson, who had started the Lake Minnetonka Dredging Company. Anson later took over the Dredging Company after Cap Johnson died in 1931.

Oscar Lindbo had been an employee of Cap. Johnson for years and knew the lake and the business better than almost anyone. Anson said that he attributed most everything he knew about the business and the lake to Oscar. By 1960, Oscar had been with the company for 54 years. Oscar was Cap Johnson’s nephew. Oscar came from Norway to work for his uncle when he was only 15 years old.

Mayor in 1960 – 1961. Anson was Excelsior’s Mayor and was well known for building The Tonka Bell, a 100 foot long all steel excursion boat that held 300 people. He had never built a boat before the Tonka Bell. But, he painted a white water line on the blue and when the boat was launched, the water met that line perfectly.

Anson married Lorraine Studer, the sister of the Studer boys who lived across the street. Anson and Lorraine had six children. A boy at each end and four girls in the niddle.

Although Anson was a friendly soul, he was often called upon to physically handle troublemakers who came to town. People said that with his strength he could lift up the rear end of a pickup truck with his bare hands. Dad was an avid sportsman all his life. A champion trap shooter, he and Horace Aldritt often competed together. Ans also loved deer hunting and would usually shoot down our family Christmas tree every fall besides getting his deer. Anson ran the dredging company until his death on Christmas Eve, 1963. The story below by Tom Knowlton is typical of something my dad would do.

-- contributed by Martha Tollefson (Mase)

A story about Anson Mase: Told by Tom Knowlton.

In 1957, four of us young men built a houseboat we named “Bachelor’s Delight.” Soon after launching my dad, Mark Knowlton, told me that Anson Mase wanted the boat builders to stop in at his office at the dredging company. When we walked in to Anson’s office, he is sitting behind his desk.

At that time, we were mooring this blue houseboat just west of the dredging company at the foot of Timber Lane.

Mr. Mase told us we needed a proper anchor to hold this large boat. He reached down next to his chair and proceeded to pull up a six foot piece of small red ribbon to which was attached a very small anchor. All the while he has this big smile on his face. It took us a while to realize he was joshing us. After a good laugh and this fooling around, he then showed us a beautiful large anchor that we assume was made in the shop just for us.

-- Thank you Anson Mase

Mason Motors Chrysler/Plymouth – 440 Water Street

Mason, Raymond (Ray) W. (1900 – 1987) Raymond William Mason was born to John and Ann Mason on September 25th, 1900. He had two brothers, Harry and Frank. Ann gave birth at home in Chanhassen.
The Masons moved to Chowen’s Corner in Deephaven, where Harry had an auto repair shop on that corner, and the Masons built the three homes just north of the intersection. John Mason was a contractor, and built several homes in the area, one being a Frank Lloyd Wright home in Northome, and found it so difficult working with Wright, that it caused him a meltdown for a period.

**Schooled in Deephaven.** Ray completed his public schooling in Deephaven, and transferred to DeLaSalle Catholic High School, where he graduated, before going on to higher education. Ray went on to Minneapolis School of Business, and while there, worked for the Washburn Crosby Company, later known as WCCO.

After graduation from the business school, Ray came to Excelsior and took employment with Hank Smith (Grandfather of Lynn Smith - class of ’59) at his Ford dealership.

It was during that period, that Ray met Mr. McCarthy, the manager of NSP, who told him that if he opened his own repair garage, McCarthy would give Ray all of the service for the fleet of NSP trucks. That was the start of Mason Brothers the business, as brother Frank had joined Ray in the venture. They bought Bennett Livery Barn building on 2nd Street, across the alley from what is now M&M Auto Body.

In 1922 they took the franchises for Moon, Star and Durant autos, and later in 1926, Ray was granted the franchise for Chrysler. Frank had since left the business for health reasons, and Ray continued to run the business in that location until 1945.

During those years, Ray met a school teacher who was new to Excelsior by the name of Engeborg Dale. They dated and then married in 1937. The had two children, Julie and Raymond William Jr.

In 1944 Ray and Engeborg “Enge” purchased the block between George Street and old Highway 7, now County Road 19, on Water Street in Excelsior. They built a state-of-the-art dealership, as there was not a single post anywhere supporting the roof. Ray had a friend who manufactured I-beams that were able to span the service area. No one had done that much of an expanse before. With that new facility, Ray was able to get the Plymouth and International Franchises, which he had until each had ceased to exist years later.

A humorous part of the move to the south end of Water Street, was a comment by Ray’s old employer Hank Smith, “Ray, you are crazy moving way out of town with that new store.” What made it so funny, was that it was a move of only three blocks.

Bill came into the business to help out temporarily when Enge was stricken with cancer in 1963. She passed away in 1966. A number of friends of mine and I will never forget the birthday parties mom would have for me. Friends came year after year but it wasn’t that I was that popular, it was the fact that my mom made, without a doubt, the best fried chicken and potato salad in the world.

Along with my dad’s passing, the industry lost the dedication that he had built into his plan of customer service first, sales will follow. Bill and his son Ryan carried on until the government began to determine how they were able to run the day to day operations and finally who could and who couldn’t have franchises based on your political beliefs.

As I look back at my Father’s later years, I smile, as I remember his greatest love – spending time talking with customers. I’d watch their faces, engrossed in stories about how things were back in the old days around Excelsior and Lake Minnetonka. I would often times find myself listening to those stories time and time again, never tiring of them, as the people and the stories were so wonderful.

– Recollections from R. William Mason
Pioneers Clarence and Maggie McClure settled their Excelsior eight acre farmstead on Murray Hill in 1919. Clarence in his 40s and Maggie in her late 30s were accustomed to hard work and eager to teach their three children the rigors of truck farming.

Helen was the oldest at five, Harold was four at the time. Little brother Ralph came along two years later. As they grew and the great depression swept the country, farming vegetables and apples became the family’s livelihood and the McClure way of life.

But Clarence McClure was a skilled carpenter and eventually built two homes in the area. Inevitably, preferring carpentry to farming the McClures sold the farm and moved into the home Clarence had built on Glencoe Road.


John was born in Litchfield, Minnesota and Tova was born in Copenhagen, Denmark. They moved to Excelsior from Luverne, Minnesota in 1936 with two of their four children, Evelyn and Joyce. Their two sons had already joined the military and were off serving their country. John Nelson became the manager of the Excelsior Mobile station on Water & Third Street. Later as empty nesters John and Tova moved into the home they had built on First Street, next door to the Eddy’s.

Evelyn graduated from high school in 1938 and found work as a telephone operator in the building that now houses Jake O’Conner’s. During summer vacation she worked a second job as an attendant at the Excelsior Amusement Park, where Harold McClure, now a young man, also worked, when not working his second job as a projectionist at the Excelsior Movie Theater.

It was inevitable that Evelyn Nelson and Harold McClure meet, a meeting that quickly became a budding romance. The two married in 1940, rented in Excelsior for a year before moving to Deephaven to begin their family.

As children the McClure girls enjoyed every opportunity to spend time with both sets of grand parents. Grandpa Nelson loved having his granddaughters help at the station where they’d pump gas and clean car windows for accepting customers.

When Grandpa McClure retired, Grandma found a wonderful lake home in Tonka Bay with a big yard that sloped gently to the water’s edge. Grandpa built a long dock with a bench on the end directly over where sun fish schooled. It was there Diane and Nancy would find him during their many summer sleepovers in the second floor sleeping porch with its wonderful lake smells and sounds, and bats. They smile when they remember watching grandpa swing his cane at a disconcerting bat who had ventured out of the attic. He would have made a great tennis player.

Diane and Nancy attended Deephaven Elementary and Minnetonka High School and after graduation went on to marry their high school sweethearts, Ron Stanchfield and Bob Olds respectively, and raise their families within a few miles from where it all began, Excelsior.

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Recollections from Diane Stanchfield (McClure) and Nancy Olds (McClure)

**Meloche, Leo**

**Merz, Ray**
Mithun, Ray (1909 – 1989) Campbell Mithun was founded by Ralph Campbell who had been dismissed from BBDO after he refused to relocate to New York. Campbell, nearing the age of 50, teamed up with 24 year old Raymond Mithun who had worked beneath him as a copywriter. Their first three accounts were Andersen Corporation, Land O’Lakes, and Northwestern National Bank. Campbell Mithun survived the great depression and the war years with flying colors. Campbell died in the fall of 1949 during the halftime festivities of an Iowa-Minnesota football game. Nonetheless, the shop surged on and became well known for its highly creative work and determination to pitch, as well as win big accounts. It was in 1949 that Ray Mithun hired Al Whitman out of New York and the Agency continued to thrive with many new clients after the success of the Hamm’s Beer, “The Land of Sky Blue Waters,” business and the development of the Hamm’s Beer mascot, the Hamm’s Bear. Cleo Hoval was an account man with CM in 1952 when, after numerous attempts by numerous artists in Minneapolis and Los Angeles, Cleo asked Ray Tollefson to try drawing a bear. Cleo and everyone liked the bear Ray drew. The design that Ray Tollefson did went on to become the famous Hamm’s Beer Mascot, The Hamm’s Bear.

Morse, Owin (0000 – 0000)

Murf, Horace (1909 – 1992) Horace “Murf” Murfin was born in Sleepy Eye, Minnesota. Murf had four sisters and the family moved to Eureka when Murf was just a baby. The old stucco house, 5735 Smithtown Road, is still there. (2015) Murf’s dad worked for the Grain Exchange. Murf’s wife, Lura Fitzgerald Shaw (1902 – 1998) was a Medical Technician from the Hiawatha area in Minneapolis. Lura would visit Excelsior with girl friends and rent a beach house near the commons. One time she ran into Murf and that was it. Murf and Lura had two children, Mike and Virginia and lived near Howard’s Point, later Zumba Heights and then Birch Bluff.

Murf went to Minnewashta Grade School, Excelsior High School and then graduated from Carleton College.

In the 1950, Bob Williams wrote articles for the Minnetonka Record which was located on second street on the west side of Water Street, behind Bacon Drug. In the mid fifties, Bob wrote as follows: “28 years ago when Murf started in business, there were just hay fields where Tonka Terrace is, now Country Club Corners. (Smithtown Crossings as of 2014) Murf owns Country Club Oil Company located on the corner of Highway 7 (as of 2014 this is Smithtown Road) and Country Club Road. He’s been doing business there since 1931.

In 1953 Murf built the Smack Drive-In at Vine Hill on the South side of Highway Seven. He added some beautiful signage, (an eye and lips) added on to the building so it could be a truck stop and a place for school students to gather.

Murf and Bob Naegle also owned 26 acres on what’s known as the Brom’s Market property along Highway 7 near Vine Hill where they have plans for a million dollar shopping center.” – end of article.

Murf and Naegle together laid the groundwork for Lord Fletchers in North Arm along County Road 19 but at one point they parted ways and R.O. Naegle completed the restaurant.

If you didn’t know Murf and were overhearing him talk, with his powerful, somewhat gruff voice and his always interesting choice of words, you’d think he was 12 inches taller than his 5’ 4.” He was a good business man and a fun loving guy who would loan
Naegele, Robert O. “Bob” Sr. (1915 – 1984) Bob was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota and met his wife to be Harriet Edwards at Washburn high school. They married in 1934 and later moved to Birch Bluff (The northwest corner of Grant Lorenz and Edgewood Road) on Lake Minnetonka in 1942. Bob went in to the sign and show card business while in high school and started the Naegele outdoor advertising company in 1935. In 1963, Naegele outdoor purchased General Outdoor Advertising company, which at that time was the largest outdoor company in the world. The company continued to grow through creative innovation and the development of new technology for outdoor and indoor billboards and became the largest privately held outdoor advertising company in America.

Bob and Harriet raised three children, Robert Jr., William, and Joni. The doors of their home were always open to neighbors and friends. They were indeed gracious hosts. Most summer weekends were spent playing tennis on the family tennis courts. They also enjoyed the quiet of a Sunday afternoon with the entire family on an anchored boat in the middle of the bay in front of their home. The Svithoid Home, the neighbor to the west, hosted parties, celebrations, and picnics on weekends. The property could handle approximately 400 people. The boat would offer a perfect place to relax from the sounds of live polka bands next-door.

Whenever friends would stop by to visit one of us kids, Pop would greet them at the front door and practice proper handshakes and discuss the best ways of greeting people. Once that was out of the way, we would go outside and play. Pop was always honing his social sales skills, as well as ours. Proper etiquette was important to our folks. Both Mom and Pop were involved in their children’s school activities and athletics. Mom was one of the key people in implementing the lunch program at Minnewashta school and Pop
served on the school board. On several occasions they would host a “fall welcome back” party for Minnewashta school teachers at our home.

In 1954 they purchased and donated the first uniforms and some equipment for the Minnetonka beltline bantam hockey team (Beltline was the name for Highway 100 in those days) There were fifteen eighth and ninth grade boys who had been wearing rag tag uniforms up until that time. Oftentimes newspapers for shin pads, blue jeans and sweatshirts as hockey gear. One of the boys even remembers to this day, what the new gear smelled like “freshly out-of-the-box.” The day of the new uniforms was a memorable day!

Bob and Harriet’s interest in duckhunting and being in the wild during the duckhunting season lead them to the 1957 purchase of the Jimmy Robinson Sports Afield lodge on the Delta marsh in Manitoba Canada. They loved being in the out-of-doors and they loved duckhunting. They established a wonderful tradition for family and friends of being out in and enjoying the great out-of-doors. It continues to be carried on by the Family today at the lodge they renamed “Mallard Lodge” that year in 1957.

– Recollections from Bill Naegele
– and Robert O. Naegele Jr.
Superintendent of Schools

Nilsen, William O. (1903 – 1993) William O. Nilsen “Bill” was born to migrant Norwegian parents on January 22, 1903 in Brooklyn, New York. When he was 7 he and his parents moved to Hettinger, North Dakota, where he attended school for 3 years until the family moved to Minneapolis.

After graduating from South High School, he attended St. Olaf College where he received his B.A. degree in 1924, with a double major in pre-med and education. For financial reasons he chose teaching and began his career at Buffalo Lake, Minnesota where he was kept busy as a high school principal, taught 5 classes in science, coached football (this past year he was invited to attend a reunion of his State Championship Football team), coached track (Region Champs) . . . and fell in love with the first grade teacher, Carrie Peterson from Frost, Minnesota. They were married in 1926, and had 35 years together until her sudden death in 1961. Career moves took them to Browns Valley, Minnesota, Holmen, Wisconsin, and Spring Grove, Minnesota before their move to Excelsior in 1943.

He received his Master’s degree from the University of Minnesota, and took graduate courses at Harvard, Stanford, Berkley, the University of Chicago, University of Wisconsin, and University of Minnesota. In the course of his career he was a teacher, coach, high school principal, superintendent of schools, and a college professor for 9 post-retirement years at Augsburg, St. Thomas, and the College of St. Catherine, supervising student teachers for a total of 52 continuous years in education.

One of his biggest achievements was the work that he did with the Boards of Education of 6 separate school districts in organizing one large educational unit called the Minnetonka School District in 1949. Bill had the privilege of being the Superintendent of the Minnetonka School District for 19 years, retiring in 1968.

Several honors came his way over the years. The one he valued most highly was the Distinguished Alumni Outstanding Achievement Award presented by the University of Minnesota Board of Regents in 1968.

Along other honors were awards from the Boy Scouts (Silver Beaver), YMCA (Red Triangle), Red Cross (Executive Board member for several years), 2 WCCO Good Neighbor awards, and numerous honors in the education field, where he continues to be highly regarded. On April 20, 1987 the Excelsior Chamber of Commerce honored him at the Person of the Year Program, for his contributions to the schools and community. He is a charter member of the Excelsior Rotary Club and continued to be active in monthly educational groups and Torske Klubben for years. Bill was one of the many Rotarians who would often travel to Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada for one weekend a year to participate in the annual Rotary International meetings. It was a time for Rotarians to become more aware of what Rotary was doing around the world and it was a great time to build on personal relationships with one another.

Bill always had a special interest in music, whether attending social events, participating at the piano, organ or mandolin, singing in a quartet or choir, or harmonizing with a young daughter during evening prayers. He continued to be active in church work and on committees, and enjoyed a favorite life long hobby - fishing. He took pride in keeping his property attractive, and lived on Christmas Lake for 44 years.

After his first wife died, Bill remarried. He and Bertha (Flotten) had been childhood family friends in Brooklyn.

Bill was a friend to everyone. He had a real interest in people, young and old, and a knack for remembering details about everyone. Bill contributed that warm, home-town personality with a quiet sense of humor that makes areas like Minnetonka unique.

– Recollections from Corrine Nilsen Peterson, daughter

Nygren, Ev

The Amazing History of Our Community
Olds Dry Goods – 250 Water Street


Roger and Betty loved the water and owned a cabin on The Whitefish Chain in Cross Lake. Roger had a pilot’s license and was a member of an Excelsior Flying Club. He owned a float plane with Wally Kingsbury which they kept on Lake Minnewashta in front of Wally’s home on Yellowstone Trail.

Other members of the flying club were Stan Kinghorn, Clem Owens, Al Fletcher and Fred Cooper, Betty’s brother.

On weekends during the summer, Betty would drive up to Cross Lake with the boys and Roger would close the shop on a Friday night or Saturday night and fly up to meet them. The store didn’t allow Roger much time away over the early years so flying helped him spend some valuable time with the family. Roger and Betty also kept a boat on Lake Minnetonka and they would head out onto the lake often during the week after the store closed.

Roger was also a member of the Excelsior Gun Club which was located just before where Wood Duck Circle is today 2015. Now there is an office building there. Other members were Owen Hermann, Clem Owens who owned the Texaco Station at George Street and Water Street, Wally Kingsbury and Al Fletcher the shop teacher at the Excelsior school.

In the 1930s and 1940s, most people did their shopping locally. At Christmas time during the depression, most did not have the money to buy gifts well ahead of time so they waited until Christmas Eve. Consequently, Roger kept the store open until late at night Christmas Eve. Betty didn’t start working at the store until the 1950s when Roger began experiencing a little heart trouble.

Both Roger and Betty were fun loving people that enjoyed family and friends and could find humor around any corner, having fun with and playing pranks on other local merchants while doing all their business with them at the same time.

Like almost everyone in Excelsior in those days and earlier, they all had Mrs. Eva
“dudes” on trail rides. Beth Murfin, my mother, worked in the laundry. As the story goes, he needed his shirts laundered and my mother wanted to learn how to ride. The rest is history.

Once they were married, they moved back to Excelsior.

Clem and Beth and their family eventually moved from Excelsior to Anoka. Clem and his partner, Ruben Frisk, owned the Dodge and Plymouth dealership and the Anoka to Minneapolis bus line along with Lawrence Keilor, Garrison Keilor’s uncle.

The Amusement Park 1925 - 1973

Pearce, Fred W. (0000 – 0000) Fred Pearce, Sr. had built a roller coaster for the park, and in 1930 he acquired the entire park and this house from the Streetcar Company. The last streetcar ran to Excelsior in August of 1932, and the house was converted into a duplex for Mr. Pearce and his two park managers, Fred Clapp and Joe Colihan.

The Amusement Park was eventually closed and removed in 1973-1976, and after the house was named to the Register in 1977, new owners transformed the house into the Christopher Inn Bed & Breakfast in 1985.

Fire Chief – 1925 – 1964

Peck, Ellis Adrian (1904 – 1987) Ellis “Elly” Peck was the Excelsior Fire Chief from 1925 until 1964. Elly was a close friend of Anson Mase. They . . .

Owen, Clem (0000 – 0000) My dad, Clem Owen, was born in Oklahoma. Clem was born in Oklahoma and moved to Montana at the age of 2. Raised on a ranch near the Custer Battlefield and at the source of Rosebud creek, we were often told stories of the Indians that he grew up with. He attended what is now Montana State in Billings, but then was Montana Normal and attained his teaching degree. In the summers he was a guide in Glacier Park, leading

Umbahacher as their first grade teacher in the Excelsior school at 261 School Street.

Olds Dry Goods eventually was owned and operated by James “Jim” Olds until 1996 when it finally closed its doors. Jim was very active in just about everything that went on in the community from the old Roaring Twenties Days, the Planning Commission, he was the mayor from 1987 through 1991, a Rotarian and loved to sail. Jim worked for the village of Excelsior almost until his death in February of 2013. Jim owned one of the most handsome homes in Excelsior at 100 Lake Street on the corner next to the Commons.

Robert “Bob” Olds married Nancy McClure and later was the golf pro and owned the pro shop at the Minnetonka Country Club.

Clif married Susan Weir who’s family belonged to the Congregational Church in Excelsior. Clif became a College Professor of fine arts and taught at the University of San Diego, University of Michigan and Bowden. Clif and Susan have a daughter Elizabeth who became a ballet dancer.

Clif and Jim both graduated from Dartmouth College. Jim wanted to pursue Architecture and continued at the University of Minnesota but soon left college to help out at the store as his father had once done.

Bob and Nancy have two children who graduated from Minnetonka. Three of their grandchildren go to Minnetonka as well. (Nancy’s parents, the McClures, lived on Murray Hill and later moved to Deephaven. See their story.)

Bob said that they love the area for reasons too many to talk about here so he shares some stories in the Personal Reflections of The Times, 1940 – 2014 section of this book.

– Recollections from Robert Allen “Bob” Olds
Phillips, Harvey S. (1900 – 1986) Harvey and his wife Elsie (1903 – 1991) had one son John and lived at 386 Oak Street at overlooking College Pond. Harvey owned the Phillips Garage which was the Chevrolet Dealership located on Third Street and East Drive where the Excelsior Brewery is as of 2015. Harvey’s father Walter, actually however, built the building at 420 Second Street in 1915 where he started the Dealership. A number of years later, Harvey took over the business from his father and moved it south across the parking lot to the Third Street location. As of 2014, the 420 Second Street building still stands and is home to M&M Auto Body.

Rachel’s Marina – Howard’s Point 1940s
Rachel, Walter “Wally” (1905 – 1984) Wally and his wife Iva owned and managed Rachel’s (Landing) Marina after Howard Johnston sold it in the early 1940s. This is where Howard’s Point Marina is located (2015). Wally and Ivy were both easy going, friendly neighbors who ran a thrifty little store, bait shop, boat rental and gas dock. They also had the best ice cream cones in the neighborhood. Often times having to call the parents of some of the local kids who charged too many cones and candy to their parent’s accounts.

Wally was often referred to as Wally Raéshel, the French Fishing Guide as he knew the lake very well and always had tips on where they were biting, but the kids also thought the name Rachel had a different sound to it and they thought that calling him a French Fishing Guide was funny.

In the above photo, the building on the right is the original store and shop. On the left, hidden in the trees, you can see the home of Howard Johnston, the original owner of the landing. Howard and his cousin Maurice Leach eventually opened a hardware store in Excelsior where Artworks is as of 2015. Their grandfather was Silas Howard who homesteaded Howard’s Point.

Reed’s Drive-In
Reed, Guy (1885 – 1981) In 1939, the Guy Reed family moved from Minneapolis to just west of Excelsior. While in Minneapolis, Guy and Jennie owned and operated the Welcome Inn, a restaurant at 10th and Marquette. Living above their business with 2 small children, they decided it was time to move. Guy purchased land on the west side of Chaska Road (now Highway 41), where he would reclaim the orchards, the house and the gardens. This was 1939 and 5 year old Roger and 1 year old Gary, could now enjoy the country life and its challenges. There was no running water so therefore an outhouse, no furnace - just a space heater, no bedrooms. The property had 300+ apple trees – all in need of pruning. A two story chicken coop was built and fresh dressed chickens were delivered to stores and customers in the area. In addition to apples and berries, other produce was taken to the fruit growers association in Excelsior and they also sold it on their property on Highway 41.

World War II brought more change. Dad hooked our 35 Chevrolet pickup to a small house trailer. He put the 4 of us in the front seat and our dog Dixie, along with our belongings, in the truck bed. Dad did carpentry on army barracks from Sparta, Wisconsin to Corpus Christy, Texas. While in Texas, we had an accident and in all of the commotion, Dixie was nowhere to be found. Unbelievable as it was, Dixie returned all the way back to our home in Excelsior. Whether from exhaustion, malnutrition or heartbreak, as we had not returned home yet, Dixie soon passed away.

Back home after the war, we resumed life on Lot G Bardwell acres with a small band of livestock. After purchasing a pair of mules, Puss and Babe, from Willis Wilson (former Excelsior policeman) Dad would cut hay in the area. Feeding the livestock, milking the cows, caring for the orchard and gardening was ongoing work for both Gay and Jennie. At the same time, Dad worked on carpentry projects around Excelsior such as the Firestone Building and Old Log Theater while completely remodeling the old house – putting a real floor in the basement and finally indoor plumbing.

Working to feed the family didn’t leave much time for fun but they played card games such as 500 and Canasta with neighbors. We also would have get-togethers at the Old...
Townson Hall on Strawberry Lane, where Guy and neighbors played instruments and Roger and I were made to sing. Very quickly Roger would be left singing while I picked up the pennies and nickels that people would throw.

A truck was purchased from Laramie Motors and was used to haul apples to Little Falls MN. We had to be there by 6 am. The farmers would have already sold their feeder pigs and would buy apples for canning. We would sell 80 bushels and be back on the road home by 10 am.

In the late 40s, a small building was moved up to #41 where apples, fresh cider, and some produce were sold. Mom would provide homemade donuts to go with a glass of cider. With the help of Palm Brothers Restaurant Supply, “Reed’s Drive-In” was officially opened in 1948.

As the drive-in business was growing and the building needed to be enlarged, a lower level was added for baking and other food prep that needed to be done. That small space under the drive-in was responsible for the award winning buns, pies, shortcakes, etc. that many remember. Drive-ins were fading from the scene and ours closed in the early 70s. Guy was already in his late 80s and Jennie, although younger, was past retirement age.

Excelsior was a great place to grow up using the lakes for fishing, swimming and boating and the park for other activities. The amusement park provided excitement for us and provided jobs for my friends. Big Reggie’s Dance Land was a favorite spot. The Excelsior Commons had summer programs for the kids and some of the basketball players from the Minneapolis Lakers would come and help. The swimming beach was great.

Roger and I and our friends enjoyed skiing on Mount Baldy which was east of 41 in Maxwell’s cow pasture. Later we added a ski tow composed of a ‘46 Chevy from Jim Zakariasen, 300 feet of rope from Sears, and parts from Carmichiel’s junk yard. It actually worked and was great fun until we had no snow the following winters.

Excelsior was a much different town with hardware stores, grocery stores, cafes, barber shops, bakery, auto dealers, lumber yards and Olds Dry Goods which was later run by my good friend, Jim. It’s good to see that Tony’s Barber Shop is still on the main street and run by my friend and classmate, Ed Zembrycki. We miss the old town but embrace the new with new buildings and new businesses. It holds on to its charm and is a good place to visit and live.

As for me and my wife Jan, we still live on part of the original Bardwell Acres. The east end, where Reed’s Drive In was, is now a beautiful Memory Care and Hospice facility called The Beehive.

— Recollections from Gary Reed

Roers, Kora

The Amazing History of Our Community
Reutiman, Robert W. “Bob” (1908 – 1998)  Reutiman, Robert W. (“Bob”), Sr. Bob was the oldest boy of six children who survived infancy, born to Ernest Reutiman and his Ernest’s wife, Mary. Ernest, a Swiss immigrant, moved his family and possessions by a team of horses from North Minneapolis to that part of Shorewood commonly known as Eureka where the family established a homestead. The family was proud, hardworking, and dirt poor.

For want of a better phrase, Bob bloomed where he was planted. He attended Minnewashta Grade School, Excelsior High School, and eventually Dunwoody Institute in Minneapolis. After a stint as a mechanic at a Dodge dealership in St. Paul he enlisted in the Navy at the outbreak of World War II.

In 1941 Bob married Elsbeth “Betty” Doering and they too homesteaded in Eureka. Betty managed the household, which included both her elderly parents, while Bob was in the service. Their union produced a son, Robert W. Jr., known informally as “Bill,” and a daughter, Mary.

After his discharge Bob went into the oil business with his boyhood friend, Horace Murfin, doing business as County Club Oil Company. In the 1950’s Bob’s partnership with Murf dissolved and Bob incorporated a similar business. Vine Hill Oil Company, essentially delivering petroleum products in bulk to service stations and marinas and providing fuel oil to residential customers. The business flourished allowing Bob to engage in one of his favorite pastimes, lending (and sometimes forgiving the loans) to others down on their luck who could not have obtained credit elsewhere.

Bob had the foresight to realize and take advantage of the directions in which Shorewood would grow. He bought up and consolidated various parcels of land at the intersection of Highways 7 and 41, on both sides of the intersection. He later sold the land to developers one of which built the existing Shorewood Shopping Center on the northerly side of the intersection.

Bob was a good churchman and was instrumental in the construction of Our Savior’s Lutheran Church located at 23290 Highway 7, serving on the building committee. He also was elected to and served two terms on the Minnetonka School Board. He was its treasurer during the construction of Minnetonka High School, a building required by the merger of the old Excelsior and Deephaven High Schools. He later also served on the Shorewood City Council. It pleased him greatly that in 1997 the City recognized the contributions of he and his siblings by naming an access road to Freeman Park “Reutiman Road.”

Bob and Betty lived in a simpler time in Shorewood. It was a time when people of average means could purchase acreage at a reasonable price, go into business on a shoestring, and when the graduating class at Minnetonka High School numbered less than 200. While it is a time that will never come again the time and they deserve remembrance for their part in helping lay the foundation for what exists today.

Country Club Lanes


Wally was a life time resident of the area. He grew up at Eureka crossing; moved to Third Street in Excelsior when he married his wife Peggy and later lived in Minnewashta Manor with his family of two sons and two daughters.

Wally had begun his business career at an early age by owning a small dairy operation in the area, which he later sold. Moving on from there he founded an iron foundry business in Minneapolis (National Foundry) in 1939.

No stranger to startups, Wally opened Country Club Lanes in the mid-fifties during the height of the bowling boom. At the time, the closest bowling opportunities were in Hopkins and Navarre. The business was a welcome addition to the community, with two leagues operating five nights a week.

– Recollections from Robert W. Reutiman, Jr.

– Recollections from Wally Reutiman II
Seamans, John (0000 – 0000)

John Seamans was the 1938 and 1939 basketball team won 25 out of 26 games to win the Lake Conference Championship both years. (I need to confirm this info)

Seifert, Milton Henry Sr. (1903 – 1971)

Dr. Milton Henry Seifert Sr., born on November 29, 1903 and his wife, Laura Dupont Seifert, arrived in Excelsior in the early 1930s to establish a General Medicine Practice.

Dr. Seifert was from Sherburne, Minnesota and his wife, Laura Dupont, was from Minneapolis and her parents were from Quebec, Canada. They set up their practice on Water Street above what is now Que Sera.

Their first born, a son, arrived in April 1931, followed by six more Boys and One Daughter. The photo at right is of “Doc” and Laura with their first child, Milton Jr.

All of them helped their father and mother with the medical practice, including uncles and aunts, and for sure the Excelsior merchants and residents, so it was truly a village that made it all work.

To get the business going, Dr. Seifert examined eyes and vision and sold glasses. It was twenty steps to climb from the street, and the office exam rooms were divided with curtains. Family and friends helped along the way, including the Fire Department and the phone operator. They didn’t always know where “Doc” was when there might be an emergency. Rotary phones weren’t installed at that time. So when the fire department siren sounded “Doc” would pick up a phone to check with the operator to see if someone needed him. This helped him get a head start for both his and the patients benefit.

An office visit in the early days was $2.00 and a home visit was $4.00. Or payment was often made in fruits, vegetables, fish or even a basket of chickens ready for the oven. This was the barter system of exchanging goods and service for medical care. Insurance, if residents purchased it, was mainly focused on Hospital Coverage until the 1950s.

“Doc’s” Family residence started on 2nd Street, moved to Oak Street and then, when their eighth child was born they found a home and land located at what became 675 Water Street. The home was surrounded by 5 acres and it was on that land Dr. Milton Seifert Sr. would build his Medical clinic.

Medicine was certainly in the DNA of “Doc” and his family, with an Uncle, and 4 Sons becoming Physicians and now two Grandchildren.

As the street cars faded and were replaced by the automobile, Dr Seifert’s practice flourished. In the 1950s, the daily patient load some days could exceed 80 people.

Today their Excelsior home and the office have been replaced by the Ridgeview Medical Center, and the street named after Dr. Seifert Sr. was eliminated when the street was buried with the building of the Ridgeview Excelsior Clinic.
Dr. Milton H. Seifert was a very hard working, diligent and caring physician and always provided Excelsior residents/patients with what they needed but far more than they ever realized.

– Recollections of many of the children

**Smith, Homer R. (1900 – 0000)** Homer and Emma were originally from Illinois. They married and moved to Excelsior in . . . .

They had two boys, Tom and Russ. Tom grew up and met Nancy Aldritt in school and they eventually married.

Homer operated a shoe store in Excelsior. It was first located at about 350 Second Street. Later Homer moved to a location near the Dock Theater. Before Nancy Aldritt had any idea she would marry his son Tom, Homer would give her shoes to wear to school and hoped she would advertise them for him which she did.

More about the Smiths . . . .

**Stans, Paul:** Paul Stans (Leo)

**Stark, Paul** Nina Talk with Nina soon.

**Doctors, Road Builders & Pilots – The Studers**

**Studer, Donald (1910 – 2008)** Donald “Donny” Studer was the youngest of the Studer men except for Jimmie who died during World War II flying for Canada.

Donny was born to Edward and Mary Studer in Wesley, Iowa. He lived in Excelsior from 1914 until 1940 after the family moved to Excelsior in 1912. Donny went to Excelsior Schools and then to the University of Minnesota Medical School. While he was a teenager, he worked for Owen Morse who had a thriving Ice business. (Photo at right)

Donny married Margurite Armitage. From 1940 to 1942 served as Medical Officer in Charge at the Fort Peck Hospital, Fort Peck, Mont. He was a contract surgeon with the U.S. 9th Engineers. In 1942-43 he completed a surgical residency at Minneapolis Abbott Hospital and studied Red Cross pediatrics. He and Marguerite eventually lived in Fairbault, Minnesota. Donny practiced medicine there for many years. They had five children. After retirement in 1981, he moved back to Excelsior. Years after his wife Marguerite died in 1963, Donny married his childhood sweetheart, Florence Johnstone who was the widow of Bruce Johnstone of Excelsior.

The family home was at the corner of Second Street and Courtland Avenue. 201 Second Street. (Photo below)

Donny was a member of the Knights of Columbus, The American Medical Association, Minnesota Medical Association, the Rice County Medical Society, the Elks Club, the University of Minnesota Alumni Assn. and President’s Club. He was a past president
of the Faribault Rotary Club in 1960 and the Faribault Youth Service, and a Paul Harris Fellow of Rotary International.

Edward Studer had two sons, Ray and Irwin. Their mother, Ed’s first wife, died in childbirth with Ray. A few years later Edward met Mary V. Kaufman and together they had seven more boys and one girl. Herb, Louis, Eddie, Ralph, Jerome, Donald, Lorraine and the youngest, Jimmie.

**Studer, Ervin H. (1890 – 0000)** Irvin Studer was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He moved to Wesley, Iowa and then Excelsior, Minnesota with his family. He and his wife Clara eventually became a Canadian citizens and lived in Kelowna, British Columbia. Irwin was in the parliament.


**Studer, Ralph J. (1903 – 1991)** Ralph Studer was born in Wesley, Iowa. He moved to Excelsior with his family around 1912. Ralph went to the Excelsior schools and married Cecilia (name). They had 5 children, Dean, Ralph, Claire and Mary. Ralph, like many of the brothers and his father, was always in construction and started Studer & Sons Construction in Billings, Montana in the early 1950s.

**Studer, Herbert (1905 – 1969)** Herb Studer, like most of his brothers, was born in Wesley, Iowa. Herb grew up in Excelsior. He married Bertha “Bert” (name). Bert had been a cook on the road cooking for the men who worked for Herb building highways in western Minnesota and the Dakotas. They eventually married and lived on Murray Hill at 6490 Murray Hill Road.

Bert later in life was a stock holder and board member at Minnetonka State Bank. She was also a devout Catholic and good friend of many of the priests over the years.

**Studer, Edward J. (1907 – 1996)** Edward “Eddie” Studer was born in Wesley, Iowa and moved to Excelsior with his family. Eddie went through the Excelsior school system. He and Anson Mase played football together, lived in Minnesota and lived on the north edge of Chaska for much of his life and Tucson, Arizona. Eventually living at 101 West Lake Street after his wife Catherine died.

**Studer, Louis P. (1912 – 1971)** Louis Studer was born in 1912 in Wesley, Iowa. He married Viola Ester Koschel in 1937 and moved to Excelsior. Louis served as a Navy Seabee in the South Pacific from 1943 to 1945. He worked with Studer Construction Company out of Billings, Montana. From their home in Excelsior, Louis traveled with the construction jobs as needed.

**Studer, Jerome Wilfred (1915 – 1999)** Jerome was born in Excelsior in 1915. He married Cathryn E. (name). They raised six children and lived near Gideon Bay in Excelsior.

Jerome and Catherine owned the property across the railroad tracks from their home. Cathryn died in 1969. The corner that now includes Collision Center and The Excelsior Animal Hospital was the city dump (Studer Dump).

Jerome worked for the city of Excelsior in varying capacities over the years. He was always interested in the welfare of almost everyone, and one of his missions later in life after retirement was picking up any of the women at the nursing home when they needed to go to an appointment or go shopping or to church. Jerome died in Arizona in 1999.
Studer, James Arthur (1920 – 1943) Jimmie Studer was a high spirited man growing up in Excelsior. He played hard, enjoyed friends and family, rode a motorcycle and dated the girl next door. Jim was fun loving but had a strong feeling for what was right.

Before he entered the war he met his sweetheart. A pretty, quiet girl named Carol. They fell in love and got married and soon Carol was pregnant. The photo at left was taken by the front steps of Jimmies boyhood home at 201 Second Street in Excelsior.

In the mean time, Jimmie felt called to duty but he wanted to fly. There wasn’t time to train with the U.S. Airforce so he went to Canada where he flew 30 to 40 missions and was finally done when his commanding officer asked him if he’d fly just one more mission and of course Jimmie said he would. It was a short while later that the family received that letter in the mail the started out “It is deeply regretted that . . ." Jimmie was missing in action. Apparently his plain was shot down on that mission somewhere over France. Pilot Officer James A. Studer, CAN.J. – 14875 Reported Missing. Jimmy was shot down on September 6, 1943.

Studer, Lorraine (1909 –2005) Lorraine was the ninth child. Born to Edward and Mary. She was the only girl amongst all those men.

Her baby brother Jimmie, pictured above, was killed in the Second World War flying for Canada. She kept him tucked away in her heart for the rest of her life. Once when she was at her daughter’s cabin and was performing her morning ritual of putting up the American flag, she said “I wonder why I feel so patriotic?” Her daughter said, “Mom, don’t you suppose it’s because of Jimmie? You’ve felt that way ever since he was killed in the war.” Lorraine stopped for a moment, and almost silently, agreed.

Lorraine grew up in Excelsior and made lots of good friends whom she stayed close to all her life. She worked for Vic Arnold for a while in his Drug Store on the corner of Water Street and Second Street.

