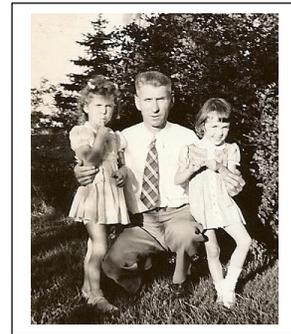
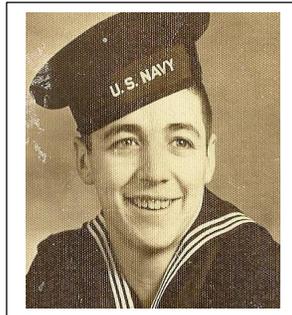
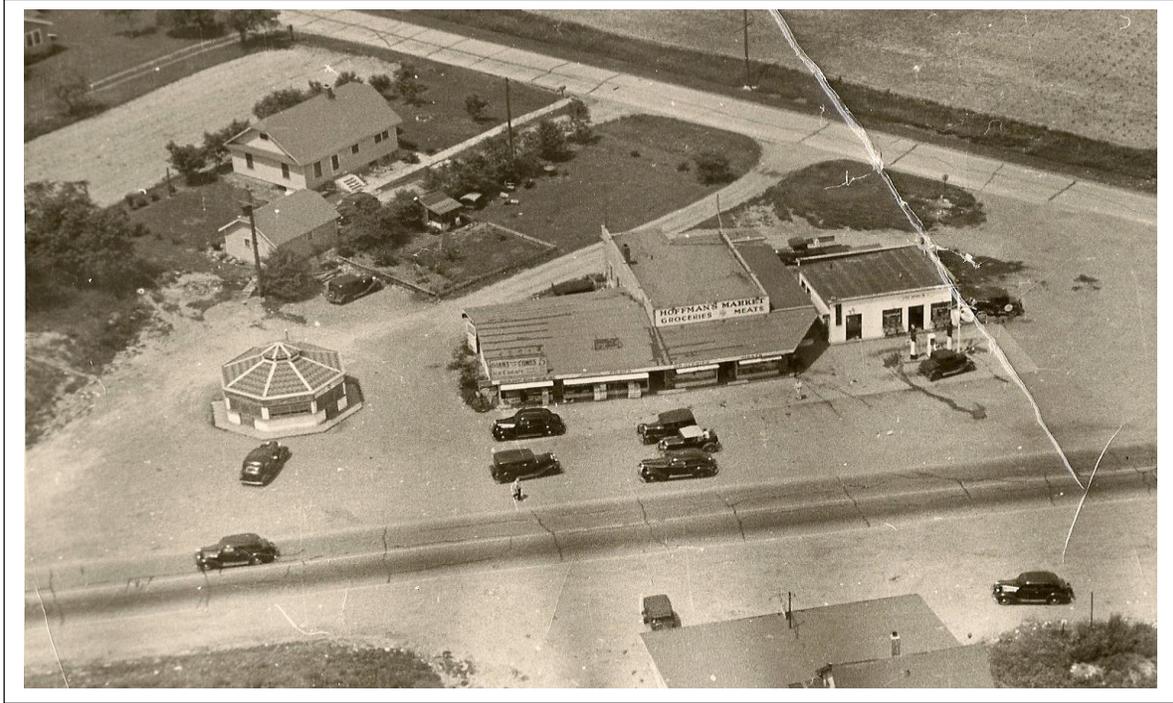


Gem Lake Historical Articles from City Newsletters 2007 to 2016



Written and assembled by Gretchen Artig-Swomley

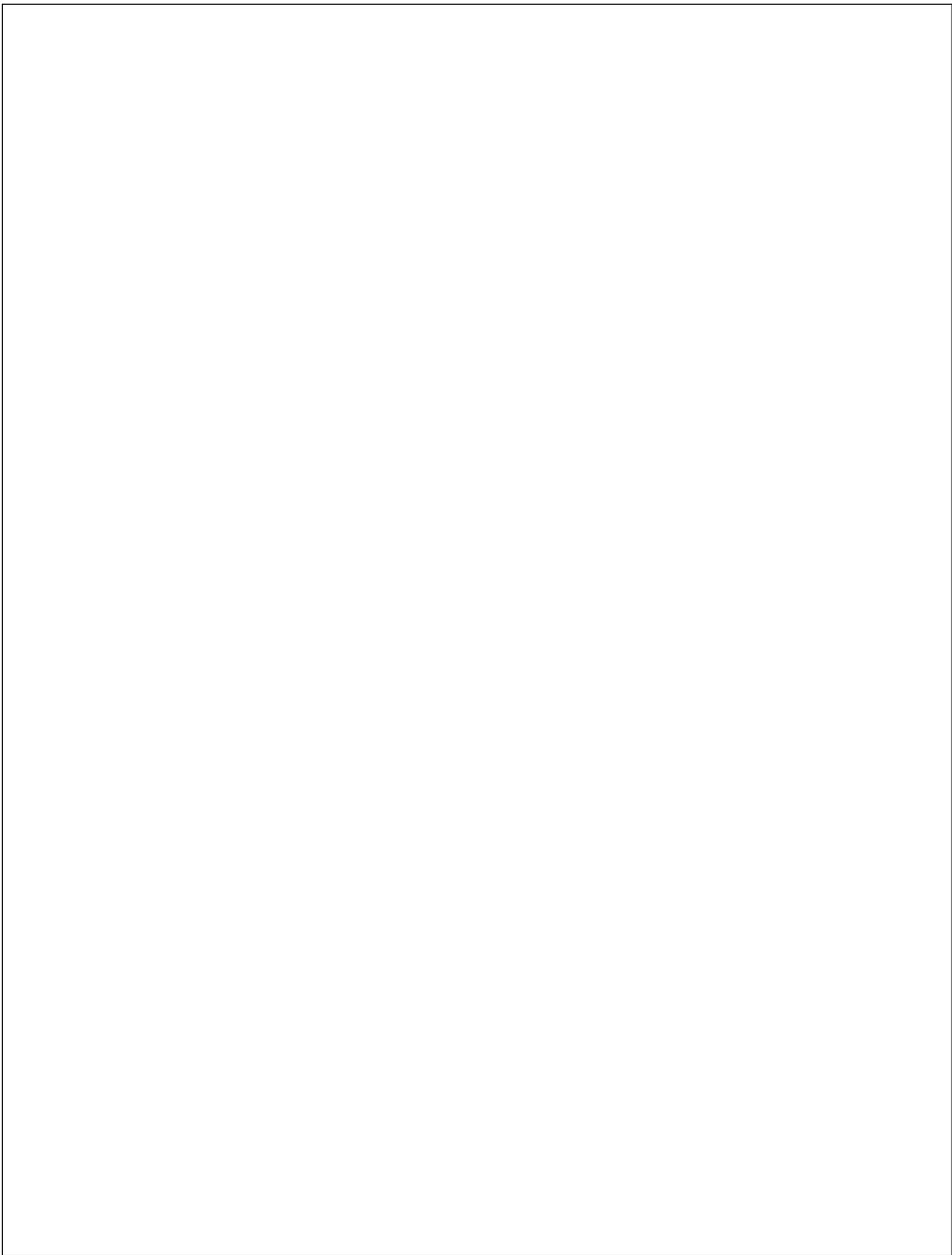


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1. RESIDENTS REMEMBER THE GEM LAKE OF 'YESTERYEAR'

The speed and volume of traffic are a real problem today in Gem Lake, but it wasn't always the case. During the early 1950's Connie Bigelow Kunin, just a little girl at the time, once built a barrier on Goose Lake Road with her friend Mary Lou Opstad. The two decided to stop traffic as a prank and piled up brush and other debris. Then the youngsters hid in the woods to see what affect their little barricade would have on drivers. The answer: not much. After spending 20-30 minutes giggling and waiting for a car to come by, they gave up and went home, where they were promptly punished for their misdeed. By today's standards, Gem Lake is still an amazingly semi-rural city. Fifty to sixty years ago it was almost entirely devoted to large farms, dairy and livestock businesses and several large estate properties.

Although the basic street layout was much the same as it is today, the number of cars traveling through Gem Lake is very different, agrees former mayor Lloyd LaBore. Lloyd was born here in 1925 and remembers when Scheueman Road was an unpaved country lane. His father, Duesty LaBore, owned a dairy located at the current location of the Gem Lake Hills Golf Course. He also remembers when much of the City of Gem Lake and surrounding land was devoted to agriculture.

There was a large pig farm on Goose Lake Road, approximately where the golf course's northern portion is located, says Lloyd. Areas to the west on Goose Lake Road were also farmlands.

Things began to slowly change, first as a result of the depression and then during and after World War II. Duesty LaBore sold his farm and moved to California while Lloyd was serving in the navy during the war. Other large farms began to be sold and turned into residential properties. Sandy Bemis moved out to Gem Lake sometime after World War II, buying property that had once been the Matoska Golf Club. In fact, part of the old Bemis house, which still stands today on the Hillary Farm Development, was the original Club House for the course.

A bit later, new roads such as Tessier Road and Haven Lane were built to accommodate expanded housing developments off of Goose Lake Road.

"When I built my home on Goose Lake Road, there were very few other houses around me," says long-time Gem Lake resident Ray Tessier. "Things were pretty rural, like they are now, but the traffic wasn't as scary."



Sandy and Barbara Bemis of Gem Lake in the 1950's



A current look at Gem Lake. A measurement tracking stick inserted by the Department of Natural Resources show that lake water level has dropped over a foot this year.

Post war progress also brought the interstate highway system, which almost ran right through the City of Gem Lake. Original staking of Interstate 35E, which took place in the 1950's, put the freeway right through the current Kunin property, near the west end of Goose Lake Road, and significantly east of LaBore Road. The wetlands that are located north of LaBore Road, around the current White Bear Parkway, caused engineers to rethink the route of the freeway. As a result, the road was moved west to its current location.

"At the time, some people thought my mother, Eileen Bigelow, must have had a lot of power if she was able to get the freeway moved out of Gem Lake," says Connie. "Actually my mom had been ready to move herself as a result of the construction. It was the wetlands that caused the route change. Primarily, I think it's the same problem engineers now face when contemplating the extension of LaBore Road and White Bear Parkway north to Highway 96."

Although current residents are particularly fond of our local flora and fauna, things weren't always as forested as they are today. Aerial shots of Gem Lake taken in the early 1930's show a landscape that was largely wide open farm fields and pasture lands, rather than the more forested acres we see around us today. "I could see across the fields from my house on Goose Lake Road," says Connie. In fact, I could see as far as Centerville Road and the area that is now Wal-Mart. Over the years, my mother did a lot of tree planting. She bought the areas around what is now Big Fox and Little Fox Roads sometime in the 1960's and turned them into a small housing development with larger lots. She wanted something in keeping with the rural nature of Gem Lake. That meant adding a lot of trees because the property had been a farm."

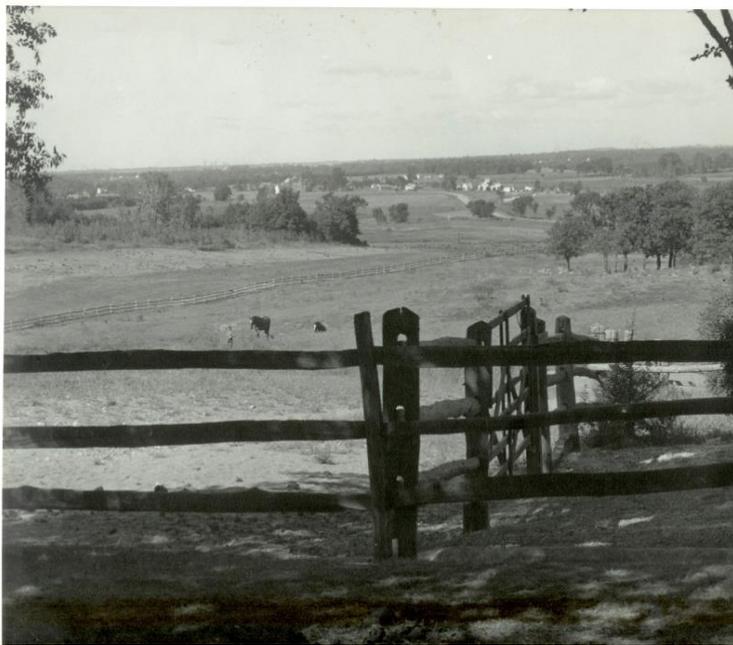
"There were vast areas of Gem Lake that had virtually no trees. For instance, parts of the original Daniels land that are now pretty deep forest, were once completely open" says Connie. "Many of those trees were planted by Martha Daniels in the 1950's (daughter-in-law of Tom Daniels, who originally built the home during the depression.) The estate home, long since sold to owners outside the family, is still located on the south end of the lake. "Martha's efforts are seen particularly today around the area that is called the Hunter's Run development, off of Big Fox Lane."

Ray Tessier worked for Sandy Bemis when Ray was a teenager in the late 1940's and early 1950's. The two labored side-by-side, planting literally thousands of trees that now make up the heavily forested areas within the Hillary Farm Development. Some of those trees were cut down to allow for the private road that winds though the development.

“Remember, because it had been a golf course, Sandy Bemis’s land was more or less open fields. There was a lot more open space then, “says Ray.

Ray served on the Gem Lake Planning Commission for 17 years in the 1970’s and ‘80’s. “Then our goal was to maintain the country life aspect of living here as much as was possible, and just letting other cities build around us. “

Judging by the beautiful landscapes around us today, their planning really paid off.



A view from the original Bigelow House off of Goose Lake Road, looking west towards the area of what is now Walmart and Interstate 35E. Photo taken in the 1940's. ”

2. GEM LAKE CIRCA 1930, LOTS OF FARMLAND, FEW TREES

The photo below is an aerial shot of Gem Lake taken in 1930. The road starting at center bottom was the private drive to the original Daniels estate. One of the driveways turns ends at the stable and another ends at the main garage near the house. To the north of the large garage structure is Gem Lake itself, then possibly called "Sucker Lake", due to the many interesting creatures in the water.

To the north of Goose Lake Road you can just make out a large train traversing the track. The lack of trees in this photo is rather startling. The photo was provided by John Daniels, who now lives out of state and is the son of the original owner of the home, Tom Daniels.



3. CITIZEN PROFILE: DICK ARCAND

A rural oasis greeted Dick Arcand, Senior when he moved to Gem Lake in 1950. "It had a quiet village feeling. Everyone knew everyone."

The surrounding community was growing, with increased needs for services. He and his wife Shirley started Hoffman Food Mart that year, which was located right across from present day White Bear Floral. Then the street was Highway 61, a two lane roadway that was in dire need of straightening and increased capacity.

Shortly after he began to build the family house, the end of his driveway became the new wider, straighter Highway 61. He was concerned about the traffic. But, Ramsey County worked with him to plant trees to shelter the home from noise. (Today the home is nestled comfortably behind a grove of mature trees. He grew to love the community of Gem Lake and had many ties here. His wife Shirley was a Hoffman, her father Henry startling. was in business in the Hoffman Corners area (naturally) and later served as mayor. His wife's sister Kathy married and still lives in the community.

Hoffman Food Mart was used by most of Gem Lake and became a bit of a hang out and meeting spot. He and Shirley got a chance to meet and know nearly everyone over the years and their eight children (four boys and four girls) had many friends in the area.

"My four daughters all rode horses so this was the perfect place for them," says Dick. His property borders land once used as an old horse trail around the lake. "All the folks with horse farms used the trail so the kids had a lot of fun."

