

Farms and Fox Hunts
A History of the City of Gem Lake, Minnesota



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Farms and Fox Hunts: A History of the City of Gem Lake, MN

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Introduction

June 30, 1999 was perhaps one of the least celebrated anniversaries in the state of Minnesota. For it was on this date forty years earlier that the City of Gem Lake was incorporated. Yet there is a good chance that absolutely no one within the city's boundaries even lifted a glass to commemorate the occasion, not because they didn't care but rather because most, if not all, never knew the date held any significance.

But on June 30, 1959 Gem Lake voted to incorporate as Ramsey County's newest suburb. Ninety five percent of the people who went to the polls on that day voted in favor of incorporation, successfully ending attempts by the City of White Bear Lake to include the Gem Lake area into its official boundaries. One hundred and two future Gem Lakers voted "yes" to incorporation while only five opposed. To get to this point, Gem Lake witnessed a failed and a successful annexation of at least part of its land into the City of White Bear Lake, a court battle to overturn this annexation, and a final battle before the supreme court of the State of Minnesota.

Gem Lake owed its existence not to a revolutionary army, but rather to visionaries who saw the need to remain rural in an ever growing sea of suburban development, and to the lawyers they employed.

Ask just about any Gem Lake resident on July 1, 1959 as to the meaning of the prior day's referendum and at least 102 would say it meant the successful culmination of a legal battle to exist. Ask anyone on July 1, 1999 and most would not have a clue what the question even implied. This is not to say the people of 1959 were smarter, it's just that the City of Gem Lake neglected to capture its history into a concise volume for all to read. Perhaps this is because there is little communication between the body politic of Gem Lake and its citizenry. As of this writing, the first ever Gem Lake city newsletter was published just days before.¹ Whatever the reason there clearly is a need to retain and disseminate our common history.

This, then, is the purpose of the present analysis. It will trace the development of Gem Lake to illustrate how our city came to be. But it is not meant to be a dry volume of politics and legalities, for, and this is most fortunate, many of Gem Lake's elder citizens are still alive to share their stories. Thus this work has a dual purpose: to cover the details of incorporation while simultaneously serving as a citizen's history. It is hoped that it will spur others to place their accounts onto paper so that our community, small though it is, can stand along side Maplewood, White Bear Lake, Vadnais Heights, St. Paul, and the other communities of Ramsey County as a place fully aware of its past as it approaches its future. In the end, the reader will discover that what Gem Lake lacks in physical size, it more than makes up for with its unique blend of characters.

¹ The Summer, 2003 edition of Gem Lake [Community Notes](#) arrived in city mailboxes in June, 2003.

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These characters range from truck farmers of French-Canadian descent to Chief Executive Officers of multi-national corporations to wartime companions of a future President of the United States. There is wealth and poverty, secluded estates with fox hunts as well as ramshackle houses that in all likelihood do not conform to building codes. This is Gem Lake, a suburb of 720 acres and 419 (2000 census) people.

This work of history obtained a sense of urgency when Judson Bemis died in February, 2001. Lost forever was an icon of the community and one who understood the history of Gem Lake's formative years better than anyone before or since. In part what follows is a living history project, one derived from the memories of those who lived it. Over time the human memory has a tendency to distort and overlap certain details, but the intent is to recall to the best of one's ability. Therefore, the details included here are meant to reflect what the individual recalled at the time of their interview. Any attempt to correct intimate details would result in an unending quest that at best would be time consuming with no real added benefit to the reader and would be quite a boring read. As a result, those interviewed for this project will see their words transposed as spoken, limited only by the author's ability to write as fast as the speaker talked and his inability to ask a subject to repeat their answer.

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Part I: Early Settlement

Originally, the area that became the City of Gem Lake was part of the Town of White Bear, established on May 11, 1858. This is the very same day Minnesota was admitted to the union as the 32nd state. But human social history always precedes human political history. French and later English explorers ventured into Minnesota as early as the mid seventeenth century. Some of their names live on today: Hennepin, Carver, Duluth, and Grossiliers (Gooseberry) have all leant their names to Minnesota's maps. The first two are remembered as counties, the third is a city, and the last is a picturesque waterfall along the north shore of Lake Superior.

But history is far more than the famous people whose names survive as landmarks. None of the above would have become famous if not for a supporting cast whose names history does not recall. A visitor to the City of Little Canada is greeted by a sign stating it was first settled in 1844. The first settler, according to one source, was Benjamin Gervais.² Who the first person was is not nearly as important as the fact that he went there and remained at least long enough to be identified as the first settler. A year earlier French explorer Jean Nicolle drew a map depicting "Bear's Lake." An 1851 account shows a road in the area that became Little Canada, though this was as close to the future Gem Lake that progress existed. Seven years later, according to this same source, Hugh I. Vance settled on Bald Eagle Lake, and became the first settler in what would soon become White Bear Township.³ There is some discrepancy in accounts, as a cited 1847 land survey included the names Louis Bibeay, Peter Triroux, E. Morisette, Michel Auger, while a survey the following year added Pierre Paul, J.B. Demarais, and Antoine LaBore to the growing list of settlers.

This same source gives credit to Abraham Lambert as being the first to purchase land in White Bear Township.⁴ It is of interest to note most of these names are French, which probably indicated the easier route via the northeast waterways rather than any trans-Appalachian route Americans would have had to traverse. The French-Canadians, though their ancestral government was evicted from North America in 1763, still demonstrated that wanderlust that allowed their forbearers to penetrate deep into the continent shortly upon arrival from France.

² Nancy Woolworth, The White Bear Lake Story, White Bear Lake, White Bear Lake Historical Society, 1975, p. 13.

³ W.H.C. Folsom, Fifty Years in the Northwest, St. Paul, Pioneer Press Co., 1888, pp. 545-9.

⁴ Woolworth, The White Bear Lake Story, p. 13. There may be a difference in that Lambert purchased the southeast quarter of section 28. Naturally the township had to be established for such a description to exist, and this occurred, as stated prior, in 1858.

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Many of these same French-Canadians or their kin, along with some of Anglo descent, became White Bear Township's initial town officials once it was established.⁵ From here, it was hoped, the town would grow and prosper. Fate, however, had different plans. Three years later the country dissolved into civil war, and local men went off to fight at distant places like Corinth, Mississippi, Nashville, and Gettysburg. Meanwhile in Minnesota, the mistreated Sioux Indians rose against the United States in 1862. Though miles from the actual hostilities, many local residents temporarily abandoned their homes to head to the relative security of Stillwater, next to St. Paul, the largest and presumably safest settled town.⁶ After the hostilities the relieved settlers returned unscathed to their homes.

White Bear survived war and uprising largely unscathed and the postwar period did finally bring the anticipated development. The Lake Superior and Mississippi Railroad ran tracks from St. Paul northeast to White Bear sometime between 1865 and 1868.⁷ This route would eventually become Gem Lake's northern boundary. The railroads provided the initial means of accessing White Bear, but mass transit took the form of streetcars, which were originally invested in by real estate companies. The intent was to develop the land between St. Paul and White Bear, with emphasis on the White Bear end of the route. A true town center developed in the eastern portion of the Township and in 1881 White Bear Village was created, separate from the Township.

Thomas Lowery eventually gained control of the streetcar companies that served the outlying areas, which included White Bear Village. By 1921 development was sufficient to warrant the incorporation of the City of White Bear Lake. In the 1920's, Lowery's streetcar company even built Wildwood amusement park in the area (specifically Mahtomedi) which further promoted the development.⁸

But White Bear Lake grew into a town whose economy was largely based on summer tourism. St. Paul's elite sought refuge from the summer heat by erecting summer homes on White Bear Lake, many of which still exist along Lake Avenue and Manitou Island. White Bear Lake earned the reputation of being a tourist destination. It is, after all, the largest water body in Ramsey County, indeed in the entire eastern metropolitan area. In time, with the many streetcars serving the area, many St. Paulites made the journey to Wildwood Park or the beaches of the lake itself. This development promoted growth which eventually embodied the suburban nature of White Bear Lake and the surrounding township.

⁵ Reverend Edward D. Neills, "History of White Bear Township and City" published in the March 4, 1937 edition of the White Bear Press, p. 1. The full list was J.F. Murray, chairman, Moses LeMay and Casper Mossbrugger, supervisors, G.W. Schader, clerk, V.B. Barnum, assessor (Barnum is also identified here as the first resident of White Bear Lake, again no geographic qualifier given), Joseph LaBore, collector, Lewis [sic] Bibeau, overseer of the poor, J.R. Clewett and A. Pepin, justices, and Joseph Pepin and W.F. Park, constables.

⁶ Woolworth, The White Bear Lake Story, p. 8.

⁷ April 23, 1937 White Bear Press, p. 1.

⁸ Judith A. Martin and David A. Lanegram, Where We Live: The Residential Districts of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1983, p. 86.

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But for those who desired more seclusion, or who wanted to limit contact to those of similar economic station, there was a smaller lake west of White Bear Lake that offered the perfect opportunity. Land around it eventually became the sole property of a local gentry. Gem Lake was too far west to either benefit economically or receive population increases due to improved public transit, but it was ideal for those who sought shelter from the masses of weekend tourists. Gem Lake grew to be a more exclusive summer retreat than White Bear Lake, and eventually became an ideological and political rival.

Part II: White Bear's "Gem Lake" area

The body of water known as Gem Lake appears on the map drawn for the 1874 Atlas of Ramsey County. This lake sits remote from other lakes. Coincidentally, the road now known as LaBore Road is shown on this same map, tracing a path remarkably similar to the present street that makes the Gem Lake city western border. Gem Lake is spring fed and shallow, with attendant wetlands making it appear larger than it really is. There is no natural beach area along the lake and no public access. The entire area is naturally wooded though land was cleared for human use in the early twentieth century. Both estate lots and farm tract lots existed within the future City of Gem Lake's borders and the interaction between the two distinctly different classes ultimately became one of Gem Lake's most enduring legacies.

How people first heard of Gem Lake is not clear, but those first families to settle there came from similar economic backgrounds. Families named Bemis, Bigelow, Daniels, and White all were associated with companies bearing their names and each turned to Gem Lake as a place to recreate and enjoy the fruits of their labor. Others moved to the area as farmers. L.G. Bennett's 1867 Map of Ramsey County lists names that disappeared prior to formal Gem Lake development. The map lists T. Wilcoxon, E.G. Leary, A. Goergerson, and M. Johnson as landowners.⁹ Another family, the Hansen's, eventually came to own the land previously owned by Leary. Hansen family descendent, Bryan Hansen, identifies 1903 as the date his family first moved to the area.¹⁰

Interestingly, the very first people to move there did not necessarily come for the water but rather the land. Neither Bigelow nor Daniels ever owned lake property, but sought acreage for horse riding activities.¹¹ Still others served in ranking positions in corporations or made names for themselves in fields such as law. Most owned horses, and some riding rings are still visible. The barn on the Daniels family estate is a recognized historic structure, designed by architect Edwin Lunde.

With the horses and stables came the activities associated with large tracts of land. Riding was common, but many people recall fox hunting. Gem Lake resident and wife of one of the city's founding fathers, Barbara Bemis [nee White], spoke of the fox hunts as merely part of life. However, those of the working class are more apt to talk of the hunts as an impressionable event. Scheuneman Road resident Vern Grundhofer recalled being outdoors one summer day when he heard a bugle off to the west. He went into the woods and eventually saw men on horses sporting red jackets and black hats. It then dawned on him that he was witness to a fox hunt, something he had read about in school, but had not expected to see in his own neighborhood.¹²

⁹ L.G. Bennett, "Original White Bear Township, 1867" reprint ed. Donald Empson, 1995.

¹⁰ Bryan Hansen frequently appears at Gem Lake government meetings and often refers to his family's presence in the city.

¹¹ Connie Kunin interview, July 2, 2003.

¹² Interviews with Barbara Bemis, conducted July 29, 2001 and Vern Grundhofer, conducted August 6, 2001.

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Horse and rider in fox hunt

The Daniels' family earned their wealth in agribusiness as co-founders of the Archer-Daniels-Midland Co., and the family first arrived in Gem Lake in 1929.¹³ Thomas Daniels purchased land at the south end of the lake from Richard Hansen. The land parcel spread east to border the Matoska golf course. Daniels spent twelve years in the US Diplomatic Corps then entered employment at ADM. In 1947 Thomas was elected president of the company upon Shreve Archer's death.¹⁴ A large house was designed by Edwin Lunde and christened "Worsted Skeynes" by its owner.¹⁵ During his diplomatic service, Thomas Daniels was assigned to Rome, serving as "first secretary to the ambassador to Rome."¹⁶ He later served in South America. By 1940 he was working at ADM, but his connections to US diplomacy remained strong. He gave a talk in White Bear Lake on his experiences serving overseas, but his shining "diplomatic moment" was when his estate was designated the site for an official visit by the Duke and Duchess of Windsor.

¹³ John Daniels interview, April 13, 2004. John's grandfather, John W. Daniels, founded the Daniels Linseed Co. in Minneapolis in 1902. The following year, George Archer joined Daniels and constructed the Archer-Daniels mill and produced flax linseed oil. In 1905 the company changed its name to Archer-Daniels Linseed Co. John W. Daniels remained president until 1924 when Shreve Archer took the helm. Archers and Daniels would control the company until 1968 when Lowell Andreas is elected president. The corporate history can be found at http://www.admworld.com/eng/meet/timeline_history.htm.

¹⁴ http://www.admworld.com/eng/meet/timeline_history.htm

¹⁵ John Daniels interview, April 13, 2004.

¹⁶ White Bear Press, July 5, 1940, p. 1.

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The Daniel's home

The Duke, the former King Edward VIII of England, and his American-borne wife, Mrs. Wallis Simpson, embarked on a journey from their home in the Bahamas to their ranch in Alberta, Canada.¹⁷ A grand reception was held, in Gem Lake, for the visiting royalty on September 28, 1941. Daniels' son John, though away at Yale during the visit, told of the reception and of the level of security never before seen in Gem Lake.

The family's English governess, Miss Ethyl Whitefield, actually missed the opportunity to meet the royal couple due to an eye infection.¹⁸ The dinner which "went off without a hitch" consisted of trout and prairie chicken and was complimented with fresh strawberries and vanilla ice cream.¹⁹

¹⁷ Students of English history will recall Edward VIII abdicated his throne in December, 1936 to marry the American divorcee, Wallis Simpson. Shortly after he was named the governor of the Bahamas, a position he held until 1945. See website Kings and Queens of the United Kingdom at <http://www.royal.gov.uk/output/Page 143.asp>.

¹⁸ John Daniels interview. Various newspaper accounts are contained in a packet in the possession of John Daniels. The papers, clipped from local St. Paul and Minneapolis papers dated September 28-29, 1941 and are contained in a family photo album.

¹⁹ Minneapolis *Daily Times*, September 29, 1941. p. 13.

