

Lake Keene Narrative



David Cold and Josie Smoot
Photo by: USF

The following narrative is based on an interview with David Cold at his home on the east shore of Lake Keene, on October 6, 1999. David's sister-in-law, Josie Smoot, a long-time resident of Hanna Lake, joined the interview, and her perceptions will be included in the family history section. Their perspectives offer a unique window into the history of Lake Keene and the surrounding environment.

Family History

David Cold



David and Zora Cold in 1980
Photo by: David Cold

The Colds, David, his wife Zorah, and their two daughters, moved into their home on the east shore of Lake Keene in 1955. The Colds had been married for seven years and were looking for lake front property in the vicinity of Zorah's family on Hanna Lake. David recounts the scenario of how they received their property from Zorah's father, Mr. Leon Hanna. David states, "My wife, she lived on Hanna Lake. As years went on, we were gonna buy some lots on the other side of the lake - they were just developing it. And Mr. Hanna fussed at us and said, 'You kids don't want that swamp land. So any how, a couple of weeks later he had divided up his estate and my wife had the pick since she was the oldest daughter.'" The parcel Zorah picked is five acres and currently has two structures, a main house and a guesthouse. A small orange grove occupies the front of the property.

Since moving into their home, the Cold's have tended to the small orange grove that was sowed by Mr. Hanna. David views his work with the grove as a labor of love, and states, "You don't make nothing off it." He replanted the grove three times and remembers the worst freeze being in the eighties. David comments, "What was it, '83 or '85, we had such a bad one I replanted two-thirds of [the grove] I guess...two hundred and something trees ... the original grove was Valencias, which actually bring a little more money, but are more susceptible to freezes; Valencias are late oranges. With freezes you can lose your whole crop and not get anything out of it, which I did a couple of times. So I changed to Hamlins, which is an early orange. They pick them usually right around Christmas

time or before...At least you get them off before any bad freeze."

David's father-in-law, Mr. Leon Hanna, was a prominent citrus grower in northern Hillsborough County. David recounts the extent and location of his father-in-law's industry, "That was his living. He had these groves out here [Lutz], about seventy acres all together. And then he had eighty acres down by Bonita Springs, that was mango and avocados mostly. He had some oranges."

David describes how the Hanna's originally came to own property in the vicinity of Lake Keene. In doing so, he implicitly demonstrates the Hanna's significance within the history of Tampa, by demarcating property owned by Leon Hanna's father. David comments:

"Are you familiar with Tampa... You know where Hanna Avenue is in Tampa, it crosses Nebraska, runs east and west... Mr. Hanna's father [Joe Hanna Sr.] owned from that Hanna Avenue to Hillsborough river. And from Central Avenue now to about 22nd street... Somebody from up north that had money to spend and blow, bought all that for a dollar an acre. And, he moved out here and bought all this land [property on Lake Keene and Hanna Lake] for twenty-five cents an acre. But, uh ... that's way back in the 1800s."



Members of the Cold family
swimming with friends in 1977
Photo by: David Cold

The Cold's raised two daughters on Lake Keene. Throughout this period the Cold's used the lake for various activities including swimming, fishing and water-skiing. David was also the LAKEWATCH monitor for Lake Keene. He collected data on the lake concerning water clarity, the water level and other characteristics of the lake. Although he is no longer a monitor for LAKEWATCH, David still enjoys the beauty of the lake and its surroundings, and fishes

occasionally. The Cold's property remains the home of David and one of his daughters. David's wife Zorah passed away in 1998, but their memories, the lake, and their home remain to link the past and the present.

Josie Smoot

Josie, Zorah's sister, moved to the shores of Hanna Lake - the southernly neighbor of Lake Keene - in 1943 when she was ten. This move was the result of a marriage between Leon Hanna and Josie's mother. Her mother met Leon Hanna in Louisiana while he was there for business. Josie recalls what happened after their meeting: "...they corresponded quite a while. And then, my mother made the trip over here to see [Mr. Hanna]. And then, the first thing you know they're getting married. And she's bringing us over here." Josie was the middle child between Zorah (the eldest) and Johnny. Since Josie originally moved to Florida in 1943, she has spent most of her life in Hillsborough County, except for a ten-year period when she and her husband moved to Ohio for employment.

As children, Josie and her siblings spent time working in Mr. Hanna's groves. Josie recalls using lake-water to water the grove with her father and siblings. She comments, "My stepfather had a jeep with big drums on it. And we would go get the water. Fill it up with buckets. And water those trees." In light of this, Josie implies that her childhood was not always fun and games, but that she and her siblings made sure they had fun.

Josie recalls that Lutz had no entertainment centers when she was growing up. However, she spoke fondly of the local hotspot, Sulphur Springs. Her comments about sharing rides to Sulphur Springs highlight the sense of community that existed in northern Hillsborough County during her youth. Josie reminisces:

"You went into Sulphur Springs. That was where you went to get entertained. The old springs theater, you know, that was the nearest theater...[and there was also] Maves, five and dime, which I wish was still there. The whole little area there was very historical. They had the pool, they had the skating rink...And when you were dating, or going out, that's where you went, to the Springs. I mean you would see everybody out here in Land o' Lakes that you knew. I mean that was the closest [entertainment center]. The movies, the drive-ins, and the pool, and the skating, that was it... I can remember when I was dating [we use to offer other community members rides to Sulphur Springs]...we use to take two or three [people].

