Willis Ward - West Bloomfield Lakes Association

Some sixty years ago a boy lived on a farm between three beautiful lakes. There were miles of lovely wooded shores for a playground and several thousand acres of water on which to row and sail in summer and skate and ice-boat in winter. There were also hills for coasting out on to the ice on the lakes. Instead of the “old swimming hole” there were clean sandy beaches and clear water to go swimming in. On a hot summer’s day this boy was known (or rather unknown by his parents) to have gone in swimming as often as five times a day. This was his method of keeping cool. Whenever he liked, he amused himself by wading on the clean lake bottom along the shores catching clams or going fishing. He became acquainted with every kind of song bird in the groves and forests, their habits, the kinds of nests they built and the color and size of the eggs they laid. He recognized each variety of wild ducks as they halted several weeks on these lakes each spring and autumn during their migrations. He learned the names of every variety of trees, shrubs, vines and wild flowers that grew about. All this seemed like heaven to the boy. His boyhood memories of it have been perhaps the brightest side of his life, something that nothing afterward could deprive him of. Do you wish your boy to have such an heritage? If you do, this boy of sixty years ago has provided it for him.

How It All Came About

It was in this way. The time came during early manhood when this boy of sixty years ago realized that it was well to be forehanded in providing himself with his choice of a dwelling place of his own and on purchasing a farm with extensive shores along one of these three beautiful lakes he experienced that delightful sensation that comes to one who secures a homestead of his own that he is in love with. Later on his children enjoyed the same outdoor life and privileges that he had in boyhood and acquired the same love for it. Still later, in middle life, owing to apprehensiveness that the shores of these lakes might become tarnished by unsightly structures, as had already happened elsewhere, he in due time acquired a number of neighboring farms which had extensive shores on these and other lakes.

Fond of trees and flowers, he planted thousands of trees, including evergreens, the latter to cheer up the landscape in winter, and especially in a tract oflargely forested and rugged country lying between three smaller lakes that he was particularly charmed with. Also many, many thousands of different varieties of flowering bulbs that may endure for generations were successfully naturaized in innumerable colonies ranging from small to large and irregular in outline and shape as nature might have arranged, in the various forested areas. For years this restful occupation and relaxation from business cares and strain continued. Numberless became the evening rambles along secluded shores or through forest and glade, often alone, sometimes with others, that cleared the cobwebs from his brain to meet the following day’s business problems. During these rambles alone he often mused upon what was to be the destiny of this country so dear to himself and his children. No greater heritage could bless his grandchildren than the out -of-door life and privileges he and his children had enjoyed, and for years he dreamed of the attractive development of this community where they and their friends might live. Years of dreaming finally crystallized in a comprehensive plan, which has been carried out with the hearty co-operation of his children.

Nature had exerted herself to mould this region into one of rare attractiveness. All that need be done was to stay the hand of man from marring her work. Accordingly mathematical accuracy was thrown into the discard in laying out this future residence community. Instead of straight roads demanding unsightly cuts and fills, the drives were winding and negotiated the hills in an attractive way. Furthermore the drives were private, one on each farm providi access to its group of residence sites. The lay of the land and shore of the lake largely determined the size and shape of the residence sites. Instead of the small orthodox 50 x 100 ft. lots, these residence sites average a dozen times this area, thus prohibiting congestion and insuring an ample home playground for the children of each family. To further still enlarge the outdoor recreational facilities of the residents a tract of approximately 200 acres of very rugged and forested country near three small lakes was set aside for recreation. Seven or eight miles of forest drives and bridle paths were made through this tract. Small frontages on all of the eight lakes touching the property were included, and the siteowners were given the privilege of becoming stockholders in the West Bloomfield Lakes Association, which is a non-profit corporation controlling these lands.

Careful restrictions were drawn to prevent nuisances, and anything detrimental to an attractive residence community. Years were leisurely consumed in the inspiration, conception, formulation and perfecting of this plan.

A name for this region where the area of the lakes exceeds that of the land was a subject of considerable thought. The name of Bloomfield Hills in Bloomfield Township, where beautiful hills abounded was a happy one for a neighboring district. Why not West Bloomfileld Lakes in West Bloomfield Township where beautiful lakes prevailed? The name Bloomfield with which these sister townships had been christened had the mutual significance that the bloom of the wild flowers observed in them by the pioneers was unusual. Let it be hoped that their followers will see that they are not exterminated. And so it came to pass that the name of West Bloomfield Lakes was adopted for this property.

