

A HISTORY OF PINEWOOD LAKE

The following material was written by Mr. E. Merrill Beach for whose family Beach's Park was named. He advises that information for this history of Pinewood Lake and its background had been gathered from many sources, including the Trumbull Town Records, history books, maps, recollections of old timers and the writer's experience in the organization of Pinewood in the 1940's.

Before Trumbull was settled, the Pinewood area was the home of Mischa, a Paugussett Indian, who lived with his clan near a natural lake, later called Old Farm Pond, which was located about 1150 feet in length and 775 feet at its widest part. It tapered on both sides to a point at its northerly end. This lake was fed by the Booth Hill and the Bears Den Brooks which joined about 1550 feet before flowing into the lake.

During the period from 1836-40, about one hundred acres, including the natural lake, were purchased from many different natives by the Pequonnock Manufacturing Company and Diantha Bunnell. These purchasers had financial trouble and the property was transferred to others. Over the years there were several owners of this property including William R. Bunnell, Dean and La Monts, James Reed and Christopher C. Chadwick of Boston, the Bridgeport Paper Company, George Curtis of Boston and probably others.

The dam for the Upper Pond, as it was called, together with a factory near it, were apparently built before the Civil War, according to our information. We are informed that woolen shirts and blankets were made in this factory during the War. The pond was about 3600 feet long and covered a natural lake. It was necessary, in order to contain the water, to build a dike across the low neck of land on the southwest side of this pond. The dike is still visible below the water of present day Pinewood Lake. It is this dike that gave its name to present day "Old Dike Road".

Howard Curtis, who lived on Huntington Turnpike and owned property at Pinewood, recalled ox-drawn carts of timber being drawn across this dike. He also recalled the spring-fed pasture land north and to the south of the present day island at 181 Pinewood Trail.

It was on August 27, 1893 that George Curtis of Boston sold this approximately one hundred acres, including the reservoir, then called Bunnell's Pond, to the Bridgeport Hydraulic Company, which also purchased a large tract of land to the west as a watershed, and proceeded to raise the dam about eight feet, extending the lake some 600 to 700 feet. The new dam was built over the old dam and north of it.

In the 1930's, Benjamin Plotkin, an affable and progressive gentleman, purchased the lake and the surrounding property from the Bridgeport Hydraulic Company and developed it as a resort for guests, calling it Pinebrook Lake. He built many cabins and erected an auditorium with a revolving stage.

We are very fortunate to have the following statement from Mrs. Mary T. Keane, who has lived at Pinewood for twenty-three years and is a student of the American Theater, with special knowledge of the Pinewood Lake facilities and background over the years.

"When Ben Plotkin hired 130 carpenters to build the Pinebrook Theater in two months, he could not have foreseen that the roots of modern American theater would form there, or that famous actors of the Group Theater who played there would include Morris Carnovsky, Phoebe Brand, Ruth Nelson, Elia Kazan, John Garfield and Cliff Odets. Kurt

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Weil and Paul Green attended the rehearsals of their plays Johnny Johnson and Waiting for Lefty at Pinebrook too. Acting methods and theory were taught by Lee Strassberg and Stella Adler with the help of artistic director Howard Clurman. These people influenced the future of American theater perhaps more than any others. A future Town Attorney, Aaron Levine, worked as a waiter at Pinebrook to earn his college tuition for law school.

Ben Plotkin lured weary New Yorkers to his theater and the bucolic shores of Pinewood Lake with photographs, postcards and folders advertising a round trip railroad fare of \$1.25 in the 1930's!"

The resort continued for some time until it became unprofitable, at which time a bank was appointed as trustee. Mortgages were held on the property by both the bank and the Bridgeport Hydraulic Company. The bank, as trustee, changed the name to Pinewood Lake and developed it into building lots. In the development of the property, the purchasers of the building lots were given the option of becoming members of the Pinewood Association, and also

given privileges for the use of the Clubhouse. While working on Pinewood Trail, the developed discovered a cache of some dozen or more Indian arrow points, placed there, no doubt, by Mischa or some member of his clan.

Over a period of time all of the property was sold, including the large parcel to the west which was purchased by E. Merrill and Florence G. Beach, who donated it to the Town of Trumbull as a park in memory of their son, Robert Greening Beach, a casualty in World War II. A sufficient amount was received by the sale of the property to clear the entire total of the mortgage indebtedness.

Information concerning Pinewood Lake furnished by the Bridgeport Hydraulic Company indicates that the lake is 165.5 feet above sea level. Its drainage area is 4.3 square miles and the lake area is 63.8 acres.

Today Pinewood is a very attractive community with many fine citizens.

E. Merrill Beach, October 16, 1991