Josie offers another view of life in Lutz during the late 1940's. In reminiscing about the only phone in the immediate area of her home, she reveals the historically rural character of Lutz. Josie recalls:

"Gertrude Mitchell lived down here on Hanna road from us, in 1950...sooner than that '48 or '49. She was in real estate. She owned the only phone. That was the only phone [in the area]... she was a good neighbor."

Josie still lives in Lutz, but no longer on Hanna Lake. She remarks that the lake is still beautiful, but that she has lost interest in lake activities. She offers an interesting perspective on lake activities and age. "The young people love it. With the water, and the sports, that stuff. It's a lot of work too....[What kind of work?] Well, keeping the beach clean and keeping all that growth....You know if you're not careful you can get that cane grass up....Rake it every so often, to get the sand worked up. So young people are more able, other people aren't as able, or were...[not willing to do the work]."

Lake History

Lake Keene is a 30.1 acre lake, located in Northern Hillsborough County, northwest of the intersection of Hanna Road and Sunset Lane. David reports that Lake Keene has gone through major changes in the forty-four years he has lived on its shores. These changes are largely due to residential and

infrastructural growth in the environment surrounding Lake Keene, which he believes have adversely affected the lake environment.

David cites several occurrences which have had negative effects on the quality of Lake Keene's water. These occurrences started with the initial residential development of Lake Keene, which was followed by the advent of the St. Petersburg well fields pumping station, and the creation of a sewage treatment plant north of the county line.



The west side of Lake Keene was originally developed in the 1940s
Photo by: David Cold

Upon discussing the lake's history, David recounts the dredging of the lake by a land developer, Mr. Yocam, in the mid 1940's. The property Yocam developed is located on the west side of the lake and is currently the site of the Lake Keene subdivision. David describes the adverse effects it had on the quality of lake water and the lake environment. David states:

" Mr. Yocam, of the Yocam Battery Company, he bought that land and it was all swamp. He destroyed the lake [for] about ten or fifteen years...He dredged all that land [west side], and... shut off our flow from the other lakes...The only thing that opened it back up was a hurricane, which broke through and cut its own path... Before he [dredged and built up the west shore, in]...normal high water, like it is now we could go through to other lakes in our little boat. You know, through the swamps...He developed it and he cut some canals all around, but he got into clay, dredging over on this north side. And it just made the whole lake milky. And it took years for that to settle out. Especially when we had no flowing water going through."



Low water levels in 1995 created a resting-place for cranes
Photo by: David Cold

David believes that the nearby St. Petersburg well fields have also contributed to a decline in the quality of Lake Keene's water.

"Now, when I moved out here you could swim out over your head and see the bottom. The lake was crystal clear. The next piece of property over there, there was a little boiling spring. When [the lake is] slick like this you could see it, you know, but once they started all these well fields, it just killed it all."

David offers his perceptions of the extent of the well fields effects on Lake Keene in his comments about the smell of lake water and the colorful residue it leaves behind. David states:

"It's startin' to get sulfur smell and stuff, that's bad...It's not actually sulfur. It's actually from your lake and rain water going down to quick, because you know they're pumpin' out from us so bad. And, it creates actually a tannic acid and it gets in with the other minerals and creates like a sulfuric type thing. It's not real sulfur...but you got to take a shower with it and you think its real sulfur...cut your breath off."

In commenting about the residue left behind from lake water, David recalls, "[You] use to [be able to]...run the sprinkler on [all day]...our house use to be white, it would never stain it. Now you wouldn't run it on there thirty minutes...just be turnin' it all kinds of colors...I just spent thirty-nine hundred dollars on a complete water softener. I mean a full system softener, iron, chlorine and the whole works, because the well is getting so bad." David's comments expose his anger and frustration over the degradation of the lake.

David cites the release of effluent into the lake from a nearby sewage plant as the most detrimental occurrence in Lake Keene's history. David states:

"See the main problem we've had with our lake is probably 15 years ago...just north of the county line road they built a big, big subdivision up there. And they put in their own sewage treatment plant, which was very inadequate. And all of their effluent went in the swamps behind them. You see this is a chain of lakes on down. We'd have dry seasons, [and] we'd finally get some rains. Across the lake, one of the guys who is not here anymore, use to go up there (sewage plant) and take pictures. Their pumps would actually be under water. And they were dumping raw sewage in that swamp. And when the water got high enough it would start runnin' through. And it would come in this lake and it don't sound good but it's like somebody flushed their toilet, the odor and everything. We had bad fish-kills and everything out here. For years we wouldn't even swim in the lake. Now they have finally cleaned that up and they're on the County sewer system now."

David relays the horrible consequences of contaminated lake water when he recalls a clean up of fish after a fish kill, which he believes was the result of the effluent pumped into Lake Keene. David comments: "I help gather them up and bury them. Of course they're good fertilizer for the grove. But it's sad to pick up eight, ten, twelve pound bass, beautiful fish and have to bury them all...I don't think the big ones have ever come back. But, I'm sure there is probably some that didn't get killed."