She didn’t go far for romance. Lorraine met and married her neighbor, Anson Mase who lived just across the street. A while after they were married, they moved into Anson’s parent’s home at 200 Second Street which had also been his grandfather Captain John R. Johnson’s home years earlier. Lorraine and Anson raised six children in that home. Fred, then Mary, Mina (named after Anson’s grandmother, Mina Johnson) Margaret, Martha and Jim.

Excelsior Meat Market

Tedholm, Oscar E. (1910 –1994) Oscar Tedholm and his partner ( ) owned and operated a meat market located at about 212 Water Street in what later became the Ben Franklin store next door to the original V. G. Bacon Drug on the corner of Water Street (West side) and Second Street.

Oscar and Florence raised two daughters, Susan and Sally.
Strate, Kenneth

Strate, John

Strate, Ray C. (0000 – 1993)
The Hamm’s Bear

Tollefson, A. Raymond “Ray” (1910 – 2002) Ray Tollefson was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1910. After high school, he worked as a cartoonist for the Star Tribune and Fawcett Publications. For a time Ray illustrated the Captain Billy’s Whiz Bang Books and Magazines. In the late 1930s, he and a partner, Vogue Albinson started what became the largest Commercial Art Studio (Artists Incorporated) Minneapolis has ever seen with over 45 employees.

Ray was appointed to sketch the principals in the trial of Wilbur Foshay. The businessman’s Foshay Tower opened just before the stock market crash of 1929, and Foshay’s fortunes crashed not long after. Foshay was convicted of mail fraud and spent three years in a federal prison.

Ray created the first drawings of the Hamm’s Bear in 1950 for Cleo W. Hovel who created the idea of the bear during his first tenure with Campbell Mithun. Ray went on to create a book on How To Draw the bear for other artists around the country and own and manage Artist, Inc. Though his knowledge and advice regarding the art business was always well respected, here’s a funny story about when he and Charles Schulz (Peanuts) had lunch in the late 1950s. This was just prior to Charles’ move to California. Ray told Charles that California was going to be a tough place to make it as a cartoonist and he ought to reconsider and stay in the Twin Cities. Obviously, Charles ignored Ray’s advice and went to California and did pretty well.

Besides the Hamm’s Bear, Ray also created the characters Albert and Stanley for Grain Belt Beer. The drawings were fashioned after Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy. He also created the Little Flame Girl “Minnie” for Minnegasco, now CenterPoint Energy.

Ray later was hired by Art Instruction Schools to create the drawings for their ads that invited the public, who were interested in learning how to draw, to redraw Ray’s artwork, mail it in and hopefully win a credit against their enrollment in the school if their drawing appeared good enough.

Ray & his wife Helen (Susag) built a home on Howard’s Point in Shorewood in 1936. Ray and Helen both loved the lake, water skiing, snow skiing and golf. They were charter members of the Edina Country Club and were still snow skiing into their 80s. In those years they were taking their grandchildren on skiing trips to Wisconsin and Michigan.

Their 3 children, Janney, Susan and Alan, went to Minnewashta, Excelsior, Northrop and Minnetonka schools and the family belonged to the Congregational Church in Excelsior. Ray donated drawings of the church for their 100 year commemorative plate and booklet. Their two daughters preceeded them in death.

Helen sang in the choir for years. She loved music and always had a piano that she played often as did her mother and both of her daughters. Helen was at a Christmas party at her grandson’s when she was 94. After dinner, she quietly moved to the living room piano and started playing Christmas songs. Slowly, everyone, children and adults alike, gathered around and either hummed or sang along quietly. It was very special. These are the memories that mold the rest of us into who we are.

Ray and Helen’s parents lived in the Excelsior area later in life. Arthur Trigva (1887 – 1964) and Olga Victoria (1891 – 1974) Tollefson lived on Galpin Lake Road. Arthur worked part time at the post office in the 1950s. Helen’s parents, Jerome “Jerry” (1892 – 1960) and Esther (1891 – 1984) Susag, lived on Howard’s Point Road. Jerry had his strawberry patch, flowers and fishing. Esther made a specialty of baking Krumkake and Rosettes at Christmas. Both couples were good friends and doted playing cards together. Jerry and Esther both baby sat for their neighbors, the Wartmans.

Ray loved family, friends and drawing. He passed on his art talent to his children and provided them with many opportunities to explore life. He was always ready to give his best to his many clients most of whom were his close friends and when he wasn’t golfing or water skiing, he was at his desk honing his drawing skills.

The Amazing History of Our Community

The Hamm’s Bear

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Pioneers of Home Services

Wartman, Stanley Edward (1902 – 0000) – Hildegard

Ed and Hildegard lived in the Edgewood area of Shorewood. Ed managed the home services business that he and his brothers did so well. Ed and Hildegard were kind, caring and responsible individuals.

Hard working at everything they did. They were long standing members of Sy. John’s Catholic Parish in Excelsior. They were good friends of everyone in the community and gave a helping hand where ever they could.

Wartman, Philbert Joseph “Phil” (1933 – 0000) – Rita D. Struss

Phil and his wife Rita, lived on Howard’s Point Road. They raised three children, Tom, Gail and Elizabeth. Picture here is Phil with his daughter Liz.

Phil worked with his brother Ed in the Home Services business. They did lawn care work, put in docks every spring and took them out in the fall.

Rita had her own Hair Dressing business. They too were members of St. John’s Catholic Parish in Excelsior. Phil and Rita’s son Tom has been responsible for the development of Boulder Bridge Farm and other commercial ventures. Tom started in the business mowing lawns much like his father did at one time. Phil and Rita’s daughter Gail owns and operates the Country Store on Highway Seven in Minnetonka. Liz works with Gail.


Roman and Adeline were married in 1941. Roman was the only brother who was not involved in the area yard and home care business. Roman and Adeline belonged to St. John’s Catholic Parish.

The Amazing History of Our Community
Wendt, Howard C. (1913 – 1982) Howard was born in Becker, Sherburne County, Minnesota and moved to Excelsior. Howard Wendt’s Minnetonka Cleaners was started about 1940 next to Bill’s Cafe across the street from its later and final location of 234 Water Street. Howard’s building was sold to Roger Hennessy.

Howard’s sense of humor was legendary. Always playing pranks on friends and hosting the floating crap games in the back of his cleaners on Friday nights. (Craps is gambling with dice.) Vic Bacon (Bacon Drug) joined in the fun. Joe Spinnelli, a business man from Minneapolis, came out to have Howard press all his bills flat for his business dealings on Monday. Howard & Jerome had three sisters. Howard and his wife Mildred had three children, Dave, Fred and Deanna (DeeDee) and lived just west of the Minnewashta Elementary School on what was then Highway Seven, now Smithtown Road. Howard’s parents, Carl and Anna Wendt lived next door. They owned a small hobby farm with one cow, chickens, one horse and a shetland pony.

The kids and many of their friends will always remember their horse Tex and especially a shetland pony named Felix because of all the stitches they needed after riding him. No stopping Felix as he ran into fences and headed back to the barn.

Howard was another one of the many memorable people that gave Excelsior its stability and personality.

– Recollections from Deanna Preiss Wendt

Wendt, Jerome (1924 – 2010) Howard Wendt, Jerome’s brother, also owned the property on the corner of third and Water Street (100 Water St.) which had been a Pure Oil station. That property became Jerome’s business around 1962. It was called Hazel’s Laundromat & Dry Cleaning.

My favorite story – from Caroline Melberg (Jerome’s daughter): “Dad met my mom (Hazel) while on his laundry route. Hazel’s mother (Mary) cooked chicken and made sure there was always food available when he was stopping by, just to insure he would hang around a little longer! David, Howard’s son, remembers sitting in the delivery truck for an hour or so while Jerome ‘courted’ Hazel.”

Jerome served in WWII in Normandy on D-Day and the Battle of the Bulge. Caroline recalled fondly that everyone who met Jerome always commented on what a nice man he was.

– Recollections from Caroline Melberg Wendt

West, Vern (1890 – 1991) He gave the name “Minnetonka” to Minnetonka High School. Vern and his wife Maude built a home on Center Street in 1925. Vern owned West & Headla Plumbing located on Water Street in downtown Excelsior.

They raised a daughter Pat and two sons, Howard and Doug, both of whom were decorated pilots in WWII. Pat married and raised four children, Jean, Howard, David and Mark Anderson.

Vern was on the School Board when Excelsior and Deephaven schools were combined in 1952. He suggested they name the school Minnetonka, after their shared lake.

In 1974, Excelsior declared August 21, Vern West Day. He was recognized at the Minnetonka Country Club and given golf balls, a golf bag and a Golden Membership which allowed Vern to use the Club without paying further dues. Besides the school board, Vern was also on the Excelsior Council and the Planning Commission. He was active in Rotary and a Mason for 53 years as of 1974.

On top of everything else, WCCO named Vern Good Neighbor the day he was honored at the Country Club.

Vern loved golf and would go to Minnetonka Country Club (no he didn’t name the club)
23rd of July, 1887.

My father was about five years old when he arrived in America, on August 8th, 1887. He was the oldest of ten children. He followed in his father’s footsteps as was common back then, and became a tailor. He and my mother met when both were singing in the church choir in Brainerd, Minnesota. After getting married, many moves and many kids later my father moved his family to the apple orchard farm near Mill Street in Excelsior about 1932. My father worked as a tailor at Juster Brothers. In addition to his job at Juster Bros. he and his sons and daughters worked the apple farm and contributed to Apple Days in Excelsior for several years. He was a handsome dude. Here’s a picture of him in a suit he made for himself, standing in front of the Waldorf-Astoria hotel in New York City at a tailors convention.

Cora, my Mom, was born March 14, 1893, the oldest of five children. Mom died September 6, 1965. Mom was born near Brainerd. What a treasure and a beauty. She never had a bad word to say about anyone! She and Dad were a good pair. Dad was a little more intense – Mom a little more calm. Mom was an incredible cook! She was always asked to bring her dinner rolls to the church pot lucks, and she had to bake them in a wood burning range. Her family had a hard time financially. She was only able to finish eighth grade. Mom and Dad really did a great job raising their family, and their timing was awesome. With a few variations we all were close to two years apart. Let’s see, 12 kids at roughly 9 months each. That’s 108 months Mom was pregnant. Mom was pregnant nine years of her life!

The first photo of mom and dad was taken in 1911 when they were married. The photo at left was their 50th wedding anniversary in 1961. My parent’s focus was always on living things, hence their loving devotion to their children. But their concerns went far beyond doing their best raising their kids. I remember their love and care for our livestock, even special treatment and food for them at Christmas. Planting in
the Spring was almost a religious event, and harvesting had Charlton Heston overtones! Naturally, in a group this size many stories evolve about the individuals, reaching mythological levels in some cases. Some of these myths I have been able to verify through others that were there. I, obviously wasn’t there for any of them since I was the youngest. **Myth #1.** My father made all the band uniforms for Excelsior High School. Truth: He measured for them. The first uniforms for Excelsior. Still a major contribution. **Myth #2.** Ray did a handstand on the top of a spinning windmill. Truth: The windmill wasn’t spinning! **Myth #3.** Ken, working at NSP was left at the work site to watch the equipment while the rest of the crew went to town to repair the winch used to install telephone poles. When the crew returned they found that Ken had installed the pole singlehandedly. Truth: He did! **Myth #4.** We Zakariasen’s had a ‘scooter’ that was a bicycle without a seat, only one pedal on one side, no brakes, no chain drive and no handlebar! Truth: We had a handlebar!

**What’s next? There were twelve of us.**

Russell, the oldest was born May 19, 1912. Russell died in 2009. He was a lot like Mom — a soft voice and a warm smile. Russ was an Eagle scout. He graduated from the University of Minnesota where he reportedly participated in wrestling. Russ loved music. He was a soloist and directed choir for several years at the Excelsior Lutheran Church. A long time family friend, Jim Moffet, sang in the choir with my brother Ken in 1947. Russ was a Lieutenant (junior grade) in the Navy during WWII. After the war he established Homedale Nursery in Hopkins. Russ was involved in civic responsibilities in Hopkins, a member of the Rotary club and ran for public office. Russ was president of the Minnesota Nurserymen’s Association and the Hopkins Businessmen’s Association. Russ used his University degree in Landscape Architecture to design and build Cedar Hills Golf and Ski in Eden Prairie, and several golf courses including Payson, Arizona where he bought a nine hole course and added another nine holes.

So Russ was a busy man. He and brother Kenneth were both dynamic and successful business men. When Ken joined him at Homedale Nursery they formed an alliance that proved to be helpful to both their personalities and business acumen. He and his wife Hazel had seven children. Hazel died in 2003.

Bernadine Fay, my parent’s first girl was born December 13, 1914. Unfortunately Bernadine lived only 8 months.

Kenneth was born May 29, 1916. Ken died March 21, 1991. What a guy! It was special just to be in the same room with him! Comforting and fun! Ken was a big man over six feet tall. He was on the football and track team running the one hundred yard dash under ten seconds! He graduated from Excelsior High School and continued his education at St. Cloud State where he excelled in football and was selected all-conference. He also put the shot, and participated in the broad jump. Ken was a Lieutenant (junior grade) in the Navy during WWII. After the service he joined Russ at Homedale Nursery for many years.

Ken was also a member of the Rotary Club and had a reputation for integrity. I knew that, but it was solidly brought home when I met a man by chance in a bank waiting for the next teller. The teller greeted me by name. On the way out this man asked if I knew anyone named Ken Zakariasen. I did of course, my brother! The gentleman then told me this story: “Ken and I were roommates at the Officer Candidate School. We both had committed girl friends at home. One evening several other candidates got ready to do the town! I was ready to leave to join them when Ken stood in the doorway and said “if you want to join them you’ll have to go through me!” When I realized he wasn’t kidding I backed down. He then asked if I wanted to join him for dinner. That experience and dinner with your brother was easily the most fun and significant celebration of my service life!”

We shook hands and parted, both reenergized. This conversation occurred in 1985. That man’s experience with Ken happened in 1941! Ken and his wife Florence had three children. Florence died in August, 2013.

Beatrice, mom and dad’s second girl was born September 16, 1918. She married Al Olson and together they built a house in International Falls, Minnesota. They were blessed with two beautiful daughters. A beautiful and talented lady, Bea played the piano and provided direction and leadership to form a trio consisting of: Louis Jr., Lloyd and James. This group sang for church services and family and public gatherings around Excelsior. Beatrice also went to St. Cloud State and became a teacher. Bea today (2015) lives in Staples, Minnesota.

Russ, Ken and Dad pooled their resources to buy the house on Yellowstone Trail and Bea provided a new water well. Al died December 4, 2008.

Raymond was born August 18, 1920. Ray died in 2014. Ray played football at Excelsior High School. He too, went to St. Cloud State and received a teaching degree. He was a wonderful teacher in the St. Louis Park school system for many years. Ray had a paddle!
Any student needing discipline was given a choice; the paddle or a trip to the principal’s office. I don’t know what the percentages were who chose the paddle, but I have met many of his students that chose the paddle, and all have spoken highly and with respect for him. Ray was in the Coast Guard serving as a gunner’s mate during WWII. Aboard ship he showed Jack Dempsey one of the guns. Ray was a practical, hand’s on guy. He too, had a soft voice, but always strong enough to get the job done. Ray and his wife Shirley had two girls and two boys.

Margaret was born August 10, 1922. Margaret was always good to me. Like Mom, she would sing to me with an angelic voice that could put me to sleep, or wake me up! Margaret also went to St. Cloud State and got a degree in teaching. She also taught in the St. Louis Park school system. She married Charles Dake, and together they had two sons. Margaret is a legendary cook. She was asked to be a test kitchen for Betty Crocker for many years. Charles died May 17, 1991.

Robert was born October 15, 1924. Bob died October 2, 1980. He was a short guy with a big heart. At Excelsior High School Bob played basketball, football and baseball. He played basketball for Hamline University. But golf was his game and Bob was seldom without his fishing pole and golf clubs. Bob established his own successful landscaping business. Bob and his wife Pat, a former beauty queen for the Hopkins Raspberry Festival in 1947, had two beautiful girls. Pat died July 16, 1979.

Doris was born October 2, 1926. She died in 2012. She was the youngest of my four sisters. Doris also went to St. Cloud State and became a teacher. I talked with more than one Excelsiorite that remembers her waitressing at the old Blue Line Café. Doris was also a cheerleader for Excelsior High. She taught in the Rockford, Minnesota school system. Omar was employed by General Motors. They had three beautiful girls. Omar died March 9, 1999.

Louis Jr. Was born March 20, 1929. He loves music. Instead of college Louis got busy with his music, first as an organizer establishing choirs, then as a choir director for several different choirs. He is often asked to be a guest soloist for weddings, funerals and holidays. Louis and his music makes any gathering an event! Louis was also involved in art, teaching wood carving. He volunteered to teach a group of eight Chanhassen Woodcarvers, and together with; Joe Warneke, Sherol Howard, Lorraine Clark, Jack Mauritz, Ken Hookom, John Sailor and Dave Headla, several carvings were created and can be seen in Chanhassen at the library and Senior Center. Many of his carvings can be seen around the lakes. Louis was instrumental in building canoes and taking inner city youth on canoe trips. Louis and Gladys have four children.

Lloyd was born June 22, 1931. Lloyd died November 12, 1987. He was charming, good sense of humor and fashion guru and a great athlete too. He played football, basketball, baseball and track. Lloyd was looked up to for his athletic accomplishments, very often the high point man. Lloyd played football at the University of Utah, and basketball for Augsburg. He and his wife Elizabeth had a boy and a girl. A subsequent marriage gave Lloyd and Maylo a son who leads a country western band in Texas.

James was born December 2, 1933. He is just two years older than me but MY guru. Jim was big guns in sports at Excelsior and Minnetonka High Schools. Basketball was his thing but he played football too and excelled in that as well. Jim was captain of the basketball team in 1953. After high school he made his way to St. Cloud State where he played basketball, setting a scoring record that may still stand. Jim taught in a private school system.

I was born February 24, 1936. I graduated from the University of Minnesota and I enjoyed a military career of thirty-one and a half years. I was married for over twenty years producing five wonderful children. After a divorce, and eight years of unmarried bliss, I married Senada, a beautiful and accomplished lady from Bosnia. After twenty years of wedded peace we are still talking to each other, enjoying life and retirement.

Okay, that’s my family. Now I’ll share some recollections of my life growing up in Excelsior.

Remember, I’m writing this today, 2015 at the age of 78.

Up to this point I was sure we were richer than most people in Excelsior. The perimeters of my understanding started expanding, I discovered that most people in Excelsior didn’t have to fold newspaper and stuff it in the hand-me-down shoes to make them fit better and cover the holes in the soles! And the hand-me-down clothes! Never mind that the back pockets of my pants overlapped – I didn’t need pockets anyway.

Every day, it seems, I would discover something that said “You’re not rich, Albert! Wake up!” And every day I would fight it! Why was it so important to be rich? The next few years were confusing and rewarding at the same time. It was obvious to me that we were not rich by many standards. But we always ate well and fed others as well. I remember clearly, poor looking men tell Mom they would work for food. She never refused them.
I never felt poor!

Let’s walk through Excelsior in about 1957. But wait! Isn’t our village special? Doesn’t that make us rich? Walk with me, won’t you? There’s Melba’s café and across the street the Hasty Tasty café. There’s Excelo Bakery and those huge bismarcks, and Old’s Dry Goods. Bill’s Café and Tony’s Barber Shop. All wonderful village places that add so much to our rich lives. Bacon Drug store with their old fashioned soda fountain. This is also where the Minneapolis Bus, with the green and grey herring bone upholstery would stop for passengers. Whenes Drug store was kiddy-corner across the street and had a similar soda fountain where all my sisters worked at one time or another. When I was about six or seven I used to go down and wait for whichever sister was working to walk her home safely. Naturally I was always there early enough to eat a sundae before quitting time! Doesn’t Rockwell know about Excelsior? There’s the movie theater my sister Bea took me to see a Chopin movie. The opening scene showed Chopin playing the piano very hard and a drop of blood splashed across the white keys! I was out of there with my sister right behind, really mad! She took me over to Conky, our friendly cop waiting in his police car for some international diamond thief or truant kid to show up. Bea asked him to drive me home. There is no end to rich experiences. Lundsten’s bank just up from Whenes’ Drug store. Where did “Supe” Lundsten get his nickname? Or was it “soup?” There’s the old Red and White grocery, and the S & S grocery owned by Smith and Sampson, brother and sister! Trig Torkelson, the best butcher in town! Half way up 2nd street is the old Minnetonka Record where Bob Williams wrote such interesting and timely articles. Where’s Digger O’Dell, I got a toothache! Speaking of toothaches I can see the window on the second floor, above Bacon Drug. Where Dr. Stenderson has his dental office. A short little man with hairy forearms bigger than my thighs! Did he have to sharpen his needle in front of me? Aldritt’s hardware store was also on Water Street. And Leipold’s! Haven’t they been there forever? There’s Clausen’s seed store. Everett has to be one of the nicest men in town! And Ben Franklin with Mrs. Schmid serving so many well. There’s Mr. Way, the supervisor at Lampert Lumber watching me and my friends so we don’t climb the water tower that supplies the steam engines for the trains. So many wonderful little stores and their special owners and employees that contributed so much to our quality of life, making ALL of us rich!

The Commons, where we played ball, went swimming and had the very best experience a kid could ever have!

I beat Vern Mikkelsen of the Minneapolis Lakers at a game of Horse when I was about fifteen years old! I know he let me win, but isn’t that a great story? It really does take a village to raise a family!

School years were all wonderful years. Often I think about the special teachers I had. There were so many. Mrs. Fick, Ms. Huebner, Ms. Buchow, and our principal Mr. Larson and Superintendent, Mr. Bill Nilsen. It’s a long, long list.

Coach Haley was also my History teacher. He wrote test questions on the blackboard and we answered on a sheet of paper with our name on it. I turned in a blank sheet with my name on it. He asked me why I hadn’t answered any questions. I told him I couldn’t see the board. He moved me to the front seat. I still couldn’t see the questions so he got behind and pushed the seat forward until I could see. I didn’t ace the test but I did OK. He talked to my parents and I got glasses a few weeks later. Mr. Haley was a really great guy concerned about students first – sports second!

Al Fletcher, Bob Scheid, Lyman Bump, Mrs. Campbell, Don Carruth, Raymond Minkler, Lorraine King, Harold Miles, Dave Headla, John Gray, Bob Noren, Bob Sevey, Bob Cheney, Ed Foley, Jim Foley, Gene Bristol, and on and on!

The Kochens, Huntingtons, Knowltons, Tollefsons, Olsons, Carlsons, Johnsons! More families that shaped Excelsior. These are just a few of the many people that have molded Excelsior into the dynamic, character shaping village I was privileged to grow up in.

Church too, was a significant factor in our richness! The sermons were great unless they went too long. Reverend Burns was my favorite because he would often read and comment on parts of the poem “The house by the side of the road” by Sam Walter Foss. My favorite poem. The basement ladies at our church, the Methodist church on George Street and Courtland were awesome! I really liked the jell-o dishes. We couldn’t afford such extravagance at home. Courtland was the street with the old rickety bridge that went over the railroad lines.

Mr. John Schevenious was my Sunday school teacher and he didn’t stand for any nonsense! I still remember the Apostles Creed. There were many memorably people in our church. One Sunday everyone got up to sing a hymn and this lady sang her heart out! She was so loud and off tune I couldn’t stand it anymore, and got ready to leave when Dad grabbed my arm and made me stay! I started giggling! Jim chimed in then Lloyd and to top it off Mom started! Dad, a stoic Norwegian, wasn’t going to give in! I learned later that he was within a few seconds of giving up when the song ended. He said that the wiggling of the whole pew from our giggling almost put him over the top!
I struggled for several years with defining my life’s direction and goals. I got married and had a wonderful family. During these family years I reconnected with the traditions, expectations, biases, games, values and peculiarities from my youth and wonderful siblings. From those formative years came the foundation for building my family. My children have followed my lead in raising their children and I’m grateful for the richness passed on to me from my parents and siblings during those very poor years.

To sum it up let me explain my RICHNESS. I’m sure there are many Excelsiorites reading this that are more than a little confused! It was no secret that we Zakariasen’s were poor. We lacked so much of the worldly things like shoes and clothes and fancy furniture. Our home was quite small for our needs, and there was no money for the extras like, class pictures, treats and special sports equipment or training. So how can I make a statement that I grew up rich in Excelsior? It’s very simple: The quaint village, schools, teachers, coaches, people of Excelsior, peers and my family provided all the support I ever needed. I was never rich in the sense of having money, but I enjoyed a quality of life I am very grateful for, and that is what growing up rich in Excelsior is all about.

Thank you Excelsior!

– Recollections by Albert Zakariasen
After the turn of the century, all our communities began to thrive as tourism was continuing to grow with better transportation into the area and a reputation as a premiere vacation area, primarily due to Lake Minnetonka.

And of course, along with more visitors, came the need for more residents to open stores, hotels, restaurants and manage the steamers on the lake. As usual, churches preceded much of the activity and then schools were next.

This part of the world has always stood out as a thriving community for musicians, artists, inventors and theater along with milling and horticulture.

Amusement Park, Big Island (1906 - 1911) Big Island Amusement Park was a popular Twin Cities tourist destination that existed between 1906 and 1911. It was located on the eastern side of Lake Minnetonka’s Big Island, hence the name. At the turn of the century, The Twin City Rapid Transit Company (TCRT) announced they were buying 65 acres of land on Big Island for an amusement park.

The TCRT had expanded its rails east to Stillwater and west to Excelsior. In 1905 it purchased the dilapidated Lake Park Hotel and renovated it for overnight visitors to the amusement park it was building. They renamed it the Tonka Bay Hotel.

Twin City Transit built 3 large double-ended ferries that could carry up to 1,000 passengers on a run. Additionally, the smaller streetcar boats would assist but they were primarily for commuting lake residents.

Electricity was brought out to the island for the park and a 186 foot tall light beacon was added that could be seen from downtown Minneapolis. For entertainment on the Island, a large music casino was completed in 1907.

Among the biggest names to perform there was John Phillip Sousa and his band, but most entertainment was local. Other features of the Park included a roller coaster, the “Olde Mill” ride, the “Scenic Ride to Yellowstone,” a Carousel, rowboat rentals, and numerous picnic grounds. In August 1911, due to tremendous operating costs and lack of revenue during the off season, TCRT closed Big Island Amusement Park indefinitely and abandoned the property. Most of the buildings and rides were dismantled in 1917.

Amusement Park, Excelsior (1925 – 1973) The Excelsior Amusement Park opened in the City of Excelsior. The Excelsior Amusement Park and Big Island Amusement Park are commonly confused for being the same entity, when in fact they were entirely separate operations and existed during two different periods of time.

Inspired by Coney Island, the park’s main attractions included a wooden roller coaster called the Cyclone, a Ferris wheel, bumper cars, boat rides, a fun house, and a carousel. The fun house had a gunny sack slide, a spinning disc that hurled people into a padded sidewall and a turning barrel that was nearly impossible to walk through. The carousel, built by the Philadelphia Toboggan Company, was in service for the entire duration of the park and is still in use at Valleyfair Amusement Park in Shakopee. A second ride, the Scrambler, was also saved from destruction. Contrary to widespread belief, the Cyclone roller coaster was not relocated to Valleyfair and renamed High Roller. The Cyclone was scrapped.

1925. Excelsior Amusement Park opened and was run by Fred W. Pearce, an established amusement park operator and roller coaster builder.
Fred bought the Wyer home on Mill Street. Jim Wyer, the grandson of the original owner, stated that the home at one time had tennis courts and fruit and vegetable gardens all the way down to the lake and the Wyers would harvest and store the produce in their basement. The photo on the previous page shows the gardens near the lake before the park was built.

Construction on the Amusement Park took a number of years to complete. The lake in front needed to be dredged and of course the rides and the roller coaster need to be built. The photo at left shows the roller coaster construction going on in 1923.

**During the 1920s and 1930s**, a streetcar waiting station was on what became Lake Street, very close to but across the street from the location of the Commons Workplace in 2015. There was a 30 foot long tunnel under the station allowing residents to access the park. The photo at right also shows the old water tower in the background.

The photo below is an aerial view of the bay out from the roller coaster that needed extensive dredging as it had been a shallow, swampy area and they knew they’d want good, clear open water for future activities.

In the background you can see Solberg’s Point and even Captain John R. Johnson’s home on the hill near the right edge of the photo. Note that the point to the right is much longer than it is today, 2015.

Every summer a streetcar line from Minneapolis brought guests to the park from Memorial Day through Labor Day. Excelsior Amusement Park was very popular in the 1940s and 1950s. During the 1960s the park became a hangout for Excelsior teens and attracted crowds of young people from around the Twin Cities. The park was a hangout for families and kids, but also for teenagers and sometimes gangs, guys with motorcycles and matching jackets.

Several incidents occurred in the late 1960s, some with racial overtones, and the trouble contributed to the park’s eventual decline.

The Danceland Ballroom at Excelsior Amusement Park hosted many well-known musical acts, including Lawrence Welk, Tommy Dorsey, the Beach Boys and the Rolling Stones.

Legend has it that a visit by the Rolling Stones in June 1964 inspired the lyrics to the song “You Can’t Always Get What You Want.” A chance meeting between Mick Jagger and local character “Mr. Jimmy” (Jimmy Hutmaker) at the fountain in Bacon Drug Store, gave rise to the story, which has never been verified.

**Clellan Card.** Axel of Axel and His Dog & Axel’s Treehouse on WCCO television, was an extremely popular figure back in the 50s. The park hosted Axel Day which ran from 1955 to 1959, and featured Axel, free rides, prizes and of course a lot of live entertainment. This great man died of cancer on April 13, 1966, a very sad day for the children of the Twin Cities. Clellan Card was a resident of Excelsior and lived near St. Albans Bay. Diane Groose and Martha Mase are pictured with Axel in this photo from 1963.

In the early 1920s, kids would hop the trains coming out to Excelsior from Minneapolis. And, during the depression, the entrance fee was three cents per day. “In the 1950s, some of us would come down to the park in the hours between final tests at what was then the Junior High School which had been the High School up through 1951.”

Today, in 2015, the area that was the Amusement Park is now condominiums, tennis
courts and two restaurants, Maynard’s, the Bayview Event Center – Bayside.

1973. The Excelsior Amusement Park closed in 1973. In 1974, everything was demolished or sold. The carousel went to the new amusement park, Valley Fair, near Shakopee. The merry-go-round building went to Victoria, Canada, where it served as a horse ring before burning down in 1990.

**Aldritt’s Hardware:** Lincoln (Linc) and Harriet Aldritt owned and operated Aldritt’s Hardware during the 1950s and 1960s. They were first located in the building that is 254 Water Street and later moved across the street to 239 Water Street where Leipold’s is today (2015). They lived on County Road 19 near the Tonka Bay City Hall. A long garage near by on the corner stored most of the beer kegs for sale in Tonka Bay in those years. In 2015 the dark brown building is still on the corner.

**Belle Aire Yacht Club & Cochrane Boat Yards:** Cy Cochrane had built Cochrane’s boatyard in 1946 where he provided repair and maintenance of wood-planked cruisers, crane service, winter storage and a showroom for new boat sales. When Cy discontinued boat sales, the boat showroom was remodeled into a restaurant which became the Belle Aire.

In 1959 the Kanan family opened The Belle Aire Yacht Club which was a popular private club with dock facilities.

The Belle Aire was one of numerous early restaurants on the lakes edge. It was a Private Club and a Bottle Club due to the fact that Excelsior was still dry left over from the prohibition period of the 1930s. It was located at 21955 Minnetonka Boulevard in Greenwood and faced west on the edge of Excelsior Bay.

**Big Reggie’s Danceland:** The Tonka Bay Roller Skating Pavilion was moved to Excelsior over the ice. First they took apart the roof boards and took down the trusses. Then off came the porches. The walls were sawed into sections and carried down to the shore and slid over the bank onto a barge. They were then carried across the lake to the shore of what is now the Amusement Park and then rolled across the road to the present site of the ballroom. The timbers and underwork of the building, and the floor sheeting were all loaded on trucks and brought over to Excelsior.

From at least 1950 to 1957 Excelsior Park was the site of the Miss Minnesota contest.

1950. The tenth annual Miss Minnesota contest was held at the Park on August 13. Cedric Adams of WCCO radio was the emcee of the bathing suit competition, and Jack Thayer of WLOL emceed the evening gown and talent competitions. Music was provided by Bud Strawn’s Orchestra, the park’s house band.

1952. The Excelsior Park hosted the 12th annual Miss Minnesota-Universe Pageant, directed by Rudy Shogran. Cedric Adams of WCCO radio was the emcee of the bathing suit competition, and Jack Thayer of WLOL emceed the evening gown and talent competitions. Music was provided by Les Williams and His Orchestra.

The Miss Minnesota-Universe Pageant took place at the Park on June 16, 1957, directed by Ray Colihan. Jack Thayer of WDGY was the emcee and music was provided by singer Gloria Greer, the Joe Kimble Trio, and the Showoffs.

**Ray Colihan,** aka “Big Reggie” became the manager of Danceland in 1956 and soon the music gave way to rock ‘n’ roll.

Every spring, the amusement park sponsored a Twin City High School Night for the area’s teens. In February 1963, Colihan booked the Beach Boys to perform for that year’s show and dance, reported for only $400. At the time they were booked, the group had charted four records on the Billboard charts, notably “Surfin’ Safari,” which entered the chart in August 1962 and reached #14, but they hadn’t had any top 10
hits. Then, on March 23, 1963, “Surfin’ USA” entered the chart, a monster hit eventually reaching number three. So by May 3, 1963, they were big, and Colihan had scored a real coup.

1964. On June 12, the Rolling Stones played to 283 unimpressed Minnesotans at Danceland, capacity 2,000. Although they made radio appearances earlier in the day, Danceland owner Ray Colihan deliberately didn’t advertise the concert for fear that too many kids would show up and he’d lose his license. But word of mouth failed to bring in the fans, and he lost money on the $2,000 he paid the Stones. A $6.00 admission fee also kept the kids away in an era where tickets were generally $1.50. (After 10pm tickets went to half price and more people showed up.) In an interview Colihan says that he booked the Stones about a month too early, before they were popular in the Cities. The only single that had been released in the States was “Not Fade Away,” which had only first appeared on the Billboard chart on May 2.

Who picked them up from the airport? What’s the real story?

– Limo driver Dick Sather says that he picked the boys up from the airport in a nine passenger Cadillac limousine, but was told to wait until their manager came around with his car. Time went by and the boys were complaining that they were hungry, so Dick set off to their first destination, KDWB studios, for an interview. Unfortunately he went the wrong way on 494, which was under construction, and they were an hour and a half late. Somehow they got to WDGY for a second interview and then to their hotel, the Sheraton. Dick picked them up there to bring them to Excelsior, and delivered them through the loading dock. He stayed in the limo and listened to the Twins game during the concert.

? Someone else said that Ray Colihan picked them up from the airport in a limo.

? Pat Maher, Colihan’s assistant, remembered when he picked them up at the airport “they were a scruffy bunch of guys who looked like they’d flown in the luggage compartment. This was the first big English band to come to this area.”

? Yet another person said they ate lunch at the Lincoln Del before heading out to Excelsior.

! Jack Dunn, of Excelsior, did take them back to the airport the next day.

The song “You Can’t Always Get What You Want” was released in July 1969 as the B side of “Honky Tonk Woman.” Jagger has apparently made no move to clear this up; some speculate that he didn’t want to share royalties with Mr. Jimmy. Mr. Jimmy attended the Bridges to Babylon tour at the Metrodome on November 25, 1997, by winning a WCCO contest that required a written entry of 25 words or less. Mr. Jimmy won easily in his age bracket with the help of Bob Bolles. He was driven to the concert in a limo by Bill Keefer and signed autographs, dressed in a tuxedo. He did not get to meet Mick, and Mick did not sing the song.

Mr. Jimmy enjoyed his fame, carrying with him a business card with his photo, and the words “Mr. Jimmy, Roving Ambassador, Excelsior, Minnesota – ‘You Can’t Always Get What You Want.’”


Big Bands played in the 30s like Harry James, George Ganz and Red Seivers. Even Perry Como sang there. Other acts that appeared at Danceland included: Jerry Lee Lewis, The Everly Brothers, Conway Twitty, Johnny and the Hurricanes, The Beach Boys, Hollywood Argyles and Roy Orbison to name a few.

Danceland was owned by Fred Pearce and as of 1968, Ray Colihan no longer had the lease for the property. After trying to rent it out as an adult operation with liquor, which the village wouldn’t allow, or a teen club, Fred said he was losing money on the dance hall and finally rented it out as a storage building. Danceland burned to the ground in July of 1973. The Excelsior Amusement Park closed for good after Labor Day 1973.

Bird House, The: Part of the Birdhouse Inn and Gardens at 371 Water Street was built in 1858 by early settler James H. Clark, who also took in boarders there. During the 1940s and 50s, the three daughters of Edwin Aldritt, Hazel, Florence and Marietta lived there. Today, 2015, The Bird House is run as a Bed and Breakfast that provides guests a complimentary wine bar, cross country ski equipment and much more.
Boulder Bridge Farm: The farm was originally owned by Edmund J. Longyear who bought the property in 1906 and built the home and barns. It was then called “Rose Farm” and was not only 90 acres of farm land but it also embraced 100s of feet of Minnetonka lakeshore. The Longyears enjoyed the farm and the lake for 20 years. The property is near Smithtown Bay.

In 1926, G. Nelson Dayton and his wife Grace Bliss purchased the farm and renamed it Boulder Bridge Farm for the beautiful boulder bridge on the lakeshore that was a foot bridge over a small channel into a lagoon. The Daytons and their five boys, Donald, Bruce, Wallace, Kenneth and Douglas came out every spring and stayed for the summer. The Dayton’s were a large family that were the original owners of Daytons Department Store in and around Minneapolis. They ran the farm year ‘round raising a large herd of Guernsey cows and at least 70 Belgian Horses. The farm also had beautiful native rock bridge and pillars that marked various entries to the property by lake and by road.

Cottagewood Store: 1850 – 1895 – Samuel and Harlow Gale came out from Minneapolis 1850. Harlow bought a small Island for $2.40. He later built a summer house on it and called it “Brightwood.” Today it is called “Gale’s” Island or just “Gale” Island.

In 1873, Samuel acquired 95 acres on what has become known as Cottage Wood. Today it is one word Cottagewood. In 1882, he re-plotted the acreage into numbered lots. In 1887, lot number 17 was sold to Ralph M. and Stella G. Chapman on which Mr. Chapman built a small grocery store eventually to become known as the Cottagewood Store.

The Cottagewood Store today is a thriving, community-owned gathering place for coffee and conversation. You can catch up with your neighbors, meet an occasional stranger, buy a few knickknacks, groceries, T-shirts and it’s a great place to get a hug. The “University of Cottagewood” has often been promoted on T-Shirts and residents wearing them out of state would do their best to convince acquaintances that, in fact, it was a real university.

The store is open during the summer months from early Spring until sometime after Labor Day.

Grill Night. One terrific get-together goes on June through August, every two weeks and that’s “Grill Night.” Everyone invites everyone. They come from all over at 5:30 and stay until 7:30 or 8:00 talking, laughing and telling stories while enjoying great food and beverages prepared by neighborhood volunteers.

Kids and adults alike also partake in pony rides, scavenger hunts, movies, live music and turtle races while enjoying everything from burgers to pizza.