This boy of sixty years ago has now become an elderly man; although not so old. When one ceases to find interest in anything, some say he is dead. If so, this elderly man is very much alive, for he finds his dream coming true of absorbing interest. It is a joy to watch the children riding horseback over the miles of bridle paths he has made through the rugged forest country. He watches the children and young people swimming and diving each afternoon in summer. The week .. end sailing is of neverending interest for old and young. In all these and other recreations his grandchildren now participate.

He enjoys searching for the wild flowers, but he does not help exterminate them by picking them. He knows that in certain varieties one withered bouquet marks the end of the perpetuation and increase of a bevy of plants, thus not only ending the pleasure of others in seeing their blooms during the present blooming season, but far worse still, ending that of all mankind from enjoying their otherwise annually increasing blooms for all time. He finds the flowering bulbs he has naturalized a great pleasure. Although he remembers where he has planted the larger colonies, he is often surprised at running across some cluster of flowers in some out-of-th-way nook that he had forgotten. He knows that no one else planted them. There is something pathetic in their loyalty. He had forgotten them, but they had not forgotten him. They had faithfully bloomed each year until they had attracted his attention again. Always a tree planter from youth, he still plants trees and hopes thereby to produce autumn color effects around the countryside that may be greatly appreciated in the future. An incident that occurred a dozen and a half years ago while motoring through England profoundly impressed him. A lane was observed with the unusual sight of straight rows of immense oaks on either side that must have been planted before the Pilgrim Fathers landed at Plymouth. The regularity of the planting did not add in particular to the charm of these venerable trees, but it showed they had been planted by man instead of nature. The planter must have known that appreciable resuits from these slow growing oaks in his lifetime were impossible. He must therefore have visioned in some measure the pleasure and charm his simple act would afford the dozen generations that have followed him since then, which in the aggregate is immeasurable and will endure several generations longer. Could he have known that the lesson of his example was to be so far-reaching as to cross the Atlantic to a new world several hundred years later, he doubtless would have felt abundantly repaid for his effort. May his lesson travel even further!

It is natural that this boy of sixty years ago, now in the evening of his life, should have visions of the future of this community that,.he has helped to build. Indeed he has numbers of them. The thousands of beautiful passenger pigeons can never return each spring to this vicinity as they used to do when he was a boy. But the wild ducks may, for the State of Michigan has made a game preserve of Orchard Lake, and a John Miner proposition on a large scale can be developed. He visions these wild ducks in thousands pausing, for several weeks each autumn and spring during their migrations, in this haven of security for these harmless and persecuted creatures who find men, aided by science, the most murderous of their enemies. The tragedy of the extermination of the passenger pigeon lingers in some minds. It hurts cruelly whenever the realization repeats itself that mankind never can see one of these beautiful birds again.

He pictures graceful swans, the one last exquisite touch to a perfect water scene, gliding about on the waters of these lakes where their beautiful heads may not again become shining targets for expert rifle shots.

Before another generation has passea he visions the community as having been developed and several hundred parents will have been in charge of it for some time. Their children will be living on its soil with much the same scope of privileges that he enjoyed. The aesthetic and artistic sense of a people that were attracted by the natural beauty of this district, empowered with enforcing the wholesome restrictions that have been inaugurated, will have jealously guarded against any marring of the beauty of the landscape that nature so bounteously blessed them with. He feels that they will increasingly be impressed by what such outdoor environment throughout the year means for their children in developing sound bodies and healthy minds; that they realize that the finer environment in what is beautiful in nature naturally and persistently directs the development of the child morally for the better and that the opportunity for the maximum development physically, mentally and morally to meet the problems of life are his due.

Now you have read quite a story, albeit a true one, and no doubt you may be curious to see just how this lovely inland lake district looks that you have been told about, in which the area of water exceeds that of the land, where this boy of sixty years ago played, swam, rowed, fished, sailed, rode horseback, skated, coasted and did other things. If so, and you will fill out and mail the enclosed postal card, we will send you free of charge many lovely photographs showing these lakes, which you will find very interesting, and after that, if you desire to see the district itself, we will send you directions how to reach us very handily.