

## Heritage Preservation Month

### The Island in Loon Lake: Part 1

There is a mystery in our town! Many citizens remember the tented roller-skating rink that in the 1940s appeared every summer in Loon Lake Park. It beckoned young and old with its lively music and promise of a good time. Much less is known about Loon Lake Island, that tree covered islet in the middle of the lake. It isn't even shown on some old maps of the area! What does show up is a skinny peninsula that juts southeast toward the center of the lake.



Loon Lake Island, Waseca, Minn.  
*Photo: Hand-tinted color postcard of Loon Lake Island in 1910*  
*Courtesy of the Waseca County Historical Society*

Ron Purcell, whose grandparents, George and Ruby Fell, once owned the island and the park, has made a study of this property even as he has researched his family tree. In President Lincoln's time (1859) the land that contains the island and the park was given to Andrew Ruark for his service in the war, most likely the Mexican War. After several owners, including W.G. Ward, prominent in early Waseca history, it was sold to David and Louise Fell in 1898. After their deaths it was willed to their adopted son, George Fell, who was married to Ruby Ruetta Irwin. George and Ruby left the farm shortly after that and moved into "Town", about a mile away. Ron Purcell now lives in the old home, which was built by David Fell's brother, John. Because of concern about the property's upkeep, George and Ruby sold the island to Waseca County in 1957 for the sum of \$300 and ten years later sold the park to the City of Waseca.

What happened to create the island? At one time Loon Lake, a shallow lake home for huge turtles, frogs, waterfowl and bullheads, drained into Clear Lake, which was about 8 feet lower, through a channel at its east end. We still see evidences of this in some Waseca streets after a heavy rain and at the ditch's Clear Lake terminus. The M. and St. L. railroad tracks crossed the northeast part of the lake on a trestle bridge built in 1877. Late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century a decision was made by the village trustees to have the railroad company fill in the space under the trestle with an earthen dike, thus damming the channel and causing Loon Lake to rise several feet, resulting in loss of shore land and covering most of the narrow peninsula, leaving an island at its far end.