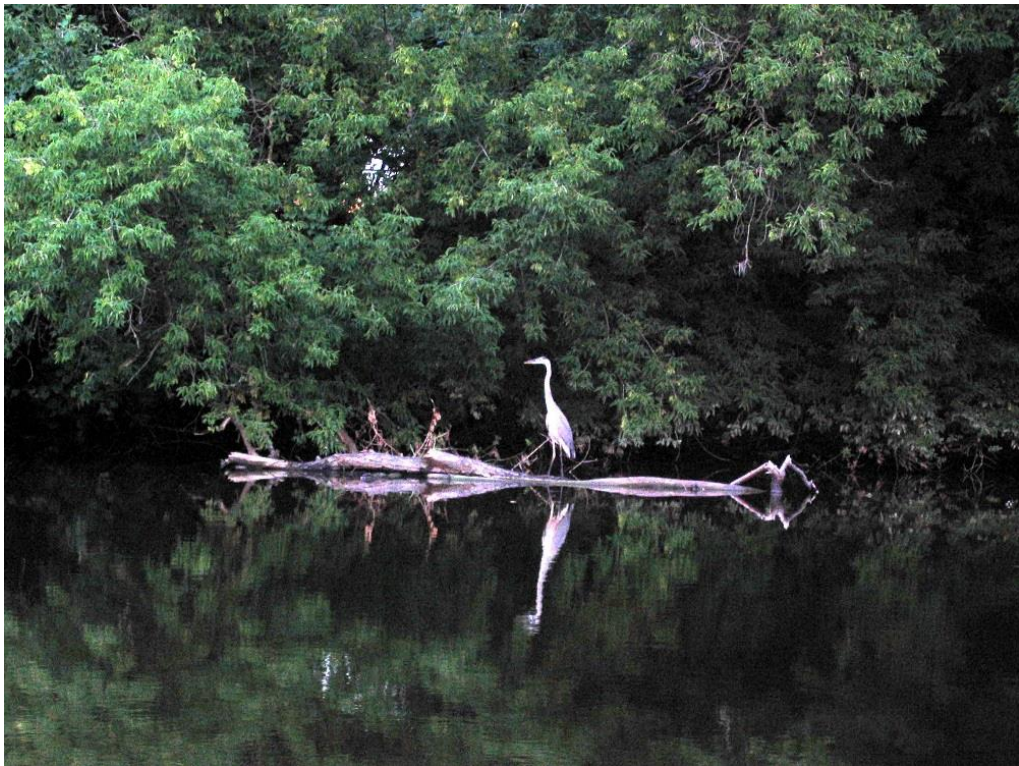
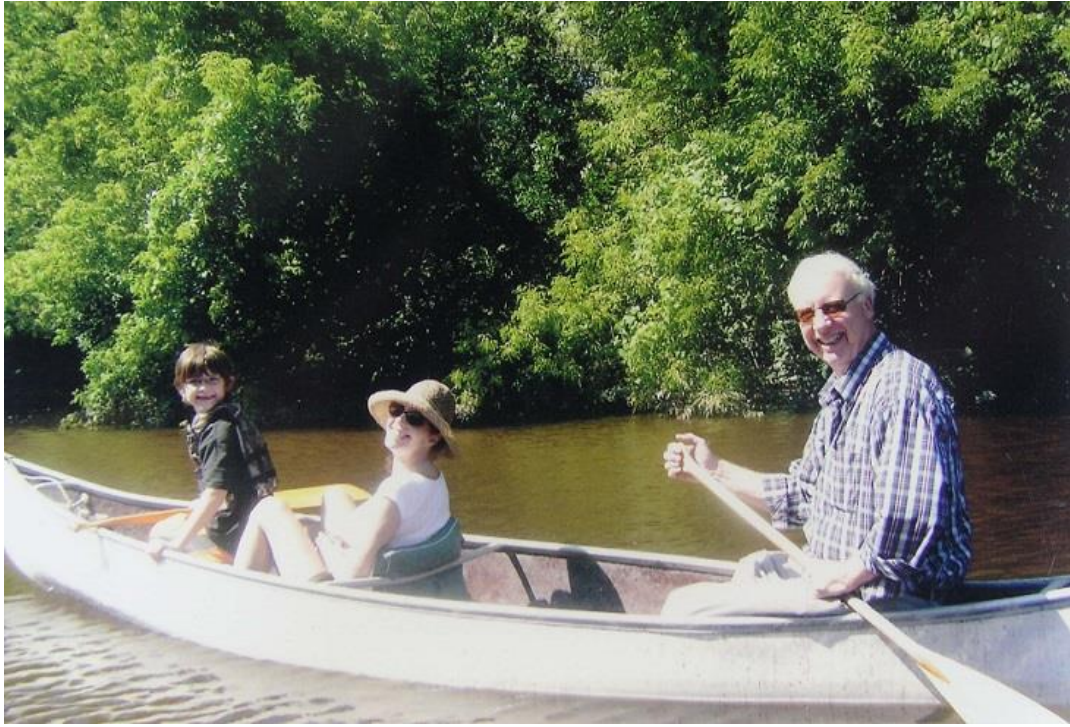
