



Sylvan Lake – A History

Overview

Sylvan Lake's history dates back to 1818 when an expedition led by Rev. John Montieth rode into the area to see what lay between Detroit and the newly established post of Pontiac. The expedition discovered a chain of lakes. The lake which lay closest to Pontiac was surrounded by a fringe of tamaracks and was considered by the group to be the most beautiful. The explorers named this body of water Timber Lake, afterward changed to Sylvan Lake.

In 1824, Isaac Voorheis purchased land on the eastern side of Timber Lake and lived in a shanty built of small logs with a roof made of shakes and bark. Game was plentiful in the area, as were wolves. The Voorheis family owned a vast piece of property which they farmed and on which they built cabins and a few larger homes. When the Voorheis family sold their property in the early 1900's, some of their tenants moved to the south side of the lake. Those who moved to the Ferndale Street area left a highly superior sandy beach for a marsh.

A snapshot in time

Sylvan Lake owes much to one man, Merrill B. Mills, who, in the early 1890s acquired hundreds of acres just outside Pontiac's municipal limits. Mr. Mills planned two large subdivisions with winding roads and parks. He commissioned the architectural firm of W. B. Stratton to design a resort hotel to be built adjacent to the residential development. The hotel was constructed in 1893 expected to cost of some twelve thousand dollars. The classic sales pitch began:

“Excursion and Auction Sale of Lots at Sylvan Lake.”

Remember. We are going to sell the Lots and You make the price. Terms of sale - \$10 down, \$10 in fifteen days and ten percent of purchase price quarterly thereafter. This makes it possible for each and every one to buy a lot. Five Handsome Cottages will be built and given away absolutely free as soon as 150 lots are sold. If you purchase you may get one of these.

Mills knew the “Sylvan Lake Inn” would thrive only with volume business in the summer months, when rooms could be rented to potential buyers for the nearby cottage lots.

Having served as director of the Detroit Transit Railway Company, Mills found the answer in a reliable and inexpensive electric railway or inter-urban system to be known as the Pontiac and Sylvan Lake Railway, franchised in 1895.

Thousands flocked to the resort in 1896 for the extravagant Fourth of July celebration. The resort thrived for several years until October 1903 when a fire ravaged the Inn and left it a total loss.

Sylvan Lake Inn 1893 - 1903



SYLVAN LAKE INN.

Sylvan Lake Inn

In 1893 Merrill B. Mills, Mansfield Shelly, George Barbour, and J. Blair Simpson decided to establish a resort at Sylvan Lake. Merrill B. Mills built a summer hotel on a hilly point separating the two parts of the lake. He did his best to encourage land sales by offering a free weekend at his hotel for those who brought a lot in the subdivision. There was a golf course, a riding stable, furnished with saddle horses, a bathing beach, a bowling alley and even a billiard parlor. The center of the resort, a hotel, was erected on the present site of the Community Center for \$25,000. The grounds were lighted by electricity in connection with the interurban railway.

In addition to the hotel, owners planned a community containing 1300 building lots, six public parks, a school house, a depot and church sites. In 1903 the Sylvan Lake Inn burned down.

For many years, the family of Merrill Mills gave the Detroit Free Press a restricted deed to the property formerly occupied by Mills' summer hotel. Around 1906, Mills donated this property to The Detroit Free Press for use as the Fresh Air Camp.

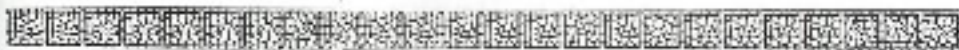
Merrill B. Mills

Photos 1891 and 1904



Sylvan Lake Inn Drawing





THIS new and elegant hotel, which has just been erected, will be open to the public about July 1st. Parties desiring rates and information can write the Sylvan Lake Inn Co., 410 Hammond Building.

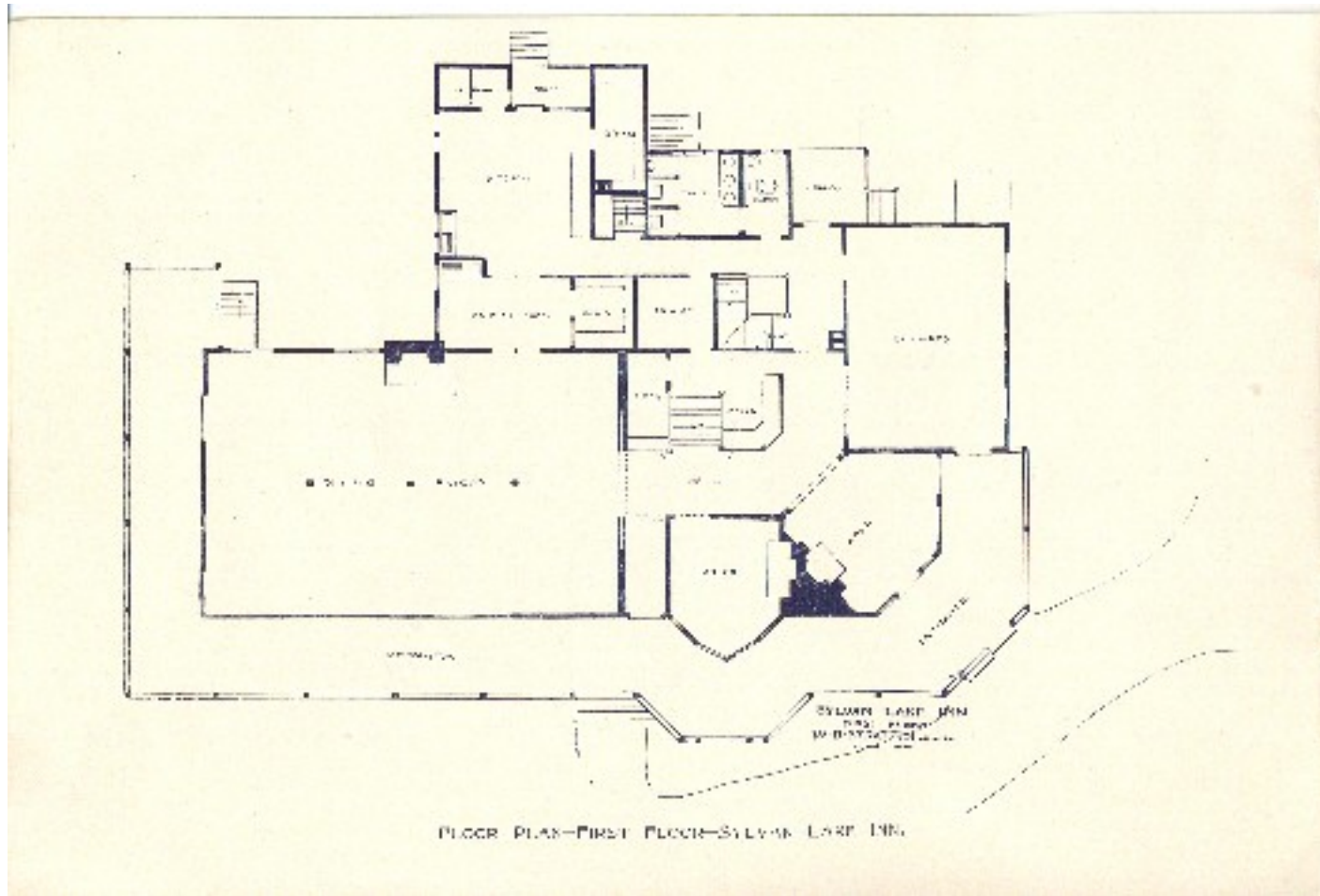
In order to protect the interests of all purchasers and to prevent the existence of anything injurious to the property or disagreeable to residents, restrictions, which will severely guard against the presence of all objectionable features, will be placed upon all lots sold.

A franchise has been granted and an electric road will be built shortly connecting beautiful Sylvan Lake with the City of Ferndale.

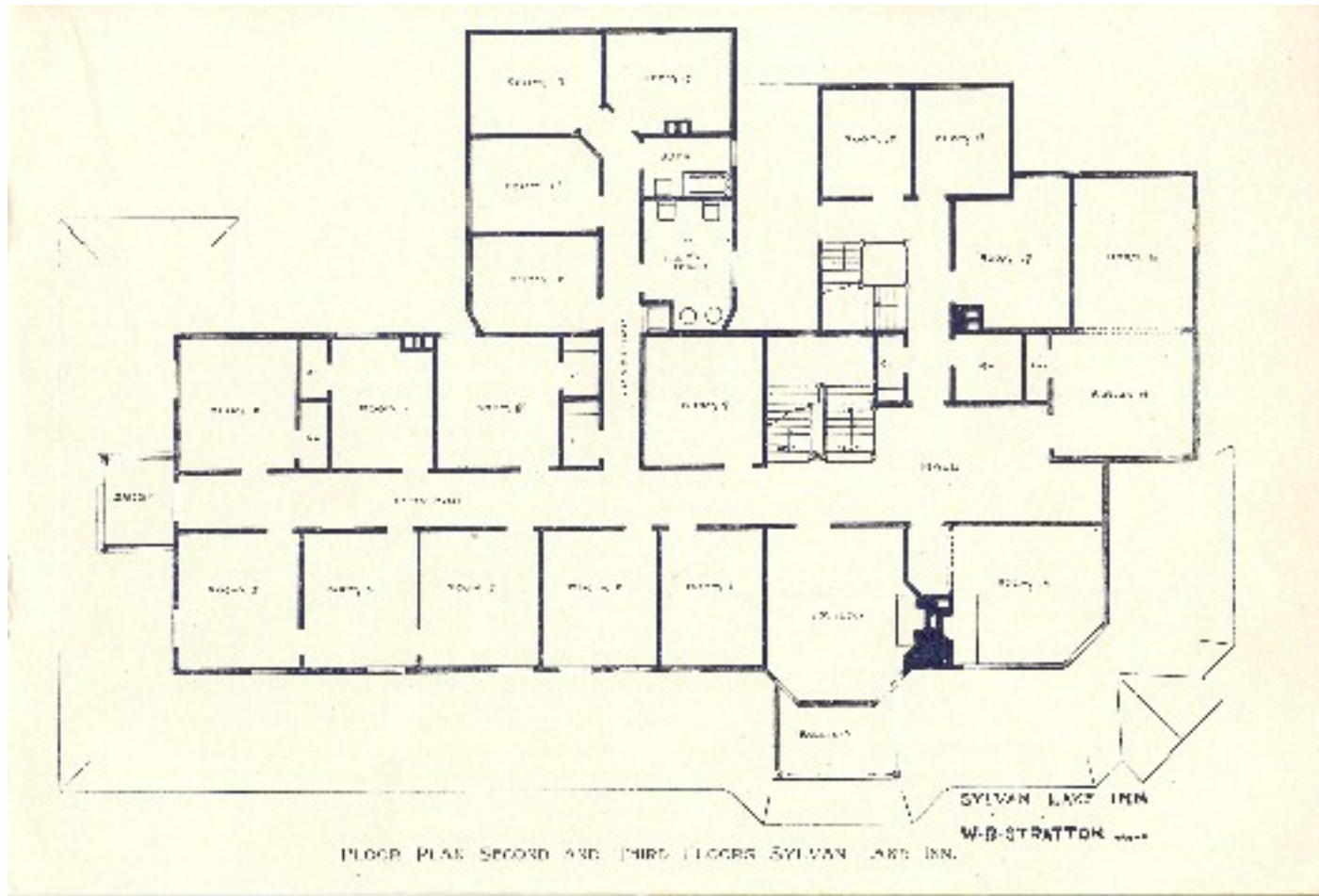
While Sylvan Lake is destined to become one of the most pleasant watering places in the west, its location will also make it a beautiful and popular suburb of Detroit. At an expense of only twenty cents, and within less than one hour, you can pass from the heat of the City to the shaded shores and cool waters of the Lake.