Chowen’s Corner: Chowen’s Corner is the corner that is the junction of Minnetonka Boulevard and Northome Boulevard. Chowen’s Corner is actually Annie Chowen’s Corner as it was the property of her father, Joseph Chowen and he named it after her.
The Chowen’s all arrived here in the early 1850s. There were five siblings all together. William Chowen, Joseph, George, Sarah Gray (Amos Gray – Gray’s Bay.) and Sarah Shaver (James Shaver – Shaver’s Lake).

**Curley’s: (The Caribbean) Gordy Koch:** Caribbean Marina, a Lake Minnetonka tradition, has been owned and operated by the Koch (pronounced “Cook”) family since 1960. It has a gas dock and rents boat slips. The view of Echo Bay is spectacular. Once called Curley’s, it became the Caribbean in 1966. Ginny Herman played at the piano bar.

**Deephaven Today 2014:** Deephaven is a city in Hennepin County bordered on the west by the lower lake area of Lake Minnetonka. It is approximately 2,429 acres of rolling, wooded land. Population of 3,718 in 2012. One recalls that Hazen J. Burton’s wife Alice named the Minneapolis and St. Louis Railroad station at the foot of their hill, Deephaven after the title of a book by her favorite New England author. Since 1900, when Deephaven was incorporated, Deephaven and Cottagewood have developed their reputation as a premiere sailing community. The areas of Northome, Chowen’s Corner and Tye Abels Corner as well as Deephaven overall, can now boast of churches, schools and a wide variety of commercial and retail businesses.

**Deephaven High School:** A second floor was added onto the old school in 1916. It became a high school at that time. Then in 1920, more rooms were added at the back due to the ever growing population.

With the additional space, the school house became the perfect place for a growing community to meet. Church services were held there, scout meetings and many types of community gatherings and dinners.
Excel Food Market: Like many of the businesses in Excelsior, the Excel Food Market was a family business run by George and Fern Darke along with their three sons. The Darke’s, having moved from Minneapolis in 1941, first ran the Christmas Lake Grocery until 1949 when they decided to open the new business on Water Street. A large part of the business was taking telephone orders while suggesting menu items based on fresh seasonal fruits and vegetables and special meat cuts and then delivering those orders later in the day. Their clientele were largely Lake Minnetonka residents. All three of the Darke boys took their turns at working in the store, filling special orders and then driving the delivery truck to customers’ homes, unloading the groceries on the kitchen counters and placing perishable items in the refrigerator if the customers were not at home.

Jim, Bob and John. Each of the Darke boys was active in scouting while working in the store and all three achieved the rank of Eagle Scout under the guidance of scout leaders Line Aldritt, who owned the Aldritt’s Hardware Store and Lloyd Johnson, a Northern States Power linesman. Mr. and Mrs. Darke were active members of the Masonic Lodge and the Eastern Star in Excelsior. The Darkes lived on a six acre mini farm on Highway 41 near Murray Hill. None of the Darke boys remained in Excelsior. Dr. James Darke settled in Portland, Oregon, Robert Darke was an executive with Alcoa in Cleveland, Ohio and later in Los Angeles, and John Darke settled in Silicon Valley. George and Fern Darke later retired in Portland, Oregon, where Mrs. Darke lived until the age of 107.

Excelsior Junior High School:

Excelsior Public School: (261 School Avenue)

This school building was built in the Georgian Revival style between 1899 and 1901 to serve Excelsior during a time of growth in the community. Before this structure, there were two other school buildings located on this site. The first was moved to 321-323 Third Street, and the second (photo below) was destroyed by fire in 1896.

The building originally housed grades 1 through 7 in four classrooms on the first floor, and eighth grade and high school students were on the second floor. At the time of its construction, it was deemed the finest school in rural Hennepin County. By 1908, the school served 308 students, and by 1915 the high school students had moved to a new building on Oak Street now the elementary school in 2015.

The school bell, mounted in a bell tower, had to be removed from the tower in 1962 because of a decaying structure. It was mounted on a granite pedestal next to the Excelsior Public Library in 1966. In 1964, the school was closed, and later became administrative offices for the Minnetonka School District. The building is currently used for office space (2015).
**Dates of Significance regarding Excelsior Schools.** 1855 – Excelsior school district organized. 1857 – First school house built. ($900.00) 1885 – New enlarged four-room, two-story frame house built. 1898 – Present eight-room two-story brick school built. (The finest in rural Hennepin County) 1915 – High school built on present sight. 1928 – High school burned. 1930 – Present high school re-built and dedicated on January 24th. ($400,000 building and equipment)

**Excelsior Meat Market:**

**Farm & Garden, Excelsior:**

*Ev Clauson.*

Ev Clauson opened his Farm & Garden Store south on Water Street and later in (0000) moved to the location on Second Street behind Laramie Ford that was on the corner.
Hasty Taste: 261 to 270 Water Street.

Hazel’s Laundromat & Dry Cleaning: This was located where Patisserie is located in 2015. It was owned by Howard Wendt and operated by Howard’s brother Jerome. Jerome would pick up and deliver dry cleaning from this location.

Hozar’s Cafe: The building on the left is Hozar’s Cafe. Today, 2015, it is Haskell’s Liquor Store and Lounge. The next building beyond Hozar’s, which is Dunn Brother’s today, was the National Tea grocery Store.

Humblemiers: This cafe would have been at about 454 to 470 Lake Street next to Pee Wees.

Laramie Ford Company: In the late 1930s, Lee Laramie began Laramie Ford Company on the northeast corner of Water Street and Second Street. In 1946, Lee and his family bought and moved into a house on Howard’s Point. Laramie eventually sold his dealership and it became Jordan Ford.

Leach Johnston, Inc. Hardware:

Mason Motors: Ray Mason bought the block of property on the South end of Water Street that included the Williams home and a large hill. Ray removed the hill and the house and built the dealership and a large paved car lot. Ray ran a thriving new and used car business at this location which became 440 Water Street for 40 plus years. Slowly over the years his son Bill took over management of the business and when Ray slowed down some (he never retired as he loved the people and couldn’t stay away). Bill then acquired the Jeep franchise and renamed the dealership Bill Mason Chrysler Jeep. Ray died in 1987 and a few years later Bill’s son Ryan joined the business and together they did some remodeling and made improvements but Chrysler finally forced them to close down. They finally sold the property in 2012 and as of 2015, Kowalski’s Market built on the site.
Melba’s Cafe: 274 to 276 Water Street.

**Merri Way, The:** In 1960, Dick Geyen built the Merri Way which today is the “Lady of the Lake.” Apparently big companies in the area back then were cutting their divisions from hundreds of people down to less than one hundred and at that time, the Tonka Belle, built by Dick’s father-in-law, Anson Mase, was the only charter boat on the lake and it was too big for the smaller groups. So Dick decided to build a smaller charter cruise boat, one that would hold about 80 people. Geyen designed the boat himself. He learned everything he needed to know to build a boat while in the Navy. He added the red paddle wheel, or sternwheel, on the back of the boat in order to make it “unique.”

**Minnehaha (streetcar boat):** The Minnehaha is 70 feet long and about 15 feet wide. This beautiful boat weighs close to 62,000 pounds! The design was especially good for keeping the boat steady and the ride smooth as it actually sliced through the water ignoring the waves.

The TCRT (Twin Cities Rapid Transit) recognized that there were three types of Minnetonka boat passengers: lake residents who needed a way to get from place to place; excursionists who wanted to take a leisurely tour of the lake; and visitors who had come to spend time at the new amusement park on Big Island.

The Minnehaha was first launched in 1906. Ridership began to wane by 1920 so in July, 1926, 3 of the 7 boats, the Como, the White Bear and the Minnehaha were dismantled and filled with red clay.

Then the tug Priscilla towed the boats to deep water between Big Island and Brackett’s Point. There the boats were pumped full of water and allowed to slowly sink to the bottom.

Jerry Provost had been searching for years without success for the streetcar boats that were scuttled in 1926. In the summer of 1979, he decided to try again and found them in 60 feet of water. In 1980, the recovery operation began. It took many years and hundreds of hours of work to rebuild the Minnehaha but by the mid 1990s it was finished. On May 25th 1996, thousands of people flocked to the lake to cheer on the reborn Minnehaha as it set off on its inaugural voyage from Excelsior to Wayzata.

**The Tonka Bell:** The Tonka Bell was built from scratch by Anson Ropstol Mase, Captain John Ropstol Johnson’s grandson, in the 1950s. It was 100 feet long and could carry 300 people on two decks. It was used as an excursion boat that would be rented for class reunions, parties of all kinds as well as senior class parties. Anson (Ans) was generally the Captain while various men and women, including some of his children, would tend bar or serve as first mate on their excursions around the lake. In the photo at left that was taken in about 1952 are, from left to right, four of Anson and Lorraine Mase’s six children; Fred, Martha, Jim, Margaret with Ans on the right.
Minnetonka Country Club in Manitou Forest: (1916)

The area that the country club was located in was called Manitou Forest. Manitou itself is presently located along what is now County Road 19, one quarter mile north of Smithtown Road.

The Minnetonka Country Club was organized in the autumn of 1916 and was opened to its members in the spring of 1917. It was considered a high class golf and country club.

A group of business and club men purchased 47 acres of beautifully rolling land with a complete set of buildings at what was called Manitou Forest, in the Lake Minnetonka area. Sufficient adjoining land was purchased next to lay out a full eighteen hole course. The location was strategic, being three blocks from the streetcar line and at the intersection of roads leading to the Upper Lake and the Lower Lake.

The original nine was designed by Scottish-born journeyman Tom Bendelow who designed over 400 courses between 1905 and 1929. His work survives to this day from coast to coast with the majority of his courses being located in the Midwest. His best known course design is Medinah in Chicago, home to the 1999 PGA Championship. Construction was supervised by Robert Taylor of Minnikahda.

The land was undulating, permitting links of diversified nature. Good weather helped along the work on the course which was finished the day before Thanksgiving. Teeing grounds were large, to preserve the sod under hard usage, and putting greens were 80 feet in diameter. Fairways were wide and generally run north and south to void the morning and evening sun. A good share of the land was in natural blue grass but it was plowed and hand raked wherever required to make the course one of the best in the Northwest.

The grounds were laid out by a landscape artist. The club house was unique in its architecture, with wide porches, large dining, living and rest rooms, breakfast room and several fireplaces. The interior is richly finished and panelled throughout with quarter-sawn oak. The kitchen, with large ice box and three built-in refrigerators, butler’s pantry and every convenience, insured satisfactory dining service. Lockers and shower baths completed the club house accommodations.

The course was sold after World War II to an investor who ran it strictly as a 9 hole public golf course. The club changed hands again in 1954, and the restoration process began to reclaim the nine holes left to the wild and bring Minnetonka Country Club back to its full-size stature.

The project was completed in 1959 and the decision was made to return the club to private country club status in 1960.

The original clubhouse nicknamed the Governor’s mansion had been constructed in 1908. It housed the popular Riviera supper club during the 1950s and unfortunately was lost to a fire in 1958. The clubhouse in use at the time was remodeled in 1959. The club lost this clubhouse to fire on Thanksgiving of 1962.
The current clubhouse as of 2014 was constructed (as fire proof as possible) in 1963. A Gazebo room was added on in 1967 and the Ivory room was added on in 1970. The club offices were expanded in 1996, a large deck added in 1998, and the Ballroom was expanded in 1999.

15 golf courses have closed in the area in the last nine years. The Minnetonka Country Club was closed in 2014. A final decision on the long-term plans for the club have not been announced. The rolling hills of what was once the beautiful Manitou Forest will undoubtedly change forever.

Club officers in 1917 were: Edgar L. Mattson, President; George P. Dickinson, Treasurer; B. W. Smith, Vice-President and Richard C. Thompson, Secretary.

Mt. Baldy – Today, The Highover development is located where Mt. Baldy once existed. Directions – If you drive into Highover off of County Road 41 south of Excelsior, then turn right onto Highover and Drive up the hill then take the first left. Then turn right on Highover Lane. Drive to top of the hill as far as the road will take you. You are now due east of the original Ross home located at 6934 Highover Drive. You are very close to the top of Baldy at this point. There were no homes here but the Ross’ at that time.

During the winter in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, people in the area would drive or walk to the top of what became Mt. Blady and ski or slide down the hill. It was one of the steepest slopes in the area and it faced north east, somewhat away from direct sunlight. Roger and Gary Reed came to Baldy with their hand-me-down skis with rubber and leather bindings in about 1942. They lived only a half mile from Baldy.

In 1957, Gary got the idea to build a rope tow on Mt. Baldy. Gary found a 1946 Chevy he purchased from Jim Zakariasen. Miscellaneous parts from Carmichels Salvage Yard and 300 feet of three quarter inch hemp rope from Sears Roebuck. Gary had an idea how all this would work and he knew how to weld which helped the two create the pulley system that the rope would not only travel on but a system that would power the rope to pull them up the hill.

Gary and Al Tollefson secured the old Chevy at the top of the hill. They attached automobile wheel rims to three poles they placed in a row. One near the bottom, one in the middle of the hill and another near the top. The first rim (pulley) at the bottom of the hill was anchored to a heavy post allowing the rope to come down and round the pulley and head back up the hill to go around a deflated tire mounted on the car which squeezed the rope and kept the rope moving.

“We started the car, placed it in reverse and locked the throttle at the right speed. We then skied down the hill and grabbed the rope and up we went. Mt. Baldy now had a rope tow. Now all we needed was snow. We put up a tent at the top of the hill and kept a fire burning near it for warmth.”

Gary and Roger Reed, Alan Tollefson, John Darke, Cliff and Jim Olds, Mike Fowler, Jim and Doug Lange, Jim Logan, Bill Osborne and his dad, Bill Patterson, Dick McKesson, Bob Keller, Mike Helin and many others, all skied at Baldy.

There weren’t many ski areas in those days. In Bloomington there was Mount Normandale which today (2015) is called Hyland Hills. Moon Valley was in Shakopee along Highway 212, which is now County Road 61. It was located just north of the highway on the bluffs of the Minnesota River Valley. Moon Valley Ski Area closed in the 1960s and became a shooting range years later. Further south on what is presently 35W was Buck Hill that began in the 1930s.

The first surface lift of any kind was developed in 1908 in Germany. In 1933 a rope tow was built in Montreal and in 1934 one was built in Vermont. Finally a rope tow was built in the early 1930s at what became Buck Hill but because of poor snow, the area never opened and was abandoned for years until the 1950s. But it was only open for a few weekends now and then because of poor snow. The 1960s brought snow making equipment which changed everything.

These areas were all serviced by rope tows only. Later, Poma lifts (or Platter lifts) became popular and then finally chair lifts arrived at these smaller areas during the late 1960s. The first three chair lifts in this country were built for Sun Valley, Idaho in 1936 and 1937.
Mason Motors was right across the street and that was perfect for my dad as he loved cars. In 1953 he bought a prize yellow Plymouth convertible from Ray.

We were only two blocks from the lake so my folks bought a boat and Bunny and I learned to fish and water ski. For our family, that is what Excelsior was all about. The fun activities, the close proximity of everything and the friends and family that were always near.

My parents finally sold the property in 1959 to Minnetonka State Bank.

Nelson’s Cabins (1948): In 1948, My parents, Vernon (1920 – 1964) and Eleanor (1922 – 2002) Nelson bought the Excelsior Tourist Cabins. These cabins were next to the Bird House and located where Minnetonka State Bank was and where Wells Fargo is today (2015) on Water Street.

There were 18 cabins that they rented either long-term or seasonal. Many of the actors from the Old Log Theater stayed there when they were in a play which could last for three months or up to a year.

My sister Bunny (1942 – 1984) was six and I was eight and for all of us, being right in town and near the lake was very special. We also had a wonderful skating rink and hockey rink behind us on the school property. Weekends, kids would come from all over to play.

The cabins were perfect for many reasons. The times then were very laid back and gatherings like you see in the above photo were commonplace. My grandparents came from Grand Forks, North Dakota and stayed in the cabins for two years until they found a house to buy. We had good friends, Mary Jo and Allen “Shorty” Clapp who eloped and came back after they married and stayed for a while until they found a house.

Phillips Motor Company:
food prep that needed to be done. That small space under the drive-in was responsible for the award winning buns, pies, shortcakes, etc. that many remember.

If you wanted that unique taste of a homemade bun for your hamburger or the best strawberry shortcake in the world in late summer, you would drive, walk, bike or ride your horse to Reed’s Drive-In.

**Seven-Hi Drive-in Theater:** The theater was located on the South East corner of the intersection of Highway 7 and Highway 101. The 7-Hi Drive-In opened in 1953. Shows would start right around dusk and there was generally only one show per night. Car capacity was 350 cars and the drive-in was open into the late-1970s. The site is now Northern Tool & Equipment and Burger King. They served snacks and pop but it was common practice to bring your own goodies as well as a few kids always hopped in the trunk and sneaked in to see the show. It was always exciting to spend a late summer night at the drive-in as they obviously couldn’t open until after dark. In 1953 Murf built the Smack Drive-In at Vine Hill on the South side of Highway Seven. He added some beautiful signage, (an eye and lips) added on to the building so it could be a truck stop and a place for school students to gather.

Murf and Bob Naegele also owned 26 acres on what’s known as the Brom’s Market property along Highway 7 near Vine Hill where they have plans for a million dollar shopping center."

**Skipper Cafe:**

Rachel’s Boat Works: Ivy and Walter “Wally” Rachel owned and operated one of the only boat and gas docks on the lake during the 1950s. They purchased the marina from Howard Johnston who operated it up until the early 1940s. They rented boats and motors, space on the dock for your boat and sold cane poles, fishing equipment, minnows, worms, snacks and beverages. It is Howrd’s Point Marina in 2015.

Red Owl Grocery Store: The Red Owl moved in during the 1930s. The store was on the corner where V.G. Bacon Drug was for many years later on. The building’s original exterior had been covered up at times over the years as owners and occupants changed. Years later the Red Owl moved to the south end of town and remained there until the 1980s. Today (2015) the original exterior of the of the building has once again been exposed since Victor’s restaurant moved in. Victor’s is named for Victor G. Bacon who owned the drug store. You can see the building and the name Red Owl on the left.

Reed’s Drive-in: In 1939 Guy and Jennie Reed and their two sons, moved to Excelsior and purchased land on the west side of Chaska Road, now County Road 41. The property had over 300 apple trees. In the late 1940s, a small building was moved up to #41 where apples, fresh cider, and some produce were sold. Mom would provide homemade donuts to go with a glass of cider.

With the help of Palm Brothers Restaurant Supply, “Reed’s Drive-In” was officially opened in 1948. As the drive-in business was growing and the building needed to be enlarged, a lower level was added for baking and other

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*From “Howard's Point,” written by Mark Welty.*
Southshore Senior Center: Several years numerous groups attempted to secure senior housing for the elderly in the South Lake Minnetonka area. In 1975 Pastor Hugh Gilmore, of Mount Calvary Lutheran Church, gathered together some of the people who had worked on the project in the past. He also contacted the pastors of the local churches to secure their input and support.

A citizens committee was established to begin some planning. Pastor Gilmore chaired the group consisting of members from Rotary, Medical, Chamber of Commerce, Financial, JCs, and Senior Citizens groups.

1976 the group applied and received a grant of $25,000 from the Metropolitan Housing Commission to do research. An extensive survey was developed and distributed to the wider community, seeking input as to the need for elderly housing. It was determined a great need existed.

There were many up and down struggles, but in 1980 things started to solidify. Four cities, Excelsior, Deephaven, Greenwood and Tonka Bay, came together to support the project committing their Community Development Block Grant money. Pastor Gilmore also brought together Lutheran Social Service and the Archdiocese of Minneapolis/St. Paul.

Application was made to HUD for financing. September 1981 HUD announced an award to South Shore Communities of a $3,077,000 long-term loan for construction of a 67 unit of Elderly Housing.

The City of Excelsior granted exclusive right to negotiate a parcel of land. The old Ball Field, consisting of 2.2 acres, was purchased from Fred Pearce for $244,745. Ground breaking took place on October 13, 1982 with a community “open house” involving all four mayors and the Board of South Shore Communities. September 11, 1983 the new facility was completed with 66 one bedroom units and a managers unit. It was named “South Shore Park” and managed by Westminster Corporation.

— contributed by Hugh Gilmore

Smack Drive-in: In 1953 Murf built the Smack Drive-In at Vine Hill on the South side of Highway Seven. He added some beautiful signage (an eye and lips), added on to the building so it could be a truck stop and a place for school students to gather.

Smack was, in fact, more of a truck stop and it had great food. In 2015, if you turn off Highway 7 to go east, you’d be slightly north of the Smack parking lot. It may have been the first restaurant with a “Juicy Lucy” hamburger. It was sold later and became Gordy’s."

Murf and Bob Naegele also owned 26 acres to the south known as the Brom’s Market property along Highway 7. They have plans for a million dollar shopping center. But that never happened though a strip mall came years later after Brom’s Market closed.

Snuffy’s Drive-in: The original Snuffy’s Drive-In was one of the most popular drive in restaurants in the area. Ernie Pivic owned and managed Snuffy’s. It opened in the late 1940s.

Ernie, who was a former Navy Seaman, named the drive-in Snuffy’s after a pet skunk. He ran a tight ship.

Ernie was meticulous about cleanliness and the quality of the food and one thing Ernie didn’t tolerate was loitering customers. However, if one wanted to stick around, Ernie had a great Lillie-Putt course just to the north of the drive-in. The shopping strips on either side of 101 didn’t exist at this time. Those areas were swamps.

The car hops did not wear roller skates. That was likely Porkys on Central Avenue in Minneapolis. Snuffy’s was located on the Southwest corner of Highway 101 and Highway 7. Snuffy’s was probably the most popular of all the Drive-ins for the younger set. There were four all together. Snuffy’s, Round Up, Smack and Reed’s Drive-in which was more of a family drive-in.

The Amazing History of Our Community 157
Stans Color Center  Stans, Paul

Studers City Dump: The property was located on County Road 19, (Oak Street) or what once was Highway 7, near the junction of Bechrle Avenue where in 2014 you found the Collision Center, the Excelsior Animal Hospital and designated park and community garden called “Studer Park.”

Jerome and Kathrine Studer were the owners and “proprietors.” They not only took your “junk,” they also set aside some real gems and semi-valuable items that they would then re-sell. This was classic recycling back in the 1950s and 1960s.

Jerome Studer eventually donated the land to the City with the stipulation that they make much of it into a park for the community. Some of the land had been sold for business including the Collision & Color and the Excelsior Animal Hospital.

Studer Pond: The lake south of the City Community Garden is Studer Pond. This pond was originally dredged by Anson Mase. His daughter Martha drove the barge, that they filled up with mud, to the west side of the lake to have it onloaded. Roger Olds always told her she should try to get on the Television program “What’s My Line.”

The Delos: The Delos was a nice little restaurant along the strip in Spring Park where the Del Otero Hotel was at one time. The restaurant looked out over Spring Park Bay and serviced traffic by automobile and boat. Among other delights, it served wonderful fried chicken, french fries and old fashioned chocolate malts — to go. Cruising the lake in the late afternoon enjoying dinner from the Delos was a memorable treat.

They may have been one of the first grocery stores to sell the slices of packaged Apple, Cherry and Blueberry Pie. Un-refrigerated Pillsbury, General Mills or Hubig’s brands. They came in a paper wrapper.

The Old Log Theater: The Old Log Theater is the oldest professional theater in the state of Minnesota. It is located just off of Minnetonka Boulevard near St. Alban’s Bay at 5185 Meadville Street in Excelsior.

The Old Log Theater first opened in 1940 in a building originally used as a horse barn with a dirt floor. Though the theater began providing more serious plays, throughout most of its existence it has focused mostly on screwball comedy, contemporary plays and British farces. In its early years it operated as a summer stock company. During its years of operation in its original Greenwood, Minnesota location the theater was able to seat 270 people and during its summer season would present a show per week.

During the 1950s the theater’s popularity grew and late in that decade it found a need for larger quarters. Herb Bloomberg, who was a builder in Chanhassen, Minnesota, was hired to design and build the new theater on the 10 acres near Lake Minnetonka in 1960. The Stolzs and Bloombergs traveled all over the state to get ideas for the new Old Log. The new building could seat 655 and was designed to look like a barn with a large lobby featuring a fireplace and a high ceiling. Herb thought he might like to own a theater and asked Don to partner with him. Don declined as he felt he had enough to do with just the Old Log. With Don’s help, Herb went on to build and operate the Chanhassen Dinner Theatres.

Charlie Boone and Roger Erickson hosted the “Good Morning” show on WCCO radio and were often invited to join the others on stage to perform in numerous plays over the years. During the Christmas Holiday they would read the original version of “A Christmas Carol.” The wonderful story the way Charles Dickens wrote it. Don Stolz would narrate it.

Don Stolz, the prior owner of 73 years, joined the theater a year after its inception.

The Amazing History of Our Community
When he joined the Old Log Theater he was 23 and was a graduate student in theater at Northwestern University. The first show Stolz directed that year was Sidney Howard’s, Ned McCobb’s Daughter. Stolz was instrumental in the growth of television in the Twin Cities and became a radio veteran in the area. In 2006, several of Stolz’ sons took over theater operations. During that time, Don still remained active in the productions, including a short speech before and after each night’s performance.

**Theater alumni** include actor Nick Nolte who spent three years with the theater. Nick lived in Excelsior much of the time in a cabin on first street. He also played softball for a city team. Loni Anderson grew up in Roseville and met her first husband while competing in a Miss Minnesota contest. She had a daughter Deidra in her first marriage and living near by, she brought her daughter to nursery school at the United Methodist church. Also, long-time Twin Cities news anchor and actor, Dave Moore, blessed the stage at the theater in numerous production over the years.

An estimated 6 million people have attended productions at the Old Log Theater over the years from 1940 until 2013. The Old Log Theater exists solely on income generated by ticket and concession sales, and by its attached restaurant.

In the early 1940s, actors like Robert Aden (left) got their start and women like Deborah Tighe helped build the theater. Earlier in Deborah’s career, as Deborah Douglas a recent graduate of Vassar, she went to New York to work for a start up magazine where she was the first assistant to the editor. After a number of years there, she came home to get married. That start up magazine goes by the name of “Time” today, 2015.

**Current owners and operators Greg and Marissa Frankenfield** purchased the Old Log Theater May 2013. Both Greg and his wife are theater enthusiasts and producers who have been on the boards of several local theatre organizations.

The current Old Log Theater has been reconfigured to seat 560; recent remodeling has included a deeper stage and new sound and lighting systems. The attached restaurant, The Old Log dining room, currently seats 300 diners and provides an important source of revenue.

**The Dock Theater:** Built near the shores of Lake Minnetonka, in downtown Excelsior, the Tonka Theatre opened in 1941, a small but elegant Streamline-style whose auditorium was decorated with murals of steamboats on the nearby lake.

Just three years later, however, the Tonka Theatre was gutted by a fire. It took an appeal to the War Production Board, as this occurred during WW II, and there were strict regulations on building materials. As it was the town’s sole movie house, the owners of the Tonka Theatre were allowed to rebuild, and during the summer of 1945, it was reopened.

During that time, the theater would show black and white filming of current events before each movie as there were no televisions at the time to catch up on the news.

In the 1970s, Henry Arendt and his wife, twinned the theater and at the same time, received a new name, the Dock 1 & 2, with the main floor being Dock 1 and the former balcony, Dock 2. The theatre was triplexed during the 1980s.

The theater remains a popular destination, screening a mix of first-run, art and foreign features.

**The Eureka Store:** During the 1930s, 40s and 50s, the Schimmelfennig family owned a store at Eureka. The store had about 4 isles of shelves containing packaged goods – mostly food. They had one gas pump. They serviced the neighborhoods in and around Minnewashta and Howard’s Point and along Highway Seven (now Smithtown Road), Woodside Road, Birch Bluff and Edgewood Roads.

They may have been one of the first grocery stores to sell the slices of packaged Apple,
that time. In 1890, the Fire Barn was built.

In 1893, a committee from the newly organized Fire Company requested that the council secure fire apparatus. They would move to purchase five ladders, fire hooks and fire axes and rope. The new fire company, The Excelsior Volunteer Fire Company was named. All businessmen were expected to become honorary members and anyone 18 years of age or older could join by paying $1.00 and signing the bylaws.

In 1899, the Excelsior Village moved to donate $25 towards the purchase of a bell that earlier had been the bell on the steam ship Belle of Minnetonka.

At right is one of the early fire trucks. The first truck was employed in 1898.

From this point on, members in this community joined in and became part of a very close knit community. There were more and larger fires as the city grew, but the fire department was better equipped every year to do a better job at minimizing the damage.

Moving forward to 1925, Ellis Adrian Peck (1904 – 1987) was involved in the Fire Department until 1964 and served as the Chief for 23 of those years.

Ellis “Eli” Peck noted some of the changes within the Fire Department during his time in the department.

We changed from the chemical to the squad company. We began using a much more practical 1 1/2˝ hose than a 2 1/2 ˝ hose. It took most of the water we got from trucks just to charge the larger hose. We installed a second siren. We changed from soda and acid extinguishers to foam. We advanced from prone pressure to mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. We saw a big improvement in gas masks.

And there were people he felt should receive special recognition. Mark Knowlton who tried in vain to save the Johnson kids. Cliff Ballard, Orrin Morse, Henry Beinert, Charles Smith, four generations of Sweeneys, Fred Johnson, the Morse brothers, Northern States Power for releasing firemen with pay, our doctors, businessmen and our wives.
Excelsior Rotary Club (1949 – To Present 2015)

Rotary International traces its beginnings to a meeting in Chicago, Illinois, in the office of Gus Loehr, a mining engineer, on February 22, 1905. The meeting was called by Paul P. Harris, an attorney. Out of this meeting came the foundation for the Chicago Rotary Club. Through the efforts of Harris, who is credited with founding Rotary, new Rotary Clubs were chartered.

Rotary came to Minnesota when a group organized Rotary Club Number 9 in Minneapolis. Rotary became an international organization in 1912 when a club was chartered in Winnipeg, Canada. By 1949 there were over 7,000 Rotary clubs.

The Excelsior Rotary Club grew out of an organizational meeting held on Monday, April 19, 1949. The meeting was held in the office of Bill Nilsen, the Excelsior Superintendent of Schools. Present was Bill Naasinger, the president of Minneapolis Number 9, the sponsoring club. He was accompanied by Bill McPhail, the incoming president of Minneapolis Number 9 and Jerry Horn of Minneapolis Number 9 who was asked to help establish the new Excelsior Rotary Club. At the second meeting on April 25, 1949, eleven men from the Excelsior area signed the charter. Additionally, seven more signed this charter before it was formally submitted.


Of the early club presidents; two owned auto dealerships. Ray Mason and Harvey Phillips; two were employed by NSP, Ray Johnson and Harry Hanson and two were educators, Harold Larson and Bill Nilsen. Other presidents over the years came from retailing, publishing, collection agencies, accounting, banking, real estate, public relations, funeral home, insurance, law, printing, dentistry and many other business classifications.

Others who were members in the early years and played a prominent role in the activities of Excelsior include, Joe Colihan of the Excelsior Amusement Park, Vic Bacon of Bacon Drug, Bud Long of Long Accountants, Anson Mase of Lake Minnetonka Dredging, and Vernon West of West & Headla Plumbing.

In the early years, our club met at the Sampson House. It was on October 11, 1949 that the first honorary membership was awarded. This award was presented to Willard Dillman, Excelsior newspaper publisher and promoter of pageants. Ray Johnson presented Dillman with the award. At the end of the meeting, Dillman started to rise to be acknowledged, but fell dead. Dillman was married at the time to Daisy Dillman, Ron Hughes’ grandmother.

After the Sampson House closed and was demolished in 1958, the club met at Bill’s Cafe on Water St. This cafe closed in about 1970, and our club then met at the Minnetonka Country Club. When the Minnetonka Country Club would close each year during the month of January, our club would meet at the Copper Stein or at the Arboretum. In 1981, the meeting location was moved to the Old Log Theater. As of 2015, the Excelsior Rotary Club meets at BayView Event Center.

The Lake Minnetonka-Excelsior Rotary Club, a newer morning club, formed because their were numerous business men and women who found it difficult or impractical to come to Rotary meetings at noon. This club meets mornings at Maynard’s as of 12015.

Wendts Cleaners: Howard Wendt start his dry cleaning business in about 1940. It was located at (about) 234 Water Street where Hennessy Travel was for many years. Howard’s brother Jerome opened up Hazel’s Laundry where the Pure Oils station had been and where Patisserie is in 2015. The Pure Oil roof is still visible. Jerome named it after his wife Hazel and would pick up and deliver families dry cleaning.
War, beginning as a private in the Union Army and ending as a brevet major. After the war, he settled in Canton, Ohio, where he practiced law and married Ida Saxton. In 1876, he was elected to Congress, where he became the Republican Party’s expert on the protective tariff, which he promised would bring prosperity.

Theodore T. R. Roosevelt, Jr. (1858 – 1919) Roosevelt was an American politician, author, naturalist, soldier, explorer, and historian who served as the 26th President of the United States. He was a leader of the Republican Party (GOP) and founder of the Progressive Party insurgency of 1912. He was in office from September 14, 1901 to March 4, 1909. He had been McKinley’s Vice President. He was sworn in the day McKinley was assassinated. Teddy was 42 years old.

He was known for his exuberant personality, range of interests and achievements, and his leadership of the Progressive Movement, as well as his “cowboy” persona and robust masculinity. Born into a wealthy family in New York City, Roosevelt was a sickly child who suffered from asthma. To overcome his physical weakness, he embraced a strenuous life. He was home-schooled and became an eager student of nature. He attended Harvard College, where he studied biology, boxed, and developed an interest in naval affairs.

When Roosevelt’s first wife, Alice, died two days after giving birth in February 1884 and his mother died the same day in the same house, he was heartbroken and in despair. He temporarily left politics and became a cattle rancher in the Dakotas.

President William McKinley (1843 – 1901) William McKinley was the 25th President of the United States, serving from March 4, 1897, until his assassination on September 14, 1901, six months into his second term. McKinley led the nation to victory in the Spanish–American War, raised protective tariffs to promote American industry, and maintained the nation on the gold standard in a rejection of inflationary proposals.

McKinley was the last president to have served in the American Civil War, beginning as a private in the Union Army and ending as a brevet major. After the war, he settled in Canton, Ohio, where he practiced law and married Ida Saxton. In 1876, he was elected to Congress, where he became the Republican Party’s expert on the protective tariff, which he promised would bring prosperity.

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The RMS Titanic (1912) RMS stands for – Royal Mail Ship. RMS Titanic was a British passenger liner that sank in the North Atlantic Ocean in the early morning of April 15, 1912 after colliding with an iceberg during her maiden voyage from Southampton, UK to New York City. The sinking of the Titanic caused the deaths of more than 1,500 people in one of the deadliest peacetime maritime disasters in modern history. The RMS Titanic, the largest ship afloat at the time it entered service, was the second of three Olympic class ocean liners operated by the White Star Line, and was built by the Harland and Wolff shipyard in Belfast. Thomas Andrews as her architect. Andrews was among those lost in the sinking. On her maiden voyage, she carried 2,224 passengers and crew. Walter Donald Douglas from Deephaven was one of the casualties.

Charles A. Lindburgh (1902 – 1974) Charles Lindburgh was nicknamed Slim, Lucky Lindy and The Lone Eagle. He was an American aviator, author, inventor, explorer, and social activist.

As a 25-year-old U.S. Air Mail pilot, Lindbergh emerged suddenly from virtual obscurity to instantaneous world fame as the result of his Orteig Prize-winning solo nonstop flight on May 20–21, 1927, made from the Roosevelt Field in Garden City on New York’s Long Island to Le Bourget Field in Paris, France, a distance of nearly 3,600 statute miles in the single-seat, single-engine purpose-built Ryan monoplane, Spirit of St. Louis.

1929 – The Great Depression. The Great Depression was a severe worldwide economic depression in the decade preceding World War II. The timing of the Great Depression varied across nations, but in most countries it started in 1930 and lasted until the late 1930s or middle 1940s. It was the longest, deepest, and most widespread depression of the 20th century.

Worldwide GDP fell by 15%, 1929-32. In the 21st century, the Great Depression is commonly used as an example of how far the world’s economy can decline. The depression originated in the United States, after the fall in stock prices that began around September 4, 1929, and became worldwide news with the stock market crash of October 29, 1929 (known as Black Tuesday).

World War II (1939 – 1945) World War II also known as the Second World War.

It was the most widespread war in history, and directly involved more than 100 million people from over 30 countries. In a state of “total war,” the major participants threw their entire economic, industrial and scientific capabilities behind the war effort, erasing the distinction between civilian and military resources. Marked by mass deaths of civilians, including the Holocaust (during which approximately 11 million people were killed) and the strategic bombing of industrial and population centers (during which approximately one million people were killed, including the use of two nuclear weapons in combat), it resulted in an estimated 50 million to 85 million fatalities. These made World War II the deadliest conflict in human history.

Japan. The Empire of Japan aimed to dominate Asia and the Pacific and was already at war with the Republic of China in 1937, but the world war is generally said to have begun on September 1, 1939 with the invasion of Poland by Germany and subsequent declarations of war on Germany by France and the United Kingdom. From late 1939 to early 1941, in a series of campaigns and treaties, Germany conquered or controlled much of continental Europe, and formed the Axis alliance with Italy and Japan. Following the Molotov – Ribbentrop Pact, Germany and the Soviet Union partitioned and annexed territories of their European neighbors, including Poland, Finland and the Baltic states. The United Kingdom and the British Commonwealth were the only Allied forces continuing the fight against the Axis, with campaigns in North Africa and the Horn of Africa as well as the long-running Battle of the Atlantic. On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked the United States and European territories in the Pacific Ocean, and quickly conquered much of the Western Pacific. D-Day was the invasion of Normandy in France June 6, 1944 and the war ended on August 14, 1945. The Armistice is celebrated every year on the Anniversary date of November 11.
## Annual Community Events and Traditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Apple Days</th>
<th>Art On The Lake</th>
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Fireman’s Dance
(Annual Community Events and Traditions continued)

Roaring 20s

Water Ski Shows
Personal Reflections On The Times

Early 1900 – 1940s

This time in our communities, was the beginning of the modern era. The automobile, the airplane, movies at the local theater where they would show the most recent news of the day before every film began. It was also the birth of new industries due to the various war efforts the United States was involved in.

This was also the time of the Great Depression, prohibition and eventually television.

Many people began to move to the area even though they worked in Minneapolis or St. Paul. The Lake was a wonderful place to live and as the highways improved as well as automobiles and automobile tires, it made commuting much more reasonable.

Excelsior was a dry town during the 30s, 40s & 50s – Chanhassen wasn’t: During this period, Chanhassen had the only bars and liquor stores around. A lot of Excelsior residents would head for Chanhassen (Chan) to Pauly’s or Joe’s and enjoy a few drinks. On occasion, and most often in the winter, they would have a little too much to drink and end up in the ditch near William Kerber’s farm. The men would walk to the house and ask Dan to get his tractor and pull them out which he usually did. Before they went on their way, they usually asked Dan not to say anything about it which Dan honored.

– memories from Bill Kerber

The Show-Off Club: Emceed by Russ Gray and Chuck Mathes. The year is 1949 and the place is Harry’s Cafe in Minneapolis on 11th St. and Nicollet Avenue. One night each week WTCN sponsored a program that invited anyone to come to Harry’s and perform. Russ Gray of Excelsior was part of a group of men that participated.

