

Lake Reflections

Written by: **Dan Whetzel**

Deep Creek is Maryland's largest freshwater lake and Western Maryland's premier recreational destination site, as each year thousands of vacationers enjoy the four-season activities the lake offers. The increasing popularity of Deep Creek Lake has caused many changes over the years, especially in the development of lakefront property. While change has brought growth and undeniable economic benefits to Garrett County, it has also prompted long time residents to recollect when the lake was undisturbed for years, and the tree covered shoreline only hosted wildlife. As Deep Creek Lake approaches its 80th year, let us take a trip down memory lane to an earlier time when the region remained a hidden treasure waiting to be discovered by vacationers.

Ground was broken for Deep Creek Lake on November 1, 1923. Its name was derived from a stream located between Roman Nose Ridge and Marsh Hill Ridge, and its purpose was to provide hydroelectric power for the Pennsylvania Electric Power Corporation of Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Approximately 8,000 acres of land were purchased to begin the project, including 140 farms. An ambitious undertaking, a new rail connection from the B&O Railroad in Oakland, Maryland, became necessary to transport heavy equipment and materials to the excavation site. A quarry for stone crushing provided raw materials for the dam work, while steel bridges were erected to accommodate rising waters and vehicle traffic around the water. After months of planning and construction, the hydroelectric plant went on line in May, 1925.

The lake provided electrical service to distant customers but offered few activities to residents during the years prior to World War II. Organized events were hardly necessary as the only population center was McHenry, a village settled in the 19th Century. Local folks recall the early days of Deep Creek when only three stores offered goods in McHenry: C.M. Railey's, Glotfelty's, and Hubert Bowman's.

They were general merchandisers, while Bowman's also served as a Post Office. Resident Leo Friend reminisced that as a youngster, it was typical for him to walk a distance of three miles to make grocery purchases at McHenry stores where his father had accounts. Mr. Friend's first soda was purchased at Bowman's, and he "bought cherry because it was red." The only boats he observed were small fishing vessels, while other forms of recreation were limited to swimming and ice-skating. As the 1920's ended and the Great Depression wore on, money stayed scarce, the lake area remained sparsely populated, and visitors were infrequent. Leo Friend could see only one house on the opposite side of the lake from McHenry, an area today that bustles with private residences and commercial activity, including Wisp Ski Resort.

While housing did not significantly increase during the lake's first two decades, a modest start to nightlife began when C.M. Railey built Stone Tavern near McHenry, one of the first local establishments to serve alcoholic beverages after prohibition was repealed. It was also a hotspot for square dancing on weekends, as residents would pack the dance floor to enjoy the entertainment provided by live bands. The tavern, a local landmark, was razed several years ago when the new Deep Creek Bridge was constructed. Tom Thayer of Oakland recalls Rainbow Inn, located at the present day location of Arrowhead Resort, as being one of the prominent commercial establishments outside of McHenry, at the lake during the late 1930's. The busiest nightlife spot according to Mr. Thayer, however, was Cabin Lodge, where free shrimp on Wednesday nights caused patrons to "drink mountains of beer to cool off the shrimp; they really made out on that." Cabin Lodge was appropriately named, as it was constructed of logs in the early 1930's; Eddie and Louise Fry operated the business. Adjacent to Cabin Lodge was Thayer's Barn; a typical agricultural structure that was built before the lake



Early photo of the old Deep Creek Bridge taken from Grace King's house, year unknown.



Photo of the new Deep Creek Bridge taken from the former location of Grace King's house, Sept. 2003.

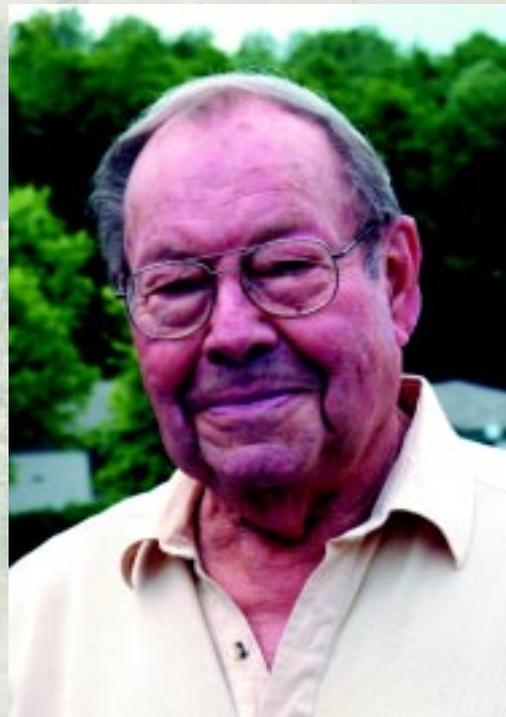
was created but later converted to a restaurant and a “roadhouse.” Tom Thayer remembers several other barns around Deep Creek that were converted to entertainment spots including Arden’s Boat Club in McHenry, McComa’s Beach on Red Run, and Blue Barn on Beckman’s Peninsula, where a summer theatre operated for a number of years.