David also recalls the release of weed eating fish, which was met to curb the growth of invasive plants. David believes that in the long run this may be more detrimental than beneficial. David describes the scenario and speculates about the effects of this measure on the lake in the following comments. David states:

"Another thing I don't agree with. They put these grass eatin' fish in here. Supposed to be sterile and last for six years but it's been ten,

twelve years ago and they're still eatin' all the grass up... You see this use to be one of the best fishing lakes in the area. And just a few years after they brought them in, they cleaned up the grass and the underbrush so much that it wiped out the fish. The little fish don't have any place to hide. It's still pretty good for bass and stuff, but it was the best speckled perch fishing lake in the whole of Hillsborough County that everybody knew of. I mean you would catch two pounders out of there."

However, it should be noted that David does consider the current fish population as healthy and diverse. David states: "You have most any standard of fresh water fish that you had around. There's bass, there's catfish, there's speckled perch, there's all kinds of brim, it's pretty well balanced."

In his younger days, David played a mediating role between the area's lakes and the alligator population. David states:

"Well, we have had a lot of alligators. In fact, before I ever moved out here, me and just a couple other guys use to get paid to go to Lake Padgett and all these places and get big alligators out. ... I love to see alligators in the lake, but when they get too big, they start killing dogs and stuff, well then there's a danger of them getting a kid. So, I always take 'em out when they get that big. I mean I don't anymore because it's against the law for me to do it. The last one I got out of here was nine feet long and it weighed a hundred and seventy-eight pounds."

David has seen the bird population fluctuate over his stay on the lake, and comments:

"It's startin' to come back. It kind of disappeared for a while... I believe the sprays and insecticides on groves and things probably eliminated a lot of them. Which they don't do anymore but now we see big herons. Big Blue Herons. There's a lot of them around, big white egret. You know the great big ones... about the size of the Blue Heron... I think the main thing that keeps a lot of them away now, mainly on the weekends, [is that] there's so much activity out there, they can't put up with that. We used to have ducks all the time. Mallards were stayin' here long time, quite a few of them. But, now you can see 'em. The kids get in there [the lake] on those scooters and chase 'em [the birds]. You know after a while [the birds] just go somewhere else."

Development

David has seen drastic changes occur on the shores of Lake Keene during his forty-four years of living there. David reminisces about Mr. Yocam's land

development and the progression of residential development he has witnessed over the years. David states: "There was three homes on the lake for a long time. I think there was maybe ten when he started his development...around '44, '45. By the time the late 50's rolled around there were people liv'in there...now there's way over a hundred [homes on the shores of the lake] altogether, in those canals and everything else."

David recognizes several negative consequences development has brought. He mentions that the increased population has placed more pressure on the lake, and cites jet skis as being detrimental to the quality of lake activities. David states: "The worst thing we have now are these water scooters on the weekends. They get out here and you think they are trying to kill each other. They'll be six or eight of them at the time. And this lake is not big enough for that. No way you can go fishing or even boat riding out there on the weekends."

Another result of increased residential development, which greatly concerns David, is the rising cost of property taxes, which he attributes to expensive homes being built on the lake's shores. David states:

"The taxman...[is] killin' me...On the southside of me, that was all groves. Now it is all homes. That ones right there...unbelievable on a little lot seventy five feet wide \$360,000 home. Seven or eight years ago I looked it up, not long ago, my taxes were \$780.00. This last year they were like \$2,400 and something...And you know you go down there [tax collector's office?] and argue about...I say, 'look, my house is forty-something years old.' They said, 'it's not your house, it's the property.' See, I got a hundred and ninety feet frontage on the lake...that's what they go by."

David speculates that older residents on fixed incomes may be under severe financial strain due to steady increases in property taxes, thus placing their ownership and their way of life in jeopardy.

Through conversing with David, it is obvious that Lake Keene has undergone dramatic changes in the second half of the twentieth century. In the face of increasing residential development and increased use of the lake, it is uncertain what the future holds for Lake Keene. However, implementation of formal and informal proactive measures, such as guidelines for multiple use conflicts (e.g., personal watercrafts and fishing), and communal monitoring of the lake levels and water quality, should help to preserve social relations among the area's residents as well as the lake's health.

The Future

The health of Lake Keene has varied over the years due to a series of development related events. David and Josie provide an insightful perspectives on Lake Keene's history and on the problems it has endured. Currently Lake Keene seems to be in relatively good health. However, David cites several problems that threaten the social and natural environment of the lake. It is impossible to predict the future health of the lake, although it is obvious that

environmentally sustainable management of the lake is the only way to maintain its current health and to facilitate its continuance as a resource for future generations. With David and Josie's thoughts in mind, it is important for all of us in the general public, as well as those in relevant government agencies, to be vigilant in safeguarding Lake Keene from environmentally unsustainable development. For it is only when development decisions are made in light of social and environmental concerns that environmentally sustainable plans can be created and implemented so that a healthy Lake Keene can be preserved for use by future generations.