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Minnesota Lieutenant Governor C. Elmer Anderson and his wife were the official state representatives as Governor Harold Stassen had a prior commitment. Stassen arrived in Gem Lake after the dinner, but in time for a dish of ice cream.²⁰

Horses were the Daniels' family's primary source of entertainment. Their land was of sufficient size to have several horses, John H. Daniels recalled having between five and ten horses, and polo was Thomas Daniels sport of choice. He practiced at home, but he and another prominent local, attorney Francis Butler, often loaded their animals into trailers and drove to Fort Snelling. Here they would play against teams comprised of US Army officers. Daniels and Butler were part of a traveling team that would go south to Illinois or east to Eau Claire, Wisconsin to pursue their equine interests.²¹ Daniels had several houses constructed on his property for the various servants he employed. Daniels' chauffeur and horse tender each had their own house, and a guest house was also constructed. One local rumor has Daniels constructing a guest house specifically for the Duke's visit, but John Daniels dispelled this rumor.²²

John Daniels grew up on the estate and recalled the activities of his youth with fondness. He and his elder brother Forest would sail small watercraft on the lake participated in a variety of sporting events along with other local boys. John eventually entered Yale University and enrolled in the Reserve Officer Training Corps program. The coming of war in December, 1941 speeded up his education (primarily because of an accelerated ROTC schedule) and by the following December, John graduated. He was immediately indoctrinated into the army and by August, 1944, he was commissioned a Second Lieutenant and assigned to the US Third army under George S. Patton. On August 15, 1944, John's artillery unit landed at Utah Beach, and he remained in Europe until the end of the war, being mustered out in 1945. Returning home, John and his wife Martha took up residence on the family estate first residing in the guest house then eventually moving into the main house.

John joined ADM and rose steadily through the ranks, becoming chief executive officer in 1958. His family called Gem Lake home, and named the estate "Worsted Skeynes" presumably after the John Galsworthy setting for his *The Country House*, and settled in as the new main family of the estate.

While he made his living in the business world, John Daniels recalls most vividly the years is spent in Gem Lake at the family's estate. He recalls how vines had grown on the chimney and he contracted a person to remove them. Ben LaBore was hired to do the work along the way earning the nickname "Speedy" as an antonym to his true work style. "Speedy" was in fact such a novelty to the family that Martha Daniels actually suffered a broken leg on his account.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ John Daniels interview.

²² Barbara Bemis interview and Connie Kunin interview. The current occupant of the former Daniels' guest house, Al Becicka, relates this story but admits there may be more myth than substance.

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One day Martha decided to lean out an upper floor room window to observe the work in progress when the nail she grabbed onto dislodged causing her to plummet to the ground below. She acrobatically twisted herself in mid fall so she might land on her leg rather than her head. This maneuver saved her life, but seriously broke her leg.²³

John stated that an ADM engineer in Kansas City constructed a pontoon boat which John transported to Gem Lake and the family used it one summer.²⁴ This represents perhaps the only time in the history of the lake that a motorized craft rode its waters. John continued to lead ADM until 1969, when the Archer family sold its interest in the company to Dwayne Andreas, an Iowa native who had plans to relocate ADM to Decatur, Illinois. John and Martha moved with the company, and the family estate became ADM property, a corporate policy of relocated employees.

The houses on the property were sold as separate lots, Stan Donnelly becoming the first non-Daniels resident when he and his wife purchased the guest house. Later, Cran Ingham moved onto the property, himself purchasing the guest house after Donnelly moved to another house on the estate.²⁵ By the time John and Martha left Minnesota, Gem Lake had incorporated, Martha had served as an election official for the first ballots. John, however, had no designs on local political office and remained focused on his CEO role.²⁶

Another portion of the Daniel's land was sold back to the Hansen family who operated a dairy, the well-known Summit Farms, to which later was added a liquor store. Part of this parcel of Daniels land now owned by the Hansen's, was subsequently leased to automobile dealer, Herb Tousley. Tousley opened his Ford dealership at the corner of County Road E and highway 61 (Hoffman's Corners) in 1956. Barbara Bemis remembered how the Daniels were more advanced than any other Gem Lake resident as they had a swimming pool to swim in while others had to swim in the lake.²⁷

Those unfamiliar with the lives of the landed did not likely realize the circles they moved in and the people they met. Barbara's life was typical of the landed class. Her family, the Whites, lived on the north shore of Gem Lake. She recalls how most Gem Lake residents stayed on Gem Lake throughout the summer yet trekked to the lake on winter weekends. She attended Shipley School in Pennsylvania, studied in France, then finished at Katie Gibbs' school in 1939.

She married Judson (Sandy) Bemis in 1943. Bemis, a Boston native and Harvard graduate whose father founded a bag company in the 1850s.²⁸ The reception was held at the Daniels house on the south end of the lake.

²³ John Daniels interview. Follow-up interview September 2, 2004.

²⁴ John Daniels interview.

²⁵ John Daniels interview.

²⁶ Connie Kunin interview, John Daniels interview.

²⁷ Barbara Bemis interview.

²⁸ For details on the Bemis Bag Company, founded in 1858 by Judson Moss Bemis, please see http://www.bemis.com/company_overview/history.html.

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The couple first lived in Minneapolis, but could not build on to their house there when they had children so they looked to return to Barbara's former neighborhood, which they did in 1949. Sandy would eventually obtain 80 acres of land and build a house on the eastern shore of Gem Lake.²⁹ Part of the Bemis land was the former Matoska Country Club, a golf course that failed during the Great Depression.³⁰ Bemis negotiated the purchase with landowner Horace "Gokie" Thompson, who co-owned the Freeman-Thompson Shoe Company in St. Paul.



The Bemis home

According to Barbara, her husband would not have built on Gem Lake had he not acquired lake access from Thompson.³¹ Bemis eventually named his estate "Hillary Farm" and its eighty acres was and remains the single largest parcel of land in the city.

Barbara's family made contact with other well known families, though some people would gain greater fame later in life. Her brother, William Gardner (Ted) White, and another boy, White Bear Lake native John (Jack) Hannaford, organized what they christened the Gem Lake regatta though none could remember the exact date.

²⁹ Barbara Bemis interview.

³⁰ Lloyd LaBore interview, August 22, 2001. According to Lloyd, the former clubhouse stood where Bemis' driveway now stands.

³¹ Barbara Bemis interview. Thompson sold his house to Barbara's father Edwin "Ted" White but apparently retained acreage on the lake as late as Bemis' purchase in 1949.

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The two boys, joined by a third, Frazier Whitsherd, built then raced their “boats” on the water. Oars and sails provided the power, for then as now, motorized craft were not permitted on the lake. Judging the race was a local girl who had a crush on Gardner, who did everything within her power to assure the victory for Gardner. First she declared Hannaford’s oar was too long so she disallowed it. Somehow, Hannaford’s craft managed to remain in the race, but when his boat came in contact with Gardner’s she disqualified the former in favor of her beau. The youths, which included their peer Forest Daniels, also staged the one and only Gem Lake Olympics which included running and jumping contests on the White estate.³² Hannaford eventually became an attorney and purchased the former White house. In time he became a Gem Lake City Clerk, a position he performed with pride and still speaks with fond memories.

Youth is fleeting, and Gardner White grew up and followed in his father’s footsteps to Yale University. Then the Second World War came and Gardner found himself in the United States Navy serving as a gunnery officer in squadron VT-51. Among his responsibilities was maintaining the weapons systems for Grumman TBF/TBM “Avenger” aircraft, which included torpedoes and two 50- and one 30-caliber machine guns.

One pilot assigned to VT-51 was one Lt. jg. George Herbert Walker Bush, a future American president. White and Bush were assigned to the same aircraft carrier and were joined by another familiar name, fellow Yale Forest Daniels.³³ Bush’s flight crew included radioman Jack Delaney and gunner Leo Nadeau. On January 24, 1944, Bush and crew along with the rest of VT were assigned to the light aircraft carrier, U.S.S. *San Jacinto*, and by April, 1944 had entered the Pacific theatre. In late August, the carrier left its port at Eniwetok to join an attack on Japanese positions in the Palau Islands. Earlier raids had been unsuccessful in eliminating Japanese radio installations, so on September 2, 1944, VT-51 was assigned to conduct another attack. The specific target was a radio position on Chi-Chi Jima.³⁴

On this occasion, Gardner approached Bush to seek permission to join the flight crew. In a letter to this author dated October 1, 2001, Bush cites he in fact approached Gardner if he would like to fly along in order to witness the plane’s weaponry in live fire action. In either case, Gardner joined the crew replacing gunner Nadeau.³⁵ The raid was routine and Bush’s plane was third in line to strike the target.. However, shortly before Bush was to approach the target, Japanese fire hit the plane’s engine. Bush ignored the smoke that filled the cockpit and made its dive to the target.

³² Barbara Bemis interview supplemented with information from an interview with Jack Hannaford, July 29, 2001.

³³ John Daniels interview.

³⁴ Malcolm W. Cagle, “George Bush, Naval Aviator,” Naval Aviation Museum Foundation, vol. 10, no. 2, fall 1989. The article contains additional excerpts from Section B of Lt. Commander D.J. Melvin’s squadron history dated December 20, 1944, pp. 7-11. Additional information cited from a letter from George H.R. Bush to his parents contained in his autobiography All the Best, George Bush, pp 49-52..

³⁵ Letter from George HR Bush to author dated October 1, 2001.

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His bomb found its mark then Bush radioed his intention to bail out of the disabled craft with his crew. At 3000 feet, Bush and one crew member jumped out over the open ocean. Of the two only Bush survived, the second parachute was never seen again. Of the crew it is not known if it was Gardner or radioman Delaney that also bailed out, the remaining crew member went down with the plane.

Bush swam to the safety of his life raft and was rescued by the U.S.S. *Finback*, which searched but found neither plane nor missing crew.³⁶ White's disappearance did not warrant significant coverage in the *White Bear Press*, the only substantial mentioning of his fate appeared in the September 15, 1944. The *Press* merely stated "Lt. W.G. White [was] missing in action."³⁷ Four and one half decades later, then President George H.W. Bush would invite Judson and Barbara Bemis to the White House.³⁸

Horace Thompson, the shoe company co-founder, sold his house to Edwin White, Barbara's father, and land to Sandy Bemis, Barbara's husband. He was among the landed class in Gem Lake and counted among its largest landowners. According to Barbara Bemis, Gokie was somewhat of a loner with a "quirky" disposition. Hannaford jokingly referred to Gokie's "Pout House" a building on his property nicknamed by his wife. One day a friend called on Gokie and his wife mentioned he was off in his "pout house" apparently sulking over some earlier occurrence.

The name stuck with the structure and it too became a small part of the local lore.³⁹ Eventually, Thompson moved away from Gem Lake as did his business partner, Mr. Freeman, who owned land directly east of Thompson.

Another name associated with a local business was Bigelow, who were leaders of the St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Co. (now shortened to the St. Paul Companies). Eileen Bigelow was the daughter of Charles Bigelow, who moved to the area in the late 1920s. Construction on the house, nicknamed "Paddyhill," began in 1929 and was complete by 1932.⁴⁰ Eileen moved to the area not because of the lake, her land has no lake frontage, but because of the excellent horse riding opportunities it offered. Eileen actually had a barn constructed before a house for herself. She loved horses so much that she kept photo albums of them much the way others retain family photo albums. During her peak years of horse raising, there were about fifteen horses on Eileen's land.

The event of the season, in Eileen's world, was the Gem Lake Hunter Trials, held annually right after the State Fair was complete. It was an all day event complete with hired judge, and opened to anyone with horses, though this usually meant the socialites of the neighborhood. The event began at the Daniels' estate during the 1940s then later moved to Paddyhill. It finally discontinued in the early 1960s.

³⁶ Cagle, "George Bush, Naval Aviator" p. 11.

³⁷ *White Bear Press*, September 15, 1944, p. 1.

³⁸ John Daniels interview.

³⁹ Barbara Bemis and Jack Hannaford interviews.

⁴⁰ Connie Kunin interview, 7-2-03.

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The winner of the annual event was awarded a ceramic jug, now an heirloom in the Bigelow house. Now the Bigelow house is occupied by daughter Connie and husband Dan Kunin.

Always somewhat nontraditional, Eileen took an interest in the land her house stood on. In the early 1940s she took a radical departure from standard female behavior of the time and adopted two infants, Connie and her brother Robert.⁴¹ An accomplished photographer, during the Second World War, Eileen worked for the St. Paul *Pioneer Press*, though she was forced to give up her position at war's end when men returned to pre-war jobs. Eileen continued on her estate raising her adopted children into the 1950s.

A lover of privacy, she turned a monetary debt into a beautiful stand of pine trees along Gem Lake side of LaBore Road. A Birch Lake resident, John Spreck, owed Eileen money but she took the trees as payment in kind.⁴² The result, unbeknownst to her at the time, became the future Gem Lake's statuesque border with Vadnais Heights and prompted the Gem Lake city council to enact a tree preservation ordinance.

After Gem Lake was incorporated, Eileen became involved in local politics, complimenting the land use vision of Judson Bemis. When a developer purchased land in southwest Gem Lake and threatened to erect suburban style ramblers ala White Bear Lake, Eileen purchased the land from the developer and made what became the city's first land subdivision.

She named it Red Fox Hills and mandated that each lot be a minimum three acres.⁴³ Eileen's politics also blended well with the sentiment of the day, that the fewer ordinances the better. She did not desire that Gem Lake become like North Oaks, a restricted community where all plans were subject to governmental approval.⁴⁴ To Eileen's great dismay the Minnesota Department of Transportation staked out the route for Interstate 35E right through her land. Fortunately for her and the City of Gem Lake, the route shifted west a half mile to avoid some wetlands.⁴⁵

Other scions of Gem Lake included lawyer Francis Butler, who lived on the west side of the lake in a cabin designed by architect Lunde. Butler purchased his Gem Lake cabin around 1932 from physician Wallace Cole, who set Martha Daniels' broken leg twice, first when she fell out of the upper floor window, the second after she was kicked by a family horse.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Connie Kunin interview.

⁴² Connie Kunin interview.

⁴³ Letter from John E.P. Morgan to Eileen Bigelow dated December 5, 1966, contained in Judson (Sandy) Bemis files contained in City of Gem Lake Planning Commission papers.

⁴⁴ Commie Kunin interview.

⁴⁵ Connie Kunin interview.

⁴⁶ John Daniels interview.

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The Butler Cabin in 2004

Butler moved in different circles than those of corporate America, choosing instead to associate with figures from the literary world. According to Jack Hannaford, author T.S. Eliot is rumored to have visited Butler's house.⁴⁷ Butler would one day take up the cause of his home and fight to disallow Gem Lake's annexation into White Bear Lake. Later, other professionals and entrepreneurs would purchase land in the south, west and northern portions of the city. The zoning has remained consistent with the original vision, three acres being the minimum lot size for most of this area.

Coexisting with the Gem Lake gentry were the residents of the eastern portions of the city. Many of these people were of French-Canadian descent drawing on a similar heritage to neighbors in Vadnais Heights, Little Canada, and White Bear Lake. Two Gem Lake streets bear the names LaBore and Tessier in honor of these working class families. Many were large landowners in their own right, opting to eke out a living growing crops and produce sold in local markets. But there were no social barriers (at least not on a neighborhood level) between these people and their wealthy western neighbors. Many times the lives of both classes of people came in contact as they provided either services or employment to the other. This is perhaps the most important bond in Gem Lake's history, as there eventually developed a mutual need that metamorphosed into the creation of the City of Gem Lake.

⁴⁷ Jack Hannaford interview.