The beverage of choice for lake revelers was beer, and a special cap on Garrett County beer bottles was required because of a tax levied by the county. Tom Thayer stated, “people would go to West Virginia to buy their beer to save the tax. Supposedly, West Virginia beer was only 3.2%, but everybody would sneak up to Terra Alta on Friday evening to buy a case of beer and bring it home.”

Leaving early Deep Creek nightlife behind, let’s make our next stop at Johnny’s Bait House, located along Route 219, south of McHenry. Scarce is the fisherman who did not stop to consult with Johnny about water conditions and “what the fish were hitting.” It could be said, without exaggeration, that visits to Johnny’s Bait House became a rite of summer for many vacationers.

John Marple began his business as a youngster in a modest way, selling night crawlers from an old washtub along Route 219, for 20 cents a dozen. The washtub marketing enterprise lasted a couple of summers until Mr. Marple’s father constructed a 3’x5’ building that enabled the young entrepreneur to offer customers hooks and tackle to supplement live bait sales. A subsequent improvement was moving the business location to a dock on the lake where keeping minnows was possible. A small building on the dock housed tackle and additional boating supplies his customers requested. Following a two-year stint in the military, Mr. Marple returned to Garrett County, purchased lakeside property, and constructed a small building that was to be the basis of his business over the next five decades. Over that time period, a variety of goods and services were provided including bottled gas, fishing boat rentals, and boat repairs. Mr. Marple recalled that in the 1950’s and 1960’s, most customers were from the Pittsburgh area, but from that time forward visitors increasingly came from the northern Virginia and Washington-Baltimore suburbs.

One promotion that attracted customers to his store was “Johnny’s Bait House Fishing Contest,” a joint effort of Mr. Marple and the former Garrett County Promotion Council. “I would give them (fishing contest winners) a silver dollar for the largest fish of the week, and it got customers into my store. I would relay the weekly winners names to the council, and they would have it printed in the newspapers. We ran that about 40 years, and it turned out pretty good. I really handled a lot of fish during that time.” Not content to weigh and measure other people’s catch of the day, he also angled from his dock several times a week as a form of sport and relaxation. “I always did say that you would never need a psychiatrist if you fished. I solved a lot of problems from that dock.” Mr. Marple noticed over the years that yellow perch was the dominant species in the lake, although it also produced nice size blue gills. “The lake has never been a pay lake where you throw a line in and catch fish; you have to work at it.”



Tom Thayer



Thayer's Barn was a "nightlife" hotspot in the 30's and 40's. Sitting on the banks of the Lake, it was a favorite of many locals.