First Floor – Sylvan Lake Inn



Second & Third Floor Plan



Sylvan Lake Inn Rates

RATES.

The rates at Sylvan Lake Inn are from \$2.00 to \$3.00 a day, and from \$10.50 to \$21.00 a week.



FOR FURTHER PARTICULARS
ADDRESS

N. H. HENCHMAN, JR.,

Manager Sylvan Lake Inn,
PONTIAC, MICH.

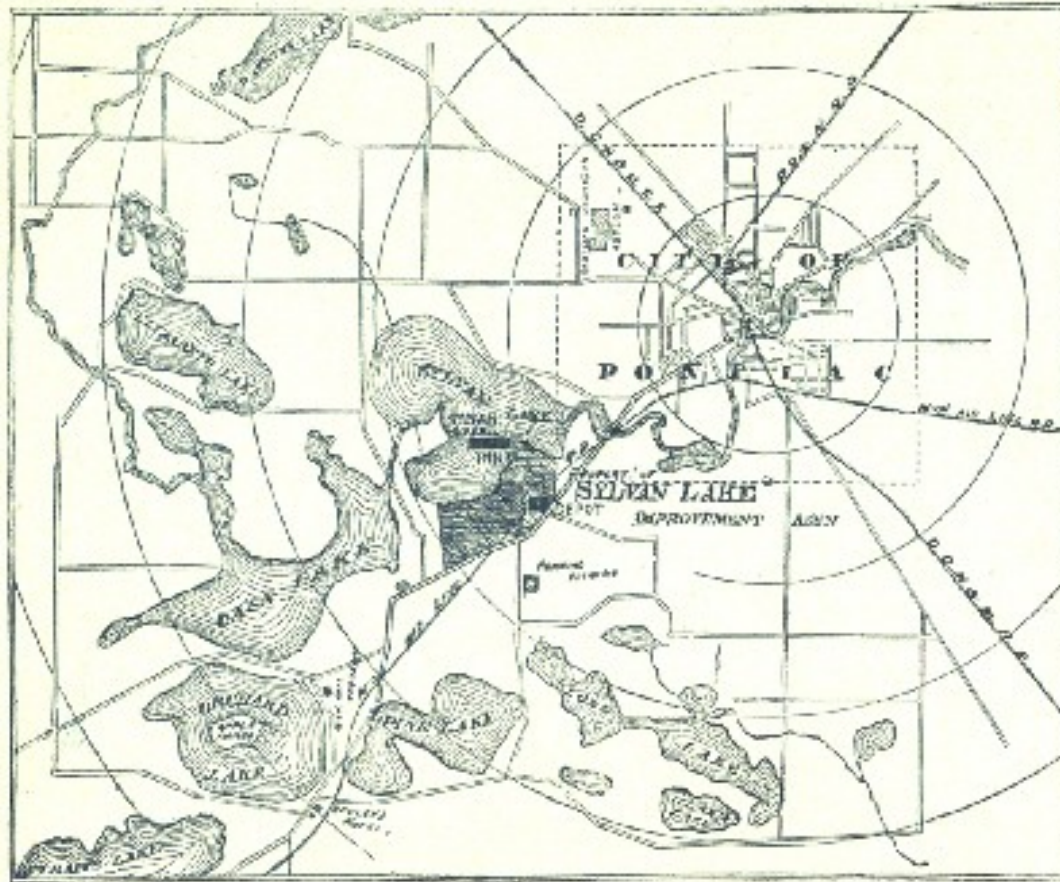
OR _____

The Sylvan Lake Inn Company

1840 BARKWOOD STREET,
DETROIT.



Sylvan Lake and Vacinity



SYLVAN LAKE AND VICINITY.

Sylvan Lake Inn

Looking through the trees.



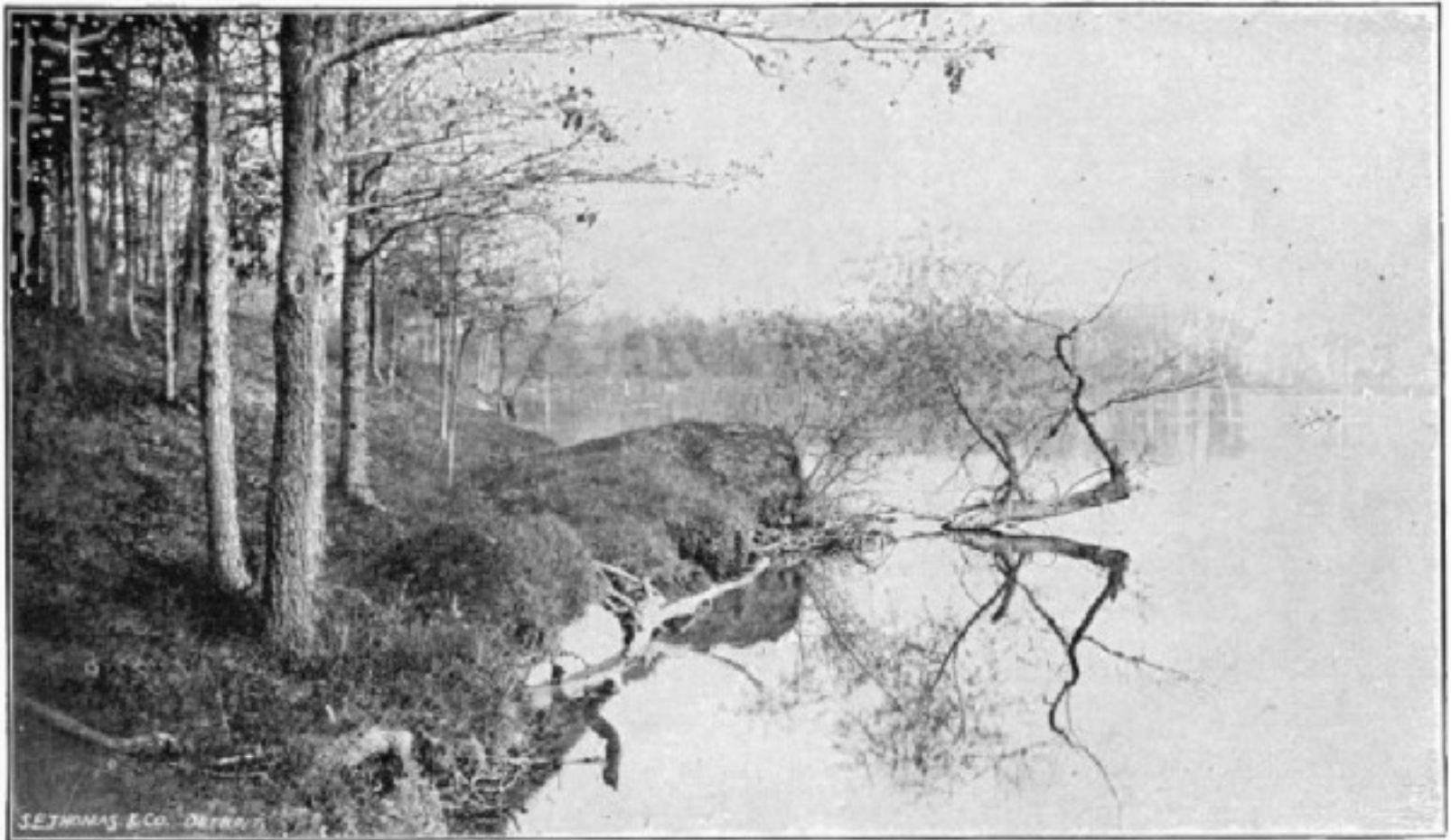
SYLVAN LAKE INN, LOOKING THROUGH THE TREES.

Boating - Sylvan Lake



BOATING-SYLVAN LAKE.

