

# Gem Lake News

Gretchen Artig-Swomley, Newsletter Editor

## Special Interest Articles:

- History of Gem Lake
- New City Clerk
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## Upcoming Recycling Dates:

- May 19
- June 2
- June 16
- *Tip: put out your bin the night before for 7 a.m. pick-up.*

## Welcome Gem Lake's New City Clerk

Melissa Lawrence joined the staff of Gem Lake as our new acting city clerk and administrative assistant on March 29. Since that time, she has been engaged in the many and various day to day activities that make up the life of a city clerk. This has involved processing permits, answering questions from citizens, helping set up meetings and taking minutes, learning utility billing procedures, etc.

Melissa served in the military for 8 years, as well as working as an administrative assistant for a grocery chain and as a convenience store manager. She and her husband have four children and live in the Forest Lake area. Please welcome her to Gem Lake. The City Council also thanks Gloria Tessier for her service to our community.



## Deer Hunting Ordinance Examined

The topic of deer hunting and the discharge of weapons in Gem Lake will be the subject of a virtual City Council Workshop on May 10. The public is encouraged to attend this session, which will focus on Ordinance 124B (Available on the Gem Lake website).

During this workshop, the council is seeking input on how, or whether, our archery deer hunting ordinance can be improved, edited, clarified or otherwise changed to benefit the public. Currently, a land-owner can apply for a permit to conduct a deer hunt on his or her own property within very strict guidelines. For instance, the property on which the hunt takes place must be at least five acres, but can be made up of several parcels joined together, as long as all property owners agree to it.

There are strict rules about deer stand placement, timing of hunts, etc. Deer hunts have taken place for the past few years without incident, but various concerns have been raised about size, goals, etc. (continued on page 4)



## Gem Lake's Colorful History in a Nutshell (by Jim Lindner)

We hope this brief introduction will help you better understand the community and transmit a sense of pride similar to what Gem Lake's residents have demonstrated since its incorporation in 1959. Though among the smallest of Ramsey County's incorporated cities, Gem Lake has been a presence since the earliest days of area settlement.

Gem Lake officially traces its origins to a voter referendum on June 30, 1959 when over 100 of its future residents voted to separate from White Bear Township and form what was the known as the Village of Gem Lake. Well before this date people knew of the small lake that sparkled in the sunlight akin to a gemstone, a lake that would lend its name to the eventual city that grew up around it. A Ramsey County atlas published in 1874 already identified the small lake southwest of White Bear Lake as Gem Lake. Of course, neither the cities of Gem Lake or White Bear Lake existed at this time. All the land was part of White Bear Township which had been formed on May 11, 1858, the same day that Minnesota entered the union as the 32<sup>nd</sup> state.

White Bear Township traces its original population to branches of the indigenous Lakota and Ojibwe peoples who inhabited the native hardwood forest and oak savannah open spaces of what became east central Minnesota. Rivalries amongst the indigenous inhabitants pushed territorial boundaries back and forth for millennia prior to the arrival of European explorers. Such explorers often stood upon a distant shore and boldly proclaimed all the land now belonged to their respective monarch, often the source of income for said explorer.

But claiming land and occupying it were two different things, and eventually individual Europeans came to further explore and determine how best to earn a living from the land. In the case of the land that eventually became White Bear Township, fur traders from France, who came to the area via the French colony of Canada, were among the earliest to visit the area. These men from France (and in the early 1600s there were no French women accompanying the men) became known as French-Canadiens and followed the prized beaver for its pelts, which was popular in European fashion at the time.



*This is an aerial shot of Gem Lake, taken around 1929. The Gem Lake Villas area is lower left. The lake is upper middle. Goose Lake Road is visible across the upper portion of the photo.*

Though eventually the armies of Great Britain defeated the armies of France for control of the North American continent, many local names still reflect the French-Canadian (Canadian with an "e" being the French spelling while Canadian with an "a" is the Anglicized spelling of a European with ties to Canada) heritage imprinted on the area. Modern day Little Canada is a community south and west of present-day Gem Lake and visitors are informed on the Little Canada welcome sign that it was first settled in 1844. Its name leaves little doubt whence its first white settlers originated. French-Canadian fur traders left their mark on much of St. Paul and its surrounding suburbs. Names like Gervais, LaBore, Paranteau, Tessier, Vadnais, and others still identify roads, lakes, and landmarks in the area. These were names all associated with the fur trade and subsequent settlement by Canadian natives. Many farmed, some owned stores, while others still served as teachers or professionals.