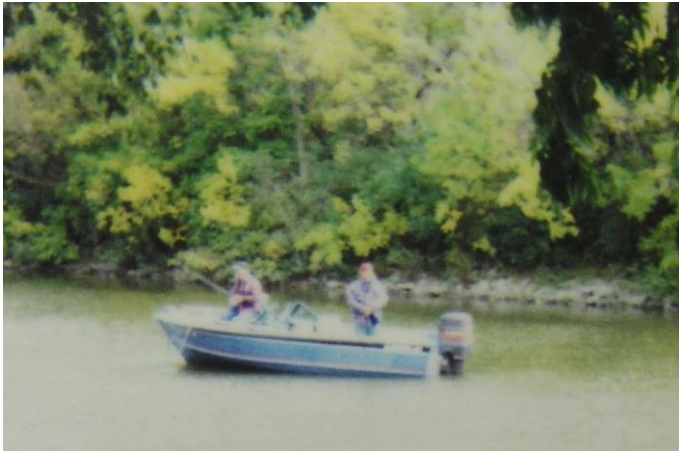
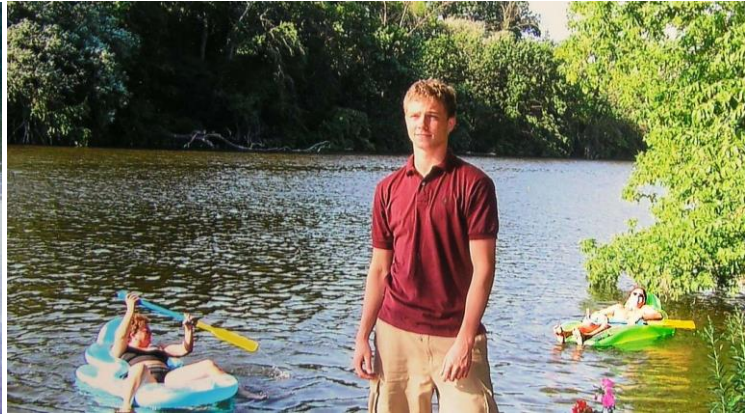


