

Exploring Delavan's storied past

By Lisa Bates
Special to the Lakes Edition

Delavan was once an inland lake. During the Ice Age, many glaciers covered this area. The last glacier, the Michigan Tongue, descended down what is now known as Lake Michigan. Part of the glacier broke off, pushing southwest into what is now known as Walworth County. This section of the glacier was called the Delavan Lobe.

Early Paleo Indians occupied this area as early as 5,000 B.C. This was followed by Archaic Indians, Woodland Indians, and Mound Builders. Mound Builders lived in what is now the Delavan Lake area. Along the shores of Dela-

van Lake, more than 200 effigy mounds were erected. Many were along the north shore of the lake. During the late 18th century, Potawatomi Indians settled around the lake. It was estimated there were 240 Potawatomi Indians in the county. Assembly Park has preserved some of the burial mounds. A treaty was signed in 1833, ceding these lands to the U.S. government, following the Blackhawk War.

This area was known as "New France" from the mid-17th century through the mid-18th century. They were under the French flag, and under British rule. This followed the French and Indian War. After signing the

Treaty of Paris in 1783, it was turned over to the United States as part of the newly established Northwest Territory.

Delavan became part of the Indiana Territory between 1800-1836. It then became part of the Illinois Territory and part of the Wisconsin Territory in 1836. In 1848 statehood was granted.

The first white settlers arrived in 1836. The first known settler in the Delavan area was a man from the Rockford, Ill., area named Allen Perkins. Arriving in the spring of that year, he built a log cabin for his family at the base of the hill along what is now Walworth Avenue.

Delavan became a town in 1838. The Baptist church was the first

church organized there in 1839. From this church grew the first anti-slavery and temperance societies in Wisconsin. The belief in temperance was so strong that it was included in all deeds that no alcohol could be bought or consumed on the premises. In 1845, this unconstitutional inclusion was outlawed.

Delavan became home to 26 circus companies between 1847 and 1894. In 1871, P.T. Barnum Circus was organized here. Hundreds of clowns and circus performers from more than 26 circuses set up their winter quarters in Delavan from 1847 to 1894. Spring Grove and St. Andrew cemeteries include more than 130 members of the 19th century circus colony.

In the late 1840s, many new immigrants came to Delavan. Many were from New England. They weren't very tolerant of the Europeans who tried to settle there. Many were turned away.

In 1861, the first manufacturing plant was built. It manufactured windmills and wooden pumps. Thirty-five men were employed there. Later, a foundry and machine shop were added. The first major manufacturer was Bradley Knitting Company in 1904. Over the next 30 years, 1,200 people were employed there. After the Civil War,



This 1899 photo shows a Delavan dining hall that, in its prime, served up to 3,000 people, three times a day. The hall was remodeled and expanded over the years. This building burned down in 1947 and was replaced with a Quonset hut, which served as a neighborhood grocery store and gathering place for many years. (Photo submitted by Lisa Bates)



Assembly Park's first fire house, shown in a photo taken in the 1920s. (Photo submitted by Lisa Bates)

Logan Cheese Factory, Jacuson Tack Factory, N.W. Hoaz Grain Elevator and Van Velzer Cigar Factory built in Delavan.

In the early 1900s, Delavan became a recognized art center. William T. Thorne, Adolph and Ada Schulz, Frank Dudley and Frank Phoenix were all famous artists that had studios there.

In the last decade of the 19th century, fires devastated the business district in 1892-1893.

Electricity was brought to town in 1896.

Today, Delavan is home to more than 230 businesses. As of the 2010 census, there are 8,463 people in Delavan.

Agriculture is an integral part of the Delavan community. The area is renowned for its variety of products and is home to award-winning dairy and beef cattle. Farms include goats, sheep, swine, and poultry, which produce much of the country's food.



An undated photo of sleigh rides during a Delavan winter. (Photo submitted by Lisa Bates)

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