

**75 Years on Geneva Lake:
A History of Cedar Point Park
1925-2000**



Photo: Mary Bohm

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Chapter 1: Before Cedar Point Park: Geography and People Prior to 1925

An Introduction

On July 7, 2000, many members of the Cedar Point Park Association (CPPA) started their days with what had become an annual tradition. By 9:30 a.m., they had filed into the place and were somewhat drowsily consuming cups of coffee and orange juice as they tried to catch up with neighbors that they had not seen yet during the summer season. They talked about the events of the day to come, about their children and grandchildren, about their houses and their health. Differentiated mainly by their matching green Cedar Point Park t-shirts, the Cedar Point Park Association Board of Directors gathered in clusters to discuss the day's agenda and go over last minute plans for a day of celebration. In still another realm of activity, Cedar Point volunteers (also in green CPPA t-shirts) were sitting together at a group of long tables busily tabulating attendance to see whether the meeting could proceed as planned. A quorum was needed, and, as always, the meeting would not start until it was assured. Shortly after 9:30, a quorum was assured, and the 75th annual meeting of the Cedar Point Park Association was ready to begin.

The differences between the first CPPA meeting in October 1925, and the 75th annual meeting on July 7, 2000 are too numerous to count. However, a few very important differences give a quick view of all that had changed on Cedar Point over those 75 years. The most important differences were in the number of members present, their goals for the meeting and the coming year, and the format and atmosphere of the meeting. In 2000, well over 150 men and women were present, dressed in all levels of formality, and a few, at least, looked like they may have come straight from a morning dip in the lake. At the very first CPPA meeting in 1925, only 25 people attended, and no women were mentioned in the minutes. The meeting was not even held near Cedar Point or in Williams Bay, or in Wisconsin, for that matter. That first 1925 meeting was at Chicago's Morrison Hotel. Although the minutes from the meeting do not actually describe the air in the room as being smoke-filled, that is the impression they give: A few Chicago men gathering to make decisions about the future, plan for governance, and build an institution and lakeside community almost a hundred miles away.

By 2000, most of the members had an idea of what to expect from their annual meeting. There would be some debate, perhaps, and even hard-fought contention on an issue or two, but the general format of administering, caring, and planning for Cedar Point had become a familiar exercise. Over 75 years, new ideas and plans had become old traditions and accomplishments. Cedar Point had prospered. The future would bring new challenges, but their thinking about the future was grounded in the many strong institutions and difficult decisions that Cedar Point Park Association members had made since the first Association meeting 75 years ago.

This is the story of those institutions and decisions, and it aims not to be a complete record of those 75 years, but an accurate, fair reckoning of the most important happenings and memories created in 75 years on Cedar Point. The Cedar Point Park Association Board of Directors hopes that it will help all members know more about the challenges of the past, and, in that sense, serve as a guide to the future. As importantly, though, this history serves to

record some of the many personal memories of the residents of Cedar Point. Their memories serve to freeze the timeless pleasures of living on Geneva Lake and remind us all of the wonderful place that Cedar Point has been and can always be.

“Keshegekiaketakewun”: Native Americans on Cedar Point

Cedar Point’s attractive geography forms the eastern enclosure of Williams Bay on Geneva Lake. This geography helped to make Cedar Point an important location for the Potawatomi tribes who lived here for centuries before the arrival of European settlers.

In fact, the Potawatomi had a village site on Cedar Point before they were forced off the land and sent to reservations in 1836.¹ Their leader at the time was Chief Big Foot, and they maintained regular camping spots in the level areas of lakeshore that would become Birch Grove, Oak Grove, and Walnut Grove Parks once the land was developed almost a hundred years later. Details on the exact location of campsites are not precise, but it is known that the Potawatomi spent much time on Cedar Point, though they called it “Keshegekiaketakewun,” meaning “cedar hill” or “cedar ridge.” Of course, the Potawatomi did not stay only at Cedar Point. They spent time almost everywhere in the area, and Chief Big Foot himself had a lodge at near present-day Fontana before he and his tribe were moved away from the good fishing and hunting of the lakeshore to the much more difficult terrain of Kansas. After their removal from the Geneva Lake area, some tribe members tried to recapture the lakeside way of life they had by leaving Kansas and heading back to more sparsely populated parts of northern Wisconsin. Their appearances on the shores of Geneva Lake were rare and brief. The Potawatomi had lost the joys of Cedar Point and Geneva Lake for good.

In the early years of Cedar Point Park, signs of the Potawatomi past were unearthed fairly regularly. Arrowheads and pottery shards were not uncommon, along with cracked hearthstones and flint flakes. Even today, a careful eye in a Cedar Point garden might be able to spot some flint or an arrowhead that has been overlooked.

Signs of the Native American presence on Cedar Point show up in other places as well. James Phillip, a resident who lives on Circle Parkway, reports that there is a dot shown on the plat of Circle Parkway that indicates a spot of spiritual significance to the Potawatomi. Also, at least one of the granite boulders found on the higher ridges off the end of Cedar Point had special spiritual significance to the Potawatomi. Reg Darley, a resident of Cedar Point, has affixed a plaque to a boulder on Sacred Hill with a dedication to his family and to Potawatomi who were here before them:

“Where you stand was holy ground to the Potawatomi. The tribe gathered here until 1836 to make offerings to their great spirit. This plaque honors their memory”

¹ Brown, Charles E., and Jenkins, Paul B., *History and Indian Remains of Lake Geneva and Lake Como, Walworth County, Wisconsin*, Geneva Lake Historical Society (printing place unknown), 1930, p. 34-35, 54-55, 62-64, 102. Special thanks to Reg Darley for his work researching this topic.