From the very beginning, Dick's experiences with Gem Lake involved the animal kingdom. The Arcand family kept three horses and three ponies, as well as a variety of dogs. Deer, fox, pheasants and wood chucks routinely wandered across his property. Dick has had his share of adventure and tragedy. He served in the 7th army in World War II. For a time he was housed in the estate of General Rommel in Germany.

Later, he and Shirley lost one of their children to a tragic accident. Five year old Larry followed his dog across the new Highway 61 when it was being constructed and was hit by a car. Later his oldest daughter died of cancer. Then in 2000, his wife died of Alzheimers. Currently, two of his sons and one of his daughters still live in Gem Lake. Dick served on the city council in the late 1950's, early 1960's time frame. Henry Hoffman was the mayor then. He hopes that Gem Lake can maintain its rural feeling while still 'moving with the times.'

4. CITIZEN PROFILE: CHUCK HOFFMAN

Gem Lake lost a long time resident recently with the death of Charles (Chuck) Henry Hoffman. Chuck was the son of businessman Henry Hoffman, of "Hoffman Corners."

Chuck was born in 1935 and died on August 9. He grew up in Gem Lake, along with his three sisters Shirley, LaVonne and Kathleen. The family home was located across from the present day White Bear Floral. His father ran several businesses in the Hoffman Corners area, and served as mayor of our town starting in 1959. His sister Shirley married Dick Arcand, and the couple ran a grocery store in the business district. His sister LaVonne married Lloyd Urban. His third sister Kathleen still lives in Gem Lake.

Chuck served in the Marines during the Korean War and then went on to become an iron worker for local construction companies. He helped to build a variety of skyscrapers and other structures in the area.

As an adult he lived for many years in a house on Goose Lake Road, near the new city hall. About 15 years ago, he moved to White Bear and then to a town home in Vadnais Heights. He loved the area and never strayed far from it. Although surrounding areas changed greatly, aspects of Gem Lake still retain the feeling of long ago, and he appreciated that, says his sister Kathleen. Chuck was known for his wry sense of humor. He liked to go out and buy his lottery tickets every day, adds Kathleen, even though he never won.

Chuck's father Henry died in 1986 and his mother Anyrine died in 1964. Chuck married twice and is survived by three daughters.

5. WHO WERE HOFFMAN, TESSIER AND LABORE?

Most of us pass street signs hundreds of times a year without knowing much about the folks they are named after. Sound familiar?

Here are a few facts about several local streets and their name origins.

Hoffman Road is named after **Henry Hoffman** (1898-1986), whose family first came to the area in the 1890's. Henry owned the land that is now commonly known as "Hoffman Corners" at the intersection of Highway 61 and County Road E. He was a progressive business man and turned the area into an important shopping hub, where locals could buy groceries, meats, produce, fresh hamburgers, gas for the car and other necessities. Henry also served for over a decade as Gem Lake's first mayor, beginning his term in 1959.

Tessier Road is named after **Joe Tessier** who operated a farm and apple orchard approximately where the Structural Wood Company is today. Tessier Road was originally his driveway. He was born around the turn of the century and died "about 30 years ago," according to his nephew Ray Tessier, who still lives in the area.

The origins of the name for LaBore Road are somewhat less definite. It may be named after **Antoine LaBore**, an early settler of possible French Canadian descent, whose name begins to show up on land surveys in the area around 1847. Antoine LaBore owned land in what is now known as Gem Lake as early as 1874, as did family members Joseph, Leon and Damasa.

6. SCHEUNEMAN, WHO?

Scheuneman Road is reportedly named after Augie Scheuneman, a local farmer. The street has been there as long as Lloyd LaBore, who is in his 80's, can remember. When Lloyd was a child, the road was an unpaved country lane. Map quest and other on-line mapping services have not yet made up their minds about the correct spelling. Try googling the Gem Lake street and you will find: Schuneman, Schueuman, Schuman, Scheunemann and others.

According to local historian Jim Lindner, the name was originally spelled with two n's.

7. FACT OR FICTION? HALF OF GEM LAKE RESIDENTS ARE RELATED

Nightmare scenario: you move into Gem Lake and start complaining about your neighbor to the left to your neighbor to the right, only to find that they are related. Sound far-fetched? Maybe not...An amazing number of Gem Lake residents appear to have family ties.

Let's start with the Hoffman Clan. Henry Hoffman was the patriarch of the family. His children were Shirley, LaVonne, Chuck and Kathy. Kathleen still lives in Gem Lake. Chuck married and moved into a house on Goose Lake Road. LaVonne moved all the way across the city line into Vадnais Heights and married Lloyd "Shorty" Urban. Shirley married Dick Arcand. (We'll get the Arcands shortly.)

Henry Hoffman's brother Robert ran a sandwich shop at (where else?) Hoffman corners! Robert's son Tom Hoffman lives right next door to his cousin Kathy on Goose Lake Road.

Then there's the Arcand clan. Dick and Shirley Hoffman Arcand had eight children. Three of them still live in Gem Lake. They include Rick, Patrick and Dick's daughter Mary, who lives near Dick, on Highway 61. Dick and Shirley ran a grocery store at Hoffman Corners.

If you aren't related to the Hoffman or Arcand families, maybe you have a connection to the Tessiers. There was Joe Tessier, after whom Tessier Road is named. He ran a truck farm that supplied produce to local markets. Tessier Road used to be Joe's driveway. Joe's nephew Ray lives in the community, as do Ray's two sons and their families. Ray's dad was Oliver, Joe Tessier's brother. Mary Ann Tessier Grundhofer, Ray's sister lives in White Bear.



Is everyone in Gem Lake Related?

Here's just one more example. Brothers Kenneth and George Jungmann live next door to each other on Haven Lane. George bought a parcel of land here in 1976 and Kenneth decided to become his neighbor the same year. The people at left are completely unrelated to this story.

Then there are the LaBores. Former mayor Lloyd LaBore's father Duesday used to own a farm on what is now the Gem Lake Hills Golf Course. Lloyd's sister also lives in Gem Lake. There are many other LaBores in the area. For instance, Jim Lindner's wife Amanda is a LaBore by birth. (Jim is the chairman of Gem Lake's Planning commission.)

Amanda's grandfather, Amabe LaBore, was Duesday LaBore's cousin. Got that? Just to make things complicated, there were multiple Amabe LaBores, as well as other LaBore family members all over White Bear, Vадnais Heights and surrounding communities.

And, by the way, the LaBore and Tessier families are actually related to each other and several other Gem Lake families. Oliver and Joe Tessier's mother was Ludavine LaBore. Oliver was married to Edna Leick, who was Mary Ann and Ray Tessier's mother. Edna's mother was Catherine Hubert, who was the

sister of Lucia Hubert, who was the wife of Adam Braun, who was the father of Joe Braun, whose daughter is Jodie Braun Lorenz, who still lives in Gem Lake. (There is going to be a test on this later.)

Families all over our city have links to the Braun family. Joe Braun had three siblings: Eva, Bud and Anna. Anna married into the Kuehn family, still Gem Lake residents. Eva was the mother of the Thury, clan, who grew up at 1400 Goose Lake Road, which was the original Braun homestead.

Bud Braun married Lorraine McLevish, who is the sister of Margaret McLevish, who was married to Bernie Przybylski, and is the mother of two Przybylski sons, both of whom live in the area.. This means the Thurys, the Kuehns, the Przybylskis and the Lorenz are cousins. It also means that Gem Lake has a rich history of family relationships.

I think you are getting the picture... So, anyway, if you need a DNA match for a kidney transplant, you might not have to look too far.

8. ORIGINS OF THE BIG AND LITTLE FOX DEVELOPMENT

The beautiful residential area in Gem Lake that is now criss-crossed by Big Fox Lane and Little Fox Lane was once one large farm. In the late 1950's and early 1960's, the forces of change began to pressure the very center of our city. Loosely called the 'Red Fox Hills' neighborhood, the area was next to the original route planned for the new Interstate 35 freeway. Connie Bigelow Kunin remembers that the stakes went right through her mother's pasture land near LaBore and Goose Lake Roads. That proposed interstate route fell through when concerns emerged about building the freeway through nearby wetlands. The freeway route then began to take its current path slightly to the west. When the farmer who owned the Red Fox Hills farmland died, a developer appeared who wanted to put high density housing in the area. Eileen Bigelow stepped in and bought the land about 1964. She wanted to protect both her own land and preserve the tranquil rural feel and lifestyle of Gem Lake.



At left, trees planted by Connie Kunin in the early 1970's (approximately) in the new Big Fox Lane neighborhood. Photo below shows one of the first houses in the neighborhood.



Instead, Eileen envisioned a development with larger lots and more open space. She had the land platted to contain three acre lots, gently curving streets and plenty of room for the area's natural beauty. "She knew the handwriting was on the wall," says Eileen's daughter Connie Kunin, "unless she did something about it. "

A spec home was built at 3673 Big Fox Lane that was later occupied by Connie and her family starting about 1969. "For several years, the new neighborhood was empty, except for our home. There were also very few trees except, for three that we planted in the front yard," she says.

Slowly people began to move into the neighborhood, building houses and planting a variety of trees. Early on there were a lot of foxes, as well as the ever present deer. Connie thinks that her mother Eileen, who died in 1982, would have been proud of the result we see today.

9. A LIFETIME WONDERFULLY SPENT IN GEM LAKE

Gem Lake lost a cherished long term resident with the death last month of Gladys Parenteau. Gladys died on December 6 at the age of 86. She was the daughter of Duesday and Melina LaBore, who owned the property that is now Gem Lake Hills Golf Course. In essence, she spent her entire life living in Gem Lake. She married George Parenteau and had nine children, eight of whom survived her. She is also survived by three siblings, one of them is Lloyd LaBore, another long term resident of Gem Lake.

According to Gladys's son and daughter-in-law Steve and Colleen Parenteau, she was a beautiful person. "Gladys was easy going. She loved to garden, play cards and travel." She also did a lot of canning. When her children were young they kept a very large vegetable garden, leaving them with enough to sell their produce on occasion. She loved the "hustle-bustle" of having a large family around her.

Gladys was a member of the parish of St. Mary's of the Lake Catholic Church, where her funeral service was held on December 10. She will be missed by family members and many friends.

10. A NOVEL WAY TO MEET YOUR NEIGHBORS

The phrase “drop in anytime” takes on a whole new meaning if you live with Gayle and Tom McMahon on Goose Lake Road. Since they moved into their yellow home near the northeast corner of Goose Lake and LaBore Roads thirty-one years ago, they have had literally dozens and dozens and DOZENS of unexpected visitors. Unfortunately, the visits are usually precipitated by a *crash and a boom*.

The McMahons have the unique pleasure of living right next to the major sloping curve at the end of Goose Lake Road. You know the spot...right near the three arrow signs and the heavily dented guard rail. In fact, maybe you have had the chance to knock on their door and ask to use the phone to call the tow truck. A surprising number of folks have met the McMahons in just this manner.

Cars that have taken the curve a bit too quickly have resulted in over 24 new mail boxes for these very patient residents of Gem Lake. Gayle McMahon, who works in the human services field, tries to always keep a sense of humor about the traffic tie ups that she has seen—or heard.

She recalls for instance one very snowy, slippery day several years ago, when seven accidents happened, landing cars on their property, one after another.



“We called then city clerk Fritz Magnuson and he thought we were kidding about how many fender benders had happened,” says Gayle. “The family decided to give up and go out to dinner. I don’t know how many more incidents happened later, but there were a lot of tracks.”

The first year they moved into their house, which is very near the edge of the road, they had a little taste of what they were in for. Tom, who is now retired, had just planted a garden and their young daughters were awaiting the results. One day a car screamed around the corner, rolled over into their driveway and landed face down, but very neatly, in their new garden. Tom told their daughters they were growing Ford Mavericks that year. (No one was seriously hurt.)

“The county put in a new guard rail system several years ago to cut down on the accidents, if possible. The day the guard rail went up, guess what happened?” (A young lady hit their mail box and propped her car up against one of the arrow signs.)

Several of the many traffic incidents particularly stand out, for one reason or another. Here are a couple of examples from Gayle. “One night a woman crashed into our yard and then informed us she was going to sue us because we had a wood pile at the side of our driveway. We just laughed and we never heard from her again. However, we started pulling our own car further into the driveway when we parked.”

Another night a gentleman hit the mailbox, ran over something in the McMahon's yard and deflated his tires. He drove away, leaving all the damage behind. He also left skid and tires marks that allowed the police to drive right to him.

"About 1993 a young man totaled his car in our driveway. He staggered right into our house without knocking and laid down on our couch. He was bleeding so we just said hello and called for help. We have 911 on speed dial."

Unfortunately, at least twice the accidents have been fatal. One man on a cycle hit a tree about 25 years ago. Another young man who had been racing with another car died across the street.

When Gayle and Tom hear the familiar crash and boom they just hope the driver has made it through with no injuries. So, think of the McMahons next time you round that corner and slow down a bit. But, if you wipe out in their driveway, just knock and say hello... They know the phone numbers for all the local towing companies.

11. GOKEY'S POUT HOUSE STILL A LOCAL FIXTURE

He was a memorable character who preferred the company of men. This is the way John Daniels (son of Thomas Daniels) described long-time resident Horace "Gokey" Thompson. Thompson lived on Gem Lake from December 1920 to August 1946, when he sold his land to Don and Virginia Opstad.

In addition to a large farm house on the edge of Gem Lake, the property included a small hunting shack that had been infamously dubbed Gokey's "Pout House." The overall acreage was bordered by the Bemis property on the east side and was entered from Goose Lake Road.



Gokey's Pout House over the years. The photo at left shows the house in 1946. The middle photo shows the dilapidated house in 1998, prior to restoration. The photo at right shows the fully restored little gem in 2008.

Apparently, Gokey liked hunting and disliked his wife's interference with his hobby. According to legend, he retreated to his "pout house" following their marital tiffs. Gokey Thompson co-owned the Freeman Thompson Shoe Company and later founded the famous sports retailing chain called "Gokey's." The chain had a large retail establishment in downtown St. Paul, Wayzata and Edina and closed in the early 1980's.

When the Opstads bought the Thompson property in Gem Lake, the pout house became the honeymoon home to daughter Mary Lou Opstad, following her marriage to Jay Schreiner in June of 1964. The wedding reception took place on the property.

The pout house had fallen into major disrepair by the 1990's, due to lack of use and maintenance. A huge party of enthusiastic teenagers nearly proved fatal to the ailing structure. When over 50 people packed

inside the tiny cabin and started dancing, the rotting floor collapsed. The raccoons moved in shortly after that and chewed away happily on the window frames.

In 2000, the Pout House was fully restored to its original charm. Another honeymooning couple stayed there in July of 2007.

12. THREE INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT GEM LAKE

1. Gem Lake was incorporated on June 30, 1959, ending an annexation attempt by the City of White Bear to absorb its tiny neighbor. Perhaps someone will volunteer to organize a 50th anniversary celebration?

2. The Duke and Duchess of Windsor attended a grand reception at the home of Thomas Daniels on Gem Lake on September 28, 1941. The Duke and Duchess were the former King Edward VIII of England and his wife, the former Mrs. Wallis Simpson. Edward abdicated his throne in 1936 to marry the woman he loved. The royal reception included an elaborate dinner, tight security arrangements and probably the only royal motorcade ever seen in Gem Lake. Lorraine Birkeland of White Bear Floral remembers the motorcade rolling majestically into town.