Recreation at the Estabrook Dam Lake Prior to 2008, when the water was deep enough to swim and boat









Couple operating speed-boat on Milwaukee River at West Silver Spring Drive in Glandale, WI enjoying the late days of summer (Labor Day) “circa late 1960’s”

Photo by Donald N. Emmerich (former Milwaukee Journal)



RIVER ADVENTURE

Canoe trip not as far off as it seems

By Maureen Dietzel Mertens

Three canoes push out from shore into the slow-moving river. Their oars slicing into the calm waters in unison, this group of 11 heads north against the mild current.

For some, this river journey is a first; they've not traveled this river before.

The river splits. On either side the canoes are bounded by land packed with timber and brush and wildlife.

"Look!" someone shouts, pointing, as a huge bird lifts off a branch and soars above the water.

"What is that?"

"A blue heron."

"Wingspread about 4 feet?"

"Five. At least 5 feet."

Another shout as a young boy in the last canoe points at something lifting out of the muddy water. "It's a turtle. I've never seen such a big turtle."

The turtle, its shell about the dimension of a basketball, stretches its neck high and watches the people watching him.

"How old is it?"

"Thirty, 40 years." And all around all kinds of birds sing from the skies above and dart across the river — kingfishers, Baltimore orioles, cardinals, crows and blue herons.

Farther on, a fish leaps out of the water and with an enormous splash disappears again.



The sights and sounds of nature surround canoeists on the calm waters of the Milwaukee River.

"It's a carp."

"They get to be 5 feet long."

"There's trout in these waters and largemouth bass and catfish."

And although not seen on this morning, it is known that in the woods on the islands live deer, raccoons and even a red fox — at least it had been sighted the year before.

Just then a two-legged creature appears, bringing this party of adventurers back to earth.

"Golfers," a girl scoffs.

If it weren't for the golfers and the muffled rumble of the nearby expressway, one would never know this small group of explorers had launched their expedition in the heart of the city, on the Milwaukee River at Lincoln Park.

Best-kept secret

This oasis of nature is one of the best-kept secrets of Milwaukee's park system, according to Dick Yahr, a Glendale resident and member of the Lincoln Park Historical Society.

And Yahr is out to share that secret at 10:30 a.m. Saturdays with anyone who has a canoe and a sense of adventure.

From Yahr's home on North Milwaukee River Parkway, he has a clear view of the river from the east.

"I looked for 10 years to find a place on the river," he said. "It's a requirement of mine to live near the water."

Yahr's main objective in organizing these canoe trips is for others to take advantage of the beauty that is so close at hand. "The message I want to put out is here's another resource and doggone how wonderful it is to take advantage of it and share it with other people."

He feels deeply, he said, that the river must be used or it will be lost to future generations.

"I'm saying to the people of Milwaukee, there's this resource, this incredible beautiful place for water activity and it should be used."

"I'd like to see hundreds of people out here," he said. "At night I canoe and it's like being in the North Woods."

It's important for people to use the parks, the river, he said. If it's just there, and on one's on it, it's lost, he said.

"People see us on the river, and they realize it's possible for them to do it, too. It's an example for them."

Canoe-mates share bond

That morning Jeff Geise, Grafton, and John Waite, Yahr's neighbor, were part of the group that had spotted Yahr's sightseeing canoe trip notice in the newspaper, along with Jennifer Radke, almost 12; her mother Vicky Williams; friend David Lindberg, just back from a trip to Nepal; and the Barnes family from Mequon.

Waite is an artist working in oils in photo-realism. His work has been shown at the DeLind Gallery as well as being available in New York. He also owns a canoe.



Ready to embark on a Saturday morning adventure on the Milwaukee River, participants secure themselves in the canoes lined up at the Blatz Pavilion at Lincoln Park.

(CNI photos by C.T. Kruger)

"It's like having a bike in the garage," he explained. "You just use it."

Bruce Barnes is a civil engineer with HNTB. He and his wife Sharon and their children, Julie, 7, and Kevin, 11, had been living in San Francisco. They're using the canoe Sharon's father had given her when she was 15.

"We saw the announcement in the paper," Sharon Barnes said, "and decided to see what it was all about."

Boaters in tune with nature

Geise, an arborist living on a river in Grafton, points to a tree on the shore; its huge roots hang over the side and the limbs spread wide and high over the river and over the land.

"I think that's the biggest cottonwood in the area," he said. "Must be about 80 or 90 years old."

Along the shore people fished. "There are lots of fish in here right now," said Geise.

In the middle of the river someone had put down plastic milk jugs as markers.

"A man comes out here and water skis," explained Yahr. "Last week I swam from my house up the river." But he doesn't suggest others do that.

According to Yahr, there are a number of excellent places for launching a boat in the area, including the Kletzsch Park dam.