Photo: The Darley Family

Reg Darley at the Sacred Hill Memorial, circa 1999.

Early Settlement and Disaster off Cedar Point

There is little information available on the early settlement of Cedar Point. Several CPPA members' title abstracts indicate that the U.S. Government probably first deeded some of the land on Cedar Point to Julius Wadsworth and Thomas Dyer in 1839. Throughout the next 60 years, the land would be passed through a fairly dizzying number of hands, due to new investment schemes and the vicissitudes of the nation's economy. In fact, much of land in the area was ceded back to Walworth County or to other creditors at least once during the speculative land booms and busts that characterized the last half of the nineteenth century.

Because much of the land around Geneva Lake was recognized early for its beauty, many Chicagoans and others made vacation trips there. Indeed, there seems to have been a brisk seasonal economy developing on the lake even before the Civil War. The first steamboat on Geneva Lake arrived in 1858, and could carry up to 150 passengers for sightseeing on the lake. The influx of people created a demand for more steamboats during the summer season, and one of those boats became Cedar Point's greatest recorded tragedy. On Sunday, July 7, 1895, a powerful storm descended on Geneva Lake. A steamboat named *Dispatch* was caught out in the storm and away from the shelter of a bay. It was overcome by water driven by terrific, probably tornadic winds, and went down in water 110 feet deep, straight out from Cedar Point.² None of the six people on board were rescued.

² Burke, Jerome T., *Black Point*, HollyCourt Press, Elgin, Illinois, 1994, p. 222-227. This novel, though fictional, is built around the facts of the day the *Dispatch* sank.

Creating Cedar Point Park: 1900-1925

By the late 1800's, the eastern shore of Williams Bay that is now in Cedar Point was held by a Mr. N.K. Fairbank (and, later, his estate and inheritors). *The Book of Lake Geneva*³ notes that this "eastern shore of Williams Bay, including Cedar Point . . . has remained in its original untouched wooded beauty." In fact, the book also notes that Mr. Fairbank was very involved in early efforts to stock Geneva Lake so as to improve fishing. The land farther off the shoreline of the bay—the land that was part of the original Cedar Point Park Subdivision—seems (according to title abstracts) to have been passed more frequently, through the hands of families named Beidler, Smyth, Meatyard and Johnson. Other than a passing reference in a title transfer to a farm well off the water, all of the land seems to have remained basically unimproved and unsubdivided until 1920. In spite of this, there was increasing tourism in the Williams Bay area. During the height of the summer season, 3,200 cars would use state highway 50 between Delavan and Geneva Lake. It was only a matter of time before wholesale development of the lakeshore began.

By 1922, Emory F. Jaeger and Alfred A. Pederson had acquired the land that would soon be known as the original subdivision of Cedar Point Park. This land contained no shoreline except for the very tip of the Point itself, where Moeller Park is today. This land they designated as a community park on the plat of the original subdivision that was filed on December 12, 1922. Also included on the plat was space for tennis courts on three lots on the south side of Washington Parkway, in lots 113, 114, and 115. Jaeger and Pederson worked to get clear title on the land they had acquired and, subsequently starting selling lots in the original subdivision and the other additions.

Each lot was sold to new owners in Cedar Point Park with numerous promises attached to it by the subdividers. One promise included the exclusion of all non-whites or non-Christians from Cedar Point (according to later references to this promise in the CPPA minutes). Whether this abhorrent promise was an extension of Jaeger and Pederson's own attitudes, or a manifestation of the prevailing attitudes and concerns, we do not know. Quite possibly, it was both. The nation as a whole would not confront discrimination in the courts for several decades to come.

It is worth noting that none of the original advertisements or handbills for Cedar Point Park have been preserved in the Association's archives or otherwise turned up during the research for this book. What little we can learn about how Cedar Point was sold by Jaeger and Pederson can only be culled from CPPA minutes recording what promises were not kept. For instance, as will be covered later in this history, good drinking water must have been integral to the set of promises made by the subdividers, but we only know this because of the difficulty they had making good on that promise.

One positive, well-delivered promise did remain in the records, and was the basis for most of the future decisions made by the residents of Cedar Point. Jaeger and Pederson made a commitment to create a Cedar Point Park owners' association to govern community affairs as soon as a majority of the original lots were sold. That promise, written into the original deeds, became the most powerful force in creating and guiding the community of Cedar Point through the remaining three-quarters of the twentieth century. The promise to "form a permanent organization of the purchasers of lots" became active as soon as a majority of the lots in the

³ Jenkins, Paul B., *The Book of Lake Geneva*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1922, p. 181-182.

original subdivision had been sold by Jaeger and Pederson. The original subdivision totaled about 65 acres and contained 225 lots as drawn on the original plat. The roads platted then—Cedar Point Drive, Lincoln Parkway, Garfield Parkway, Humboldt Parkway, etc.—have retained their original names to the present day. In addition to the original subdivision, Jaeger and Pederson were subdividing and selling the lands that became the first, second and third additions to Cedar Point Park.

By 1925, a majority of the original subdivision and first addition had been sold. It was time for Jaeger and Pederson to hand off the responsibility for Cedar Point to the owners themselves.