Johnny Marple



Charles "Skeeter" Bowman and wife Mary

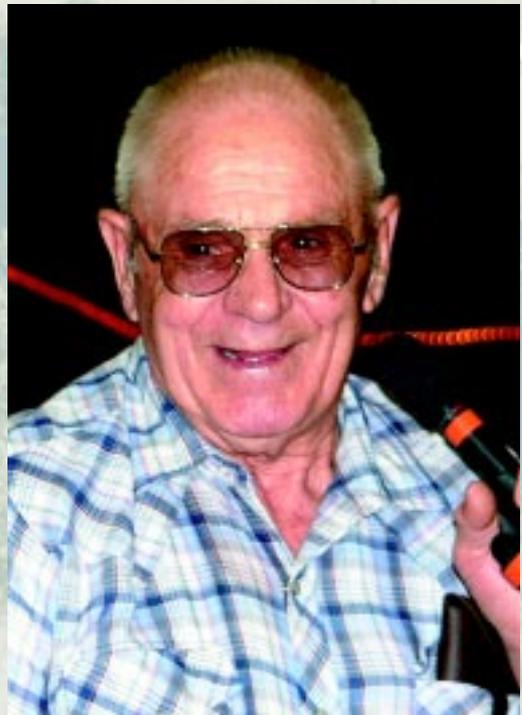
Johnny's Bait House sales grew with the increased traffic to the county. At first, there were a few summer cottages to attract vacationers, some without roads to them. "People used to come and enjoy the mountains, water, and lake. People also came to take a boat ride for one dollar. Not many people had boats back then." According to Mr. Marple, growth remained steady at the lake until sewage services became available and then major development occurred because condominiums could be accommodated on lakeside property. Another significant change occurred when Johnny's Bait House was sold in early 2002. Mr. Marple indicated the new owner offered to keep the store name, but he "decided it was time for Johnny's Bait House to end." It was a good run.

Reflections of Deep Creek businesses would not be complete without Bowman's Marina, a popular stop for boating enthusiasts. The marina's owner, Charles H. "Skeeter" Bowman, started boating early "when two logs were nailed together with old scrap boards, and we propelled it by using long poles." Mr. Bowman grew up in McHenry on the family farm, now the site of Garrett County Fairgrounds. "My dad had this farm, and we milked the cows by hand, and my job was to bottle the milk, in glass bottles, and carry it to a cold spring, and then deliver it to cottages in our area of the lake." Mr. Bowman's father also operated the local Post Office and a general store, so other business opportunities became available including fishing boat rentals, the first such service on Deep Creek. Charles Bowman purchased a few wooden fishing boats in the mid 1930's and continued to offer them for rental until the start of World War II. "There really wasn't much to McHenry at that time, just a few country stores and a few residences."

"Skeeter" Bowman was always fascinated with flying, so he enlisted in the Army Air Corp after World War II was underway. Following military duty on Tinian, and bombing missions over Japan, he returned to Garrett County and resumed the boat rental business. In 1952, it was decided that a marina in McHenry offered business opportunities, so Bowman's Marina was born. It offered a full line of boats and a spectrum of boating supplies

including Johnson Outboard Motors and Christ Craft wooden boats. In those days, boats were constructed from wood, a labor-intensive boating material. "Refinishing boats kept us busy in the winter," recalled Mr. Bowman. After two decades of marina ownership, the Bowman's decided to sell the business in 1972, to become semi-retired.

The marina occupied much of his time, but Mr. Bowman's passion for flying aircraft had the added benefit of providing vacationers with an alternative means of arriving at Deep Creek—flying in by single engine aircraft. A portion of the Bowman farm was developed as an airfield, on a site now occupied by the fairgrounds, and vacationers from Pittsburgh would fly in for weekend visits. The airstrip also provided the entrepreneur with his own airline service to metropolitan areas. "I used to joke that I had the first airfreight service in the area because I would fly to Baltimore and pick up boating supplies and stack them in my plane." The one-day supply



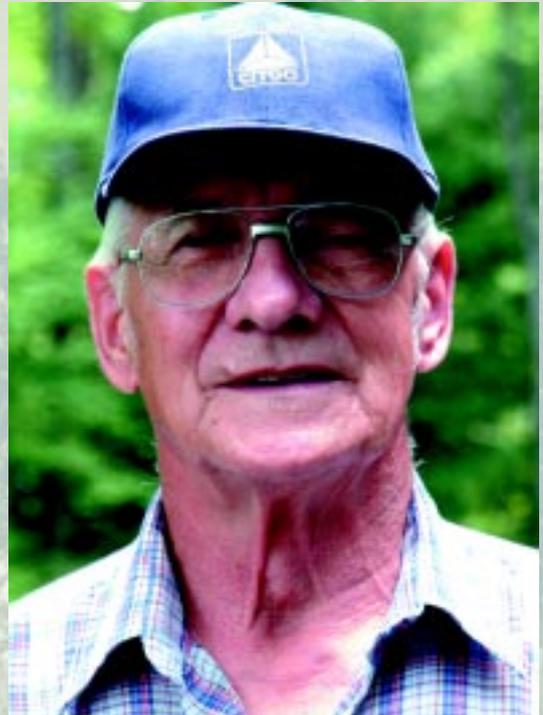
Leo Friend



Early aerial view of Deep Creek Lake, McHenry area.