Murray Hill & Excelsior around 1939.

Joyce Howard McFarland offers random remembrances of the years beyond September, 1939, when our family moved to a ‘country farm house’ atop of Murray Hill Road.

My family was Marjorie Johnston and C. Edward Howard. Young Edward was one years old and Joyce was five. Our Mom and Dad packed us up in the “old Ford” and drove out from Girard Avenue, along two lane Highway Seven, to old Chaska road and up a dirt hill to what has now become 6341 Murray Hill Road. At the time there were no route numbers but soon to modernize mail delivery we became Rural Route Five. I believe that happened about the same time as we received our private telephone line - no more operators for 661W. My Dad drove into Minneapolis everyday to work at Piper Jaffrey and my Mom became a stay at home mother. She was active in PTA, gardening the veggies and flowers and school lunch programs. Red Cross driving during WWII, canning, etc.

I have enclosed a picture of our first grade class which I treasure today as all our children have gone through the Excelsior school system (now of course, Minnetonka). Entering first grade was a BIG deal for me as I had to walk from our house down Chaska Road (differently configured in those days) into Excelsior to attend school - even in the winter (during the War, gas rationing only paid for Dad’s drive to downtown Minneapolis) - Back to the picture, which somehow I had sense to label the names on the back. I had the sense to label the names on the back. Donald Huntington, Lloyd Zachariasen, Betty Leech, Lorna Koenan and Donna Aldritt were just a few. My “best friend” was Betty Leech who lived right down next door to her father’s hardware store (now knitting/yarn shop and Artworks) - Miss Umbahacher rented an apartment from the Leeches. As our first grade teacher, she was pretty stern and held high expectations for her class. I can still recall the smell of wet snow suits and mittens in the classroom closet! I also remember being sent to sit in a corner for talking to Betty during study time.

The Amazing History of Our Community
I have cherished memories of growing up in Excelsior. Our home was/is actually right over the line into Chanhassen/Carver county but we always have gravitated to Excelsior. Dick and I raised our family in the home at 6341 Murray Hill Rd - we had first lived in Hopkins until 1970 when we bought the home from my folks, soon after my father died and Mom built a home across the road from us. We were her primary care givers in her aging process. We have lived in my family homestead for 44 years - again!

I recall Blue Jays Roost- a teen club that my Dad helped found - downtown Excelsior during the war years (1940’s) - right on main street.

- Jean Laramie who joined our class later - her Dad had the Laramie Motors on the corner of Water Street - across from Weines Drug Store where the bus would pick me up if I was to meet my Dad downtown after school. An adventure!

- Remember the Excelo Bakery and their wonderful little blue bowls and chicken pot pies they would make for the Trinity Lawn Fete each summer? I also remember the treat of getting a “long-John” in the morning bakery line. “Take a number please.”

- The Post Office was across the street – I think. Remember the days of the Sampson House up on the ‘hill’ where we would be able to watch the July 4th fire works - across at the bridge behind the Amusement Park. My grandparents would live at the Sampson House for a few years after we had moved out to the “country.”

- Other memories of eating ‘chicken in a basket at some summer establishment down across from the Amusement part - with my Dad if my mom was out of town.

  I have lots of memories around Trinity Church - having gone there since we had moved out to the area. I got to sing in the choir which I loved. And I will always remember the Lawn Pete’s - such a tremendous amount of work by the parishioners -we ‘kids’ got to serve those pot pies and clear and set tables out of doors when the weather was lovely. I remember winning a $25.00 War Bond during the War Bond drives.

- Free movies at the theatre for children with candy at Christmas time; piano lessons on the top floor of the old fire barn with Ms. Seline. The Big Blizzard of 1940 which stranded many commuters along the route to home; we were snowed in for several days.

1942 article in the local Excelsior paper: (some information from the article has been deleted) Mrs. Lars Erickson is hauled off to the Hennepin County jail in her nightgown by special Deputy Hoag. The chief of police, John Kohnke, suspected Mrs. Larson of sabotaging his Tulip Bed with a salt solution and had gotten permission to hire deputy Hoag to watch her 24 hours a day. Kohnkes and Ericksons were neighbors.

When the deputy saw her throwing something out her kitchen door late at night he grabbed her, locked her in a garage until he could get a car to take her downtown. She claimed it was a pan of scraps for the animals. They saved the pan as evidence.

Mr. Erickson awoke the next morning to find his wife missing. He discovered where she was, paid bail and brought her home.

When the trial was held, it was necessary to declare a village holiday. There were so many people that wanted to be at the trial, the judge was forced to move to another court room.

Justice Bergin found Mrs. Erickson not guilty and that was the end of that.

--- reflections from Joyce Howard McFarland

PHOTO – submitted by Nina Stark

The Amazing History of Our Community
I grew up in Tonka Bay through the 1940’s and 1950’s and lived there until about 1968.

The Tonka Bay Resort, in the late 1940’s was owned by Tom and Mary Thompson. They owned and operated about five cabins and ten boats.

One of my jobs was to clean the boats and make them ready for the next renter. I was also expected to catch frogs and dig worms which I then sold to the resort and to Leonard Dennis who had a boat livery. We got about 25 cents a dozen for frogs and 10 or 15 cents a dozen for worms.

On the weekends, the resort would really be rockn’. There was always a lot of partying going on and often an occasional fight in the parking lot. Good or bad, there was never a dull moment back then.

On the south side of the resort there was a stair case up to a small activity room. People such as Anson Mase, Johnie Anderson, Roy Beehrle and others would gather there from time to time for a poker party. I was the gopher for those guys. Getting them sandwiches and ice to mix their cocktails. They would gamble usually into the wee hours of the morning.

Almost every Sunday afternoon, there often was the same character there who owned a 14 foot boat with a ten horsepower motor. He’d get roaring drunk, hop in the boat and head out in front of the resort and drive in circles, back up and hit waves in any and every direction, doing everything in his power to tip the boat over or sink it. He never did however, but it was great entertainment for the resort guest.

In those days, the biggest outboard motor around was a 22 ½ horsepower Johnson, direct drive. Periodically, the operator of the boat would forget that it was a direct drive, stand up to start the motor and it would throw him right out of the boat.

Vern West lived in Tonka Bay and had a number of kids. The West boys and winter were always exciting. The boys would usually head out onto the lake too early in their vehicles and more often than not, they’d go through the ice. Unfortunately, Vern’s daughter Fuzzy drowned on one of those occasions.

As soon as the ice got to about 20 to 25 inches thick, Vern would bring out his famous ice saw. Vern was the supplier of ice to the cabins around Tonka Bay, most of which didn’t have electric refrigerators. All they had were Ice Boxes. I worked with Vern on those ice fields for many years putting up ice in old barns and covering it with saw dust.

Vern attached and old model A engine onto old plow handles and then attached a 36 inch saw blade. He would just tip the contraption up so the blade started cutting through the ice and then travel straight ahead for about 100 yards, then turn around and go back the other way.

Then he’d start making cross cuts on those two line to end up with ice blocks 20 inches wide by 20 inches thick. We would get some ice tongs and grab ahold of a block of ice, bounce it a little and then, just at the right time, bounce it up out of the water to then slide it up onto the truck. Many a time I fell into that frigid water, ran home to change clothes, only to come back out to finish the job.

All summer long, Vern would deliver ice to all the summer cottages with his dog Stacy sitting on top of the roof. Vern’s reputation was very colorful and one thing he was know for was that dog always on the roof.

Vern’s brother-in-law was Leonard Dennis, the one who ran the boat livery just north of where Tonka Bay Boat Works is today (2015). He sold a lot of frogs and worms and when the bass were biting, he’d take us kids out into the country somewhere and drop us off and just leave us there to find the frogs and worms. He’d come back later in the day of course, when he figured we were done. There were no cell phones in those days.

Leonard also had a trapping permit so I worked for him all winter long as well, trapping mink, raccoons and muskrats. We usually averaged about 400 muskrats on a poor year to 800 muskrats on a good year.

A little know fact was that Ginseng grew on Big Island back then. Leonard hired us to help harvest the Ginseng. He would then sell it, most likely to Asian countries, as at that time it wasn’t very popular in the United States.
Roy Anderson had a store right next to the Tonka Bay Boat Works where all we kids would hang out. In those days you could by a quart bottle of Black Jack Sour for a nickle. He also had all kinds of penny candy. Roy provided charge accounts for all his customers. My guess is that in those days he may not have collected on everything he wrote up on the carbon copy slips he had. He was the kind of guy who tried to help people out as much as possible as there were many in those days who had trouble paying for groceries.

The highlight of every summer for everyone in Tonka Bay was the fourth of July. Everyone would head over to Sunrise Point to Ginny Lugowski’s to spend the evening fooling around and then watch the fireworks. What a great time in my life and what great people.

Inspired to make a difference

**Naegele, Robert O. Jr “Bob” (1939 – )** I grew up in Edgewood a half a mile East of Howard’s Point. My family lived on Lake Minnetonka and our yard provided ample opportunity to play touch football and tennis while there were always pick up hockey games on weekends somewhere. Consequently it is no surprise that I continued to enjoy in all three sports in High School.

I graduated from Minnetonka High School in 1957 as did my childhood sweetheart, Ellis Fitzimons. We married in 1961.

We moved around a bit as I pursued a business career that took us to Madison Wisconsin, Detroit, Denver and back to Minnesota in 1966. We moved back to Edgewood when we returned.

We raised four children and I worked in the family Outdoor Advertising business for 20 years. My interest in Hockey inspired two opportunities outside of the family business. “For a number of years you would see Bob and a few others inline skating regularly along the roads from Excelsior to Edgewood.” said a friend. That interest gave way to the founding of Rollerblade, Inc. in 1985. In addition, I helped return the NHL to Minnesota in 1997. The team became the Minnesota Wild and commenced play in 2000.

Presently we live in Naples, Florida for most of the year but still migrate back to Excelsior at special times. We have eight grandchildren.

**Bennett, Elizabeth Moran “Beth” (1930 – )** I grew up in the Kenwood area of Minneapolis. My father was Clement John Moran and my mother was Monica Feeney Moran. I’ve had many Feeney relatives around Lake Minnetonka. I married Russell M. Bennett, II in 1951. We ended up living in Deephaven and Excelsior before Russell died in 2010. We’ve loved the whole lake area and found special qualities in both cities.

Deephaven especially, offers a quality of life unlike anywhere else. We loved sailing and there we have the sparkling water, the Islands and the beautiful rolling woods and amongst all that are the very special people who made it both home and exciting.

To stroll through our neighborhood and see wildlife, hear the birds and geese and listen to the Cottonwoods rustling in the breeze then finally to end up by the sparkling water of Carson’s Bay and bump into friends along the way was and is an experience like no other. I’m blessed to have been there and been able to share it with so many.

Russell and I raised two lovely daughters and all of us were actively involved in many community programs. We have been board members or trustees of various organizations. I’ve been involved with Abbott Northwestern Hospitals and St. Therese Homes for the Elderly among other things. Russell served as a Trustee for the Village of Deephaven, a term as Mayor and was an A-Scow Skipper, a Yingling Skipper and also served as a second generation Commodore at the Yacht Club in 1962. He also was involved with Lakewood Cemetery, Blake Schools and was President of Woodhill Country Club.

But even with all our involvements and activities including sailing across the Atlantic, we always had Deephaven to come home to. The peace we’ve have and the unbelievable feeling of belonging we found made our lives so much more special than they would have been anywhere else. It’s a place made for memories.
Recollections of growing up in Excelsior.

I was born August 8, 1929, in Minneapolis, MN to Russell Jean Gray, Sr. and Veronica “Babe” Gray. I have always been called Jean (not junior) as there was no question who Russ Gray was. There could not be two of him. He was unique. I was told we moved to what is now 5150 Meadville Street in Greenwood when I was about two years old. It was then an unnumbered house on a dirt street on Rural Route 6 of the Excelsior Post Office in Meadville Park, Excelsior Township, with telephone number 465. In her third year, my younger sister Carol died October 3, 1934; my brother John was born March 23, 1935.

John and I grew up in that old lake house on the hill looking northwest across Lake Minnetonka toward Big Island. The hill was higher than it is today. A zigzag path hacked into the steep hillside led down to the boat dock. There were always boats! Once we all rushed outside on the lawn in front of the house because someone thought they had caught sight of the legendary Minnetonka sea serpent away out in the lake near Gale Island. On one side the summertime neighbor was Fred Dassett, a butcher from Minneapolis. A very kind man never without his straw boater hat, his pet peeves were sparrows and squirrels which landed in his poplar trees leading out to Meadville Street. He kept a .22 rifle at the ready and blazed away at them with no visible effect. The Duddings were on the other side in the summer. Young Dick Dudding had a C-Class racing scow and I crewed for him.

It was the Depression. The old house was a poorly insulated summer cottage with a full width front porch that was glorious, if sweltering, those blazing hot 1930s summers and frigid in winter. There was just one bathroom. In the winter John and I slept on the unheated north side porch; the windows covered with Plexiglas wrap. One of my buddies, Farrell Morse who lived two doors away, also slept in an unheated bedroom – heat was expensive! Our house was heated by coal. Dooley Hoag used to carry baskets of coal on his back up two flights of cement steps and dump it down a chute into the basement. Dad got up before dawn to stoke the fire in the basement. Later he bought a hopper with an augur to feed coal into the furnace. I recall running from the porch into the kitchen to get dressed for school while standing on the heat register in the floor above the coal furnace. Those old frame houses were fire traps. Two such houses that were where the Old Log Theater parking lot now fronts on Meadville Street went up in flames in those years.

Milk in bottles was left on the doorstep. In winter it would freeze with the cream pushing up and dislodging the bottle cap. Mother would place it in the icebox cooled by a 50 pound block of ice in the upper chamber. When the ice was nearly melted mother would put a large “ICE” sign in the window. The driver of the passing Morse Brothers ice truck would be carrying 100 pound blocks. The ice was harvested from St. Alban’s Bay each winter and stored in sawdust in the barn where the marina is today. The driver would chip off a 50 pound chunk and carry it up two flights of stairs to the icebox. The ice might last for 3 or 4 days. In the winter most of Meadville Street’s residents returned to their homes in the city. Snowplows were rudimentary. Once we were snowed in for three days until the Town sent its “road patrol” street grader to break through the drifts and reopen the street.

The house was in sad shape. The basement floor was dirt. The foundation only extended down a couple of feet so the lower walls were also dirt. Mother washed clothes down there in an oval copper tub atop a gas stove, stirring them with a paddle and then hanging them from clotheslines to dry inside the unheated basement in winter or in the yard in summer. What a joyful day it was for her when dad brought home an electric washing machine with a wringer and a mangle for the sheets. Across the street next to what is now the Greenwood Park tennis courts my Uncle Leil and Aunt Criss (Clarissa) Gray had a stable for their two horses, Dawn and Miss Chief. They lived in what today is 5170 Meadville Street, two blocks south. Both loved to ride their horses on Meadville Street. I had a Shetland pony that did not like me at all. Near the barn my paternal great grandfather, German speaking Nicolas Heck, had a vegetable garden that he cared for in the summer. Unfortunately the barn and the feed barrels attracted rats and mice which entered our house via the dirt floor and walls to reside for the winter.

Dad was a founder in 1926 of the Gray Company, today’s Graco, Inc. He worked long, long hours. In the Depression we seemed to survive on meat loaf and peas - and Devil’s Food cake if we were lucky. A Central High School graduate with an amazing...
grasp of fluid mechanics, Russell would sit at the dinner table with a yellow legal pad and pencil and sketch out diagrams for compressed air powered pumps as we ate. The next morning he was off to the factory at 120 South 10th Street in Minneapolis where he would thrust his drawing into the hands of machinist Oscar Wicklund at his belt driven metal lathe and tell him he wanted it replicated in metal immediately. Before we kids came along mother wound copper wire around coils used to make electric motors at the tiny factory. To earn extra money Russell piloted a Chris Craft speed boat at the Excelsior Amusement Park after dinner and on summer weekends. The regular run for 25 cents was from the docks out and around a bell buoy with a blinking red light that was moored about two thirds of the way to Gale Island then back to the dock. When it was busy and dad was driving one boat and Bud Jensen was using his Hacker Craft they would pass each other going in opposite directions. Pretending not to see each other they would often set a collision course then at the “last minute” swerve starboard (the pilot’s wheel was on the port side so they were eye to eye) and try to drench the passengers in the passing boat. (The “good old days.”) Dad stayed at the dock nightly until Joe Colihan, the Park manager, switched on a red light bulb in the center of the grounds as a signal to close up. One of the first bonanzas provided beside the washing machine was the conversion of the coal furnace to an oil burner. I can remember his excitement as he showed it to me, turning it on and off. It meant the end of the coal bin and shoveling!

Always a dare devil, family lore has it that dad and my godfather, Ray Mason, the Chrysler Plymouth dealer in the converted livery stable on 2nd Street, (now called Bennett Place, 432-438 Second Street) had automobile races from Excelsior around Lake Calhoun and back. Remember in those days the area between Excelsior and Minneapolis was mostly empty farm land. It didn’t hurt that Russell and Ray were buddies of the motorcycle troopers of the State Patrol who used to show up at our old house on a hot summer afternoon, park their bikes in the drive, and amble in for refreshments and a break from the roads.

**My first bike.** Once I got my first bicycle I had a newspaper route to deliver the morning Tribune around the neighborhood. I was never early enough for one gentleman on Byron Circle who would be standing impatiently beside his car as I pumped up the hill. Another annual chore was selling Christmas Seals. I believe they were a penny apiece. This being the Depression it was a hard sell. The average purchase was $1 or less. Had I not been the brat from down the street it might have been “no sale.” David Gordon and I raked lawns in the fall and were happy when we earned 25 cents an hour. At one point dad told Lloyd Wehnes I could charge at his Minnetonka Drugs at Second and Water. That lasted one month. Lloyd had booths and a juke box in the back in what we called “Baldy’s Gold Room” – 5 cents a song. I treated David and others to fabulous hot fudge sundaes – two scoops with whipped cream and a cherry on top – for 15 cents a pop. The first month’s bill was $15.00. Account closed!

My cousins, Barbara and Ann, lived with Leil and Criss. We met after school to play in the street where Meadville Street curves sharply north. One favorite game involved a huge log fort on the empty lot where the Ekelund’s pine grove now stands. Harry Kuechele had dozens of “telephone pole” timbers stacked there. I can recall my cousins being upset when about 5:30 PM I would run home to listen to “Jack Armstrong, All American Boy” and other radio fare that was like today’s television for entertainment.

Kuechele’s stable became the Old log Theater about 1940. At the end of World War II he built his dream log cabin homes. A couple of American Indians trimmed the logs by hand using spoke shaves, axes and saws for the beautiful main log cabin on the lake shore where the Grave’s home (5110) is today and a large second cabin across for this son Bill and wife Betty where the Ekelund (5135) and Wolf (5115) homes are today. Bill’s burned to the ground.

My mother, Babe, contracted cancer in the mid 1930’s. After a malignant tumor the size of a grapefruit was removed surgically, she was brought to our old house after the hospital said it could do no more for her. With a nurse in residence, my dad and his father, Lafayette Mark Gray, cared for her and administered “Powdr X,” a diatomaceous earth from Colorado my grandfather was (illegally) “prescribing.” Suddenly her body explosively ejected the cancer and she was free. Dr. Milton Seifert, Sr., called her the “miracle lady.” It is unexplained. I know she believed her deep Catholic faith played its part.

It seems this was the turning point for our family. Uncle Leil bought a home in Wayzata and we moved into the house at today’s 5170 Meadville Street about 1940 or 1941. It even had a concrete basement floor! It had been the scene of company picnics in the 1930s when you could play softball out on the beach during the drought of the dust bowl years. Dad loved music. The Excelsior Park Ballroom saw big bands in the 30s such as Harry James. Russell and Babe were there dancing the night away. He played the piano, trombone, xylophone and who knows what else. He bought an electric organ for our
new home which he played when he came home from work and even hauled to Minneapolis each year for Graco’s big employee Christmas parties. He played so constantly mother eventually made him add on another room for the organs (which got bigger and bigger) to get her living room back in a semblance of order for her bridge club.

World War II touched everyone. School chums went to war; some came home wounded, others never returned. I was in junior high school. Meadville Street had an Air Raid Warden, Art Swanson. Mr. Swanson lived in the venerable frame house with the big screen porch that still stands on the south side of Fairview Street where it branches off from Meadville. He drafted me as his assistant. On designated dates everyone had to extinguish all outdoor lights and cover their windows to keep indoor light from showing. Wearing our steel helmets (left over from WW I) and Civil Defense armbands, I would accompany Mr. Swanson patrolling the streets looking for visible light. He would confront home owners who had light showing. While the program did not approach the importance of the efforts on the coasts where U-Boats sank ships silhouetted against lights on shore, it was a national effort. I think I carried a shielded lantern for Mr. Swanson who lugged a bucket of sand or water to quench incendiary fires. It was a drill but taken seriously.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt. I was in the old Excelsior High School in late afternoon April 12, 1945, when the radio announced that President Franklin D. Roosevelt had died suddenly. I went out to the flag pole and lowered the American flag to half-staff. Coach “Butch” Lokken came running off the football field demanding I raise the flag. He refused to believe FDR was dead. But the end of WW II was fast approaching.

As Graco took off our place became action central. Graco manufacturing was caught up in the war effort, even turning out airplane landing gear for Beechcraft in Wichita. This led people like Walter Beech and his wife Olive Anna to be visitors. After the war Dad’s contacts in the Kansas oil industry and elsewhere formed a continuous parade of business people, neighbors and friends that turned our house into everyone’s home away from home. The door was always unlocked; people just came and went, bearing food and drink. Every once in a while we and the neighbors went through our china and glassware to gets things back to the house they belonged in. I remember Cedric Adam’s, the WCCO radio personality and dad’s longtime friend, arriving unannounced at our dock in his cabin cruiser and parading into the house with all the princesses of the Minneapolis Aquatennial. An old summer cottage on an adjacent lot stood where my home now stands became a home away from home for many. Dad always loved his boats. His 1948 Chris Craft Sportsman was a perfect water ski towboat. The late 1940s saw endless hours of cruising on the lake by John and me in that boat which still graces my brother John’s dock today. It glistens; dad would be proud!

Growing up in Excelsior was great!

Russell was the emcee of Excelsior Apple Days several years. It was a big event lasting two or three days. I can recall taking a perch on the embankment next to the White House Hotel where Haskell’s and Dunn Brothers are today to watch dad on a platform whipping up the crowd in front of the movie house. The parades always featured the large drum and bugle corps of Boy Scout Troop 40, marching war veterans, bands and more. The drum and bugle corps would deviate from the parade route and march blaring away through Bill’s Café about where Coalition is today. There were three drug stores at 2nd and Water with barrels of apples out front for the taking. Dad and his cronies, Ray Mason, Vic Bacon and Lee Laramie were great supporters of the town and masters of gin rummy. Where today we boast of many great cafes, in those years we had at least eight gas stations between Morse Avenue and George Street plus another at Highway 7 and Water.

Today’s soccer mom. Babe was the tireless hostess and forerunner of today’s soccer mom. Her kitchen was her heaven. My friends loved her. She was always ready to provide cookies for those who just came for a swim from our dock or to drive me and my friends to school events, etc. She must have been overjoyed when I could finally bike to the Excelsior schools with my best friend, David Gordon, and later learned to drive a car. I was an editor of the school paper – “The Minnetonka Breezes” – and president of the student council but most importantly a benchwarmer on both the football and basketball teams. I was selected for that key assignment as I could get my mother’s car to drive “fellow athletes” to games since school buses were a thing of the future. I seldom touched a ball except to put it in the bag in the car’s trunk. I even drove to Albert Lea for a game.

My first girlfriend was Cherry Grace Merritt who lived with her eccentric mother and sister, Marilyn, on Murray Hill across from the Howard home. We were in the high school band together. Cherry had a saddle horse named “Honey Boy.” When I took
her home from winter dates she would stand at the window watching while I bravely braved the frigid blasts to use a hand pump to fill a bucket with water to take to Honey Boy. That horse despised me. As I neared his stall with his precious water he would start kicking the walls. After I filled his trough I held up the empty bucket to demonstrate the water had been delivered, Cherry would turn off the yard light. I was dismissed. I am not exaggerating about Honey Boy. One day Cherry and I rode two horses into the fields along Galpin Road. I was, foolishly, aboard Honey Boy. Returning there was an apple orchard next to the barn and when it came into view he broke into a gallop which I could not control, ran through the orchard branches with me wrapped around his neck and right into his stall. I am lucky I escaped without being kicked! Cherry was wonderful but made poor choices of horses and boyfriends.

In 1947 I graduated from Excelsior High School, got my first car, a Plymouth coupe, and entered the College of St. Thomas. I believe I am the first family member to attend college. I carooled to classes with Bob “Red” Reichert and Allen Smith – high school chums - both now gone. In 1951 I got my B.A. and was commissioned Second Lieutenant in the USAF. I served two years as a Special Agent of the Office of Special Investigations (IG) USAF. I discovered I liked investigative work and met several FBI agents. After separation in 1953 I came home and went to work at Graco. I also ran for public office - Constable of Excelsior Township – a position that no longer exists. I worked at the company days and roamed the township at night. After a year I applied for the FBI, was accepted and entered on duty as a Special Agent in January 1955. When dad asked me why I had done so, I reminded him he had told me to do in life what made me happy. And I did.

Wonderful moments and tragedies in Excelsior.

My grandpa John “Jack” Knowlton’s business name was J. E. Knowlton. Many people remember him walking along the Water Street sidewalk from his home to downtown. I never saw him wear a winter coat or hat.

Grandpa was very connected with the Excelsior Fire and Police Departments. I am guessing I was about 12 years old when Grandpa John picked me up at 240 Third Street. He said, “We are going to follow the fire trucks.” We followed to the south west corner of Minnetonka Boulevard and Highway 101, which was an undeveloped area at the time. Some man had taken his own life. He had left his car running, laid on the ground on his back, put his coat over the pipe and his head and inhaled until he was gone. I don’t think Grandpa knew what he was bringing his grandson to. I don’t remember being greatly disturbed by the scene. I do remember standing close and I could see the man’s hand and shiny shoes and thinking that this person dressed this morning and tied his shoes and did this to himself.

I was probably in third grade during early winter when I walked in to our kitchen. Dad was sitting on a kitchen chair, his wet clothes on the floor, blankets wrapped around him, his feet in a tub of hot water that Mom was adding water to. They were very sad and quiet. This was the day that three Johnson children had broken through thin ice on Galpin Lake and drowned. Dad was the man who went in to the water to pull each child out. I remember the empty desk in our classroom the next morning where the Johnson girl had been our classmate.
My Parents and Excelsior Beginning in the Early 1930s.

My parents, Mark and Grace Knowlton, moved into 240 Third Street in 1936. Pearl and Ade Seamans lived in the other half of the duplex from before that and until about the mid 1950s. Pearl and Ade were part of a radio program called David Stone’s Sunset Valley Barn Dance. I remember many good times listening to the group practicing on their side of the duplex. Their sons Bill and John continued during and after Pearl and Ade moved up north. Bill’s son, Steve “Stymie” is still making music. “Stymie” today in 2015, is married to Leslie “Lester” Hughes.

Down behind our house, next to the railroad, was a small garage that housed the railroad repair car. Every morning the repair crew would pull the car out of the shed to the tracks and were able to turn it 90° and set it on the main line. This machine was powered by a gasoline engine. When Tom Seamans returned home from the Navy, one of his first jobs was working with the crew on this repair vehicle. The foreman told Tom he was qualified for something more challenging, so Tom moved on. Tom and his wife June lived in this same duplex for some years raising their family.

Ade Seamans was a painter and wallpaper hanger. He would sign his name on the wall before he wallpapered. Some people have mentioned to me that while stripping old wallpaper they had found Ade’s name.

Getting back to my dad’s cousin, Ed Johnston, his son, James (named after his grandfather) was born about 1932 on the same day as I was. I remember Jim “Jimmy” as a very handsome, smiling and fun person, but he died as a very young man.

I believe Ed and Adeline Derice Johnston raised their family in the original Jim Johnston home and continued to live there until Ed and Adeline passed away. This house and the barn in the rear were maybe a couple hundred feet south of the Howard’s Point Marina. Both buildings are gone now, but the lakeshore and cabin across the road are still there as of 2015. This is just south of Howard’s Point Marina.

**Fish Fries Near Howard’s Point.** Many fish fry picnics were held on this beach. When a fish fry was planned, as I recall during the late 1940s to early 1950s, Dad and his three Johnston cousins and maybe six or eight more of us, using outboard motors and wooden rowboats from the marina would head out on the water at sunrise. We would fish for bass and northerns using cane poles, bobbers and frogs for bait, until late morning, clean fish and fry them on an old kitchen wood-fired cook stove converted to an outside grill/stove. All the Howard’s family relatives would gather for the feast and fun. Always, enough fish were caught to feed everyone. Of course, it was the women on shore who did most of the work watching the smaller children and preparing all the food to go with the fish.

During one of the gatherings, I was by the shore and saw my mom running from all the way across the road into the lake by the dock. Reaching under the water, she pulled my little sister Jean out then carried her onto the shore. Mom had seen Jean fall off the dock. Fortunately, Jean was OK.

My school classmate, Judy Sierup lived next to a small lagoon just south of this beach area with her mother, father and younger brother Jon. One winter evening we were at Ed and Adeline’s when I was possibly 10 years old. Ed asked, “Would you like to go for a ride on the cutter?” I was picturing a very uncomfortable piece of farm machinery. It was, in actuality, a wonderful night ride in a “one horse open sleigh” with blankets on us and bells on the horse as we traveled the lake, ice and snow.

**Paper Routes.** For about four years between 1946 – 1950 when I was age ten to fourteen, I had a small Minneapolis Star paper route of about twenty families and eighteen dogs. Excelsior carriers picked up their bundles of papers behind Wehnes’ Drug Store . . . about where Licks Unlimited is now.

As an aside - a few years later, I was in Wehnes’ Drug Store to buy cigarettes. Mr. Wehnes said to me, “You are the Knowlton kid . . . you are too young” – small town vigilance.

The paper routes were the big corporation versus the paper boys. We paid the Minneapolis Star for the papers whether or not we were able to collect from our clients. My profit for a weekday paper was 2.5 cents x twenty, or fifty cents a day. Sunday paper, maybe 5 cents each. The paper was always put somewhere out of the weather . . .

**The Amazing History of Our Community**
between doors or in a container made just for the paper.

My first stop was “Torchy” and Helen Armagost who lived at 426 Lake Street where Hour Glass Cleaners is today in 2015.

Helen worked for NSP electric power company. They had a nice home on a small rise. I also shoveled snow, mowed grass and did other small projects for them. They were good enough to trust me with some of my first odd jobs. “Torchy” had a barber shop on Second Street where Jake O’Connor’s is now. I remember inside the large windows was a white tiled goldfish pond that I think everyone during that time was fascinated with and remembers.

The next stop was a small grey house at 434 Lake Street belonging to E.F. and Inace Sweeney. If I have my generations correct, these folks would be John “Skip” Sweeney’s grandparents. Every week on collection day they would put the coins for the seven papers in a small jar on the back porch and I would leave the yellow receipt. They never missed a payment. I can remember all there stops I made to deliver the papers. Who they were, how they paid me and what kind of dogs they had.

The family living where Adele’s Custard is now had a nasty German shepherd dog.

The family at 231 Third Street, across the street from our house, owned a dark brown Chesapeake hunting dog named “Butch.” He was my companion on many paper route delivery days. Once I had to protect him from a pack of about six other dogs. He and I did okay but it wasn’t pretty.

**Selling Frogs to Roy Beehrle.** Brother John, cousin David Anderson and I had a business venture. We caught frogs by hand and sold them wholesale to the local bait shops. We caught most of the frogs along the shores and pastures around Lake Lucy. We also found an abandoned brick cistern on Murray Hill which the frogs fell into. One year when the “new hatch” of frogs came ashore. Dad and I were in the pastures just as it was getting light in the morning. We worked until 7 a.m. Dad had to be at work at NSP at 8 a.m. We caught 35 dozen frogs in that short time. We sold most of the frogs to Roy Beehrle’s bait store which at that time was in his filling station next to the intersection of Highway Seven and Christmas Lake Road.

One time David and I rode our bikes to Crescent Beach. On the way home we traveled “the swamp road” and we noticed another cistern on an empty lot, in the woods, on the north side of the road. We came back with our frog boxes and collected many dozens without having to chase frogs around in the grass. The next day at school one of my classmates was very unhappy with me for stealing “his frogs”. So we did not do that again.

Milton Brooks, Sr., was our neighbor and also the local garbage collector. This was at a time before plastic bags, and mechanical arms coming out of garbage trucks to pick up and dump out the cans. Most everyone had a “burn barrel” in the back yard and we would burn anything that was combustible. The rest of the nasty garbage would be wrapped in newspaper and tied. As you can imagine, by the time garbage was picked up in summer it could be pretty ripe. Mr. Brooks would stop at each house, pick up the garbage can and reach up over the top of his open dump truck and to empty the can. This city garbage was hauled out to the dump which was on Highway Seven (now Smittown Road) just past Howard’s Point Road where the road makes a sharp turn to the left.

The dump was in the low area on the left side of Highway Seven. The garbage was fed to the pigs living there and then burned and buried. I was 5 or 6 years old on a hot summer day when Mr. Brooks came home after work. I went towards his yard and he walked towards me smiling. He was wearing a short sleeved shirt and I asked him, “Mr. Brooks, what are those white lumps on your arms?” “Oh,” he said, “those are maggots” as he proceeded to brush them off. Mr. Brooks also taught me to tie my shoes. Things are so different today.

**Heating with Coal.** Until about the early 1950s when natural gas came to Excelsior, we had a large coal furnace in the basement. There was a 3’ by 3’ steel grate above it in the floor between the kitchen and living room. All winter Dad would keep the fire going. He was skilled enough that it might go 5, 6 or 7 hours without tending to it. John’s and my bedroom was in kind of an attic room upstairs in back. It was heated by the heat rising up the kitchen stairway and into the bedroom through the door. I remember early morning, still dark, we were smuggled down under the covers we could hear Dad in the basement shaking down the coal clinkers and getting the fire going again. By the time we got up, everything was warming up again. – *Thanks, Dad!*

Gladys Zakariasen’s dad, Bill Way, worked for Lampert Lumber Yards. Late fall, Mr. Way would bring a load of coal, depending on how much money we had, the good or the poor quality of coal, Mr. Way would back the truck around through the driveway to the back of the house. There were two small windows about 24” x 30.”
One was the coal bin, one was the wood bin which was used to get the coal fire going. Before Bill would start shoveling the coal from the truck through the window, maybe he was able to dump it in, I am not sure. Anyway, to keep the coal dust contained to the bin. Mom would hang wet blankets around that area. When we converted to a gas furnace, Dad hired his friend, Vern Abel (Abel Heating) to install a brand new Lennox furnace and duct work. That furnace was still working when we sold the house in 2011. Somehow my folks came up with money to pay Abel Heating. Can you imagine what a blessing this was to Mom and Dad to not have to contend with the big old furnace. Now you just turn the thermostat to whatever you need.

Bill Way told me the story of the blizzard of Armistice Day November 11, 1940. The roads were bad but Mr. Way walked from his home on Red Cedar Point on Lake Minnewashta to Lampert Yards because he knew people needed coal delivered to survive the cold. Bill told me as he walked he held a scoop shovel in front of his face to protect himself from the wind and snow.

There are so many memories of such a different time. Today, much has changed as you can tell if you’ve read my story, but yet, when it comes to the people and the general lay of the land, a lot is still the same. This is quite a community.

Cottagewood – Cream of Wheat, Thompson Point and Sailing at night.

One of my favorite things was having the yacht club out in front of our house and watching the sailboats start and finish their races. Going on sailboat races on nights with a full moon when there was no wind or when there was a storm – we survived.

Our neighbors to the east were the Thompsons, owners of Cream of Wheat. They owned Thompson Point. Sadly, it is all divided up now. Cottagewood was a great place to live.

Old Chaska Road near the entrance going up to Murray Hill – John Darke

There were stone pillars near the base of Murray Hill that was the entrance to our place. The six acres that my parents purchased from Peter DeVries had been the main part of a larger farm, perhaps twenty acres or so. There were at least three plots split off from the original farm, two of them granted to children of Peter DeVries and the third sold off. So it was that our six acres included the original farm house, combination garage, two stall cow barn and hay mow, along with a berry house and chicken coop.

Backing up a bit, my grandfather and his wife migrated from Missouri to Northern Minnesota in 1897. My grandmother was pregnant with their firstborn. They travelled in a covered wagon and I believe they received a land grant in return for farming the land for five years, as did most of the folks at that time. They settled near Alexandria and raised their family of three daughters and three boys. My mother was the second born. It was always easy to correlate history with her because she was born in 1900, and so was 41 years old when Pearl Harbor was bombed, etc. As you probably know, 1900 was the last year of the 19th century and so my mother who lived to 107 lived in three different centuries and two different millenniums. Not too many folks in that club!

Anyway, My parents met at Donaldson’s Department Store where my Dad worked in the Grocery Department and my Mom worked elsewhere. They dated for four years
before getting married in 1931. My Aunt Nana was the Paymaster at Donaldson’s and responsible for getting my Dad his job and later got my brothers and I jobs.

So it was my mother who wanted to bring up her three boys in an environment that she was used to. She convinced my father to move from Morningside to Excelsior. I have my first ever memories of walking up this driveway in May of 1941 when I had just recently reached my third birthday.

Back then, the part of the property that was not apple orchards, gardens, acres of lawn or alfalfa fields were covered with hardwood trees including Elms, Maples, Oaks, Poplar, and Willow and others.

I was the youngest of three boys. We were spaced three and one half years apart. Brother Jim graduated from Excelsior High School in 1949 along with Milt Seifert, Bob Noren (both physicians) and Ed Welch. Brother Bob graduated from Excelsior High School in 1952 and I believe was in the last class before Minnetonka High School and Deephaven combined with Excelsior. I believe I was the second class to have spent all high school years at Minnetonka, graduating in 1956 along with Tom Williams, John Larson, John Cunningham, Jim Bruce and just one year ahead of Tiger Olds, Danny Graham, and Gary Reed.

The alfalfa fields were large enough and had a bit of vertical allowing my brothers and I to have some fun skiing on those days where I wouldn’t cross country up to Gary Reed’s house and then out to Birch Bluff where we would spend the day, coming home with chilblains and huge appetites that Gary’s Mom would eliminate with some of the best cooking that I have ever experienced. I think you know in your heart that my Mother loved, now was a much smaller and noisy place to live. We all grew to accept the fate that was dealt us for the good of the community to have a better and safer road. Still, it was a bitter pill to swallow.

As we read all the Laura Ingalls books about the “Little House on the Prairie,” and their lives in the Indian Territories and later in Minnesota we tend to forget what life must have been without fossil fueled machines to farm and transport goods and people. We also had horses that were used to cut and transport the alfalfa grown on our property. The horses belonged to neighbors who would provide us with hay in return for keeping a large portion for their own needs.

If you look at the far side of the frame to the right, you can see the edge of the property line. It butted up to Billy Rand’s home and also the Zakariasen’s home. The sad news was that in the early 1950s, Highway Seven needed to be expanded, and Eminent Domain was used to force all land owners to give up property, for a small remuneration, to allow the highway to be built. Suddenly the six acre mini farm was a three acre place to live. My parents did not have the time, energy, or enthusiasm to continue farming, and it changed the personality of our place and was a sad day for our entire family.

