

Lake Eckles Narrative

The following narrative is based on an interview held in the Chamblisses home on May 26, 1999. The interview provides a glimpse into their life on Lake Eckles over the thirty-year period the Chamblisses have called its shores home.

Jean and Jim Chambliss



Jim and Jean Chambliss depicted in front of their giant cactus, that when it fell, shattered the tiles in their sewer system, 1978.

Jean and Jim Chambliss have lived on Lake Eckles for 30 years. They relocated to the shores of this Central Hillsborough County lake with their two sons, Scott and Neal, from a home in the Town and Country area. When asked about how they ended up there, Jean reminisces,

"I think we were looking for waterfront. It's been so long that I really don't remember...I told him I found this place I needed him to look at. The people who built it were circus people...they did concessions...they hadn't lived in it for a couple of years, and it was an absolute mess...the lake was barely visible from here because of the weeds and

the cattails and everything else in the water...I told him about it and I said, 'You need to come look'. He said, 'Well I don't know how to get there'...Well, we almost didn't get this house because I couldn't find it. We drove around and around with him behind me. I could see him getting more and more aggravated. Well finally, when we did find it and he saw what a mess it was and what a fixer upper it was, I asked him, 'How much do you think they want for it?' He quoted, 'I wouldn't give a dime over thus and such.' I thought, 'Aha! I got you!' It was like \$10,000 less than what he said, and I knew I had him then."

Today, their uninterrupted expanse of lawn stretches down to the lake, providing a much different aesthetic than in the past. Jean comments, "It was kind of a neighborhood dumping ground for awhile. Not bad, but the people who had lived here didn't leave it that bad. We picked up cans and we chopped down stuff and we started over on vegetation."

Lake Eckles has provided a backdrop for many Chambliss family activities. When the extended family came to visit, the day was accentuated by kickball. Neal and Scott Chambliss interacted daily with the lake. Jean comments, "They

loved the water. Even the one who does not live on water now; he played in the water and water-skied... behind a boat with a six-horse motor on it. You talk about work, that was hard... They just thoroughly enjoyed it."



Scott and Neal Chambliss, the second generation of the family to enjoy Lake Eckles, 1970.

The older Chamblisses have retired from their jobs as educators and now have more time to appreciate the lake. Neal and Scott have moved on, one relocating to Virginia and the other to Odessa where he has bought lakefront property. The yard, once inundated with melaleuca, bamboo and cacti has been groomed and is now dotted with trees planted to commemorate the births of their grandchildren, and the third generation enters the scene on Lake Eckles.

Lake Eckles

Lake Eckles is a 25-acre lake located in the Curiosity Creek Watershed. The small watershed, the littlest in Hillsborough County, is located in a highly urbanized area. Jean comments,



Misty shot of the north central shore of Lake Eckles, 1982.

"In the 1960's there was some flooding on the lake. There are some houses over there that are much lower than they are on this side. A lot of rains in the 1960's caused some flooding over there, and after that was all over, they [City of Tampa] put a pump on the lake... The City of Tampa heard all the flak when there was flooding. They're the ones who got all the complaints about stormwater and flooding. They're the ones who put the pump on the lake and set a limit for it to be a certain depth or height... The pump would automatically go on when it reached a certain point... always pumping out."

The pump deposits the fresh water taken from the lake into a sewer and the Chamblisses lament fresh waters succumbing to such demise.

The setting of appropriate maintenance levels for the lake was a challenge. The original levels adopted by the City were too low, and concerned residents contacted SWFWMD who rectified that problem. Jean explains,

"When they first did that, they kept our lake too low in anticipation of all the runoff and everything else. We finally got in touch with SWFWMD and they talked to the City and [now] they keep it

higher. If they panic and pump too low, then we have a drop like this and then you have a mess."

The natural fluctuations in the lake level have been altered by the pump's placement. The Chamblisses remember times when the water in the lake would rise with rainfall and would drop when evaporation took effect, sometimes half of a year later.



The shoreline on the Chambliss property has been effected by erosion, 1999.

Another issue of concern is the shoreline erosion enhanced by boat traffic. Jim comments,

"Those big boats, because it's their natural ski pattern to come around, we just happen to be right in the middle...and get a nice wake [causing] a lot of washdown ...It's equated to the shape of the bank and how close the boats get to the bank. Ours is kind of like a bowl shape, so we get quite a bit of wash... Those big in-boards put out a nice wake. My yard used to go gradually right down to the water, but it's got a drop-off now about 12 to 18 inches where it's eroded out."