Grace King



Frank Beckman

service provided speedy service to marina customers. If one looks behind Burger King in McHenry, they will see the orange windsock that flies over “Skeeter” Bowman’s airplane hanger, a colorful reminder of the lake’s past.

Long time visitors also recall Matt Storey’s Marina, located along Route 219 in McHenry. Mr. Storey not only sold and rented boats, but he learned to build them as well. “I went to Florida and got a job in a boat factory; that’s where I learned how to make boats.” Following service in the Coast Guard, Mr. Storey decided to locate a business at Deep Creek and put his carpentry skills to the test. Boats in those days were made from oak and plywood, and special precautions had to be taken for swelling and shrinkage caused by water. Mr. Storey saw a potential market for boat sales on the lake because the product was not plentiful before the war, but a revitalized national economy after the conflict promised economic growth and more affluent consumers.

Storey’s boats were designed for fisherman and came in two lengths, 12 and 14 feet. Deep Creek’s first boat

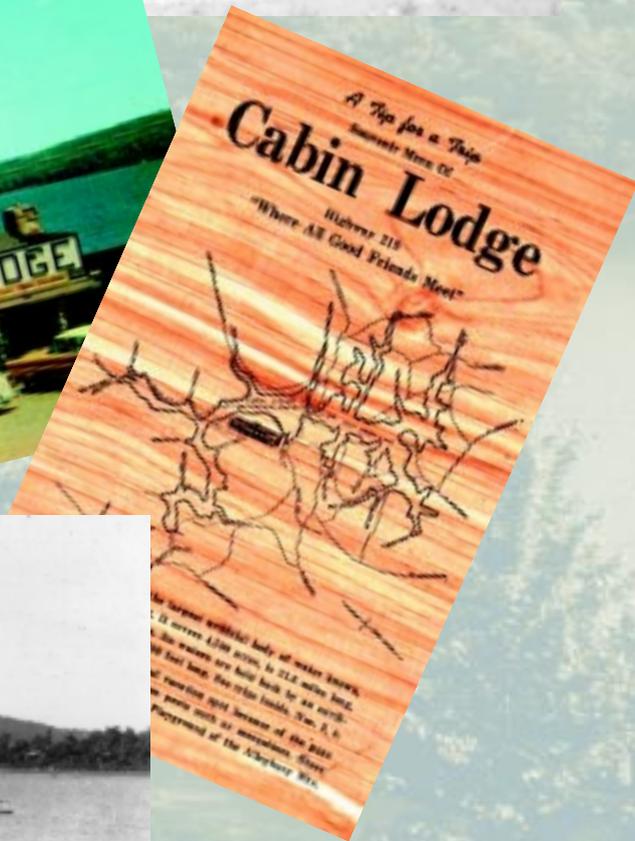
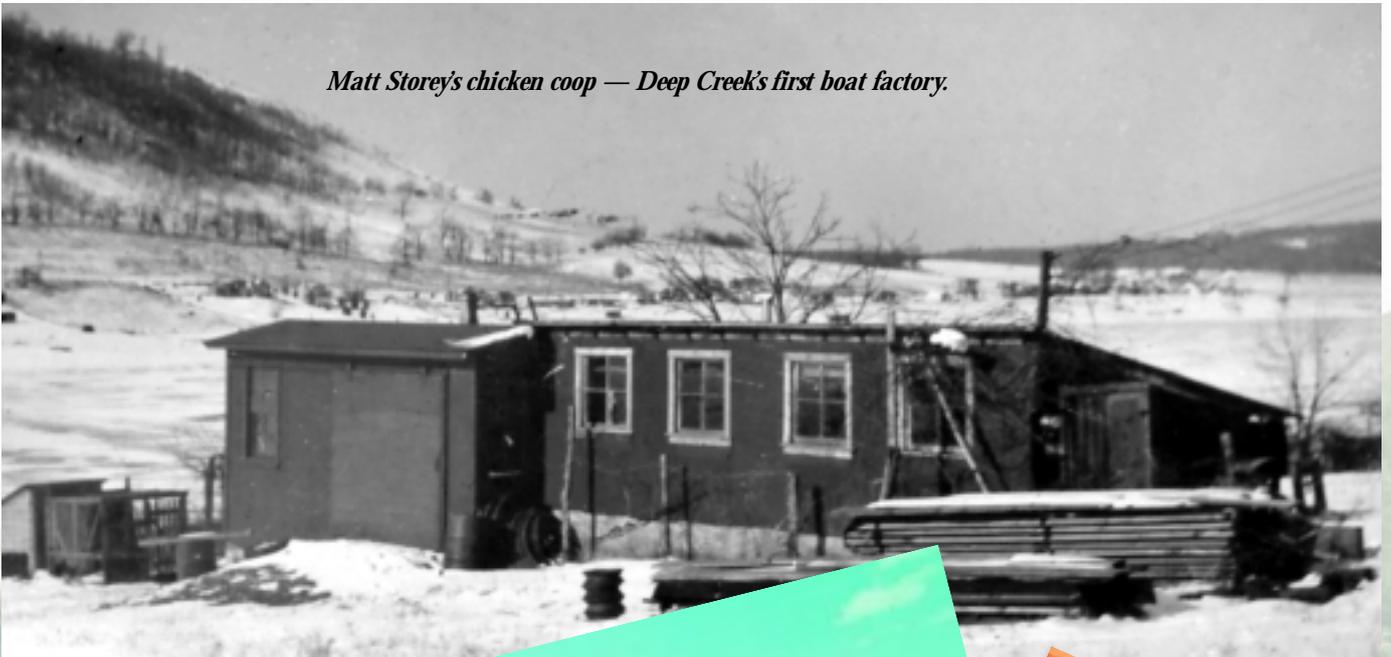
factory was located in an old chicken coop along the water, and he generally had one employee during that time. Boat building only lasted about three years as large companies began to enter the market and mass-produce them, making boat sales and rentals a more profitable enterprise. He became a franchised outboard Mercury dealer and a showroom dealer for many boat companies. “I would go to a boat show every year and order new boats. I had many different lines of boats over the years.” Mr. Storey found that after 20 years, the lake and business was growing too quickly. “It just became too big, and I decided to sell it,” thus ending an important link between Deep Creek and recreational boating.

