

## **X. MICHIGAN AND ITS LAKES**

## INLAND LAKES

During our childhood, Dorothy and I could usually look forward to several lake experiences. Near at hand were little lakes unromantically named Camp, Long, Round, and Sand. I recall Dad's hiring from the local livery stable a horse and buggy which ably ploughed through the several inches of sand to the last mentioned lake. I don't remember the actual picnic at this specific place, but I do remember the family enjoying many later picnics there. When automobiles came in, there was always the prospect of our parents renting a cottage at a lake farther north or taking the thirty mile trip to the state park at Muskegon.

It is only recently that I have come to realize how difficult it must have been to plan any trip involving a Michigan lake. For, by the time of my birth, practically all shorelines both on Lake Michigan and all the inland lakes had been bought up by private investors. Fortunately Lake Michigan was partially saved for us by the creation of a state park.

Dad must have done considerable maneuvering to find picnic places for his family on any small lake. He had either to resort to outright trespassing or make an agreement with a private owner.

Still in early years, our parents were financially able to rent a cottage for two-week intervals. Although we had full water rights, the scenery, the water, and the fishing were disappointing. President Roosevelt's CCC boys had not appeared on the scene; the Depression was yet to come.

Nevertheless, Dorothy and I had a few compensations. The two grandmothers were included in the cottage renting. They made very good companions for us children. I remember toying with blue and pine embroidery thread and a hoop which held down a piece of cloth. The grandmothers were also very good story tellers and acted as an audience for our original dramatizations. They also concocted wonderful berry pies out of the gooseberries, blackberries, and ground blueberries which we found in wooded areas.



Dorothy and Marion in 1918 with Grandma Clark in front of a spirea bush



Grandma Smith with Marion and Dorothy

Nearby Camp Lake undoubtedly made a great impact on the residents of our town. Although this lake too had been taken over by the developers, there was a certain amount of public access to the shoreline.

At the private dock we could not only rent a row boat, but could also utilize a certain area of lake frontage for swimming. We probably had to pay a bathing fee.

There was also a fairly large pavilion overhanging the lake. The management catered banquets and held dancing events.

Another feature at Camp Lake was a wide area which provided recreation activities to the public at large.

What made Camp Lake unique was its stand of virgin pine, which had somehow escaped the handsaw of the loggers. These lovely pines, however, were almost overwhelmed by the welter of cottages weaving around the lake. In fact, the cottages were packed so closely together that their screened in porches were within touching distance. I have no idea who owned the many cottages located at Camp Lake; but I do know that the occupants weren't seeking privacy!

In early days there was no bathing shelter. But Mother, as usual, improvised her own unique facility. In fact, all she had to do was to fasten down the isinglass side curtain of the parked car enabling us to change into our home-made one-piece bathing suits.

Another experience I remember is being casually allowed to row all round the lake by myself. I



Lillian, Dorothy, and Marion  
in their home-made bathing suits

was not only enamored by my expertise but by the tree-bordered shore line and the colorful water lilies which seemed to float on the surface of the water.

Unhappily I remember all too well the three annual picnics which were held at Camp Lake. First, there was the Community Picnic sponsored by the Sparta businessmen. I'm sure Dad gave time and money to make it a success.

The first order of business, of course, was the picnic itself. The covered dishes already placed on the long tables were unveiled and each lady present seemed to enjoy someone else's cooking. I remember Dorothy and I poked gingerly at the food.