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In the legacy of Antoine and Joseph LaBore, others of that family settled along Scheuneman Road. A 1931 Atlas of Ramsey County shows land owned by brothers Henry and Louis LaBore who owned 49 and 26 acres respectively.⁴⁸

Henry and Louis grew vegetables sold in local markets including the White Bear Farmer's market, St. Paul farmer's market, and probably at August (Augie) Scheunemann's market located at Hoffman's Corners.⁴⁹ Other LaBore's also lived in the vicinity, of whom most notable was Duesty, another brother of Henry and Louis.⁵⁰

Duesty LaBore represents a character that embodied the link between rich and poor in Gem Lake. Duesty owned his own small farm, but hired himself out to the Daniels family, where his skills with horses enabled him to find employment. Duesty was somewhat of a jack-of-all-trades who circulated freely between the two classes of people in Gem Lake. He extinguished an out of control bonfire on the Daniels property, made repairs to many of the tools that would break, and would return to his own land where he would raise, among other items, strawberries. Duesty and Oliver Tessier would challenge each other to see who could grow the biggest strawberry.⁵¹

Another commodity Duesty provided was milk from his dairy herd. He provided raw milk to local dairies, most probably Summit Farms, operated by the Hanson family in the Hoffman's Corners area. He is also on record as having cut hay for Gokie Thompson. According to Gem Lake resident Vern Grundhofer, Duesty eventually sold his land to Gilbert Foster, who designed the present Gem Lake Hills golf course. Duesty relocated to a house across the street, and eventually died in 1978 at age 86.

Other LaBores remained active in communal development. Recalling that a LaBore was party to the original establishment of White Bear Township in 1858, ancestor Louis LaBore's obituary cited him as having served on the White Bear town board.⁵² In time, Duset's son, Lloyd, would serve many years on the Gem Lake City Council.

Equally as prominent in local affairs was the Tessier family. Brothers Joseph and Oliver Tessier grew up north of the railroad tracks, outside of the modern Gem Lake boundary. Their father had emigrated from Quebec and settled amongst many others of his kind. Tessiers owned land around the present North Pond, which borders Gem Lake Hills golf course and abuts land presently owned by descendants and in-laws of Oliver Tessier.⁵³

⁴⁸ St. Paul Real Estate Board, *Atlas of Ramsey County, Minn.*, St. Paul Abstract Co., 1931, p. 27.

⁴⁹ Hoffman's Corners is at the intersection of County Road E and U.S. trunk highway 61. It was and remains the primary business district within Gem Lake's corporate boundaries.

⁵⁰ In 1996 a family memoir, "LaBore Family Reunion" was published which traced the heritage of many LaBore and LaBarre family members, the names being nearly interchangeable due to language barriers and phonetics. Many trace their roots to Sorel, Quebec, and records indicate the earliest migrants to Minnesota came in the 1850s.

⁵¹ Vern Grundhofer interview.

⁵² White Bear Press, April 18, 1947.

⁵³ Vern Grundhofer married Oliver Tessier's daughter and Oliver's son Ray lives along Goose Lake Road.

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Oliver was the other part of the strawberry contest duo and would get together with others who still spoke French to exchange stories and sing songs. Oliver's son-in-law Vern Grundhofer recalls Oliver singing in French with another LaBore, Amabe Bazille LaBore, son of Louis.⁵⁴

Many of the local French-Canadian descendents married into other families of similar heritage. LaBores and Tessiers dominate the land rolls, but smatterings of other names appear as well. South of the LaBore brothers' land was property owned by Rose Lizee (pronounced "Li-Zay"). To Jack Hannaford's best recollection, Mrs. Lizee owned land all the way to where Gokie Thompson eventually built his house. Lizee sold some of their land to the developers of the former Matoska Golf Course but still owned 62 acres in 1931.⁵⁵ Mrs. Lizee lived an adventurous life that took her from Osseo, Minnesota north via ox cart to Red Lake Falls, where she married, then eventually to Gem Lake. Her 1943 obituary states how she and her husband "about 40 years ago purchased 500 acres of lnned (*sic.*) which included Gem Lake and the surrounding farms." This placed the Lizees among the earliest land owners and the couple continued to live in Gem Lake even after selling most of the land they originally purchased. Eventually Rose Lizee moved into White Bear Lake, as an in town address was given in the obituary.⁵⁶

Another French-Canadian descendant was David Pierre, who occupied a small parcel of land south of Louis LaBore and north of Rose Lizee. The Vincent family owned land parcels east of Scheuneman Road (where the present Blue Spruce Estates development by resident William Kahl exists) and at the northeast corner of the Scheuneman Road-Otter Lake Road intersection. Matt Pelloquin ran a pig farm well known to all his neighbors, depending on wind direction, where that part of present Gem Lake Hills Golf Course that lies north of Goose Lake Road is now located.

In addition to families of French-Canadian descent, other families lived in the area. The Brown family owned a large portion of land north of Goose Lake Road where a portion of the present Gem Lake Hills Golf Course lies. One of the Brown's sons, Gerald, married Mayor Henry Hoffman's daughter, Kathleen, and attempted to run for mayor in 1970. Also raised by Browns was resident Larry Keuhn who now operates an excavating business in the northern part of the City of Gem Lake.

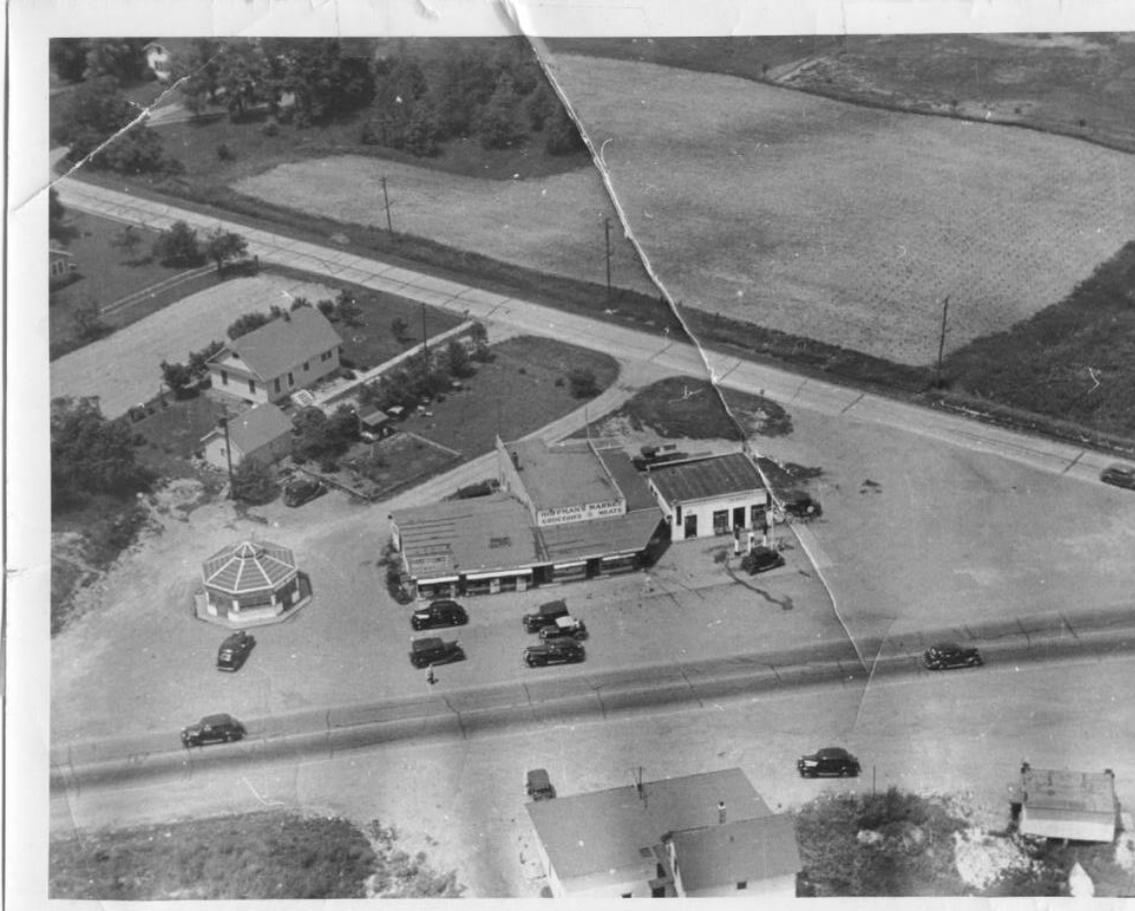
Apart from the agricultural portion of the present Gem Lake, but equally important to the community's economic base, was a retail sales area called Hoffman's Corners. The area occupied an important location along Highway 61 between St. Paul and White Bear Lake. Indeed any traffic along the route would pass through this area. Not surprisingly businesses catering to travelers sprung up there. Markets for the locals mixed with eateries and gas stations for travelers co-existed on the corner.

⁵⁴ Vern Gundhofer interview. Amabe Bazille LaBore purchased a house on land owned by Paul Tessier. The address, 4155 Otter lake Road is currently the home of the author, who purchased the land from Amabe's sone, Amabe Jr. after marrying into the LaBore family in 1988.

⁵⁵ Jack Hannaford interview. Real Estate Board, Atlas of Ramsey County, p. 27.

⁵⁶ White Bear Press, July 23, 1943, p. 2.

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Hoffmans' Corner in the 1930s or 1940s

As mentioned, Herb Tousley opened his auto dealership in 1956 and sold 603 cars in its first year of operation.⁵⁷

At a recent Gem Lake Planning Commission meeting, Tousley Ford manager Dick Heinecker reminded those present of how originally Herb Tousley wanted to retain the rural appeal of the rest of Gem Lake which was basis for the windmill and went so far as to include live barnyard animals wandering the premises.⁵⁸ An advertisement in a 1976 Vadnais Heights' community history states that Hoffman Corner's Oil Co. had been in business sine 1944. There may be some confusion as to the actual date of origin, for a June, 1932 article stated Hoffman was about to begin selling ice, and that he was "constructing a \$2000 oil station" complete with men's and women's restrooms and a sandwich shop. Hoffman had hired Matt and Ray Leick to run the new establishment.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ White Bear Press, July 4, 1957, p. 1.

⁵⁸ Gem Lake Planning Commission meeting, February, 2002.

⁵⁹ White Bear Press, June 3, 1932, p. 1.

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“Hoffman’s Corners” was named for the Hoffman family, which would also lend its name to a road, an early day strip mall, and provide the future City of Gem Lake with its first mayor. Donald Charles Hoffman wrote that Charles Hoffmann Sr. (there were two “N’s” in the family name prior to America’s entry into World War One), bought the land, roughly twenty acres, in the 1890s.⁶⁰

Henry Hoffman, first opened a fruit and vegetable stand and eventually expanded his holdings to include a store and gas station. Former area resident Lorraine Corrigan Berger, an employee of Hoffman’s, described the corner as containing “Hoffman {‘s] Store, Scheunemann’s Market . . . seven beer joints, two gas stations, a big garage, a dancing establishment, and an octagonal white building” that sold hamburgers. She wrote that she lived where Tousley Ford now stands.⁶¹ Berger goes on to describe Hoffman as a “progressive businessman” who sold beer, meat, dairy products, produce, and treats from “eight huge buckets of ice cream.”⁶² News of Hoffman’s store was occasionally covered by the *White Bear Press*. A November, 1943 article informed readers that Hoffman’s market just received its first shipment of oranges and grapefruit “from his Southern Texas groves.”⁶³



Hoffman Corner market

⁶⁰ Hoffman, Donald Charles, “Memories of Hoffman’s Corners,” in *Krumkake: Tales of Wit, Wisdom and Wonderings from the White Bear Lake Area*, White Bear Lake, MN, White Bear Center for the Arts, pp. 127-30. Also of note here is the spelling of the name “Scheuneman.” In April, 2004, Bryan Hansen told of a gathering of Scheuneman descendants at his Vadnais Heights restaurant where it was asked what happened to the second “n” in the family name. It is possible the letter was dropped as was Hoffman’s “n” in response to anti-German sentiment following World War One.

⁶¹ Berger, Lorraine Corrigan, “Working at Hoffman’s Store,” in *Krumkake: Tales of Wit, Wisdom and Wonderings from the White Bear Lake Area*, White Bear Lake, MN, White Bear Center for the Arts, pp. 23-5.

⁶² *Ibid*, p. 23.

⁶³ *White Bear Press*, November, 12, 1943.

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Donald Hoffman recalls that Henry Hoffman ran the store while brothers Joe and Oliver Tessier ran the market. Next door, another Hoffman, Bob, opened what is described as Minnesota's first hamburger stand. Bob also operated a service station and after 1942 was joined by Lloyd "Shorty" Urban. Yet another son, Charles Jr. ran his own fruit and vegetable stand but converted it into a restaurant in 1935.

The service station became known as Hoffman Corner Oil, which eventually grew to twenty-six stations across the Twin City metropolitan area.⁶⁴ Prophetically, the *White Bear Press* summarized Hoffman's expansion claiming "Henry will have a town all his own if he continues spreading out."⁶⁵

The restaurant changed owners several times becoming "Pad's Place" and then the "Burlap Lounge." After Arthur Birkeland purchased the building he tore it down in 1964 and erected the "Country Lounge" an establishment still in operation.⁶⁶

Hoffman's Corners was significant enough to warrant its own section of news tidbits in the *White Bear Press* in 1939 editions of the paper. Resident Mrs. J.W. Truax contributed newsworthy events from shopping trips to birthday parties, to family vacations.⁶⁷ For whatever reason, Truax did not provide information consistently, and when she no longer made submissions, the *Press* dropped Hoffman's Corners from its list of reporting areas. From time to time news of the area did make its way into the paper, but never with much regularity. Nor did any of the other reporting areas, namely Sunrise Park, think to include Hoffman's Corners as being part of the area for which it provided information.

⁶⁴ Donald Hoffman "Memories of Hoffman's Corners", p. 128.

⁶⁵ *White Bear Press*, June 3, 1932, p. 1.

⁶⁶ Donald Hoffman "Memories of Hoffman's Corners", p. 129.

⁶⁷ *White Bear Press*, March 17, 1939, p. 7. This column was part of a section describing local happenings around the area. Other entries on these pages included Bellaire, Bald Eagle, and other parts of the White Bear area.

Part III: Establishing the Village of Gem Lake

During the years immediately following World War II, America's cities experienced wholesale growth as returning soldiers married and started families. Cities were soon bursting at the seams with a "baby boom" generation. All across the country people looked beyond city boundaries to build new homes. A natural course of events was for new communities to develop which in many instances grew to become incorporated cities in their own right. St. Paul and Minneapolis were no different than cities across the nation. For St. Paul and Ramsey County, Minnesota the years 1948 through 1957 brought enormous growth and the emergence of many new villages, carved out of the original townships established in 1858.

White Bear Lake was not among these new villages of post World War Two, but it was in perfect position to take advantage of the influx of people looking for places to live. What had been a resort town prior to the Great Depression now became a suburban community that made the most of its municipal status. It already had in place infrastructure and the city government apparatus that enabled such infrastructure to expand. Many of the new houses in the area were actually built on land still under the Township's jurisdiction, but at the time the Township was not in position to offer city services, most important of which were city water and sewer. A map displayed at the White Bear Lake branch of the Ramsey County Library, printed in 1950 by the White Bear Lake Lion's Club, illustrates the growing city.

The White Bear Lake city limits are shown along with the emerging "suburbs" of Gardentette, Richland Acres, and Sunrise (Park). Hoffman's Corners was also identified just down the road from Sunrise. There was a large tract of undeveloped land between Hoffman's Corners and Sunrise which makes this connection important for Gem Lake's eventual development. There is no reference to "Gem Lake" on this map, the water body now called Gem Lake is not even shown. What is now called the North Pond is identified only as "Pond" and there is an illustrated scarecrow labeled "Farming County" where Gem Lake now lays. Scheunemann Road is labeled and New Canada Road (now Goose Lake Road) is also shown.⁶⁸ But White Bear Lake was the central player in the area and it dominated its corner of Ramsey County.