Conditions are excellent for boating on the river from May through October, which is when his Saturday tours end for the season. From November through April, the Estabrook Park dam is opened and that changes the river. It narrows, becomes more shallow and makes boating all but impossible, Yahr said.

But now the river is wide and smooth. It splits and the group heads west this time. "Another split. Another choice. The

History's hope

The land surrounding the Milwaukee River was put aside decades ago and remade for the people in the community to use and enjoy.

According to a 1938 newspaper account of the building of Lincoln Park, hundreds of men built the riverbeds with picks and shovels, working 17 months "to change nature's course and build a beautiful recreational area in Lincoln Park."

The Lincoln Park project was commissioned by the Depression-era Works Progress Administration (WPA).

Before the work was done, the area flooded almost every year, but with the remaking of the river, the flooding stopped.

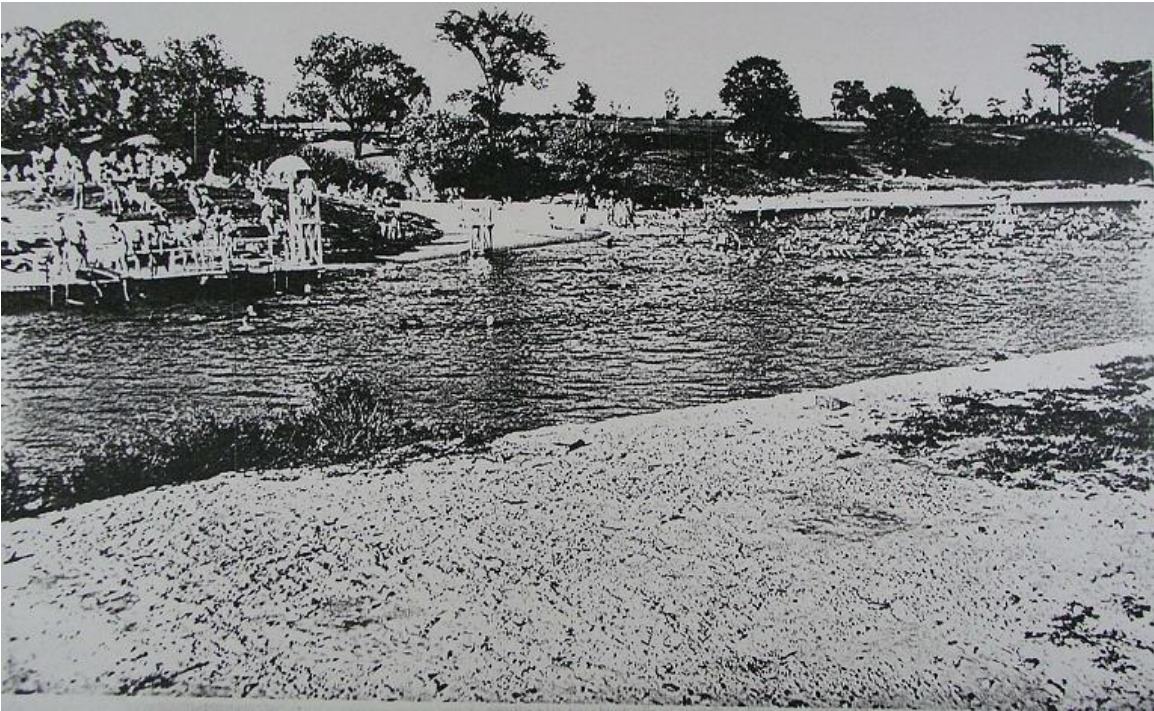
Four islands were built, as well as bridges, a golf course, boat landing, bath and boathouse, swimming beach and walking paths. The main island was to be a game refuge. Picnic areas, an archery range, fields to be used for baseball and football were planned.

"They are building for Milwaukeeans of today and of generations to come, recreational area that will be one of the finest of its kind in the land," according to the newspaper account.

river twists and turns, time is forgotten and ahead are two more canoes. The groups wave at each other.

The river is alive. "How beautiful it is just to take pleasure in what we have," said Yahr. "We should enjoy it."

Estabrook Park Beach 1938



Estabrook Park 1890s