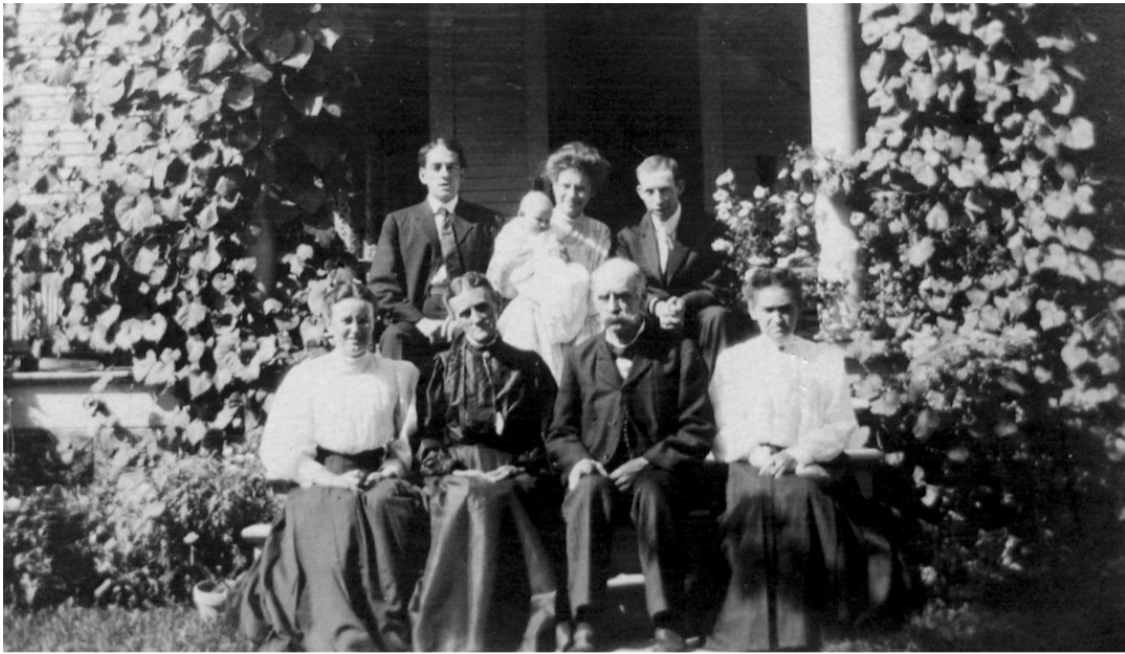
After the dishes were put away, everyone was practically forced into participating in the program of events. I have little recollection of the horseshoe contest. I vividly recall the races: foot, relay, and three-legged. Dad and I participated in the last mentioned contest; we lost! In some strange way I did win a foot race; undoubtedly, the stop watch was set incorrectly. As a prize I was given a hall tree which was donated by Will Rogers' hardware store. Mr. Rogers' gift proved to have a broken hook at the top.

How I detested the all-inclusive baseball game which concluded the day's activities. Doubtless the city fathers considered they were giving the children a treat by including them in the game; but I knew all too well from past experience I would only stand helplessly around in the heat during the interminable number of innings. Never in my short life had I made any direct contact with any forthcoming ball. Nevertheless, the game did proceed to its end, the winning team was probably suitably rewarded, and the signal was given that home was not too far away.

The second event was the Smith reunion. This "family" affair was the result of Dad's turning out a typed volume tracing the Smith family tree. That this particular "tree" had no "branches" of social or historical significance did not deter Dad in any way [Ed.: see Appendix].

Since the various families represented had no close family or social relationships, conversation tended to be vapid and disjointed. Although Grandma Smith and Dad seemed to have an exciting time conversing about old times with this person or that, Mother must have longed for some rest and peace at home. I know that we children could hardly wait for the signal of departure.

There was no excuse, however, for any childish petulance at the Pioneer Picnic. This event was of great importance to the old timers; and each year Grandma Smith looked forward to meeting again old friends and acquaintances. Of course, the participants at this



Gathering of the Clark family (Lillian's relatives) in the summer of 1908, when Marion was an infant. Top row: Uncle Fred Clark, Lillian (holding Marion), and Erastus. Lower row: Alice and Elizabeth Potts (Grandpa Clark's niece and sister) and Grandpa and Grandma Clark.

picnic were largely unknown to Dorothy and me; but I do vividly recall observing several Civil War Veterans, a few of whom were missing arms and legs.

Today Camp Lake exists only in memory; somehow the lake water has disappeared [Ed: see Appendix]. Undoubtedly there are few mourners, for this pretty little glacial lake belonged to another era when mobility was limited and recreational opportunities were few. Camp Lake, however, must have been very meaningful to countless numbers of peoples in the early years of the twentieth century.

## LAKE MICHIGAN

After automobiles became reliable, our family visited the state park on Lake Michigan at Muskegon several times during the summer. Here we were treated with beach picnics and wiener roasts. Various times we made attempts to combat the waves, to climb the tricky dunes and to fish off the pier that extended for quite a distance over the lake. The last activity was a real challenge, for the fish didn't "come in" every day. In fact, I



Dorothy and Marion in 1917  
on the Lake Michigan beach

remember only one occasion when word circulated that this was "the day." Somehow Dad collected the necessary bamboo poles, tackle, and bait and our family proudly went home with a fine catch.

Like all visitors to the park, we tried to take in the majesty of Lake Michigan itself: the varying colors at different times; the dynamics of the wave action; and the broad expanse of the horizon line. Naturally, we all rejoiced in the never-ending stretch of beach sand.

Sometime during the day we were usually induced to make the trip to the top of one of the dunes. I can remember no certain trail upwards. I do remember, however, having to cope with the sliding sand. Boardwalks came in much later.

Especially memorable for me was the unique vegetation scattered throughout the dune area. Years later I learned that we had encountered clumps of marram grass, groupings of sand cherries,

white pines and cottonwoods. I was also informed that it was the grasses and the cottonwoods which held the dunes together.

It is certainly to be hoped that the Michigan state legislators who enacted the necessary legislation for establishing not only this state park at Muskegon but the twelve others similar to it were adequately thanked by their constituents.