

The Birth of Lake Hollybrook

By Lyle Brighton

The Gosport Express circa 1977

Lake Hollybrook was once a 154-acre farm through which Limestone Creek flowed. The farm was owned and farmed by Shirley Martin. Because of the abundance of water supply from the creek and frequent springs, the early Westward wagon trains passed through what later became the Martin farm. There was a house that stood on the western part of the farm near Limestone Creek. Brice Miller told Ruby Martin Collier that he watched the last Wagon Train pass through the area. He was standing in front of the "old house" and watched the wagons until they passed out of sight. Ruby Martin Collier, is the daughter of Shirley Martin, she said that the wagon train was visible for many years. Another unique thing about the farm was there was a natural site where a dam could be put to make a lake of several acres. At that time, there were few lakes in South Central Indiana. Lake Monroe, Cataract Lake, Griffey, Lake Lemon, and others did not exist.

Mr. Martin had the foresight to explore the idea of damming Limestone Creek and turn the area into a recreational park. To raise capital, he sold stock to the public and Lake Hollybrook Corporation was born. Several local people who purchased the stock were, Mike Brighton, Fred Hollis, Sam Sanders, and other businessmen. This all happened in the late 1920's but the financial crash of 1929 did not stop the project. In fact, the crash may have helped Mr. Martin to preserve his capital.



The Lakebed was cleared and the dam constructed with manual labor. Because of the depression, construction jobs were scarce, so it was easy to find people who were eager to work. Some of the men were willing to accept a lake lot as a part of their pay, which helped Mr. Martin with his startup capital. I remember watching some of the work on the dam. The earth moving was done with horses and a scoop. Joe Haase was given the contract to put the concrete face onto the dam and the spillway. They built wooden ramps, which enabled the men to push wheelbarrows of concrete from the mixer up the face of the dam. The work was hot, difficult, and slow, compared to the way it is done today.

As the completion of the lake drew near, speculation and rumors began as to what the lake would be called. Some said it would only be a mud hole. Because Fred Hollis was one of the early investors, some called it "Holly's Place", then came Holly this and Holly that. One day Maggie Brighton called it "Hollybrook" and the name stuck. As the lake began to fill with water, interest in the project grew rapidly. Lots were sold to people in Bloomington, Indianapolis, and to local people. Soon, lake front cottages were built and the lake was on its way.





On the site where the present lake community building now stands, a swimming beach was constructed, complete with a bathhouse and concession stand. The swimming area contained a small float, a larger float with a slide and a diving board. Sometime later, a windmill was added which became a place for the "dare-devil type" to dive or jump into the lake.

Just east of the bathhouse, a large high slide was built, which ended at the water's edge. It was made to accommodate a wooden sled on which a person could sit, lie, or stand and ride down the slide, then skim some distance over the water. In the winter, when the lake froze, it was possible to freeze ice on the slide and ride a sled all the way to the dam.

Over the years, several attractions were added to the lake property. Such as a skating rink, Fourth of July fireworks, refreshment stand and dance hall. The July 4th fireworks drew large crowds. Also added to the lake bottom in the swimming area, was a concrete slab. That slab was recently rediscovered when the lake was dredged. Things were going well for Lake Hollybrook, but one June day in the mid 1930's, disaster struck! A sudden summer storm with heavy rains put the lake level over the top of the dam. In short time, the dam gave way, which caused extensive flooding downstream on Limestone Creek. I remember boats hanging in trees below the dam. Fortunately, there were no personal injuries, but I expect some cropland downstream was flooded.



When the lake dam was constructed, there was only one spillway. At first, the lake was not as large as it is today, which if left that way, the one spillway may have prevented the washout. After the lake was completed, it was soon discovered that the original lake level did not cover all the available Martin farm. A wall some two to three feet high was built on the original spillway, which increased lake level and acreage. However, this did not leave ample space for the single spillway to carry a large volume of water that would happen during heavy rains. When the broken dam was repaired, a second spillway was added which has taken care of floods to date.