What had once been a pristine, quiet place to live and experience on a very small scale farm life that my Mother loved, now was a much smaller and noisy place to live. We all grew to accept the fate that was dealt us for the good of the community to have a better and safer road. Still, it was a bitter pill to swallow.

– Recollections from John Darke – brother, son, grandson

The Amazing History of Our Community
### Annual Community Events and Traditions

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<th>Apple Days</th>
<th>Art On The Lake</th>
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Fireman’s Dance
The People Of The Last 70 Years

There are many people that have and are contributing greatly to these communities that are still alive and well and will continue to keep this area special and make sure it is always going to be the wonderful place it is to live, work and play.

And, during this period of time, there have been members of these communities that we have lost. We will highlight them here also because of what they did, what they represented and what they contributed. And, also because in many cases, we lost them much too soon.

Before we explore the last 70 years in these communities, let’s take a look at what condition were like in the 1960s.

The 1960s have been used to describe the counterculture and revolution in social norms about clothing, music, drugs, dress, sexuality, formalities, and schooling.

- November 22, 1963 - John F. Kennedy assassinated in Dallas, Texas.
- Jack Paar Show, shows a clip of the Beatles singing “She Loves You.”
- Plans for World Trade Center announced (NYC).
- 1st appearance of Beatles on “Ed Sullivan Show” (7.3 million viewers).
- Cassius Clay joins the Nation of Islam and its leader Elijah Muhammad renames him Muhammad Ali.
- 1964, Sean Connery’s 1st day of shooting on “Goldfinger.”
- 1964, Ford Mustang formally introduced ($2,368 base).
- 1964, Longest HR (471’) in Baltimore Memorial Stadium (Harmon Killebrew, MN).
- 1962, Nelson Mandela is sentenced to life in prison in South Africa.
- 1963, Liberal reforms were finally passed under Lyndon B. Johnson including civil rights for African Americans and healthcare for the elderly and the poor.
- 1964, August 10, Rolling Stones appear in Excelsior, Minnesota.
- Vatican abolished Latin as official language of Roman Catholic liturgy.
- Roman Catholic Church in US replaces Latin with English.
- 1964, "Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer" 1st airs on TV.
- 1967, the First Super Bowl
- 1968, U.S. President Richard M. Nixon was elected defeating Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey.
- 1968, both Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King were assassinated.

Berkey, John (1932 – 2008) John Berkey, the artist, moved to Excelsior in 1941. I know that stories abound that place his birthplace in North Dakota in 1932, with short episodes in South Dakota and St. Joseph, Missouri. But the real John Berkey, the world-renown artist, this genius, the unassuming gentle person got his inspiration for greatness while living in our little town of Excelsior. I always thought that Excelsior had the feeling of a small town that Norman Rockwell might have painted. It was into that town and with the spirit of Rockwell that John Berkey began his incredible career.

I got to know John when he was 15 years old. About the time he was developing his enormous talent. I was excited to meet him because I heard he was a good artist and I was interested in art. But when I visited John in his home on the Chanhassen Road in the upstairs bedroom I was speechless. He showed me pen and ink works, some colored illustrations with brush and I immediately knew that this was what a real artist was like but there was no way that a man as humble as John would ever brag about it.

John was soon to go to Minneapolis College of Art and Design where he ended up putting together pieces of junk for a sculpture and he knew this was not for him. So he applied for a job with Ray Tollefson, another well-known Excelsior resident who just happened to own the largest art studio west of the Mississippi employing 35 artists. He was to run errands, do paste ups (now done by computer) and wait for his chance. There were lots of good artists to help him along. Some became mentors and long time friends.

About this time he had met Demi, and Joan and I double dated and spent time together. Demi was in college at St Olaf. One of the Saturday night’s dates we waited up to see the Sunday paper, which had published a line drawing by John. We were all excited for him. This is an important event in the life of an artist. To see your work in print is thrilling. And it was the beginning of his long career.

After a couple more art studios (one in which he worked with Bob Alechnra another Excelsior man whose folks owned Tonka Bay Marina) he found work at Brown and Bigelow, the largest calendar producer in the world. This was probably the most important job John ever had. Not only did they have a warehouse full of paintings by Norman Rockwell, Maxfield Parish, Charlie Russell and Gil Elvgren. But, he also could bring them home to study. What a way to start your career.

John spent 7 or 8 years at Brown and Bigelow and he averaged about 70 paintings a year involving all sorts of activities from historical to scenic to agriculture to family activities.
A Favorite Quote of John Berkey found after his death taped inside his art cabinet.

“His talent was a natural as the pattern that was made by the dust on a butterfly’s wings. At one time he understood it no more than the butterfly did and he did not know when it was brushed or marred. Later he became conscious of his damaged wings and of their construction and he learned to think and he could not fly anymore because the love of flight was gone and he could only remember when it had been effortless.”  – Ernest Hemingway

(Think of the famous artists that would spend months on a single painting). As there was an incredible number of assignments coming through the door, John, as their best, and most prolific artist, could satisfy his thirst to learn. He also developed his technique for collecting any visuals of the subject, make a sketch and then paint from the sketch rather than return to the original.

Buoyed by his success at Brown & Bigelow and armed with an incredible number of paintings to select from, John contacted Frank Lavity, probably the best known illustration rep in the country and flew to New York to present his work. Frank was very impressed and told John that he would rep him and explained the procedure for accepting assignments: the artist would come to New York where the job was described and the artist would go back, complete the illustration and bring it to Frank.

John said he wouldn’t do it. Of course most of the important illustrators in those days lived on the east coast and could probably travel by train. But John was a home body and didn’t like to travel. Plus it took time out of his usual productive days. Mr. Lavity relented and said he would try a relationship by mail. And so the little mailbox on the quiet shores of Christmas Lake received frequent messages from the hub of the art world in New York City.

Some of the assignments that came as a result of this association were designing stamps for the US Postal Service. He painted 16 stamps including 5 different Santa Clauses, Hubert Humphrey and the Old Elvis Presely, part of a contest presented by the post office to create an interest in buying stamps. The contest asked the public to choose the old or young Elvis (both executed by John). But when the winner was announced another artist produced a painting of the young Elvis.

John did over 200 book covers, mostly science fiction. Of particular note were a series of dazzling paintings for Ballantine Books STAR series.

The paintings done for movies have been the most widely seen by the general public. John said they were the most mysterious as the studios did not want to divulge too much information as sometimes the movies were not finished. He started posters for movies in 1973 with “The Neptune Factor” for which he did about a dozen sketches. This was followed by “The Towering Inferno,” ablaze in forced perspective, “Orca,” the 1976 remake of “King Kong” (with Kong astride the now significantly absent twin towers of the World Trade Center, plus four other King Kongs. He also did many of Paramount’s feature-length movies, based on the series “Star Trek.”

Somewhere along the way an assignment came that asked for a “space painting” portraying the original Astronauts in the Space Program.

As John Berkey had handled many complex paintings with apparent ease, he threw himself into this new world. And the imaginative mind and hand of his literally took off. But before we go deep into the era of space painting I would like to share some of the impossible assignments I watched him complete.

One of the assignments was for the depiction of the Indianapolis 500 Memorial Day car race. John got photos of the race track, each car and the stands. It was a large painting probably 2 feet high by over 3 feet wide. It had to include the 33 cars, the track, the stands and about 3500 (of 18-40,000) rapt individuals reacting to the race. Now each person was visibly portrayed revealing a face, a gesture, individual colored clothes and positioned in groups walking and sitting and cheering on their favorites. John told me that he had to cut out about a 10 by 12” mask so he wouldn’t have to look at so many of the figures at once.

Another painting was of one of the eastern universities-let’s just say Harvard. And the assignment was to take photos submitted of all of the buildings in various poses, most not in the same perspective, and make an illustration of the entire school, including various foliage and students. Nobody I knew could have put together these 2 paintings as accurately and painterly as John Berkey.

I hardly ever saw him working on the paintings of outer space but I did see many of them finished. Then Star Wars burst upon the scene. I vaguely remember John saying he had gotten a call from George Lucas asking him to do some sketches for a movie he was about to produce and John did some preliminary work on a poster plus other visuals and sent them off to California. (I need more information about the conflict and the eventual outcome)

Before we go on about the artistic accomplishments of this ground-breaking artist, let’s
discover John Berkey the family man. In the early 60s John and his growing family built a house on the family land about a half mile south of town on Christmas Lake Road. I was gone when John and Demi were married but we renewed our friendship when we moved back to Excelsior. Brian was a baby and there would be three more children.

Kevin, Sharon and Johnny completed this beautiful and talented family. Demi was to eventually take up calligraphy, but for the moment she had 4 kids on her hands and they were very active. I remember seeing the older boys doing flips on skis at “Cedar Bumps.” (Cedar Hills-developed by the Zakariasens, another Excelsior family.) Eventually each member of the family took their place developing names for themselves in various artistic ways. Kevin was the best painter. He could paint like John but was struggling with problems of mental illness since an early episode in his 20s. Brian is now a sought after Special Effects Designer, flying between Minneapolis and Chicago doing work for TV commercials and movies. He has patented the Berkey System which is sold to companies who want to create their own props.

Sharon who died after child birth was a wonderful writer and married a photographer. Johnny is known as a Medical Product Design Engineer and although he has not had any medical training has applied his skills to a variety of complicated devices. All of them have inherited the genius of John Berkey and all of them have incredible creative abilities.

It seems like John spent most of his life in his 3 room studio in the basement of his home in the woods. To be comfortable and relaxed he played a variety of music on some 32 speakers in his working studio. And he developed a device that would, at a glance, place his paintings about 15 feet from his drawing board to get better distant view of his work. Most artists get up and walk away to get a fresh view of the painting from a different perspective.

Berkey also was into sound as he wove together sound bites from recordings of phone conversations, outside speakers and a variety of sources to tell a story in sound. In addition he invented a technique that amazed photographers as he put together images (mostly of his paintings) moving the camera in and out of focus to sounds selected by this technological genius. And he did some extraordinary sculpture and wrote very moving poetry. Several films were shown at Carlton College during his one man show.

He spent every day in his studio mixing his own paints, mounting and sometimes framing his paintings and sometimes just reflecting with Demi while listening to his eclectic selections of music. This was a man whose every movement was art. He lived and breathed art, while continuing to improve his skills.

The moment he entered the Star Wars era he was again enveloped in a new world to conquer. As his ability and exploration grew he attracted the attention of George Lucas bought three or four space paintings and then called him to do the first sketches for this bold adventure. He even helped create some of the characters. And he soon joined the few memorable artists who had the imagination and ability to see this new world.

However, a conflict developed between studios and a law suit ensued, not involving John, but preventing him from completing this important project. Although he did actually produce the first Star Wars poster. He continued to press on and became famous for these imaginative interpretations of this emerging market. He was called “the most innovative, influential futurist painter of all times.” After his death he was given a tribute from around the globe as the “father” of space images—though what really amazed them was he painted the scenes rather than manipulate images on a computer.

His health had started to decline and was not able to climb stairs or get around the studio. John died in 2008 in a small room above his studio in the home by Christmas Lake. The studio still exists, the drawing board vacant and many paintings are stacked nearby.

Although his art soared into outer space, his friendship and loyalty remained down to earth and it fell on a very fortunate few of us.

In 2004 John Berkey received word that he was to be initiated into the Illustrators Hall of Fame. Now this is the tribute all artists strive to obtain. The list of artists who have achieved this honor include N.C. Wyeth, Norman Rockwell, Fredrick Remington and John James Audubon. And more. It is the zenith of recognition and only the very best are considered. John was excited enough to actually travel to New York with Demi to receive the acclaim.

I picked them up at the airport. They were both extremely tired but had an air of accomplishment. John gave me a copy of all of the accolades and I bought the Illustrators Annual so I could see the story of his journey to fame.

Very few Excelsior people knew that this world renowned artist was in their midst. But the local art world knew and he became a legend. As I worked in Minneapolis I proudly kept my advertising friends updated as everyone would ask—“what’s
Berkey doing now?"

A one man show of his work featuring several “space paintings” but many other landscapes and some nudes. The opening was held in Northfield in 2005 at the Movable Walls Gallery. The show was well attended and got a fair amount of publicity. They sold a number of “space” paintings to collectors out of state.

John loved to paint the human female body and we would travel to Northfield once a week to sketch models. It took almost an hour each way and it was exhausting. But sketching people was a great chance to do everything from quick 1 minute drawings to longer poses, all in the company of fellow artists who would give you critiques and fellowship. We also used to go and draw at Keith Wilcock’s studio on St Albans Bay.

Knowing John and being a part of John and Demi’s life for the last 60 years has been one of my proudest experiences. Not only because of his ability but also because he was a kind, gentle, considerate friend. He had this great sense of humor and that knowing sly smile. We continued to eat dinner out together regularly until just months before his death.

His health had started to decline and was not able to climb stairs or get around the studio. John died in 2008 in a small room above his studio in the home by Christmas Lake. The studio still exists, the drawing board vacant and many paintings are stacked nearby.

Although his art soared into outer space, his friendship and loyalty remained down to earth and it fell on a very fortunate few of us.

– Jim Hillis, Excelsior, Minnesota

Bidwell, Edward (1928 – ) Edward “Ed” Bidwell and his sister Evelyn Murray (Bidwell) (1929-2007) were the third generation Bidwells from Excelsior. The two of them grew up along West Lake Street living on Gideon Bay high on a ridge looking towards Tonka Bay. They had many neighborhood friends as shown in numerous photos within this book.

Ed and Evelyn loved the lake and spent time sailing and learning to water ski. Ed became an engineer in spite of the time he spent water skiing in competition and forming the Aqua Bats water ski Show that he, Evelyn and Don Russell owned.

Much of Ed’s skiing life is covered in Chapter VII – History of Water Skiing. Ed was also a snow skier and he and another water skiing champion from White Bear Lake, Tom Chapin, often skied together in Aspen, Colorado in the early days.

Boyer, Joe (1899 – 1988) Boyer Construction . . . wrestling, Lake Minnewashta, etc.

Joleen, Bob, Pete . . .

The Amazing History of Our Community

183

Bullock, Father William Henry (1927 – 2011) Father Bullock came to Saint John the Baptist in 1971. Bill was born to Loren and Anne Raiche Bullock in Maple Lake. He grew up on the family farm and attended Maple Lake Elementary and Annandale High School. Bill’s sister Mary Anne recalled that Bill was destined to be a priest. They would play church as kids and Bill would even make his siblings be quiet while he gave his homilies.

After two years in the Navy from 1944 to 1946, Bill enrolled in the University of Notre Dame on the G.I. Bill. He graduated and then completed his seminary studies at the Saint Paul Seminary.

After Father Bullock arrived at Saint John’s, he initiated numerous new masses and even though budgets were tight, he found a way to hire a liturgist to help educate parishioners on what Vatican II changes really meant. Father also felt music was an important part of liturgy so he found and hired a salaried organist.

Father Bullock touched everyone in a very positive way. He was a very strong but loving and caring individual. He was committed to God, the Church and the people. You could say that he was in charge of Saint John’s much like a CEO would be in charge of a corporation. He knew what the church needed and recognized who, among the parishioners, would love to do it.

Father was very enthusiastic about the Cursillo de Christo movement and encouraged everyone to experience it and even sponsored a number of people himself.

He also recognized the church’s need for money and was without a doubt, one of the best fund raisers Saint John’s has ever seen. Western Roundup, a wonderful day of music, games, auctions and even a fun run, was conceived and Father became a master at motivating people to get involved. The amount of money raised in the beginning was about $15,000. In the last years it existed, that number was close to $35,000.


“My wife and children were catholic but I wasn’t and Father Bullock knew I had questions about the church as did a few other couples. So, almost every Monday night for a year, Father Bullock came to our home and we discussed, argued, laughed but learned all there was to know about Catholicism. How committed he was and how Blessed we were. By the end of that year, I became a Catholic and Father baptized me at the Easter Service and then sponsored me at Cursillo. It was a very big and special event in my life.” – a friend.

Clapp, Allen L. “Shorty” (1933 – 2010) Allen was raised in Excelsior by a single mother. He was the youngest of 4 boys. Shorty graduated from Excelsior High school and lettered in football and basketball.

He joined the Navy after graduation in 1951. Shorty met and married to Mary Jo Staska in 1959. Later they had two children, Kelly and Jeff. Shorty operated the Pure Oil
Driscoll, R. Everett (1903 – 1997)

French, John D. (1933 – 2012) John and I met in the 8th grade of Excelsior High School. I was new and John had moved to town a couple of years earlier in 1944 from Berkeley, California. We became instant best friends. John’s father, Horton I. French was the minister of the Trinity Episcopal Church in Excelsior. Because we were both born in the depths of the depression we joined one of the smallest classes in years with only 41 classmates. It also was instantly clear that one of the students in this country school was a lot smarter than the rest of us.

Both of us were interested in sports. We were teammates on the baseball team and John was student manager of the football team. But it was his love for basketball that prevailed and he made the A squad his senior year. So whereas many people knew him as the president of the University of Minnesota Alumni Association, I knew him as a scrappy guard and a student manager. During baseball season the only time we argued was over the St Louis Cardinals, which John supported because he had lived in Missouri, and the Boston Red Sox, which I favored. As the Cards won the 1946 World Series he had the upper hand. Remember this was pre TV and pre Twins.

In our sophomore year during the summer we got the bright idea to form a lawn mowing, sod laying and junk hauling business out of my ’38 GMC pickup truck. I am pretty certain that his business skills were further developed, as we became employees of National Tea’s new store in Excelsior and John carried out groceries. That’s an interesting contrast to knowing John as the chairman of the Faegre and Benson management team. In school, John was also editor of the school newspaper and manager
of the football team and baseball team.

We both went to the University of Minnesota where we roomed together during several quarters. So I had a small town friend as a roommate and the world would soon have a Rotary scholar to Oxford and our country would have a brilliant student who became president of the Harvard Law Review and a clerk on the Supreme Court. It was our local Excelsior Rotary Club that gave John the Oxford Scholarship.

We all knew this extraordinary man as a gracefully high achieving; kind, humble get along with everyone individual.

After graduating from high school, John and I chose to attend the University of Minnesota and we were roommates most of our Freshman year. We managed to stay together on a couple more occasions. And we went on to graduate from the U (John graduated summa cum laude) and get married in 1955 to our betrothed girl friends. John was the best man at Joan’s and my wedding and I was best man at his wedding to Nan Richards. We also shared military service obligations and a social life together. In fact we both graduated, got commissions through ROTC and got married in 1955 in a brief 2 month period.

After the service, John received a Rotary scholarship from the club in Excelsior for 1 year at Oxford College in England. It was a great honor and it was the start of his post graduate career which culminated in being accepted at Harvard Law School, graduating magna cum laude from there with the additional honor of being Editor of the Law Review, presumably the highest honor from the best law school in the country. It is the position that President Obama obtained while at Harvard.

John French was appointed a law clerk for Justice Felix Frankfurter on the United States Supreme Court where he served for 2 years. From there he received job offers from every major law firm in the country. He choose to return to Minneapolis where he picked Faegre and Benson, the 2nd largest law firm in Minnesota.

After many years working on anti Trust cases he was chosen to be the Managing Partner of this prestigious firm. While there he also was appointed president of the Alumni Association and vice chairman of the Humphrey Institute. A passionate Democrat he was a member of the Democratic National Committee for two years and chaired the Mondale for senate volunteer committee in 1972. In the 70s and 80s John chaired eight state conventions and was a delegate to four national Democratic Conventions.

As time passed we saw less of each other but we still shared political interests. John on the state and national stage and I served several years on the village council in Greenwood, population 600, a part of the original Excelsior township.

John French was known for being intelligent, well-prepared, articulate and a paragon of civility. In all aspects of life he was considered a great mentor and a kind, generous, caring and considerate man. In his career in law he was described as an able appellate attorney arguing cases before state and federal courts including the US Supreme Court.

In 2012 John was diagnosed with cancer of the esophagus. Early on in his life he contracted Lymphoma and survived this early onslaught. But the Esophageal Cancer proved to be his undoing.

We had just had a few moments together recently, when John’s wife Berna Jo “BJ” asked if I would sit with John as she ran some errands. I welcomed the opportunity. It was just two weeks ago. BJ left, and there we were, roommates once more. We sat together and spoke a few words but John dozed a lot and was disturbed by a persistent cough. We were able to talk a little more and I told him that I loved him and he responded as well. After a couple of hours, BJ returned and we sat together, John was anxious and distraught and eager for her return. We talked of ways to help John and make him more comfortable. We turned to John who looked up pleadingly asking, “how can I help?” Here was this very sick man struggling to survive and he wanted to help us. That was the man we all knew and loved.

John died August 22nd, 2012. He was buried at Lakewood Cemetery in south Minneapolis. There was not a more modest or accomplished individual that lived in this area that I can remember.

John remained an Excelsior graduate. A product of a very special community. I’ll never forget John French, my boyhood pal, my trusted friend and an inspiration on how to live for all of us.

– Jim Hillis, Excelsior, Minnesota

Friberg, Avis: In 1974, Avis Friberg of Excelsior, sold President Gerald Ford a golden retriever he named Liberty.
Gagne, Laverne Clarence “Verne” (1926 - 2015)  Vern was an American professional wrestler, football player, wrestling trainer, and wrestling promoter. He was the owner and the predominant promotor of the Minneapolis-based American Wrestling Association (AWA) throughout the Midwest and Manitoba for many years. Gagne formed the AWA in 1960 and remained in that position until 1991 when the company folded.

Verne Gagne’s success was not just the story of an athlete or promoter. It was not just his commitment to community or to helping those less fortunate. It was that he was a wonderful and loving family man. He cherished his time with his wife, children and grandchildren. Fishing, skiing, hiking in the woods, riding horses, eating a good meal or boating on Lake Minnetonka. He cherished those moments.

Verne’s wife Mary was a flight attendant and clothing model in Twin Cities. The two were married nearly 56 years. Mary died at the age of 75 from complication due to colon cancer. Verne said, “I’d come back hurt, with bandages on, that sort of thing,” Verne said. “She got used to it after a while. She was a wonderful mother, great homemaker and wonderful companion.”

Gagne was born in Robbinsdale, Minnesota and grew up on a farm in Corcoran, Minnesota. He left home at the age of 14 after his mother died. He went to Robbinsdale High School and excelled in football, baseball and wrestling, winning district, regional, and state championships in high school wrestling, as well as being named to the All-State Football Team. In 1943, he was recruited to play football at the University of Minnesota, where he was named to the All-Big Ten Team.

In 1949, Gagne decided to wrestle professionally, starting his career in Texas. In his debut, he defeated Abe Kashey, with former World Heavyweight boxing Champion Jack Dempsey as the referee. On November 13, 1950, Gagne captured the National Wrestling Alliance (NWA) Junior Heavyweight title in a tournament for the vacant championship. For more than four decades, Verne Gagne was a legendary wrestler and promoter in Minnesota, and was an instrumental figure in the expansion of sports-entertainment in the early 1980s. Gagne rightfully took his place among many of sports-entertainment’s other big names when he was inducted into the WWE Hall of Fame in 2006.

Geyen, Laurel “Dick” W. (1934 - 2009) Dick Geyen married Mary Mase. They lived in Excelsior and together raised four children. Dick owned several businesses over the years and built the cruise ship “Merri Way” that is now the “Lady of the Lake.”

The Excelsior area is certainly home to many interesting folks, many of whom have lived in the area for decades. Many of these people helped make the South Lake area what it is today.

One such long-time resident is Laurel “Dick” Geyen who, back in the early 1960s, built the Merri Way excursion boat - completely on his own and right through the middle of winter. Today, that cruise boat, now known as the Lady of the Lake, is the oldest running commercial boat operating on Lake Minnetonka.

Dick was certainly proud of the work he did on the boat but he really built the boat just as a way to make a living and to support his family.

Dick grew up in Chaska and moved to the Excelsior area when he was 16 years old to work at the Excelsior Amusement Park.

After a four-year stint in the Navy ended in 1956, Geyen, who was by then married and had two children, returned to the Excelsior area with his family and went to work for Northern Ordnance in Minneapolis. As an experienced welder, he performed a variety of duties for the heavy machinery company.

He stayed there for a couple of years and discovered that he wanted to work for himself. So, he left Northern Ordnance and started running the excursion boat, Tonka Belle for Anson Mase, the longtime owner of Minnetonka Portable Dredging and his father-in-law at the time.

Dick noticed that all of the big companies in the area were cutting their divisions from hundreds of people down to less than one hundred. And at that time, the Tonka Belle was the only charter boat on the lake and it was too big for the smaller groups. So Dick decided to build a smaller charter cruise boat, one that would hold about 80 people.
He worked on it 16 hours a day, right outside in the cold of winter at Anson Mase’s dredging company. He knew he had to get the boat finished by May because he already had charters booked. He always seemed to work better under pressure.

Geyen designed the boat himself - He learned everything he needed to know about building a boat while in the Navy. He added the red paddle wheel, or sternwheel, on the back of the boat in order to make it “unique.”

The charter business went well for several years, before Geyen decided to sell the Merri Way in 1964 in order to start his own dredging business, Geyen Portable Dredging.

While living in the Excelsior area, Dick experienced plenty of good times, raising a family of four children, running a cruise boat business, starting his own dredging company and later a blacktopping business.

Dick suffered some hardships along the way too. He was severely burned by a downed electrical line and lost both of his arms. He was working on a dredging project in Tonka Bay at the time of the accident. Dick persevered however and got along as though nothing had happened. He had the use of a prosthetic right arm but his left arm and left shoulder were completely gone.

Since the accident, Dick has never felt sorry for himself. There was never a “Why me” moment which was amazing especially considering all he accomplished since the accident. Dick believed that feeling sorry for yourself didn’t accomplish anything.

In addition to losing his arms, the home that Dick and his wife lived in back in the late 1960s, next to the Excelsior Post Office, burned to the ground in 1970.

Besides being a hard worker, one of the gifts Dick always possessed was a strong work ethic. Once he started something, no matter what, he never quit.

Dick had to build his own portable dredge on a barge. He built it right there next to the old Studer Dump on County Road 19. Building a portable dredge meant a lot more 16-hour days.

Dick had a great amount of respect for, and had never met anyone like, his father-in-law Anson Mase. About the time that Dick was building that portable barge, Anson died and Anson’s company, Minnetonka Portable Dredging was being run by Don Latterner. Bill “Nick” Nicum, who at one time worked for Geyen, bought the business a number of years later. Dick finished the barge and ran his dredging business through the 1970s. One of the projects he had was dredging out and widening the old channel that Olaf A. Searle started back in the 1800s at Big Island. Dick and two other men including his brother-in-law Jim Mase, dredged out the channel and hauled much of the debris away to the Upper Lake.

Dick always said that Excelsior was quite a place to own a business back in the 1950s and 1960s. Dick would go to breakfast every morning at the Skipper Cafe which later became Ned’s. Everyone knew everyone back then. If you needed some help with a project or just about anything, you could ask some other business owner if they had someone or knew someone that could help for a day or two and they usually did. There was always the opportunity to do odd jobs around town to make a few extra bucks.

In 1978, Dick started his own blacktop business, G&L Black-topping, which he ran until he retired in 1995. It seemed like everyone knew Dick Geyen and Dick knew everyone else. He worked hard through good and tough times, raised his family and left his mark. Laurel “Dick” W. Geyen was buried at Fort Snelling National Cemetery.

Hart, Debbie (1956 – 2013) Debbie Hart owned and operated Artworks, a complete art supply and framing shop on Water Street in Excelsior. She opened the doors to Artworks in 1978. The store was started as a family business along with her parents, Don and Dorothy Lindert and her brother Bruce Lindert. Debbie became a great force in the Excelsior Chamber of Commerce. Debbie loved Excelsior. She was on numerous committees and volunteered her time for the promotion and good will of Excelsior. Her immense involvement in the community garnered her the honor of Person of the Year in 1996. Each winner is awarded a plaque and a caricature. Her caricature showed her bright smile and her signature long, blonde braid.

Debbie made every effort to involve the community in any and all forms of art. Debbie and her brother, Bruce started the Excelsior Art Festival in 1980. It started on the main street of Excelsior and moved to the Excelsior Commons. Debbie was the heart and soul...
of this art festival for 27 years. During her tenure it became one of Minnesota’s premier art festivals. She was very focused on recognizing and involving the artists in this event.

Debbie’s brother Bruce hired Terry Hart as a framer. Terry and Debbie eventually married and took over the management and ownership of Artworks. The store is currently located at 345 Water Street next to the recently opened Excelsior Library. When the landmark Lyman Lumber building next to Artworks was torn down approximately in 1994, a huge blank wall on the side of the Artworks building was exposed. Anne Bonine, a local artist, suggested to Debbie that they use the plain wall as a canvas for a mural. Debbie agreed and chose Monet’s water lilies since it was near Lake Minnetonka and because it would be a piece that would be familiar to passers by.

Many people contributed to this piece of art during its creation from the mayor, a postman, artists, to children of all ages. It is still considered a landmark to this day.

Debbie and Terry have four sons, Jackson, Mason, Jarrett, and Tristan. She involved them in the town’s activities and cherished the fact that Excelsior is a great place to raise a family. When the boy’s were young, they had fun participating in the town’s Apple Day parade, Crazy Days, the Fourth of July Celebration, and other town events. These were great traditions that Debbie helped to keep alive through her participation in the town and through her business.

Debbie was also an avid horsewoman. Her passion for riding brought many people into her life. She kept horses at her home in Delano and was active in the Sherburne Mounted Patrol as well as the Dassel Saddle Club.

On Friday, September 12, 2014, the unveiling of an incredible bench dedicated to Debbie Hart took place. Excelsior artist David A. Cooley devoted over 800 hours to creating this beautiful memorial. The bench is created from handmade ceramic tiles and includes a poem written by Debbie’s son, Jarrett.

“Deep dark seas of dreams, what pain, what love wraps ‘round me? a heart floating free”

Debbie Hart’s Bench - From David Cooley, The artist who designed and built th

e bench. – I had known Debbie for several years because of their art supply business. I almost went to work for Debbie years ago as a picture framer. I worked as a volunteer with her on the Art On The Lake art fair for two years and came to really appreciate her leadership skills as she managed all the diverse personalities and kept them on track.

In the past, I’d made a simple mosaic bench for summer use in front of Debbie and Terry’s store. A few months after Debbie’s death, Terry called and asked me to create a mosaic bench as a memorial to her and that he’d try to get it put in the park in Excelsior. I did a simple sketch idea for the bench and Terry and the council approved it. That’s when I got the big lump in my throat because, now I had to figure out how to build it.

Three dimensions don’t come as easily to a two dimensional painter. I started on the bench in August 2013 and got all of the welding done except for the legs on the base by the end of October.

I cast the concrete form for the top in my basement over the winter and made tile for the top. Tile for the top was set and grouted during early May. I then set about making tile for the base and bending metal and welding it for the legs of the base.

The bench contains around 200 feet of stainless steel rod framework (100 lbs.); 300 plus pounds of concrete and several pounds of miscellaneous setting materials. A small amount of the tile is hand made the rest is a commercial porcelain tile that was hand glazed with up to three coats of glaze. The commercial tile was chosen for uniform thickness and is freeze thaw stable. The completed bench weighs between 4 and 5 hundred pounds. It took approximately 800 hours to complete. It should last for several decades.

– David Cooley, Shorewood, Minnesota

Hoyle, Reverend Wayne E. (1907 – 1974) Reverend Hoyle was from Gardiner, MA and was a graduate of Banger Seminary. He married Grace E. Alward in 1941 and in 1946 he received a call to serve for the Excelsior Congregational Church which he served for 26 years. He was a kind and generous man. Some youngsters thought he
was Jesus because looked a bit different as he was totally bald with a beautiful smile. He spent hours outside of church, often visiting the sick or injured friends or parishioners. Reverend Hoyle and his wife had two sons, Stephen and David.

**Hutmaker, Jimmy (1932 – 2007)** Jimmy was born in New Germany, Minnesota but moved to Excelsior in the 40s where he became known as “Mister Jimmy.” He was a celebrity in Excelsior. His outgoing demeanor and engaging personality earned him the title of “Roving Ambassador.” It was in this capacity that Jimmy spent his days and nights wandering the streets of the city, chewing on a cigar, talking to himself, and greeting locals by name. He would surprise anyone who took the time to engage him in conversation however, with relevant and current discussion about you, your relatives or current events.

Jimmy was the key character involved in the story about Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones, writing the song “You Can’t Always Get What You Want” after the Stones visit to Excelsior in 1964. Bob Bolles and his wife Diane had Jimmy over for dinner weekly. Bob recalls taking Jimmy by Limousine (they both wore tuxedos-Jimmy also in top hat) to see the Rolling Stones in 1997 at the Metrodome. Jimmy spent almost the whole time in the Lobby signing autographs. He might have missed most of the show, but as Jimmy often told folks, “you can’t always get what you want.”

**Kruckenberg, Cory (1926 – 2013)** Cory was born on May 4, 1926 in Hartley, Iowa. After serving in WWII and the Korean War as a Staff Sergeant in the Airborne Infantry. He and his wife Mary were married in 1953. Cory earned his dental degree in 1957 from the University of Minnesota and started his private practice in Excelsior, while teaching part-time at the University of Minnesota School of Dentistry.

Cory also loved the game of golf and developed quite a reputation amongst those who knew him and were fortunate enough to play a round of golf with him. You also never saw him without a smile. Good natured and always optimistic.

While living in Excelsior he was a member of many civic organizations and had a life long devotion to Rotary International. Cory dedicated most of his life to helping others around the world. Cory taught at the University of Saigon, worked in a Vietnamese refugee camp, worked with the Totonac Indians of Mexico, and spent time in Moscow and Stalingrad as a consultant to dental clinics. As a Director of Project HOPE in 7 Eastern Caribbean countries, and the director of the school of Dental Nurses on the islands of Grenada and Jamaica.

**Lord, Miles Welton (1919)** Miles was born in Dean Lake, Minnesota. He married Maxine Zontelli. Miles and Maxine raised two boys and two girls at their home on Christmas Lake. They had one other daughter, Mary who died in infancy. He received his Bachelor’s degree from the University of Minnesota in 1946 and his law degree from University of Minnesota Law School in 1948. He served in the U.S. Army Air Corps from 1944 to 1945 and served as an Assistant U.S. attorney for the District of Minnesota in 1951. He became Minnesota’s Attorney General from 1955 to 1960 and a full U.S. Attorney for the District of Minnesota from 1961 until his appointment to the Federal bench in 1966 by President Lyndon Johnson.

A recap of Miles’ career.

- 1944 –1945: U.S. Army Air Corps;
- 1948 –1951: Private practice, Minneapolis, Minnesota;
- 1951–1952: Assistant U.S. attorney, District of Minnesota;
- 1952 –1954: Private practice, Minneapolis, Minnesota;
- 1955 –1960: State attorney general, Minnesota;
- 1960–1961: Private practice, Minneapolis, Minnesota;
- 1966 –1985: Federal judge, United States District Court, District of Minnesota;

Miles lives in Chanhassen, Minnesota. His son Jim served in the Minnesota State Senate and as Minnesota State Treasurer and died on June 6, 2008. Jim suffered from Diabetes. He also has a daughter, Priscilla Lord Faris, who ran against satirist Al Franken in the Democratic Party primary in 2008 for the Senate seat held by Norm Coleman. Miles Lord, Jr. (Mick) served as a top assistant to State Auditor Robert W. Mattson, Jr. and later managed the business affairs of the Miles Lord & Associates law office prior to his death on April 12, 2012. Miles’ youngest daughter, Virginia, is a lawyer and real estate agent for Coldwell Banker Burnet in Wayzata, Minnesota.
short stay in the hospital, their daughter came home but she needed a tremendous amount of medication. Vic Bacon, who owned the drugstore, filled all the prescriptions. Friends helped with food and caring for their little boy while they spent so much time with their daughter while she was receiving treatment. The police and firemen gave blood for their daughter and Bill was given a job driving a truck for Super Valu in Hopkins. Everyone helped so much but their daughter finally died in April of 1954.

After things settled down a little, they went to see Vic Bacon to find out how much they owed him for the medication. By that time, Bill was able to borrow money through the 544 Local Union. Vic said to them, “Did I send you a bill?” They said no. “Well don’t think about it until you get a bill, just go home and enjoy your little boy and your life together.” A bill never came.

Bill and Lorraine were blessed with another little girl in 1954 and another little boy in 1955.

Lorraine worked for another generous man by the name of Conroy Webster. Conroy Webster who owned the Super Valu store. Conroy took her aside and told her when to slide groceries through without the people having to pay for them. He said too many people were having hard times and couldn’t afford the groceries or school supplies they needed.

“Bill and I could fill pages and pages about all the kind people and businesses in Excelsior who helped out whenever they could. Businesses like Minnetonka Bank and Lyman Lumber were just a few. As the children grew up, the town always offered them a job doing something appropriate for the age they were at the time,” Lorraine said.

Bill and Lorraine have lived in Excelsior for 62 years and at 89, Lorraine still drives and works part time for various people in town. Lorraine says there is little if anything they would want to change about living here. “The people, the schools, the churches – what a wonderful place to live.”

Lueck, Wilbert “Bill” and Lorraine Bill and Lorraine moved to Excelsior in 1952 and bought a home at 239 Courtland Street. The two of them have an unwavering fondness for all the past and present friends and neighbors they’ve known over the years.

In 1953 they had a two year old daughter and a one year old son. Their daughter became ill and the polio epidemic was in full swing so they thought that’s what it might be. Dr. Milton Seifert Sr. and Dr. Joe Dupont were their local doctors and they suggested they see a Dr. at the Sister Kenny Institute. We found out there that it wasn’t polio but cancer.

Bill worked at an airstrip in Greenland at the time but came home as soon as he heard the news. Like many people during those years, they had no health insurance so after a
Newhouse, Dr. William “Bill” (0000 – 0000) Bill and his wife Sandy . . .

Olds, James (Jim) Roger (1939 – 2013) Jim “Tiger” Olds had two brothers, Clifton (Clif) and Robert. (Bob) Jim grew up in Excelsior. He was a Boy Scout and an avid snow skier and spent time skiing locally and in Aspen, Colorado. He loved canoeing in the Boundary Water Canoe Area and sailing at his parents cabin in Cross Lake, Minnesota. Jim also had a passion for the arts, and was an accomplished trumpet player. Jim played in High School and continued through his years at Dartmouth. Though he was intrigued with architecture, he decided to manage his families dry goods store, Olds Dry Goods, until it closed. He served on the Planning Commission from 1975 to 1982, as mayor from 1987 to 1991 and was city treasurer from 1996 to 2009.

Rumor has it that, one summer a young man accidently knocked over a light pole with his fathers truck. The young man went to Jim to explain and Jim said he’d make a notation and come up with a cost. The young man came to Jim numerous times to find out what the charges were and Jim’s response was always the same, “The bill continues to end up on the bottom of the pile. We’ll let you know when it comes due.” It never did from what we’ve heard.

Jim was also very involved with the Excelsior Rotary as a long-time member and past president. He promoted Roaring Twenties Days and was a big supporter of the annual 4th of July Fireworks. Jim’s personality and sense of humor had a positive affect on his many friends and the whole community.