While marinas, boats, and related fishing goods provided business opportunities for lake entrepreneurs; Grace King is able to reflect on a time when the word, “Lake,” was not attached to the title. Having moved there in 1919 from Red House, she and her father would frequently cross the stream, called Deep Creek, on a bridge where Johnny’s Bait House would later be built.



Matt Storey, at his home, with a beautiful view of Garrett County, Maryland.

Matt Storey's chicken coop — Deep Creek's first boat factory.



This early post card of Deep Creek Lake was given to us by Grace King. We have no idea who took the photo or what year it was, but it has a 1¢ stamp on the other side; our guess is early 40's.

She remembers one occasion when her father returned from a sale to find the stream flooding the bridge, preventing folks from crossing and creating general concern. Remnants of the road that Mrs. King traveled on are now located under the water between the former Johnny's Bait House and Rock Lodge Road. Another vivid memory of pre-lake days is when her family was able to "pack up the old Ford on a Sunday" and visit the construction site, where intake tunnels were being dug through the mountain. Her brother supervised the family's tour of the massive tunnels, as he was employed there as a construction worker during 1924-1925.

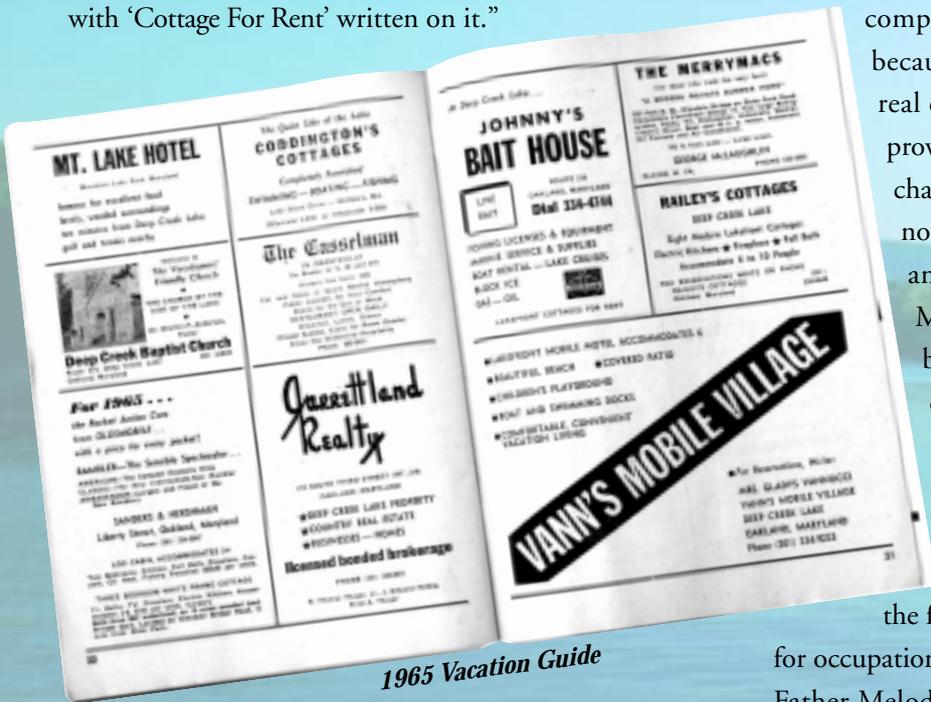
As time passed, Grace King married and established a residence on the hill that overlooked the old bridge and road site. In 1946, the King's decided to build a small cottage for friends who requested visits to the lake. Mrs. King recalled "friends didn't visit too frequently, and when they did, they stayed in our house; I put a board out near the road with 'Cottage For Rent' written on it."