Chapter 2: The Foundation Years: 1925-1929

Forming the Association

The first meeting of the Cedar Point Park Association (as it was later called) was held in the Morrison Hotel in Chicago on October 7, 1925. The Association, as intended by Jaeger and Pederson, consisted at that time only of residents from the original and first subdivision. (The first subdivision contains much of the land along the Bay, roughly from Oak Grove on the north end to just south of Walnut Grove Park, with Cedar Point Drive as the eastern boundary.) Mr. Jaeger explained to the new residents of Cedar Point Park that the subdividers envisioned a non-profit corporation being formed to oversee the activities of Cedar Point Park. A member-elected board of trustees would control the corporation as it strove to maintain and improve the community. Upon formation of the corporation, Jaeger and Pederson would hand off responsibility for the roads, parks, and piers to the corporation.

The residents of Cedar Point Park formed committees to organize the new Cedar Point Park Association. Residents met again later in October 1925, and there was more specific discussion about the form their association should take. Jaeger is paraphrased in the minutes as saying that "one management of the entire area known as Cedar Point Park Subdivisions would be more practical . . . and would assure the people in the original subdivision more facilities for recreation in parks and at bathing beaches." The democratic feelings at this meeting were strong, and a Mr. Claus Erlandson exhorted the group that Cedar Point Park should:

"be looked upon as a mutual community, one person as good as another, all contributing to the maintaining of the dedicated property, all enjoying the same rights and privileges, there being no difference in the states of the members in the different sub-divisions, all having the same voting power per lot owned, and paying the same dues per lot owned. . . ."⁴

These sentiments were put into action by a unanimous vote to form the Cedar Point Park Association.

Throughout the rest of 1925 and early 1926, the business of formalizing Cedar Point Park Association proceeded. CPPA was incorporated and by-laws were drawn up, and the first park rules were created at the end of April 1926. Many of the rules have remained in nearly their original form to this day, but their colorful 1920's diction has not survived. For instance, the original rules define the 'closing' of the parks as the "cessation of all noise, hilarity, music, singing, etc."

The original CPPA by-laws set up the procedures for electing officers and outlined their duties. They also delineated who could be a member of the Association and what members' responsibilities were. Sadly, the by-laws prohibited people who were not "Causasian" from participating in the Association. (By extension, of course, members of those excluded groups could not own in Cedar Point.) Interestingly, though, the by-laws specifically allowed for the full participation of women and forbade discrimination "by reason of sex." The by-laws also included penalties (liens, turning off power and water) for not paying Association assessments on time.

⁴ CPPA minutes, 10/28/1925.

CPPA Begins: Assessments, Water, and Taxes

The first CPPA assessment, for \$10 for the partial year 1925-1926, was sent out in February 1926. Other than expenses for parks, roads, and labor, the only other early expense of note was insurance to protect the Association from liability. (An almost astoundingly cautious \$50,000 in liability coverage was purchased just for the caretaker's truck.) Jaeger and Pederson were still very much on the scene, though, and, in October 1926, they promised to provide better drinking water by digging a well. The Association minutes record dissatisfaction with the pace of the well-digging, and the Association voted to hurry their subdividers along at a meeting in early 1927.

The well was dug later in 1927, but problems with the quality of the water persisted. Jaeger and Pederson gave further written promises to provide safe drinking water in 1928. The problems with water and other utilities would continue despite their promises and efforts. The Association would write to Jaeger and Pederson in July 1929, asking this time that Board of Health certify that CPPA water was drinkable. It was the last note about water before the Great Stock Market Crash of 1929, which made all future improvements more difficult.

Throughout these early years before The Crash, though, assessments and expenditures continued to increase. Lots continued to be sold and more members and assessment revenues were added to the Association's coffers each year. Much of the money was spent on improvements to the parks and roads, many of which had drainage issues of one kind or another and required extensive work. These improvements to the parks were under the direction of the Board's Grounds Committee and the Association's first caretaker, Charles Henne. Another active committee in those early years was the Fire Committee, which sought to protect the lives and property of Cedar Point Members.



Photo: Shirley (Rand) Deuchler

Bernice Rand enjoying the lake with her daughters, Shirley and Virginia, in July 1929.

Property taxes were an important issue for the early residents of Cedar Point. A Committee on Taxes was authorized to seek and obtain legal advice on the possibility of secession from the Village of Williams Bay. It was, perhaps, an inauspicious beginning to the relations between the Village and the residents of Cedar Point, but the Association members were very angered by the taxes they paid relative to what they received for them. In fact, Ignatz Schwinn, whose property was outside the edge of Cedar Point, donated \$1,000 to help with the fight against property taxes. In the end, Cedar Point did not secede from Williams Bay. In fact, the Committee on taxes was refused services by a Delavan lawyer who suggested they could only find willing counsel in an area farther removed from Williams Bay. Apparently, feeling was so strong within Williams Bay against the lowering of property taxes that the lawyer did not want to risk future business by representing the Committee on Taxation. The Committee continued its work, but no great successes were recorded.

Second and Third Additions Accepted

The Second Addition residents became part of the Cedar Point Park Association in 1927. The Third Addition of Cedar Point Park was officially incorporated into the Association in 1928. Both of these additions took place with little debate. It is reasonable to assume that the lack of debate indicates a general approval of how the CPPA had so far handled its affairs and worked in the interest of members. The demarcation of Cedar Point Park was complete.

Memories of Cedar Point: When the Husbands Were Away

Cedar Point was kind of a bedroom community to Chicago. The husbands would come up on the weekends. During the week, the wives would get together and have big parties. My mother used to tell us about them the next day.

—Shirley Deuchler

Chapter 3: The Great Depression: 1930-1940

Hard Times

The Crash came in October 1929, almost four years exactly after the first organizational meeting for the Association. The tremendous strains that the implosion of the national economy placed on the lives of all those involved in Cedar Point are difficult to overstate. The Great Depression, of course, was not called by that name at the time, or at least not immediately, and the minutes of the Association meetings, in fact, make no specific reference to the economy until the Depression had become deep and long indeed.

