

East Grand Rapids

The Early Years

Other Early Settlers and important family names from this community include: Ezekiel Davis, George Young, John Muir, Thomas and W. A. Muir, John Paul, Walter J. Pierce, L. Mead, J.T. Miller, D. Robertson, the Anderson farming family, George S. Lovett, Stephen P. and Edmund Barnard, George B. Rathbun, the Burchard farming family, Blodgett, Wilcox, Avery, Benjamin Hanchett, Judson C. West and son Ben E. West, Charles P. Limbert, Frederic A. Wurzburg, Melville and Anna Bissell.

Village of East Grand Rapids

As early as the mid 1800s Reeds Lake was a popular summertime spot for area citizens. People would travel from Grand Rapids to the Lake by horse and carriage, horse drawn trolley and steam engine to picnic, swim, fish and enjoy a day in the country. By 1877 the street railway system made it easy to travel from the city of Grand Rapids to Reeds Lake. This rise in tourism encouraged the establishment of businesses. Before this time, the majority of the settled land consisted of farms, with the exception of the area on Reeds Lake from Rose's to where the middle school is now located. This was a seasonal, recreational area, with a small population policed and governed by Grand Rapids Township. One could argue that with the increased tourist trade it was not policed too well. The place was known for its road houses (saloons), unseemly entertainment, gambling, and organized fighting events such as boxing, dogfights and rooster fights. In 1890, after much discussion about the sorry state of affairs in the area around Reeds Lake, a bill was introduced in the Michigan State House of Representatives by local Senator Edmund Barnard to set up a village government. In 1891 the area known as Reeds Lake became the Village of East Grand Rapids.



FIRST VILLAGE PRESIDENT, 1891-1892
Edmund Barnard

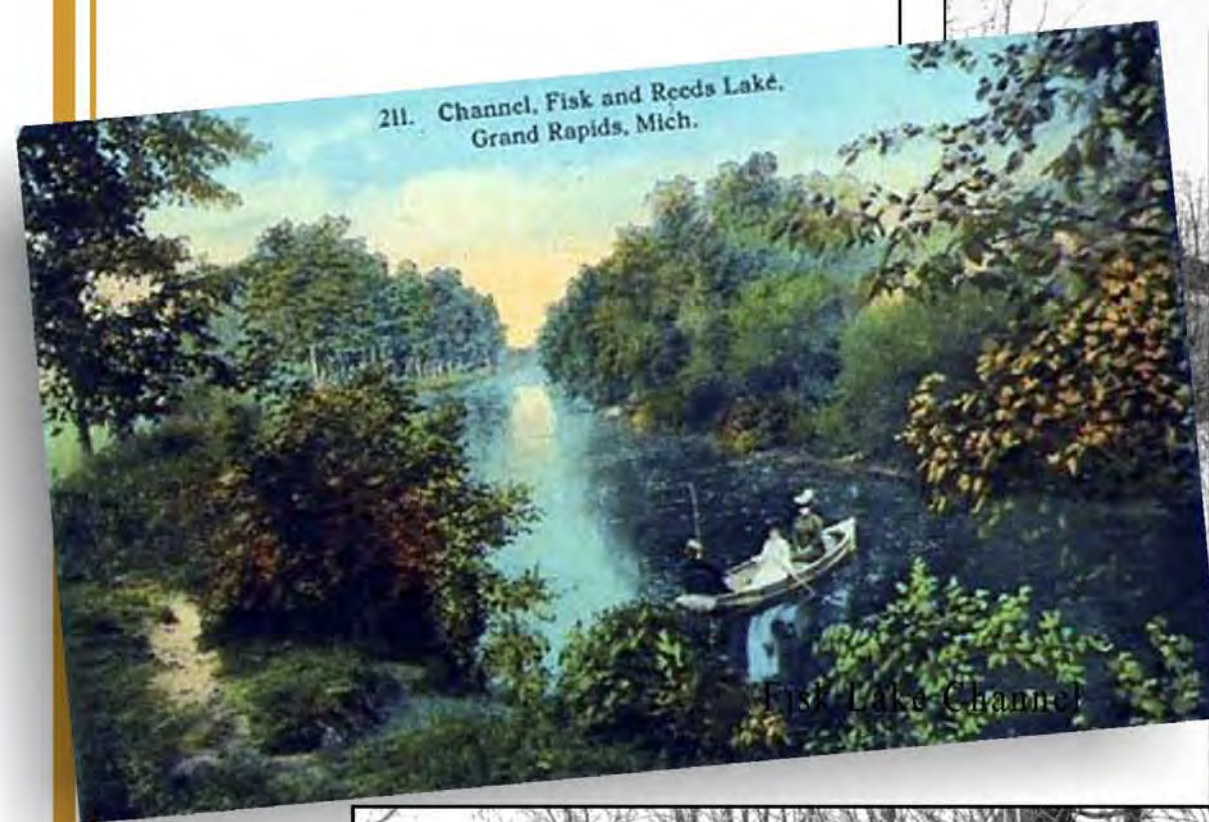
East Grand Rapids was incorporated as a village in 1891 and governed by a president who presided over a village council. Its boundaries were from Fulton Street on the north, Hall Street on the south, Gladstone on the west and just west of the East Beltline on the east. The population was 300 and growing.