3. The famous and flamboyant pianist Liberace once performed at a party at the Opstad home on Gem Lake. The party was held in the late 1960's. The Opstads owned an estate they named "Fair Weather Farm."

13. HISTORIC BEMIS MANSION SET FOR MAJOR RENOVATION PROJECT

The sprawling home, once owned by Gem Lake residents Sandy and Barbara Bemis, was originally the club house for the long-defunct Mataska Golf Course. After several years of standing vacant, this historic home has now been purchased by local business man Greg Smith and his wife, who is a local physician.

Greg and his wife are planning a sweeping restoration of this historic home, with an eye on maintaining the structure's original character. The design firm of Authentic Remodelers of St. Paul

will assist the family to recreate the charm of the past, with some truly modern touches.

Their phased remodeling plan began this May, starting at the south end and moving north. Phase One will involve enlarging the master bedroom, adding such features as a vaulted ceiling and a larger master bathroom, and reconfiguring the first floor.



The original rooms, which are in the center of the home, will be structurally untouched. This includes the beautiful sunken living room, the dining room, the library and the large and gracious foyer.

Sandy and Barbara Bemis expanded their home several times to accommodate their growing family. Some of the small upstairs bedrooms may be combined in the future. The kitchen may also be updated.

A key factor in the next phase, according to Greg, will be coming up with a garage solution. The original separate garage building was destroyed in a fire several years ago.

Greg thinks it might make sense to combine the garage into the existing bedroom wing that now takes up much of the north end of the home.

“We want to have a long range plan, while remaining flexible based on existing conditions which may arise. We really love the character of the home and don't want to do drastic alterations.”

Greg helps manage Gopher Sign Company, which his family has owned for several generations.

He has been familiar with Gem Lake since childhood. "One of my teachers was Sandra Bemis." (Sandra is the daughter of Sandy and Barbara Bemis.)

He also went to school with several local residents. Welcome to Greg Smith and his wife!

14. SMALL TOWN ATMOSPHERE OF GEM LAKE ALSO KEY IN THE 1960's

Many Gem Lake residents admire the small town feeling of their city and say it is an important reason why they live here. The same was also true in the early 1960's when Gem Lake's third mayor bought a house in the area.

James G. Terry grew up in the North St. Paul and moved to Gem Lake 46 years ago. He thought the area was very nice and bought a brand new home on Scheueneman Road from Gem Lake's first mayor, Henry Hoffman. Terry raised two sons and one daughter in the home and served as mayor for fourteen years, starting in 1972.

"The main issues at the time were setting up the city itself and determining the general business rules," said Terry. Gem Lake had a decade before deflected an annexation effort from White Bear and was trying to establish its own identity.

"People really wanted to stay independent as a city. It was important to people who lived here that we keep that 'small town' feeling."

When asked how things have changed, Terry said "The traffic was always kind of intense. Otherwise, it has stayed pretty much the way it was. That's what people wanted."

How does Terry feel about the city hall and today's mayor? "I like the city hall and I think Paul Emeott has been a good mayor."

Terry says "We must be doing something right because a lot of people have been living here even longer than me!"

A brief look at Gem Lake's Mayoral List:

Henry Hoffman was elected as Gem Lake's first mayor on October 9, 1959. This was shortly after the city was incorporated on June 30 of that year. Hoffman served as mayor for 11 years.

William Flaspeter was elected to one 2-year term in 1970. Flaspeter was a write-in candidate and pulled off a stunning upset over the official candidate.

James G. Terry was elected in 1972 and served until Paul Emeott was elected in 1986.

15. OUT OF THE ASHES: A NEW HOME FOR HISTORIC BUILDINGS

A devastating fire to a historic out-building in Gem Lake last year has led to the rebirth of two other architectural jewels. In February of 2007, the Lundie designed garage and shop. that resided near the original Daniels home on the south side of Gem Lake burned to the ground. The Daniels home is now the property of Tony Scornovacco and his partner Mike Garrett. The garage, which was designed as part of a total estate complex in 1931, was one of a number of buildings on the grounds. The Daniels moved to the area in 1929 or 1930 and hired the well-known architect Edwin Lundie to create the feeling of an English county manor on their rural estate.

Part of the estate complex was a large barn with attached residential apartment, and a secondary garage building located to the southwest of the main house and garage. Sometime in the 1970's, the large Daniels complex was broken up and the barn and secondary garage buildings, as well as the land they sat on, where sold to separate owners. The barn was later used as a residence.

After the main garage building burned down last year, Tony and Mike decided to purchase the barn and secondary garage and have them moved onto their property as replacement out buildings.



The photo above shows the secondary garage in its new position at the South end of Gem Lake.

“We had gotten estimates on replacing our garage and they were high. It made sense to look at replacing the missing building with buildings that were designed to go with the house originally. ”Tony worked with Semple Movers, a local company that has been “relocating” historic buildings for many years.

They developed a careful plan for moving the structures with minimal damage to the buildings and to the surrounding landscape. It was decided that the secondary garage and the barn would be moved at separate times, to allow new foundations to be built.

Since the garage structure would be moved further (perhaps several hundred yards), it would go first, and would be dragged across the area where the barn would later be relocated.

Each structure would be dragged to the northeast, over a gentle hill to their new resting spots.

Luckily, Tony and Mike found the original blueprints for the Daniels Estate at the library of the University of Minnesota, School of Architecture.

The detailed design records for each building helped not only with the move, but will also assist greatly with the long-term restoration of the structures. The secondary garage portion of the complex was moved at the end of May and was suspended above its new foundation, approximately where the burned out garage sat. The new and old garages had approximately the same square footage, although they were somewhat differently shaped. The relocated garage will be settled onto its new foundation in early June.

The move itself took about five to six hours and attracted a small crowd of interested on-lookers. Much of the time was spent maneuvering the 77 year-old structure up a slight incline and through a small apple orchard. Tony and Mike had the entire procedure videotaped.

During the month of June, the barn portion of the complex will also be moved. A small portion of the barn will have to be cut off in order to make the journey possible, however, Semple Movers (and Tony) expect the project will go smoothly. The two buildings being moved have a rich history in Gem Lake. Both the barn and the secondary garage were used to stable horses in the 1940's and '50's, according to long-time Gem Lake resident Connie Bigelow Kunin. The complex of buildings was once the virtual center of activity at the Daniels estate and for much of Gem Lake's horse community.

"In fact, in earlier years, it served as a site for important polo matches," said Connie.

Later, the complex became a central meeting place for riders. "I'd join my friends, LuLu Opstad and Sandra Bemis there."

During the summer fox hunting season, riders came from all over the Twin Cities. Some even boarded their horses there. Even the hounds, used in the hunt, were housed there. However, adds Connie, the hounds were not killed as part of the event. The hunt was always a "drag hunt," that is the hounds followed a scent, not a real fox. Tony Scornavacco said he is very pleased the historic buildings have a future here in Gem Lake.

"We accomplished the first move of the garage with a minimum of problems and a lot of cooperation from neighbors. It's exciting to be able to restore a Lundie structure to original charm."



The newly moved garage with the original house in the background.

16. THE BEMIS LEGACY IN THE GEM LAKE OF TODAY

Although most Gem Lake residents recognize the name of Judson “Sandy” Bemis, few people know the impact this long-time resident had on the Gem Lake we see around us today. Ever wonder how we retained large lot sizes, acres of mature border trees and a business district that is distinctly separate from residential areas? We have Sandy largely to thank for early development guidelines that set the tone for Gem Lake’s semi-rural landscape.

Sandy was born in 1914 in Cohasset, Massachusetts and graduated from Harvard in 1936. He began his career at the family business, then called Bemis Brothers Bag Company.



The company was founded in 1858 by his grandfather Judson Moss Bemis. Over the next 150 years, the company would morph from a regional fabric bag manufacturer to a billion-dollar international business in the flexible packaging market.

In the 1940’s, Sandy’s job brought him to Minneapolis, where the company had a major presence. Bemis Bag had established its very first branch factory in the Twin Cities in 1881. He married Gem Lake resident Barbara White in 1943. The couple lived in Minneapolis for six years before deciding they needed the space that Gem Lake could give them. They moved back to Barbara’s home town in 1949, purchasing the former club house of the Mataska Golf Course. They turned the structure into their family home, expanding it several times as their family grew.

Sandy led the Bemis Company (as it was then renamed) in the 1960’s. It was a heady period of growth for the company, during which it acquired many associated businesses. Sandy worked for the family business for 50 years, but his real legacy lies in his public service. He was a member of the board and chairman of the Minnesota Orchestral Association and was at the center of the work to fund and build Orchestra Hall in Minneapolis and the Ordway Center for the Performing Arts in St. Paul.

He also became heavily involved in local Gem Lake politics. First he helped to lead the successful fight to keep Gem Lake from being annexed by the City of White Bear in 1959. Then, he helped establish Gem Lake as a separately incorporated city. Sandy had enormous involvement in helping to guide Gem Lake through its early development. He, more than many others, provided what local historian Jim Lindner called “the conceptual guidance needed to retain its unique rural character.”

Sandy served as the head of the Planning Commission starting in 1961. At that point, the city council and the commission were developing a city plan with corresponding zoning ordinances. Lot sizes, sewer, and retaining the physical characteristics of the villages were discussed at length. The initial document, titled

“Statement of Planning Objectives of Gem Lake Village” (as it was then called) was the first attempt to define the community’s values with respect to land use. Here is an interesting paragraph from that first document:

“We prefer rural living to city residential living, even to typically suburban living. We have continued to live in Gem Lake because we prefer its easy, unsophisticated quiet atmosphere; because while it is close to the cities...there is open country to look at, woods, water, and a feeling of openness and relaxation. We like doing things outdoors, whether it be raising vegetables or flowers, keeping pets, riding horses, farming or what have you.”

Next, the city plan and suitable zoning ordinances were adopted. Each mirrored the same core values about rural living and minimalist government. With a plan and zoning ordinances in place, Gem Lake directed its own development, or lack of it, for the next generation. It remained a rural oasis, bordered by mature trees on most of its edges, unlike any of its closest neighbors. The Metropolitan Council of the Twin Cities will exert more and more influence on the density of Gem Lake’s future development. However, Sandy Bemis played a huge role in helping maintain Gem Lake’s nature beauty to this point.

Sandy and Barbara lived in their 80-acre estate, which they called “Hillary Farm,” for over 50 years. Sandy died there in February of 2001 of heart failure. Before his death, he drafted a variety of vision plans for how his own 80 acres might someday be developed. He had several ideas that were very forward thinking 10-15 years ago, including the concept of “cluster development.” This concept preserved more open space in a housing development plat by clustering homes in small areas within a much larger space.

His land was ultimately purchased by the McNulty Development Company and turned into the Hillary Farm housing development. Hillary Farms was platted for 29 homes and has a private walking trail for its residents.

17. HORSES AND CARS ONCE SHARED THE ROADWAYS IN GEM LAKE

Wide open pasture land, gentle hills and a minimum of trees made Gem Lake an ideal place to establish a horse farm in the late 1920's. The first large horse farm was the old Daniels estate, set up on the southern portion of the lake, on land purchased from the Hansen family. The Hansens ran a dairy in the area and had formerly used the land for the grazing of cows. Thomas Daniels of Archer, Daniels and Midland Company built a large estate here about 1930.

Other horse farms followed the Daniels family to the area. "It wasn't that we came here to establish a stable," says Sandra Bemis Roe, "it was more that we settled here, the terrain was ideal for riding, and other families were already doing it."

Within twenty years, the Bemis, Bigelow, Thompson, and, later, the Opstad families had all established horse farms on or adjacent to the lake. A variety of Gem Lake families near the lake also kept horses and enjoyed the pastoral nature of the landscape. Horses were an integral part of daily life.

For instance, the Bigelow family, kept between 8 and 12 horses at any one time, according to Connie Bigelow Kunin. This included horses that were being temporarily boarded for visitors to the area. For a long time, Connie rode almost daily with her friends Sandra Bemis (now Sandra Roe), and Mary Lou (LuLu) Opstad Schriener. Typically, they rode around the lake on a very old trail, or down the railroad bed on Highway 61 on the eastern edge of Gem Lake. It was an ideal place to ride in the 1950's," according to Connie. "Keep in mind that County Road E was a quiet two lane highway then. It wasn't a big deal to saunter across it on horseback."

The Opstad family boarded ponies at their medium sized stable on the north side of the lake. They always had a variety of horses available but did all the stable work themselves. When the Opstad family moved to Gem Lake in 1946, they turned an existing chicken barn into a stable. Mary Lou Opstad Schriener remembers that the stable was built of huge timbers and had four stalls.

Her parents purchased horses from New York for the stable. When the horses arrived by train into the White Bear Train depot, Mr. and Mrs. Opstad rode them home from the station. Mary Lou remembers their various horses over the years had names such as Second Fiddle, Canopy Mist, Nosey, and Red. Mary Lou rode almost daily. Nearly all of the residents who owned lake front property were horse owners, which accounts for the existing trail system, as well as several now barely visible horse jumps.



At left: A picture of the 1963 "Hunter Trials," which took place at the Bigelow estate.

Unlike the Opstads, the Daniels family kept extensive facilities for horses, as well as a small staff to take care of them. Out of this environment sprung Gem Lake's own fox and hound hunt, which was called the "Hunter Trials." The event was started by John Daniels (son of Thomas). The hounds used in the late summer event were bred on the Daniels estate in a special area of the stable and barn complex. (For more recent information on this stable, see the story on page 5.)

Dick Arcand, Senior, who moved to Gem Lake in 1952, participated in the "Hunter Trials" and remembers them as being "a lot of fun."

Dick built a "stable" in 1956 and kept four horses and several ponies for his children to ride. All of Dick's four daughters enjoyed riding, although none of his sons caught the bug. His "stable" was built as a "garage" because White Bear Township, in which Gem Lake then resided, denied his building permit, saying stables were not allowed.



At Left: The Opstad children with one of their horses in the 1950's. **At Right:** The Opstad stable about 1998. It was torn down several years ago.

People in various parts of Gem Lake kept horses, it wasn't only the folks on the lake," says Dick. "For instance, John Gray had a stable. He lived on Scheuneman Road, next to the house where the mayor now lives. Also, Al Nelson was a horse lover. He lived on Hoffman Road. When Eileen Bigelow stopped keeping horses, she gave her last one to Al."

"Eileen Bigelow was a great lady," according to Dick. "She loved jumpers and had her horses in competitions each year at the State Fair."

John Daniels also vied for prizes for his horses at the State Fair, says Dick. The Daniels family was originally from England and there was a lot of equestrian experience in their ancestry. The Daniels family kept at least two polo ponies and a variety of hunter/jumper horses at any one time.

Sandy Bemis shared John's enthusiasm for 'jumpers.' Horses were an important part of his life in Gem Lake. "He was such a nice man," says Dick. "He was a big guy and rode a big horse." "Mom and Dad built our stable here in the early 1950's," says Sandra Bemis Roe. "People around us had horses and rode all the time. We started out with one pony named Jumbo that we all learned to ride on. He was a very stubborn pony, so it was a good one to start with." Things snowballed from there. Sandy and Barbara's

five children took to riding and a local person named Michael Roberts was hired to manage the growing stable. There were 7-10 horses at peak. Sandra remembers favorite horses named Lassie and Frosted Flake. "Dad was an avid rider, but mom rode only occasionally," says Sandra. However, the family enjoyed

As the Bemis children moved participating in local competitions in what was then called, the "Family Class." This meant all family members rode together in a horizontal line.