– Internal content authoring

Olson, Senior Pastor Dave – Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church Dave is still a young man. A father, husband and good friend. When we speak of people in our community who have given back in so many ways, I think of Hugh Gilmore who was the pastor here at Mt Calvary in the 1990s and today the community embraces Dave Olson for many reasons.

We have the benefit of

– Internal content authoring
Stolz, Don (1917 – 2015) Don Stolz was born in Castleton, Kansas. Don married Joan Fuller in 1944. Don and Joan had one daughter Joannie and five boys. They sadly lost their daughter Joannie to drowning when she was three years old.

Stolz bought the Old Log Theater in Greenwood in 1946 and sold the theater in 2013. Stolz was an actor, writer, producer, and director best known as the guiding force behind the Old Log Theater, but he was also a radio veteran and played a pioneering role in the growth of television in the Twin Cities.

His broadcasting career began in 1938 at WKY Radio in Oklahoma City, where he co-starred in the network program Devil’s Roost. He later appeared on the CBS Radio Network program Let’s Pretend. He bought the Old Log in Excelsior in 1946 and soon became heavily involved in the Twin Cities broadcast scene, acting for WCCO Radio and directing all the television commercials produced by Campbell Mithun. He produced several shows and holiday specials for WCCO TV, including the first full-length play ever televised here, and hosted and produced On the Spot, which featured amateur motion pictures. In 1953 he began the roles for which a generation remembers him: the “paws” and off-screen voices of “Towser the Dog” and “Tallulah the Cat” on the beloved WCCO TV children’s show Axel and His Dog with Clellen Card.

Until 2013, Don worked at the Old Log Theater seven days a week. He was tireless in his dedication to the Old Log, to his family, and the community. Well into his 90s, Stolz was at the Old Log for every performance, always giving a pre-show curtain speech.

“He’d give a detailed curtain speech, highlighting audience birthdays and anniversaries, teasing and delighting the crowd. Those speeches never failed to astonish me, and each and every time I give a curtain speech for Dark & Stormy, I think about Don, and hope to capture a tiny sliver of the enormous presence and charm and joy he always exuded.” – Sara Marsh of Dark & Stormy Productions

In 2008, Stolz won the Ivy Award for Lifetime Accomplishment in Minnesota Theater and was inducted into the Evergreen Club of Musicians. He has also won the Honorary Lifetime Membership of Actors Equity, named Businessman of the Year by the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce and Excelsior Chamber of Commerce. He has also written two books and four plays.

Up until almost days before Don died he spent hours at his office “Don Stolz Productions” in Excelsior two to three days a week. Les Todd would bring him to and from his office and the elder care facility he was living at.

– Internal content authoring

The Amazing History of Our Community
Williams, Robert K. “Bob” (1922 – 2014)  
Bob loved living in Excelsior and considered himself a lucky person – he was a neighbor, friend, author, musician, historian, journalist, story teller, public speaker, and an avid University of Minnesota fan. “I’ve been a lucky person, very lucky,” Bob said at an awards ceremony.

“Bob had one of the most positive and uplifting attitudes of anyone I have ever met,” said former Excelsior Mayor Nick Ruehl. “I know he is one of Excelsior’s greatest cheerleaders.” Lewis Agrell said that Bob “ . . . was a renaissance man – someone who inspired the people around him to work diligently, to create more, to give more, and to be more.”

Bob was born in Breckenridge, Minnesota and arrived in Excelsior when he was 8 years old in 1930. Bob’s family were seasonal residents in Excelsior while his mother worked at the Excelsior Amusement Park, and they moved permanently from Minneapolis to Excelsior when he was in the seventh grade. Growing up in Excelsior he worked at odd jobs – among them mopping floors at Olds Dry Goods and delivering handbills for Red Owl. At Excelsior High School, he was active on the school paper The Breezes. After graduating from Excelsior High School in 1939, he worked at Northern States Power and after December 7, 1941 joined the Army Air Corps (now the Air Force) where he became an officer, a B26 bombardier, and trained flight crews to fight overseas. He didn’t have any expectations about going to college – his family didn’t have much money – but was able to attend the University of Minnesota thanks to the G.I. Bill after his discharge.

Bob married Patty Lees at Trinity Episcopal Church in Excelsior in 1947. They lived on First Street, then moved to Second Street, and then moved into their home on Bell Street in 1954 where they lived for more than sixty years. Bob and Patty had three sons, Robert J., Donald and David plus five grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

After graduating from the University of Minnesota with a degree in Journalism, he began his newspaper career at the Hennepin County Review and then went on to edit the Minnetonka Record and the Deephaven Post, owned by publisher George Dutoit; jobs he saw as a public service. He was not only the editor, but reporter, photographer and sports editor. “Our main objective was always to do what we could for our community,” said Williams. During his tenure, the Minnetonka Record supported many major initiatives in Excelsior, from house-to-house mail delivery to parking meters along Lake Street, which helped with the upkeep of beaches and the Commons. The newspaper won an award for their Centennial edition and another for local fire prevention.

Bob spent a lifetime devoting time to his family and giving service to the Excelsior Community. He wrote four novels over the years, one of which, Good luck on Your Downward Journey is partly autobiographical, based on stories of his own youth in Excelsior. Bob was a past president of the Excelsior Rotary with perfect attendance for over fifty years and was proud to be a part of the Rotary Strive program mentoring seniors at Minnetonka High School. He served on the vestry at Trinity Episcopal Church and sang in the Trinity choir for over sixty years. Bob also edited The Minnesota Missionary, a publication for the Episcopal Diocese of Minnesota. His association with Don Stolz and the Old Log Theater spanned over five decades. In 1965 he left the newspaper business to work full-time at the Old Log where he managed public relations, group sales and wrote original scores for the holiday children’s plays. Bob was a local historian and gave summer walking tours of Excelsior until he was ninety. In 2014, Bob received the Minnetonka Alumni Association Distinguished Service Award in recognition of his contributions and service to the community.

Both Bob and Patty loved to travel and took twelve trips to England and seventy-three trips to the Island House Hotel on Mackinac Island, each time staying in the same room. After first visiting Mackinac Island in 1964, they expanded their annual visit to two or three times a year and were frequently joined by family and friends. In 2011 they made their final visit to Mackinac Island for a family reunion. Where ever they traveled they made friends, and on the door of their room at the Island House Hotel is a plaque that reads “In Honor of Bob and Patty Williams, Author, Guests and Lifelong Friends”.

Bob loved Mackinac Island, but he loved Excelsior
even more. “I always remember a quote from a former minister in Excelsior,” he said. “He moved a lot, and when he retired he came back to Excelsior because, he said, it was the closest place to Heaven on earth.

Which pretty much says it all about this marvelous town.”

Bob wrote in one of his songs:

“One summer afternoon, a day forgotten,  
When every moment was a friend,  
It never crossed my mind  
There’s be an end to summertime.

No time to think of yesterday,  
There’s no tomorrow, just today.

One summer afternoon, a day forgotten.

I knew my autumn would begin;  
When sunny days must yield  
To shadows cross a field  
A secret unrevealed before.

And there’s no summer anymore.

– Bob Williams

“One of the things that Dad passed on to us was, whatever it is you’re doing, do your best at it,” said his oldest son Bob. “He sets the bar pretty high.”

– Recollection from Bob J. Williams

View Bob Williams acceptance speech of the Distinguished Service Award at the 2013 Minnetonka Alumni Association Awards Ceremony as of 2015, can be seen at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FXlb-z4CPb4.

There is an interview with Bob done by Lael Grathwol in 1988 that can be seen as of 2015 at: http://reflections.mndigital.org/cdm/ref/collection/p16022coll38/id/139
The Lake and The Cities

Though much of city government and city services got its start prior to the 1940s, the brief history will be covered in this section and will bring us up to present day 2015.

Planning, decision making, regulations, fire and police protection, governance and the health and wellbeing of the residents and businesses, is all part of becoming and remaining a thriving community.

Chamber of Commerce:

Planning Commission:

The Position of Mayor:

Tonka Bay: Wheeler, Wilcox, Ed Bauman, Glen Froberg, Gerry De La Vega

Excelsior: Anson Mase, Roy Bechrle, Dick Knapp, Nick Ruehl, Mark Gaylord

Deephaven: Hazen J. Burton, Tom Andersdon, Paul A. Skrede
Invasion of Eurasian Watermilfoil – 1950s through the 1980s

Eurasian watermilfoil was accidentally introduced to North America from Europe. Spread westward into inland lakes primarily by boats and also by waterbirds, it reached Midwestern states between the 1950s and 1980s. A key factor in the plant’s success is its ability to reproduce through stem fragmentation and runners. A single segment of stem and leaves can take root and form a new colony. Fragments clinging to boats and trailers can spread the plant from lake to lake.

The Excelsior Volunteer Fire Department:

One of the oldest records of the Excelsior Volunteer Fire Department is the Relief Association Charter from the State of Minnesota. This Charter in a black walnut frame hanging in the station. Other records are a bucket brigade operation in 1882, and a horse drawn water tank in 1893. This water tank could have been the street sprinkler, or Mr. Green’s cistern filling tank wagon.

It is recorded in an earlier book of...
The Churches, Schools, Businesses and Events During The Mid 1900s to the Present, 2015.

We have seen tremendous progress on many fronts during the mid to late 1900s and into the twenty first century. We have also experienced tragedies once more that have darkened our spirit at times.

All of us in these communities have celebrated the men and women who have given their time and their lives in the all too numerous confrontations around the world over these many years. They have assured our safety and our freedom.

At the same time, we celebrate the men and women who have lived here and done so much over the years to assure that we would have healthy, progressive and exciting communities to grow up in and live in. During this same period of time, we’ve seen transportation, travel, technology, medicine, health and fitness, religion and education grow and improve our lives like never before.

We are fortunate to live in these exciting times and in such a wonderful area with a heritage to honor and respect. It is a privilege to carry it forward for our own children and future members of these communities.

**Abel Heating:** Vernon (Vern) Abel opened Abel Heating and Air Conditioning at 274 Water Street in 1953. Vern ran a business that everyone respected and appreciated.

**Adele’s:**

**Belle Aire Yacht Club:**

**Biella:** Biella, opened its doors on June, 2003. It was a upscale Italian restaurant on Water Street in Excelsior. It announced that it will close on June 24 after 10 years in business. Owner Mark Nazigian announced the closure Sunday night on the restaurant’s Facebook page. He said Biella’s landlord doubled the property’s rent, causing the restaurant to move. This restaurant was a wonderful addition to the community. Everyone was sorry to see it go.

**Curley’s:** (The Caribbean) Gordy Koch

**The Christmas Lake Yacht Club.** The Christmas Lake Yacht Club was founded in the late 1950s by Don Zinn and Ray Walker. The purpose of the Club was to create an interest in and teach sailing to the children living on Christmas Lake.

The original 14 members ordered a Sailfish Alcort boat (75 square feet of sail) from the Minnetonka Boat Works. The original members included: Don Zinn, Ray Walker, Dick Thompson, John Schmitt, Jim Peterson, John Olin, Miles Lord, Bill Kruger, Joe Joyce, Lee Hermann, Paul Elwood, John Edwards, Pat Cunningham, and Lucian Brown. A Christmas Lake Yacht Club Sail Pennant, with the initials “CL” followed by a stylized Christmas tree and the initials “YC”, was adopted for their use. It had a light blue background, green tree and white letters. Races on Christmas Lake were held Sunday afternoons in July and August at 2 p.m. These men and their families manned the “Judge’s Barge”, Ray Walker’s pontoon boat.

The officers - Commodore, Vice
Commodore, Chief Judge and Secretary/Treasurer - were elected at the Award’s Dinner which was held annually for nearly ten years. Three trophies were awarded: the Walker Trophy for First Place Overall, the Cunningham Trophy for Second Place Overall, and the Most Improved Sailor Trophy.

The Club both held and went to Invitational Regattas with White Bear Lake, Sunfish Lake, Lake Nokomis and Lake Minnetonka Yacht Clubs. Also, each year the Club sent boats to the Minneapolis Aquatennial Regatta on Lake Calhoun.

The first Fourth of July Boat Parade was sponsored by the Christmas Lake Yacht Club and was organized by Paul Elwood and Heidi Zinn Larson. The Parade later included a Picnic, usually held at the current Commodore’s home.

With the introduction of Catamarans and Lasers on the Lake it was difficult to hold races and judge them for three classes of boats. As a result, members lost interest and formal activity ceased in the early 1970s.

Information gathered by Joe Joyce, with information provided and reviewed by Carl Zinn, David Walker, Jim Peterson, Lee & Jo Hermann, and Sue Joyce Seifert.

Thank you to Corinne Nilsen Peterson
Excelsior High School – Rescue of Old Excelsior High School:

Every driver passing through the City of Excelsior on Highway 7 has observed the old Excelsior High School building. Its dark bricks -- stacked three stories high -- make it a distinctive landmark. The 1929 building was already fourteen years when William O. Nilsen was named Excelsior School District Superintendent District in 1943.

By 1949, with Bill’s vision and vigor, and Excelsior School Board encouragement, citizens around the south end of Lake Minnetonka were presented with two highly significant referendums in close succession; both passed with 87% approval ratings. The first referendum proposed the formation of a consolidated school district to be named Minnetonka School District 276. “Wild Bill”, his nickname by then, was appointed as its first superintendent.

The second referendum proposed the purchase of land for Minnetonka High School on which it now stands. Old Excelsior High School became used to educate older elementary students during the baby-boom years following World War II. Population growth years under “Wild Bill” also prompted construction of additional elementary classrooms throughout District 276 as well as a new Junior High Schools (East and West).

By 1973, Bill was well into his retirement at his home on Christmas Lake. On Monday mornings of his own choosing, and completely unannounced, he returned to the District 276 offices in Excelsior, threw his hat 12 feet into the superintendent’s office where cabinet meetings were being held, and immediately stopped the business-at-hand. He never stayed very long (up to ten minutes); he expressed his warm regards, shared a school remembrance, and always ended with a joke. For us in the room, he became “Good Humor Bill”, which encouraged us as we addressed challenges in a new era.

We faced a “perfect” storm. One huge challenge was the 1971 Minnesota Miracle legislation that severely restricted District 276 revenues in order to equalize better per pupil revenues and expenditures across the state. A second challenge was the loss of revenues from student enrollment decline, as the baby-boom years ebbed. A third challenge was continued growth in salary costs as staff training and experience grew and...
were no longer offset by the employment of younger staff.

To reduce operating costs, old Deephaven High School was rented to a private school. Old sections of Groveland and Minnewashta Elementary Schools were demolished. West Junior High School was closed, partially leased to businesses and non-profits, and the rest mothballed. All 9th were moved to the Minnetonka High School. Old Excelsior High School continued to be used for auxiliary purposes, including a place for senior citizens to meet.

Once again, things changed. By the start of the 1980s, children of the baby boomers had school-age children of their own. New housing developments opened in District 276. West Junior High re-opened first as an Intermediate School for grades 5 and 6 and later was used for grades 6, 7, and 8 (West Middle School). Additional classrooms were added to elementary schools. What about old Excelsior High School?

New state building codes had raised the bar. Old Excelsior High School had a single, wooden stairway, all the way up and down its three floors; there was no elevator for the handicapped. Windows were single-pane and energy inefficient. Many rooms had a single electrical outlet. The auditorium stage doubled as the gym, and very old wooden seats on the main floor and balcony made for poor acoustics. Moreover, the small high school classrooms of earlier eras lacked the square footage required by the state for activity-centered elementary school instruction.

Two plans emerged. Option #1: Thoroughly renovate old Excelsior High School for elementary school use and meet modern day building codes. Option #2: Demolish the old Excelsior High School and build new elementary classrooms on the site. Option #1 cost more than Option #2. The cost-conscious school administration and school board proposed Option #2 in a referendum proposal on September 11, 1990. Community engagement ensued.

Life-long Excelsior resident Roger Hennessy, who had attended the old high school and who subsequently ran his Travel Agency on Main Street in Excelsior, wrote a letter to the local newspaper. He opposed the referendum, citing his fond youthful memories in the old structure and advocated that it not be demolished. Excelsior residents rallied, and District 276 voters defeated the proposal 58.8% to 41.2%.

Another subsequent referendum bundled the more expensive Option #1 with other building additions and improvements around District 276. It passed! Thus, old Excelsior High School was rescued for use by future generations. Moreover, the strong desire of many residents in the City of Excelsior to modernize the interior of older buildings while retaining their historic character and general outward appearances was honored.

That tradition was continued in 2013 when District 276, under Superintendent Dr. Dennis Peterson, added a new gym/lunchroom adjacent to the old Excelsior High School to meet student growth requirements in the present day and age. Care was taken to mimic the 1929 architecture and 1929 windows. Moreover, the original high school logo (courtesy copy from Rod Thompson, Class of 1948) was reproduced in the middle of the gym floor. After 61 years of silence – 1952 through 2013 – the cry of the Blue Jay is heard once again in Excelsior.

-- Submitted by: Dr. Donald Draayer, Retired Superintendent, 1971-1995

The Amazing History of Our Community
Excelsior Animal Hospital: For many years Dr. Bill Stover owned and operated the Excelsior Animal Hospital which is located on the corner that County Road 19 takes at Beehrle Avenue and County 19. This was the site of the Studer Dump during then 1940s through the 1960s. Today is is owned and managed by Patricia Waples and is still a highly rated Animal Hospital.

Excelsior Title: Beverly Holtze started Excelsior Title in

Johnson, Captain John Ropstol Memorial: This memorial is located at the junction of West Lake Street, Second Street and Mill Street. The men’s garden club annually maintains and beautifies the triangular memorial with flowers and fall clean-up. The Johnson memorial is shared by the War Memorial conceived of by Kenny Kohenen.

Cap Johnson’s Grandson’s are named on a plaque placed on one of the two monuments that straddle the anchor and the boat propeller. They are: Anson R. Mase, Karl F. Hehl, Kenneth R. Strate, Raymond E. Strate & John M. Strate.

The Memorial itself was donated by Kenneth, Raymond & John Strate May 30, 1988.

Captain Johnson Owned and operated the City of Saint Louis, the John Alden, the Mayflower, the Plymouth, the Priscilla, the Puritan and the Lake Minnetonka Dredging Co. from 1906 – 1931.

The War Memorial: The left side of the War Memorial is inscribed with “In Memory Of Those Who Were Called And Served.” The names for World War I are: Grant Lorenz, Donald Gray, Blanchard West, Mervin Grover, Guy R. Forbes, J. Jay Vietz, John W. Crabtree and Roger Kennedy. The Korean War Veteran is Herbert L. Schmidt.

The inscription on the right side, “Excelsior Area Veterans Killed In Action While Fighting In Our Great Wars,” commemorates World War II and Viet Nam. Names for WWII are: Alfred Bottkes, Omer E. Huntington, Paul B. Johnsen, William R. Olsen, Donald M. Eden, Lyle E. Hollister, William H. Hollister, James A. Studer, Donald Bengson, Roy D. Schuck, Russell F. Marboe, Frank Quady, Richard J. Hollister, Daryl Luedke and Bruce C. Stangoht.

The names for Viet Nam are: Bernard A. Teske, Thomas A. Knopik, Jerome A. Olson, Martin J. Benson, Roger M. Kittelson, Dale G. Granger, Carl Kollmeyer and Eric C. Egge. These men served in the Army, the Air Force, the Navy, the Canadian Air Force and the Marines.

Leipold’s Gifts & Antiques:

Lord Fletchers:
M&M Auto Body

Maynard’s: (The lineage of the building)

Mai Tai:
Excelsior Lutheran Church became Mount Calvary Lutheran Church in about 1941: The 1920s and 1930s presented some very difficult economic times. It was not a good time to start any projects.

Yet, on August 6, 1930 a small group of courageous men and women organized the Excelsior Lutheran Church. There were fifty-three adults and twenty-two children who composed the charter members of the new church. It adopted as it’s motto “The new church with the old gospel”.

The members met for the first time on May 4, 1930 in the Masonic Hall on Water Street. The theme hymn was “Jesus, Keep Me Near The Cross.” Soon the Sunday School and Women’s groups were formed.

Times were hard and members pitched in to do whatever was necessary. A portable altar was made and a candelabra was made from melted brass collected from the members of the congregation.

The congregation continued to grow and develop new areas of ministry. In 1933 a building fund program was established, looking forward to a new church facility. On a cold January night in 1936 the congregation voted to purchase two lots in downtown Excelsior for $1,400 at what became 30, County Road 19. In April of that year construction started on the new church, with only a basement completed. This facility served the congregation well, even though there were many problems with the building, including leaking roofs during the spring rains.

Again, the congregation continued to persevere during the difficult times of WWII. September 8, 1948 they voted to build the edifice at an estimated cost of $62,350. The new edifice was dedicated on June 5, 1949.

June 6, 1954 they again voted to purchase additional property for Sunday School classrooms. With the growth of children’s ministry the congregation became a charter member of the Luther Park Camp in 1958.

In 1959 additional property was purchased which was used to build an education building in 1961 at a cost of $200,408. In 1959 the congregation voted to change the name to Mount Calvary Lutheran Church.

The 1970s saw a substantial grow in membership, programs and ministries. A Garden Court was constructed in 1975 to provide for outdoor services.

In 1986 the congregation approved the design of a new worship center. Ground breaking took place on September 1987. The new building was dedicated on September 18, 1988, providing a new sanctuary, offices, education classrooms, kitchen and fellowship space.

August 29, 1999 witnessed the dedication of Luther Hall, providing fellowship and recreational space, a new Narthex, new offices, refurbished classrooms and other spaces.

Mount Calvary has always been a church with great outreach into the community and world. It continues to focus it’s ministry on sharing the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

– contributed by Hugh Gilmore (prior Pastor)

The Church of St. Therese of Deephaven: St. Therese Catholic Church has been a part of the Deephaven community since 1946. Our vision states: There are many ministries involved in parish life including: pastoral, worship & music, child care, faith formation, school, and business administration.

The St. Therese Catholic School opened in 1959. We are blessed to offer an environment in which students experience God’s love through a commitment to academic excellence and spiritual growth, while fostering moral, social and physical development.

St. Therese is located at 18323, Minnetonka Boulevard in Deephaven.
**Party Cove:** Party Cove is a beach and area of water on the Northwest side of Big Island where boats of all sizes and men, women and children will gather to anchor and swim, listen to music, meet friends, get some rays and “Party.” It’s a long stretch of the Island that most of the time is protected from wind and heavy boat traffic. The water patrol monitors activity there and buoys have been placed to accommodate water patrol boats in case of an emergency.

**The Downbeat:** The Lakeview and Downbeat were located in Spring Park on County 51 and on North Arm with Lake access. They were very popular during 1950s and 1960s. The Downbeat would provide big band entertainment on Sundays. Jim “Tiger” Olds, from Excelsior, one of the people who this book is dedicated to, was part of a musical quartet with Jim on trumpet, Larry Henke on Drums, Danny Graham on piano and John Darke on bass fiddle. All Minnetonka High School graduates. They played there a few times including a set when they opened for George Shearing.

George Shearing was a British jazz pianist, born blind in London in 1919 and composed more than 300 titles including “Lullaby of Birdland.”

“Tiger” passed away in February of 2013 and was partly the inspiration for this book. Danny Graham is a gifted pianist who received a P.H.D. in music from John’s Hopkins and Yale and then taught music at Northern Colorado State University for years before moving to Los Angeles. John Darke’s parents owned the Excel Food Market at 211 Water Street in the 1950s. John went on to become very successful in the computer industry in California but has maintained many good friendships in the area and his ties with Excelsior.

**Studer Park:** Jerome and Katherine Studer owned the land that was the local Excelsior Dump for many years. This property is now the Collision Center, the Excelsior Animal Hospital and Studer Park. Jerome and Katherine donated the land to the city with the agreement that the city would take some of the land and save it for a park or some kind of community use. Presently, 2014, part of the land designated as the park is used for community vegetable gardens in memory of Jerome and Katherine Studer. Jerome was one of 9 boys born in Excelsior in the early 1900s. The boys had one sister, Lorraine.

**The Copperstein:**

**The Lakeview:**

**The Narrows Restaurant:**

**Twin City Federal:**

**Wells Fargo Bank:**

The Amazing History of Our Community
We’ve seen changes occurring in everything we’re about and seen it happening faster than at any time in history.

We’ve had our share of wars. We’ve been “hot and cold” on numerous confrontations. Our shores were severely attacked and we’ve seen words become more common place like “terrorist” and “extremist” and new words, terms and acronyms like ISIS.

We’ve enjoyed many kinds of music and unbelievable developments in the movie industry. Computers, cell phones, iPads, the space program and major growth in athletics, health and medicine. But at the same time we’ve once again seen tragedy in assassinations of political figures, celebrities and tragic deaths due to the growth and use of illegal drugs.

Some of the progress we’ve made in freedom of speech, religion, the right to vote and racial equality is very positive, but it is interesting and sad to see that each of those issues still surface too often indicating that we still have more work to do.

Our communities continue to thrive because we care and we build with the love, hard work and creativity much like that of our forefathers. We’re responsible to them as much as we are to our future and it looks like we’re doing the job right. Following are a few things that were happening around this country as we have been enjoying and growing up in our communities.

Korean War: The Korean War was a war between North and South Korea. The United Nations force led by the United States of America fought for the South. China fought for the North, which was also assisted by the Soviet Union. The war arose from the division of Korea at the end of World War II and from the global tensions of the Cold War that developed immediately afterwards. The war lasted 3 years, 1 month and 2 days from June 25, 1950 to July 27, 1953. The result of the war was a Korean Armistice Agreement. Key players in the war from the US were President Harry S. Truman, General Douglas MacArthur, General Ridgway and General Omar Bradley and president elect Dwight D. Eisenhower. The US suffered 33,686 battle deaths.

Elvis Presley: Elvis Aaron Presley (January 8, 1935 – August 16, 1977) was an American singer and actor. He was born in a Shotgun House in Tupelo, Mississippi. He is regarded as one of the most significant cultural icons of the 20th century, he is often referred to as “the King of Rock and Roll,” or simply, “the King.” Presley was born in Tupelo, Mississippi, and when he was 13 years old, he and his family relocated to Memphis, Tennessee. His music career began there in 1954, when he recorded a song with producer Sam Phillips at Sun Records.

President John F. Kennedy, Bobby Kennedy, Martin Luther King and John Lennon:

Man on the moon: Apollo 11 was the spaceflight that landed the first humans on the Moon, Americans Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, on July 20, 1969, at 20:18 UTC (Coordinated Universal Time). Armstrong became the first to step onto the lunar surface six hours later on July 21, 1969 at 02:56 UTC.

Segregation: Congress passed the Reconstruction Act of 1867, the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution in 1870 providing the right to vote, and the Civil Rights Act of 1875 forbidding racial segregation in accommodations. The repeal of “separate but equal” laws was a key focus of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. In Brown vs. Board of Education, (1954), the Supreme Court outlawed segregated public education facilities for blacks and whites at the state level. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 ended all state and local laws requiring segregation.

Martin Luther King Jr. (January 15, 1929 – April 4, 1968) was an American Baptist minister, activist, humanitarian, and leader in the African-American Civil Rights Movement. He is best known for his role in the advancement of civil rights using nonviolent civil disobedience based on his Christian beliefs. On October 14, 1964, King received the Nobel Peace Prize for combating racial inequality through nonviolence. He is best known for his “I Have A Dream” speech on August 28, 1963 in Washington, D.C.

Martin Luther King was assassinated on April 4, 1968 (aged 39) in Memphis, Tennessee, U.S. In 2015 there is still unrest amongst whites and blacks in America and the only solution appears to be for all people to learn to love one another and forgive past injustice.

Drugs and Alcohol Treatment: As early as 1750 the Native American Revitalization movement to place to 1784 was the beginning of the American temperance movement. 1935 marks the beginning of Alcoholics Anonymous with the meeting of Bill W. and Dr. Bob S.
In 1980 Mothers Against Drunk Driving was formed. In 1947 the idea for Hazelden is born when Austin Ripley, a recovering alcoholic, sets out to create a rehabilitation center for alcoholic priests. In 1948 the Coyle Foundation authorizes purchase of the Power family farm in Center City, Minn., known as Hazelden Farms, for $50,000, and, in turn, sells the property to a charitable hospital corporation in formation, to be called “Hazelden.” Hazelden incorporates in 1949.

Road Racing and Marathons: A messenger runs from Marathon to Athens to report the Greek victory at the Battle of Marathon. At the 1908 Olympics in London the marathon becomes 26.2 miles rather than 25 miles so the Royal family can watch the finish line. In the 1970s, it was becoming common to see a few people out running long distances along the roadways and races on measured courses on roads, as opposed to cross country courses, were popping up all over. 5K, (kilometers) 10K and 42.2K (the marathon) were and are the most common races. Walks and runs are done for fun, for money and often are fund raisers for certain causes like the cure for cancer.

Folk Music: Folk music includes both traditional music and the genre that evolved from it during the 20th century folk revival. The term originated in the 19th century but is often applied to music that is older than that. Some types of folk music are also called world music. Traditional folk music has been defined in several ways: as music transmitted orally, or as music with unknown composers. It has been contrasted with commercial and classical styles. One meaning often given is that of old songs, with no known composers; another is music that has been transmitted and evolved by a process of oral transmission or performed by custom over a long period of time. Peter “Pete” Seeger (May 3, 1919 – January 27, 2014) was an American folk singer and activist. One of his signature songs was “If I Had A Hammer.” He typifies the Folk movement in the middle 1900s and was a member of the “Weavers.” He was inspired by Lead Belly and Ivery popular along with many others such as Woody Guthrie, Peter, Paul & Mary, Joan Baez, Joni Mitchell and Minnesota’s own Bob Dylan.

Personal Computers: Computers were being used as early as 1939, but the the Programma 101 was the first commercial “deskop personal computer,” produced by the Italian company Olivetti and invented by the Italian engineer Pier Giorgio Perotto, inventor of the magnetic card system. The project started in 1962. It was launched at the 1964 New York World’s Fair, and volume production began in 1965, the computer retailling for $3,200. A related term is “PC” that was initially an acronym for “personal computer,” but later became used primarily to refer to the ubiquitous Wintel platform.

Fax Machines: Fax (short for facsimile), sometimes called telecopying or telefax, is the telephonic transmission of scanned printed material (both text and images), normally to a telephone number connected to a printer or other output device. The original document is scanned with a fax machine (or a telecopier), which processes the contents (text or images) as a single fixed graphic image, converting it into a bitmap, and then transmitting it through the telephone system in the form of audio-frequency tones. The receiving fax machine interprets the tones and reconstructs the image, printing a paper copy.

Cell Phones: In 1918 the German railroad system tested wireless telephony on military trains between Berlin and Zossen and hand-held radio transceivers have been available since the 1940s. However, the actual first cell phones were considered to be “car phones,” as they were too large and cumbersome to carry around in a pocket or purse. However, in 1983, the Motorola DynaTAC 8000x arrived on the market. Though huge by today’s standards, it was considered the first truly mobile phone because it was small enough to carry.

911 Emergency Telephone Number: In November 1967, the FCC met with the American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T) to find a means of establishing a universal emergency number that could be implemented quickly. In 1968, AT&T announced that it would establish the digits 9-1-1 (nine-one-one) as the emergency code throughout the United States. The code 9-1-1 was chosen because it best fit the needs of all parties involved. First, and most important, it met public requirements because it is brief, easily remembered, and can be dialed quickly. Second, because it is a unique number, never having been authorized as an office code, area code, or service code, it best met the long range numbering plans and switching configurations of the telephone industry.

911 and the World Trade Center: On September 11, 2001, 19 militants associated with the Islamic extremist group al-Qaeda hijacked four airliners and carried out suicide attacks against targets in the...
United States. Two of the planes were flown into the towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, a third plane hit the Pentagon just outside Washington, D.C., and the fourth plane crashed in a field in Pennsylvania. Often referred to as 9/11, the attacks resulted in extensive death and destruction, triggering major U.S. initiatives to combat terrorism and defining the presidency of George W. Bush. Over 3,000 people were killed during the attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C., including more than 400 police officers and firefighters.

**Country Western**: Country music is a genre of American popular music that originated in Southern United States, in Atlanta, Georgia in the 1920s. It takes its roots from the southeastern genre of American folk music and Western music. Blues modes have been used extensively throughout its recorded history. Country music often consists of ballads and dance tunes with generally simple forms and harmonics accompanied by mostly string instruments such as banjos, electric and acoustic guitars, fiddles, and harmonicas.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Lester Flatt, Earl Scruggs and Roy Acuff were popular. Then came Hank Williams, Patsy Cline, Johnny Cash and Carl Perkins. Willie Nelson, Buck Owens and Merle Haggard have blessed the stage in Nashville. New singers join the ranks of Country Western music every day. Shania Twain, Brooks & Dunn, Faith Hill, Garth Brooks, Dwight Yoakam, Dolly Parton, Carrie Underwood, Taylor Swift and Blake Shelton plus bands and groups of all kinds.

**American Idol**: American Idol is an American singing competition series created by Simon Fuller and produced by 19 Entertainment, and is distributed by FremantleMedia North America. It began airing on Fox on June 11, 2002, as an addition to the Idols format based on the British series Pop Idol and has since become one of the most successful shows in the history of American television.

Winners to date from the beginning are: Kelly Clarkson, Ruben Studdard, Fantasia Barrino, Carrie Underwood, Taylor Hicks, Jordin Sparks, David Cook, Kris Allen, Lee DeWyze, Scotty McCreery, Phillip Phillips, Candice Glover, Caleb Johnson, and Nick Fradiani in 2015.

**Dancing With The Stars**: Dancing with the Stars is an American dance competition show airing since 2005 on ABC in the United States, and CTV/CTV Two in Canada. The show is the American version of the British television series Strictly Come Dancing.

The contestant pairs consist of a celebrity paired with a professional dancer. Past celebrity contestants have included professional and Olympic athletes, supermodels, actors, singers, and astronauts. Each couple performs predetermined dances and competes against the others for judges’ points and audience votes. The couple receiving the lowest combined total of judges’ points and audience votes is eliminated each week until only the champion dance pair remains.

Tom Bergeron is the Emmy-winning host, alongside Erin Andrews, who became co-host in season eighteen Lisa Canning was co-host in season one, Samantha Harris co-hosted seasons two through nine and Brooke Burke-Charvet in seasons ten through seventeen. The show is currently in its twentieth season (2015), and has been renewed for season 21.
Professional Sports:

Satellites:

Hologram Time Capsule: The idea of capturing ourselves on a video for our descendants isn’t anything new but the idea of creating a life-like Hologram that descendants can talk to and ask questions of is breakthrough technology out of futuristic Star Trek or Star Wars imagery. We would be recorded in 3-D, and would talk about pre-determined topics. It would be done with technology presently available that would create a Hologram so our descendants could ask us any of a multitude of scripted questions and view us from almost any angle as we answered. Albums of the future.

Michael Joseph Jackson, August 29, 1958 – June 25, 2009 was an American singer, songwriter, record producer, dancer, and actor. Called the King of Pop, his contributions to music and dance, along with his publicized personal life, made him a global figure in popular culture for over four decades.

The eighth child of the Jackson family, he debuted on the professional music scene along with his elder brothers Jackie, Tito, Jermaine, and Marlon as a member of the Jackson 5 in 1964, and began his solo career in 1971.

Aspects of Jackson’s personal life, including his changing appearance, personal relationships, and behavior, generated controversy. Jackson’s deep dissatisfaction with his appearance, his nightmares and chronic sleep problems, his tendency to remain hyper-compliant, especially with his father, and to remain childlike throughout his adult life, are consistent with the effects of the maltreatment he endured as a young boy.

In the early 1980s, Jackson became a dominant figure in popular music. The music videos for his songs, including those of “Beat It,” “Billie Jean,” and “Thriller,” were credited with breaking down racial barriers and with transforming the medium into an art form and promotional tool. His distinctive sound and style has influenced numerous hip hop, post-disco, contemporary R&B, pop, and rock artists.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entertainment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coffee Shops:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daisy Dillman Band</td>
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Mid 1900s – 2014

From the 1940s through 2014, the people in and around our five communities, have witnessed the wonderful, the heartbreaking and the curious.

From the coverage of man’s first walk on the moon and visits from bands like the Rolling Stones, to the closing of the Amusement Park, the end of drive-in restaurants and theaters to various wars. We’ve experienced it all, not unlike the rest of the country. Yet, at the same time, some happenings were totally unique to this area.

**Man on The Moon 1969:** Apollo 11 was the spaceflight that landed the first humans on the Moon, Americans Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, on July 20, 1969, at 20:18 UTC. Armstrong became the first to step onto the lunar surface six hours later on July 21 at 02:56 (20:18) UTC. (UTC is the primary time standard by which the world regulates clocks and time) A third member of the mission, Michael Collins, piloted the command spacecraft alone in lunar orbit until Armstrong and Aldrin returned to it just under a day later for the trip back to Earth.

Launched by a Saturn V rocket from Kennedy Space Center in Merritt Island, Florida, on July 16, Apollo 11 was the fifth manned mission of NASA’s Apollo program.

**Polio Outbreaks:** The Polio Epidemic of the 1950s. Polio, a word nearly forgotten since the 1950s, a word I will forever remember. The year was 1952, the year of Polio’s onslaught, the worst in U.S. history: 52,000 reported U.S. cases, nearly 3,000 deaths and thousands of lives changed forever from paralysis, withered limbs and immobility.

Fifth grade had ended; summer had begun, with cousins coming for the summer, my twin brother and I anticipated a season of fun, except for one certainty, we would avoid public beaches where we could come in contact with someone carrying the dreaded and highly contagious polio virus. A friend was a grim reminder of polio’s devastation, useless legs, waist to ankle steel braces and short little crutches.

But my twin had the flu, and while he was recovering, I new I was next. Then one day, I felt a chill as I returned early from swimming at an isolated sandy shore on St. Albans Bay, despite the mid-day heat. The fever worsened overnight and the next day, during a family outing on Lake Minnetonka, I could not quiet my shivering and spent the day bundled in towels. The flu, I thought, or was it?

Dr. Reed from Excelsior, had his own suspicions and after I drifted in and out of consciousness for three days, and when the fever broke I could not walk, scheduled an evaluation as Sister Elizabeth Kenny Institute in Minneapolis, the nation’s leading institution for the treatment of polio.

Early the next day, my mother, with my grand parents carried me down a long corridor of the famed institute where two orderlies took over and wheeled me on a gurney through two double doors to a small examination room. A doctor administered a spinal tap to confirm I had Bulbar Polio. Next I was wheeled to the second floor and a 16 bed isolation ward. I couldn’t walk and I couldn’t bite through a banana. My muscles just weren’t working. There, with kids my age I began 100 days of famed Sister Kenny treatment.

Soon I was transferred to a double room where a boy my age, not as fortunate as me was lay paralyzed from the waist down. My Treatment was a twice each day application of steaming hot strips of wool wrapped around arms and legs, usually a soak in a hot tub, and a therapist’s manipulation of my arms and legs, stretching me in ways I didn’t believe possible.

My mother was my only official visitor, for one hour each Sunday. 60 days passed and I gladly welcomed a second visitor, my grandmother. She had volunteered as an aid so she could stop by my room twice each week.

Ninety days passed. School had begun for my twin. I could now walk with the aid of the unique waist length crutches, no steel braces. I had progressed to the point that one day a doctor proclaimed I no longer needed the steaming wool hot packs.
As the doctor exited my room, my mother unexpectedly entered. She carried a small suitcase, which she placed on my bed and opened. In it were my clothes. “Get dressed,” she said. “You’re going home.”