JOHN FISK - Fisk Lake

John W. Fisk, of English descent, was born in Southington, Hartford County, Connecticut in 1815. He moved with his wife, Phalinda, and family to Plymouth, Michigan in 1835. He established and proceeded to run a hotel in Plymouth for the next two years.

In 1837 Mr. Fisk took up residence in Grand Rapids Township (currently East Grand Rapids). He acquired 200 acres of land on the southwest corner of Lakeside Drive and Robinson Road. Purchased from Lucius Lyon, the Fisk property sat high on a bluff overlooking the lake that would later be named for him. Fisk then built a log tavern on this land. In later years it was rebuilt in brick and would become recognized as the first hotel in this area. The tavern was a favorite rest stop for many travelers. Many a fine meal was had here and the hospitality was top-notch. After managing this property for 25 years he sold a portion of it, reserved ten acres of land for himself, and built a fine family home in 1871.

By the 1870s John Fisk had created the channel between Reeds and Fisk lakes. Small boats could easily travel from one lake to the other. Around 1960 the EGR city government decided to remove the Lakeside Drive bridge over the channel and lower the road, closing the connection and making it almost impossible to get into Fisk Lake.



Lakeside Drive Bridge over channel, circa 1906



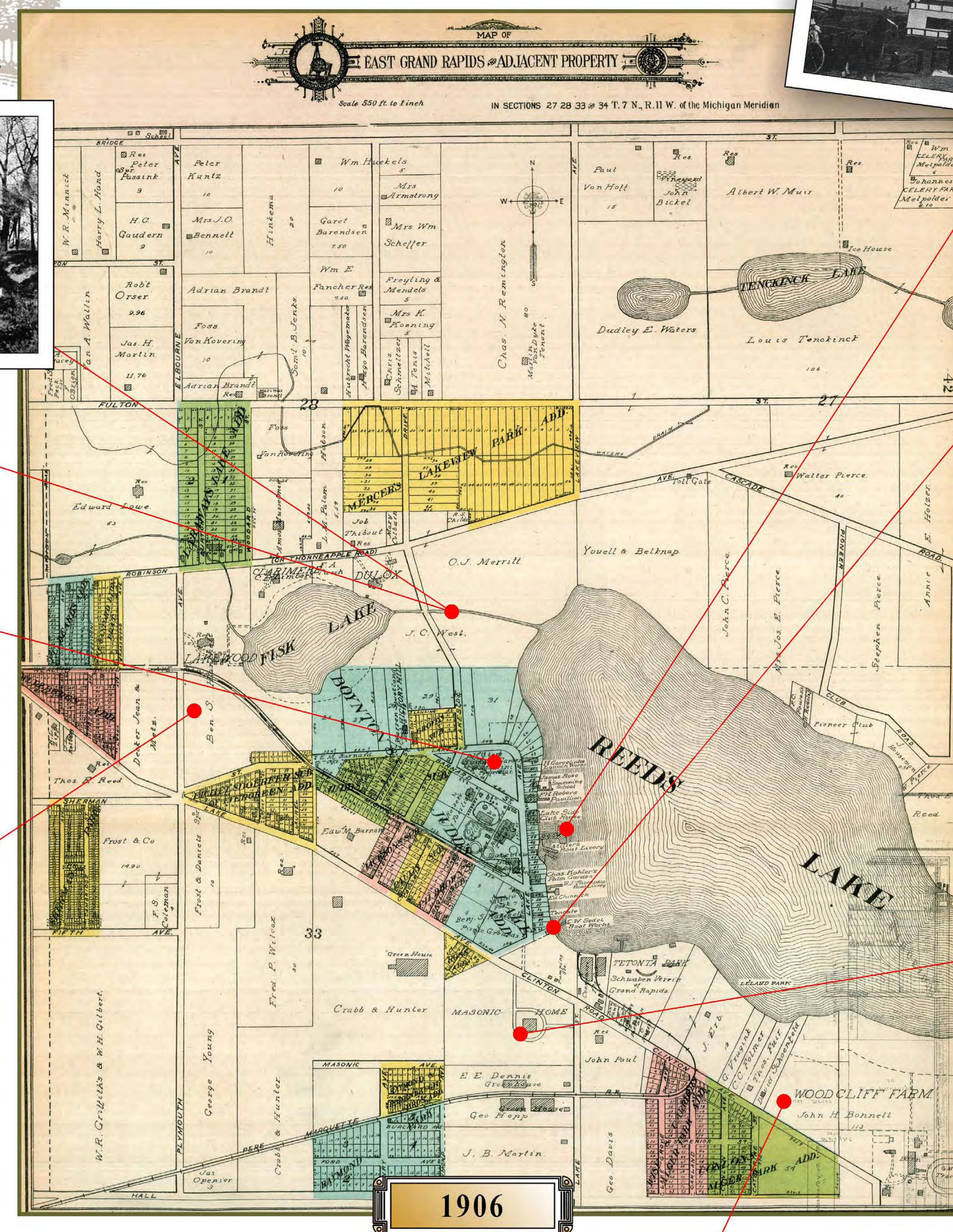
Huber's Summer Garden

Established in 1889 by German immigrant Henry Huber and later run by his brother-in-law, Herman Martini, this rustically built family-style restaurant and beer garden was a popular spot until its business was halted by prohibition in 1919. Located on the property occupied by the former Ramona Medical Building (2008) on the corner of Barnard, Lakeside and Greenwood, and known to many as Martini's, its picnic grounds, spacious porches and unusual war relic decorations made this a popular spot. Attempts by the Grand Rapids Street Car Company to revive the place as a restaurant and nightclub failed. The vacant building fell into disrepair and was demolished by the mid 1930s.