Various Bemis family members also competed in local events, including the "Hunter Trials." Several hundred spectators and riders would participate in this September event, says Sandra. The competition would start on the Bigelow land and would proceed around the lake for the jumping competition. It was a lot of fun, including picnics and a formal dinner.

While various families still had horses in the 1960's, riding gradually tapered off as a local hobby. As a result, the need for a large stables diminished. The Hunter Trials event became incorporated into competitions held in Long Lake and Wayzata. The estate was sold to a developer following Barbara Bemis's death several years ago. The Daniels family sub-divided their land in the early 1970's and closed their stables permanently.

The Opstads moved from the area in 1966 and their stable building gradually fell into disuse.

Land development and the growth of Gem Lake forests inhibited the wide open spaces that made for ideal riding terrain. While it lasted, Gem Lake's equestrian era was magnificent.

18. HISTORIC LUNDIE BUILDING GETS A NEW GEM LAKE HOME

A large and impressive outbuilding that was designed by famous Minnesota architect Edwin Lundie, has now been successfully moved the equivalent of several blocks on to the property of Gem Lake residents Tony Scornavacco and Mike Garrett.

The building was originally a large stable/barn with a residential apartment, built about 1931. It was part of the sprawling complex of estate owner Thomas Daniels, who moved his family to Gem Lake several years earlier. The entire Daniels estate was designed to mirror the feeling of an English manor, and included a variety of buildings surrounding a Tudor inspired main house. The complex included several garage buildings, a stable/barn building with residential quarters, a caretaker's house and other outbuildings. Each of the buildings had similar design features that tied them together and were reminiscent of Lundie's designs in that era.



The land was subdivided by the Daniels family in the 1970's, placing several of the original outbuildings on different lots with different owners. Tony and Mike decided to reunite two of the original buildings with the main house, which they own, when their existing garage was destroyed by fire in February of 2007. At the time of the fire, the secondary garage, as well as the stable building, which were located about 500 feet from the main house, were owned by other Gem Lake residents. After looking into the cost of replacing their burned out garage, Tony and Mike decided to purchase the Lundie designed outbuildings from their owners, planning to move and restore each of them.

Plans called for the garage to be moved first because it had to travel further to its final destination next to the house. Semple Movers, a local company specializing in the moving of historic buildings, was hired to do the job. Part One was accomplished in May of this year after extensive research and careful planning. After the garage was placed on its new pad in May, restoration to that building proceeded throughout the summer. This included a new shake roof to match the main house. The moving company and the current owners were lucky enough to locate and utilize the original blueprints of the complex,

as designed by the architect over 70 years ago. While garage restoration commenced, a new pad and foundation were also being laid for the stable complex during the summer months. The goal was to utilize the stable and its attached apartment as a guest house in coming years. In late August, the stable/barn complex, was cut into two pieces and moved up a gentle hill to its new site. The move took several weeks and was especially challenging due to the building's size and age. The entire process was videotaped for posterity. "The movers were very successful at moving an old and somewhat fragile chimney," said Tony. "It might to be tuck-pointed in the future. The move went amazingly well and we were thrilled."

Tony and Mike will spend the coming year restoring the building to its former glory and installing doors they previously purchased from a Lundie home that was being torn down in the area. "We are so pleased to have saved a piece of history for future generations."

19. GEM LAKE VETERAN SERVED PROUDLY

*In honor of Veteran Day, this issue of Gem Lake News will spotlight Veterans living among us. **Lloyd LaBore** served in World War II.*

Lloyd LaBore was only 17 years old when he left his family in Gem Lake and joined the U.S. Navy. It was late 1942 and men were urgently needed. He was eager to see more of the world, get a break from the hard work involved in the family dairy farm, and do his part for his country. Little did he know the war time drama and the brush with history that awaited him!

Lloyd enlisted in the Navy but was transferred to the 4th Marine Division, where his skills as a newly trained medic would be needed on Tinian Island. Tinian is part of the Mariana Islands, which are 1300 miles southeast of Tokyo. The islands were strategically crucial to the Allies, providing the potential for an airbase and a supply station. The problem was that his division had to first take the island away from the Japanese, in order to establish this crucial toe-hold in the Pacific theater. The invasion of Tinian Island was costly and Lloyd would prefer not to dwell on the details.

However, his job then became to help establish the hospital there. A very important airstrip was also being built. He spent 17 months on the island working as a medic and dealing with enemy soldiers who were still hiding in the hills. During this time, the airstrip was home base for a fleet of B-29 bombers, the new and revolutionary plane that had just been put in action by the Army Air Force. The B-29 represented the very latest in American engineering and brought new advances in speed, range and bomb load. They were also the first such "super bomber" to have pressurized crew compartments.

The fleet of planes performed regular bombing raids on long-range targets in the Pacific and returned to base for refueling and repair. They regularly came back full of bullet holes. Lloyd once witnessed a spectacular, and successful, belly landing of a damaged B-29.

He remembers one particular plane being equipped there that was brand new and very shiny. It was called the 'Enola Gay.' Although he did not know it at the time, the Enola Gay was in the process of being fitted on Lloyd's island with the world's first atomic bomb, which would be dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945.



Photo at left: A B-29 bomber named the Enola Gay on Tinian Island in 1945.

For months and months, Lloyd received no mail from home. Then one day he received a stack of letters. He arranged them in date order so he could savor them chronologically. In the first letters, his father Duesty LaBore, wrote that he was thinking of selling his farm in Gem Lake. By the last letter, Duesty had sold the farm and was living in California.

Life was hectic on Tinian Island, due to constant battle support activities that were going on. Many civilians lived there and some of them sought out medical services from the American soldiers, including one woman whose baby Lloyd delivered.

After his time on Tinian, Lloyd was assigned to the hospital ship *Repose*. The ship moved eastward delivering medical services throughout the Pacific.

Lloyd had one nine-day leave during his three years of war-time service. It took three of those nine precious days just to get home. When he got here, gas was strictly rationed. He showed up in uniform at the fire station in downtown White Bear and was given one precious stamp for five gallons of gas. When he asked for one more, the elderly woman running the coupon desk said "Sonny, there's a war on!"



Photo at left: Lloyd LaBore in 1942.

Enough time has now passed for Lloyd to confess that Henry Hoffman, who ran a gas station at Hoffman's Corners, also slipped him a coupon or two. During the most harrowing times of the war, Lloyd promised himself that if he survived and was able to come home, he would really have fun.

At first, he had a bit too much fun, crashing his car back in Minnesota shortly after he was discharged from the service in 1947.

While in the hospital, he was visited by a friend who brought his future wife Madonna along. The first time the couple met, Lloyd was covered with bandages. They went on to marry in 1948. Lloyd trained as an airplane mechanic, but spent most of his post war career as a masonry contractor. He and Madonna have had nine children and "a lot of fun." They recently celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary.

20. VERN GRUNDHOFER SERVED PROUDLY IN THE KOREAN WAR

In honor of Veteran Day, this issue of Gem Lake News will spotlight Veterans living among us. Vern Grundhofer served in the Korean War.

When Vern Grundhofer thinks of the Korean War, he remembers the sound of bullets whizzing by his ear. As a marine, he fought one battle after another in what essentially became a trench war. The sights and sounds of war have stayed with him and are as clear today as they were more than 50 years ago.

His service began with a draft notice. He was 22 years old and standing in an enlistment line. He was grabbed by the marines, who really were looking for a few good men. The encounter probably increased his chances of coming home safely. His training was superior. When he got to Korea, it also became clear that the marines were often better equipped than their counterparts in the U.S. Army.

The fighting took place over hilly terrain and the objective was simply to take one hill after another, or prevent the enemy from gaining the high ground. Each hilltop represented a potential artillery placement for one side or another. To do the job, his company had Browning Automatic Rifles, which fired off 450 rounds per minute. When a hot-spot was located, the generals always “called in the marines.” As a result, his squad moved around a lot and often engaged in long combat situations.

In the Marines, men were then organized into squads of 12. Within a squad, there were three “fire teams.” Within a fire team, one marine served as a scout, one served as the BAR man, (for Browning Automatic Rifle), one served as assistant rifle-man and one served as the fire team leader. Vern’s fire team leader became a good friend. His name was Richard Bustle of Indianapolis. Sadly, Richard was killed July 25, 1953, only three days before the Korean War Truce was signed. Vern was on his way home when Richard died and heard the news when he landed in San Francisco.



At 22, Vern was older than many of the marines he served with. They called him “Pops” and “Old Man.” Age and experience made him more cautious than some of the 18 year olds he served with. “Some of them who felt more invincible than I did,” says Vern.

Vern was assigned to the main line of resistance in Korea. In marine lingo, this is always referred to as the “MLR.” The strategic nature of the area increased the ferocity of the fighting. One fire fight in

particular stands out from all the many others. His squad and some reinforcements (27 men in all) were defending an area called Outpost Dagmar. The Chinese shelled the outpost relentlessly until 2 a.m. one morning. In the end, four were killed, 17 were wounded, and Vern was only one of seven left to defend the hill. The result was that the marines held on. "The Browning Automatic Rifle is the only reason I am able to talk to you about this today." During the fighting, he carried a wounded marine about 800 yards through a "no-man's land" in order to get him medical aid.

With this battle over, Vern bedded down right on the main line of resistance and slept. In the morning, Vern's squad had to load the back of a flat-bed truck with the bodies of dead enemy soldiers. He realized that he had recently faced them in battle. The memory remains chilling.

After discharge, Vern went on to college on the GI Bill. He studied aircraft mechanics in Los Angeles. When he came back to Minnesota to live, he married Mary Ann Tessier, whose family lived in Gem Lake. They had five children. Each Veterans Day, Vern thinks about the guys who died in Korea. "They never had a chance to come home and get married and have children and grandchildren. They gave all of that up for us."

21. MIXED USE DEVELOPMENT SLATED FOR HOFFMAN'S CORNER AREA: CIRCA 1958

Population growth and service needs in the area adjacent to Hoffman's Corners led to the development of a plan for a mixed use shopping center area complete with extensively landscaped grounds, weather protected walks, babysitting services and fine specialty shops. A newspaper story on the project stated as follows:

"Big news to White Bear and vicinity residents is announcement of the new one million-dollar "Key" shopping center, construction of which is scheduled to begin this summer off Highway 61 and County Road E."

Sound familiar? If it weren't for the small published price tag of the project, you might think you were reading an article in last week's newspapers. In fact, this fifty year old newspaper article, recently discovered by Gem Lake resident Connie Kunin, proves the old adage, 'the more things change, the more they stay the same.'

The Key Shopping Center was set to include pedestrian friendly features, upscale retail and even a community center. All in all, the fifty-year old plan, which never came to fruition, sounds eerily like the plan proposed last year by City Planner Marc Putman. Putman's "Gateway District" development plan encompasses the open Hansen property on County Road E, the Hoffman's Corners business district and the property where Tousley Ford is located. The key shopping center dealt with the property across the street, on the southwest corner of the intersection.

Yet Putman's plan also calls for walking trails, pedestrian friendly streets, extensive landscaping and a mixture of residential and specialty retail facilities. An area was set aside for a possible community center or other civic buildings. The long ago Key Shopping Center was proposed by Summit Park Realty, a division of Summit Farms Dairy, which owned the property at the time. The project was far enough along in the planning cycle to have hired Bob Reynolds as the project manager and Sheehy Construction Company as the lead engineering firm. No one seems to remember why the idea did not progress to the building phase.

22. HENRY HOFFMAN: CITY LEADER AND ALL AROUND NICE GUY

Lorraine Birkeland was nine years old when she first encountered Henry Hoffman. Her father Henry Wohletz had moved to the White Bear Lake area from St. Paul in the darkest days of the Great Depression to start a greenhouse here in 1932. After he sold them seven acres of land, Hoffman allowed Lorraine and her family to live in one of his houses rent free for a year while the business got off the ground. "In those days, no one had a dime. He stood out as a kind and generous man," said Lorraine.

Thanks in part to his help; the Wohletz family survived their disastrous first year. In the midst of economic conditions that are unmatched in history, their small glass greenhouse was destroyed by hail. "I don't know where we would be without him—and we weren't the only ones he helped." Henry Hoffman's legacy of generosity continues to this day with the long term survival of the business now known as White Bear Floral. In fact, Lorraine Wohletz Birkeland, now 83 years old, still works there.



At Left: Henry Hoffman with his daughter Kathleen at left and Bobbie Arcand at right. Photo from the 1940's. The dapper photo below may be from the 1950's. Photo below: the original Hoffman home, built in 1939 next to Hoffman's Market, which closed in 1975.



Although some of us drive by "Hoffman's Corner" daily, it's sometimes easy to forget that Henry Hoffman was a real person. The man who grew the area into a mammoth commercial center in the 1930's and '40's, was the son of Charles Hoffman, for whom the area was originally named. Charles was born in 1867 in Luxembourg, immigrated to Minnesota and bought 20 acres of land at the intersection of two major thoroughfares in the White Bear area in the 1890's. One of these roads, later to be referred to as Highway 61, just happened to be the bustling route of the train traffic between St. Paul and the City of White Bear. Hoffman saw the enormous commercial potential for supplying White Bear, already a prosperous resort community, with fresh produce. He started a farm and sold his crops near

the intersecting road, County Road E, which was also near a train stop on the route to downtown White Bear Lake. Hence the name "Hoffman's Corner" was born. Gem Lake resident Dick Arcand, also Henry Hoffman's son-in-law, remembers Charles Hoffman as a "smart little man, who taught himself English from a book and worked very hard."

However, it was not until the next generation, under the guidance of Charles's son Henry Hoffman and some of Henry's nine siblings that the Corner area really took off. At its peak, the commercial center boosted a large grocery store, produce stands, a drive-in hamburger restaurant, a service station, several taverns, a floral shop, a dance hall, and assorted smaller establishments. In the days before the supermarket or the discount store, if you needed it or even wanted it—you found it at Hoffman's Corner. Everyone stopped there, everyone shopped there.

After the heyday of train travel between White Bear and St. Paul had passed, literally every car travelling between the two cities had to pass by Hoffman's Corner. An explosion of business growth happened under Henry Hoffman's leadership.

In the summertime, Hoffman's Corner businesses served 500 ice cream cones a day, fried up the best hamburgers in the Twin Cities, pumped gas into your vehicle, supplied you with heating oil for your house, and even provided large rooms for rent for your daughter's baby shower.

Hoffman's Corners was home to such businesses as Bob's Drive-In, Cities Service Station, Hoffman's Corner Oil, Hoffman's Market, Bloomer's Ice Cream, the Dutch Mill, Lindhorfer's Bakery, Mike's Place, Randall's 66, Scheuneman's Market and the Trucker's Home. Although not every business was owned by Henry, usually the building and the land it was sitting on was, according to Dick Arcand.

Henry Hoffman was born in 1898 in St. Paul. Although he was generous to a fault, he was also a shrewd businessman. Initially, he worked his father's farm and sold produce. Later, he was a wine merchant.

Eventually, he built a large business center on the site of his father's farm. In his opinion, the bustling commercial route was simply asking to be further developed and expanded. The development of Hoffman's Corner was very much a family affair. Almost the entire family worked there in some capacity. Many of them lived there also, in homes built for or by the family. Henry started Hoffman's Market, a large grocery store that once stood across the street to the west of the current site of White Bear Floral. The street between the floral shop and the grocery store was then the route of Highway 61. The store sold everything from vinegar to canned goods and was built in the late 1920's. Outside its doors stood a large produce stand, where you could buy local cherries, apples, and even grapefruits from the family's citrus farm in Mission, Texas. Initially, Henry ran the market with his wife Anyrine Nadeau, a beautiful girl of French descent, whom he had married in 1923.