The signs of the problems showed up soon, though, in the problems that the Association had in collecting assessments. Also, the Association, despite its own financial problems, did not raise the assessment once the depression began. In fact, the assessment was lowered several times during the 1930's, and would not again go above its 1930 level of \$20 until 1949. The Association's first caretaker, Charles Henne, had his salary cut in 1932, and CPPA spending in general contracted during the deflationary Depression.

The hard economic times also strained relations between the residents and subdividers of Cedar Point Park. Jaeger and Pederson's finances must have soured very quickly as people stopped buying lots in their subdivisions. As early as the summer of 1930, they appear to have been unable to pay at least some of their bills. One desperate engineer tried to bill CPPA for work that he had done specifically for Jaeger and Pederson, and Board President William Bazner vehemently rejected the bill in a letter: "I therefore must repeatedly disclaim any responsibility for the charges to which you refer."⁵

Indeed, it must have been a most difficult time for those voluntary members of the CPPA Board of Directors. When many of them signed on, the future of the Association must have seemed very bright, but the hard economic times made their voluntary work on behalf of the members more difficult, more distasteful, and more necessary. At several points during the 1930's, the CPPA had a current accounts deficit. Like a lot of other people and organizations, CPPA had to choose spending carefully, and, sometimes, juggle their bills and assets to keep creditors at bay. By March 1930, 80 residents were delinquent in paying their assessments. By mid-August 1932, the accumulated unpaid assessments had ballooned to \$11,570, well above the entire budget of the CPPA for that year.

Jaeger and Pederson's inability to pay assessments on their own unsold lots contributed greatly to the Association's financial problems. In 1933, the Association entered into the first of several rounds of negotiations with Jaeger and Pederson to try to get some of the money owed to the Association. Jaeger and Pederson tried to argue that they owed no assessment on their own lots because they had never been sold, and tried to use the language of past documents to support their case even though, before the Depression began, they had not had this view of the matter. Nonetheless, the CPPA and Jaeger and Pederson entered into a "friendly" suit, and a compromise was reached. The compromise itself was a complex affair, but basically it provided for the complete payment of all back assessments on the sale of their lots, as well as the partial payment of back assessments at several points in the future even if they had not sold.

⁵ Letter from Bazner to Degen Engineering, 1/20/1920. Located in the CPPA archives.

By 1934, however, Jaeger and Pederson owed 26% of all unpaid assessments. There does not appear to have been personal acrimony between the subdividers and the residents of their subdivisions, but the CPPA did move to stop Jaeger and Pederson from having votes in the Association for the lots they held because of their unpaid assessments. In 1936, the CPPA and Jaeger and Pederson again entered negotiations because the subdividers had not been making payments to which they agreed in the earlier compromise. In 1938, one of the subdividers' checks to CPPA bounced, and another repayment compromise had to be negotiated.

Memories of Cedar Point: The 1939 Tornado⁶

The tornado hit about the summer of 1939, and it was one of my earliest memories. It blew down trees across roads and in the parks; power lines were down and we couldn't get into town for two days. We (my mother and I) didn't realize how bad it was until we heard the wind roar like a freight train through the woods behind our house. And as we watched, the trees—at least four of them, some of them two feet across—snapped like matchsticks.

—Reg Darley

Mom and I had gone to town to get vegetables. All of a sudden you could hear the sound of the tornado, and we had to take shelter in a garage before we could make it home. The tornado took out six or seven huge black walnut trees in park #3 (Walnut Grove). I can remember walking through the park and seeing big holes where there used to be trees. No homes were hit directly, but I can remember that we tried to figure out whose gutters were whose.

—Jim Rokusek

The Depression-era lives of individual residents were difficult, too, of course. One resident's burnt down at the start of the Depression, and he was still living in his garage as 1940 approached. Even when employment was still to be found, thrift became a fixture in almost every household. Well-intentioned members sometimes paid their assessments in installments because it was, quite literally, the best they could do.

Caretaker: A Legacy Begins

Despite the hard times, the members of CPPA still tried to maintain and improve their community with an eye on the future and hope for better days. Ben Moeller became their ally in building that better future when he was hired as the Association's caretaker during the depths of the Depression. It was the start of a family legacy of hard, intelligent work that would carry the CPPA into the twenty-first century.

Ben Moeller was initially hired on a daily basis when Charles Henne was caretaker, in the fall of 1932. Henne appears to have begun to neglect his duties because of other business opportunities he was pursuing, and Ben replaced him as caretaker in January 1933. Ben was responsible for just about everything on Cedar Point, from performing maintenance and

⁶ The tornado may have occurred at another time in the late 1930's. Residents' memories conflicted on the precise year, but all said it was sometime between 1936 and 1939, and most put it in 1939.

clearing snow off the roads to planting bulbs and arresting vandals. He was even deputized so that he could better protect the community.

Ben improved the parks and roads as much as his time and the CPPA budget would allow, and the Association rewarded him for his outstanding service by supplying him with a lot and materials to build a caretaker's house. Keith Moeller (Ben's son, and the current manager of CPPA) remembers carrying the lumber his father needed to build the house. The depression dictated economy, and economy was used: much of the lumber came from the demolished Crane family estate.