As lots became smaller and houses more closely built, traditional rural practices of individual wells and septic systems became impractical and even unhealthy. Individual wells tap into the subterranean water table. The more wells, the more use and the more use, the more the water table is unable to retain its water level. Obviously the lower the water table the more likely wells are to run dry. People could dig newer deeper wells, but that would not prevent them too from eventually running dry. City water distribution is the best way to meet water demands from residents. Similarly, individual septic systems are not practical for closely constructed houses. Indeed, most individual septic systems of the 1940s and 1950s were little more than cesspools, collection tanks that allowed waste to directly enter the ground.

⁶⁸ White Bear Lake Lion's Club, Map of White Bear Lake and Vicinity, 1950.

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No regard was given to the proximity of the well meaning that given the right soil conditions, waste water could easily enter into the water table and become part of the water supply. City sewer systems are the best way to keep sewage out of the water supply.

Unfortunately for the residents, White Bear Township which was situated all around the City of White Bear Lake, remained best suited for a rural populace. It did not have the ability, the funds, nor the desire to provide city services to the many households it now found within its borders. Rather than establish their own city, the residents of the township looked to the City of White Bear Lake to solve their dilemma. As early as the late 1930s the Township had need for fire department service, which could only come from White Bear Lake. Interestingly, Birchwood and Gem Lake, both technically part of the Township, organized themselves to receive fire department service. The *White Bear Press* cites one example of how Birchwood and the “Gem Lake Association” agreed to the proposed rate of \$45/call, while the Township was not permitted to take part in such an arrangement until approved by voters at its annual meeting.⁶⁹ To meet the growing demands of Township residents, White Bear Lake utilized state annexation laws to continuously expand its borders throughout the 1950s. In fact, annexations dominated the headlines of the local *White Bear Press* as much as Cold War politics dominated the headlines of major urban newspapers.

Most annexations were a matter of expedience as neighborhood after neighborhood found themselves in need of city services. A map originally prepared by the *St. Paul Dispatch* depicts how White Bear Lake grew from its original boundaries to what was then its greatest extent.⁷⁰ Many of the city streets, built in this period, were constructed as feeders to larger roads and carried the traffic of new homeowners who purchased the houses that would soon need the benefits of city services. There is a logical procession of White Bear Lake’s boundaries to include as many of these houses as possible.

Throughout most of the 1950s White Bear Lake enjoyed suburban growth mainly because there were no other communities anywhere nearby and could annex Township land virtually at will. Maplewood was established in 1957, but it really had little intention of expanding its northern boundary beyond what was originally set. Vadnais Heights was also incorporated in 1957 but again, it focused on land sufficiently far from White Bear Lake that there was little cause for concern for White Bear Lake’s annexation machine.

⁶⁹ *White Bear Press*, July 14, 1939, p. 1. How and why Birchwood and the Gem Lake Association was able to contract for fire service is not explained. Similarly, what exactly the Gem Lake Association was is unclear.

⁷⁰ *White Bear Press*, October 18, 1956, p. 5. The map shows six separate annexations dating from March, 1955 to September, 1956. The trend is a south and eastward progression which allowed the new residential areas along Cedar St. and White Bear Avenue to become part of White Bear Lake. There still remained land between Cedar St. and County Road E and south toward the Maplewood border yet to be included in the city.

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As mentioned, most of White Bear Lake's annexations met little resistance. To most, particularly those south of the city of White Bear Lake, annexation was a win-win opportunity to obtain city services and become part of a growing community. However, not everyone in the area sought city services or desired to be part of White Bear Lake. One annexation plan in September, 1956 met with enough resistance to cause it to fail with the voters.

This particular annexation effort was sizable. One thousand eight hundred and fifty acres

“bounded on the south by County Road E; on the west by Highway 61, Scheuneman Road, and Otterlake [*sic*] Road; on the north by Stillwater Street and the Soo Line Tracks; and on the east by an irregular line as follows: beginning at the intersection of Northwest Avenue and the Soo Line racks the line goes straight south to the lake, then surrounding Manitou Island it goes south through the lake on an imaginary of the east County Line; then excluding the area of Bellaire proper, goes south on Myrtle Avenue to County Road F, then on F to Bellaire Avenue and then south on Bellaire Avenue to County Road E”⁷¹

were part of the annexation area. Earlier annexations were smaller, almost limited to individual neighborhoods, but this one was to make a significant addition to the city and included 4723 people and 1231 homes. Some of the homes were in the Gem Lake area of the Township.⁷² Perhaps if this annexation had a more limited scope it might have succeeded, but even though the annexation petition contained four times the required number of signatures, it met steadfast opposition.⁷³

The vote was set for October 6, 1956, and the *White Bear Press* chronicled the debate in editions leading up to the vote. In part the area was contested because it included White Bear Township's town hall, situated west of Highway 61 on Hoffman Road overlooking Goose Lake. Two town board members, Edward Welsch (the town board chairman) who lived in the Sunrise Park area and Paul Cromer of Bald Eagle would lose their seats. Indeed, 800 residents west of White Bear Lake were included in the annexation area.⁷⁴

A meeting held on September 20 at Gall School in the Sunrise Park neighborhood served as the stage for pro-annexation forces. Both White Bear Lake mayor William Fleming and Township chair Welsch offered solutions to meet the growing need for city services in certain portions of the proposed annexation area. The meeting did little to unravel the dilemma facing voters or to address many of their concerns. One resident in attendance wrote a letter to the editor explaining how he had entered the meeting “leaning towards annexation” but “left confused and undecided.”⁷⁵ The meeting was sponsored by the Sunrise Park Civic Association and was chaired by state representative Joseph Karth.

⁷¹ *White Bear Press*, September 20, 1956, p. 1.

⁷² *Ibid*, p. 1.

⁷³ Numbers can be confusing as state law only required five signatures on an annexation application in order to bring about a referendum. In this case 23 people signed the petition.

⁷⁴ *White Bear Press*, September 20, 1956, p. 1.

⁷⁵ P.A. Adam, Letter to the Editor, *White Bear Press*, September 27, 1956, p. 8.

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Clearly, Sunrise Park was the biggest advocate of annexation, and rightly so as its growing population needed more city services each passing year.

White Bear Lake's mayor and two city councilmen were joined by the city engineer. The Township was represented by chairman Welsch, board member Cromer and treasurer Gus Rasmussen. White Bear Lake saw the annexation as just another in a series of such endeavors that sought to bring needed services to Township lands. The Township saw annexation as threatening to its very survival. Other annexations had removed town lands and added them to city tax rolls. Earlier in the year, North Oaks voted to incorporate their village, which further reduced the Township. Some Township citizens were concerned that further losses of Township tax rolls would place a greater burden on those remaining. At this meeting Rasmussen said such tax increases were not imminent, but he did not address how long the Township could continue to lose land and not reassess its tax base.⁷⁶

Arguments for and against annexation carried over into the *White Bear Press* the following week. Pro-annexationists derided the argument put forth by the anti-annexationists, claiming their opponents made only a financial case against annexation. Ted Wolfe wrote the pro-annexation viewpoint in the *White Bear Press*, and asked if the future would "continue to grow with ill planned expansion" which created their "present problems" or whether "by uniting [with White Bear Lake residents could] look forward to an organized community, dedicated to the mutual benefit of all those within its boundaries." Wolfe criticized the township government stating the "part time government [had not] met the challenge of a suburban community." Wolfe added that township government was best suited to serve farming communities, and not suburban bedroom communities. Wolfe hyperbolized his case raising it to a level of "freedom of democracy in action."⁷⁷

Countering Wolfe's argument was Graham Anderson, advocate of the anti-annexation forces. His argument centered on how acute the situation facing Sunrise Park really was and that the majority of the proposed annexation area did not face the same infrastructural needs.

It is the opinion of many people that any decision of Sunrise Park should not include those people outside its boundaries. This controlling power of Sunrise Park is due to having a majority of voting power centered on an area which is less than 15 per cent of the area to be annexed. Any decision by people concerning their government should not only be by majority but should also be a majority within any and all areas regardless of size and location. It is unfortunate that such an important issue can be initiated by only five signatures on a petition.

⁷⁶ *White Bear Press*, September 27, 1956, p. 1.

⁷⁷ "Views on Annexation" For by Ted Wolfe, *White Bear Press*, September 27, 1956, p. 1 and 8.

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We probably should appreciate the fact that the 23 originators of the petition included over four times the required signatures, but they still represent less than one-half of one per cent of the people residing within the annexation area.⁷⁸

Anderson countered Wolfe's argument and matched his hyperbole. But for Gem Lake's situation he was correct. None of the farmers living within the annexation area had any need for city services. Even Hoffman's Corners was not developed sufficiently to warrant city water and sewer. None of the residents there would have wanted to pay for such services anyway. Hoffman's Corners' economic geography came from the west, not east in the direction of Sunrise Park.

The campaign continued right up to Election Day. A full page campaign advertisement in the October 4 White Bear Press listed the benefits of annexation. It listed the names of ninety-two people who presumably would vote in favor of annexation and gave their street addresses. Ironically, all had Sunrise Park addresses.⁷⁹ Not to be outdone or outspent, the anti-annexation forces used a similar full page advertisement to show how expensive the White Bear Lake plan was compared to the Township plan. The so-called Sunrise Park Citizen's Committee claimed White Bear Lake's plan would cost taxpayers \$192.50 annually while the Township plan would cost but \$2.50 per year. Details on these figures were not provided.⁸⁰ A clever editorial cartoon showed how voters in Sunrise Park stood at the crossroads with politicians from either side advocating their offers. Attached to a leash with no vote of his own was a dog representing the fringe areas (which included Gem Lake and areas west of White Bear Lake), the dog would follow whichever path the master led.⁸¹

⁷⁸ "Views on Annexation" Against by Graham Anderson,, White Bear Press, September 27, 1956, p. 1 and 8.

⁷⁹ White Bear Press, October 4, 1956, p. 5.

⁸⁰ White Bear Press, October 4, 1956, p. 14.

⁸¹ White Bear Press, October 4, 1956, p. 1.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 4, 1956

Annexation Election

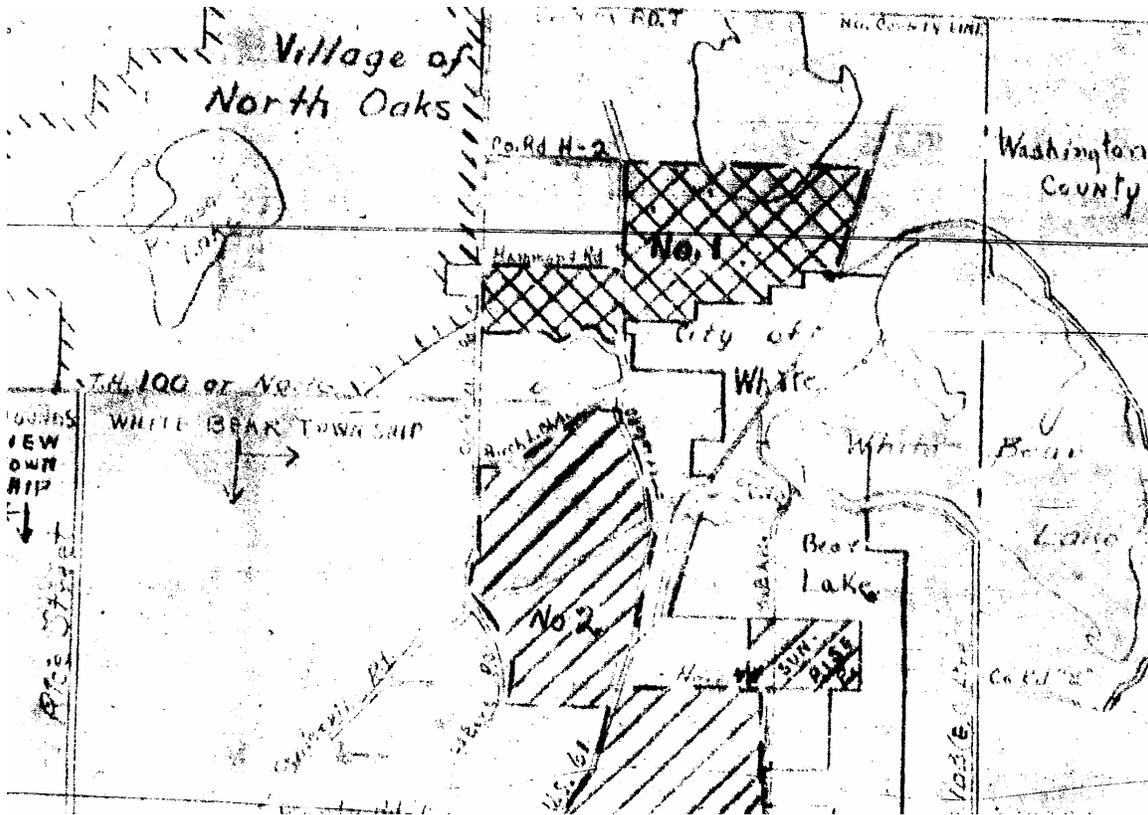
At The Crossroads



A timely political cartoon from the White Bear Press, October 4, 1956 showing the confused voter receiving promised from both White Bear Lake and the Township. On a leash without a choice but to follow the master is the fringe areas which included Gem Lake.

Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society microfilm collection.

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This map from the April 4, 1957 White Bear Press identifies those areas on the election ballot on April 13. Map courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society microfilm collection.

Armed with rhetoric and sensationalism, Township voters went to the polls on October 6. The anti-annexationists won the day, soundly defeating the proposal 1088-640. If Sunrise Park was to become part of White Bear Lake, it would have to wait. Gem Lake farmers such as the Vincents and entrepreneurs Augie Scheunemann and Henry Hoffman would not be subjected to the burdens of city government. Others in the area, those ineligible to vote since they were not formally part of the proposed annexation area, likely also breathed a sigh of relief. They would not be next in the sights of the expanding City of White Bear Lake.

Both White Bear Lake and the Township took note of the election results. The city stood unfazed by defeat as it looked towards the future with confidence, knowing it could offer city services when and where they would be called to do so. The Township recognized the need to shift its earlier positions on city services. Whether they liked it or not, their agricultural past was fading away as new developments brought new people with needs for city-like services.

The Township organized a “fact-finding committee to study the problems currently before the township.” This committee consisted of people from all areas of the Township and would consider how best to offer the more services promoted in the October 4, White Bear Press editorial cartoon.

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Conspicuously absent from the published list of committee member names is anyone with a Gem lake address.⁸² In what remained of the Township, only Gem Lake still represented a concentrated population of farmers and estate landowners whose land holdings resembled agricultural use.

While the fact finding committee met, other annexation and related votes took place. On October 16 Bellaire residents voted 143-98 against incorporation, opting to remain part of the Township. The following week, on October 23, Normandy Park residents voted in favor of annexation into White Bear Lake. Incidentally, the president of the Normandy Park Civic Association, Thomas Jefferson, a member of the Township's fact finding committee, "worked for annexation while serving in a Township capacity."⁸³ Unlike his more famous namesake, this Thomas Jefferson does not appear to have had problems working directly against the very government that offered him an opportunity to serve it.