– from Ron Stanchfield Minnetonka class of ’59

### Celebrities That Have Enjoyed Our Communities

**Amy Lou Adams.** Born in Italy in 1974 of English descent. Amy eventually moved to Colorado with her parents. Her father was in the Army and was moved to Castle Rock, CO. She worked at the Chanhassen Dinner Theater for 3 years and while recovering from a pulled muscle, she auditioned for a movie, Drop Dead Gorgeous, which was being filmed in Minneapolis. She got the part and later moved to Los Angeles. She later recalled how very wonderful her time was in Chanhassen because of the security, her schedule and the friendly people.

**Dave Moore (1928 – 1998).** Dave was a local radio and television celebrity who acted at the Old Log Theater often. Moore hosted the evening news on WCCO channel 4 from 1957 until he retired. The anchorman’s humble nature meant that he did not push for high salaries. While reporters in significant markets around the country negotiated more and more expensive contracts, Moore and other newscasters in the Twin Cities were modestly paid. In 1985, Moore stepped down from the 10 p.m. newscast, eventually retiring from the evening news in 1991.
Ken Senn. Jim Haverstock of Deephaven, tells a story about himself and Ken Senn after WW II was over. The two of them had about another six months of duty and were asked if they wanted to work repairing equipment or spend time working at the theater. What would you do? They studied and performed at the theater in London, England until they could come home. Jim enjoyed it and spent a lot of time reciting poetry, Ken studied and became a wonderful actor, came home and eventually ended up entertaining thousands with his charm and humor at the Old Log Theater for 26 years.

Loni Anderson. Loni Kaye Anderson was born August 5, 1945 and raised in Roseville, Minnesota. Her mother, Maxine Hazel Kallin was a model. She attended Alexander Ramsey High School and the University of Minnesota. Loni was a participant in the Miss Minnesota Pageant of 1964. She met the brother of the winner of the pageant and they eventually married and had a daughter Deidra. Years later she married Burt Reynolds and they adopted a son they named Quinton. Loni was an actor at the Old Log Theater for a number of years during the late 1960s and lived in the Excelsior area while raising her daughter. Deidra attended Nursery School at the United Methodist Church.

Nick Nolte. Nick was born in 1945 in Omaha, Nebraska. He was an actor for a period of time at the Old Log Theater in Excelsior and played softball off and on with one of the local Excelsior city teams. While in Excelsior, he lived in a number of different places, one of which was a cabin on First Street near the Commons.

All Came To “Big Reggies.”
Perry Como.
The Beach Boys.
The Rolling Stones.
Donald Gilbert “Don” Shelby (born May 27, 1947) Growing up in the tiny town of Royerton, Indiana, just outside Muncie, Don was the youngest of three children. A high school basketball standout, he attended the University of Cincinnati but never graduated. Instead, he dropped out in the late 1960s and enrolled in the Air Force. He was stationed at Bolling Air Force Base in Washington D.C., when he met his future wife, Barbara, a civilian who worked as a secretary in the same office with him. As part of her job, she fielded phone calls.

“When we first met, he had many other girlfriends,” Barbara Shelby said. “He would get a lot of phone calls from girls at the office, and I just thought that was fascinating. That changed, and we started seeing each other.”

In 1972, after serving four years in the military, Don was honorably discharged. That same year, he nabbed his first commercial TV news job in Charleston, South Carolina. A couple of years later, he married Barbara, and the couple went on to have three daughters.

Don joined WCCO-TV in 1978 as a news reporter. After continued work as a reporter, he began assuming anchor responsibilities in greater capacity, eventually assuming the primary anchor chair from Dave Moore.

Don was the chief architect behind WCCO’s “I-Team” segment, which spotlighted current issues, both local and on a larger world scale, with rigorous investigative journalism. After suffering a mild stroke in early 2004, Don returned to news reading duties by the end of that year. Don retired from television after his final WCCO-TV newscast on November 22, 2010.

Don Shelby has played an active role in the preservation and maintenance of the Mississippi River. Through his WCCO-TV segment entitled “Project Energy,” He has investigated energy conservation, renewable energy, and alternative fuels. He has also given his time as an on-air representative for a number of pledge drives on behalf of the local PBS station TPT (KTCA), as well as narrated the third installment of “Lost Twin Cities,” a TPT produced documentary.

In 2012, Don and his wife, Barbara, had the opportunity to build a home exactly the way they wanted. Their mission was to go green, incorporating the latest technologies, as well as recycled and repurposed materials. The home is on the corner of First Street and Grove Street in Excelsior.
Sandler, Tony. (1933 – ) Most Americans of the network television era know Tony Sander as the Continental half of “Sandler & Young” – a debonair singing entertainment act that headlined in Las Vegas for twenty years.

Tony started performing when he was twelve, was also a scholar, a linguist, and a collegiate sports star in Belgium, made his first hit recording when he was eighteen, performed for Allied troops during the Korean conflict where he served with the Belgian Air Force as a radar specialist, then soared to fame across the European Continent.

In 1963, while headlining at a club on the Italian Riviera, Tony was recruited to perform in Las Vegas. With his sonorous voice, European savoir-faire, charm and wit he quickly captured the hearts of audiences on this side of the pond. Tony loves to sing and entertain and continues to lift the spirits of audiences in the U.S. and abroad.

After living in Belgium, Italy, and in New York, Las Vegas, Lake Tahoe, and upstate Minnesota, he is now cozily ensconced here in Excelsior where he and his wife, Mimi, can enjoy proximity to their three daughters (Valerie, Nathalie, and Stephanie) and their families.

Following a fast-paced life of fame with its glamour and distractions, Tony now enjoys this quite island of nature, his gardens, the birds, the critters, the gentle human scale of neighbors and friends – he cherishes the simple pleasures each day brings. You will find him working on shows and recordings in his studio, or in his woodworking shop, occasionally running an errand looking bearded and scruffy, then on a stage where once again he is his dazzling self.

Beardsley, Dick. (1956 –) Dick is an American long-distance runner best known for his close finish with Alberto Salazar in the 1982 Boston Marathon. Dick placed second with a time of 2:08:53 on the heels of Salazar breaking the Boston Marathon course record and the American record. Of course, so did Salazar with only slightly faster times than Beardsley.

Dick is the only man to have ever run 13 consecutive personal bests in the marathon, and is in the Guinness Book of World Records for the feat.

His finish time of 2:09:37 at the 1981 Grandma’s Marathon stood as a course record for 33 years until it was broken in 2014.

Dick and his wife Mary lived in the Excelsior area during the 1970’s and 1980’s. You could find him running Smithtown Road, Yellowstone Trail and all around Lake Minnetonka. For a period of time, Dick and a fellow runner worked part time, managing a running shoe repair shop at 443 Union Place.

While here in Excelsior during those years, Dick inspired many around town to establish road races. One was the Excelsior Fire Cracker Fun Run, a 10K and 2 mile run. A second was the Easy Race which was a half marathon sponsored by the Easy Banks in Wayzata and Excelsior. Both races are still in existence today – 2015. Dick also was a member of the Excelsior Running Club which was involved in the beginning of those races and the members of the club were good friends of Dick but non were in his class. Their club motto was “Start Out Slow and Then Ease Up.” The did have a lot of fun though and this was really the early years of road racing.

Dick makes his way back to Minnesota periodically to visit and promote various races in the area such as Grandma’s Marathon in Duluth which takes place every June. Dick presently lives in Austin, Texas and is an author, a motivational speaker and still a runner.
I saw the Beach Boys and The Rolling Stones in Excelsior.

My brother and sisters and I were so fortunate to grow up in idyllic Excelsior. Why idyllic? Excelsior had it all but so much more – St. John’s church & school, the lake, the beach with old bathhouse, the Commons, every store you’d need, a real, genuine community plus it had the Amusement Park! How many small towns had that? We’d go about every Sunday, luckily our parents were good friends with Ray and Bev Colihan so fortunately, free tickets were the norm not the exception. For me, that was even topped by Big Reggies Danceland. Folks used to travel all the way from Buffalo, Minnesota to see Lawrence Welk!

Because of where we grew up, kiddy corner to Danceland, I heard all the Twin Cities finest rock bands during the summer months from my bedroom window when the park was open. I always wanted to get in but was too young, envious of the teens who were of age. The closest I got to inside was trying to see through the screens! In the early sixties, there was the “British Invasion” of a new band on their first trip to the states – The Rolling Stones. Big Reggies signed them to play at Danceland. Having heard they were going to play Danceland, my folks finally relented to let me go see them. I had just completed 6th grade. After getting Reggies approval, Reggie told my friend’s Dad, Mr. Kriesel who took tickets at the door, to let me in. Wow, I was in Danceland!

Being a new band, and from England, most of the crowd sat in the booths along the east side of the big dance floor. There were maybe two dozen of us in front of the stage and I was belly up to the edge of it! I was mesmerized with the Stones look and sound…not knowing of course what the future had in store for what we know now as the Iconic Rolling Stones! A childhood memory I’ll never forget. Some people over the years have doubted me when I’ve told that story but hey, “You can’t always get what you want!” You can no longer ask Mr. Jimmy, but Mick Jagger would know.

I’ll always be grateful to Ray Colihan (who also brought The Beatles to the old Met stadium) and my wonderful parents for allowing me at such a young age, to witness The Rolling Stones play Danceland, in Excelsior, Minnesota. How many small towns can say that? I love Excelsior. I even saw the Beach Boys play on an open stage in the park near the ferris wheel on their first tour of the states. Their Dad drove them all over the country in a station wagon!

– Recollections from John P. Huber “Cab,” The Huber Funeral Home family.
Moonshine on Minnetonka? In the 1950s, a certain individual, let’s call him Denny, tells of visiting a young, local resident at his families property on Big Island. After an evening of partying, Denny was walking along the beach of this 16 acre parcel, when he stumbled upon some old copper kettles buried in the sand. Well, it turns out that what they found were some old copper stills from back in the 20s and 30s during prohibition. Apparently the young, local resident’s grandfather and friends made whiskey on the property and hauled it off to Grays Bay for delivery to those were willing to pay for Moonshine.

– Anonymous

The Excelsior Amusement Park as I Remember It. “I remember my Mom telling me about coming from Minneapolis to go to the Amusement Park, so she understood the fascination I had with the park.

At the end of every school year all of the schools in the area would load all the kids into the school bus and we descended the bus running in to buy tickets and then racing for our favorite rides. The tilt a wheel, ferris wheel, dodgem cars, merry go round, the whip. Everyone had their own favorite thrill. I can’t think of any way better to end the school year.

During the polio scare 1944, 45, 46 and 47, we were not allowed to play with our friends or neighbors. My Dad would load us into the car on a Saturday or Sunday and drive to Excelsior from Deephaven. He would go into Wehnes Drug and buy us each an ice cream cone. Then he would drive home the long way on the back roads. Parking the car on the side of the road we would get to watch the roller coaster make its round once or twice and then we would head home. That was our social activity for the summer. Somehow I didn’t feel deprived by not going on a ride myself.

Forward to 1955, 56 and 57. My friends and I would take the bus to Excelsior everyday as spring descended on us. We would hang around the park and then suddenly someone would come out and say, “Do you kids want a ride on the roller coaster?” Oh sure we would. It was the Minneapolis paper and he would take a picture of the roller coaster coming down the big hill. The next days the picture would be on the front page saying Spring is here The amusement park is open. It didn’t matter to any of us that we had to walk home from Excelsior every day because the ride was ours and it was free.

Years later when the amusement park was closing, my sister and I went to the sale that they had. One last look and maybe a little souvenir.

We both cried. It was a sad day after a long, long journey.”

– Dale Alice Kroc (Bollis) Minnetonka High School Class of 1957
Living and skiing on Minnetonka – The 1940s and 1950s: "I grew up on Lake Minnetonka and had the wonderful opportunity to experience the days when even weekends on the lake were like glass; a rarity today except possibly during the week, early in the morning.

At very young ages, we would spend every waking hour from morning until night swimming, playing rag tag, diving off bridges, driving our little outboard boats and skiing. When I was older and during the middle of the day, I barefoot skied through the Narrows all the way to Smithtown Bay and never encountered a wave from another boat. You could also locate a ski jump and slalom course almost anywhere on the lake.

We could travel at night, even on a weekend, from Wayzata and Excelsior Bay or to places like The Downbeat and The Lakeview in Spring Park on West Arm or the Surfside in Mound and then back home and rarely see more than a few other boats.

One of the most exciting things I did in 1948 when I was seven years old, was water ski behind Cedric Adams’ 52 foot cabin cruiser. The wake to me was like a mountain and I literally had to step up and over it. Cedric Adams was a news broadcaster on WCCO Radio in the 1930s, 40s and 1950s and a friend of my dad.

– Al Tollefson Minnetonka High School Class of 1959

Homes, cars, party lines and test patterns: During the 1950s, no one locked their homes and the best place to leave the keys to your car whether it was in your driveway or parked on Water Street was in the ignition. Party lines were another phenomenon. We’d pick up the phone, listen to our neighbors for a moment and when they were done talking, you’d ask Audrey or Mable or Gladys the operator, to connect you with Mike or Bill and she would connect you, as she knew who you were and who they were.

We also grew up during a time in the 40s and 50s when it was simply amazing to turn on a black and white TV with a large 9 inch screen and watch a test pattern for half an hour, totally fascinated by the technology that brought it to you. No longer did we have to get the news in the beginning of movies at the theater which was the best way to view current events until that time.

– remembering the “good old days.”

Three Blocks from the Amusement Park – The 1940s and 1950s: Yup! We walked or biked down Morse Avenue from home all summer. Friends and relatives came from Morris, Hancock and St. Paul – all over, just to enjoy the park. There was also the beach which was just a few blocks farther.

I’m Sandy Bechtle Ahlstrom and I still live in Excelsior. I was born in 1941. Roy and Clara Bechtle were my parents. My sisters Susan ‘46, Stephanie ‘51 and Shelley ‘56 and I lived on Morse Avenue near Highway 7. Highway 7 was just 2 lanes back then. It curved west just past our place and followed what is now (2015) County Road 19 and Minnetonka Road. When I was born, my folks rented a cabin from Anson Mase. I slept in a dresser drawer. Later, they rented from Pat Farrell – the Morse Avenue place. When he died, my folks bought the property.

Besides the beach and the park I think fondly of the Chaska Sandhills too, where we could wonder around for hours along a creek bed and up and down the steep banks. (The sandhills were a wilderness area off of County 41, just south of the present County 41 at Highway 212.) I had lots of jobs growing up. Pat Farrell, who we rented from, raised peonies and apples which I sold on our folks property right on Highway 7. Later, after dad moved from Christmas Lake Road and started the bait shop across from Galpin Lake where we were living, I helped push lawn mowers in and out of his repair shop and sold minnows in the bait shop. In the winter, dad and I seined minnows and fatheads through the ice in lake Rose near Chanhassen. It was hard work but “so” much fun. I loved being dad’s right hand man (girl).

I also worked at the Dairy Queen near Christmas Lake Road. (2015 it is the Deputy Registrar #59 Office.) Mrs. Roeschel was a great boss and taught me how to make dipped cones and dilly bars. Later I was a cook at Smack’ Drive-In at Vine Hill Road.

After I finished WSI (Water Safety Instruction) Certification, I taught swimming at the Excelsior beach. Jim Gilbert (Jim graduated from Minnetonka. Jim today 2015, is a consulting naturalist for WCCO Radio, co-author of the Minnesota Weather Guide Calendars, author of two books on nature in Minnesota, and writes a weekly nature column in several newspapers.) was my lifeguard at the time. Dad was with the fire department and he’d bring dow “Resusci Anne & Kate” to teach Mouth-to-mout Resuscitation to all my swimmers and their parents.
I also taught swimming at Leaches Minnewashta beach. All the Boyer kids were in my classes. Joe, Bob, Pete and Joleen. Joleen, years later was my student teacher at Gatewood Elementary School in Hopkins.

I just loved school. I’d walk just up the hill to the old school. Miss Street, Miss Umbahacher (who everyone who ever lived had as a teacher). Then I walked to the Junior High around Mud Lake until 9th Grade. I’d walk home for lunch at times and often mom would have some stranger who got off the train at the table for lunch. The conversations were always interesting. Mr. Donald Carruth was our principal and he still lives in the area at 102 years old. He was the best.

When I got up to Minnetonka, I was a sophomore. Minnetonka was only five year old and this new, large, sunny building was exciting. I was involved in the creation of and participated in Skipperettes. Unless someone bumped into the record player, performing was always thrilling. When the basketball team advanced to state, we performed at Williams Arena and that was awesome.

I started out at Excelsior Lutheran Church and was baptized there. The church made the world’s best popcorn, sponsored camping trips and had a bowling league at Country Club Lanes where I met my future husband who bowled for Christ Lutheran in Maple Plain. Now as parents and with our youngest of two daughters, Lindsay Lang, her husband Brian and their two boys, we’re back at Excelsior Lutheran, now Mount Calvary. (2015)

Our oldest daughter Jenny lives in Park City, Utah and has two sons.

I taught elementary school in the Hopkins School District for 40 plus years. Today my husband Tom and I are both retired and live on Yellowstone Trail. We presently are nannies for our two grand children who are both in Spanish Immersion at Minnewashta. Today . . . what a wonderful place to live. We walk to our doctor’s office at Ridgeview Clinic, Licks Unlimited for cones, meals at Patisserie, Maynard’s, Jake’s, Adelle’s and shop at all the lovely stores. We walk or we bike, all over town or on the wonderful bike trails.

I am Blessed to have been born and to have grown up here in this delightful, loving and pioneering town.

– Sandy Ahlstrom (Beehrle) Minnetonka class of 1959
The Tornadoes of 1965. May 5 & 6, 1965. In the late afternoon, at 6:25 p.m., two tornadoes struck the Lake Minnetonka area both traveling southwest to northeast. One made a swath across Mound, Spring Park and Navarre coming from Norwood and Waconia. The other, an F-4, hit parts of Chanhassen and devastated Christmas Lake, Cottagewood, Deephaven and Wayzata then on to Fridley. Throughout the whole area that the tornadoes struck, 16 people were killed, 685 were injured and there was over $57,000,000 in damage that would amount to about $3.8 billion in 2014.

The photo at right was of what is left of a home near Christmas lake. After Chanhassen, the tornado struck there first. The funnel then crossed Highway seven just west and south of the Holiday station (2014). Most of the mature pine trees were destroyed in the small park areas on either side of the highway.

The tornado then swung its way up and over what is now the Amesbury development then came back down and devastated Cottagewood before heading through Deephaven, Wayzata and then out of the area.

It left nothing untouched. Boats were piled in yards and cars were thrown into the lake. A couch from one home on Carson’s Bay near the Village Hall, ended up in the living room of a home on Summerville Road. Mail for Cottagewood residents ended up in Wayzata.

The tornadoes that struck the area were F-2 to F-5 tornadoes and there were actually nine tornadoes that hit the area from May 5 through May 8. The conditions were perfect. These storms formed as training supercells-an atmospheric phenomenon that is extremely rare in Minnesota. This photo shows one Lake Minnetonka tornado.

The tornado that struck Navarre, damaged residential areas and downtown Navarre businesses like the cleaners, Braun’s, Axel & Bobs meat market and across the street the Bowling Alley and gas station were totally destroyed never to open again.

The area was hit by tornadoes two other times. Once in 1892 when they referred to that storm as the “Big Blow.” Another storm hit with a tornado in 1904 that severly damaged Woodend Farm and much of St. Louis Park and Minneapolis.

– Internal content authoring

Clifton Cooper “Clif” Olds. Clif is named after his grandfather Clifton and his middle name is his Cooper which was his mother’s maiden name. Growing up, Clif worked for Clem Owens Cities Service Gas Station on the corner of George Street and Water Street and for Darke’s, Excel Food Market at 211 Water Street, delivering groceries.

Clif, like his younger brother Jim, graduated from Minnetonka High School and Dartmouth College and yes, like everyone else in Excelsior, they had Eva Umbehacher in first grade.

– Bob Olds Minnetonka class of 1966

Extreme weather in 1965

It all began in March. The average temperature for March was 19.4 degrees. The second coldest in history and also the snowiest month in history with a blizzard on March 17 adding to 20 inches on the ground.

Then came May. Local cities were already applying for financial assistance on May 3rd due to the weather. Then the tornado struck.

(Personal Reflections On The Times continued)
Lake Minnetonka. Notes from Dick Osgood: I moved to Shorewood in the summer of 1992. My job at Freshwater Society brought me into immediate contact with Lake Minnetonka. At that time, Eurasian watermilfoil was new in the lake and there was a high level of handwringing and angst – would it take over the lake, would the economy be ruined forever – just what would happen and what should be done? My job at the Freshwater Society was to help facilitate a community response. Many people and agencies were involved.

Milfoil didn’t take over (although it remains a significant recreational impediment and management problem).

With this introduction, Lake Minnetonka had become a central focus of my professional and personal like in the community.

By early 1993, I had started my own lake management consulting business. I had a short contract with the Lake Minnetonka Conservation District, keeping my fingers in the lake.

I didn’t have much professional involvement with the lake for most of the remainder of the 1990s. However, in 1998, the Lake Minnetonka Association approached me to help get a state grant to initiate a Citizens Monitoring program. We received the grant and my job was to educate, train and deploy 60 citizen lake monitors.

Lacking a physical facility, the Lake Minnetonka Communications offered their facility in Spring Park to host the training meetings. As a bonus, they broadcast the education/training sessions for the benefit of the community. I think it is safe to say that I became a TV star ...

At the end of the monitoring project (June 2001), the Lake Minnetonka Association asked to serve as Executive Director – a position I held until December 2013. That job was one of the most challenging and rewarding professional experiences of my career. And it got my fingers (and toes and everything else) back into Lake Minnetonka.

I have had the opportunity to work on lakes around the country, work with lake scientists and managers around the world, and through this I can say Lake Minnetonka is unique. Certainly the lake is special, but so is the community.

Lake Minnetonka is large and complex, it has a rich cultural history and it has numerous lake management challenges.

Lake Minnetonka was at one time highly polluted. At the time of the Clean Water Act, the country as well as the Lake Minnetonka community awakened to severe water quality issues. As a result of community leadership and substantial federal funding, six wastewater treatment plant discharges were diverted from the lake with the result of long-term improvements.

Contemporary pollution and ecological issues include ongoing runoff pollution and water quality problems in some bays, aquatic invasive species infestations (as well as the threat of additional introductions), and fish consumption advisories.

The Lake Minnetonka Association’s role was (and remains) to represent the interests of lakeshore owners and lake-related businesses. Their collective interest boils down to keeping the lake clean.

There are two challenges to this – first, “clean” means different things to different people and second, there are many individuals, businesses, organizations and agencies with a stake – probably too many!

I am most proud of my association with the Lake Minnetonka Association’s milfoil management project. The interest and leadership of the Bay captains and many others speaks well of the community and their stewardship of the lake. There are many more examples.

Mainly through my role with the Lake Minnetonka Association, I have served on a number of community boards, committees and events.

A list includes: South Lake Excelsior Chamber of Commerce – Board member, chair of the 4th of July Committee, Art on the Lake Committee, Apple Day volunteer, Tour de Tonka volunteer and Excelsior Rotary.

In October 2014, my life partner Judy Budreau and I moved to Duluth. While this was a very difficult decision, we love the City and living on another world-class lake. We miss the Lake Minnetonka community, but we still visit from time to time.

– Reflections by Dick Osgood
Dick Osgood: Dick is educated as a scientist (M.S. Aquatic Ecology & Geology; B.S. Biology), experienced as an Environmental Planner and Lake Manager, and has worked for and with public, private and non-profit organizations. Dick has authored numerous scientific journal papers, made hundreds of presentations at professional meetings, is the author of regular columns and has frequently served as an expert witness. Dick is also trained as a mediator and facilitator. Dick is a Certified Lake Manager, one of about 80 in North America.

Dick is a published author. His book, co-authored with Diane Lynch, Minnesota Winery Stories, was published in May, 2014 by North star Press. Dick is also working on a book titled A Lake Manager’s Notebook.

Dick enjoys camping, outdoor photography, hiking, bicycling and woodworking and apparently he’s been in and about water since he was a kid.

– Internal content authoring

The Excelsior Flying Club - Ann Heimerl (Herrmann) The flying club of Excelsior started around June, 1947 and continued activities through 1953 according to my Dad’s log book. They met at the Gun Club on Old Highway 7 before it became County Road 19. The gun Club was where the office building is (2015) next to The Garden Patch.

Roger Olds of Olds Dry Goods, Owen Herrmann (my Dad), Clem Owens, (Texaco Station on Water Street and George St., Al Fletcher (shop teacher at Excelsior schools and also Mayor of Excelsior) and Wally Kingsbury who lived out on Yellowstone Trail near Lake Minnewashta.

They kept their planes at Flying Cloud Airport. Mr. Kingsbury would also keep the float plane on Minnewashta in front of his home near Minnewashta Manor (2015).

The Gun Club had trap Shooting in back of the building.

– reflections from Ann Heimerl Herrmann (great granddaughter of L. F. Sampson)

My father, James Roger Olds – Olds Dry Goods and Ray Mason – Mason Motors, during the 1950s. Roger Olds was very active in the city, Rotary, the Masonic Temple, Excelsior Little League, the Chamber of Commerce and many Excelsior special days and events. He and my mother, Betty, knew everyone.

The town was very close knit and most business owners were each other’s customers. Well, one of my favorite stories is about a young man with special needs who took his bicycle to Ray Mason’s automobile dealership with a flat tire. He asked Ray if he could fix the tire and Ray told the lad that he couldn’t but that Roger Olds down the street fixed bicycle tires in the basement of Olds Dry Goods.

Roger was at his desk in the downstairs office when he heard the thump, thump, thump commotion coming down the stairs. After the young man told Roger the story about why he was there, Roger went across the street to Aldritt’s hardware and purchased what he needed to fix the flat tire. The young man was very appreciative and came back often for assistance.

Ray Mason, at a later date, was totally befuddled by a sign in the dealership window offering Free Ice Cream Sundaes. Roger always made really nice signs.

– Bob Olds Mika class of 1966

The Amazing History of Our Community
In the early 1970s, three enterprising team managers in the Excelsior Slow Pitch Softball league got it in their minds that it was time to make a change; Bruce Carmichiel, a local merchant from Carmichiel Auto Parts, Shorty Clapp, a local merchant from Shorty’s Service Station, and John Gilbertson, a local resident, felt that there needed to be lights on the softball fields at the Excelsior commons. Carmichiel, Clapp, & Gilbertson approached the Excelsior Village Council, to the best of everyone’s recollection, in the fall of 1970. They made a presentation to the Village Council illustrating and highlighting for them the many benefits that lights on the commons would provide to the village.

The presentation was well received. The mayor at the time was Budd Thomas, a very strong supporter of maximum use of the commons area, and the village providing as many recreational facilities to not only the residents of Excelsior, but also the neighboring villages.

Money for the project. Unfortunately, there was no money available, and so no one on the Village Council felt that money could be made available in the future. They did indicate, quite strongly, that they were very fond of the idea and would entertain any future thoughts and suggestions.

In the spring of 1971, the same three individuals approached the Village Council with a new plan. The new plan proposed that all costs of putting the lights on the commons would be donated to the Village of Excelsior. “All costs” meant not only the cost of the equipment, but also the cost of installation. The Excelsior Jaycees had volunteered to take on the project and to raise the necessary money to pay for the project. The City of Excelsior only had two issues; one was that the lights needed to be turned off at 10:00 in the evening or no inning could be started after 10:00 in the evening, and they asked that the Excelsior Slow Pitch Softball League make a yearly contribution towards the electric bill of $300.00/per year. The terms were agreed upon by all parties and the Village of Excelsior and Budd Thomas, (who was very instrumental in getting it passed by the Village Council), instructed the Jaycees, Carmichiel, Clapp, & Gilbertson to put the project into action. The Excelsior area Jaycees appointed John Gilbertson and Ralph Hatch to be the co-chairmen of the project.

$15,000 to $18,000. The plan was to raise an estimated number of dollars somewhere in the $15-$18,000 range, which became the budget number that everyone was aiming at. The Jaycees undertook a number of fundraising projects. They held several casino nights, window washing projects, and they formed a fundraising team to solicit contributions from all of the local merchants and residents.

John Gilbertson was primarily responsible for the fundraising responsibilities. Ralph Hatch took on the responsibility of securing all of the necessary man power and implementing the plans for the actual construction of the lights. Ralph and fellow Jaycee Marlo Peterson, an employee with Northern States Power Company, (now known as Xcel Energy), secured permission from NSP management to use NSP’s equipment for putting in the poles, all trucks, trenchers, wire, and a large number of NSP workers who had agreed to show up on the appointed weekend to do the work.

Some of those NSP employees that worked two very long days on Saturday & Sunday were Glen Carlson, Al Gelshaus, Steve Bauman, & Ron Lano. It was very convenient that Budd Thomas was also an employee of NSP, and far enough up the management ladder that he was able to help obtain NSP’s support. These were just some of the people who donated long hours to install the poles, lights, and wire.

Jaycee Phil Bonthius, who worked as a distributor for electrical equipment, represented a major light manufacturer called Stonco. Phil convinced Stonco to provide the lighting plans and blueprints for the layout of the light poles and how many lights would be necessary to provide adequate lighting. All of that was donated by Stonco. He also convinced Stonco to provide all of the lighting fixtures at cost.
Pat Cunningham, a local Excelsior resident and electrical contractor by trade, donated countless hours helping to prepare for the actual installation day. At the time of the actual installation, Pat was also there working two long days facilitating the initial wiring of the lights.

The week before the big weekend, Hatch, Peterson, Jaycee Mike Arone, and Gilbertson spent two long nights working in the beach bath house bolting the lights to the cross arms. The bath house was used so they could lock it for security.

Due to the quality and character of all the volunteers working, the preparation and planning went smoothly, and quite quickly.

A Gracious Benefactor from the Community. One of the more difficult parts, as always with a project of this type, was raising the money. The local merchants were generous, the residents gave when they could, and the Jayces worked tirelessly to secure the funds. By the end of the first year, approximately $9,000 and change had been raised. Gilbertson was very concerned with where they might go next to secure the money. Local auto dealer and Jaycee, Bill Mason recommended one individual in the community that had not been solicited to date.

On a cold Saturday afternoon, a gin rummy game between Russ Gray, founder and CEO of Graco Company and Vic Bacon, owner of Bacon Drug Company, helped provide the solution to the problem. Mason & Gilbertson presented the concept of being the “Champion” of the “Light the Commons” project to Russ Gray in between hands of gin rummy. About an hour later, after having heard Russ Gray repeatedly tell all that he “didn’t want the lights shining across the lake at night to keep him awake,” he broke down. He told Gilbertson & Mason that it was out of his hands and that they had to see his director of the Graco Foundation for approval.

Gilbertson visited Graco Corporation the following week and met with the director of the foundation, John Gray, Russ’s son. He listened and agreed that something had to be done on the commons and said he would get back to the committee.

One week later, John Gray committed the Graco Foundation for the balance of the money needed to complete the project but not to exceed $15,000. The $15,000 limit was in place because he was certain the Jayces and the softball league were going to throw one heck of a big party.

The project was completed the following May with the final cost being in the neighborhood of $14,500. In retrospect, after almost 45 years, I believe it is safe to say, very few gifts to the City of Excelsior have ever been worth so much or used or enjoyed by so many. It was a phenomenal project, years ahead of its time, and accomplished as a result of the efforts of a lot of caring and giving people.

The following is not a complete list of those that put it together but as many as can be remembered, need to be mentioned again.

A special thanks to the late Bruce Carmichiel & Shorty Clapp for helping provide the incentive for the project. Special thanks also to Ralph Hatch, Marlo Peterson, Phil Bonthius, Bill Mason, & John Gilbertson for leading the effort. A special thanks also to all the guys at NSP who donated Saturday & Sunday on that hot weekend to do the work.

The late Pat Cunningham of course, should always be remembered for his help and the project would have gone nowhere without the support of the late Bud Thomas.

The City of Excelsior and all its residents should forever be indebted to the Excelsior Jayces, the Excelsior Slow Pitch Softball League, the late Russ Gray and also his son John Gray and the Graco Foundation, NSP and all their local management at that time.

10,000 Lakes Concours d’Elegance. As of 2015 and since the beginning in 2012, this wonderful antique auto exhibition is held at the Commons each summer. The show is a non-profit event that raises money to support local programs such as ICA Foodshelf and The Courage Center. If the Community had never received the support of local residents, the Lights and programs like this may never have existed.

– Story and reflections by John G. Gilbertson Sr.

– Internal Content Authoring
The 1950s and 1960s. Swimming Lessons; Skating on Mitten Pond. Here I am, walking home from the beach along the new rip rapping, and exploring the Blue Line building. Taking swimming lessons every summer. Loving to go on Clat Holden’s boat for rides around the lake. Eating at the Belair.

I knew all the merchants on Main Street, we were able to go all over town for Halloween and know what the treats would be.

We’d start the summer watching the Memorial Day parade and knowing the marchers, the veterans at the end, and celebrating the Fourth of July by watching the fireworks from the 3rd story windows in our house above the funeral home on 2nd st. What a view!

We skated on Mitten Pond and College Lake. And next door, we had fun up at the Sampson House many times but were terrified watching it burn.

I went to kindergarten in the old school building on Third and School Street. And piano lessons upstairs in the old library with Mrs. Michner. She often played at funerals, and her husband Ed Michner was a distant relative of James A. Michner the author, one of his most well known books being “Hawaii.”

I walked to St. John the Baptist school for eight years and knew all the children in my class. Among all the other baby boomers, the school was overflowing! The nuns were tough – that is a much longer story.

I remember my mother, Patricia Huber doing many kind things for people. She was involved in many organizations like Befrienders, and just too many to list. She was instrumental in starting the “Friends of the Library.”

Mom was organized and worked very hard. She did things like wash the altar linens for church for years with little fan fair, or recognition. Her love beyond measure was given to my Dad and the five of us.

She loved bridge and played often. Women in her bridge club were dear friends. She played golf and tennis and bowled. She was a travel guide for a couple European trips for Hennessy Travel. She loved the Panama Canal. My folks had a chance to meet Pope John Paul and that was a thrill for them both.

My father John Huber also served on many organizations around excelsior and professionally. As a small town funeral director he was well known in town. He had a wonderful sense if humor, which he exercised most every day when he met Kenny Koehnen, Vic bacon and others for coffee.

Though I could write about all his accomplishments what I think is his finest tribute is that when he died we received hundreds of cards and I believe all of them said what a kind man he was. What an example for his children, Me – Mary Pat, John, Marguerite, Paul, and Jane.

– reflections from Mary Pat Huber

(Personal Reflections On The Times continued)
(Personal Reflections On The Times continued)
Annual Community Events and Traditions

**All Class Reunions**: Minnetonka High School has been in existence since 1952. Prior to that, Excelsior and Deephaven had separate high schools.

In (0000) the Minnetonka Alumni Association was formed and in (0000) decided to begin hosting “All Class Reunions” which welcomed graduating classes from Deephaven and Excelsior from well before 1952. There have been representatives from the class of 1934.

Once every four years the streets of Excelsior are blocked off and entertainment, food and beverages are available and all are welcome. In 2014, the Excelsior Commons were roped off and the reunion was held overlooking beautiful Excelsior Bay.

It is a wonderful opportunity to see old friends and make many new ones. Graduates from these local schools are a pretty proud group of men and women who all have a fondness for their alma mater and their teachers.

**Apple Days**: Darel Leipold is writing this.

**Art On The Lake**: Ask Laura Hotvet to write about it.

**Boat Shows at Maynard’s**: Find out who’s in charge of it.

**Crazy Days**:

**Farmer’s Market**:

**Fireman’s Dance**: 
Ice-out on most lakes is usually quite a celebration. Towns throughout the state will place an old car or snowmobile on the lake and have a contest to see who can guess the date they fall through the ice. These are generally raffles or bets and drawings for cash.
The real excitement is when the ice goes out and the boat goes in the water. The first skiers, boaters and sailors celebrate the cool but beautiful, first days on the lake and the beginning of another marvelous summer.

**Official Ice Out Dates on Lake Minnetonka since 1855.**

Ice-out on Lake Minnetonka is a sign of spring that scientists, naturalists and lakeshore residents have been tracking since at least 1855. The late Dick Gray, the lead founder of the Freshwater Society, cataloged the early records and made his own records from 1968 through 2013.

Ice-out has been determined by a number of methods — sometimes when a car placed on the ice fell through or when a boat could travel from Excelsior to Wayzata.

From Dick Gray:

A springtime ritual in northern climates is guessing when the wintertime ice cover on lakes, rivers, streams and marshes will give way to warmer weather. An anticipated local event is the day when the ice goes out on Lake Minnetonka, one of the largest and most complex lakes of the 15,291 lakes in Minnesota.

The Freshwater Society has researched, compiled and verified ice-out dates for Lake Minnetonka spanning a period of 149 years — from 1855 to 2003. Prior to 1968, consistent means of determining the ice-out did not exist. Some of the past criteria included when the ice appeared to be 90% gone, when an old car placed on the ice fell through, when a boat could travel around Big Island, and when a boat could travel from Excelsior to Wayzata. Ice-out dates prior to 1968 were gleaned from letters, diaries, journals, personal memories and even restaurant table mats.

In 1968, a new method was established to determine when the ice was out of a large lake such as Lake Minnetonka. The ice is considered out when it is possible to travel by small boat from any one shore to any other shore through any passage on the lake. Using this method, the Freshwater Society has determined ice-out dates for every year since 1968, and these dates are regarded by most as the “official” ice-out dates.

March 11, 1878, is the earliest ice-out date in the past 149 years. This date is accurate, coming from extensive field notes by renowned naturalist Dr. Thomas Roberts. The latest ice-out date of May 8, 1856, was found in a letter written by a Lake Minnetonka mother to her daughter. The most frequent ice-out dates are from April 11 to April 19 (54 times in 149 years), yet the ice has never gone out on the average date of April 15. Ice-out dates for the years 1861 through 1876 and 1879 through 1886 are unknown.

As of 2015, anyone having information on ice-out dates on Lake Minnetonka, for the missing years should send the data to the Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society.

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Earliest ice out: March 11, 1878
Latest ice out: May 8, 1856
Most common ice out: April 17, 18 and 19
April 14 is the median
April 1 happened 4 times
April 24 happened 4 times
April 18 happened 9 times

Same Ice-Out date in back-to-back years:
1914 and 1915 – April 17
1954 and 1955 – April 12
1984 and 1985 – April 13
2005 and 2006 – April 9
Chapter VII
Water Skiing – Its Beginning and History In and Around Lake Minnetonka

Lake Minnetonka, from Wayzata to Mound, played a major role in the early development of water sports in Minnesota. Water skiing, eventually becoming a major player as recreational skiing grew, show skiing became popular and finally tournament skiing gave many local men and women the opportunity to compete in a sport they loved. Since the early days of competitive skiing, many things have changed. Wake boarding became popular, boats built especially for wake boarding with tall booms and ski pylons came to be and then wake surfing grew out of all that.

Many of the early pioneers lived around the lake or visited friends or relatives here. This story about Water Skiing will take you, the reader, to different bays on Lake Minnetonka, Lake Pepin, White Bear Lake and numerous other states in this country as well as other countries around the world. You will read about all of that because many people from this area not only contributed to their communities through inspiration and entertainment but also because of their inventiveness and development of various technologies in and around water skiing.

