

Deep Creek Lake Celebrates 80 Years



After examining and disassembling sections, the Madsons confirmed that the wood suffered from moisture damage and was beyond repair. At that point a decision was made to use the swan as a pattern for creating a new boat. Mark Madson's interest and subsequent research efforts into the swan's origins, uncovered photographs, diagrams and notes from Mr. Obenshain that were instrumental in planning the new vessel. Since more than basic repairs were necessary, the Madson family contacted a Garrett County craftsman about the possibility of building a new craft based on Mr. Obenshain's original design. The Madsons consequently entrusted the boat to Ervin Sweitzer of Grantsville, Maryland, a long time acquaintance of the family and a person who watched Mr. Obenshain build the first swan in the early 1960's. Mark Madson recalled, "My father knew Ervin for a long time and we knew the great quality of his work."

Ervin Sweitzer was excited to undertake the project. "I watched the swan being built when I was 10 years old because I knew Mr. Obenshain. When the boat came to me, outside sections were damaged and the tail was completely rotten. I took the swan apart to get a pattern and to make sure the new swan boat would be the same as the first one. The most difficult parts to work with so far were the head and tail, both curved pieces." Ben Sweitzer, Ervin's son, has also been busy with rebuilding. The new swan is nesting in Mr. Sweitzer's garage. The 13-foot neck and head are finished, including an operating airhorn and colored running lights. The tail section is also receiving finishing touches.

Disassembling the swan revealed much about the boat's construction and later modifications. Original pontoons were polystyrene covered with fiberglass but in time were penetrated by water and found to be useless. The gear box and its motor have been replaced by a stronger and more modern system as has the mechanism used to raise and lower the rear tail light. These new mechanical systems

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When the swan makes its debut this summer, it will also be the 80th anniversary of Deep Creek Lake. Ground was broken for the lake on November 1, 1923. The purpose of the project was to provide hydroelectric power service for the Pennsylvania Electric Power Corporation of Johnstown, Pennsylvania. An ambitious undertaking, 8,000 acres of land was purchased, including many farms. A railroad connection from Oakland, Maryland, became necessary to transport heavy equipment and materials to excavate the dam site. Stone crushing machinery for quarry use added to the massive building effort.

The hydroelectric system provided electrical service to distant customers but offered little else in the way of recreational activities and services during its early years. The only population center was McHenry, a village that offered three general merchandise stores and a post office. Fishing and boating activities were primarily weekend events for vacationers from Pennsylvania, a trend that continued into the 1950's and 1960's. Deep Creek Lake's rapid development and transformation into a premiere vacation destination site began during the 1970's due to completion of Interstate 68, the building of condominiums and development of a sewerage system. Today, Deep Creek Lake continues to grow and offers year round activities, drawing visitors from a wide region. To celebrate the lake's 80th birthday, the Garrett County Chamber of Commerce is planning a birthday party at the Discovery Center, near Deep Creek Lake State Park, in September. Check the website for a time and date.