Regardless of events around it, the Township continued to function and to move towards a revised concept of city services. The fact finding committee met throughout the remainder of 1956 and into the following year. Four subcommittees were formed: Incorporation and Annexation, Storm and Sanitary Drain, Water Supply, and Town Government. New members were added, but again not from Gem Lake.⁸⁴ One new member, L.H. Mikeworth, was a Bald Eagle resident. Of the subcommittees, the most intriguing was the Incorporation and Annexation committee, chaired by Orval Alstad. As the main committee continued to meet, the notion of incorporation or further annexation into White Bear Lake emerged as the most desirous options. The struggles of the Township did not go unnoticed by outside parties, and on November 22, the League of Minnesota Municipalities weighed in with an essay explaining township versus city government to the readers of the *White Bear Press*. This appears as an attempt to better educate the voters rather than subject them to opinions and hyperbole as had occurred before the October 1956 vote.⁸⁵

Though it is somewhat beyond the scope of the present study of Gem Lake, it is important to note that the fact finding committee set a date of final report for January 31, 1957. The February 7, 1957 edition of the *White Bear Press* revealed the committee recommended full annexation of all Township lands into White Bear Lake; a viewpoint endorsed "100%" by town board president Welsch.⁸⁶ Gem Lake, as part of the Township appeared destined to be part of White Bear Lake.

⁸² *White Bear Press*, October 11, 1956, p. 1. The full list consisted of Orval Alstad, President of the Sunrise Park Civic Association, Mrs. T.G. (Cecile) Schonebaum, chair of a temporary citizens committee against the recent annexation proposal, Paul Thomas of West Bald Eagle Ave., Robert M. Hanson, former town board chairman, Thomas Jefferson, president of the Normandy Park Civic Association, Lowell Eastlund, president of the Vadnais Heights Booster Club, W.L. Hunziker, White Bear Beach resident, Mrs. Lloyd Louks, Mrs. Benjamin Rice of Sunrise Park, and Fred Frost of the Bald Eagle Community Club. Town board president Welsch could appoint more members if needed.

⁸³ *White Bear Press*, October 25, 1956, p. 1.

⁸⁴ *White Bear Press*, November 1, 1956, p. 8. The new members were L.H. Mikeworth of Bald Eagle, Mel Sandbakken of White Bear Beach, and Fred Vogt of Cottage Park.

⁸⁵ *White Bear Press*, November 22, 1956, p. 3.

⁸⁶ *White Bear Press*, February 7, 1957, p. 1.

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It seemed all the City of White Bear Lake had to do was organize annexation efforts and it would grow to include the entire former Township. The committee's report appeared in the February 14, edition of the White Bear Press and it detailed how it made fiscal sense to utilize services established by White Bear Lake instead of duplicating them under the format of a new city.⁸⁷ But annexation would still be a gradual process as legalities had their own requirements.

Contrary to the fact finding committee's report, not all Township residents desired to be part of White Bear Lake. From a logistical standpoint this makes sense. The further away one lived, the longer it would take for city services to arrive, services that would be part of the tax burden long before there were substantial beneficial uses. Police and fire responders would take longer to arrive and road crews would likely neglect far reaching roads for those of in town. Vadnais Heights' residents ultimately took the opportunity to incorporate their own city rather than be part of White Bear Lake. Gem Lake residents were not as well organized and still lived as their predecessors had in the years before World War II. Somewhat surprisingly, they did nothing rather than attempt to begin the incorporation process.

White Bear Lake remained focused primarily on its southeastern hinterlands as it annexed Golfview Heights and Lakeview Terrace in February, 1957. More land transferred itself from the Township into the city. At the end of February, Chairman Welsch and town board member Al Jensen "definitely declared themselves in favor of total annexation" of the Township into White Bear Lake.⁸⁸ By this time Welsch had resigned himself and his Township that the end was near. Jensen, however, is somewhat of an anomaly. Before the end of the summer he would find himself as the duly elected mayor of the newly formed Village of Vadnais Heights. Somewhere along the way, Jensen's annexation vision changed.

A partial answer to Jensen's change of heart may be found in an editorial in the White Bear *Press* by Carl Peters. Peters crafted an argument similar to that used by Illinois Senator Stephen Douglass during the slavery controversy of pre U.S. Civil War Kansas, an argument focused on the idea of popular sovereignty. "Action for annexation, or for any other step, must come from township citizens themselves," Peters wrote. He added that it was "conceivable that different groups of citizens in different or even the same sections of the township will seek to take different actions."⁸⁹

Peters recognized there was no one-size-fits-all solution to the Township's problems and that annexation might work in one area, but not in another. The White Bear *Press*' official position on the issue was utilitarian, and stated annexation "would achieve the greatest good to the greatest number" but agreed with Peters that people should decide for themselves.

⁸⁷ White Bear Press, February 14, 1957, p. 1.

⁸⁸ White Bear Press, February 28, 1957, p. 1.

⁸⁹ White Bear Press, February 21, 1957, p. 1.

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Given the green light to proceed with annexing the Township, the White Bear Lake city council on March 5, 1957 passed a resolution to annex all of the Township, should residents of the Township so desire. The council authorized Mayor Fleming to appoint an annexation committee to “work out orderly plans with any township group of citizens seeking annexation.”⁹⁰ Simultaneously, the council passed eight separate ordinances annexing portions of the Township into the city. Township resident Mikeworth, who does not seem to be an advocate of annexation, nevertheless resigned himself to the concept. He only wished that annexation come in stages rather than all at once.⁹¹ The annexation machine had reached full speed. During the annual election for Township officers, only 134 ballots were cast.⁹² The Township seemed to be fading into history.

Unconcerned for the welfare of Gem Lake residents, White Bear Lake made yet another attempt to annex Sunrise Park into its corporate boundaries. In mid March, 1957, petitions were filed to annex Sunrise Park and a large portion of Bald Eagle into White Bear Lake. The timing is interesting as there was meeting at the same time of southwestern Township residents who intended to incorporate the “area from Vadnais Heights to Bald Eagle as the village of ‘Eagle Heights’ with a total population of over 5,000.”⁹³ Should this incorporation occur, White Bear Lake would have a serious rival for Township lands. The scramble for the Township was on. The Eagle Heights group petitioned the Ramsey County Board for an election, but White Bear Lake played a trump card by accepting the Sunrise Park/Bald Eagle proposed annexation petition and pre-empted a vote for incorporation. Mikeworth, an attorney, worked towards annexation into White Bear Lake.⁹⁴ Why he opposed the Eagle Heights plan in favor of annexation into White Bear Lake is unclear, perhaps he related better to White Bear Lake rather than Vadnais Heights, which had no real city center at this time.

The vote was set for April 13, 1957. White Bear Lake offered an olive branch directed towards the residents of Gem Lake. On March 26, the city council passed a resolution stating the city would “reassure the residents of rural areas [of the township] that might be annexed . . . that present agricultural land could continue indefinitely.”⁹⁵ The resolution said nothing of increased taxes or future assessments should annexation occur. But the intent was clear, the owners of Gem Lake’s large estates as well as its sizeable farm acreage would not see their land rezoned should they opt to join White Bear Lake.

Gem Lake was specifically identified as part of the proposed annexation area, which listed as boundaries the “large district bounded on the east by Sheuneman and Otter Lake Roads, on the north by Birch Lake Boulevard South; on the west by Labore and Centerville Roads; and on the south by a line somewhat below County Road E.” A map appearing in the White Bear Press identifies Gem Lake as area #2.⁹⁶

⁹⁰ White Bear Press, March 7, 1957, p. 1.

⁹¹ White Bear Press, March 7, 1957, p. 1.

⁹² White Bear Press, March 14, 1957, p. 1.

⁹³ White Bear Press, March 21, 1957, p. 1.

⁹⁴ White Bear Press, March 21, 1957, p. 1.

⁹⁵ White Bear Press, March 28, 1957, p. 1.

⁹⁶ White Bear Press, April 4, 1957, p. 1.

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Before progressing, it is worthwhile to acknowledge the vision of the Eagle Heights group as an alternate means of government. It is not specifically clear if Gem Lake would have been part of Eagle Heights, but Gem Lake land use practices would have been better served by Eagle Heights than White Bear Lake. The April 4, 1957 White Bear *Press* published the Eagle Heights manifesto, explaining its vision.

The purpose of this statement is to clear up any matter standing which may exist as to the reasons for an attempt to incorporate the rural areas of White Bear Township into a village.

Early in March, a group of interested residents of White Bear Township, recognizing that the Township form of government could not be retained indefinitely, met and discussed the problem. In the course of the meeting, it was decided that the interests of the majority of the people could be best served by the formation of a rural type of village. This decision seemed the most logical for several reasons:

1. Most of the residents of the rural areas of White Bear Township are either long-time residents who prefer their present way of life or are persons who have moved into the community because of its rural atmosphere.
2. The greater portion of the Township has no need at present for any of the services which could be furnished by annexing to an adjacent city. Should the need arise in the future, it could be taken care of by the [proposed Village of Eagle Heights] itself.
3. The village, if it included all the semi-rural areas of the Township, would have a population large enough to qualify for a share of gas tax monies under the new gas tax amendment.
4. By formation of a village, a major portion of school transportation aids would be retained by the school district. This would be lost under annexation.

In drawing up the proposed boundaries of the village, only those areas were included which are rural or semi-rural in nature. No attempt was made to include communities which could not conceivably be benefited by annexation.

Before the legal details of presenting a petition for an incorporation election could be completed, persons in the Bald Eagle and Sunrise Park areas submitted petitions for elections to be held on annexation to the City of White Bear Lake. Since the annexation areas included portions of the proposed village, this effectively stopped any further action on incorporation.

We do not believe that any future incorporation actions should be a factor in the April 13th annexation elections. The choice must be that of the people concerned. Annexation is an issue in itself and should not be confused with prejudices or fears.

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We have no quarrel with the government nor the people of White Bear Lake. We have been good neighbors in the past and hope to continue in mutual cooperation whether as neighbors or as part of the City of White Bear Lake.⁹⁷

Given the background of Gem Lake's estate owners, it would be somewhat surprising if they fully endorsed being part of something like Eagle Heights proposed, but similarly they might have been caught between a rock and a hard place. However, as mentioned, White Bear Lake never allowed a vote on incorporating Eagle Heights. Once again Gem Lake appeared destined to become a part of the City of White Bear Lake.

Once again the campaign machines revved their engines. Pro and anti annexation advertisements adorned the pages of the White Bear *Press* immediately preceding the vote. This time, the voters approved the annexations. But satisfaction with the results depended on where one lived. Sunrise Park finally achieved what it had sought since the previous year. Bald Eagle would not become part of Eagle Heights. Gem Lake stood to lose its isolation and identity.

Finally spurred to political action, Gem Lake residents sought to legally challenge the annexation vote. The April 25, 1957 White Bear *Press* referenced a court hearing at which White Bear Lake city attorney Edward Springer and clerk Richard Krantz would defend the annexation against the opposition of "certain White Bear Township residents." Representing the township would be attorneys Francis Butler of Gem Lake and Paul Thomas of Bald Eagle, township clerk Robert Wille, and an outsider, Little Canada attorney Fred Memmer.⁹⁸

The case did not get off to a favorable start for the township plaintiffs. District Court judge James Otis denied a temporary injunction against certification of the election results. Yet the plaintiffs remained undaunted and challenged the legitimacy of those registered to vote. This was the beginning of a plan to invalidate the election of technicalities. The *Press* stated that all was in order for the certification to occur and only a *quo warranto* proceeding could overturn the results.⁹⁹ This proved prophetic as this was what the attorneys did next.

In the meantime, the City of White Bear Lake proceeded on to the next annexation as it sought to include the area north of Bald Eagle and the Birch Lake areas into its boundaries. Vadnais Heights residents ignored the loss of Bald Eagle and sought to incorporate with its northern border set at County Road G (Highway 96), and by July, had become its own suburb. Gem Lake was now essentially on its own as it had now clearly delineated boundaries between two substantially larger cities.

⁹⁷ White Bear *Press*, April 4, 1957, p. 1. The document was signed by Alden Krueger, Carl Olson, Lowell Eastlund, Albert Jensen, Donald Carley, and Paul Cromer. The *Press* again weighed in on an important local political issue. Press editors claimed the Eagle Heights group demonstrated lack of vision by claiming only certain parts of the township would benefit from annexation. It also warned of the likelihood that several small incorporations would occur if annexation failed. This "Balkanization" of White Bear Township is an interesting, and accurate, projection.

⁹⁸ White Bear *Press*, April 25, 1957, p. 1.

⁹⁹ *Quo warranto* is a legal maneuver that asks by what authority did something occur.

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Another hearing was set for April 27. Later district court judge Robert Rensch issued two writs of *quo warranto* to the attorneys and a citizen of each area (Bald Eagle and Gem Lake) and set a July 12 hearing date. The writs put the City of White Bear Lake on the immediate defensive, and required it “to show by what right it assumes jurisdiction over the annexed areas.”¹⁰⁰

At face value the case of Gem Lake might have appeared hopeless. One could easily make the argument that White Bear Lake had the right of jurisdiction thanks to due process and the successful vote. Certainly the Sunrise Park voters had achieved what they had sought, but careful reading of the law, application of technical abnormalities, and perhaps just a little sympathy from Judge Rensch all converged.

Gem Lake attorney Frank Butler used every legal angle available to him to make his case. Butler included the voter registration case from the previous spring then worked in more technicalities into his presentation. Because the portion of Gem Lake east of Scheuneman Road had been included in the election of 1956, Butler argued how state law required a two year waiting period before another annexation vote could occur. In reality, the entire Sunrise Park annexation stood to be overturned on this issue, but that was not why Butler was making his case. He was working for the interests of Gem Lake, his very own neighborhood. He added that Gem Lake was “too rural to be properly ‘conditioned’ for city government.”¹⁰¹ Mayor Fleming of White Bear Lake countered that most people had voted for annexation and hoped Gem Lake’s case would be thrown out of court. But Fleming was thinking in too broad of terms. Butler localized his case to Gem Lake specifically, which due to land use by the farmers and the estate owners did not resemble suburban White Bear Lake. Butler seemed to be all-inclusive in his arguments as to why the election should be voided, but his best hope for victory hung on that portion of the *quo warranto* writ which claimed “the irregular shape of the area purported to have been annexed renders the Town of White Bear a badly fragmented and irregular-shaped area that is and will be an awkward, difficult and grossly expensive subject to town government.” The idea that Gem Lake was not suited for city government” was his strongest argument.¹⁰²

The same legal team was in place for the township since their first appearance before Judge Otis. Frank Butler remained paired with Paul Thomas and Robert Wille, and this legal team represented two citizens, one from each area in question. J.H. Howe resided in Bald Eagle while Henry Hoffman hailed “from the southwestern area.”¹⁰³ The hearings resolved little as both sides presented their arguments and a trial seemed imminent, in spite of rising court costs.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ White Bear Press, June 20, 1957, p. 1.

¹⁰¹ White Bear Press, June 20, 1957, p. 1.

¹⁰² State of Minnesota Supreme Court Case 37544-5 State of Minnesota ex. rel. Town of White Bear and J.H. Howe and Henry L. Hoffman vs. City of White Bear Lake, et. al., p. 4.

¹⁰³ White Bear Press, July 11, 1957, p. 1. It is somewhat interesting that the Press did not identify Gem Lake as Hoffman’s place of residence. Whether this was intentional or just an oversight is not clear. However, the Press strongly supported the annexation and worked to portray it in the best light possible.

¹⁰⁴ White Bear Press, August 28, 1957. Carl Peters penned an editorial claiming the dispute had already cost the township \$750 and the city \$950.

