

Pine Lake Narrative

Introduction

The following narrative has been derived from an interview with Marge and Bob Webb, at their home on the shores of Pine Lake, on August 12th, 1999. The Webbs have lived on Pine Lake for fifty-two years and their comments not only offer a view of life prior to the modern era, but they also highlight changes in the lake area.

Family History

Bob and Marge Webb were the first family on South Pine Lake Drive in 1948. Marge remembers her parents when they were told about the young couples decision to leave the urban confines of Seminole Heights ". . . *to be the only house out . . . [there].*" At that time Pine Lake had no electricity or telephone service.

The remoteness of the area was heightened by the lack of paved roads. Forest Hills Drive, Armenia Avenue and Florida Avenue were the only paved roads in the area the rest of the roads were dirt. Bob recalls how they initially went without phone service. *"I had to buy all of the telephone poles between here and the next lake down there. . . they were \$35 a pole and I had to pay for them from [Eckles Lake] up to here."* When they received phone service they were on a party line with 13 other people who lived in the area. Bob asserts that, *"you could never get the phone and people would say, 'you don't really have an emergency you just want the line. . .'"*

The Webbs fondly remember the quaintness of the local elementary school, Lake Magdalene. Prior to moving to Pine Lake, Marge never thought her children would be receiving their primary education in such a *"tiny country school"*. Marge remembers favorably the proximity of the little school to their home, she comments, *"The children could walk home from school when they got a little older."* The Webb's are happy to say that, *"Lake Magdalene Elementary is now one of the county's leading schools!"*

The Webbs have enjoyed fishing and swimming in the lake and in nearby water-bodies for the last five decades. The Webb children swam in Pine Lake when they were growing up and Bob swam in a nearby area when he was a teenager. During high school, Bob would come from his home in Seminole Heights to swim in the southern end of Curiosity Creek at *"a place called Blue Sinks"*. Curiosity Creek is a waterway that connects lakes in the general area surrounding Pine Lake.

The Webbs also fish in the lake. Bob recalls the time when his dad caught a 'whopper' in the lake. Bob states, *"We have a picture of my dad. He caught a 13-pound bass out here and the mouth of the bass was that big around and you could shove your whole fist inside of his mouth. He was about that long (two feet) and a real fat one."*

Lake History

Pine Lake is an 8.3 acre lake in the Curiosity Creek Water Shed. It is located in northwestern Hillsborough County, just north of Fowler Avenue and west of Florida Avenue. In the five decades that the Webbs have lived on Pine Lake they have seen the area around their home change from one with no homes and few paved roads to suburbia.

In the 1920s, well before residential development came to the lake (i.e., 1940s), Pine Lake was dubbed Varsity Lake. At the time this was deemed a fitting name for the lake because the property between Pine Lake and Eckles was 'earmarked' by developers in the early 1900s to be developed into a

university. Bob notes that the Great Depression put an end to the development of a university, but the name, Varsity Lake, stuck until W.E. Hamner, a major player in the development of the area, instigated the change of the lake's name to Pine Lake. Bob states,

"Now, this is called Pine Lake because it was [historically] surrounded with huge pine trees [until the trees were killed by a flood in the 1950s]. . . . When we moved out here, Hamner, said they wanted to change the name to Pine Lake because of the pine trees, because [the university was never built and thus the name] Varsity [Lake] didn't [mean] anything. . . . [Hamner] asked if it was okay if we called it Pine Lake and I said, 'yes I would like that.'"



Pine Trees no longer crowd the shores of Pine Lake.

When the Webbs first moved to Pine Lake its water was clear. Bill reminisces, " [It was] beautiful. You could go out and . . . see the fish swimming on the bottom and the grass flowing. . . . It [was] . . . very clear spring water. . . ." Not only do the Webbs reminisce about the lake's clarity, but Marge also remembers how particular areas of the lake varied in temperature depending on their proximity to the springs. Marge comments, *"The lake had warm water and then you would go out to the spring and it would be cold, any temperature you wanted. It was heaven."*

Unfortunately, over the years the Webbs believe that the lake's water quality has declined. They speculate that residential septic tanks built too close to the lake may have contributed to the decline in water quality, although Marge mentions that water quality can't be *"hurt too much because . . . [people] still swim in the lake."*

Water levels have fluctuated since the Webb's have lived on Pine Lake. Although water levels were extremely high at one point during the 1950s, by the 1960s water levels near 2 were quite low, in fact, Bob asserts that the lake dried into three sections that barely touched. During this period of low water, Bob actually took steps to increase the habitat of the fish that were stuck in one of the three sections by digging a canal approximately two feet deep to connect two of the sections.