For the first few years, his family lived in the back of the store. Henry's brother Joe ran the citrus farm in Texas and shipped the fruit by train to the family market in Gem Lake.

The popular hamburger stand, next door to the market, was run by Henry's brother Bob Hoffman. Bob's Drive-In sold a very popular new concept in fast food, consisting of a beef pattie on a soft bun. Bob added lettuce and tomato and called it a "California Burger."

Henry and Anyrine had four children: Shirley, LaVonne, Charles (Chuck) and Kathleen, who was born in 1942. Shirley married Dick Arcand and the couple took over the running of Hoffman's Market in 1950. Prior to this, Dick had worked at Bob's Drive-In next door. When Shirley and Dick took over the market, Henry and his wife, occasionally with the help of their youngest daughter Kathleen, ran the produce stands outside. Henry's daughter LaVonne married Lloyd ("Shorty") Urban, who eventually ran Cities Service Station at Hoffman's Corner.

"I can tell you that Henry Hoffman was a really good guy," says Dick. "I learned a lot from him. He helped out anyone and loaned a lot of people money. I remember a few times hobos would wander through wanting a hand-out and he would always give them something. When I asked him about this he said 'listen, if you were down and out you would want something too'."

One particular incident stands out in Dick's mind as epitomizing Henry's giving spirit. "Once there was a guy working at White Bear Floral who had just gotten married. His name was Eddie. Henry lent Eddie his brand new car so he could take his bride on a honeymoon trip to California. I never forgot that."

By the time the baby of the family, Kathleen, was born, the family had moved its dwelling from behind the store and into a brand new house built for them in 1939. The house stood next to the market. Later, the family moved into another house, which stood on the present day site of Enterprise Car Rental. There were a variety of houses in or near the business area, which housed Hoffman family members. (An early rendition of what we call "mixed use zoning today.) Although the original Hoffman home was later demolished, others were moved to new sites on Goose Lake Road, as business in the Hoffman's Corner area expanded or changed. These houses are still in use today. With the coming of the freeways, Highway 61 diminished in importance as a route to and from St. Paul. Gradually, business began to taper off throughout the 1960's, also affected by the emergence of "supermarkets." But, Henry Hoffman would be a prominent businessman for many years to come and was well-known in the area when Gem Lake first incorporated as a city in 1959. He became Gem Lake's first mayor in 1960.

"I don't think he had any particular desire to be mayor," says his daughter Kathleen, "but someone had to do it." City council meetings were typically held around their family dining room table. She remembers being present when some of the new streets were being named as Gem Lake expanded. Kathleen personally named Haven Lane. She remembers her father Henry Hoffman as a very even tempered man and a great father. Lorraine Birkeland remembers him as tall and dignified looking.

Henry wintered in California in the 1970's but continued to sell produce here in the summers. He died in 1986 after breaking his hip. His legacy now includes twenty-three grandchildren and 50 great grandchildren.

23. BOB'S DRIVE-IN PUT GEM LAKE ON THE MAP IN THE '30'S

It may be hard to visualize Gem Lake as a “destination,” but that was most certainly the case in the heyday of a very popular restaurant in Hoffman’s Corner called “Bob’s Drive-In.”

When it first opened in 1932, fast food was an unknown concept, drive-ins were rare and a carhop was considered a rather exotic job. Even night spots where young people could congregate were few and far between.

“People came from all around to go Bob’s Drive-In, says Lorraine Birkeland. In the midst of the depression there weren’t even that many places to eat out.”

What distinguished Bob’s was the quality of his food. Ask Dick Arcand. He ought to know—he worked there in 1941, setting up trays for the carhops and then reminding them to bring the trays and money back to the register in the midst of all the merry-making. “We served terrific food—hamburgers and pork tenderloin. And, the waitresses were awfully cute! It was a fun place all around.”



Bob's Drive-In was initially a seasonal restaurant, also known as the 'Round House.'

The Drive-In was the brain child of Bob Hoffman, the brother of Henry Hoffman of “Hoffman’s Corner” fame. (Henry ran Hoffman’s Market and owned many of the businesses at the corner. He was also Gem Lake’s first mayor.)

Bob opened his popular drive-in after taking an extended trip to California, where this type of restaurant was all the rage. One of the initial popular menu items was a beef sandwich, which he named the California burger. It consisted of a beef patty on a soft bun with lettuce and tomato. (Sound familiar?) Bob is credited, at least in this area, with bringing the burger to the Twin Cities.

He and his wife Ruth, and variously some of their children, worked at the drive-in serving burgers and other very popular items, such as barbecued pork sandwiches.

“Cars were often lined up ten deep waiting to be served,” says Dick Arcand. The drive-in concept, as well as the pretty carhops, were novel and attracted a crowd. The idea of a tray that clipped onto the customer’s car window was as ‘new age’ as Twitter is today. Legend has it that some of the carhops met their future spouses at the drive-in, according to Lorraine. It was a fun place to work and hang out. “I remember going there when I was dating.”

The drive-in had other attractions that made it a unique fun spot, according to Dick. "Bob had a barbeque pit outside in the back. He smoked all his own meats. I don't remember how much the barbeque or pork tenderloin sandwiches were, but they weren't expensive, and oh, were they good."

Free outdoor movies were another unique part of the Bob's Drive-In adventure. A gentleman from the area named George Welsh used to project free movies on Saturday nights onto Henry Hoffman's garage door, which was located in the back. No one exactly remembers how this custom got started or how it ended, but while it lasted, it boosted business.



Above is an aerial photo of the original Bob's Drive-In. Bob's is the octagonal building to the left. The road with the car on it was the old route of State Highway #61 which once ran in front of the Drive In. It is now located behind where the structures once were. The long building in the middle right was the home of Hoffman's Market and the Cities Service Station. Part of that building exists today. The white house at top was the home of Bob and Ruth Hoffman. The road that runs across the top of the photo is County Road E.

As with all Hoffman business ventures, this one was very much a family affair, according to Bob's niece Kathy Hoffman Brown. Bob was the youngest of ten Hoffman children. Many members of his generation were involved in businesses in the Hoffman's Corner area. Bob, his wife Ruth, and their children were involved in all aspects of running the family restaurant.

When Dick Arcand returned from the service after World War II, Bob's Drive-In was still a popular hot spot. However, over the coming years, things began to evolve in ways that diminished the drive-in's traffic.

As the path of Highway #61 changed, cars no longer travelled by the front of the drive-in. This and other factors, such as the aging 'Round House' structure, led Bob Hoffman to open an indoor restaurant on the end of the strip mall where Henry had his market. (The structure still stands today.) This new restaurant was called

Robert's Grill and Drive-In. This change happened in 1952. The grill had a counter and a variety of booths, reminiscent of the scenes from the television show "Happy Days."

The original octagonal structure was moved slightly to the west to make way for the grill. Over time the aging structure was torn down. Robert's Grill also faded in popularity and eventually closed in the 1950's.

Those who had the opportunity to eat at Bob's have fond memories of the food, the area and the fun.



At Left: the main building of Bob's Drive In. Middle Photo is Bob Hoffman. At Right is an unidentified waitress at Bob's Drive-In.

24. THE GREAT DEPRESSION REVISITED? NOT HARDLY

News coverage these days is often filled with comparisons between our current recession and the Great Depression of the 1930's. But, are the two events even comparable? No, say three Gem Lake residents who have been eye witnesses to both events—not even close!

“In the 1930's there were no such things as food shelves or food stamp programs,” says Gem Lake resident Dick Arcand. “During the Depression, people were actually starving. They ate potatoes or anything they could get a hold of. We have a lot of services now days to help people. From that point of view, things were much worse then.”

Without the vast social safety network that exists today, people had to rely on family or the kindness of strangers. Rarely did a day go by when Gem Lake resident Lloyd LaBore was a child when a homeless person wasn't knocking on their door in search of a meal. “My mother always fed them something. We had a dairy farm where the golf course is today. We didn't have a dime, but we ate okay and had enough to share when we needed to.”

Unemployment and homelessness were common, not rare occurrences. Lloyd remembers a hobo camp along the railroad tracks on the northern edge of Gem Lake.

“I remember everyone knew someone who was out of work and had been for a while,” said Dick. “My dad was a mail carrier, so he always had a job, but every family was affected in some way.”

Lloyd's brother joined the Civilian Conservation Corp, the 1930's version of an economic stimulus package. This program was the brainchild of Roosevelt and was intended to provide jobs immediately. Workers got a small wage, as well as food, board and clothing. “It was a godsend, “ says Lloyd. “Now days it seems like we are bailing out the fat cats and the banks, but then FDR brought relief to the little guy who needed a job.”

Buying patterns were completely different during the Great Depression. “You didn't go out and eat at a restaurant the way people do today,” said Dick. “First, there were very few places to go (with the local exception of restaurants and a drive-in at Hoffman's Corner), but also no one could afford it. No one had any cash. Mostly people stayed home with family and played cards. That's just what you did.”

Lloyd agrees, saying he doesn't even remember going to a restaurant of any kind until he was at least 17 years old. “Today, people complain about the economy, but I noticed a few days ago that the parking lot of Culvers was full.”

An economy in free fall meant that people were spending money on the necessities of life, with little left over for extras. This included cut flowers. Gem Lake resident Lorraine Birkeland's father Henry Wohletz started White Bear Floral in the midst of the darkest days of the Depression.

“In the beginning, we sold mostly to wholesalers” said Lorraine. “People didn't come in and buy cut flowers the way they do today, with the exception of funeral arrangements.” In fact, it was so rare, that she can actually remember a woman 70 years ago who bought \$5 worth of flowers for a church altar every Sunday. Lorraine compares that with today's flower business. “Even with the recession, we have been so busy this May that we had to stop taking orders a few days before Mother's Day.”

“When my parents came here to start a shop they didn’t have a place to live. Like I said before, (in a previous Gem Lake News Story) if Henry Hoffman (of Hoffman’s Corner fame) hadn’t helped us out, I don’t know what we would have done.”

25. EILEEN BIGELOW: A WOMAN AHEAD OF HER TIME

Eileen Bigelow may have been Gem Lake’s very first “feminist.” She was most certainly a woman “ahead of her time.” When she was a mere 24 years old, she decided to move from the family home in St. Paul and build her own horse farm in Gem Lake.

There was no husband in the picture and never would be—an usual circumstance at the time. Although single, she went on to adopt two children, build an estate, become an expert horse woman, take over a man’s job during World War II, and become a well-known hostess and “member of society.”

Eileen was strong willed and independent, yet she was also a nice person, letting kids in the neighborhood use her land for recreational purposes. Dick Arcand, one-time owner of Hoffman’s Market, remembers her as a “fine lady. She used to do all her shopping with me. I liked her very much.”

Eileen was born in 1905, the daughter of F.R. Bigelow. Mr. Bigelow was the owner, founder and CEO of what was then called the Fire and Marine Insurance Company, and was later renamed the St. Paul Companies. She was extremely bright and earned a degree from Vassar College.



Eileen Bigelow, probably in the 1940’s, demonstrating her expert riding skills.

“People often said that if she had been a man, she would have gone on to take over her father’s role as head of the company,” says her adopted daughter Connie Kunin. “Women were constrained by gender at the time in terms of the career opportunities available to them. Even her war-time job disappeared when the men returned home from fighting overseas.”

Throughout her childhood, Eileen had been an avid fan of all things related to horses. She moved to Gem Lake because good friends were already here. The Daniels family had begun to set up a beautiful estate nearby that was oriented around horse breeding, jumping and riding. The type of acreage Eileen wanted was available, being mostly open farmland at the time. She began to build just as the Panic of 1929 started. The barn and stable came first, followed by a two-room guest house, where she lived for two years.

By the time the main house was underway, the darkest days of the Great Depression had arrived. This meant you could build more house, if you were lucky enough to have any actual cash. However, it also meant that you dealt with the sadder and more desperate aspects of a broken economy—people going door to door in search of food, a hobo camp set up on the railroad tracks across the street, etc.

Eileen navigated her way through these tough and lonesome times and made a life for herself in Gem Lake. She named her horse farm “Paddy Hill.” Slowly, a real home came together, with the help of an equestrian manager named Pete Spreck, who many people in the area fondly remember. “He was very knowledgeable and took great care of the horses,” says Connie. “He really knew what he was doing.”

The 1940’s brought many changes to Eileen’s pastoral lifestyle. She adopted Connie in 1940 and a baby boy two years later. She also took over a man’s job as a professional photographer for the St. Paul Pioneer Press and worked very hard during the war. Her output was prodigious, some of which can be easily accessed through the Minnesota Historical Society’s on-line photo archives. According to her daughter, she loved the work and became very good at it. She even set up her own fully-equipped dark room in the basement of her home. “I think she was sorry when she had to give it up,” says Connie. “That was just the way things were at the time.”

Eileen became an accomplished rider and jumper and won many awards for her skills, including some in Gem Lake’s famous annual equestrian event called the “Hunter Trials.” Paddy Hill was host to the event on more than one occasion. At these events, elaborate courses were set up around the lake for entrants to negotiate, including plenty of jumps.

As time went on things began to change for Eileen. She eventually had to close her stables and farm out her horses to relatives in Nashville. There were three main reasons for the decline. First, the Daniels family had begun to move away. Second, Pete Spreck, their greatly respected groomsmen, died of kidney cancer.



Lastly, Eileen herself was finding it more difficult to ride her beloved horses. The flow of time had begun to wash away the bucolic lifestyle she had so enjoyed for decades. Farmland was being increasingly converted to housing and recreational purposes, such as golf courses. With her usual energy, Eileen joined the fight to establish Gem Lake as an incorporated city in the late 1950's. In the 1960's she served on the city council. She also replaced her passion for horses with a deep interest in fostering local musical talent. Eileen hosted musical evenings at her home, inviting "up and coming" talent to come and perform.

One of the things that people remember most about Eileen is that she was very "real." She was kind to everyone and enjoyed having neighborhood kids around. "I remember her as very down to earth," says Gem Lake resident Lloyd LaBore. "She let kids use the indoor skating rink that was in one of the barns. She let them ride all over her land, and was just plain nice to people."

Eileen died in 1982 after a long illness. Eventually Connie and her husband moved back to Paddy Hill to enjoy the natural setting her mother so loved. Although the horses are long gone, the place still echoes the excitement of its heyday. The large riding ring is still there. The wide open acreage that once saw eager riders is now filled with prairie grass and birdhouses. Things are quieter, but the beauty remains, in tribute to a woman who once called this home.

26. GEM LAKE CELEBRATES ITS 50TH YEAR

Whether you were an estate owner or a dairy farmer in 1959, residents of Gem Lake shared a common vision of what they wanted for their little community—*independence*.

Gem Lake was, more or less, a neighborhood of White Bear Township at the time. The township had been under siege from its larger neighbor, the City of White Bear Lake, for several years, which wanted to annex the whole "kit and caboodle" into its ever growing post war boundaries. Fifty years ago, Gem Lake won that independence, but not without a long, complicated, and very "grass roots" battle to get it. Everyone got into the act, from local business leaders, such as Sandy Bemis and Henry Hoffman, to resident lawyers, such as Frank Butler.

Residents of Gem Lake not only wanted an identity as an independent city, they also wanted freedom from what they saw as overly restrictive city ordinances that the City of White Bear and towns such as North Oaks were starting to place on their citizens. White Bear wanted the tax base, the growing room and the ability to extend water and sewer into our fair city, something Gem Lake residents vehemently opposed.