As the United States grew out of its former British colonies, new waves of settlers found their way to Minnesota and specifically to White Bear Township. Settlers with ties to Great Britain, Ireland, Germany, Sweden, Norway and many other European countries made the perilous ocean journey to America. They joined with others already living in places like Massachusetts or New York to expand  
(continued on page 3)

## Gem Lake's Colorful History in a Nutshell (continued from page 2)

America's boundaries and settle in land that would become Minnesota. Minnesota occupied a unique portion of the North American continent. Land east of the Mississippi River was originally included with the area ceded to the new United States upon the conclusion of its War for Independence from Great Britain in 1783. Land west of the Mississippi had been purchased by President Thomas Jefferson from the French under Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte in the 1803 Louisiana Purchase. Upon statehood, Minnesota welcomed all who dared to brave the cold winters and relatively short growing season to farm its land and harvest its natural resources. St. Paul was its capitol, and the local farmers were well positioned to provide food and dairy products to its growing population. The journey from White Bear Township along early roads to markets in St. Paul were often an all-day outing. In the early 1870s the railroad arrived, cutting hours from the journey and making commerce between the Township and the city much easier.

The 1880s saw new cities growing up around St. Paul, similar to satellites orbiting a planet. White Bear Lake broke away from the Township to establish a village in 1881. South of White Bear, North St. Paul followed a similar path a few years later. Many times, the arrival of the railroad made such villages possible. Transportation is a key factor in determining where and when settlement occurs.



*Hoffman's Corner area at Highway 61 and County Road E in the late 1940's.*

The dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century saw continued growth in St. Paul. Those with the means to travel, looked to White Bear as a place for recreation and relaxation away from urban congestion.

Resorts sprung up around White Bear Lake from the modern city of the same name east to present-day Mahtomedi, a native name that likewise translates to "White Bear".

After two world wars, the area formerly known for its resorts became a popular destination for those who wished to live outside of urban St. Paul. In the early 1950s a company that originated along the north shore of Lake Superior brought its corporate headquarters to Maplewood, roughly six miles south of White Bear. Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing, or 3M, grew from a maker of sandpaper to a multitude of household and industrial products and many of its executives drove along White Bear Avenue or East Road (later McKnight Road, taking its name from 3M's first chief executive) from their offices to their homes in White Bear Lake. These roads brought many others to both White Bear Township and White Bear Lake. Their arrival, however, taxed the capacity of the township's government to provide services such as city water and sewer.

Taking cues from White Bear Lake's 1881 decision to incorporate their own city, other places such as Vadnais Heights and North Oaks voted to separate from White Bear Township. White Bear Lake also extended its borders into land formerly governed by the Township. Part of this land included areas west of US Highway 61, in what is now Gem Lake.

Gem Lake was unique among the areas that were transforming from township to city governments. The eastern portions of Gem Lake were occupied by farmers, many of French-Canadian descent. Around the water body Gem Lake itself, families with ties to St. Paul businesses lived on large acre estates. Other estate owners owned large farms or even served in important US governmental offices. Given the closeness of the farmers and their wealthier neighbors, many of the barriers that might naturally separate two economic classes were often ignored. Farmers looking for extra spending money frequently performed carpentry or repair tasks needed by their wealthy neighbors. Some of those farmers even aided in local fox hunts that were popular amongst the business owners.

During one of White Bear Lake's land annexation moves, the residents of Gem lake took exception ***(continued page 5)***

## City News

### Return to Live Meetings!!

It's been over a year since the Governor of Minnesota declared a state of emergency due to the pandemic. At that point, most cities switched to virtual meetings to conduct general business, such as city council meetings. As vaccination rates rise and COVID 19 infection rates begin to decline, many cities are returning, or have already returned, to conducting live meetings.