On the Point – Sylvan Lake



SEYMOUR & Co. DETROIT

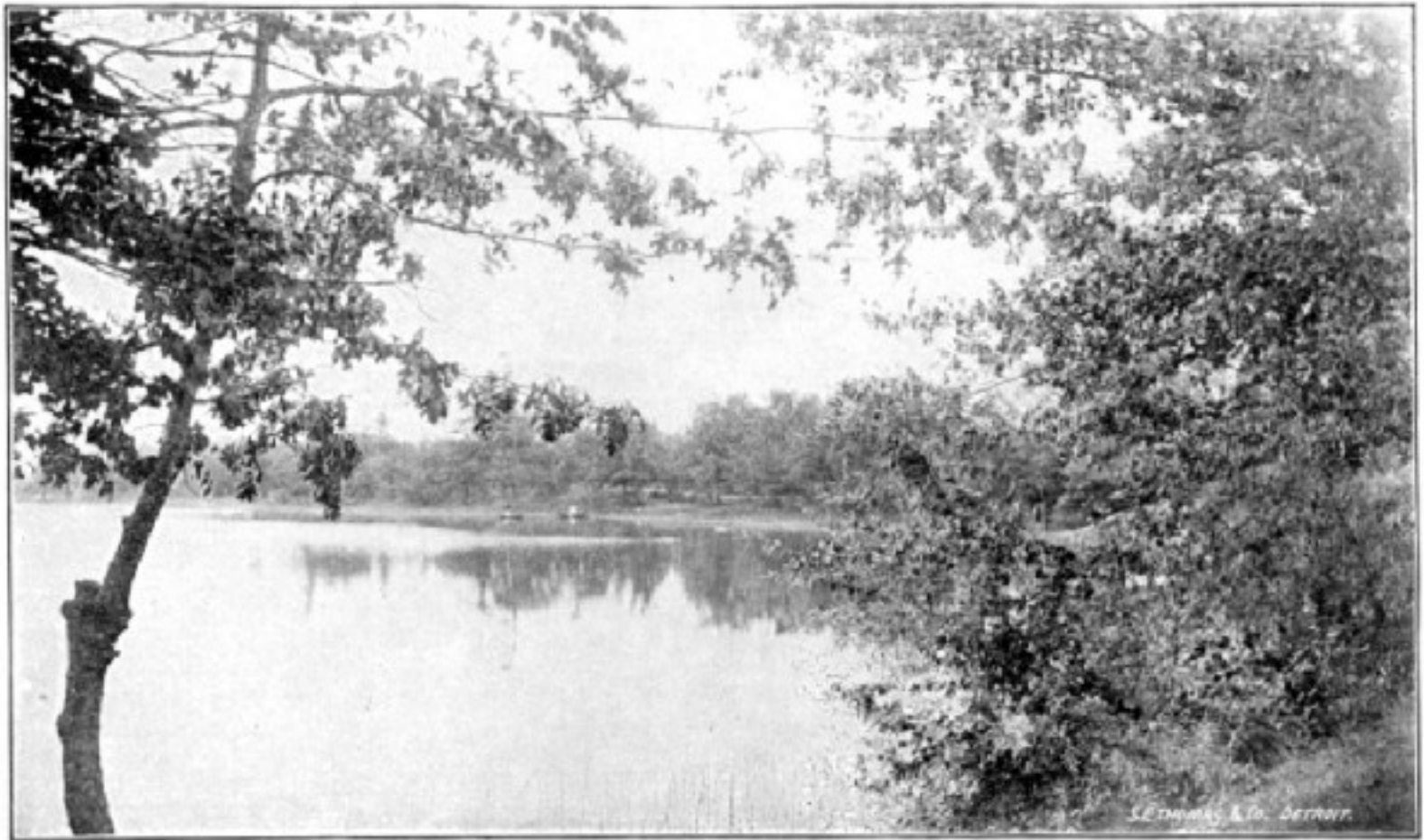
ON THE POINT—SYLVAN LAKE.

Through the opening Sylvan Lake



THROUGH THE OPENING—SYLVAN LAKE.

Pickerel Bay – Sylvan Lake



PICKEREL BAY—SYLVAN LAKE.

Catch of Black Bass

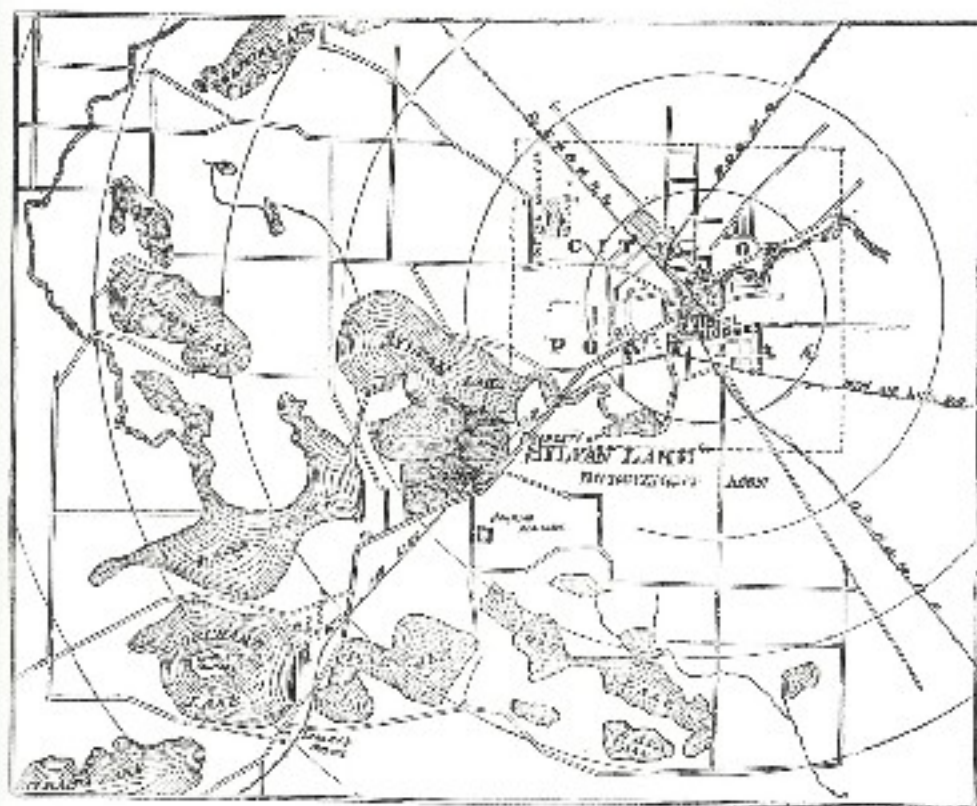


CATCH OF BLACK BASS.

Sylvan Lake Improvement Association

INCORPORATED UNDER THE LAWS OF THE STATE OF MICHIGAN.

CAPITAL STOCK, - - - \$100,000



* * * OFFICERS * * *

MADELL B. WILLS, President
2441 Marine Ave. St. C.

MARSHALL SHELLEY, Vice-Pres.
2157 Parkwood Dr. Detroit

GEO. H. BULLOCK, Treasurer
1100 East 13th St. Detroit

J. BLAIR BRIDGES, Secretary
1007 Audubon and Dearborn

D. C. JAMES, Attorney
1100 East 13th St.

WALTON L. DAVIS, Landings Engineer

CLARENCE BOST, Superintendent

TRANSFER AGENTS,

SHELLEY & SIMPSON

416 AND 417 HAMMOND BUILDING.

TELEPHONE 2875

DETROIT, MICH.

Sylvan Lake Improvement Association

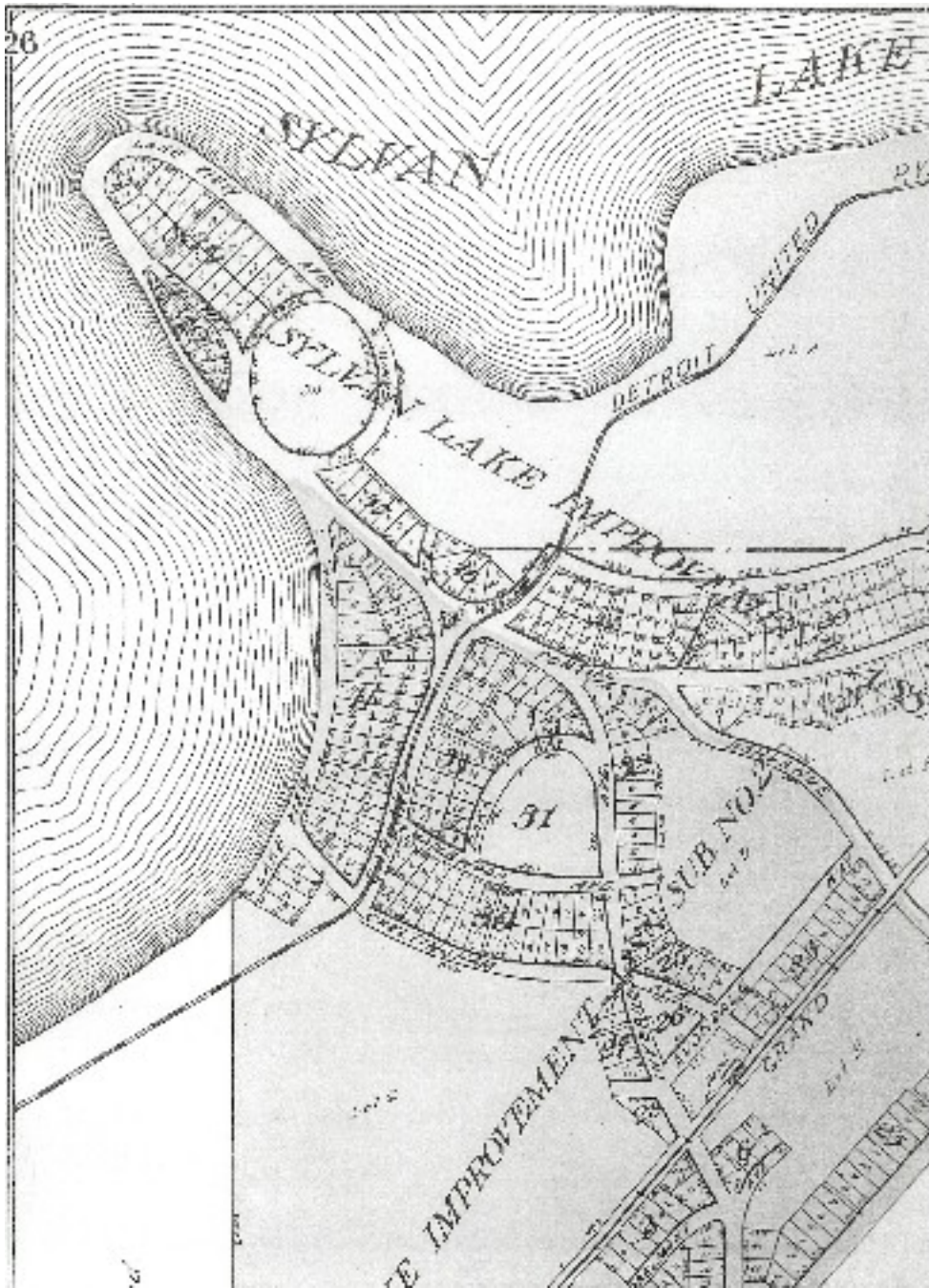
300 acres, 1300 building lots, 6 public parks, hotel site of 4 acres, school house, depot and churches