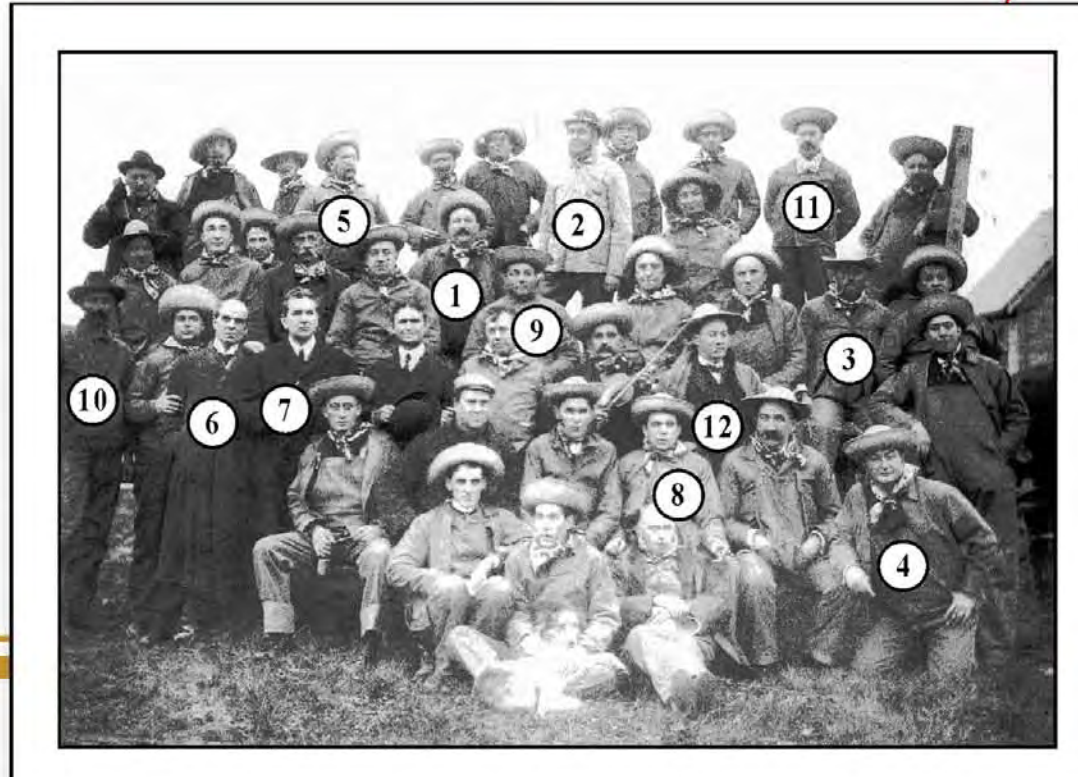
Blodgett Memorial Hospital, circa 1916

The U. B. A. (United Benevolent Association), founded in 1846 and first known as the Female Union Charitable Association, was a formidable health care force in Grand Rapids. Their hospital facilities began in humble houses and buildings in downtown Grand Rapids. They established several facilities in Grand Rapids that provided medical care to those in need, gradually working towards the 1916 completion of the full-fledged 120-bed Blodgett Memorial Hospital in East Grand Rapids. In 1886 the U. B. A. Training School for Nurses was established. The name changed to the Marion Louise Withey Training School for Nurses in 1916 and finally the Blodgett Memorial Hospital School of Nursing, 1944 through its 1987 closing. East Grand Rapids citizen and business leader John Wood Blodgett, Sr., son of lumber baron Delos Abiel Blodgett, was on the hospital board from 1895 to 1922. In 1914 he and his wife Minnie Cummock Blodgett purchased and donated 23 acres of land for a five-story medical facility on the southeast corner of Plymouth and Wealthy. The hospital was named in honor of Mr. Blodgett's mother, Jane "Jennie" Wood Blodgett. With the building of this new hospital, years of medical service by the U. B. A. came to fruition. Today (2010) Blodgett Hospital is part of the Spectrum Health organization.