Gem Lake citizens felt as strongly in 1959 as they do today about maintaining the semi-rural feeling of the community. They valued the natural beauty and feared the burgeoning post war development that was crowding in from all sides. State laws regarding one city's ability to annex another were vague and sometimes confusing. This made White Bear's initial request for more acreage seem easy. The first annexation vote took place in 1957 and was successful. What White Bear didn't bargain for at the time was the sheer unity of nearly all Gem Lake residents, and their willingness to devote their various talents to a two-year battle for independence.

Fortunately, Gem Lake had not only the enthusiasm to become a city, they also had the legal talent and the political clout to make it happen. Resident Frank Butler, a well-known attorney, as well as a variety of business leaders and farmers led the fight, according to city historian and council member Jim Lindner.

Meetings were held all over the place to plot strategy, including the basement of Hoffman's Market, the kitchen table at Henry Hoffman's house and the living room of the Bemis estate at Hillary Farm. Thanks to a "cracker jack" legal team, the matter went all the way to the Minnesota Supreme Court. The court ruled in Gem Lake's favor, saying a city had the right to determine its own destiny, within reason. The initial annexation attempt of 1957 was overturned. Gem Lake quickly decided it needed to incorporate, to protect itself from any future attempts at annexation.

A referendum date of June 30, 1959 was set by the county and Gem Lake's population turned out "in droves" for the vote. The election was a landslide, with residents voting 102 to 5 for incorporation. For reasons lost to time, the new city did not hold elections for officers until October 15 of that year. Henry Hoffman was elected as Gem Lake's first mayor. The first council consisted of Richard Arcand, Alan Hansen and John Gray. Lorraine Birkeland was elected as treasurer. Charles Schifsky and Robert Braun became Gem Lake's first "constables."

"I think the battle for independence for Gem Lake was really unique," says Lindner. "People crossed economic boundaries to work together on a common goal."



Henry Hoffman, Gem Lake's first mayor.

In essence, the main issues were purely economic. "The farmers in the area couldn't afford to have city water and sewer installed. The large estates didn't want these services. And, everyone was afraid of the assessments they felt the City of White Bear would place on them," says Lindner. "Plus, there was also a very well established political machine in place in White Bear. Most residents of Gem Lake felt they would simply lose their identity as a community and would no longer have a voice.

Kathy Brown, daughter of Henry Hoffman remembers the excitement of the entire process of becoming a city. Connie Kunin, who was away at school at the time, also remembers her mother, Eileen Bigelow, writing to her about the process. "We were a beautiful farming community at the time and everyone wanted to maintain that." Connie feels that Eileen would be proud that Gem Lake still exists as a true city, with much of its natural beauty intact.

27. GEM LAKE REFLECT ON THANKSGIVING HOLIDAYS OF THE PAST

Lorraine Birkeland, who owns White Bear Floral in Gem Lake, experiences a profound sense of gratitude when she remembers Thanksgiving holidays during the Great Depression.

“Things were very hard then but we always ate well. My mother put on quite a spread on Thanksgiving.”

Now in her 80’s, Lorraine still works daily. During the Thanksgiving holiday season in the 1930’s things were very slow. “Very few people came in for floral arrangements or centerpieces like they do today. I think we might have been open on Thanksgiving a few times.”

Lorraine’s mother, Elizabeth, was an orphan from Switzerland. She came to the United States when she was only 15 years old and worked for her uncle for two years to pay back the cost of her passage. During those years on her uncle’s farm, Elizabeth learned to cook.



Lorraine Birkeland in 2009.

“My mother canned a lot. She was a wonderful cook and we never suffered for lack of a good meal during the Depression. On Thanksgiving she made a big meal, turkey and all the trimmings.”

Elizabeth married Lorraine’s father Henry Wohletz and the couple had two daughters. They moved to Gem Lake at the height of the Great Depression and started a floral business, with the help of Henry Hoffman, who would later be Gem Lake’s first mayor. “I don’t know where I would be today without that man’s help. I have a lot to be grateful for.”

Another Gem Lake resident, **Dick Arcand**, spent Thanksgiving of 1944 moving across Europe with the 7th Army. “We were usually right behind the fighting, setting up logistics.” I don’t remember ever having turkey or a holiday meal of any kind that year. However, I can’t even look at a can of spam to this day. We ate a lot of C-Rations.”

After the war, Dick married Henry Hoffman’s daughter Shirley and the two ran Hoffman’s Grocery. “For years, we stayed open a half day on Thanksgiving. I remember one Thanksgiving when Mr. Rooney (who ran the nursery down the street on County Road E) came in because he wanted Molasses for his sick cow.”

Dick's late wife would cook a wonderful Thanksgiving meal for the family. Sometimes we had a goose. During the Depression, people didn't eat as much turkey, it just wasn't as available. Things were pretty tough then, people ate mostly pork on Thanksgiving, as I recall. But later, after the war and the Depression, we ate goose and turkey."

Turkey wasn't the primary entrée for the Thanksgiving meal for either **Lloyd or Madonna LaBore** when they were growing up during the Depression years. "People just didn't eat a lot of turkey, it wasn't around or it was too expensive, I don't know which," says Madonna. Lloyd grew up on a dairy farm, located on what is now the Gem Lake Hills Golf Course. "We ate chicken and goose, because these were animals we were raising on the farm."

Lloyd has some particular memories of Thanksgiving meals during World War II. While at boot camp in Idaho in 1942, he was served a large Thanksgiving meal, including blueberry pie that had a large nail in it. "They weren't too particular about the food we ate then. It kind of sticks out in my mind now." While serving in the Navy on Tinian Island in the Pacific, he missed one holiday meal while they were securing the island from the Japanese. "I do remember that we had a couple of great holiday meals while I was there. I remember turkey and cranberries and not much else, but the meals were pretty good."

Gem Lake resident **Vern Grundhofer** was too busy fighting in Korea during the Korean War to enjoy a Thanksgiving meal. He does, however, remember one Christmas meal delivered right to his fox hole. "It was hot turkey with gravy and mashed potatoes. I will never forget that. It was one of the best meals I ever had." After Vern returned home, he moved to Gem Lake, married the daughter of Edna and Oliver Tessier and built a house next door to them on Scheuneman Road. "We usually spent Thanksgiving at the Tessier house. Edna was a great cook."

28. THE HIGHWAY MAKE-OVER THAT CHANGED GEM LAKE

Today's modern highways follow a pattern of generally straight lines and gentle curves. Not so, before the Eisenhower Era focus on Interstate Highways and suburban growth. In the early 1950's, Gem Lake's portion of the transportation system looked pretty much like any other rural suburb at the time.

Lazy country roads skirted along the edge of existing property lines, even when that meant a highway would zig-zag across the landscape, instead of following more efficient (and safer) straighter lines. As it ran through Gem Lake, Highway 61 flowed in front of the White Bear Floral Shop, made a sharp turn east, then turned again to the north at the location of the present day Stadium Bar (now Hoffman Road), and then curved again as it crossed over the existing railroad bed. It then followed the route of current day Hoffman Road, all the way up to the area of the old White Bear Township Hall.

Clearly this "patchwork quilt" highway was a prime example of a road that needed a makeover to keep pace with its ever increasing automobile traffic. As the suburbs began to grow dramatically after World War II, this old fashioned road plan wouldn't work anymore.

So began a major project to "un-kink" the road. In reality, this was a precursor to today's "Unweave the Weave" project that just wrapped up for the I-694/35E junction point.

There were many notable examples of why this needed to happen--first and foremost being driver safety. For example, careless, inattentive or drunk drivers were often unable to negotiate the corner when they crossed over the railroad bed in the area past the current bowling alley on Hoffman Road. As a result, they ended up in the railroad ditch or even on the tracks, according to long time Gem Lake resident Dick Arcand. This area is now covered by modern day Highway 61. The railroad bed isn't visible anymore from the highway.

Another problem was very much related to nature. Frogs crossed the road in masses during the summer in the area of the old township hall (current day Hoffman Road) seeking the cool water of Goose Lake. There were so many frogs in the early 1950's that cars running over them created a slippery slime that is described by Lloyd and Madonna LaBore as "gruesome." Naturally, the slime and sliding cars created their share of accidents. (YUCK!!)

The project to realign Highway 61 to its present day route seemed to take forever, according to Gem Lake residents. It created noise, confusion, a complete rerouting of traffic away from Gem Lake's business district, and even a tragic accident.

Lloyd LaBore remembers the dust, the noise and the endlessly rerouted cars as the highway was ripped up and rebuilt. "You could hear the trucks at 5 a.m. each morning, filling Goose Lake with sand," says Lloyd. Prior to the project, Highway 61 steered clear of Goose Lake, traveling along what is now Hoffman Road instead. The construction meant that a route was created right through the middle, cutting the lake into two parts.

The filling process went on for many months, using sand and gravel hauled in from a nearby gravel pit.

"When I was a kid, there used to be an island in the middle of Goose Lake. You could walk out to it when the lake was dry. I think the new highway took a route that covered up that old island, but still a lot of fill was needed," says Lloyd. "Remember, these were the days before air conditioning. We kept our windows open and we heard all those trucks going back and forth with their heavy loads."

Both Lloyd and Dick Arcand remember one night when a drunk driver ignored the construction barriers

and drove his car right into the freshly laid concrete somewhere near Hoffman's Corner. "That section of the road had to be redone. I remember the car was stuck pretty good," says Dick.

One major consequence of the Highway 61 straightening was to reroute traffic away from a major part of the Gem Lake business district. The old highway traveled right in front of White Bear Floral and Hoffman's Grocery. The newly built Highway 61 traveled behind these businesses and in front of a new car dealership called Tousley Ford. While Tousley Ford (which opened after the construction project) was later happy, the owners of the grocery store and the floral shop were not quite as overjoyed.

"We saw a drop off in traffic," says Lorraine Birkeland, owner of White Bear Floral. "It wasn't right away, but within 6-8 months it was apparent that things had changed." Lorraine's mother lived in a little house across the street, approximately where the used car dealership is today.

"My mother's house had to be moved to accommodate the new road, which Henry Hoffman did for us." Hoffman's Grocery, which was run by Dick and Shirley Arcand, also noticed a drop in traffic. "Of course, it's always better having the cars running right in front of your store, rather than right behind it," says Dick.

One tragic consequence of the road straightening was an accident that killed Dick's son Larry, who was about five at the time. Larry had been outside playing with Lorraine's daughter. He stayed outside an extra minute or two possibly because he didn't like the egg salad sandwiches that Lorraine was serving the children that day. In that short space of time, Larry was hit by one of the many construction vehicles in the area. "It's strange," says Lorraine, "I can't remember how long the project took or exactly when it happened, but I remember those sandwiches."

29. A VERY SPECIAL REUNION

After 63 years of wondering what happened to his war buddy, Gem Lake resident Dick Arcand had a chance to find out last September.

Dick had the long-awaited opportunity for a very special reunion with his friend Dwight Applegate, with whom he served for two years in the 81st Field Hospital of the U.S. Army. The mobile medial unit was attached to the 7th Army as it traveled across Europe after D-Day. Both Dick and Dwight had received their basic training together at Camp Barkley in Abilene, Texas. "We lived in the same hut and got to be very good friends," says Dick.

Later, they set up tents behind Patton's Seventh Army. The tents provided medical and surgical care to soldiers, but Dick and Dwight performed other "behind the line" functions to keep the unit operating. Both were trained as clerks, but Dick was drafted to cut hair for wounded soldiers and officers.

"We lived through a lot together. We were always wet and cold and moving with the unit," adds Dick. "Of course, we were young and we could take it. Now that would probably kill us. At night, the Germans would fly over the unit and spray it with bullets. Neither of us was wounded. We hid under the water tank some nights."

Over the years, Dick always wondered what happened to his friend. "I knew he lived somewhere in Iowa, but for some reason, our unit never had any reunions. Unfortunately, we fell out of touch, but I always wanted to see him again."

It seems Dwight Applegate had expressed the same feeling to his daughter. Now in his 80's and in poor health, Dwight's daughter felt the reunion should take place sooner rather than later. She found Dick's name after some on-line research and got in touch. "I was so surprised and pleased. My daughter drove me to his home in Marshalltown, Iowa and we spent the whole day together," says Dick. "Dwight smiled so much. I was so glad. We had so much to talk about and we both remembered everything."

Dwight now suffers from diabetes and cancer and can't get around well. "His wife has called me to see if they can come up sometime and I hope they do," says Dick. Until then, Dick says he was so happy to see his friend again.

30. VOLUNTEERS OF THE PAST HELPED BUILD THE GEM LAKE OF TODAY

Shortly after Gem Lake's formation in 1958, Lorraine Birkeland agreed to serve as its first treasurer, partly because she "wanted to help get things started. I had little kids then, so it was kind of hard."

Although she was happy to help out, Lorraine says she remembers very little about her actual duties, perhaps because Gem Lake had a budget the size of a large dust ball. Meetings were very informal then. Some of them were held in the basement of Hoffman's Grocery Store on old Highway 61 (now directly across the street from White Bear Floral, where Lorraine still works daily).

Through the years, many citizen leaders have contributed their time and brain power to the running of Gem Lake.

By the time Connie Kunin became a City Council Member in the late 1980's, things had begun to change significantly in the areas surrounding Gem Lake. Instead of focusing only on city issues, the council had to turn its attention to the development closing in upon it from all sides, and the regulations coming down from county and state agencies.

For example, Connie recalls numerous discussions at meetings regarding storm water runoff and the need to become part of the area watershed district, now called VLAWMO (Vadnais Lakes Area Watershed Management Organization).

She was on the council when the city was finalizing plans to allow for a Montessori School at the corner of LaBore and County Road E. (County Road E had not yet become the "superhighway" it is today.) Plans were also being evaluated for a possible health club across the street on the northwest corner of the same intersection, which is in Vadnais Heights. The health club sought feedback from the City of Gem Lake, but the project never came to pass. Although she served almost 20 years ago, Connie remembers some of the same concerns we have today were foremost in the minds of residents: traffic volumes, density and maintaining some of the characteristic charm of Gem Lake, in the midst of a growing metro area.

Nearly 40 years after Lorraine Birkeland volunteered to act as city treasurer, another Gem Lake resident volunteered to take on the same role.

Richard Nordstrom had no experience with accounting when he took on the role of city treasurer, which was by now a paid part-time position with the city. He took over the role when the previous treasurer retired in 1987. At the time, he was the manager of a large jewelry store in downtown Minneapolis, a job he holds to this day.

Although the budget was larger than it was in 1958, the duties were still performed manually for the most part. Richard remembers a large ledger book where all entries were made. He worked closely with long-time resident John Hannaford, who was then acting as city clerk.

During his 14 years as part-time treasurer, Richard remembers many interesting council meetings, including much controversy surrounding a tree ordinance that was about to be enacted. Shortly before the ordinance became effective, another resident chopped down a large grove of trees in order to make a statement about property rights. The trees were mature and very beautiful and he remembers the experience as somewhat shocking.

Richard says he enjoyed working for the city and doing something for his community. He performed this role until 2001.

31. HISTORIC BEMIS HOUSE GETS MAJOR FACELIFT

When the Smiths bought their dream house in Gem Lake in 2008, they began the type of "love/hate" relationship that usually comes along with remodeling an old house.

In this case, the "old" house once belonged to Barbara and Judson "Sandy" Bemis and has long been a historic fixture in our city.