THE land belonging to the Association is situated upon Sylvan Lake, Oakland County, Michigan, just outside the corporate limits of the city of Pontiac, which lies upon the D. G. H. & M. R. R., P. O. & N. R. R., and M. A. L. Division of the G. T. R. R.

The grounds consist of over three hundred acres, containing thirteen hundred large building lots, six public parks, hotel site of four acres, also school house, depot and churches. The land has a frontage of nearly two miles upon a beautiful and picturesque lake, which affords excellent bathing, fishing, boating and yachting privileges.

The lake is situated only one mile from the centre of Pontiac, a pleasant and thriving city of 7,000 people and a natural suburb of Detroit, already widely known for its handsome residences and delightful surroundings.



GRAND EXCURSION

— AND —

Auction Sale of Lots

AT SYLVAN LAKE

The Saratoga of Michigan

— ON —

Thursday, June 22d, 1893



Train leaves Brush Street Depot at 10:10 A. M.

Returning leaves Sylvan Lake 6:30 P. M.

Fare Round Trip, 40 Cents

Ample Shelter in Event of Rain



Terms of Sale, \$10 down, \$10 within 10 days, balance cash. Five handsome cottages will be built and given away, absolutely free, to purchasers of lots as soon as

150 lots are sold. YOU MAY GET ONE.

FOR TICKETS APPLY **SHELLEY & SIMPSON, 146 HAMMOND BLD.**

1903 Slot Machine



Sylvan Lake Inn, a Prey to Fire

October 27, 1903



Pontiac, Mich. October 27 – Special

Dead when it was born, and growing stiffer with rigor mortis in each succeeding year, the Sylvan Lake Inn was cremated today.

- The structure was erected about a decade ago by M. B. Mills when he and other Detroiters were full of enthusiasm over the project of establishing a great summer resort between this city and Orchard Lake. It cost about \$25,000. It was insured for \$12,000.
- One man after another tried to make the inn pay. The last was A. C. Thompson and he found that his efforts would be fruitless as long as he respected the law. This he admitted afterwards in court. Accordingly he sold liquor without a license and kept a slot machine.
- The fire started at noon today.

Sylvan Lake Improvement Association – Subdivision 2 – June 19, 1893



1896 “Illustrated atlas of Oakland County, Michigan”



“Illustrated atlas of Oakland County, Michigan” (Knox Publ. Co, 1896), p 114

Interurban

Merrill Mills built the Sylvan Lake Inn and created the Pontiac and Sylvan Lake Railroad for his patrons to use from Pontiac. The trolley ran from 1895 to 1928. For twenty five cents you could leave the hustle-and-bustle of city life, to the beautiful and serene shores of Sylvan Lake.

Garland Avenue is a boulevard because of the Interurban. The trolley ran from Pontiac, through Sylvan Lake, Keego Harbor and down Orchard Lake Road to Farmington. Then down Grand River to Detroit.

P. 5. 1895 – The Pontiac and Sylvan Lake line was purchased from Mills and additional track was laid to connect Farmington, Northville and Pontiac to Detroit. *

P. 27 – A short stretch of track through Keego Harbor and Sylvan Lake was originally laid by the Pontiac and Sylvan Lake Railroad in 1895. There were several stops in this area, allowing passengers to enjoy Dollar Lake (Keego Harbor), Cass Lake and Sylvan Lake. The line continued into Pontiac. All of this track was purchased by the DUR in May of 1901 and became the last leg of the Orchard Lake Division. *

*Book – “Farmington Junction, A Trolley History” by Brian Golden

Sylvan Lake Village Council Minutes:

May 2nd, 1934

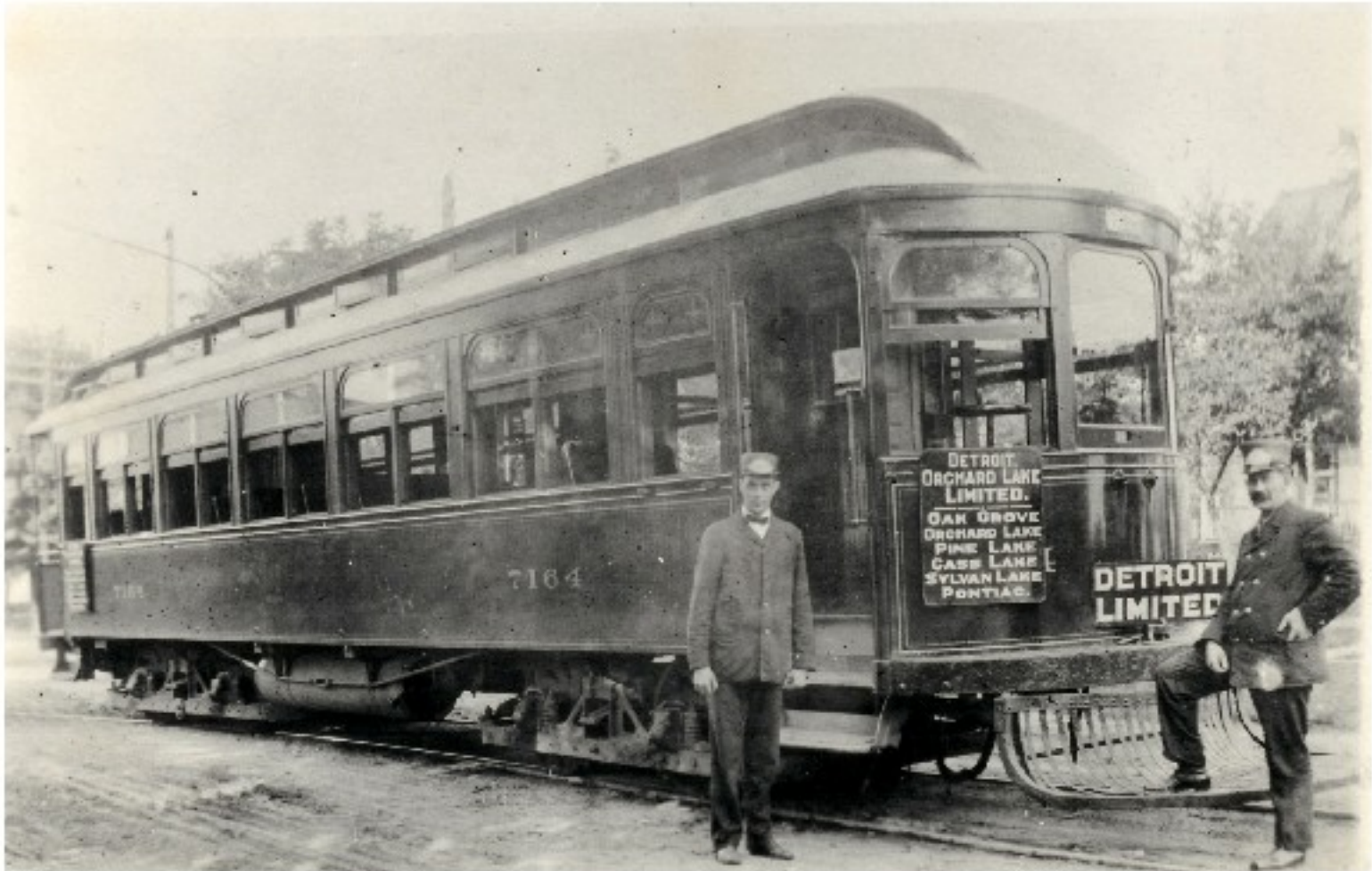
Report of Legal Committee, Mr. Hayhow

That \$500.00 per year for the next 10 years be placed in the Village Budget for the express purpose of purchasing the right of way of the Eastern Michigan Railroad. (Interurban)