decision was made to sell the property and move to nearby West Virginia, close to her birthplace. Even after five decades of general inflation and real estate appreciation at Deep Creek, Mrs. King's 2002 cottage fee was still a reasonable \$65.00 per night. Not one to regret decisions, Mrs. King said it was time to move on, and she now enjoys the country atmosphere of her new home in Aurora, West Virginia.

As residents recall early establishments at Deep Creek, one location mentioned but little understood, is Holy Cross House. To recollect the genesis of Holy Cross House, one has to turn the clock back to 1930 when Pennsylvania Electric Power Corporation was approached about selling lakefront property to the Congregation of Holy Cross religious order of the Roman Catholic Church, for the purposes of constructing a retreat for seminarians studying at Holy Cross College in Washington, D.C. The power company proved to be reluctant about the sale because it didn't desire to become embroiled in real estate development issues, a concern that proved to be unwarranted as the men who purchased the property desired "a place of retreat," not economic development, as long time visitor and Holy Cross Priest, Reverend William Melody, recently recalled. The land originally belonged to the Lohr family prior to the lake's construction, and according to Father Melody, Mrs. Lohr wanted to move from the homestead, as she believed the rising waters near the house threatened the safety of her children. The waters inundated much of the farm, leaving 36 acres of the original tract for occupation by the priests and brothers of Holy Cross.

Father Melody stated the potential purchase received criticism within the order at the time. "What are they doing, wasting money during the Great Depression, on a barren hill in Western Maryland? Now they look back and say, oh, what foresight they had." Despite opposition, the property, including the Lohr house, was deeded to the order for \$3,000.

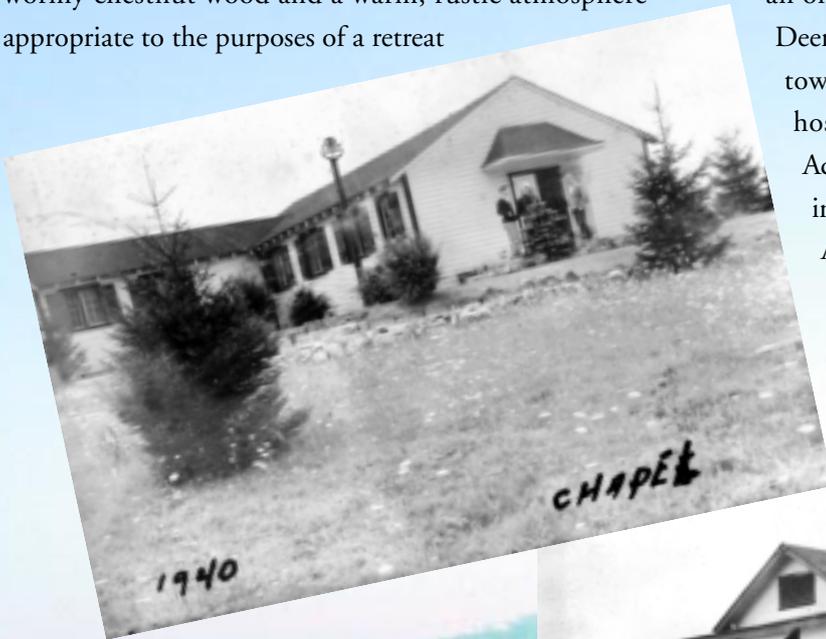
The facilities were built primarily by Holy Cross men who lived in tents during the first few years. The first



