

Heritage Preservation Month

The Island in Loon Lake: Part 2

As a child, Ron Purcell rafted out to the island and played on part of the stone foundation on its east side, a foundation that has since washed into the water. Old timers told him that this was the remnant of a dance and beer hall dating to the time of Ward's ownership. Indeed, in a Waseca newspaper article in 1888 it was reported that John Myers was putting up a lunch counter, shooting gallery, and card room on Loon Lake Island. This little "Coney Island" was reached by a dirt road atop the peninsula, just wide enough for a horse and buggy, and also by excursion boats from Bill Topal's boat landing on the southeast corner of the lake. When the lake was drawn down in the early 1980s, the roadbed was visible but it is now covered with 3 to 4 feet of water. Much of the early history of Loon Lake Island and its revelries are lost in the mists of time.

Fast forward to the present. The island had been reduced in size by the rising water and erosion. In a newspaper interview in 1957, George Fell said that when David Fell purchased it in 1898, the islet was at least twice as big as it is now. After acquiring it, the County rippedraped the shoreline probably preserving what is left. However, the island was still eroding from the top, primarily because Canada Geese had eaten or killed the vegetation, leaving the topsoil vulnerable to rain and wind erosion. With a \$500 matching grant from the County and valuable assistance from the Waseca Soil and Water Conservation District and the Waseca Lakes Association, Marla Watje, director of the Conservation District and interested citizens, Boyd Fuller, Jerry Kuhn, and Ron Purcell, are attempting to stop the erosion by re-planting grasses. As of Fall 2009, grass had been established and was doing well, but it remains to be seen how it will stand up to the geese.

Loon Lake could be an excellent lake for canoeing, kayaking, and many non-destructive activities. Boats with powerful motors would likely endanger the fragile environmental balance. It is the hope of the citizens working to save the island, that the people of Waseca will use it respectfully. Considerate use of our little island would be a unique experience for many Wasecans and a valuable legacy far into the future.

Stereograph circa 1883
Courtesy of the Waseca County Historical Society