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The case finally received its day in court on October 22. Interestingly, Judge Robert Rensch presided over the case. This was favorable to Butler and company as it seemed likely that Rensch would rule in their favor having already issued the writs of *quo warranto*. The Press did not report any further news of the case until Rensch made his decision, which did not come until January 13, 1958.

As expected, Rensch ruled in favor of Butler. He based his decision on several factors. First, he concluded that “the majority of residents involved work and trade primarily in St. Paul, and that the area west of Highway 61 [was] not suitable for city government.”¹⁰⁵ He did not elaborate on what living and working in St. Paul had to do with the case, but it is most likely a reference that St. Paul eclipsed White Bear Lake in importance to the people of Gem Lake. This could mean that there was not a common bond between Gem Lake and White Bear Lake which would make annexation into White Bear Lake unnecessary. Rensch also determined Gem Lake was indeed part of the failed annexation attempt of 1956 and sufficient time had not transpired prior to a new election. For good measure he also agreed the election participants were not properly registered.¹⁰⁶ The legal ball was now in White Bear Lake’s court, and not surprisingly, they appealed to the state Supreme Court.

In days prior to appellate courts, the state Supreme Court heard cases directly appealed. Butler remained the principle attorney representing Henry Hoffman specifically and Gem Lake in general, and he had not used up all of his tricks in earlier court arguments.¹⁰⁷ Before the Supreme Court Butler laid out all of his previous references against the legality of the annexation and now added that the Highway 61 bridge over railroad tracks was not mentioned in the annexation petition and hence was not in White Bear Lake proper. This bridge, according to Butler, remained township property.¹⁰⁸ What good would a bridge do if it was property of a governmental entity inside the property of another?

Aside from this type of far-fetched argument, Butler sought to disavow links between Sunrise Park and Gem Lake. He listed the names of signatories to the original annexation petition, all of whom were Sunrise Park residents, and none who could identify the petition’s drafters. Butler then asked these Sunrise Park residents if they ever shopped at Hoffman’s Corners to which only one said she had, but that was only “rarely.” Butler clearly sought to differentiate between Sunrise Park and Gem Lake in an attempt to show how they should never have been included as part of the same annexation area due to wholly different needs. Most of these witnesses queried said they knew no one in Gem Lake, save the Hanson family, operators of Summit Farms dairy.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ White Bear Press, January 16, 1958, p. 1.

¹⁰⁶ White Bear Press, January 16, 1958, p. 1.

¹⁰⁷ Actually, according to the Supreme Court file, another attorney, Frank Bradford was supposed to have presented the main arguments, but had taken ill and was hospitalized. Butler took charge in Bradford’s absence. See Supreme Court case 37455-5, p. 64.

¹⁰⁸ Supreme Court case 37455-5. p. 51.

¹⁰⁹ Supreme Court case 37455-5, pp. 87-103.

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Butler then turned his attention to display how Gem Lake residents had no substantial ties to White Bear Lake. Gem Lake resident Virginia Opstad testified she shopped at Hoffman's Corners, not White Bear Lake. She added how the fact-finding committee of 1956-7 conducted work that didn't apply "to us out there (in Gem Lake)."¹¹⁰ Henry Hoffman later testified that Hoffman's Corners had all the amenities residents needed for daily life, including a "filling station and grocery store, bakery, variety store, art shop, paint store and restaurant."¹¹¹

Butler also argued what he had presented before Judge Rensch. He claimed insufficient time had elapsed between elections for the same parcels of land. He then used a map to illustrate how portions of the annexed land was not contiguous to White Bear Lake so that one had "to get out of the city" to get to the newly annexed area. He indicated that state law did not allow annexations of land greater than a mile and a half distance from the city center.¹¹² Added to all of these facts, Butler used the subtleties of language to rattle the White Bear Lake side. Several times during his presentation he used the word "grab" in reference to White Bear Lake's annexation of township lands. In time White Bear Lake Mayor Fleming took offense and asked if the word had "sinister" connotations.¹¹³

Court records do not indicate whether Butler's tactics on word usage worked in his favor, but he made his case. White Bear Lake presented its position, and then both sides awaited the Court's decision. On February 6, 1959 a ruling was handed down. Justice Leroy Matson wrote an opinion that considered all evidence then concluded that west of the railroad tracks (on White Bear Lake's western edge) represented a "different situation" to the remainder of Sunrise Park.

"The area is occupied by 25-30 farms. Seventy-five percent of the farmers depend on their acreage as their sole livelihood. Two hundred acres consists of a slough and is therefore unoccupied and there is no evidence of any suburban development . . . (800) acres appear to be primarily agricultural land with a population of only 160 . . . (t)here is no indication that the area is likely to be developed in the reasonably near future for urban living. . . . Upon the record the trial court must be sustained in its conclusion that the west area (Gem Lake) is not suburban in character and has no unity of interest with the platted portion (of Sunrise Park)."¹¹⁴

Matson also noted how in "the past eleven years only five or six new residences" were built in the Gem Lake area. Subsequently the annexation was overturned. Butler's case was not entirely validated as the sole reason for the Supreme Court's decision was in fact the nature of land use in Gem Lake and how it was not well suited for city government. For instance, Matson stated that only 12% of the land considered in the 1957 election had been part of the failed annexation vote in 1956.

¹¹⁰ Supreme Court case 37455-5, pp. 196-201.

¹¹¹ Supreme Court case 37455-5, p. 296.

¹¹² Supreme Court case 37455-5, pp. 47-9.

¹¹³ Supreme Court case 37455-5, p. 60.

¹¹⁴ Supreme Court case 37455-5, p11.

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Nevertheless, Gem Lake was temporarily free of White Bear Lake's rule. Sunrise Park residents found themselves out of the city once again, as the invalidation of part of the areas annexed invalidated the entire vote.

In March, 1959 White Bear Lake Mayor Homer B. Thomas penned a lengthy analysis of the Supreme Court's decision. The text of this piece is included here for its succinctness and ability to capture the sentiments of the players involved.

“The Town of White Bear, together with two of its citizens, asked the District Court of Ramsey County, to ‘oust’ the City of White Bear Lake from exercising any authority or jurisdiction of those two areas which were annexed to the City of White Bear Lake, on April 13, 1957, on the grounds that the proceedings were invalid. They claimed that the annexations were defective or illegal in the following respects:

1. That the City had not abided by a statute that provides a two year waiting period after an unsuccessful annexation attempt. This had a reference to a proceeding that had failed in October, 1956.
2. Whether the fact that the South petition area (Sunrise area) was not signed in the presence of a Notary Public rendered it void.
3. Whether or not the annexation was void because part of the area was more than one and one-half miles from the City limits.
4. Were all annexations void because the area was not so conditioned to be suitable for City government.

The District Court found that the annexations were invalid in all of these respects. The [White Bear Lake] City Council was of the opinion that the trial court (District Court) had erred and appealed to the Supreme Court for a final decision.

On February 6, 1959 the Supreme Court handed down its decision and found that the trial court had erred as concerns the first three points, but found the annexation to be invalid on the fourth ground.

The Supreme Court said that much of the area was suitable for annexation but that there was an area in each of the North (Bald Eagle) and South petition which was not. In the North petition they had reference to the Westerly Three Hundred Twenty (320) acres which lie west of Otter Lake Road. (This, by the way, is the area that the City Zoning and Panning Committee had recommended for industrial use.)

In the South petition, the Court found that the area west of the railroad tracks, referred to locally as the Gem Lake area, was not suitable for City government.

The Supreme Court commented in its opinion that it was unfortunate that the entire proceedings must fail because of a small part of the area was found unsuitable.

The Court suggested the need of legislation to make annexation procedures more up to-date.

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In affect, however, the Court held that all of the area involved in these annexations, with the exception of that part above mentioned, can be properly annexed to the City of White Bear Lake.

The question as to whether or not these two tracts with a population of over 4,000 will join the City is for the people of these areas to determine. If they so desire they are free to again petition the City Council to be annexed.

. . . The Court held that the Gem Lake area and westerly 300 acres of Bald Eagle must be excluded, as they are not suburban in nature. It did point out, however, that if it were to appear that these areas would develop a suburban character, that they could then be suitable for government by the City of White Bear Lake.

The question has been raised as to how these areas could be considered unsuitable to city government while such communities as Vadnais Heights, North Oaks, Shoreview, and Maplewood have, under like circumstances, become incorporated, since the character of these areas is the same as that which was annexed to White Bear Lake.

The suitability of these areas for city or village government has not been submitted to a Court and the Court has never been compelled to rule. What has transpired in these areas has no effect upon the Court in its determination of the validity of the annexation proceedings had in White Bear Lake.”¹¹⁵

Thomas wanted the citizens of White Bear Lake to ignore the recent decision and continue to seek annexation into his city. Where he obtained some of his statistics like 4,000 people remains a mystery, but he clearly had his sights set on these same lands should they take on a more suburban appearance.

To anyone in Gem Lake interested, the proverbial hand writing was on the wall. They had successfully fought off *this* annexation, but what would the coming years bring? If prompt action wasn't taken, they may not be successful the next time. Or what about Vadnais Heights, the new neighbor to the west? Though there was never speculation Vadnais Heights might desire Gem Lake, it could not be ruled out altogether. The truth was, they could not go back to being part of the Township. Remember, the Township was still pondering its own dissolution. Incorporation seemed the only logical choice.

¹¹⁵ White Bear Press, March 12, 1959, pp. 1-4. The Supreme Court's decision overturned the entire annexation. Finally, after three attempts, Sunrise Park residents voted for annexation on April 4, 1959. Residents there finally omitted Gem lake from their petition. See White Bear Press, April 9, 1959.

Part IV: The Village of Gem Lake Incorporated

Gem Lake organizers presented a petition for incorporation before the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners, who in turn set a referendum date of June 30, 1959. Many of the big names in Gem Lake were named as election judges, including Eileen Bigelow, Martha Daniels, along with Helen Schifsky. Henry Hoffman, Virginia Opstad, and Richard Arcand were named as alternate judges.

Election Day came and residents voted at Hoffman's Corners Hall. The vote passed 102-5. The Press reported the new Village of Gem Lake consisted of 333 residents and 712 acres. By law the new village had to wait 30 days to elect officers, but free from any worries of being annexed to a place against their will, Gem Lake did not set their first election until October 9, 1959. Strangely enough, the chosen day was a Friday and polls were opened only from 7:00AM until noon. Eleven people filed for ten offices.¹¹⁶ On October 15, 1959 the *Press* headlined "Gem Lake Holds First Meeting, Installs Officials."¹¹⁷ Actually it was not so much of a meeting as an election, but Henry Hoffman became the first mayor. Also elected were Alan Hansen, Richard Arcand, and John Gray as Trustees (Council), Lorraine Birkeland as Treasurer, Charles Schifsky and Robert Braun as Constables, Cranford Ingham and Stan Donnelly as Justices of the Peace, and Barbara Bemis as Assessor. John E.P. Morgan was appointed the first City Clerk.

Being an official in Gem Lake was not always glamorous. Years later, Barbara Bemis had no recollection that she ever held the Assessor's position, which probably goes a long way to explain why this position is no longer utilized.¹¹⁸

Justice of the Peace Ingham later wrote how the office of constable was the least sought after, as many elected constables refused to serve or how some "were elected as a joke."¹¹⁹ The first council meeting was set for October 20. This meeting, as with the vast majority of those held ever since, was not detailed by the local newspaper.

The farmers and the estate owners had bonded together as an official city and government at last. What had developed as a mutually beneficial economic relationship had blossomed into a common mindset that transcended class boundaries. Neither farmer nor estate owner wanted city water and sewer assessments, and neither desired to be part of White Bear Lake. With the same ease that had allowed the two to hire and work for the other the two groups came together and forged a city out of a neighborhood. Vadnais Heights had its vast farmsteads, White Bear Lake had its suburban housing

¹¹⁶ White Bear *Press*, October 1, 1959, p. 3. It is interesting to note how Gem Lake was relegated to the third page of the paper, where most significant local news items like elections were nearly always on the first page.

¹¹⁷ White Bear *Press*, October 15, 1959, p. 1.

¹¹⁸ Barbara Bemis interview.

¹¹⁹ Ingham, C.M., "Constables," in *Krumkake: Tales of Wit, Wisdom and Wonderings from the White Bear Lake Area*, White Bear Lake, MN, White Bear Center for the Arts, p. 15.

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developments, and Gem Lake had two polar opposite groups of people who understood the need to join together.

Gem Lake grew more out of a vision than anything else. Isolated from its surroundings and unique among its neighbors, it probably would have been content to remain as part of the Township, but its hand was forced into incorporation by circumstances not of its own making. Nearly every land owner in the city stood to lose if White Bear Lake's style of government and development was allowed to take root. Why Gem Lake had twice been connected to Sunrise Park remains somewhat of a mystery. Frank Butler did not have to work hard to convince the courts, even the state Supreme Court, that the dissimilarities far outweighed any common bonds between the two areas. Roughly a mile separates Gem Lake from Sunrise Park geographically. The cultural and socio-economic separation is more like a hundred miles. Developers carved Sunrise Park into city lots long before the residents were officially part of a city. No developer had set foot in Gem Lake prior to its incorporation.

Gem Lake used this separation to its best advantage. The local farmers brought their produce to Hoffman's Corners markets where all people, rich and poor alike, would shop for them. Butler's legal case showed it was not Sunrise Park residents who frequented Augie Scheunemann's market but rather Gem Lakers. Hanson's Summit Farms dairy was likewise mainly frequented by Gem Lake's own. White Bear Lake was full of its own markets. Those in Gem Lake tended to be used by its own populace.

Yet in order to retain this uniqueness among suburbs, Gem Lake needed a viable plan to assure measured growth would keep its original character in tact so that changes came only gradually and then only under close scrutiny of its officials. Perhaps no one person's vision dominated Gem Lake's early development so much as that of Judson (Sandy) Bemis. Bemis had lived in the city for over ten years prior to its incorporation and sought to create a village in the image he thought best. He more than anyone else provided the conceptual guidance the city needed to retain its unique character.

Though the farmers and estate owners had come together out of mutual need, gentlemen's agreements do not allow for stable communal development. Laws were necessary to add legitimacy to Gem Lake's idealism. Joint meetings between the Planning Committee and City Council (formerly the Trustees) began in 1960 and continued for two years as Gem Lake grappled with its first and probably greatest challenge, developing a city plan and corresponding zoning ordinance. A local planning firm, Midwest Planning and Research Inc. was hired as consultants. In August, 1960 one such joint meeting of the Planning Committee and the City Council took place to formulate a city development plan. Topics of the meeting included lot sizes, water, sewer, and the plan's own costs. At stake was the future of the city and those present did not want to fail. The lead consultant, Howard Dahlgren, presided over the meeting. He noted how his firm had aided local cities of similar size and disposition to Gem Lake, notably Sunfish Lake and Mendota Heights, and had delivered successful plans.

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Dahlgren went so far as to define the importance of the Planning Committee's make up, recommending members "be intelligent, open minded, and if possible have no axes to grind."¹²⁰ Loftier goals for future generations have rarely been more obviously stated.

At the January 31, 1961 City Council meeting the Planning Committee chair, Allen Hansen, resigned and was succeeded by Sandy Bemis. Thus began a long relationship between Bemis and Gem Lake politics. Gem Lake provided Bemis the opportunity for public service, Bemis offered Gem Lake his heart and soul. During this same meeting the Plan's development costs were established. The \$3000 price tag was funded one third by the City and two thirds from "interested individuals on a tax deductible basis."¹²¹

Plan development moved slowly but surely, and in April, 1962, an unnamed author drafted a document titled "Statement of Planning Objectives of Gem Lake Village." It was the first attempt to define the community's values with respect to land use.