Many of those same people, while maintaining their relationships and devotion to their hometowns, have moved to other parts of the world to share their talents and skills and the love that stemmed from growing up here in this wonderful part of Minnesota.

We start at the beginning of course.

– Authored by Tom Skramstad with additional edits by Al Tollefson

Waterskiing in the 1920s.

How it all began . . .

Prior to 1922, people who were pulled behind boats were pulled on what were called “aquaplanes.” An aquaplane was a wooden platform 25 to 30 inches wide and about 60 inches long. The rope from the boat was attached to the front of the aquaplane, so the person on the aquaplane was not challenged by the pull from the boat. The person on the aquaplane held on to a handle attached to the aquaplane by two separate ropes, and stood on the back.

In the early 1920s an enterprising young man named Ralph Samuelson, from Lake City, Minnesota, was determined to ski on the water. He tried using snow skis and that did not work. He tried barrel staves and those did not provide enough planing at those slow speeds. (Boats could only go about 15 miles per hour back then.) So Ralph went to the lumber yard and purchased two eight foot long and one foot wide planks. He took them home and steamed the ends in a pot on the kitchen stove so that the ends could be bent up and clamped into place. They looked like water skis except that they were enormous. He went to the hardware store and purchased a length of clothes line rope and a round steel ring which would become his handle.

He went out to Lake Pepin to attempt his first skiing run. He did not know that he should keep the tips of the skis out of the water when he started out. So he swallowed a lot of Lake Pepin in those early attempts. Eventually Ralph figured out what to do and became the World’s first water skier (July 2nd, 1922). There is a book about Ralph called “A Daredevil and Two Boards” if you want to learn more.

In addition to being the first water skier in the World, Ralph was the first person to perform a water ski jump. On Lake Pepin there was a swimming platform which was floated by four barrels. Ralph removed the two barrels on one end which dropped that end into the water; creating a jump. He successfully completed the first water ski jump in the World.

Ralph was adventurous, (in case you couldn’t tell) and so he skied behind a sea plane/float plane. Such a plane would travel 60 miles-per-hour just off the surface of Lake Pepin with Ralph skiing behind. So some credit Ralph with being the first “speed skier”. At times the float plane would pull Ralph completely off the water and into the air, making Ralph the first ski flier.

All of this back in the 1920s and all of it in Minnesota!

The first patent of water skis was made by Fred Waller in 1925. The brand was called “Akwa-Skees”. These were skis in a sense because there were two boards instead of the one large board like the aquaplane. These are often called “tow skis” because the skis were tied to ropes that were connected to the boat. There was another set of ropes that connected to the skis with a handle that the skier grasped.

The early skis did not have bindings for the feet to fit into. In 1928 Don Ibsen attached tennis shoes to his skis to provide more control. The first known ski show was held at the Atlantic City Steel Pier (New Jersey) in 1928.

Waterskiing in the 1930s.

Water skiing grew as a popular recreational sport in the 1930s. Don Ibsen started the first known water ski school in 1932. In 1939 the American Water Ski Association (AWSA) was formed to bring organization to competitive water skiıng for the country.
In 1939 the AWSA held the first National water skiing championships in Long Island (Jones Beach) New York. In that inaugural event there were ten men competing and two women. The first known ski shows were started in New Jersey and Chicago in the 1930s.

Waterskiing in the 1940s.
Dick Pope Sr started Cypress Gardens ski shows in 1942. Because of World War II there was no national championship competition from 1942 through 1945. Canada started holding their country’s skiing championships in the 1940s. In 1946 the "Nationals" were held in Holland, Michigan and this is when the first Minnesota skier competed in the Nationals. His name was Ray Greenhill. Ray was married to Mary Foster who was the daughter of Robert and Mamie Foster. The Fosters owned a piano store on Nicollet Avenue and lived on Woodside Road in Shorewood. Ray had a jump along the family lakeshore. In 1947 two Minnesota skiers traveled to the water skiing Nationals, also in Holland Michigan. The two men were Ed Bidwell and Don Russell, who were friends and college students at the time. When asked how they got to Michigan, Don told the story that “Ed had lots of money so he took the bus. I had no money so I hitch-hiked.” When asked “How did you transport your skis?” Don replied "Oh, we didn’t bring any skis!” As it turns out, the two young men borrowed skis. Ed’s feet were small and his borrowed skis had bindings much larger than his feet. Not ideal. The two young men competed in slalom and jumping. No official results for that tournament have been found. In 1947 the first barefoot skier was A.G. Hancock. Dick Pope Jr, the son the founder of Cypress Gardens, was also an early barefooter. In 1949 the first World water skiing championships were held in Juan-Les-Pins, France. Willa Worthington won all three women’s events. Dick Pope Jr. was second in slalom and third in tricks.

Waterskiing in the 1950s and 1960s.
Water skiing was growing steadily as a national past-time and as a competitive sport. Local tournaments were popping up around the country. The Midwest Region (13 states) started holding a regional championships in 1952. In Minnesota the Bald Eagle Water Ski Club started putting on tournaments. In 1952 the first intercollegiate water skiing competition was held. And Tommy Bartlett started his water shows in Wisconsin in 1952. And the Minneapolis Aquatennial included a water ski tournament starting in 1955. The Prior Lake Water Ski Club ????

Ed Bidwell – Gideon Bay, Excelsior:
In 1956 Ed Bidwell skied in the Regionals, the first Minnesotan to compete in a regional tournament. Ed was an engineer by trade and a water skier as often as he could be. His family dates back to the 1860s on Gideon Bay. Ed and his sister Evelyn skied together and by the 1950s, Ed’s neighbor, Bill Pye, and numerous friends of his such as Gregg Schram, Ed Bauman and Charlie Rosenberger began the Silver Spray Ski Club. They continued maintaining a slalom course and Ed’s ski jump in Gideon Bay.

The Century Club (A Minnesota Connection):
In the jumping event, Warren Witheral reached the 100 foot mark in 1954, initiating the “Century Club.” Warren lived in Middlebury, Vermont and was active in Waterskiing and snow skiing. Northland Water Ski Company in Minneapolis, was a sponsor of Warren Witheral and Warren endorsed their skis. Warren was a teacher, coach and author besides being a great competitor.

Alan Tollefson – Smithtown Bay, Excelsior:
Al Tollefson began competing in 1958 at the age of 16. His first tournament was the Minneapolis Aquatennial which was held on Lake Calhoun. He took a second in slalom and surprised most everyone by beating George Lowing, a well known boys jumper from the Bald Eagle Waterski Club, and took first place in jumping in the boys division. The summer of 1959, Al began skiing in the men’s division at various tournaments around the midwest. He skied to a first place in slalom and jumping at the Minneapolis Aquatennial. Later that summer he and Mary McBurney skied in the Regional Competition on Lake Nakomis and both won slalom and Al took
a second in jumping to John Rosch but still joined the Century Club with a jump over 100 feet as the 76th member of the Century club and the first Minnesotan to jump over 100 feet. Al and Mary both qualified for the 1959 Nationals in Laconia, New Hampshire in that tournament. Mary and her family lived on Christmas Lake during the summers. Together, they flew to Boston with all their skis and took a cab all the way up to Laconia. All the buses, trains and helicopter flights were done for the day and they had to get to Laconia for their trial practice runs first thing in the morning. In the tournament, Mary skied to a sixth place finish out of six in wavy conditions. Al was skiing against names like Joe Cash, Warren Witherell, Chuck Sytearns, Micky Amsbury, Jimmie the “Flea” Jackson, Mike Osborn, and Buster McCalla. Al placed 12th in slalom out of 19 and 10th in jumping out of 18 (10th overall), also in wavy conditions using women’s jumpers and two handles. All those skiers were either from Cypress Gardens or California.

Al brought home single handle skiing for slalom and jumping, and a new design for a slalom ski patterned after Joe Cash’s more tapered ski. In 1960 Al won a first place in slalom at the Minneapolis Aquatennial and second in jumping to a show skier named the “Golden Bear.” But then a first place in a one jump event called the jump for distance with a jump of 127 feet.

After that tournament, Al finished building an Official AWSA waterski jump in his dad’s garage with the help of Pat Zinn and numerous other Silver Spray ski club members. It would become one of the few official, regulation jumps in the area.

Everyone in the ski club from Smithtown Bay donated the money and the building began. After the Aquatennial Al came down with mononucleosis. A few weeks after the Aquatennial, the club finished the jump and on Saturday, July 23rd and they carried it down to the lake. They hoped to have it completed in time for skiers from Cypress Gardens and California to practice on before the 1960 Nationals, which was hosted that year by Minneapolis and would be held on Lake of the Isles, the site of the Aquatennial Tournament earlier that year.

On Sunday, July 24th, 1960, and anxious to try the jump, the club neglected to put the aprons in place. Feeling better, Al was elected to be the first to try the jump. Likely due to the mono, he jumped six times but felt ill so he tried to signal the boat driver to take him in. Neither he, nor the boat attendant saw Al and feeling a little better, went for a seventh jump only to pass out on his approach. He regained consciousness seconds before hitting the framework on the side of the jump and tried to ski away but in doing so, spun around backwards. That was fortunate as he hit the framework with his upper thighs backwards rather than forward with his head or upper body.

Al spent nine months in traction with a badly shattered right femur and full thigh length lacerations. Upon recovery in the spring of 1961, Jim Neisen and his father who owned Northwestern Artificial Limb made a brace that Al could wear until his leg was stronger. With that brace, Al skied in one tournament that summer. The Minnesota State Slalom Championships in Elk River and took first place. He also drove the boats and judged in numerous other tournaments that year.

During the summers of 1959, 1960 and 1961, Al represented the Northland Ski Company. Ambrose Lund, the son of the original owner, helped Al with free skis while he gave seminars at tournaments on behalf of the Northland Company and tested slalom and jumping skis for them.

During those years, they had established the Silver Spray Ski Club and had shirts printed with their name, wore goofy pointed hats but on a more serious note, as a club, they were invited to organize and oversee tournaments in Alexandria, Minnesota and Garrison, North Dakota.

Age 19 in 1961, Al won the Minnesota State Slalom Championships in Elk River, Minnesota. In 1962, he skied in Carter Lake Iowa, Chetek, Prior Lake, The Aquatennial and the Keller Open. He jumped in a few tournaments and placed but it was never up to the standards of 1960. He took first or second place in all slalom tournaments and went to the Regionals in Celina, Ohio where he placed second and qualified for the Nationals at Calloway Gardens, Georgia. He skied in that Nationals and placed 14th in slalom. After that tournament he retired from water skiing.

The Silver Spray Ski Club.

The key members of the club, which was established on Gideon Bay in Excelsior, were Ed Bidwell, Bill Pye, Charlie Rosenberger, Eddie Bauman and Gregg Schram. The original slalom course and 10-foot wide, apronless ski
jump, were located there and owned by Ed Bidwell. In the winter of 1959 and 60, the club installed a slalom course through the ice in front of Dr. Jake Stricklers residence. Throughout 1959 and 1960, others joined the club. Al Tollefson became a member and later the Thompsons, Tommy, Jean, Gary, Ronnie and Laurie, the Stricklers, Dr. Jake, Helen, Jeff and John and the Mitchells. Bill Sr., Nancy, Billy, Jocko, Nancy and Mary as well as Bill Mason, Pat Zinn and Tom Skramstad. Left to right in the photo at left are, John Strickler, Billy Mitchell, Gary Thompson and Billy’s little sister Mary.

During those years there were some things Al did that weren’t monumental but they were somewhat break-through. Al drilled holes in the fins of his slalom skis believing that the extra drag would help keep the back of the ski in the water which it did. In 1959, everyone in Minnesota was still doing slalom and jumping with two handle ski ropes. Everyone from the south and the west coast at the Nationals in Laconia were using single handle ropes. Everyone from the south and the west coast at the Nationals in Laconia were using single handle ropes. Joe Cash also had designed his own special slalom ski.

When Al came home from Laconia he began using the single handle ropes for practice and competition and others followed suite. He told Northland about the rope handles and Joe’s ski. They began to make skis from Northland blanks that resembled Joe Cash’s ski. They were shorter, wide at the tip and tapered evenly to a narrow tail and they had smooth, beveled edges along the complete length of the ski. Northland began making a few but didn’t pursue the design much further.

Skiing was a real love of Al’s and he’s certain that he would have taken it further had it not been for the jumping accident. Though he did jump again, the accident and injuries left him a little too cautious and physically impaired enough to no longer have the strength necessary to compete at the level needed.

Waterskiing in the 1960s.

In about 1960, the Minnesota Water Ski Association (MWSA) was formed and the first State tournament was held. The MWSA made a successful bid to get the National Championships to come to Minnesota. That dream came true in 1960.

The previous year, 1959, meetings were held in Laconia, New Hampshire that gave city representatives the opportunity to present their proposal to the AWSA, hoping to secure the National Championships in their home state. A number of representatives from the MWSA, the city of Minneapolis and the Bald Eagle Waterski Club presented and won.

The Nationals were held on the south shore of Lake of the Isles just a few weeks after the Aquatennial in 1960 and many local skiers competed in this tournament.

Skiing continued to grow in the area and more skiers and their families became involved in competitive skiing. Christine Ohrbeck Fretland has this memory:

Christine Ohrbeck Fretland – Smithtown Bay, Excelsior:

“My younger sisters, Colleen Ohrbeck Browne and Cathy Ohrbeck Hartwig and I competed for several years in numerous Minnesota water ski tournaments. The Minneapolis Aquatennial Water Ski Tournament on Lake Calhoun had a large number of participants each year and was always my favorite event to compete in. My sister Colleen, two years younger, remembers an Aquatennial event, where Dad encouraged her to try jumping for the first time, as he said “the conditions were ideal...no wind, good equipment/jump, big spectator crowd, etc.” Colleen accepted the challenge, and got over the jump, only to fall on landing. It made Coach Dad happy and proud of her bravery and willingness in her first jumping. In Winona on Lake Winona, the Tournament awards presented us winners were Granite trophies (same rock found in Winona’s bluffs) and in Prior Lake we had the cows roaming right next to our lawn chairs as we watch the competition. All the competitors and families had a great time just hanging out together, but the older kids and ours Dads really paved the way for us younger kids to enjoy the sport.”

The Waterski Nationals once again on Lake of The Isles.

The National tournament came back to Lake of the Isles in 1965. Lake Minnetonka area skiers who competed included Gary Thompson, John Strickler, and Steve Bruce.

Gary Thompson, Smithtown Bay Excelsior:

“I started skiing in tournaments as you know in 1960. Competition skiing for me began right there on Smithtown Bay. We had the slalom course in front of Stricklers house, and the jump at that time was in front of Maples. We practiced almost everyday no matter what! On windy days we found a calm shoreline and practiced tricks.
The 1960 Nationals were held at Lake of the Isles, so I competed and placed 5th in jumping. I had just learned to jump that Summer. Along with my Brother and Sister we skied hard through our school years, for me that meant 1960 through 1965. Over that time frame I won or placed in many tournaments some more important than others.

As many of us did in Minnesota, we were committed to skiing in Summer and Winter! I raced on the Blizzard ski team through high school and eventually qualified for the Junior Nationals representing the Central Division. That was a huge achievement which took a lot of training and racing to get on that team and compete on that level.

After finishing the Summer season of 1965, I accepted a job offer at Cypress Gardens and went straight to Florida in Sep as I was turning 18 years old that month. That move and that job set the course for my career. I continued show skiing and working for different shows and companies throughout the United States for many years, Cypress Gardens, then the McCulloch Show of Champions, then the Oahu Water Ski Club, Marine World, and Sea World, followed by Water Ski Shows, Inc. (WSSI). With WSSI I traveled around the world skiing in shows and parks in many different countries.

Gary continued to pursue and improve his kite flying. At the Delta Wing World Championships, held at Cypress Gardens in 1974, Gary placed third behind World Champion Steve Moyes and John McKinsey.

Like many competitors, Gary has had his share of bad spills. One accident in 1975 put him out of commission for an entire season. This was reminiscent of the 1959 accident that happened to A1 Tollefson, Gary’s mentor. After the Silver Spray Club put in their new jump on Lake Minnetonka, A1 had the privilege of taking the first jumps. He blacked out while approaching the jump and crashed into the jump. He was hospitalized for nine months.

But Gary was still involved with production and the innovation of adding a theme to the water ski show. Thompson, along with the director of productions, script writers, costume designers, music directors and many others, collaborated and came up with the Roaring 20s theme.

The timing was perfect as movies like The Sting and The Great Gatsby were current box-office hits. “It seemed like an insurmountable task back then, but we got better as time went on. We compromised a lot of skiing at first, but soon we combined the theme and the show beautifully”, he concluded.

After two years the theme was changing to Superheros. Our superhero, Gary, was also making another change, to Sea World of Florida. Gary moved his family to Orlando, Florida, where Sea World built a permanent stadium appropriately named the Atlantis Theatre. The first two years saw the Superheros show succeed, then in 1979 and 1980, Almost Anything Goes, was followed by the opening of The Hatfields and The McCoys in 1981.

Although he was still competing in the World Kite Flying competition, he spent his spare time judging at the DuQuoin, Illinois, show ski tournament. The kite flying competition took place on the same weekend, which made it impossible for him to fly for a few years. “Anyway”, as Gary puts it, “kite flying competition became very specialized after those first few years. Gliders especially designed to win tournaments appeared and specific tasks were required for the fliers. Nowadays, I can’t go there with my show kite and expect to win. I just go there to have fun and give it my best shot”.

Along with judging and kite flying, Gary has nearly always been involved in the teaching part of show skiing. While at Sea World, his teaching time had dwindled. He would set up the teaching program, but it was usually Randy Messer, the ski show supervisor, who actually implemented a good part of the training. Gary was always involved with new projects and innovations. He became interested in “ultra lite” motorized hang gliders. The glider that Gary flew was named “The Eagle”. It was sometimes flown in the Sea World shows. But was usually reserved for special occasions.

When asked, in his Spray interview, if he had lost interest in water skiing, he replied, “Well, not really, I’m a highly competitive person and I like to get involved in many different sports. Because I spend a lot of time on the administrative end of ski shows, I get little opportunity to ski today.”

“Anyway, backing up a bit in my story, after working for WSSI for 15 years, I bought the company, and now still own and operate WSSI currently in it’s 33rd year of presenting shows. Although we have evolved into a live action stunt show company we still are very proud of our roots and continue to produce and operate water ski shows.

The Amazing History of Our Community
What has been huge for me through most of my life is hang gliding! From learning to fly flat kites while at Cypress Gardens in the 1960s, then learning to fly hang gliders in 1971 while skiing at Marine World, hang gliding has always been present in my life. I still enjoy flying and actually just had a great flight last Sunday (June 27 & 28, 2015) in the mountains of Tennessee.

So, that is a brief summary of my “skiing life” which all really started at Lake Minnetonka in Smithtown Bay.”

– recollection by Gary G. Thompson, Sevierville, TN

John Strickler, Smithtown Bay, Excelsior:
Steve Bruce – Christmas Lake, Excelsior:
Tom Skramstad, Smithtown Bay, Excelsior:
Successful skiers in the 1960’s were (details).
Christine Ohrbeck.....
Ron Thompson....
Gary Thompson
Steve Bruce......

Waterskiing in the 1970s.
Competitive skiing continued to grow in the 1970s
Water skiing was an Olympic “demonstration sport” in 1972 but it never achieved full support as an Olympic event.

There are 650 ski clubs in the USA and over 11 million skiers. The water ski association that was formed in 1939 to support three event skiing (slalom, jumping and tricks) has steadily expanded to include the growth in water sports: barefoot skiing, collegiate skiing, wakeboarding, disabled skiing, show skiing, wake surfing, ski racing, kneeboarding and hydrofoiling. There is also an international water skiing federation that coordinates skiing throughout the World.

Ski Troupes.
Three ski show troupes based in the Lake Minnetonka area existed and performed in the 1950s. Details below. The groups would write letters to chambers of commerce, telling of their exciting and entertaining shows, and asking if their city would want a ski show done as part of their city’s summer “festival.” Cities would respond and the ski troupes would then plan their summer trips.

Show Skiing.
Show skiing featured many water ski acts, choreographed to music and built around a theme that tells a story. This includes ballet/swivel skiing, adagio doubles, freestyle jumping and human pyramids.

The Min-Aqua Bats (from Miniacqua, Wisconsin) started their shows in 1950.
Wisconsin has become the state that has won most all of the ski show national championships in recent decades.
There were three show ski troupes performing around the state that had roots at Lake Minnetonka:
The Whiz Kids performed out of Cooks Bay in Mound and traveled throughout the stateand

Ski Antics. Lake Minnetonka connection????

The Ski Antics was a ski show “troupe” that operated from 1951 until 1957. It had its roots in Bone Lake Wisconsin where the Beddor family had a cabin. Frankie Beddor had just returned from a motorcycle trip to South America (he took his great Dane dog “Rowdy” along). On his return north he stopped at Cypress Gardens and saw their ski shows. He got excited and returned to the cabin with the idea to start a ski show operation. The first show was on July 4th, 1950 on Bone Lake; called “Sue Beddor’s Ski Bums.” The show included Sue (age 16), her sister Judy (age 13), brother Frank (age 24) and neighbor Johnny Wolfe (age 13). They skied behind a 33 horsepower outboard initially. A neighbor loaned them a Correct Craft Dart inboard (17 feet long with a 275 ??? horsepower inboard) which they liked and which they then purchased.

In 1951 Frankie renamed the group “Ski Antics”, created a ski show program, and the
troupe was off and running. The first 1951 show was in Menominee Wisconsin and the group grew to perform in the five state area, doing weekend shows.

They pioneered kite flying in 1952. Their main kite flyer was Jerry Boettcher, who was recruited to do his trick at Tommy Bartlett’s ski show in Wisconsin Dells. He also did his kite flying at Cypress gardens and apparently taught their skiers how to kite fly. And in that year they started doing the “fire jump” where gas was poured on the water in front of the jump, set on fire, and the ski jumper would go over the jump and fly through the flames.

The group included the “Par Four” which was a men’s singing quartet. Their skiing trick was to ski together and sing and play instruments at the same time (two trumpets, a trombone, and cymbals). There was one incident where the boat ran out of gas on Lake Calhoun during the Aquatennial and the four skiers sank into the water with their instruments. The Par Four group performed on the Arthur Godfrey talent show in November of 1952.

There were 14 people in the troupe including skiers, boat drivers, and an announcer. They would travel in three cars towing the jump behind one and the boat behind another.

In 1953 the Ski Antics stated a second show at Bar Harbor, Minnesota, on Gull Lake. Included now were Johnny Ellis, a 16 year old who had lost a leg in a train accident, and Johnny Ross, 16 years old and blind, who ski jumped. Their theme was “anyone can water ski!”

The Ski Antics performed in the Minneapolis Aquatennial from 1952 until 1957 on Lake Calhoun. They also performed at the St. Paul River Days celebration.

The Ski Antics performed on Wayzata Bay for Wayzata’s five day Centennial celebration in August of 1954, in front of Hart’s Café (later Sunset’s, and now CoV.)

Frankie billed his show as a “thrill show”, a “gigantic” water ski show

Frank Beddor lived on Lake Minnetonka for many years.

Frank Beddor Mississippi trip.....

Frank had sponsorships from Catalina Swimwear, Correct Craft boats, AlumaCraft boats, Scott Atwater motors...

Members of the Ski Antics are in listed appendix xx.

The Whiz Kids in Mound.

Pat and Evelyn Guy owned The Casino in Mound, Minnesota. The Casino was a restaurant, bar, roller skating rink, marina, and bowling alley. It was called The Casino from (year) until (year). Later it was called Surfside from (year) until (year). Today the property consists of townhomes. For Christmas in 1949 the Guy family bought water skis, and the family started to ski the next summer. In 1950 the family went to Wisconsin Dells to see the Tommy Bartlett Water Ski show. Pat Guy wanted to start his own ski show and he hired Lee Martin away from Tommy Bartlett to come to Minnesota to teach the kids (who were yet to be recruited) the ski show routines. Pat recruited kids from up and down the Mound shoreline (names are in appendix xxx). The group practiced in front of the Casino and what is now called “Surfside Park”, the property next door.

Pat had a Higgins inboard boat.

The Whiz Kids traveled throughout Minnesota and into Wisconsin, Iowa and Illinois during their seven years of operation. Mel Jass, the radio and TV personality, sometimes did the announcing at the shows.

They traveled by car, towing their jump behind. They also had an amphibious vehicle called a “duck” (see picture) which could travel by road or by water.

By 1958 the “kids” were going off to college and Pat and Evelyn were getting a divorce and so the shows ended. Marcia Guy (Moore) and ??? went off to ski for Tommy Bartlett in subsequent summers. Marcia then went on to ski in a show troupe in New Jersey called ???? Johnny Guy and Gretchen Rosch went to ski in Cypress Gardens shows.

Several of the Whiz Kids skied in competition tournaments. Please see their results in that section of the book. ????

Marcia won the state jumping championship in 1960 in the Womens event, setting a state record with a jump of 57 feet. She placed 6th in slalom, 4th in tricks and 3rd in overall.

Johnny Rosch was an excellent all around skier but excelled in jumping. He competed toe-to-toe with the best jumpers in the World.

The Aqua Bats.

The Aqua Bats ski show troupe was started in 1948 by Ed Bidwell and Don Russell, who skied in Gideon Bay of Lake Minnetonka. The troupe was in operation until 1952. The
photo at right was taken on Gideon Bay. Don is behind and Ed is in front. Other members of the Aqua Bats were . . .

The skiers had special swimsuits made for them. The “boys” had striped suits and the women had two-piece suits in white.

This group performed throughout Minnesota, Wisconsin and Iowa. In one example they performed two shows in one day – one in Bemidji Minnesota and the other in Lake City Iowa – 403 miles apart! They built a jump that could be trailered behind a car. After arriving at the show site, the jump would be mounted on inner tubes and floated to its proper location for the show.

One part of the show on Lake Minnetonka had Ed Bidwell ski behind a Piper Cub float plane between Big Island and Wayzata at speeds over 60 MPH.

After 1951 Don and Ed sold the business to fellow skiers Jack Dorfman and Al Smith, who operated the business in 1952 and then closed it down.

Ed Bidwell and Don Russell were competitive skiers too – look for their accomplishments in the xxx section of the book.

**Ski Clubs.**

**Silver Spray Ski Club**

Started in the 1950s. Members were, Ed Bidwell, Bill Pye, Gregg Schram, Charlie Rosenberger and Ed Bauman. In the late 1950s, the Smithtown Bay branch of the Ski Club was formed consisting of members, Alan Tollefson, Jean, Tommy, Gary, Ronnie and Laurie Thompson, Bill, Nancy, Billy, Nancy, Jocko and Mary Mitchell, Dr. Jake and Helen Stricker and their children Jeff and John, Pat Zinn, Bill Mason and the Ohrbecks, Dick, his wife, Christine, Colleen and Cathy and Tom Skramstad. The club consisted of skiers who competed in ski tournaments. The accomplishments of those club members are shown in appendix xxx.

**Wayzata Bay Ski Club**

In 1957 there was a water ski endurance race on Wayzata Bay set up by the Wayzata Bay Ski Club. In the contest there were six boats pulling six skiers around the perimeter of the bay. The winner would be the skier who was still skiing after all the others had given up. After nine hours on the water, the winner was Charlie Rosenberger from Excelsior. No other information about the Wayzata Bay Ski Club has been uncovered.

**Skiing Innovations – The Concave Slalom Ski.**

Mickey Amsbry lived in Minnesota from 1965 until 1967. Mike was a National and World champion skier. He took a work assignment with General Mills which relocated him here from Southern California. In addition to Mike’s on-the-water accomplishments he received the patent for the concave slalom ski in 1965. The story he told about this was interesting. He was traveling to a tournament from southern California across a desert with his skis strapped to the roof of his car. When he arrived at the tournament he noticed that the slalom ski had warped in the hot climate. When he skied on it he noticed a positive change. His patent number is US 3173161. Every slalom ski made since then has been concave. Mike should be getting royalties.

**Submersible slalom course.**

Steve Bruce lived on Christmas Lake near Excelsior. He was one of the finest slalom skiers ever to come out of Minnesota. He had a slalom course in front of his house on Ridge Road. A slalom course consists of a series of rubbers balls that the boat and skier need to navigate: one set of balls are to keep the boat on a straight course while the skier skis from left to right around a second set of balls. Steve is an engineering type – he likes to solve problems. So he applied his problem solving methodology to his slalom skiing. He developed the first submersible slalom course in the country (as far as we know). Each slalom ball was attached to a rope that went to a pulley on an anchor at the bottom of the lake. The rope then went to Steve’s dock where it attached to another pulley and then to a cranking wheel. When the slalom course was not in use Steve could lower the 16 rubber slalom balls out of the navigation lane by turning the wheel which tightened the ropes until the balls were pulled several feet underwater. Not satisfied with that remarkable invention Steve took it one step further. He replaced the cranking wheel with an electric motor that was controlled by a remote control box (like a garage door opener). Now he could raise and lower his slalom course with a single click of a button.

*The Amazing History of Our Community*
Professional Ski Tour

Steve Gray lived at “The Pass” which is that narrow piece of land between Halstead’s Bay and the West Upper Lake; next to County Road 44. He is a career water skier with many accomplishments and trophies to his name. He lived and worked (Toro’s of Aspen restaurant) in Aspen, Colorado, and in the late 1970s put together a skiing team; this was just before the professional ski tours were being set up. At a Disney World tournament in Florida (Lake Buena Vista) he met with Rusty Rothenberg, John Mondor, Paul Chapin, Lucky Lowe, Ricky McCormick, and others about forming a ski team for the newly forming pro tour.

Steve worked with Rob Shirley, the founder of Mastercraft, who was the main promoter and visionary of the pro tour concept. Steve formed the Toros professional Water Ski Team with Rusty, Paul, and John.

Rusty became one of the premier jumpers in the world. Paul is a Nationals Champion. John Mondor broke the World Record in jumping with 187’ as a Toros team member. Harvey McCloud, editor of Spray magazine at the time, gave Steve credit as the first non-skiing related sponsor of a professional ski team or individual skier.

Steve also videotaped a new world’s record in slalom by John McElyea at the Kempton Masters tournament in Florida. No one else was videotaping back then. Skiers were at first skeptical about the value of videotaping but then they were curious and wanted to see Steve’s videos. In short order the skiers wanted to see the videos. Among other things, the jumpers saw that they were popping of the jump late. That realization resulted in longer jumps.

People from Lake Minnetonka who helped to further the sport of skiing.
(In alphabetical order.)


Water Ski Shows, Incorporated (WSSI).

Gary Thompson, from Smithtown Bay, was a Minnetonka graduate in 1965. Gary was a competitive water skier and loved the excitement of motocross, Alpine downhill racing and eventually Kite Flying.

After finishing the Summer season of 1965, he accepted a job offer at Cypress Gardens and went straight to Florida in September as he was turning 18 years old that month. That move and that job set the course for his career. He continued show skiing and working for different shows and companies throughout the United States for many years, Cypress Gardens, then the McCulloch Show of Champions, then the Oahu Waterski Club, Marine World, and Sea World, followed by Water Ski Shows, Inc. With WSSI he traveled around the world skiing in shows and parks in many different countries.

After working for WSSI for 15 years, Gary bought the company, and now still owns and operate WSSI currently in it’s 33rd year of presenting shows. Although they have evolved into a live action stunt show company they still are very proud of their roots and continue to produce and operate water ski shows.

WSSI. In the beginning, 1978, the company’s interest was specializing in the production and management of water ski shows, thus was born the name Water Ski Shows, Inc. Thirty-three years later, the company is still in the business of producing water ski shows; however, along the way, it added much more to the entertainment portfolio. Water Ski Shows, Inc. (WSSI) is now the world’s largest producer of water ski shows, stunt shows, children’s shows and street entertainment throughout the United States and around the world.

Bob was born in Mound, Minnesota. Bob received his initial degree from the University of Denver. He earned a BSBA degree in 1957. Thirty years later, he was awarded the Doctor of Business Administration degree in Real Estate, after lecturing at Massey University, Auckland University, the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology and the University of Denver.

Over a period of years, Bob wrote the book *Hit It*, that he published in 2002. It may be tough to find, but it is a good book about water skiing and most of the book ends up being about Minnesota skiers.

“Hit It” is the term used when the water skier is ready to go and he wants the boat driver to accelerate quickly to pull him off the dock or out of the water.
**Dugout Canoe, 2014:** In 1934, Helmer and Gustave Gunnarson, discovered a dugout canoe near their family property on the North Arm of Lake Minnetonka. Up until recently, it was thought that the artifact was possibly 300 years old. But recently, it has been determined that it dates back to 1025 or 1165, making it one of the oldest archaeological finds in the state. An article appeared in the Minneapolis Star Tribune on April 10, 2014.

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**Banking:** Banking in our communities has grown considerably over the years. The first bank in the area was Minnetonka State Bank.

Around the turn of the century (1900), Eugene Merrill from Howard’s Point in Shorewood started Minnesota Loan & Trust in 1883 which later partnered with Northwestern National Bank in 1909. Then in 1929, executives formed Northwest Bancorporation (Banco). But these banks were in Minneapolis. It was nearly 70 years later that after “Banco” became Norwest and then the merger with Wells Fargo took place. Wells Fargo was the smaller of the two banks but determined to be more well known beyond Minnesota.

It was after that time you began to see branches of Wells Fargo showing up in the area such as you will find in Excelsior in 2015.

Prior to that however, Minnetonka State Bank moved up Water Street and later became part of a new bank system called the Easy Place Banks which was owned by a group headed up by Ray Mithun.

In 1989, a group of men from that bank left to start First State Bank of Excelsior and later changed its name to Beacon Bank which has four branch offices as of 2015.

In addition to these banks in 2015, there is Bridgewater, Americana, First Minnesota, Twin City Federal, Bremer Bank, U.S. Bank, Mid Country and First National Bank of The Lakes.

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**Historical Tours by Bob Williams:**
Growth on Main Street:
The New Library opened in 2014.

Mason Motors revival as Kowalski’s Grocery and the adjacent office and retail building, 2015

Numerous new retail businesses.

Zebra Muscles – about 1988
Zebra mussels and a related species, the Quagga mussel, are small, fingernail-sized animals that attach to solid surfaces in water. Adults are 1/4 to 1 1/2 inches long and have D-shaped shells with alternating yellow and brownish colored stripes. Female zebra mussels can produce 100,000 – 500,000 eggs per year. These develop into microscopic, free-living larvac (called veligers) that begin to form shells. After two-three weeks, the microscopic veligers start to settle and attach to any firm surface using “byssal threads.” It is the only freshwater mussel that can attach to objects. They are native to Eastern Europe and Western Russia and were brought over to the Great Lakes in ballast water of freighters. Populations of zebra mussels were discovered in the Great Lakes about 1988.

The MCWD’s (Minnehaha Creek Watershed District) intensive study of zebra mussels in Lake Minnetonka will continue for one more year. The District began closely tracking the population of zebra mussels across Lake Minnetonka in 2011, after zebra mussels were discovered in the lake the year prior. Due to some sampling issues during the first season of research, the District will gather one more year of data and plans to publish two research papers this winter.

Community Events the Chamber’s monthly Happy Hour and the Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society’s monthly sessions about our history held at local business establishments.
Benefactors and Collaborators To The Living Legacy Project

**Benefactors:**

There are a number of people over the years that have stepped up to invest in the idea that people will join together in order to further develop or improve a dream or the concept or the passion of one individual, a group or a community.

It is with a tremendous amount of gratitude that we thank the folks mentioned below. They were the first of many to share our passion and belief that Collaboration Around Content can create an end product that is both educational and entertaining.

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Members of the Communities of Deephaven, Excelsior, Greenwood, Shorewood and Tonka Bay, Minnesota as well as past members of these communities came together to help make this Legacy Project more unique than anyone ever could have hoped.

Their stories, insights, images, videos, edits, corrections and numerous other contributions and support have turned this project into something quite special. This book will help tell the story to future generations of how these communities were begun and shaped by the many adventurous and resourceful residents throughout the years.

And equally important, this book may inspire future generations to sustain the beauty and unique quality of life found in this legendary corner of the world.

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Dale Kroc, Excelsior, MN
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Dick Osgood, Duluth, MN
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Introductions: Alan & Adam Tollefson, Excelsior, MN

Al & Adam Tollefson are utilizing their business, Ucahoot, to help generate the content for this book. Ucahoot is all about collaboration. In this instance, community members at large are providing photos and stories for the book as well as involving themselves in other areas such as editing, proofing and print production. Al & Adam introduced this book concept to people and businesses throughout the area. Al has spent much of his time meeting and interviewing the prospective authors within book.

Design: Alan Tollefson, Excelsior, MN

Al Tollefson’s background is in commercial art. He is applying his experience in design, production and print to the development and final production of the book. While 65% of this book’s content was generated by members of these communities past and present, Al has researched content, written the balance, and has been a ghostwriter for many of the contributed stories. Al was born on Howard’s Point on Lake Minnetonka in 1941.

Members of the Communities of Deephaven, Excelsior, Greenwood, Shorewood and Tonka Bay as well as past members of these communities are joining the advisory team and collaborating by contributing their expertise to ensure that this book and the information in it is accurate, honest and that people are properly credited for their generous contributions.

Thank you.

Editing: Patty Williams, Excelsior, MN

Patty is a lifetime Excelsior resident and thrives on grammar, punctuation, spelling and content accuracy. She is fascinated by the art of “Grammarification” and has volunteered to review the complete book, page by page, as it is being written.

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This includes most uncredited content.

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Production:

Prototype and Print: Becky Smith. Smith Printing Co. LLC, Anoka, MN
Contributors continued:
Notes:

Abbreviations:
ELMCC: Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Chamber of Commerce
ELMHS: Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society
HHC: History of Hennepin County and the city of . . .
MHS: Minnesota Historical Society
History of hennepin county minnesota:
https://archive.org/stream/historyofhennepi00warn#page/246/mode/2up/search/Excelsior
The Spanish–American War
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish%E2%80%93American_War
Spanish–American_War
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http://lakeminnetonkamag.com/unusual-feasts-lake-minnetonka-past
Index:

Content by page: (Sequential)

Unnumbered:

Beginning of the book –

In Memory of:
James Roger Olds (1939 – 2013)
Debra Shanet (Lindert) Hart (1956 – 2013)

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Numbered:

5. Dedication
6. The Story: The History of our Lake Minnetonka Communities
7. Table of Contents
14. Tonka Bay – Peter M. Gideon Home
15. Community Organizations
17. Greenwood, Shorewood, Tonka Bay.
19. 20. About Lake Minnetonka

Content by person: (First Name - Alphabetical, page number)

George Bertram - 22., 48.
John Ropstol Johnson, Captain - 60
Robert McGrath - 22., 63.
William Joseph Snelling – 21.

Content by photo: (Alphabetical, page number)

City of Saint Louis - 5. Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society.
Governor Ramsey (Boat) - 19 Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society.
Lake Park Hotel 1880 - 17. Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society.
Minnetonka Yacht Club 1944 - 7.
Old Log Theater 1952 - 17.
Parade on Water Street - 11. & 12.
Peter M. Gideon Home - 14.
Rachel’s Boat Works - Mark Welty, the book Howard’s Poinmt -152
South Lake Communities map - 18