Gem Lake has made the decision to return to "normal" beginning with the May 18 City Council meeting. This meeting will be live and will happen at Heritage Hall.

To celebrate our first live meeting in a while, we are serving coffee and cookies. The meeting will start at 7:00 p.m. Masks and socially distancing will still be required. Chairs in the meeting room are marked for distance, hand sanitizer will be available. You know the drill. We hope to see you then. Please note: you are invited to bring a donation for the White Bear Area Emergency Food Shelf and help fill up our new food shelf drop off bins.

### Partnering with The White Bear Food Shelf

The City of Gem Lake has been an active partner with the White Bear Area Emergency Food Shelf for many years. Often the City Council votes to contribute all or most of our charitable gambling receipts from pull-tab sales to their very important efforts to end hunger in our community.

There are now donation bins in Heritage Hall for your non-perishable donations of food, pet supplies and basic toiletries. We can accept monetary donations (no cash please) or you can send your checks directly to the Food Shelf (1884 Whitaker Street, White Bear Lake, MN 55110).

Also, Perry Peterson, Executive Director of the White Bear Lake Emergency Food Shelf, will be attending our May 18 meeting in-person and will give an overview of their efforts to help our community, especially during the summer months.

Their web-site always indicates current and particular needs if you are in doubt about what to donate. Right now, its things like size 5 and 6 diapers, cooking oils, flour, sugar, etc. Their web-site address is [whitebearfoodshelf.org](http://whitebearfoodshelf.org).

### Deer Hunting Ordinance

**(continued from pg. 1)** Some members of the public think the rules are too stringent, while others think this type of hunt should only be conducted by agencies approved by the Minnesota DNR. Currently, Gem Lake hunts must follow all State deer hunting rules, and each hunter must have a license and must have certified training. **Please note: this will be a zoom meeting. If we have your email address, we will send an agenda and link to the meeting shortly. If we don't have your email, please let us know. Your feedback is important. The meeting will start at 7:00 p.m. on May 10**

### After Hour Emergency Number for Public Works

In the event of a public works emergency after our normal business hours, there is a number you should call. Gem Lake's normal business hours are 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday. An public works emergency is defined as a threat to public safety or critical infrastructure. (Not a pot hole, or something that can wait.) Examples of an emergency would be a watermain break, (please don't call City of Vadnais Heights), a city sewer line back up or the collapse of a manhole. The phone number to call after business hours is 651-755-9828. The City of Gem Lake has a cooperative arrangement with White Bear Township to handle these emergencies.

### Dog Licenses are Due for Renewal

Recently, you probably got a letter in the mail about renewing your dog license. The City of Gem Lake requires that all dogs over 6 months in our city have a license. The cost is \$10. You must also produce the certificate showing that your dog has a current rabies vaccine. One big benefit of having a license is your dog's safety. In the unlikely event your dog is lost, that license number will help get your darling reunited with his or her family. What do you if your dog is lost? Call the non-emergency number at the White Bear Police Department. Often, people bring lost dogs to them. The police department sometimes posts pictures on their web-site or on Facebook. Also, consider Gem Lake Next Door. If you download the app, you can post a photo of your dog. I have personally reunited several dogs with their families this way. Check it out.

## Gem Lake History in a Nutshell--Concluded

to being suddenly included in White Bear Lake. White Bear Lake represented smaller lots with city water and sewer, the cost of which was borne by the residents in the form of assessments on their property taxes. Large acre estates or farms would pay a dear price should they be assessed for city water and sewer. To prevent the annexation from becoming final, several Gem Lake residents filed suit in state court challenging the right of White Bear Lake to expand into Gem Lake. The Minnesota Supreme Court agreed that Gem Lake's ties were closer to St. Paul than to White Bear Lake and overturned the annexation vote.

Gem Lake was once again part of White Bear Township, but the writing was on the wall. Annexation likely would not be overturned a second time, so before White Bear Lake could redo its annexation vote, Gem Lake residents voted to form their own city and created the Village of Gem Lake.