Periodic bouts with vegetation have also been of concern to lake residents. Algae comes and goes on the lake, blooming and sinking to coat the bottom with a layer of dead vegetation. The lake has also experienced heavy growth periods of cattails and lily pads. The Chamblisses have addressed the algae on their property in a unique manner as related by Jean:

"The moss, I call it the moss, but the algae on the bottom was up on my bank. One of our sons was in the sixth grade and one was in the third grade. We put the sixth grader on an inner tube out as far as he could go, and all of our nieces and nephews threw the stuff at him. If you hit him, you got a penny and if you hit him in the face, you got a nickel. We cleaned the beach with nieces and nephews throwing at Scott...it was fun and Scott had a ball dodging. They cleaned a bunch of mess out of that water."

Residents around the lake have periodically united to address the problems plaguing the lake. They have collected money and introduced vegetation-eating carp to the lake, have addressed SWFWMD about the lake level, and more recently have had a planting of native aquatic vegetation on the shores of the lake.



Strings of bass can still be caught in the waters of Lake Eckles.

The lake continues to attract wildlife and Jean lists, "We have raccoons, we have possums, and I saw several peacocks walk across the yard one day. The water fowl...green parrots." Jim discusses the fish and other water animals, and they seem to not have declined with the exception of the alligators:

"I know there have been 'gators in here, but they haven't been any problem, and I haven't see one in probably 10 years. That does not mean there is not one there...Snakes, just normal, there is not an abundance. More black snakes than

anything...so I don't bother them. Once in a while I see a moccasin, but I get him with my BB Gun."

Development

Lake Eckles is the setting for more than 70 single-family homes with very few vacant lots left for additional development. Development in the area seems to have boomed in the 1960's, with various developers participating in the melee. Jim

comments, "There are three over here that were built in the last 15 years. One over there that was built in the last seven years... and the rest of them were 1950's or 60's." Concerning the boom in development, Jean comments, "The people who live on the other side [of their street] ...when they bought, there were no houses on this side and they regret not having bought on the lake side of the street...they had a real good view. It was a dirt road and then it was a gravel road..." Now it is a paved and well-traveled road.



1959 land plat chart for the area around Lake Eckles.

The area in which Lake Eckles straddles the line delineating City and County services. The houses on the City side of the line receive City sewer, water and waste services where the houses on the County side receive the same services from the County.



In the 30 years the Chamblisses have lived on Lake Eckles, property value has increased. Jean comments:

"It has gone up quite a lot...when we were getting ready for retirement, I knew that I

1970 newspaper photo
illustrates the density of
development in the Lake Eckles
area.

had to be ready to pay \$200 a month in property tax. That has been pretty true. A little over \$2000 a year, but we pay in one lump sum. If you have a mortgage, it's all in there. Young people, I don't think realize

how much they're paying for taxes. Unless you have to write a check for it...I don't think it's overly valued or anything. I think it's fair. As they say, it's not going to change much either, because the value is in the land, not the house. As it gets older, it just gets more valuable."

What Is Ahead?

The seventy residences on Lake Eckles, along with the issues arising when humans interact with the natural environment, pose challenges for the lake and the neighborhood. In the past, the residents have banded together to address threats and develop solutions ranging from xeriscaping to speed humps. They are loosely organized, but effective, even though only about 20% of the people participate. Jean comments:



The group of concerned residents is small, yet diverse and effectual.

"It always amazes me the small number of people. Yes, there is a sense of community among the group. They are here and there, not all together... I have always been surprised at the low, low number that has been involved. It just amazes me. When they talk about water quality or the lake level, or anything..."

The make-up of the area is changing relative to the age of residents. Jean comments:

"...The neighborhood has grown older and there has been quite a bit of moving in and out... It was funny, we had a young couple three or four doors down and we had a meeting about speed humps. When they came to the speed-hump meeting they looked around and saw all the gray hair. The girl said, 'No wonder we didn't have any trick or treaters.' The neighborhood is changing, and it has been changing for some time."

As the social make-up of the neighborhood changes, the diversity of reasons for lake living remains varied, introducing new challenges to maintaining the balances needed for the sustained vitality of the lake and the neighborhood. Jim muses:

"There are an awful lot of people that just live on the lake for the

beauty or something. They don't fish it, they don't walk the beach, they don't care for it as far as keeping it cleaned up or anything. They just let it grow wild because they are interested in not having someone build right behind them, just to look out right across the lake. That is the way they use it. They are not really involved or want to get involved in anything like the planting we had or anything like that. I can understand that because they just don't want to be bothered, they have their thing going."

It takes all kinds to make a neighborhood work, and the Lake Eckles community is definitely diverse. Some will pick up where others left off, and the community and lake in transition will continue metamorphosing into the future.



North central shore of Lake Eckles, 1999.