Ben's wife, Elsie Moeller, was in effect a caretaker, too, and she did what was needed to improve Cedar Point. At Ben's retirement party, she remembered some of her own jobs, including mixing concrete, trimming trees and bushes, and delivering messages from the Association phone to individual members.⁷ The Moeller family worked long hours to help carry Cedar Point to better times. Once, during the darkest days of the Depression, Ben even offered to let the CPPA defer payment of his salary until things improved. In 1944, when Cedar Point's needs were less desperate than they had been, Ben was given permission to work six days per week instead of seven, but storm damage or snow continued to bring him out whenever there was work to be done.

Boil All Drinking Water: Utilities on Cedar Point

The biggest non-financial problem on Cedar Point during the 1930's was the lack of good drinking water. Apparently, it was eventually found, the water system was poorly laid out, and there were places, called stub ends, where water would stagnate. The fungus in the water made it, by all accounts, extraordinarily distasteful to smell as well as to drink. Cedar Point residents were, no doubt, not very happy to receive their assessments in the early 1930's. Not only were bills unwelcome, but the assessment letters had bold-printed warnings such as: **"BOIL ALL DRINKING WATER."**

The water system was only really functional during the summer months, and required constant attention from Ben Moeller. Much of the CPPA Board's time was spent reviewing possible solutions to a terrible problem. Becoming part of the city water system seemed the best option (since Jaeger and Pederson clearly did not have the resources to fix the problem), but even though the solution was evident, enacting it took extraordinary efforts. As bad as the water was, the CPPA decided to shut off water service to several homes with significantly delinquent assessments. This, again, indicates how few resources were available to fix the problem.

Finally, after a water works program was defeated in 1934, another was approved in 1936 to extend the Village water to Cedar Point. Although there were still complaints about the quality of the water, the water problem was essentially solved. Soon, natural gas service was extended to Cedar Point, too. The last major utility improvement—the connection to the city sewer system—would not come for several decades.

⁷ (Author unknown), The Times, Walworth, Wis., August 1, 1974.

Memories of Cedar Point: Finding Home

My mother, Bertha Zilligen Healy, would tell us stories of when she was a young girl about how my grandfather would carry extra tires for his car so when they went up to northern Wisconsin to Muskie-fish they could get past Milwaukee before they had to fix flat tires My grandparents bought the house at 237 Circle Parkway (in 1937) when it was brand new Buying the house in Cedar Point Park was a compromise between my grandparents so Grandpa could still fish but Grandma would only have to sit in the car for two hours instead of eight to ten.

–William P. Healy

Tax Sharks and Lake Geneva Realty Corporation

On October 29, 1936, in the middle of an otherwise uneventful meeting of the Association Board of Directors, Mr. H. Bruce Spencer brought up the subject of “tax sharks” for the first time. “Tax sharks,” or, less menacingly, tax buyers, were investors who purchased property by paying the government for overdue property taxes. As the list of properties with unpaid taxes had grown during the Depression, the shadow of tax sales and tax sharks had grown. The basic facts of the tax sales were that: 1) Wisconsin law favored any tax buyer because the state needed the tax revenue, and 2) Property purchased by tax buyers was given to them with a deed free of prior liens and obligations.

There were many lots in Cedar Point that could have been purchased for back taxes in 1936. If they were, the Association would receive none of its back assessments, and might even not be able to force the new owner to be part of the Association. This threat came at a time when the CPPA finances were so poor that individual board members lent the Association money just to keep it operating. Now, the Association could be undermined as new buyers came in without the obligation to support the rest of the CPPA community.

At a special meeting in August 1937, the Lake Geneva Realty Corporation was formed. \$50,000 in common stock was sold to concerned members of the Association who were, somehow, still able to access such reserves after the long depression. This \$50,000 was estimated to be just enough to purchase all of the lots that were in danger of being sold to outside tax buyers. Sixteen CPPA members bought stock, and the corporation quickly went about the business of securing endangered properties.

It is possible, of course, that the CPPA could have been sustained even if there had been a large number of tax sales. However, the high costs associated with the types of conflicts that would have arisen between tax buyers and the CPPA spurred members to work together to find a solution. If they had not, the CPPA faced \$200-\$300 costs for every suit that might arise.

Happily, the solution did work. The Lake Geneva Realty Corporation was able to survive the remainder of the Depression. By early 1941, the national economy was improving quickly, and it was once again possible to sell real estate on Geneva Lake for something more like its real value. The Corporation was dissolved in 1941, with all liens on all land released. The assets of the Corporation were distributed among its stockholders. Because the corporation was dissolved, it is not part of the CPPA records whether it ever made money on its investments or simply succeeded in performing the service it was meant to provide. Regardless, the community of Cedar Point Park had weathered the most difficult decade of its history.

Memories of Cedar Point: Family

My mother and father got married in 1939 in the church at the top of the hill in Williams Bay. Although they lived in Chicago, they spent the majority of their free time in Cedar Point Park. When my sister and I were born, my mother stayed with us at the cottage during the summers while my father commuted to his job in Chicago. Williams Bay was the end of the line for the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad. The station was located across from the Williams Bay Beach. As a boy, I would meet my father at the train station and walk back to the cottage with him along the lakefront. It seemed strange that he was wearing a coat and tie while everyone else wore shorts or swimming suits.