While the couple wanted to perform a sweeping restoration of the big old house, they also wanted to maintain its original character. To get the job done, they hired Authentic Remodelers of St. Paul and planned a project that would be accomplished in phases in a reasonable amount of time and on a realistic budget.

Naturally, not everything has gone strictly as planned over the course of the past few years.



*The original Bemis home, now located
on the Hillary Farm Housing
Development.*

"For a while it seemed that every week, something else went wrong," said proud owner Greg Smith recently. "That's just the way it is when you start remodeling an older structure."

One of the happiest of complications to the schedule, was the birth of their daughter, who is now two years old. The fact that another child is on the way, has slowed things up a bit more. Greg's wife, Melissa Geller, is a local physician.

However, some wonderful work has been accomplished on the stately house, which was once the original club house of the long defunct Mataska Golf Course. The couple wanted to break the project into parts to minimize disruption and spread out costs.

The first phase of the project was to start on the south end and completely update the master bedroom and bath, while opening up the key rooms below on the first floor.

"To do this, we eliminated a staircase to the second floor that chopped up the master bath floor plan. We also eliminated some of the walls in that area and "borrowed" one of the bedrooms next door to create a master closet. The result is a floor plan that makes better use of the space, feels more open and works more efficiently. "

On the first floor, the Smiths turned a damp and outdated screened porch into a TV room off the living room. This, and the elimination of that staircase, expanded and opened up the main room of the house.

A tremendous aid to the first phase of the project was the fact that Greg was able to find old drawings of the Bemis house on file at the University of Minnesota School of Architecture. Next, the couple turned their attention to an old "recreation room" in the lower level of the house. "The Bemis family used this as an old movie room and it was in pretty bad shape. "

"There were some moisture problems. We went all the way back to the bare walls and made it into a great playroom."

Along the way, the couple have had to address a lot of infrastructure issues in the house, including the old heating and air conditioning systems, ancient windows, and the lack of proper insulation. At present, Greg and Melissa are engaged in what they roughly call "Phase Two" of the remodeling project.

This has involved taking down some of the walls that separated small bedrooms and turning them into fewer, but more functional spaces. "When we opened up the walls, we realized we had to add insulation and take care of some other issues. We also had to deal with some water damage when we decided to redo the bathroom that is on this end of the house."

The bedrooms in question are at the top of a large, sweeping staircase in the old home. "The rooms are kind of central. Even small changes make a big difference." Some of these changes included creating a hallway into the area where none existed before, which used to make the area feel very closed off.

Phase Two has also included putting new dormers on the east side of the house in an area that was once used for ironing clothes. "We made the room into a cute little reading nook." says Greg. Things are moving more slowly than the couple originally projected, and that has proved to be okay with both of them. They are now working with one very talented contractor who is getting things done a little at a time, which suits their lifestyle "just fine."

Phase Three of the project, may begin next summer depending on a number of factors, including his wife's pregnancy. This phase would include remodeling several of the small bedrooms on the north side of the house into a large porch, and possibly adding a garage somewhere.

Greg Smith has long been familiar with the Gem Lake area, and with the Bemis family. As it turns out Sandra Bemis, (Judson's daughter) was his high school teacher. He also went to school with several local residents. Greg now helps manage Gopher Sign Company, which his family has owned for several generations.

Since 2005, four homes have been built by McNulty Homes on the Hillary Farm Development, where the Smith's home is now located. The original Bemis home sits in the center of the development.

Greg and Melissa say they feel a real connection to the area and are enjoying the charm of their older home. They project that they may take several more years to slowly and lovingly update it.

32. FOUR GENERATIONS OF LIFE IN GEM LAKE: THE HANSEN FAMILY

By Tom Hansen

Gem Lake has always been home to our family. My great-grandparents purchased a farm they named Summit Farm, on a dirt road called County Road E around the turn of the century, over fifty years before Gem Lake became a city.

Christina and Hans were dairy farmers, who began selling their milk off a horse-drawn cart, house-to-house on the east side of St. Paul. Christina was the matriarch of the family, who served as a midwife for the community. They lived in a house near where the Tousley Parts building stands today. This is where my grandfather, Robert, and my father, Allen, were born and where I lived while growing up.

Gem Lake provided a place where my father skated and swam and cut ice in the winter for the ice house in the summer. I rode horses, and wandered through the woods and around the lake while growing up. In 1931, they stopped milking cows and sold some of the farm. We would buy some of the farmland back later.

The dairy business continued to grow after that. Using a new model, Summit Farm purchased raw milk from Wisconsin farmers, processed, packaged and sold it. Local residents from far and near would come to “the Dairy” to buy fresh dairy products and watch through a window into the processing plant as milk was being packaged.

My brother Skip and I were the fourth generation of Hansens to operate Summit Farm. We added an off-sale liquor store next to the dairy in 1971 and operated both until 1992.

My wife Beth and I have lived in Gem Lake, one mile from the farm for 34 years. We raised our three children here and our roots are deep. Gem Lake has changed over the years. From mid-1950 on, our family enjoyed trips to Hoffman’s Market for the best fresh meat anywhere, then next door to Lindorfer’s Bakery, for fresh-made bread, finally down to the Variety Store for whatever else we needed. But, everything changes and Gem Lake is changing too. We have a new town hall, a relatively new comprehensive plan, and a new vision for what Gem Lake will be in the future. My hope is that Gem Lake will continue to embrace its unique character while being open to meet the world which surrounds it. Thoughtful and progressive development and land use seems like a good philosophy for the future.



33. VICTORY GARDENS WERE ONCE COMMON IN GEM LAKE

Urban gardening projects, like those encouraged by Gem Lake's Garden Overlay Ordinance, have become more common throughout Minnesota, as witnessed by the proliferation of Farmer's Markets. It's important to note, however, that this is not a new idea--it's a recycling of a great old one.

During World War II, "Victory Gardens" sprang up all over Gem Lake. "The idea was to make citizens more self-sufficient," says long-time resident Connie Kunin. She was born into the shortages of the war years and remembers how hard it was to find some basic items. "I vaguely remember the garden out in our pasture, where we grew all kinds of vegetables. I don't remember all the specific kinds, because I was very little. I do remember asparagus and rhubarb."

Connie's family grew currants for jam and kept a flock of chickens. They also got a memorable and rather stubborn cow named Rosebud, that no one but her mother Eileen Bigelow would milk. "She (Eileen, not the cow) was very conscious of the need for self-sufficiency. She figured we would always have milk, eggs and vegetables. She was determined to have a large Victory Garden, I remember her referring to it and how important it was. To be honest, I remember the cow more than the garden.



During World War II, the U.S. government had to ration essentials such as milk, cheese, butter, sugar, coffee, canned goods and meat. The shortage of labor and transportation made the harvesting of crops and the movement of fruits and vegetables to market very difficult. To help with this problem, ordinary citizens were asked to pitch in and plant their own gardens and grow whatever fruits and vegetables they could. Some produce simply wasn't available at the store anymore.

These "Victory Gardens" were an important part of the war effort. An estimated 20 million Americans answered their country's call and started gardens in backyards, in empty lots and sometimes on city rooftops. According to the US Department of Agriculture, these 20 million gardens produced between 9-10 million tons of produce.

Families were also encouraged to can their own vegetables, partly so the commercially canned produce could be directed to military needs. In 1943, families bought 315,000 pressure cookers (used in canning), compared to 66,000 the year before.

Gardening was always a way of life in Gem Lake, says Dick Arcand, who turned a proud 90 years old last month. "There were so many gardens here, that the area around Hoffman's Corner was called *Gardenville*, and canning was very common."

Some gardeners grew tomatoes, cucumbers, onions, carrots, sweet corn and similar crops for their own use. Others were what was called truck farmers, meaning they grew produce for sale to local vendors.

"During the war, I guess they became, more or less, what you would call "Victory Gardens." It wasn't a new idea here, even then," says Dick. "Everyone in the area had a garden and grew things. My dad was a mail carrier and even he raised his own tomatoes. Almost everyone did some canning."

Starting in 1950, Dick and his wife ran Hoffman's Grocery, selling produce from all over the area, as well as from throughout the United States. By that time, produce was widely available again.

34. SCHEUNEMAN'S MARKET ONCE A BUSTLING PLACE

Although buying locally grown produce is trendy now, the idea reached its heyday in the 1930's and '40's when Scheuneman's Market was a Hoffman's Corner hot spot.

Located on the site of what is now the Gun Shop on County Road E, the market once supplied fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables to thousands of people in the White Bear and Gem Lake area.

The market was owned and managed by brothers Charley and Augie Scheuneman and opened sometime around 1928. Charley grew much of the produce on the nearby farm, which was located behind and around the market, approximately in the area of Barnett Chrysler and beyond. The 40-acre farm annually produced tomatoes, carrots, potatoes and all varieties of vegetables. Augie and his wife Rose worked in the shop.

The brothers supplemented their extensive crop output with other produce they bought from truck farmers in the Gem Lake and White Bear area. During the summer months, Charley also made daily trips to the St. Paul markets, which were located in the approximate area of the Embassy Suites in downtown St. Paul. These trips had multiple purposes. They sold their extra produce and purchased varieties of fruits and vegetables they didn't have immediately available. Charley's daughter Mildred LaBathe, who worked at Scheuneman's Market starting at age 12, remembers how her father would load up his truck the night before with various crates of vegetables.



Pictured above, Scheuneman's Market on County Road E in 1940. The shop was on the site of the present day Gun Shop.

He would start the trek downtown at 3:00 a.m., sometimes assisted by the older children in the family. (Mildred was too young to tag along at the time.) On the way back home down Arcade Avenue, they often picked up teens on summer break who wanted to work on the farm for the day and earn some spending money. For a whole day's hard work they could make as much as a dollar.

Mildred spent many summers working at the market until she got married during World War II to Bill LaBathe, who was in the Navy at the time. She remembers the shop also sold ice cream, fresh bread and other items. Although there was some degree of competition with the nearby Hoffman's Market, the rivalry was a friendly one. Mildred and her family were good friends with Shirley and Dick Arcand, who ran Hoffman's Market starting in 1950. Hoffman's was located in the still existing strip mall across the street from White Bear Floral.

"As a child, I remember going with my mother to buy fresh fruit and vegetables at Great Uncle Augie's," said Tom Hansen of Gem Lake. Augie's sister Clara, who married into the Hansen family, was Tom's grandmother. "Scheuneman's Market was always full of fresh, local produce, grown in the area. As I remember, the market was seasonal, and once the harvest was done, the doors closed for the year. It is another wonderful memory of my life growing up in a small town in the country."



Pictured at left, Mildred Scheuneman LaBathe and her father Charley on the Scheuneman family farm in Gem Lake in 1929. Old Highway 61 is visible in the background.

The market continued on for decades until it was sold to Clarence Wild following Charley's illness and eventual death. By this time, the emergence of the "supermarket" and major changes in the main roadway had already led to changes in the business.

Until the mid-1950's, Highway 61 ran right in front of White Bear Floral, skirting close to Scheuneman's Market, curving around the area of the current day Stadium Bar and Grill and running down what is now Hoffman Road near the White Bear Rental Center. The major shift in the road was done to straighten out the then very curvy Highway 61, but it shifted traffic slightly away from Hoffman's Corner businesses and had an effect on their sales.

When Charley died in 1955, his widow Anna sold the family farm to Robert Hansen, who owned Summit Dairy at the time and was Tom Hansen's grandfather. This included the family homestead, which was located near the most northern building on the grounds of Barnett Chrysler. The farm had been originally established by Charley's father Albert Scheuneman, after whom the Road is named.

The idea of locally grown produce has now come full circle, with the establishment of urban gardens on Hansen land on County Road E. Local gardeners tend the land, growing a huge variety of vegetables for local consumption and for sale at local farmers' markets.



Pictured above are Charley and Anna Scheuneman, who were part owners of the market. Charley was the son of Albert Scheueman, after whom the road is named. Pictured above right, the Scheuneman family home in Gem Lake.

35. FREDDIE ROTH'S TAVERN: QUITE A SPOT!

It wasn't the Ritz Carlton, but it wasn't a dive either. It was just a great place to get a good meal. Freddie Roth's Tavern was once located at the current site of Vera Auto Sales on County Road E. Perhaps, slightly dilapidated, but much cherished would better describe the establishment that was once a popular Hoffman's Corner "hang-out."

"There were known for their food, which was really good, " says Dick Arcand, who once ran nearby Hoffman's Market with his wife Shirley. "Sometimes we would grab something to eat there on our way home. On Friday nights they served lobster and they had great spaghetti."

Although the colorful tavern attracted a loyal following from the legal community in St. Paul, for a reason no one can remember, the place may have had its own legal issues. According to local legend, the place never actually had a liquor license. Oops. Freddie seems to have dispensed drinks from a bottle that often resided in his jacket pocket. Rumor also has it that it was also a popular spot for the Ramsey County Commissioners to hang out way back in the 30's and '40's.. No one can remember why that was either...It was a fun and friendly spot and everyone seemed to feel safe there, according to the locals.

Lorraine Birkeland, who owns White Bear Floral, also remembers the steak and fries at Freddie Roth's Tavern. "They were famous for those dinners. Everyone seemed to like them. We used to eat there once in a while."

The place was a popular after work hang-out for brothers Charley and Augie Scheuneman, who ran Scheuneman's Market, which was also on County Road E, located at the site of the present day Gun Shop.

The interior of Freddie's Tavern included a dance floor and an area that accommodated live music. It was a popular spot for anniversary parties, wedding receptions and other events. Freddie had a small staff, usually just a cook and maybe a server or two. He often donned an apron and did the serving himself. He lived in the back, right off the kitchen area, according to Richard Arcand, Dick Arcand's son.



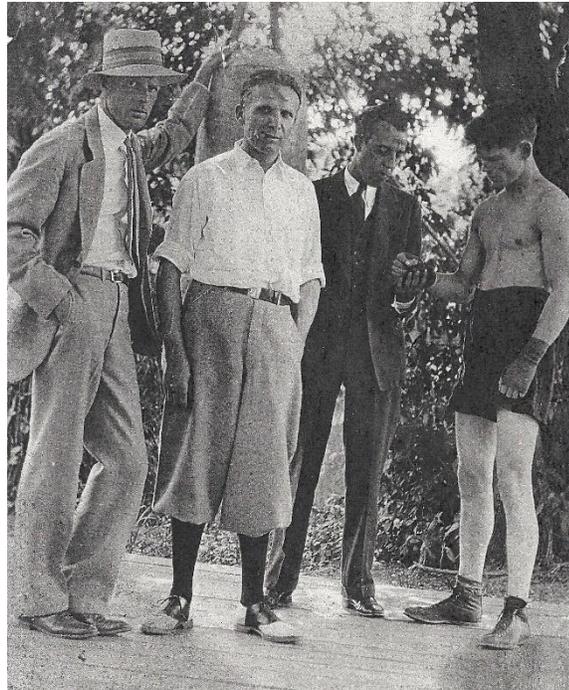
Pictured behind the white sign is Freddie Roth's Tavern, which once occupied the site where Vera Auto is now located. To the right of the tree in the background is Scheuneman's Market.

Freddie's failure to obtain that all important license finally caught up to him. When he was out of town, an off-duty sheriff stopped by to check out the rumors that he regularly served liquor. Once he was served an alcoholic drink, he arrested the bartender, a woman named Minnie. (Tom Hansen thinks Minnie may have been a relative of his.)