1965 Vacation Guide

Her marketing efforts proved to be successful, as she rented the cottage for \$5.00 the first night. Over the next few years, they purchased additional cottages for vacationers and seasonal workers. Mrs. King maintained her rental properties without assistance from 1964 forward, as her husband passed away that year. Visitors came from all over the United States, and even foreign lands, to stay at the summer cottages. After 56 years of hospitality work, a

building to be completed was the lodge during the summers of 1930-1932, followed by the dining hall in 1932, and the chapel in 1937. According to Father Melody, the seminarians and priests used the skills they had, and the skills they could read about, to build stone and wooden buildings on the site that has been enjoyed for more than 78 years. Father Craddick, who had a degree in architecture from Notre Dame, designed the chapel that features wormy chestnut wood and a warm, rustic atmosphere appropriate to the purposes of a retreat



facility. Father Wojciechowski built the altar, while Father Paul Beichner carved Stations of the Cross that adorn the chapel walls. Father Beichner went on to become head of the graduate school at Notre Dame for a number of years.

A number of other prominent church officials also enjoyed the beauty of Holy Cross House at Deep Creek including: Father Theodore Hesburgh, President of Notre Dame for 35 years, Archbishop Heston, pastor of a congregation in Rome, Archbishop Graner of Bangladesh, and Father Patrick Peyton, known as the Rosary Priest. “A World At Prayer Is A World At Peace,” a well-known admonition, is among Father Peyton’s credits. “There are great stories of great men here. Many of them left and went to the missions in India, Bangladesh, South America, and Africa, where they built churches and also established

services like sinking wells, building schools and hospitals, and educating.”

Not all Holy Cross House activities have been directly related to Biblical studies, but they have always had spiritual and recreational qualities of undeniable benefit. “Our men were great athletes. We challenged the local towns around here to baseball contests,” stated Father Melody. The Holy Cross team would pile into the back of an old truck and make the journeys to Oakland, Deer Park, Crellin, Terra Alta, Westernport, Morgantown, and Kitzmiller. Holy Cross would, in turn, host the teams at their Deep Creek setting. Additional information on the games was provided in a 1996 report written by Father John Paige. According to the report, Father Kehoe, who played shortstop, remembered “the Holy Cross team was dubbed the All-Stars because their uniforms were used by all teams at Holy Cross



and were all different. Local teams would bring in ‘ringers’ and consolidate all the best players from surrounding teams to play us. There were good crowds for the games. It was quite a social pastime for the small towns, and for us.” Father Melody concurred, “People remember those games.” Standing behind the rusty backstop that overlooks the lake, one can imagine the spirited contests and fellowship of those summertime games.

Seminarians, priests, and brothers also provided the general population of Deep Creek with weekly spiritual renewal after they made the improbable purchase of a surplus U.S. Navy lifeboat, complete with canned rations. Father Melody reflects, “We used to go down at night singing Gregorian chants, American hymns, and ‘God Bless America;’ it was a weekly thing, and people would be out on their porches waiting for the choir to come by. It was still going strong in the late 40’s. We had a great choir.” During an earlier time, Father Houser reported a similar experience. “We would line up the main boat that the men built, we put a Buick motor into it, and behind that, a sailboat and 3 canoes. We tied them together in a long string and that Buick motor pulled everything. We sang the old songs, and we heard from the people that lived along the stretch of the lake that they just waited for Wednesday nights to hear us in the boats singing.”

The men of Holy Cross no longer challenge the locals to baseball contests or provide weekly religious music, but they do challenge themselves on a more recent addition to the facility, a homemade 9 hole, par 36 golf course, designed by Father Reely, former chaplain to the Notre Dame football team. “I don’t think Tiger Woods could handle our golf course. Sometimes our greens are green; sometimes they’re not so green. We get a lot of fun out of it, and it’s a challenge.”