—Arnold C. Bilstad

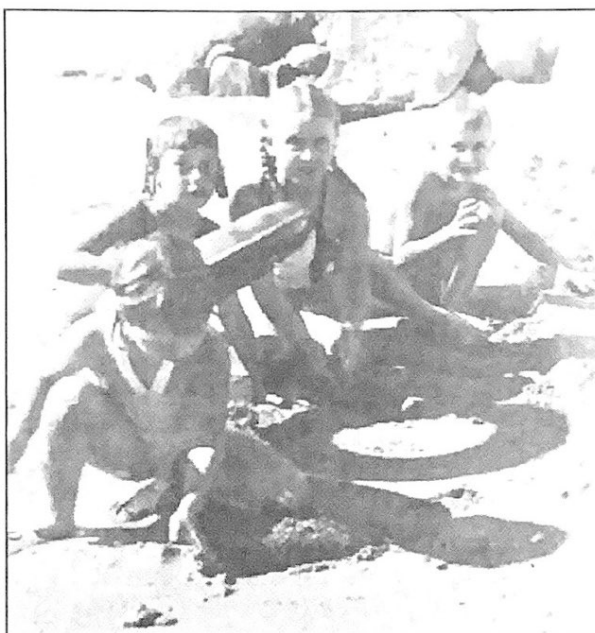


Photo: Arnold Bilstad

Karen and Arnold Bilstad, right, play with unidentified friends at CPPA Park #4, circa 1949.

Memories of Cedar Point: Paddling to Town

In those days (the 1930's), the water was very pure and clear and sometimes we would find arrowheads on the shoreline. As I grew older, almost every day I, along with friends, would paddle our canoe across the Bay, pull it up on the shore in the park and leave it there unchained When we went to town, we would go to the drugstore and have a wonderful "black cow" or soda while we sat and talked (and flirted). There was a great hardware store, a nice grocery store that had good meat in the back, and a post office on the corner. Sometimes we would rent a horse and go horseback riding up by College Camp.

—Marilyn Malles

Chapter 4: WWII and Recovery: 1940-1950

Quiet Away from the War

By 1940, the CPPA coffers were beginning to refill. The CPPA checking account held over a thousand dollars at the end of the 1940 fiscal year after dropping below five dollars in 1938. Despite the difficult times that lay ahead as war loomed, the improving economy reduced many of the pressures on the residents of Cedar Point and made it possible for their Association to look ahead.

Improvements to Cedar Point became more frequent. Roads that W.P.A. work groups had worked on during the 1930's were tarred by the Association during the 1940's. Play once again became normal, and children, not "tax sharks," receive mention in the Association minutes. In 1941, a swim meet was held for the children to compete against those from other communities on Geneva Lake. By 1942, when the meet was held again, much had transpired in the nation. This time, the winning children were given the option of receiving prizes, as they had the last year, or war stamps, a new creation to support the war effort.

Memories of Cedar Point: The War Years

With gas rationing not as many people made it to the lake. The government was buying old rubber tires to be recycled for the war effort. Lake Geneva water was very clear with visibility of perhaps fifteen feet or more and the gas station in Williams Bay was buying old tires. Enterprising young boys quickly saw the opportunity to make a little money. We had a small boat with an outboard motor. I would stand at the front while it was moving and spot old tires twelve to fifteen feet deep in the lake. I would dive in, haul them up and we'd bring them to the gas station to sell.

—William P. Healy

In general, the war years were not very eventful for the Cedar Point Park Association. Although they were certainly tragic for some families who lost loved ones to the war, the community of Cedar Point was busy building again and hoping for the future. Indeed, there are very few controversies about the direction Cedar Point should take in the meeting minutes of the war years, and perhaps that indicates the kind of perspective that members had on their homes and community in the aftermath of the Depression and the shadow of the war.

Twelve new houses were built in the Association's 1940 fiscal year as the nation's economy rebounded. Houses continued to go up throughout the war at a slow, steady rate. Once again, the condition of the parks and the roads was of primary concern, because the very existence of the Association and its fundamental goals were again unchallenged. The city added new filtration to the water system, and that was no doubt welcomed. CPPA meetings were held on C.W.T.—Central War Time—but the urgency of war does not show itself in the flavor of the CPPA minutes or the subjects formally discussed. The old habits of economy did not die with the Depression, though, and the Association changed over its phone to Ben and Elsie Moeller's name so that they could take advantage of the lower personal, rather than corporate, phone rate.

The long disputes between the CPPA and Jaeger and Pederson over assessments faded away as Jaeger and Pederson found buyers for their lots. Indeed, Jaeger disappeared from the Association records, and, presumably, moved on to other things. Alfred Pederson bought 50 Cedar Point Park lots that had ended up in the hands of Walworth County, and began selling land in Cedar Point Park again.

The Association raised its assessments to pre-Depression levels and contemplated capital improvements. Roads were blacktopped and incremental park improvements continued as more money became available. Part of the assessments in 1944 and 1945 were earmarked for road improvement spending. Another step toward the future took place when the Association moved to change its signs from the 1930's so that they would read simply "Private Property," rather than "For Members Only: A Gentile Community." The minutes indicate that this change may have been motivated by an ill-fated attempt to get state money for road improvements. The signs that were not changed in 1944 would be changed for good in 1951 without any reference to other motives.^{8,9} Cedar Point Resident Marilyn Malles remembers her relief when the signs were finally removed: "I know my parents had trouble explaining (the signs) to me and we were all very glad when they finally removed (them)."

Memories of Cedar Point: Adoring the Lake

My grandmother was invited to Northern Wisconsin in August of 1942 along with other members of the family. We traveled a long way by car and on the way back she said, "Don't anyone ever take me away from Lake Geneva or my porch again!" She adored this house and the great view of the lake.