Interurban Trolley

1895 – 1928

Notice Sylvan Lake listed

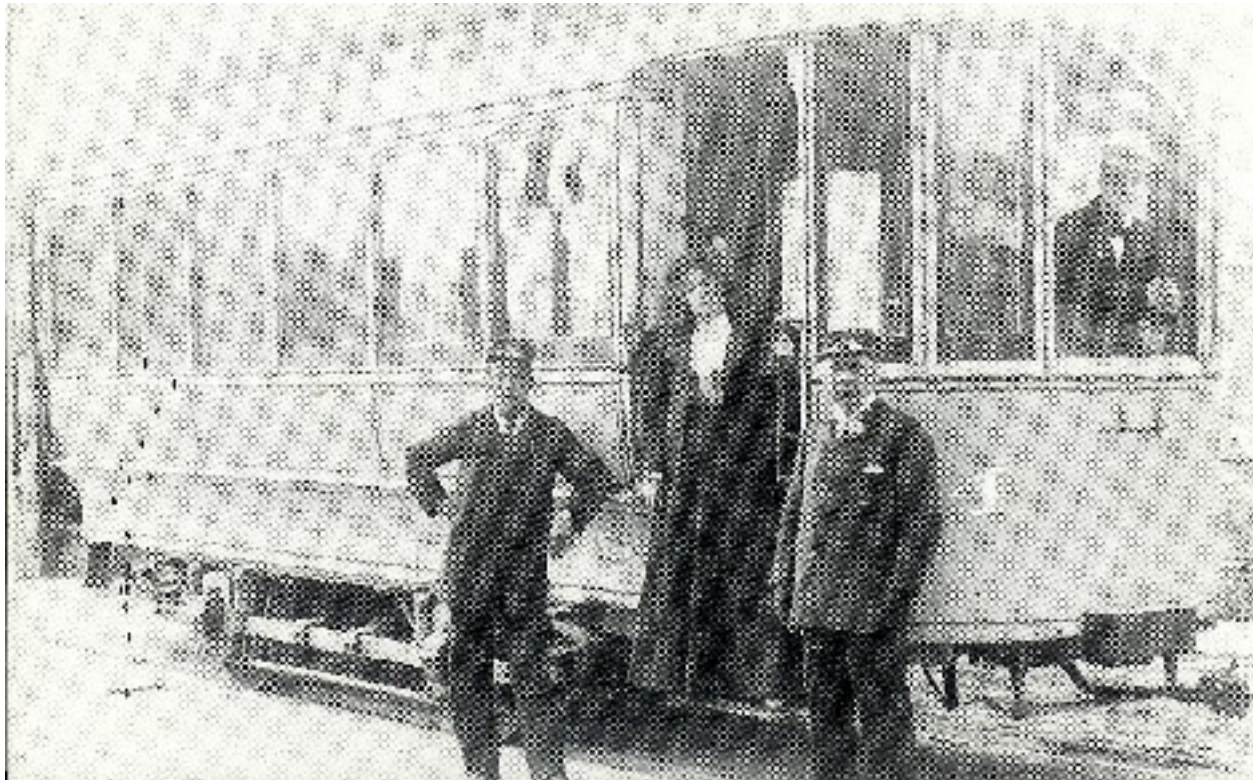


Interurban Trolley

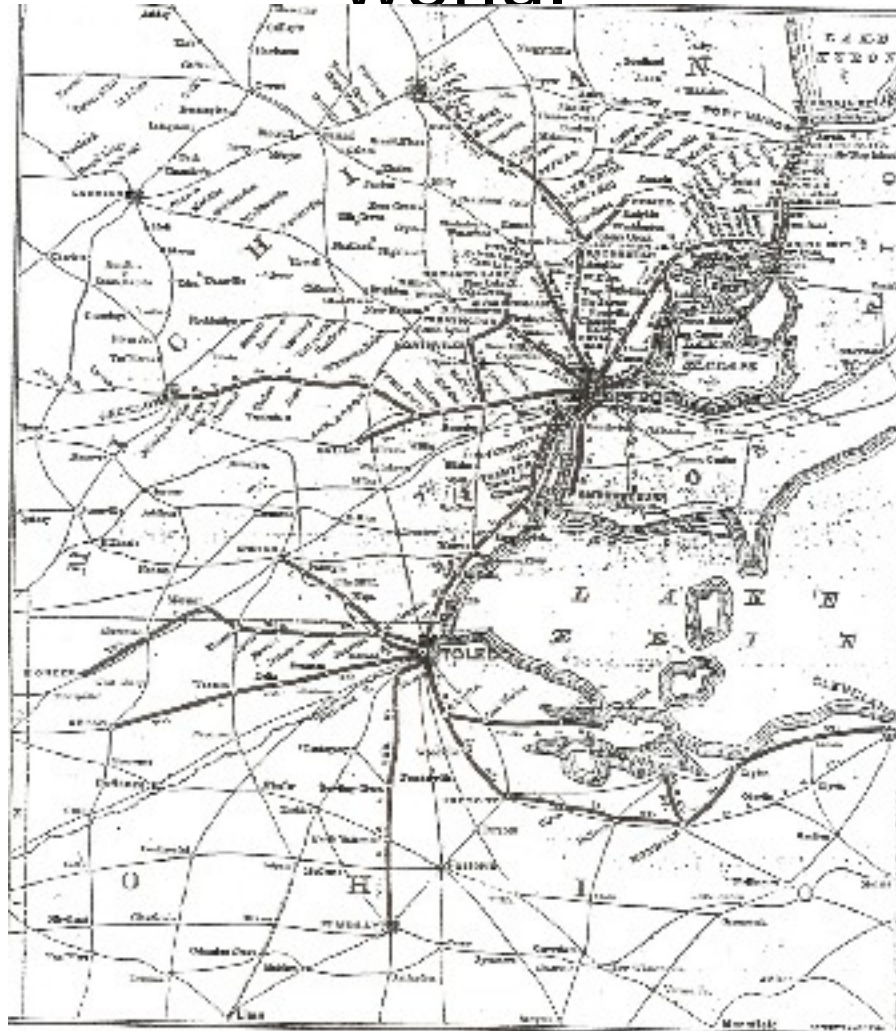
Traveled down Garland

1895 – 1928

At an expense of only 25 cents, and within less than one hour,
you can pass from the heat of the City to the shade and cool
waters of the Lake.

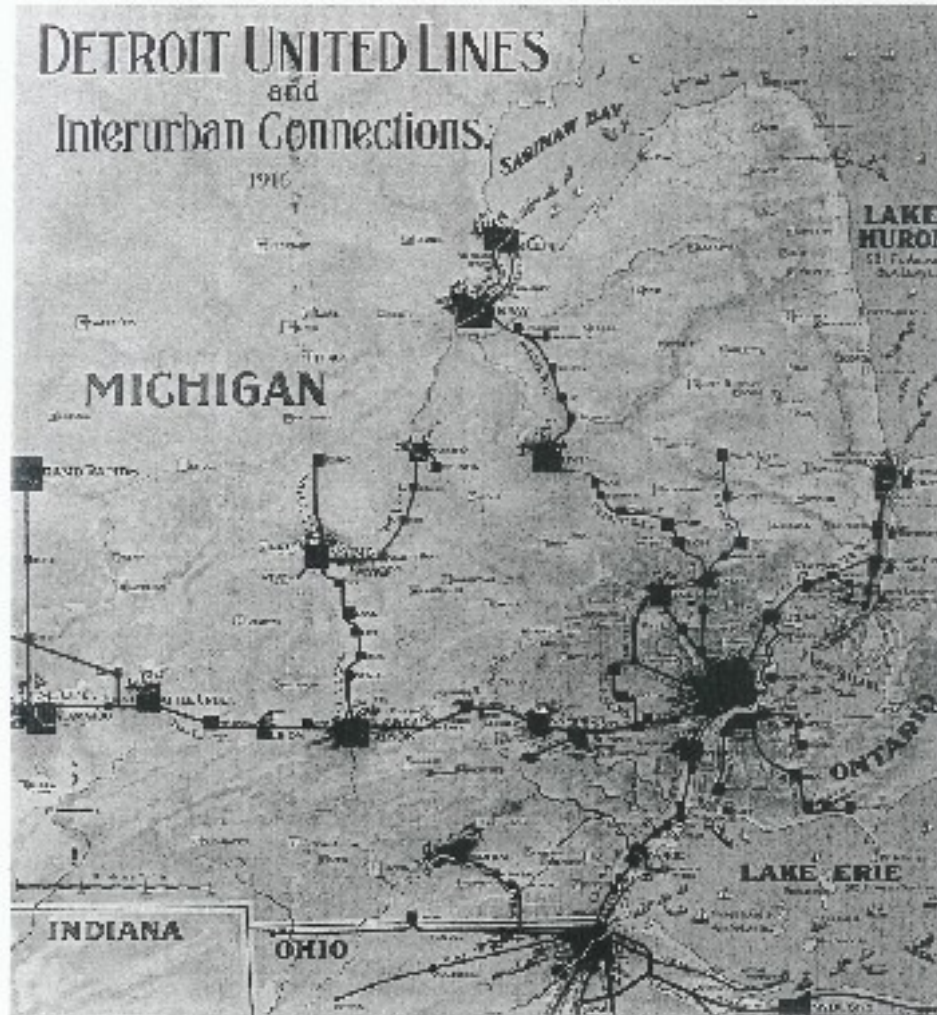


This map tells the story of the greatest interurban electric railway system in the world.



THE MAP THAT TELLS THE STORY OF THE GREATEST INTERURBAN ELECTRIC RAILWAY SYSTEM IN THE WORLD.

Detroit United Lines and Interurban Connections



The late Jim Durfee at the Interurban Tracks on Garland near Oakwood



1928 Photo of Trolley Tracks on Garland



Sylvan Lake, Pontiac, Mich. 1907 Post Card



Free Press Fresh Air Camp

The Detroit Free Press Fresh Air Camp operated for 55 years, from 1906 to 1961. The Merrill Mills family gave the Free Press a restricted deed to the property formerly occupied by Mills' summer Sylvan Lake Inn. The newspaper developed the property as a summer campground for underprivileged children brought out from the city for two weeks of recreation. The project was supported in part by city schoolchildren who sent in nickels to build the camp. Camp activities including baseball games on the front lawn, swimming, boating, and singing. At flag ceremonies each morning and evening the camp children recited the Pledge of Allegiance. During the weeknights the children would take turns entertaining the villagers with songs and skits.