The Webb's believe that over-pumping by well fields in the area is actually a major cause of low water. Marge comments, *"this is what the problem in the lake . . . [is] actually; Bob and I were watching when they were pumping and thought, actually they are pumping too low."* The Webbs believe that over-pumping and dry weather in the summer can contribute to extremely low lake levels.

Bob claims that W.E. Hamner built culverts to connect many of the lakes in the area, including Noreast, Cedar and Pine, to allow water to flow between them. Bob says that Eckles was not connected with the other lakes by culverts because it was part of a Country Club built by Hamner's brother and, as a result, a pump has been installed to control the level of Lake Eckles.

The Webbs have also altered the lake environment. They dredged a hole in the lake floor to increase the lake's depth for swimming and to drain water from their swampy yard. Bob explains how the Webbs drained their yard into the lake. He says, *" . . . we pumped in so it was 20 feet deep in that circle. You could walk out to chin deep and then you would fall off into the spring."*

According to the Webbs, the biodiversity of the area has declined since they first arrived in 1948. The Webbs report that eagles, quails, fox squirrels and rabbits were historically plentiful but are no longer seen. Marge and Bill also believe there has been a decline in the size of Pine Lake's fish population and they think this is largely due to over fishing. Bill does mention that he saw a bass in the lake about a week before the interview; however he says that it is the first one he has seen in a while.



The tree line is an indicator of past water levels and exposes just how much the lake's level has fluctuated over the years

Development



Bob believes that the Post WW II boom fueled residential growth in the area. In commenting about how long it took after his arrival (1948) for residential development to Nar 3 overtake the woodlands that originally surrounded the lake, Bob stated, *"about five years, it was, maybe a little longer. It was one of those kind of things that after the war that Tampa expanded north and everybody just seemed like they were out here after the war."*

Homes such as this one now line the shores of Pine Lake.

Two of Tampa's most prominent developers in the first half of the 20th century were William E. Hamner and his older brother Burke E. Hamner. The Hamner brothers played a large part in developing the Forest Hills area near Pine Lake*. Bob remembers that W.E. Hamner owned much of the northwestern area of Hillsborough County when he moved to Pine Lake in 1948. He says that W.E. Hamner started selling lots " . . . off at \$1,000 and by the time they sold around the lake it was \$6,000 . . . "

According to the Webbs, W. E. Hamner owned a country club and golf course in the area that is now Forest Hills. Babe Zaharius, a famous female golfer, bought the country club in the early 1950s. According to Bob, Zaharius sold a portion of the land (the north side of the original course) covered by the country club to have money to redesign the golf course. Zaharius split the course, changing it from one in which eighteen holes were played in consecutive order to a course that had a front nine and back nine. Bob offers his description of how and why residential development spread after Zaharius sold the property,

"When they sold that in the 50s, they immediately made a subdivision out of it and, like I said, it just mushroomed overnight. People were getting out of the service and looking for places to buy and all of these houses were small, modest houses [that offered] affordable housing for young couples. . . "

Babe's Golf course is still in use today and is named after her. It is now owned and run by the City of Tampa.

Future

Bob and Marge Webb aren't sure what the future will bring. However, they believe that growth has certainly changed the rural locale they moved to in 1948. The lake and the surrounding area have been affected by a variety of factors related to development. Nevertheless there is hope for the future. Bill states that *"new families moving into [the area's] older homes give a sense of renewal and offer the possibility [of] a new beginning for old Forest Hills."*

*Gisner, Karl H.

1950Tampa: *A History of the City of Tampa and the Tampa Bay Region of Florida.*
Florida: The St. Petersburg Printing Company.