—Jim Rokusek

Stability and Growth Return

The end of the war brought full recovery and robust growth. The Association's Grounds Committee was, at this time, still responsible for both the roads and the parks. Once again, Ben Moeller stepped up to help with the work, and took on many of the responsibilities of planning and coordinating improvements to the Cedar Point grounds.¹⁰

The procedures for building in Cedar Point changed radically between 1945 and 1950. Deed restrictions on many homes in Cedar Point Park that required CPPA approval of new building plans were set to expire in 1950. In advance of that, Ben Moeller became a certified building inspector for the Village of Williams Bay, and the Building Committee worked to formalize its procedures so that its recommendations would pass to the Village zoning board.¹¹ The chairman of the CPPA Building Committee, Mr. George Sundheim, labored hard between 1946 and 1949 to incorporate Cedar Point standards into the new Village zoning ordinances.

There were a few problems in Cedar Point as prosperity returned. Many people were interested in being connected to the Village sewer system, and that interest was probably heightened when one septic tank off of Oak Birch Drive overflowed and made for very unsanitary conditions. Also, the Association's indispensable caretaker, Ben Moeller, was

⁸ CPPA Board Meeting minutes, 12/8/1944.

⁹ CPPA Board Meeting minutes, 10/27/1951.

¹⁰ CPPA Board Meeting minutes, 7/10/1949.

¹¹ CPPA Board Meeting minutes, 7/22/1949.

almost lured away by other employers who were offering more money.¹² Luckily, the Association quickly granted him a raise in 1948 to go with his ever-increasing responsibilities, and that huge potential problem disappeared. The last major problem at Cedar Point was one that unfortunately became perennial. "Oak wilt," or "oak blight," began taking many trees in the late 1940's, despite increasingly sophisticated efforts by residents to spot diseased trees and remove them before it spread.

The Cedar Point Park Association took advantage of the good economic times to start selling off several lots that it owned. By 1950, 214 homes were complete in Cedar Point, up from 151 in 1940. Despite the war, the decade ended with a much more stable community on Cedar Point.

Memories of Cedar Point: Finding Home

Herb's family vacationed in Williams Bay when he was a young child and continued to rent summer vacation homes. Judy's parents purchased a home in Williams Bay. When we began to search for property in the Bay, we were delighted when the realtor led us to Cedar Point Park – a perfect place to continue memories begun long ago. Our children and grandchildren all repeat their great grandfather's favorite saying: "It's a beautiful day in Williams Bay!"

–Herb and Judy Johnson

The strains of growth were just beginning to show themselves by the end of the 1940's. The Association Board did not even have a dedicated marine committee in 1949, but a special committee was formed to look at complaints of overcrowding on the piers. The committee chairman, Mr. O.H. Boyens, was confident that the changes he suggested would help solve the overcrowding at piers. While many of his suggestions were implemented and helped greatly, he made a prediction in his recommendation that the future increase in the number of motorboats "should be slight, if any" from the 25-30 members' motorboats in the water in 1949.¹³ This forecast was proved wrong time and time again in the decades to come.

¹² CPPA Board Meeting minutes, 4/14/1948.

¹³ CPPA Board Meeting minutes and Boyens' recommendation, 5/15/1949.

Chapter 5: A New Prosperity: 1950-1970

Buildings, Zoning, and Community Relations

New construction continued during the 1950's, although only about fourteen homes were built in the first five years of the decade. On the whole, the implementation of the Village zoning ordinances seems to have gone remarkably smoothly. Several times the CPPA would move to ensure that Cedar Point was maintained as a purely residential community. One particularly difficult instance occurred when, in 1952, the CPPA Board moved to block the local Veterans of Foreign Wars from purchasing a lot in Cedar Point. The VFW had intended to use this land to build a clubhouse, but they were refused.¹⁴

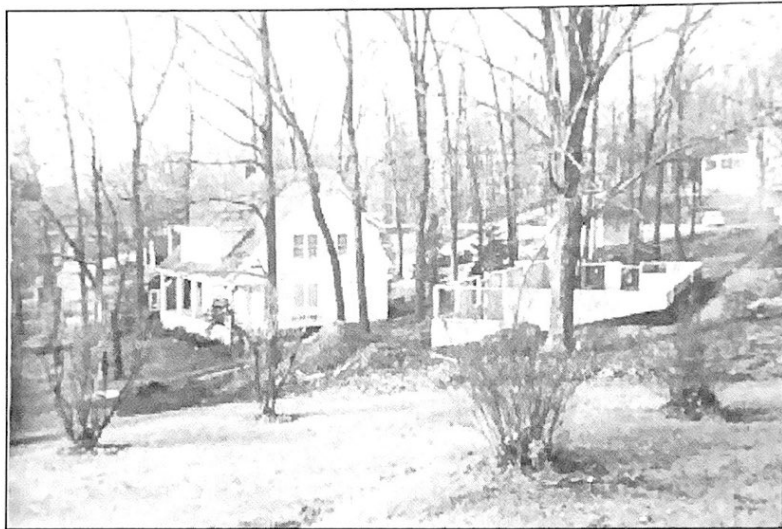


Photo: Carol Berry

Building on Cedar Point Drive in the 1950's. The foundation is for the Berry family home, 110 Cedar Point Drive.

The strain that even slow, steady growth placed on the environment of Cedar Point was worrisome to many. This was most evident in concerns about the septic systems that were still the standard on the Point. However, the additional cost of hooking up to the city sewer system was a significant deterrent to change. A 1953 poll of all CPPA members via postcard showed that they were still more than 2-1 against hooking up to the city sewer system. The need for better lighting in Cedar Point was apparent to all, however, and in 1955 plans had been started to plan streetlights for Cedar Point.