Mr. Howard Wideman stated that city officials purchased the Detroit Free Press Fresh Air Camp for \$1, with the agreement to operate it for three years as a summer camp for underprivileged children. Detroit Free Press deeded the Fresh Air Camp property to Sylvan Lake in 1962.

Detroit Free Press Fresh Air Camp 1920's



View of bridge

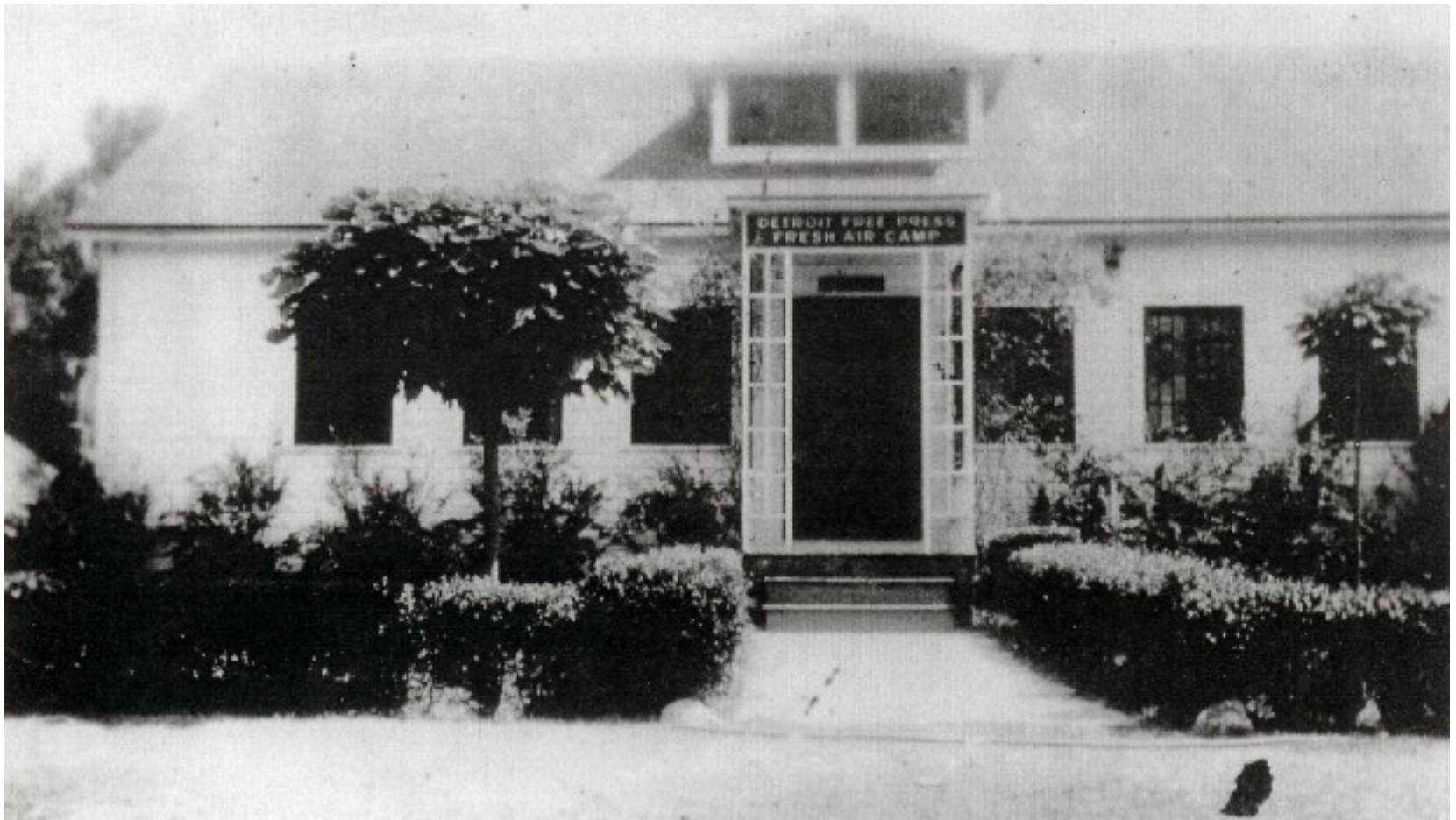
Dredging the canal 1920's



View of Lakeview and lake side cottages – 1920's



Detroit Free Press Fresh Air Camp



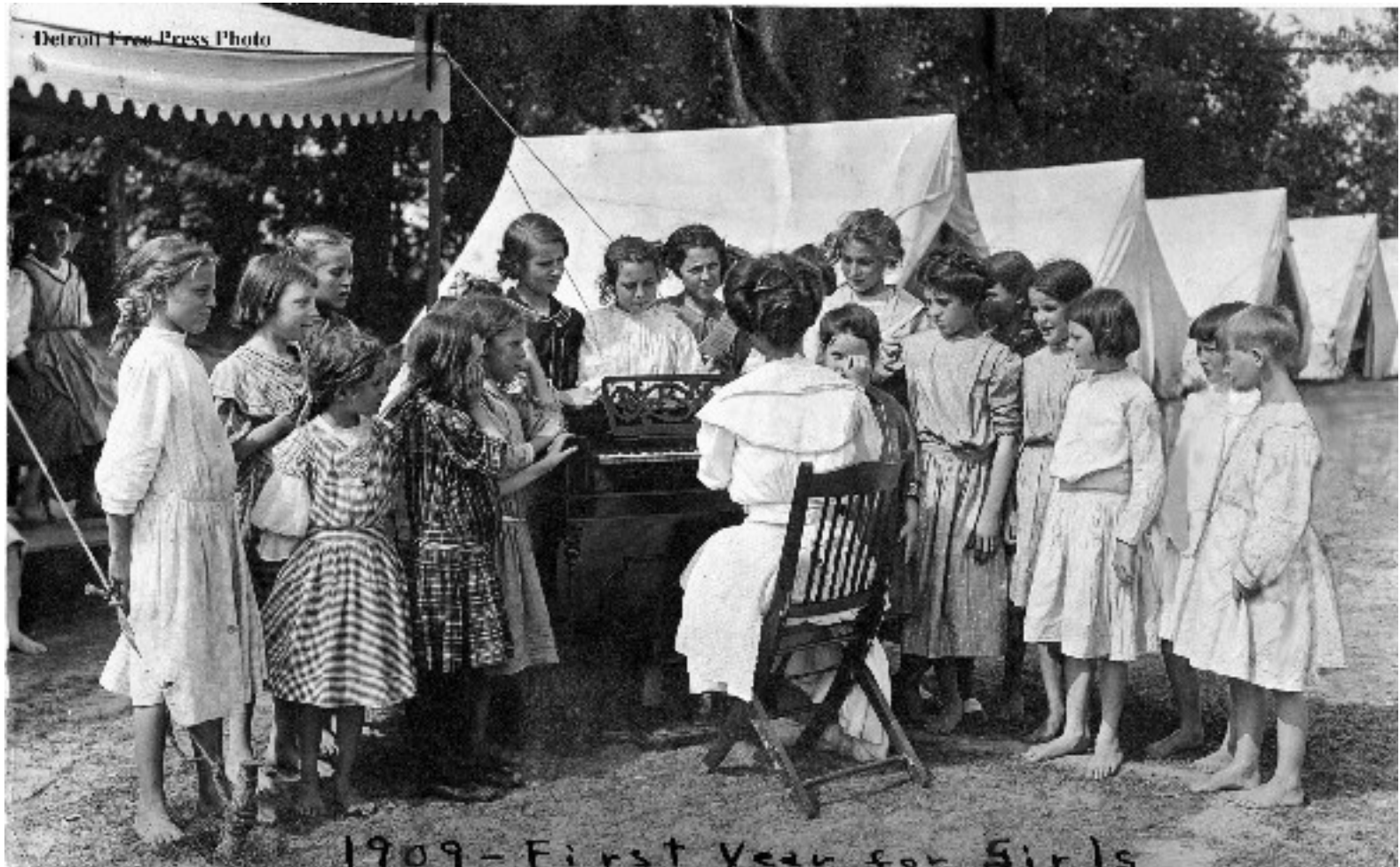
On June 24, 1906, Arthur Mosley ran a box on the page devoted to “Our Boys and Girls” that read: “Wrap up a nickel in a piece of paper and send it to the Free Press to be used to send a poor crippled girl and a poor crippled boy to the country for a month’s vacation.”