Holy Cross is rich in history but also mindful of the future. In August 2003, seventy-five seminarians and other church officials will gather to reflect on their missions and prepare for the coming year. “I look forward to the future with great enthusiasm. We will be ordaining 7 young men this coming year.” Father Melody concludes, “To me, this is a sacred place because we are here to learn how to be good ministers, and ministers by nature are supposed to be kind, helpful, and caring. This is a kind of school for that. We go out from here to minister to the people, wherever they are, and to give of ourselves.”



Lance C. Bell



A rambling rosebush was growing near the old Lohr homeplace. Father Melody (above) realized that nobody could see the roses at the original location, so he transplanted the rosebush within a Snow Flower bush close to the chapel, thus providing an interesting point of conversation. “Holy Cross House is a wonderful place to create.”

Top photo: View of Holy Cross from the Lake, on a calm quiet Fall morning.

Not all recollections on our trip down memory lane are of places; some are noteworthy events like the marathon swimming races that occurred in 1939 and 1940.

According to Tom Thayer, contestant, the race was organized through the efforts of well-known swimming coach, Joe Sollars. It was reported that a crowd of 5,000 persons witnessed the four-mile event between Cabin Lodge and Stone



Tom Thayer (center) in 1940, when he won the marathan swimming race.

Tavern, including hundreds of parked motorists along Route 219, who would move their vehicles to keep pace with the swimmers. “I was 13 years of age in 1939, and I entered the race against my mother’s wishes but at my father’s urging. I was second that year. A fellow named John Nelson, from New York, was first. The second year, 1940, I entered it again and won it, beating John Nelson.” Tom Thayer’s time was 2 hours and 12 minutes, and his prize was a wristwatch, donated by Shaffer Jewelry Company of Oakland.

Another unusual event during the 1940’s was ice boat sailing. A small group of men built the boats as a hobby, as they enjoyed gliding across the lake at high speeds. Frank Beckman, the youngest member of the group, credits four older men with getting him started in the sport. They were: “Pip” Thayer, “Shorty” Long, “Buzz” Gosnell, and Lonnie Long. The boats were of wood construction and featured three runners, two in the front and one under the seat. Mr. Beckman recalls, “the sails were about 10 or 12 feet, and you would have to duck when the sail turned around. Winds would come down from the mountain and you would really fly across the ice.” Homemade ice boat sailing lasted about five years, later such boats were commercially produced and offered for sale at Deep Creek.

Over the years, old Deep Creek gave way to a newer version, and summer cottages faded away as large, multi-use facilities replaced them. The first condominium near the lake was built in 1970, by four partners including Tom Thayer. It was not entirely certain that such an enterprise

would be successful, so the unusual name, “Four Hoopole South,” was born. “We called it ‘Four’ because there were four partners, ‘Hoopole’ because that is what the area was called, and ‘South’ because that was where we were going if it failed,” reminisced Mr. Thayer. Needless to say, the first condominium proved to be

successful, and others soon followed. Thayer believes that development of Interstate 68 provided the impetus for lake growth as vacationers from the Washington, D.C. suburbs found the lake to be a convenient four-season retreat.

Reflections about the past help us capture a moment in time when Deep Creek Lake exhibited little commercial development and life was simpler. The keen observation that one can never go home is true because change is a constant that we all live with, but reminiscing about the past helps us better connect with the present and establish a sense of community that is important in building a better future. While there are many reasons to recall the past, perhaps the best one was offered by a local resident who stated, “I just love talking about the old days.”

Perhaps no other reason is necessary.



Mountain Discoveries would like to express appreciation to all informants for their time and memories that made “Lake Reflections” possible.

All of the old photos and post cards in this story were provided by the informants. None of them have names or dates, but an effort was made to no avail, to find out the photographers. One exception is the post card of Cabin Lodge; it was published by Ruthvan W. Morrow, Jr., Oakland, MD.

For additional information on the history of Deep Creek and surrounding historical sites, visit the Library of the Garrett County Historical Society, the Ruth Enlow Public Library, both on Second Street in Oakland, MD, or contact the Registrar, Youghiogheny Glades, Daughters of the American Revolution, Oakland, MD.