The on-again off-again relations between Cedar Point and the other residents of Williams Bay were at a strain in 1955. The Village declined to pay an "excessive" \$1,020 bill that CPPA submitted for the cost of connecting private Cedar Point roads to the Village-controlled Cedar Point Drive. The bill was reduced in half, and the Village paid it. Another source of contention arose when the Village stopped plowing Cedar Point roads in the 1950's. Keith Moeller remembers that one of his uncles had been involved in doing the plowing for the

¹⁴ CPPA Board Meeting minutes, 9/13/1952.

Village previously, and was not strict about plowing only public roads. Once the Village stopped plowing, Ben Moeller added plowing and large amounts of shoveling to his list of duties. To this day, long after seasonal residents have gone back to their other homes, Keith continues the hard work of keeping the Cedar Point roads open during the winter, and CPPA assessments still pay to run the snow plow and sand the roads in the winter.

Elsewhere on the community front, relations were, on the whole, better. The CPPA continued to donate to the Williams Bay Volunteer Fire Department for their annual Christmas party for area children. By 1965, the residents of Cedar Point had gotten even more proactive in improving their relations with Williams Bay. In that year, each of the five full-time employees of Williams Bay received a five-dollar Holiday food gift certificate from CPPA.

Memories of Cedar Point: Childhood

I have many beautiful memories of time spent at Cedar Point with my Aunt Ginny and grandparents: little things like playing on the boat ramps and always falling in, riding our little red wagon down the huge hill in the park, the smell of my grandfather's cigar (he smoked on the porch because grandma wouldn't let him in the house with that smelly thing), also buffet dinners on Thursday nights at Big Foot Country Club, just to name a few.

—Diane Schlicting

Memories of Cedar Point: Old Friends

I am now spending my 47th summer and year at the most beautiful spot in the Midwest. Our block has experienced many new neighbors over the years. This year we have welcomed three new families. But in my mind, certain houses will always belong to the owners I knew as a youngster: the Lewis house, the Butler house, the Goodger and Fidler house, the Tallis house – families now gone but certainly not forgotten. And of course, Oak Haven, which was built on an “unbuildable lot” by Magna and her husband. The good times these families enjoyed were fun to share.

—Marsha Enquist

Policing Cedar Point

The Village Police Chief would often come to CPPA annual meetings during the 50's and 60's to answer questions about the role the Village police had on Cedar Point. The Village police could respond to problems on Cedar Point, but, since most of the area and roads were private property, a call had to be placed to the police first. The CPPA Board established its first standing Police and Ordinance Committee in the 50's. It would take many forms over the years.

The new Police and Ordinance Committee was concerned both with policing Cedar Point for criminal activity and ensuring that current Cedar Point membership rules were followed. However, the committee had no enforcement mechanism for membership rules beyond pressure and shame at that time. Also, the Village police did not make Cedar Point part of their regular patrols. In case of emergency, the Police and Ordinance Committee Chair reported that all Cedar Point Residents should know this procedure:

“To reach police quickly by telephone, dial Operator and request Mobile Operator. (Then) ask (the) Mobile Operator for ZA-8-5353.”¹⁵

Luckily, the security problems on Cedar Point were not usually life-threatening. There were many problems, though. Vandalism rose during the 1950's, and it was not unusual for Ben Moeller to call in the police to quell a rowdy party or stop vandalism. During one incident in 1961, a group of “six young boys got abusive with Ben Moeller.” The police were called, and the boys were released after they apologized to Ben. (On a lighter note, there is fleeting reference in the 1959 minutes to problems with “nude swimmers” on pier #6, but one suspects that Ben had enough wisdom to deal with those types of problems discreetly.) A perennial security problem for Ben also created more maintenance work for him: children regularly heaved the park benches near the piers into the water, and Ben would be left to retrieve and repair them, if possible. (Cedar Point residents Marsha Enquist and Carol Berry report that the green benches in the parks were originally used in the 1933 Chicago World's Fair, so their vandalism was and is especially lamentable.)

The late 1960's may have seen the greatest increase in disorder in Cedar Point. In 1967, vandals set six boats adrift from their moorings. For the first time, the Village police had to find out if crimes on the water were in their jurisdiction. During the winter of 1968, Ben Moeller and Village police apprehended two people who had broken into the Edward Moore home. In the summer of 1968, some boys attempted to set fire to a member's pier, but, luckily, were not successful. Less dramatically, Cedar Point residents also were very upset by the noise that motorbikes made as they sped through Cedar Point. A Village ordinance was eventually passed banning these (presumably unmuffled) motorbikes by 1969, but the CPPA had no way of enforcing speeding on its private roads, and the police could only stop someone for recklessness, not speeding, on a private road.

All these problems begged new solutions, and several were explored. Unless Cedar Point roads were made public, however, the police could not control them as they did the Village streets. One police officer was assigned to patrol the Cedar Point lakefront, but more protection was desired. At the CPPA annual meeting in 1966, there was discussion about the probable need to turn Cedar Point into a true gated community (complete with gate attendants) in order to keep non-members from using and abusing Cedar Point. No action in that direction was taken. However, the CPPA Board explored using a private security firm to patrol during the summers. Presumably because of high costs, they delayed procuring a private security force until 1974, and then hired one for just a single summer.

From the Minutes: This Time, He Was Innocent

“A complaint of dogs turning over trash cans was registered, and the name of Bo Ferris, a black Labrador, was registered as the culprit. It was then noted that Bo had gone to his last reward weeks before the alleged complaint. May he rest in peace.”

—CPPA Board Minutes, 3/3/1971

¹⁵ CPPA Board Meeting minutes, 3/1/1963.