"Although it may appear to the outsider that the Village of Gem Lake contains within its boundaries a diverse mixture of people of different skills, interests, vocations and beliefs, and of dwellings of different type, size, quality and condition, there are important and fundamental preferences and objectives commonly held by the inhabitants of the Village which tend to bind us together and make possible a logical and single plan for the future of our Village on which we can agree. These preferences are:

We prefer rural living to city residential living-even to typically suburban living. We have continued, or come, to live in Gem Lake because we prefer its easy, unsophisticated, quiet atmosphere; because, while it is close to the cities, where most but not all of us work, there is open country to look at, woods, water, a feeling of openness and relaxation.

We like doing things outdoors whether it be raising vegetables or flowers, keeping pets, riding horses, farming, training a hunting dog-or what-have-you."¹²²

Gem Lake had its freedom, now someone thought to draft its Declaration of Independence and constitutional Preamble. Later, the same memo stated "in order to keep the physical characteristics of the Village as nearly as possible in their natural state, we believe the Council should adopt a suitable [zoning] ordinance." Specifically, the memo addressed controlling public signs, but it implied retaining natural appearances in place at the time it was drafted. This became the accepted statement of beliefs that guided future meetings and the documents they produced. It set the tone for the official plan.

¹²⁰ Joint Planning/City Council meeting minutes dated August 23, 1960 by Clerk Morgan found in Bemis Papers, Gem lake Planning Commission 1960 through 1965 at Gem lake City hall.

¹²¹ Minutes of January 31, 1961 meeting of City Council.

¹²² April 4, 1962 memo to City Council and Planning Committee. It is very possible Sandy Bemis penned this memo, but no name is attached to the document residing in city files.

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In June, 1962, Bemis circulated invitations to the regularly scheduled Council meeting, which offered his hand picked audience a first glimpse at what would be presented to the general public at a formal public hearing (which would not happen until six months in the future). He drafted one letter of invitation to the meeting which stated “since this is the initial presentation [of the proposed Plan], we are not giving this meeting wide publicity, but in view of your interest and stake in the community, you will be more than welcome.” He sent copies to John Daniels, D.O. Opstad, Eileen Bigelow, and Gilbert Foster.¹²³ Democracy had established Gem Lake, but the importance of its development plan apparently required fewer people’s involvement.

Aside from personal invitations for plan review opportunities, the project continued through the remainder of 1962. The Plan adopted language similar to the aforementioned “Statement of Planning Objectives” and was probably the result of Midwest Planning Inc.’s efforts to draft what amounted to the city’s first Comprehensive Plan. The introduction reflects the city’s values and anticipated developmental direction.

“It is natural for individuals to seek free rein (*sic.*) in developing their property, but it is also pre-eminently human to establish patterns of order that make our collective life more manageable, more meaningful, and more richly satisfying. Human achievement demands that men have a sense of order about their affairs. Since so many Americans now live in or near cities, they cannot hope to measure up to their fullest stature if they are caught up in conditions imposed by lack of fore-sight.

The citizens of Gem lake realize that the Community is made up of individual land parcels and that individual property owners may or may not maintain the high standards utilized by the majority. It is recognized that adequate planning can help to assure that individual developments will add up to a Community environment that is consistent with the desires of the majority of property owners.

Each individual development must be considered in the light of its effects upon the entire Community as well as the effects upon adjacent property.”¹²⁴

Simultaneous to the Plan was the first Zoning Ordinance, which was ready for a public hearing at the December, 1962 council meeting. Combined, the two documents established the basis for Gem Lake land use, documents which have evolved, but have changed little over four decades.

¹²³ Letter from Bemis to above-named recipients dated June 12 and June 13, 1962 in Bemis papers, Gem Lake Planning Commission 1960 through 1965.

¹²⁴ Introduction to Gem Lake, Minnesota Planning Report No. 2 in Gem Lake Planning Commission 1960 through 1965.

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Jack Hannaford cited the zoning ordinance as key to understanding what Gem Lake was all about.¹²⁵ The city's development, throughout its history, continues to be driven by the zoning ordinance's ability to enforce the plan's vision. It helps explain the large lots in all zoning districts. It helps explain why the business district and residential districts are separated to the most logical extent possible. It helps explain why Gem Lake is bordered by large trees on most of its borders unlike any of its closest neighbors.

With its Plan and its zoning ordinance, Gem Lake was able to direct its development. In a 1964 episode involving a Scheuneman Road resident, John Hurt, Bemis explained the necessity of abiding by zoning ordinance setbacks. Hurt had erected a shed, in which he intended to house a pony, less than 100' from his lot line which violated established setbacks. Bemis acknowledged how neighbors did not seem to mind Hurt's actions, but any future construction must comply with the zoning ordinance. In a letter to Hurt, Bemis explained his position. "We all live in Gem Lake because we like to live in the country and do the things which that enables us to do, but a certain amount of self-regulation does seem to be desirable."¹²⁶ Later, Bemis address the issue of signs in the business district and how property values must be protected.¹²⁷ Unregulated, signs serve as a primary example of visual pollution. Bemis stressed the need for order so that business did not supersede residential importance. However, when he saw the need, he invoked the zoning ordinance against homeowners. A 1970 instance of mobile homes along Scheuneman Road resulted in the homes' removal by the owners.¹²⁸

Bemis weaved a delicate common-sense thread through most of his official actions. He opposed public recreational use of Gem Lake (the lake), but was not completely opposed to parks in general. Contrary to this opinion was that of the mayor, Henry Hoffman. Mayor Hoffman was opposed to any public parks within Gem Lake's borders.¹²⁹

Hoffman represented a vastly different vision for Gem Lake than Bemis. Business-oriented, Hoffman had little use for the quasi-Jeffersonian agrarian vision of Bemis. The City Clerk and Planning Commission Chair represented one point of view, Hoffman another. Hoffman's vision was business, if it sold it worked, aesthetics played little part. Morgan wrote Bemis regarding Hoffman "Henry has no understanding or feeling for a neat, well kept, good looking village. He is all for the dollar."¹³⁰ At issue was Hoffman's willingness to side with another merchant, Dick Hansen in regards to Hansen's request for signage.

¹²⁵ Jack Hannaford interview.

¹²⁶ Letter from Bemis to John Hurt dated October 29, 1964, in Gem Lake Planning Commission 1960 through 1965.

¹²⁷ Letter from Bemis to John Morgan, August 25, 1967, in Gem lake Planning Commission 1966 through 1970.

¹²⁸ Letters dated March 28, 1970 from Clerk Morgan to residents Mrs. R.J. Richardson and Mr. Adolphus St. Saveur in Gem Lake Planning Commission 1966 through 1970.

¹²⁹ Letter from Bemis to John Daniels, Eileen Bigelow, Frank Butler, and Cole Oehler dated January 21, 1969 and undated letters from Morgan to Bemis and from Bemis to Bernard C. Edmonds of St. Paul Parks Department, July 1968, in Gem Lake Planning Commission 1966 through 1970.

¹³⁰ Morgan to Bemis, August 21, 1967 in Gem Lake Planning Commission, 1966 through 1970.

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Later, Morgan complained to Hoffman over the general appearance of the business district. He referenced Eileen Bigelow's development-in-progress, Red Fox Hills, and how she was "trying to build or create a nice development on the property she bought to keep it from going to a row-house developer. The people she gets should be good customers to your shopping plaza – if it looks nice . . . You keep your own home beautiful-why not your village?"¹³¹

Prior to this sign matter there arose the matter of Bill Stenger's request for a special use permit for a used car lot during a special council meeting at Hoffman's house. Hoffman seemed in favor of granting the permit, but Bemis reflected that such an enterprise "would be a detriment and eyesore to the village and little if any benefit to the other merchants." Bemis concluded that the open sales lot would "lower rather than increase the prestige of our shopping center."¹³²

But Gem Lake's business district never did clean up. What resulted is the present mix of business Gem Lake and residential Gem Lake, a study in contrasting visions, those of Bemis and Hoffman. Reigning in the appearance of the business district has been an on-going challenge ever since, but does not have to be the insurmountable dilemma it may at first glance seem to be. The true challenge is to strike a balance between the needs of people and what is best for the city. Bemis' ability to invoke common sense is an important lesson for future Gem Lake politicians.

¹³¹ Letter from Morgan to Hoffman, July 19, 1968 in Gem Lake Planning Commission 1966 through 1970. Eileen Bigelow's Red Fox Hills was the culmination of her purchase of land in southwest Gem Lake. The pine trees she planted along its borders now represent the city's unique western border with Vadnais Heights.

¹³² Bemis expressed his sentiments in draft minutes of the meeting, in Gem lake Planning Commission 1966 through 1970.

Part V: City of Gem Lake Politics

Aside from conflicting visions identifying the city's character, Gem Lake has had its share of political oddities. Most of its elections are uncontested, representing either voter contentment or indifference. However, in 1970 Gem Lake made its mark in local political lore when a write-in candidate emerged as the winner of the mayor's office. By 1970, Henry Hoffman had been mayor for eleven years and had reached his seventies. His son-in-law, Gerald Brown was the official candidate, the only one who had filed for the position.

In a stunning example of voter disapproval, a massive telephone campaign started against Brown. No official reason for the disapproval exists, but the campaign worked. The agreed upon write-in candidate, William Flaspeter was elected mayor with 60 votes compared to Brown's 29 and Henry Hoffman's 28.¹³³ Flaspeter stated he was "surprised" at the results, but once reality settled in, he aspired to do as good a job at being mayor as possible.¹³⁴ He served only one 2 year term. The following election brought James Terry to office.

At some point in time the official name changed from the Village of Gem Lake to the City of Gem Lake, though even this is shrouded in comic error. In 1974 the Minnesota legislature passed legislation doing away with the name "village" and allowing communities to become "cities." In Gem Lake, however, this formality was of little serious importance. Some official city documents retain the term "village" in 1977 while others from the previous year use "city." As late as 1982 then City Clerk Jack Hannaford identified himself as either Village Clerk or City Clerk, depending on which term he opted to use in any given month. In his official City Council minutes, he freely interchanges the two terms with little regard for what the State officially considered the city's name.¹³⁵

Gem Lakers are a loyal electorate. In 1968 Judge Robert Rensch still campaigned for his District Court office. In his election bid that year, he polled 79 votes from Gem Lake voters. Though more than ten years had passed, many in the city felt the need to vote for the judge that first granted them liberation from White Bear Lake.¹³⁶

After a confrontation with the City Council over land use and zoning issues, resident Ray Kadechka in 1998 attempted to influence elections for mayor and council. He mailed to all residents a crude representation of Uncle Sam stating "I Want You for Gem Lake" then supplied his telephone number on the back. Apparently he offered to finance the campaigns of those who would contact him.

¹³³ White Bear Press, November 12, 1970, p. 2.

¹³⁴ Conversation between William Flaspeter and the author following the April 6, 2004 Gem Lake Planning Commission meeting. Ironically the meeting involved a public hearing on how best to develop the former Bemis estate.

¹³⁵ Gem Lake City Council records in Gem Lake correspondence 1976-7, 1978-9, 1982-3.

¹³⁶ White Bear Press, November 7, 1968, p. 2A.

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None of the candidates who replied to his mailing won office.¹³⁷ The purpose here is not to pass judgment on the case but to relay events as they unfolded for the benefit of Gem Lake history.



In July, 1998 Gem Lake residents received this flyer in their mail boxes. The Friends of Gem Lake grassroots committee distributed these in an attempt to force changes in the mayor's and city council offices. None of the candidates recruited by this poster won election.

Courtesy of author's city file collection.

¹³⁷ Gem Lake City Council minutes, April, 1997.

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Gem Lake takes pride in the fact in that until 2001, the city's annual budget never eclipsed \$100,000.¹³⁸ The 2000 city budget was \$99,000 and marked the 41st consecutive year the city's operating budget was below six figures. It was inevitable considering the costs of providing governmental services that the budget would one day surpass \$100,000, but research proves that White Bear Lake was already operating with budgets in excess of a million dollars in the 1950s.

Tousley Ford has hosted Gem Lake's official city meetings ever since the city abandoned meeting in Hoffman Hall. As of this writing negotiations between White Bear Township and Gem Lake were beginning for a joint powers agreement to erect a polling station/City Hall in property on the border of the Township/City at the junction of Goose Lake Rd and Otter Lake Rd. at the City of Gem Lake's northeastern edge. The Township is in need of a polling place for its southern residents, especially if plans to relocate the old Town Hall on Hoffman Road proceed. The City of Gem Lake, long has been in need of a place to meet that might be called "City Hall", as well as a location that has secure storage space to remove city records from the City Clerk's and Mayor's basements.

In national and state-wide elections, Gem Lake is neither strictly Democrat nor strictly Republican. In 2000, George W. Bush and Dick Cheney outpolled Democrats Al Gore and Joe Lieberman by a 120-110 margin. The same night, Democratic challenger for U.S. Senate Mark Dayton handily defeated Republican incumbent Rod Grams 123-94. Gem Lake voted for State Senator Linda Runbeck in her losing bid for U.S. 4th District Representative against Democratic opponent Betty McCollum, 101-82.

Gem Lake split between favoring a Democrat and a Republican for state legislative offices this same year. Although Democratic candidate for State Senate Bill Krueger lost to Mady Reiter, Gem Lake favored him by a 114-99 margin. In 2002, Gem Lake similarly split its votes. Republican candidate for U.S. Senate Norm Coleman defeated Democrat Walter Mondale, 117-101, while Representative Betty McCollum beat Republican challenger Clyde Billington, 120-100. Redistricting placed Gem Lake in the State Senate district occupied by John Marty, and he defeated Mark Zasadny, 122-107. Republican representative Carl Jacobson beat Bev Scalze, a Democrat, 117-109.¹³⁹ Of course in nearly all elections, perennial candidate Donald Duck usually receives at least one vote.

Whether it's by coincidence or not, thus far all of the City of Gem Lake's four mayors have hailed from the eastern side of town. Henry Hoffman lived at Hoffman's Corners while William Flaspeter, James Terry, and Paul Emeott have all lived along Scheuneman Road. The city is not divided into wards so all city council seats are considered "at large" but there has always been a blend of people from all corners of the city holding office at any given time. This is but another example of the entire community pulling together for a common cause.

¹³⁸ City Council minutes, August, 2001.

¹³⁹ City of Gem Lake General Election Summaries for 2000 and 2002.

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The city's only appointed body, the Planning Commission, is similarly comprised of people from all across town. Paul Emeott, the present mayor, has stated he prefers this blend and openly seeks planning commission members from the different corners of the city to bring their "perspective" of what is happening in their area of the city into city planning. Though the city is small, there are different opinions and priorities depending on where the members hail from.

Part VI: Life in Gem Lake

Gem Lake prides itself on minimal city government, which translates into few public resources available for residents. The City of Gem Lake presently owns nothing and contracts for everything. But what is life like in Gem Lake?

Even before incorporation, Gem Lake loaned its name to a local 4H booster club. A 1932 *White Bear Press* article described the “regular meeting” of the Gem Lake Boosters 4H club. Adam Vierling was the club leader and the night’s activities included music performed by Richard Hansen on his violin, a reading of the club’s creed by Verna Luckman, and a play, organized by program chairman Allan Hansen.¹⁴⁰ The location of the program was not disclosed, but Hoffman’s Corners would be a logical location.