Governing a small area with a small population sounds simple and easy, but the reality is that people have certain needs and will look to their elected officials to provide those needs. Police protection, a fire department, road maintenance, and schools are just a few things that people expect their government to provide. Given its small size, Gem Lake was in no position to create all of these services on its own. It relied on its neighbors to lend assistance. White Bear Lake's school district included Gem Lake's children in its schools. White Bear Lake's fire department agreed to provide service to Gem Lake. Ramsey County also provided services. For many years Gem Lake's police was supplied by the Ramsey



**Henry Hoffman, Gem Lake's first Mayor.**

County Sheriff. Years later, Gem Lake contracted with White Bear Lake for police protection, but it still has access to the Ramsey County Sheriff's services. Newer housing developments at Hilary Farm and the Gem Lake Villas brought city water and sewer to certain residential areas of the city.

Modern Gem Lake is a fully participating city in the greater Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area. It plays its role as it interacts with White Bear Lake, Vadnais Heights, and White Bear Township (yes, the Township still exists, the only such Township in Ramsey County) to receive its essential services. Gem Lake is part of the Vadnais Lake Area Water Management Organization (VLAWMO) a body that looks to protect ground and surface water resources assuring that water is safe to drink yet does not threaten to flood basements and yards. Gem Lake participates in regional planning through the Metropolitan Council. It works with Ramsey County during elections. Its main arterial roads, LaBore Road, Goose Lake Road, and Otter Lake Road are all maintained by Ramsey County. Gem Lake contracts with either other cities or private companies for snow removal or road maintenance.



***This is the Gem Lake School, part of the White Bear School District, located near Highway 61 and County E, where the Barnett Car Dealership is now. About 1955?***

Our thanks to City Council Member **Jim Lindner** for writing this article.

Do you have historical photos of Gem Lake that you can share with us? The City has a small data base of photos that we would like to expand as possible. You can email your photos to:

Melissa.lawrence@gemlakemn.org.

## The City of Gem Lake

PHONE:  
(651) 747-2792

FAX:  
(651) 747-2795

City Hall Address:  
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Gem Lake, MN 55110

GENERAL E-MAIL:  
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Newsletter e-mail:  
[gretchenas@comcast.net](mailto:gretchenas@comcast.net)

This newsletter is also posted on the city's web-site under the "Documents" section and the "News and Updates" section.

### After Hours Public Works Emergency Number:

651-755-9828

(For water main breaks, main city sewer back up, collapse of manhole, etc. Or call 911)

**We're on the Web!**

See us at:

[www.gemlakemn.org](http://www.gemlakemn.org)

## Meetings: May and June, 2021

The following Gem Lake meeting will be held in the months of May and June.

### May 10, 2021

City Council Workshop Meeting at 7:00 p.m.  
**Virtual Meeting-get the link by giving us your email address, if we don't already have it.**

### May 18, 2021

City Council Meeting at 7:00 p.m. LIVE MEETING AT HERITAGE HALL

### June 1, 2021

Planning Commission Meeting at 7:00 p.m. at Heritage Hall

### June 14, 2021

City Council Workshop at 7:00 p.m. CANCELED

### June 15, 2021

City Council Meeting at 7:00 p.m. at Heritage Hall.

**See also the Gem Lake web-site for more information.**

## Your Gem Lake City Council

### Gretchen Artig-Swomley-Mayor

Phone: 651-260-9742

### City Council Members:

#### Laurel Amlee

Phone: 651-347-8357

#### Len Cacioppo

Phone: 651-796-3222

#### Jim Lindner

Phone: 651-262-6678

### Ben Johnson

Phone: 612-968-7583

For more information on meetings, city ordinances, recent events, permit procedures, etc. please consult the Gem Lake web-site. The address is [www.gemlakemn.org](http://www.gemlakemn.org)

Each Gem Lake Newsletter is also posted

on the web-site under the "Documents" and "News and Updates" section.

Please email your ideas, comments and suggestions. See box at left for detailed contact information.

**CITY OF GEM LAKE**  
4200 Otter Lake Road  
Gem Lake, MN 55110