Freddie got himself a well-known lawyer and the case was heard in front of Judge Otis. According to Dick Arcand, the judge offered him a choice of an \$800 fine or a year's probation. He paid the fine, perhaps so he could go right on doing what he was doing.

Eventually Freddie became ill and the tavern was closed. Although Freddie had been in business for decades, he died without a penny. One-time mayor of Gem Lake, Henry Hoffman, paid his funeral expenses.

The building was moved to the lot next door where it sat for five years. The site where it was moved is now the site of Enterprise Car Rental.



Pictured above is Freddie Roth in the white shirt and shorts (?). At far right is boxer Jack Dempsey.

The move took place because Shorty Urban wanted to build a gas station there. Shorty was married to one of Henry Hoffman's daughters. Henry owned the lot by this time and wanted to make the gas station a reality.

Eventually the station was called HCO, which stood for Hoffman Company Oil. The old tavern building was going to be donated to the fire department for a controlled burn

but instead it was finally sold to Dick Arcand's son, Richard Arcand. Rich moved the building to its current site on Goose Lake Road in 1969.

"I was just married and had a daughter and a set of twins," said Richard Arcand. "My father-in-law, Henry Hoffman, sold me the tavern building for \$1, but we had to pay the cost of moving it, which amounted to about \$1100."

The place had all wood floors, part of which were used for a nicely sized dance floor. The walls were covered with paneling that had absorbed the smell of a generation worth of cigarette smoke. There was a big long mahogany bar and a stone fireplace that got left behind when the building was moved.

Richard and his father Dick did extensive remodeling to make the old building a livable home. They covered the worn floors with carpeting, threw away the paneling and took the interior down to the studs. They kept the old restroom signs out of sentiment, but there are few signs that the structure once functioned as a tavern. It is now an attractive home on Goose Lake Road. The original site of the tavern has gone through several transformations. For years, Shorty Urban operated his gas station. The building is now on the lot where Vera Auto Sales is located. It is very fitting that the new facility also includes a brand new restaurant called Black Sea which is located in the old HCO building.



The photo at left is the original tavern building, now a house on Goose Lake Road.

36. THERE REALLY WAS A LITTLE RED SCHOOL HOUSE IN GEM LAKE, SORT OF

It might not have been right out of "*Little House on the Prairie*," but there was once a cute county school house located on the current site of Barnett Chrysler's showroom building near the intersection of County Road E and Highway 61.

It was a small brick building, officially known as school 19-B in the White Bear School System. In the 1930's the school had between 30 and 40 students, grades 1-8. All students were taught from the school's only classroom by the school's only teacher, who was named Miss Frances Merry.

Lorraine Birkeland, who walked across the street from her home to attend the school, remembers Miss Merry as a "very patient woman."

Millie Scheuneman LaBathe, daughter of Charley Scheuneman, who operated nearby Scheuneman's Market, attended grades 1-8 in 19B and remembers Miss Merry very well. The teacher lived in St. Paul and rode the bus to work each day. Her work day was a full one, as she called on each grade separately for reading, writing and arithmetic instruction.



The grades were organized by rows, running from front to back, with first graders on one side of the room and eighth graders on the other. A section of the large classroom was set aside as a library area, but all activity took place within this large open area. Blackboards covered the walls on all four sides. The school was opened sometime around 1929 and was noteworthy for its indoor plumbing.

"I remember how excited we would get at Christmas time," said Millie. "The parents would come in and build a little stage where we would have our Christmas plays and events."

Millie lived only about a block away in a brick house on a hill, located at the other end of the Barnett Chrysler lot.

The basement of the school was one large room, often used by the Community Club for local card parties." I remember my mother often took part in these events," said Millie. By 1950, the school was still in operation. On Memorial Day weekend, neighborhood families would gather at the school for a picnic and the annual doll parade. One year, Dick Arcand and his friend Art Birkeland, who ran White Bear Floral with his wife Lorraine, dressed up as dolls and participated in the parade. (See photo below. Dick is riding, Art is pushing.) The doll parade tradition had not yet started when Millie was attending school there, but her daughter participated in the parade at some point.

Another fun event was a game day that schools in the county participated in. Schools competed against each other in sports such as dodge ball. "The kids all had a lot of fun," said Millie.



At left: the inside of School 19-B showing teacher Miss Frances Merry standing in the back, about 1936.

No one knows exactly when the school was shut down, probably sometime during the mid-1950's. The School District #624 was formed in 1952 for the White Bear area and a period of consolidation began for small district schools in the vicinity. Central High School in White Bear was opened in 1918, but the much larger North Campus school was built in 1964. This school is still in use today. In 1972, the South Campus, then called Mariner School was added.

School 19-B was eventually torn down and the land sold to Henry Hoffman, who eventually sold it to the car dealership. By 1969 when the Roth Tavern was moved to another location, the little brick school next door was a distant memory.



Top Photo: Millie Scheuneman LaBathe, about 1936. Middle Photo: the annual doll parade, about 1950. The two "dolls" are Dick Arcand and Art Birkeland. Bottom Photo: Shirley Hoffman Arcand, about 1950.

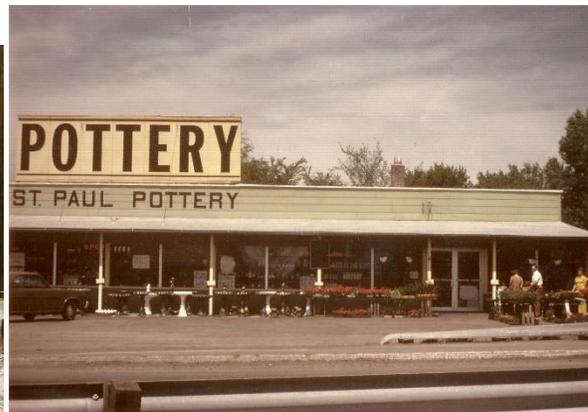
37. LONG TIME RESIDENT AL DRUMMOND LEAVES US

Long-time Gem Lake resident Al Drummond passed away January 22 at the age of 83. Al is survived by his wife of 58 years, Edith, four children and four grandchildren.

Al and his wife ran St. Paul Pottery Company from the late 1960's to the early 1990's. Starting in about 1974, the company took over the building that once housed the old Scheunemann's Market on County Road E. The building now houses the Gun Shop and several other businesses.

As the business expanded, Al and Edith built another building behind the original site and expanded into it. They rented out the original building to various tenants. Later, they made part of the new building into their residence also.

He and Edith, who was a school teacher, moved their home from White Bear to Gem Lake, where Edith still resides today. St. Paul Pottery was a retailer of all kinds of pottery that Al bought from various sources. He also specialized in making things from concrete that were very popular through a variety of retail outlets, such as fountains, bird baths, benches, tables and chairs, etc. "They were all made from molds and they were pretty popular with everyone," said Edith.



Pictured above right: The building that once housed Scheunemann's Market on County Road E later became the St. Paul Pottery Company, which was founded in the 1960's by Al Drummond and later expanded to a new building behind this one. Pictured at left: Al Drummond on his 83rd birthday.

Al moved to Minnesota from Wisconsin when he was about 12. His family owned and operated the Daylight Food Market, which was located for years on 4th Street in Downtown White Bear Lake. They were four children in the family, including Al, and they all worked at the market.

Al worked all his life and was a very good business man. "He was a very friendly guy and loved people," said Edith. "He loved to walk around and talk to all the people in the building he owned and rented out."

38. THE HONEYMOON HOUSE: A GEM LAKE LEGEND

It was just a modest little house, but for some it had rather magical and romantic qualities. Called "the Honeymoon House" it was home to at least six and maybe more newly married couples in the 1950's and '60's. The house was once located approximately where Moldings, Doors and More is now, near the corner of County Road E and Highway 61. The topography of the area was different then. Highway 61 then ran in front of White Bear Floral, instead of west of the shopping center building that still exists to this day. It was much more of a residential area than it is now, with the homes of Henry Hoffman and his brother Bob Hoffman located nearby.

The house itself was owned by Henry Hoffman and rented started about 1932 to the Wohletz family, the folks who came here to run the flower store. Despite very modest rent, the family no longer needed it after about 1952. "My parents (Henry and Elizabeth Wohletz) built a new house next to White Bear Floral after the realignment of Highway 61," said Lorraine Birkeland, who still runs the floral shop.

At right: Elizabeth Wohletz, with her granddaughter Cindy Birkeland in front of the Honeymoon House.



Henry Hoffman, later the first mayor of Gem Lake, had the house moved across County Road E and placed on Scheuneman Road, slightly north of the present day restaurant and a little north and east of Vera Auto. The move had become necessary due to the massive road construction project that changed the course of Highway 61. He then began renting out the little house to a succession of young couples. The house had two small bedrooms, a bath, a dining room and a tiny kitchen.

The first honeymooners who rented the house were Millie and Bill LaBathe. Millie had grown up in Gem Lake. Her father, Charley Scheuneman, ran Scheuneman's Market on County Road E. (Now the site of the Gun Shop.) She and her husband moved in with her parents right after he got out of the Navy after World War II. Housing was in short supply at that time. They moved around a bit, including the downstairs portion of a duplex, before the small white house became available. "We were happy to get it. Houses were hard to find then."

The couple spent one happy year there before the post-war housing boom allowed them to move into their own new house about a mile away. Millie remembers that the rent was only \$35 a month then. The couples who followed included Wally and Betty Nelson, John and Linda Hurt, Dave and Joyce Hoffman, Rick and Shirley Arcand, Steve Hoffman and his wife, and probably others. (Dave and Steve Hoffman are the sons of Bob Hoffman, Henry's brother, Rick is the son of Dick Arcand, who was married to Henry Hoffman's daughter Shirley, and no, not everyone in Gem Lake is related.)

Redevelopment in the Hoffman's Corner Area of Gem Lake caused the house to have to be moved again. Shorty Urban, who married Henry Hoffman's daughter Vonnie had built the HCO gas station. The house, along with Freddie Roth's Tavern were both in the way. The Honeymoon House was moved about 1965, according to Rick Arcand. The tavern building was moved several years later, after Rick and Shirley bought it and made it their home. Both homes are now on Goose Lake Road, although they have been extensively remodeled.

Rick and Shirley were the last couple to rent the little white house as honeymooners. They had one child when they moved there in 1968. At this point the little home had been placed in its current spot on Goose Lake Road and worked out just fine for the young couple, even after they had twins. "The kitchen was pretty small, but we probably would have lived there even longer. We moved after about a year because our home became available (the tavern building.) The Honeymoon House was inherited by Henry Hoffman's daughter Shirley Arcand when he died. She sold it to her son Patrick Arcand, Richard's brother, who lives there to this day. Only faint traces of the original building can be seen now, mostly on the east side. But, people who are familiar with the house like to think a little bit of the honeymoon happiness lives on there too....

39. HISTORIC PHOTOS OF THE HOFFMAN'S CORNER AREA OF GEM LAKE

At left is the home of business man Henry Hoffman, of Hoffman's Corner fame. He was also the first mayor of Gem Lake. The home was located on what was then Highway 61, but what is now Scheuneman Road. We are looking west at the home, which was built in the 1930's. Highway 61 is now be located behind the site where the house once was. Ten Below Motors is now on roughly the same site today. The photo at right was taken behind and to the right of the Hoffman House. It shows Rick Arcand, son of Dick and Shirley Arcand at left; Cindy Birkeland, daughter of Lorraine and Art Birkeland in the center; and Larry Arcand at right. Larry, who was Rick's little brother, was tragically killed in an accident during the realignment of Highway 61 in the early '50's. The photo was taken around the same timeframe. Over Cindy's shoulder is the rear of the Honeymoon House, which was profiled last month. The house opened onto County Road E, which is pictured in the far background.



40. CELEBRATING 44 YEARS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

For 44 years, the White Bear Lake Montessori School has been providing quality early childhood education to students in our area. This Gem Lake based organization was founded in 1970 and is now located at the Corner of County Road E and LaBore Road.

The school utilizes a curriculum designed by Italian Dr. Maria Montessori, which is based on children developing a love of learning in their early years, that they can carry forward through their lives.

The school moved to its current facility in 1998 and now serves four main groups of kids: toddlers, preschool students, kindergarteners, and elementary students, grades 1-3. There are approximately 80-100 students at the school at any one time, spread through five classrooms. "We have one room devoted to toddlers, three classrooms devoted to a mixture of preschool and kindergarten students and one classroom for the elementary school students, 1st through 3rd grade," according to Head of School Marnie McPherson. "We blend various ages in every room, so they can learn from each other too."

The Montessori concept has a philosophy of following the interests of the child in order to achieve academic success. "Children learn at their own pace and according to their own interests," said Marnie. "Yes, we expose them to letters and numbers, and things like that, but we try not to push areas of learning that the child may not be ready for, or has no interest in yet. All the learning is individualized to the child."

This means there are few group lessons. "When a child is interested in or developmentally ready for a certain academic area, they explode into learning and often progress very quickly. Our goal is to help each child develop a love of learning, and because they play such an active role in their learning, the children find a lot of joy in the process."



The Montessori philosophy was created in Italy by Dr. Maria Montessori in 1907 and has since spread to nearly all countries of the world. The White Bear Montessori program is a full day or half day program and is privately funded. "Tuition is mid-range of other private schools in the area. We also do our best to support families in need by several state funded financial aid options or private grants," said Marnie.

The school is very proud of its academic record. There are over 200 Montessori schools in Minnesota, but only 12 of them are fully accredited by the AMI (Association of Montessori International). White Bear Montessori is one of them. For more information call 651-429-3710.

41. THE COUNTRY LOUNGE: CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF FRIENDLY TIMES

The place has a "small town bar atmosphere with great regulars," said one fan of Gem Lake's oldest watering hole, the Country Lounge. "It's like visiting family."

The Country Lounge, which is located at 3590 Hoffman Road, recently celebrated its 50th anniversary. The cozy neighborhood bar is located next to White Bear Floral and is owned by John Birkeland.

According to the manager of the bar, Laurel Amlee, the Country Lounge has remained popular due to the number of special, fun events that it hosts regularly. This includes costume parties, live music, pig roasts, etc.

The Country Lounge has been in business since 1964. Prior to that, the original bar was called the Burlap Lounge. It was owned by John's father Art and was remarkable because it had a dirt floor.

The 50th Anniversary Party for the bar was a big deal for patrons. "It was really special."

Laurel has managed the bar for 8 years and started working there 4 years earlier as a part-time bartender. "I would describe us as a 'working man's bar. We are open until 2 a.m. We get a lot of people coming off of work, neighborhood people and a lot of regulars. I would say our busiest time is between 5-9 p.m.

Laurel says the regular traffic results from creating a friendly atmosphere and always having something fun or special going on. For instance, on football Sundays, there are often special menus. On a recent Sunday, when the Vikings were playing the Green Bay Packers, the Country Lounge got into the spirit by serving Tater Top Hot Dish and cheese soup.



"Once a month, at least, we try to do something different or special. This month we are holding a benefit on December 21 for an employee who recently lost a brother. The money raised will help the family with final expenses," says Laurel. "In January, we are doing an ice fishing contest that will involve chili and prizes."

Then there are the regular events, such as meat raffles on Friday nights and Bingo every Saturday.

In addition to loyal customers, Laurel credits bar owner John Birkeland as "the driving force behind our efforts. In the twelve years I have worked there, he has supported everything I have asked him to do. For instance, we have free pool tables five days a week, who else does that?" (There is a charge on Fridays and Saturdays.)

Laurel believes in using social media to promote the bar on line, so the Country Lounge does have a Facebook page. Check it out!