1908 – Third year for boys at the Detroit Free Press Fresh Air Camp



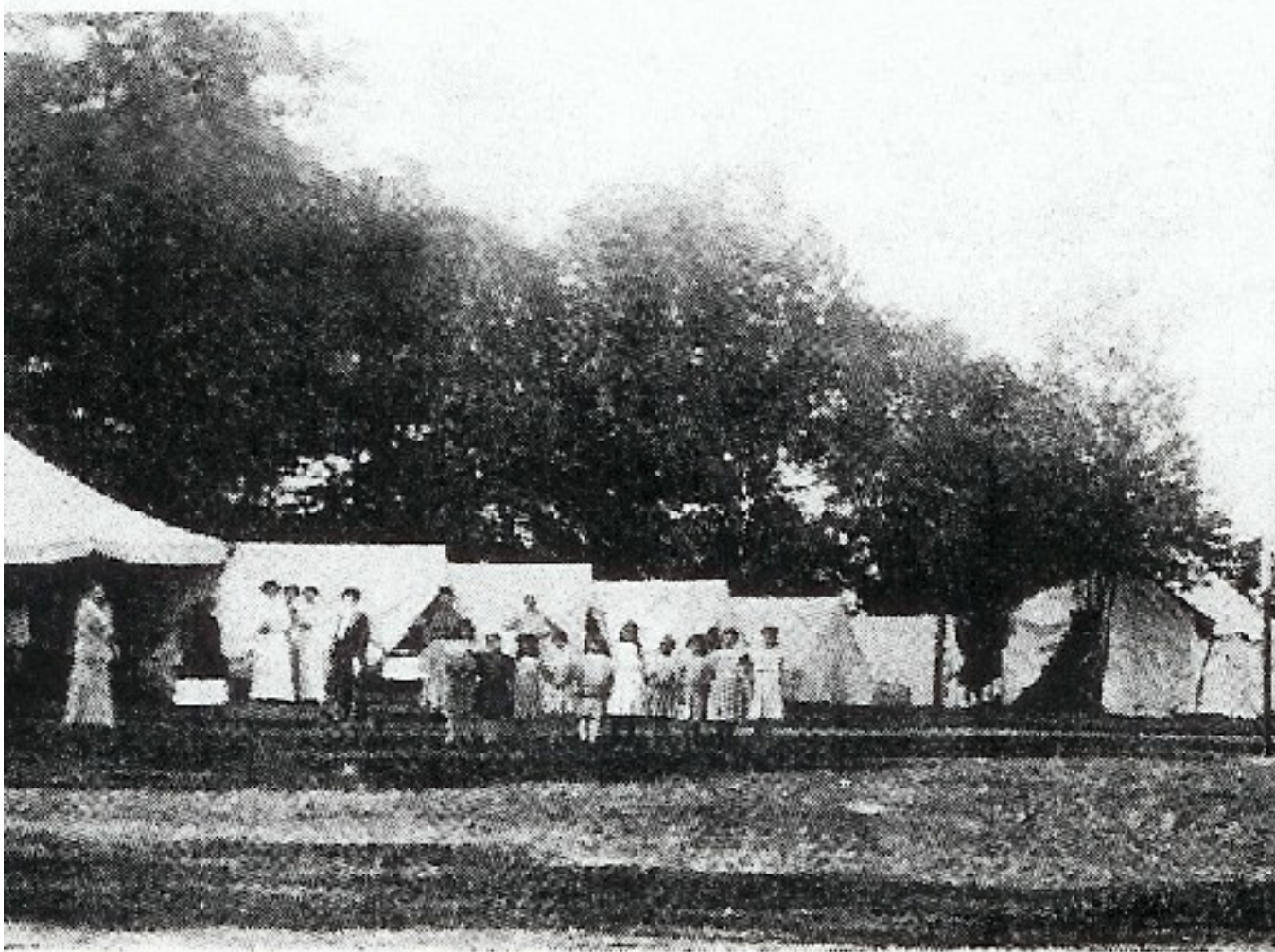
1909 - Girls first year at the Detroit Free Press Fresh Air Camp



Oh the joys of fresh air and sunshine



The boys used white tents
and the girls khaki tents



Bound for Detroit Free Press Fresh Air Camp



Crippled children at the Detroit Free Press Fresh Air Camp



Counselors and children Fresh Air Camp – tents



Counselors and children Fresh Air Camp



Boys unloading fresh fruit and vegetables from the Free Press Truck - 1939

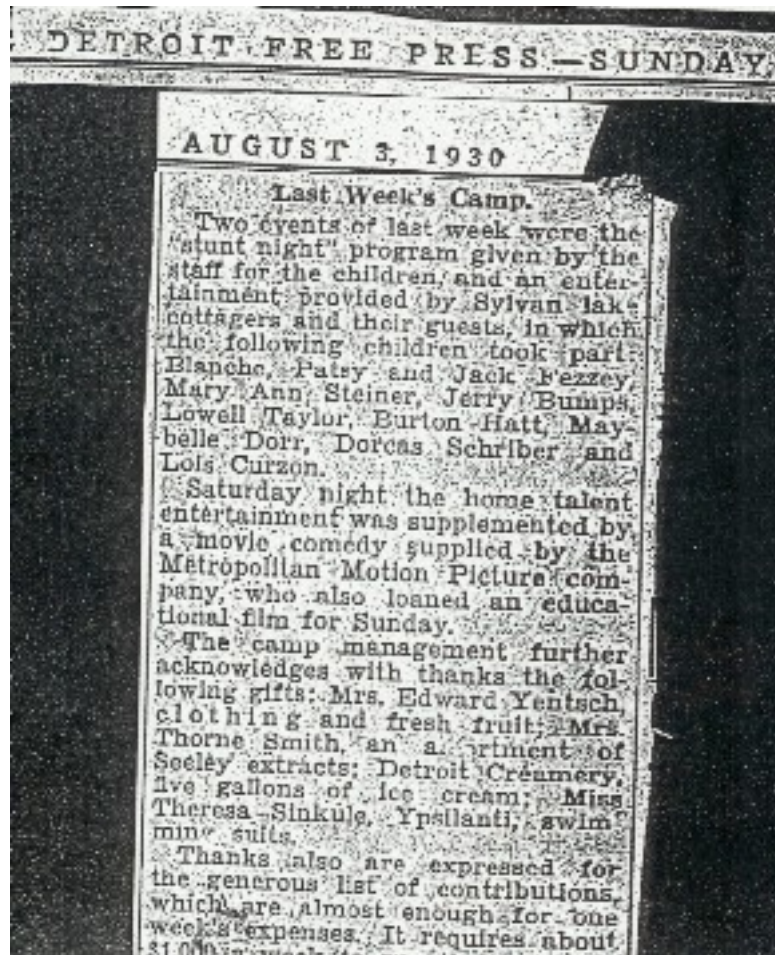


Tatsy, Fred and Blanche Feezey
Detroit Free Press Fresh Air
Camp 1940's



Detroit Free Press Fresh Air Camp

Camp Activities Week of August 3, 1930



- Two events of last week were the "stunt night" program given by the staff for the children and an entertainment provided by Sylvan Lake cottagers and their guests, in which the following children took part: Blanche, Patsy and Jack Fezzey, Mary Ann Steiner, Jerry Bumps, Lowell Taylor, Burton Hatt, Maybelle Dorr, Dorcas Schribner and Lois Curzon.

Tats and Blanche Fezzey entertaining the children
at the Detroit Free Press Fresh Air Camp in the
1940's



Blanche Fezzey Kindig – 1942 –Playing baseball at the Detroit Free Press Fresh Air Camp



Free Press Camp from front lake – Pontiac Drive



Free Press Camp

Free Press Camp - from front lake

Bridge, Free Press Fresh Air Camp, Boat Club – May 28, 1943



Men's Community Club juvenile recreation committee provide a club for Sylvan Lake young people.

Something New at the Fresh Air Camp

A Plethora-Story BY MORT WALTON

UNTIL this year the Free Press Fresh Air Camp, located at Sylvan Lake Village, has been a summertime camp for Detroit youngsters. When September rolled around and the kids went back to school all the windows were boarded up, the water system shut off and the camp on the shores of Sylvan Lake was put to bed for the winter. This winter things are going to be different. At least one night a week the club house will be aglow. There will be strains of the latest tunes from a juke box and shuffling feet of dancing youngsters. Like many other villages and towns, Sylvan Lake has a Men's Community Club, George Watson, of the Pontiac Motor Co. president. The club has a juvenile recreation committee for the welfare of their sons and daughters, and the chief spark plug is Lee Rasmussen, who works for the Phidgas Co. Lee and his workers talked things over with the younger people, who decided to have a club of their own. As president they elected Connie Walker, 19, who finished school last spring and now works for Consumers Power Co. There are 75 members on the list. All they needed was a suitable building for parties and dances. So the Men's Community Club called on the Free Press to ask if the camp recreation hall and theater would be available. The Free Press said yes, and that is why the camp will be open this winter and a lot of kids will have a lot of fun.



WHEN things start to turn this winter Lee Rasmussen probably will re-enact this very scene here. Like most people Lee likes kids and he will go to great lengths to do something for them; \$236.00 was proceeds from box social.

Box social proceeds will buy jute box, heater, fuel oil. Oct. 29, 1944



ALTHOUGH the camp had been closed for the winter and equipment was stored here and there, it made little difference between the More and Dora of Sylvan Lake were out to look a problem and I knew they have. Box social proceeds will buy jute box, heater, fuel oil.
THE COURSE—Garden, Oct. 29, 1944 9

Men's Community Club box social for the Community Juniors headquarters.



Men's Community Club Box Social October 29, 1944.



AUCTIONEER Lee Donahue, of Pontiac Motor Co. did a real job of selling.



FIRST BOX sold was brought by Mrs. Edward F. Collins, purchased by E. W. Green.



CONNIE WALKER, president of the new club, discusses plans with Glenn Husted, superintendent of St. Louis Latin School. Club manufacturing will also work with both graders.



POLICE CHIEF Clark Green, left, and **FRANK** Bakula have both just purchased lunch.



WILLIAM J. WALKERDINE and his wife arrived after the auction, but contributed.



KENNETH SEFTON, left, and Helen Dixon start to unload their basket while Mrs. Dixon pours a cup of coffee. Gertrude Bombardier, director of the Fresh Air Camp, made the coffee.

The Free Press Fresh Air Camp looks pretty quiet after the usual summer activities but in reality something new has been added. Our boys and girls of high school age are now enjoying the use of these buildings for weekly dances and other parties.

1944 Village of Sylvan Lake Christmas card sent to our service men and women.



Free Press Photo 1958



Former Fresh Air Camp photo was taken in 1958. The building in line with the middle tree was renovated and became the existing community center.

Spotlight On History

Hotel, Fresh Air Camp part of Sylvan Lake story

By JULIE ANN BAUMKEL

Statisticians tell us the average American moves once every five or six years.

It seems that surely does anyone live anywhere for 20, 30 or even 40 years.

Howard Wideman, though, might be one to buck that trend. The 75-year-old former mayor and councilman has lived in "the prettiest little city" of Sylvan Lake for more than 42 years.

Wideman remembers the Fresh Air Camp run by a downtown Detroit newspaper on prime lake property during the late 1930s, 1940s and into the late 1960s.