It has already been stated that there are no parks or public recreation lands in Gem Lake, but there have been attempts, minimal though they are, at community organization. Something known as the Gem Lake Community Club advertised a card playing party on November 4, 1967 at Hoffman’s Hall.¹⁴¹ How frequently this group met, when it was formed and who participated is lost to memory. There is no community festival similar to White Bear Lake’s Manitou Days or Vadnais Heights’ Heritage Days. Yet Gem Lake does have its recreational amenities.

Gem Lake’s most important contribution to the present day local recreation scene is Gem Lake Hills Golf Course, which occupies a large tract of land in the central and northern portions of the city. Golfers from all around the metro area, be it league, instructional groups, or individuals, come to play its two nine hole courses.



¹⁴⁰ *White Bear Press*, July 8, 1932, p. 1.

¹⁴¹ *White Bear Press*, November 2, 1967, p. 11.

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Gem Lake Hills is actually the second golf course located in the city. In 1922 plans were organized for what was then to be White Bear area first golf course. Recall the Bemis family estate encompassed land that formerly was Matoska Country Club. During the summer of 1922 several golf enthusiasts organized themselves into the Matoska Country Club and elected Dr. T.S. McClanahan president. After several possible sites, the land “south of Labore crossing and west of the St. Paul-White Bear Road” (now known as Sceuneman [*sic*] Road) was selected.¹⁴² Local golf pro Tom Varden designed the course. Work began in fall, 1922 and was the course opened in time for the 1923 season. At least one area business jumped on the golf bandwagon as White Bear Drug Store billed itself in a 1923 White Bear Press advertisement as “Golf Headquarters.”¹⁴³ In 1929 Gordon Thauwald won the President’s Cup tournament at Matoska.¹⁴⁴

The course thrived for a dozen years and then the Great Depression took its toll on the membership. L.V. Ness took control in 1935 and by 1938 the course changed its name to Gem Lake Golf Course.¹⁴⁵ New ownership and a new name did not turn performance around and the course is not mentioned in local papers after this. Another local course, Gall’s Golf Course, was in operation south of White Bear Lake, and by 1940 hosted the state “publinx” amateur championship.¹⁴⁶ Whether this course gave Gem lake Golf Course too much competition is not clear, but the land reverted to wilderness and awaited the Bemis family arrival.

Another part of Gem Lake’s past is a former baseball field that formerly occupied land along Goose Lake Road in the northwest part of the city. Local teams came to play on land now owned by Mr. and Mrs. Carl Wallin. The fields and at least one of the teams were organized by members of the Garceau family of Vadnais Heights. The field was complete with backstop and fence, and had benches and a parking area. The fields remained overgrown on land owned by Tom McMahon until he sold the property to Wallin in 2002. The land was once part of a parcel owned by Alice Williamson who created the subdivision of houses along Tessier Road.¹⁴⁷ Dates of the ball games are sketchy, but most agree they occurred at some point in the 1970s-80s.

¹⁴² White Bear Press, August 10, 1922, p.1, August 31, 1922, p. 1, and September 7, 1922, p. 1.

¹⁴³ White Bear Press, April 26, 1923, p. 5.

¹⁴⁴ White Bear Press, August 29, 1929, p. 1.

¹⁴⁵ White Bear Press, March 29, 1935, p. 1, April 16, 1938, p. 1.

¹⁴⁶ White Bear Press, May 17, 1940, p. 1. The July 5, 1940 White Bear Press identified Gall’s as located at White Bear Avenue and County Road D, p. 5.

¹⁴⁷ Gem Lake Planning Commission minutes, June, 2002. Williamson’s daughter, Robyn, married Carl Wallin and wished to return to reside in Gem Lake.

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Former baseball field location

The water body Gem Lake remains private with no public access. Aside from the “Gem Lake Regatta” of seventy years ago, there has been minimal use of the lake for recreational purposes. Most lake residents are content to admire its near pristine beauty. By lakeshore owners’ agreement, later enforced by city ordinance, motorized watercraft use is prohibited. The lake is shallow and prone to algae and weed growth, though rumor has it the occasional skinny dipper ventures into the waters, ever watchful for leeches.



Gem Lake from its western shoreline

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The water body Gem Lake, though, remains a lure for homeowners. Gem Lake's single largest development was the 2004 granting to home builder James McNulty a subdivision of the former eighty acre Bemis estate (Hillary Farm). McNulty purchased an additional five acres deemed unusable by David Gardner (the land was not directly connected to the remainder of Gardner's property) giving him eighty five plus acres on which the Gem Lake Planning Commission recommended to the City Council a plan that allowed for twenty-nine home sites. The process was lengthy and involved much discussion from neighbors and other interested parties, but such is consistent with the nature of Gem Lake politics. The small town nature of the community gives nearly everyone a stake in what transpires before the City Council. At this writing only the model house has been built, but the McNulty homes are built for high end buyers.

McNulty's project brought with it modern amenities, some that might have been adamantly opposed by the original population. A primary condition for granting the subdivision plat was the inclusion of city sewer to the new houses. City officials used the opportunity to arrange for turnback of Scheunemann Road from Otter Lake Rd to Hwy 61 from Ramsey County's jurisdiction to Gem Lake's. The deal required that the county give the city Scheunemann Road in like new condition.

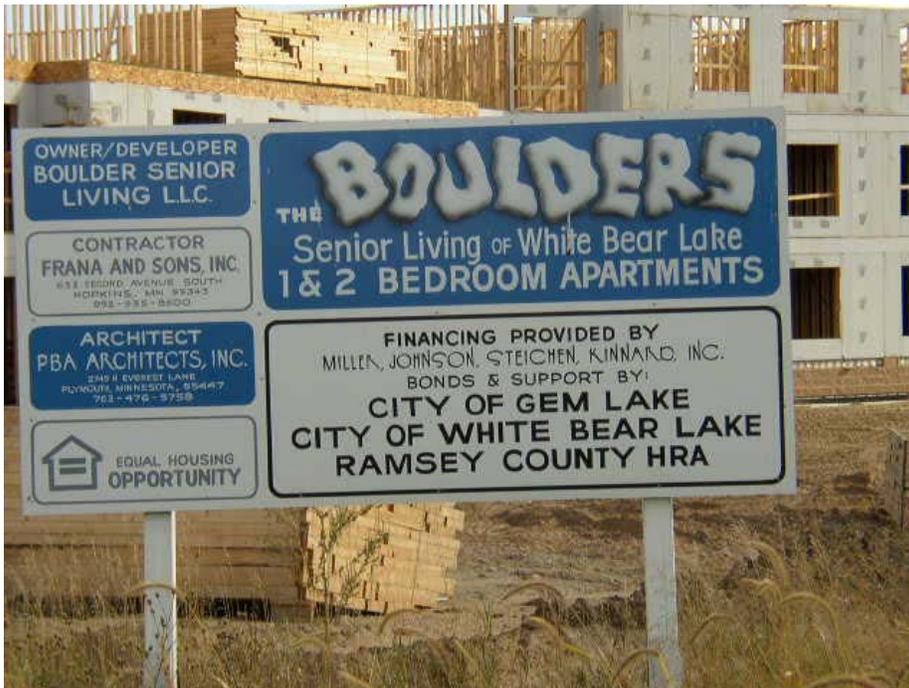
City officials then planned to extend city sewer from the intersection of Kahl Circle and Schenuemann Rd, where sewer had been introduced about three years before, to McNulty's development. What transpired was somewhat of an irony given the original city founders' opposition to city sewer, but modern realities of safe drinking water required that substandard septic systems be abandoned in favor of city sewer.

Gem Lake had achieved a degree of modernity as a result.

Part VII: Gem Lake and its Neighbors

Nestled between White Bear Township, White Bear Lake, and Vadnais Heights, the City of Gem Lake is easily overlooked. It relies on its neighbors for all essential services save for police, which is contracted through Ramsey County. Future plans for city water, if they ever come to pass, will similarly be provided from one or more of its neighbors. Gem Lake's relationships with its neighbors are positive, though there have been minor tensions between it and Vadnais Heights over LaBore Road improvements and Vadnais Heights' plans for development on Gem Lake's western and southern borders.¹⁴⁸ On the east, there are no ill feelings over the events of 1959. This is a case where time does in fact heal old wounds.

In 2002, White Bear Lake turned to Gem Lake as a funding source for a senior citizens housing complex. White Bear Lake had used enough of its state-authorized bonding capacity on other projects which left it short when it sought to pursue this particular development. It turned to Gem Lake as an alternative bonding source. The result was mutually beneficial: White Bear Lake got its senior citizen housing project and Gem Lake found a way to satisfy a portion of its Comprehensive Plan on working with its neighbors to address housing needs.¹⁴⁹ Gem Lake also received credit on the site construction sign.



¹⁴⁸ Gem Lake Planning Commission, Minutes of June, 2001. Gem Lake Planning Commission and City Council meetings addressed how best to improve LaBore Road. Ramsey County was forced to delay this project a year in order to get Gem Lake and Vadnais Heights to agree on a mutually agreeable plan.

¹⁴⁹ Gem Lake City Council minutes, August 2002.

Conclusion

To the majority of Twin Citians the City of Gem Lake, if they've heard of it at all, is just another suburb. The only way a driver knows he or she is in Gem Lake is two Minnesota Department of Transportation signs along Highway 61, roughly three-quarters of a mile apart. The city is virtually anonymous, which is consistent with the city founders' original visions.

Henry Hoffman would be pleased that his family's name is still associated with the intersection of Highway 61 and County Road E, and that is the primary business district in the city. Likewise, Sandy Bemis would be pleased that the city has developed much the way he originally visualized.

Tousley Ford remains Gem Lake's leading business establishment (it is one of the leading Ford dealerships in the Upper Midwest). Prominently set on the northwest corner of Hoffman's Corners, it should continue in its present stature for years to come. It absorbed the former Summit Farms dairy. The Tousley trademark windmill still presides over the site. The windmill has been part of Tousley's image since 1964, when Herb Tousley desired an advertising symbol that combined commerce with a "country" effect.¹⁵⁰ In 2002 Tousley Ford was willing to scrap the windmill in favor of a Ford sign mandated by Ford's corporate management (in order to comply with setbacks required by the zoning ordinance) but the city negotiated a variance to preserve what is essentially a piece of city heritage.¹⁵¹

This is but one example of how Gem Lake city government operates. At any of its meetings, be it Planning Commission or City Council, the public is always welcome and the atmosphere is relaxed enough that anyone may speak at any time. Compare this to other city meetings in other suburbs and the public is only allowed to speak at specific times during the meeting. Gem Lake hosts official public hearings when required to do so, but nearly any meeting has a public hearing element.

City leaders claim their city meetings are patterned after the New England town meeting, and if open exchange between elected and electorate meets the criteria, Gem Lake does resemble its New England model.

The City of Gem Lake occupies the same amount of land it did when first incorporated. In a city that formed to preserve its country roots, territorial aggrandizement was never part of city plans. Its population has increased by less than one hundred in forty-four years and is projected to be just 470 by 2020.¹⁵² To many the city is unknown. Tousley Ford advertises on television as being in White Bear Lake.

¹⁵⁰ Letter from Bemis to Morgan, January 15, 1964, in Gem Lake Planning Commission 1960 through 1965.

¹⁵¹ Gem Lake Planning Commission minutes, February, 2002.

¹⁵² City of Gem Lake, Comprehensive Plan, July, 1997, p. 9. Population levels have fluctuated between 216-449 in the period 1970-94.

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Tousley Ford and Gem Lake Hills golf course are the two best known places in Gem Lake, but whether patrons know exactly where they are remains doubtful. In December, 2000 a Scheuneman Road resident wanted to contact Gem Lake's city government and addressed and sent the letter to the City of White Bear Lake.¹⁵³ When lifelong resident Amabe B. LaBore died in 1987, his obituary identified him as a "lifelong resident of White Bear Lake". Former Gem Lake city councilman Lloyd Labore's name appeared in the White Bear Press numerous times during his life, and nearly every citation lists Lloyd as a White Bear Lake resident. Part of Gem Lake's burden is to live in the shadow of its larger neighbor.

But this is not to say that Gem Lake is of little consequence. Its history is something for all to appreciate, particularly as it prepares for the future. A June 1, 2003 article in the St. Paul *Pioneer Press* questioned the need for so many suburbs in the greater Twin Cities metropolitan area. Other cities such as Phoenix, Arizona or Houston, Texas have but a fraction of incorporated cities as does St. Paul-Minneapolis.¹⁵⁴

Consolidation is actually not new, for in the late 1930s, the City of St. Paul entertained an idea to extend its boundaries to coincide with all of Ramsey County. The plan never materialized, but these examples show that the possibility of consolidation never really goes away. Without a history that its residents understand, the chance that a city like Gem Lake may one day no longer exist may yet come to pass.

An old adage says "that's my story and I'm sticking to it." Well, this is my interpretation of Gem Lake's history and I'm sticking to it. If it offends, I offer no apologies but I challenge a contrary analysis. This is how scholarship advances.

James A. Lindner

¹⁵³ Letter from Laura Meyer to City of White Bear Lake dated December 20, 2000. The content of the letter echoed sentiments that Gem Lake officials had espoused for years, that development within the city should stop for the benefit of "animals and the environment."

¹⁵⁴ Bob Shaw "Metro's Mini Cities" May 25, 2003 St. Paul *Pioneer Press*, pp. 1A, 8A-9A.

Acknowledgements

It takes many people to make a history book. All I did was write down their stories, which is more or less the easy part. Nevertheless, I want to thank each of the people who helped contribute to this endeavor. Specifically, I want to thank those that allowed me to interview them, Barbara Bemis, Jack Hannaford, Lloyd LaBore, Amabe G. LaBore, Connie and Dan Kunin, Ray Tessier, Vern Grundhofer, Bryan Hansen, Tom Daniels . Even former President George H. W. Bush took time to answer a letter of inquiry concerning his association with a former Gem Lake resident. The White Bear *Press* did an exposé on Gem Lake, which allowed me to develop my research heretofore and present it formally.

I also want to thank those who helped with the mechanics of putting the final product together. Mayor Paul Emeott and Clerk Fritz Magnuson offered encouragement and showed more than a little patience as I delayed the writing of this after the initial research commenced. Fritz also allowed me access to his basement where Gem Lake's city records are currently in storage. Jack Hoeschler helped arrange the interviews with Mrs. Bemis, Mr. Daniels, and Mr. Hannaford, people I normally would not feel comfortable communicating with. I also owe a debt to a group of local historical societies from White Bear Lake, Vadnais Heights, Little Canada, Maplewood, North St. Paul, Roseville, Hugo, Shoreview, and Ramsey County which invited me to attend their biannual meetings. After each of these meetings I felt inspired and reinvigorated to again pick up my work. Gem Lake deserves to take its place among cities with written histories.

The staffs at the White Bear Lake branch of Ramsey County library and the Minnesota History Center helped me find information.

The Hoffman's Corner pictures were provided by Kathleen Brown, the daughter of former mayor Henry Hoffman.

On a personal level I thank my family for putting up with long hours at the computer, at libraries, and for one telephone call involving Jack, Tom Daniels, and myself. I married into a Gem Lake family and have adopted the city as my home town. My kids, Alyssa and Adam, are the fourth generation of Gem Lakers to live in this house; my hope is that they find a way to carry on what has become a family tradition.

If you have corrections or more data or pictures that might be added to this history, please contact me.

James A. Lindner

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