Boot Lake

This narrative about Boot Lake is based on an interview that was conducted with Flonny and Beverley Grant on January 27, 2003. Flonny, who moved to Boot Lake in the 1930s, discussed the history of the area and the changes that she has seen take place. Beverley, Flonny’s daughter-in-law, has lived in the Boot Lake area since the 9th grade and provided details about the more recent changes in the area.

Personal History

Flonny Grant moved from Maine to the Tampa area in 1926 at the age of 22. Flonny said about her reasons for making such a big move: “People have a reason for moving. I didn’t like the winters. I didn’t like trudging through the snow to go to school.” She found work at the Exchange National Bank and eventually met and fell in love with a man by the name of John Grant, who often traveled through Tampa on business. It was because of Flonny and John’s relationship that she first came to Boot Lake. She told the story:

“Well, John, my husband to be, was out of Atlanta. His home was up in Atlanta and this was on his circuit. He asked me to marry him and we couldn’t negotiate right at that time because he was there and I was here. And I was in an apartment. One day, I handled that account in the bank and this place came into the bank and it was Isabel who came over and said, ‘Flonny, this sounds like what you have been looking for.’ It was kind of holding up our marriage and we wanted a place before. So that’s what we did. She called the company that handled it and said, ‘Don’t do anything until I contact you. I already have a customer.’ He was still in Atlanta. I went out to see it and I knew at once it was what we wanted; a two-story home on four acres of land. It wasn't even named Orange Grove Drive… [It was] Barclay Road or something like that. So I sent him a telegram in Atlanta saying that I found a house and to come when he could; I could hold it a little while. That night about 9 o'clock my door rang. He just got into the car in Atlanta and drove all the way through. It wasn’t anything like it is now, you know with the roads ending. So he felt the same way I did. So the next morning he went down to the bank – not the one I worked at – but another one and closed the deal. So that was the beginning.”

Flonny and John married in 1934 and moved to Boot Lake. They raised their son, John, on the lake and took advantage of all the recreation and entertainment opportunities the area provided. They would often have friends over for picnics and would ski on and swim in the lake. It was a time that Flonny remembers very fondly. She described her early years on Boot Lake:

“We belonged to clubs and various things. We'd have people out to come out to picnic and all that fun... They were excited because people were just beginning to buy around any of these lakes. We had no post office out there. We had no stores out there.”

Beverley Grant grew up in the vicinity of Boot Lake when her family moved...
Boot Lake is a 39-acre lake located in the Sweetwater Creek Watershed, neighboring Lake Carroll. According to Flonny, the lake got its name because it is shaped like a boot. When Flonny and John first moved to the lake, the water quality was good. Flonny said that when they first bought the property, they had the water tested and it “passed all the tests.”

As land around the lake and in the area has been developed, the quality of the water in Boot Lake has been affected. Beverley cites drainage from a nearby subdivision into the lake for increased problems with nutrients. She said, “I think it's caused a lot more growth in the plants; it got out of balance.” However, in the more than 69 years that Boot Lake has been a part of Flonny's life, she has not seen any problems with algae. Even with the current problems with nutrients and aquatic vegetation, Beverley described the lake's water quality as: “Probably not as good as when they [Flonny and John] were there, but it’s not bad.” Recorded water quality data for Boot Lake goes back to 1996, and a review of this supports Beverley's statement of decent water quality, as the lake has retained a “Good” water quality rating since 1996.1

Boot Lake's level has fluctuated in a cycle over the years. Flonny's husband, John, kept detailed records of the rainfall and changes in the lake level. Based on these records, Beverley explained the fluctuations in the lake's level:

“There's a cycle. My father-in-law used to keep meticulous records for the rainfall. You knew every seven years [that] you'd go up and down. It was almost like a pendulum. So now we're in that rainy season.”

The environment around the lake, although changed over the years, still supports a variety of wildlife. Ducks and ibis are frequent visitors to the lake; however, this can often change with the presence of an alligator. Beverley shared:

“We've had gators. You can tell when the ducks aren't there something has been there. We used to feed a bunch and there was one white one we named Monsignor. And he was white and had a webbed foot that was missing part of the webbing. He would come and get his food every night. We'd feed him on the boat ramp. They would go and then they would come back. The ducks are there now.”
The area surrounding Boot Lake has changed tremendously since Flonny first set eyes on it. When she and John moved to the lake in 1934, the area was “pure country” with a number of farms and vacation homes. There were only two homes on the lake – the Grants’ home and a summer home owned by Dr. Marion Linebaugh. Flonny described what the road system was like out there: “When I bought the place out there, you had no roads extending out at all. It was not paved. The pavement stopped right in front of our house a little bit.” There were no stores in the area and the only way to get mail was to travel to Sulphur Springs. Flonny would travel every day to get the mail. She said that the trip would take “Ten minutes or so. No traffic or anything.”

However, development soon began in the area. Flonny said about the growth: “Everyone was interested in the area. It was doomed to grow.” People started to buy around the lake and build. By the 1940s the number of houses around the lake increased. Some of these landowners included the Linebaugh, Bynums, Bexleys, Dolls, and Guys. Flonny described the lakeside residents as a nucleus from which the entire surrounding area grew with a strong sense of community in those early years. She said that it was a “friendly place” where neighbors would often check in on each other.

Commercial development also sprouted up in the area as people moved in. A country store was built on the corner of Waters and Armenia, and a club, a dancehall and swimming pool were built by the railroad crossing on Busch and Armenia.

By the mid-1950s growth in the area really took off with the development of Carrollwood. Flonny discussed Carrollwood and its effects on the people who were already living in the area: “I’ll tell you, all of sudden there was a lot of growth and the people there were not accustomed to it.”

Around the lake there are now over 20 homes and an apartment complex named Deer Path on the Lake, which is on the old Linebaugh property. Although there has been an increase in homes around the lake, the immediate area has avoided becoming a “cookie-cutter” type subdivision and has retained some of its “country” atmosphere. Beverley explained why she thinks that this has happened:

“I think to some extent the homes that are here are larger pieces of property versus the original Carrollwood area, [which] have a little lot….So when you have that much property, it will keep you from having any more homes. The homes next to us – five of us easily have a good acre or more of property. That keeps you away from the cookie cutter neighborhoods.”

Although both Flonny and Beverley are concerned with too much development in the area, they both understand the life circumstances that lead to people selling off their larger pieces of property. Flonny stated:

“Circumstances force you to do things that sometimes you don’t want to do, but in the head it’s [logically] the thing to do…It’s not like selling a city lot; you’re selling something more than that.”

Development
Beverley hopes that the future of Boot Lake does not include any more homes on the lake. There are still available lots on the lake, so building could still transpire. Flonny takes a tempered viewpoint to future changes on the lake and in the area:

“You know you learn that nothing is certain in life. That’s a lesson that you have to learn along the way somewhere. I’ve watched it with other people. You watch it where you grow. Everything is changing...It's growth. And sometimes it's good and sometimes you hit things that are not good. But you have to judge all kinds of things. So in what you're investigating, and you will see when checking back, people had different ideas about what they wanted to do, but you have to get together and culminate them then they'll branch out.”

With residents who understand the history of Boot Lake and who are concerned about its vitality, the lake will hopefully be cared for and protected in the future.

(Endnotes)

1 Boot Lake Overall Trophic State Index. Hillsborough County Watershed Atlas <www.hillsborough.wateratlas.org>

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