"The camp was for underprivileged children. They had summer sessions there every year," he says. Although the camp was later closed and several of the buildings torn down, the city ultimately benefited.

"We bought it for \$1," Wideman says.

During the 1930s, Wideman says a hotel, complete with horses and a riding stable, was located on the site.

But, "It was not a prime resort area," he says. "The area was very swampy and full of mosquitos."

Wideman says the railroad, part of the Detroit-Pontiac-Gretnard Lake line, dropped off tourists at the hotel and ran through the city along Garland Street.

A green, grassy tree-lined median now lines the street in place of the railroad tracks.

The hotel later burned down, and the land that it occupied was eventually purchased for the Fresh Air Camp.

Proper drainage soon resolved the mosquito problem. Wideman worked with his fellow officials to put in sewer and water lines as the city developed.

Over the years, Sylvan Lake has grown from a resort area of lakefront cottages of about 900 residents to a bustling community housing about 1,500 residents.

Despite the growth, the little city has maintained a resort feeling and with its own police force, the community is almost crime-free.

And most of the community's residents, including Wideman, say they wouldn't trade their pretty little city for anywhere else.

Sylvan renovates its community center

By RICHARD LELI
SYLVAN LAKE — The city of Sylvan Lake has some renovations in store for its landmark community center.

Some of the work is already underway, City Manager Bruce Engler said. This includes the construction of a ramp on expansion of the center's basement and the creation of walkways and a ramp at the 4th and 5th streets.

Other work is planned for the next future, primarily at 20th, Engler said. This would be upgrading the second of the center's two main buildings; the first is already renovated, and the addition of a basketball-harshball court over the existing tennis courts.

Most of the money for the remodeling project will come from the federal and state governments, Engler said. The city will spend its money on Community Development Block Grant of \$4,000 and its expected second-year grant of \$2,500 to finish the pool, basement, walkways and ramp.

Sylvan Lake will use 1977 matching grant money from the state of Michigan for the walkways and make the basketball-harshball court, Engler said. The city planning commission has recommended that Sylvan ask for \$200 from the state, with the city matching that amount.

And as the need in past renovation efforts at the center, local efforts will provide much of the labor for the project.

"We've had a lot of volunteer help here," Engler said. "Why in the past we've had as many as 20 people here, here, creating their time."

The center used to be known as the Deane Free Press Day Center until the 1930s when the Free Press donated the land to Sylvan Lake. Buildings at the site then were the city's center as a recreation center and a structure where one could store athletic equipment for the Oakland Athletic Association.

In the past four years, the city spent to build the old center building and added a basketball court covering the waterfront building to meet children. Three years ago the city, with matching funds from the state, put in the new tennis courts.

"When we first started with the renovation building there was nothing but sand walls," Engler said. "We insulated the walls, added sidewalks, new windows and painting

and repaired the ceiling.

The finished structure now serves as the site of parties occasionally held, as well as meetings of the Rotary Club for those 20 years old and under, school class, wedding receptions, and family reunions.

The old building presently is used just for storage, but the city plans to make it a community room comparable to another building.

"We'd like to see this building getting so it could be used," Engler said. "We'll add insulation, painting, wiring and a fire floor."

The city has already secured bids for the proposed project, which will be started in 1978 if the money continues to come.

The work which will overlook Sylvan Lake will have an equal walking access, and to the Oakland Athletic Association storage building and an asphalt driveway linking it to the road.

"We have a partial construction done for the concrete room's basement, and we should have a bid opening on the project's completion in the near future," Engler said. "The basement would be used

primarily by the tennis players that they can have an activity room of their own."

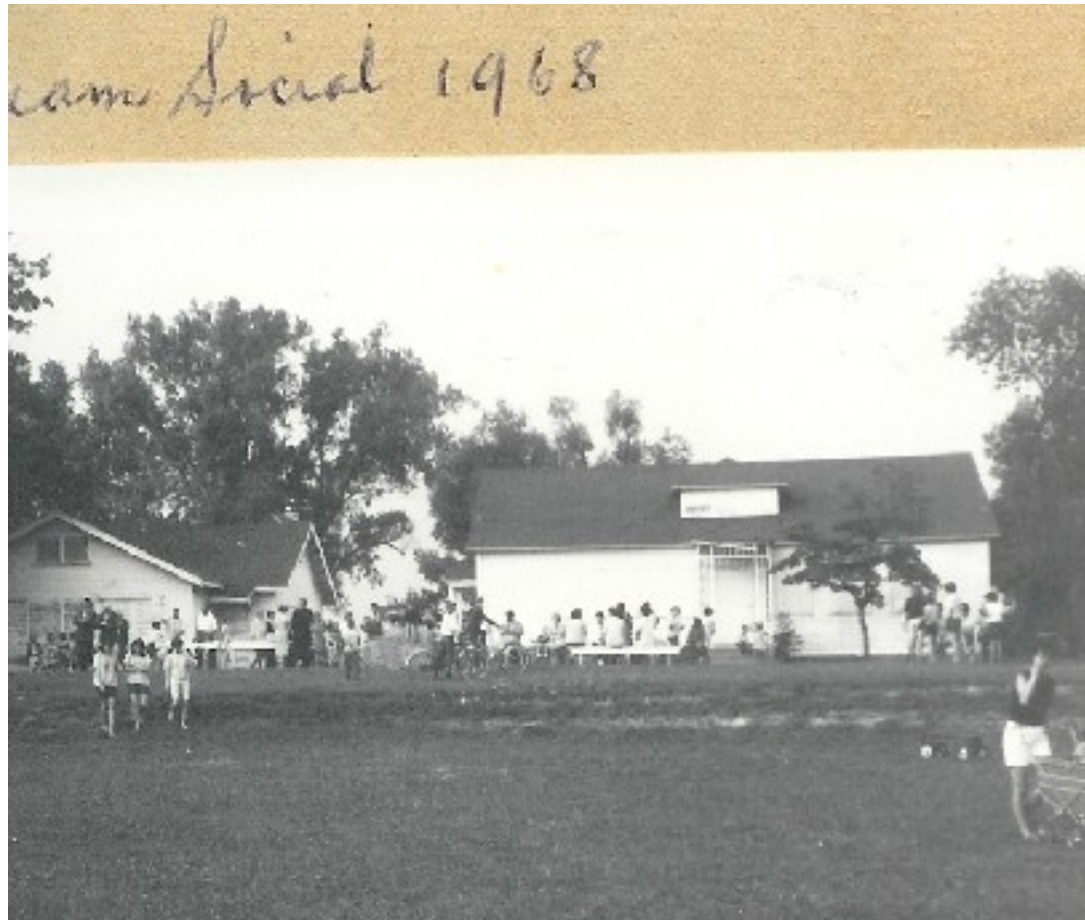
The proposed basketball-harshball court would include a basketball ring at each end, lane walks on hardwood and an expanded board court in which tennis fans can practice their game.



At the Sylvan Lake Community Center, the unfinished building (right) will be winterized in a manner similar to the building of the left.

Garden Club Ice Cream Social 1968

Notice the Community Center two buildings, they had not yet been connected.



Pewabic Tile in the fireplace at the
Community Center.

“Warm the Hand and Cheer the
Heart”



Removing the Pewabic Tile in the old Community Center to use in our new Community Center in 2007.



Proclamation to the Free Press 2007



Whereas the Sylvan Lake Community Center is the site of the former Detroit Free Press Fresh Air Camp which the newspaper developed and operated from the 1920's through the 1950's for underprivileged children who were brought from the city for ten weeks of recreation, and

Whereas the camp was supported by schoolchildren who sent nickels to help induce the camp, and during the weeknights the children would take turns entertaining Sylvan Lake villagers with songs and skits, and the children who lived in Sylvan Lake played with the camp children and Sylvan Lake residents would go to the camp at night to comfort crying, homesick city children and

Whereas the Detroit Free Press Fresh Air Camp was disbanded in 1952 and the property was deeded to the City of Sylvan Lake, and the City of Sylvan Lake developed the Fresh Air Camp property into the Sylvan Lake Community Center, which has been used not only for city functions but for generations of Sylvan Lake family events,

Therefore, the grateful citizens of Sylvan Lake express their sincere appreciation to The Detroit Free Press for their donation of our beloved community center.

Presented, Thursday, August 16, 2007

A snapshot in time

- By 1921, the community had grown sufficiently to be incorporated as a village. Henry J. Stickle was elected as the first President of the Village. The first police chief was Dick Dixon, followed by Clark Green, they also ran the road grader when needed.
- A Post Office was built in the new village at the corner of Pontiac Drive and Garland Street. Villagers could buy groceries as well as pick up mail at the Post Office, until it was closed due to neighbor complaints about noise and traffic. Mrs. John Britzer was the first postmistress.
- Street lighting was completed in 1938 and the sewer system was laid in the 1940's. Joseph Leavy II served as Justice of the Peace beginning in the 1940's, followed by Tony Kreps.

Entrance to Sylvan Lake, Pontiac, Mich. Post Card



A View at Sylvan Lake.



Sylvan Lake Post Card



SYLVAN LAKE. PONTIAC. MICH.

A View of Sylvan Lake Post Card



City of Sylvan Lake Community Center Park



Sylvan Lake Community Center 2007



Rob Galacz – General Contractor Community Center New Building



The last morning for our Community Center



Morning before the demolition



New Community Center Design 2008



Community Center Committee

John Martin, Brian Shultz, Sharon Maurina,
Aron Lorenz, Jack Hunger



Community Center Planning Committee

Back – Brian Schulz, Sharon Maurina, Jack Hunger,
Steve Auger, Brandon LaCourciere,
Front – John Martin, Aron Lorenz, Rob Galacz



Community Center Ground Breaking Ceremony Nov. 3, 2007

Annalee Kennedy; Jennifer, John and Mattisyn Hill
6th generation living Sylvan Lake