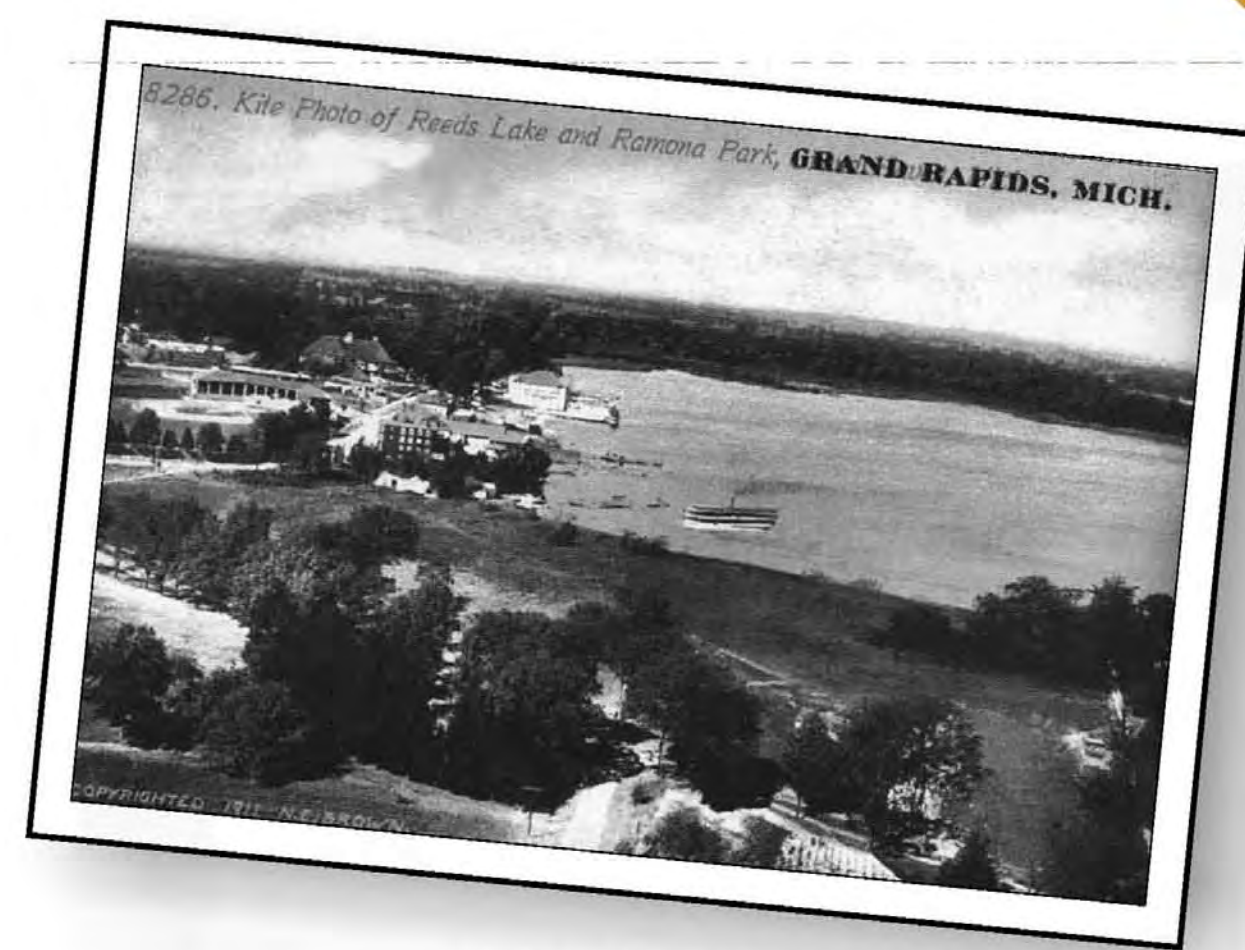


1906

"Farmer Bonnell" holds his first Annual Round-up of other East Grand Rapids "Farmers" at his Woodcliff Farm, October 1904. In reality, the gentlemen pictured were mostly prominent Grand Rapids citizens.



1. Herman Martini - Manager, Huber's Summer Garden
2. John H. Bonnell - Village President, 1901-1905
3. John Paul - First state senator to live in East Grand Rapids
4. Frank Winegar - Secretary and treasurer of Winegar Furniture
5. John Godfrey
6. Rial McArthur - President, Village of East Grand Rapids, 1905-1908, Superintendent and Secretary, Masonic Home
7. Andy Fyfe - Lawyer
8. Billy Chinnick - Restaurant owner
9. Charlie Phelps - President, Century Fuel Company
10. Henry Paul
11. Billy Boyens - Broker
12. Alfred D. Rathbone - President, Rathbone & Panigot Co.



Reeds Lake, west shore - 1915

Reed Family - First European settlers in East Grand Rapids

In the summer of 1834, three men from Herkimer County, New York, set off for the Michigan Territory to start new lives. Brothers Ezra and Lewis Reed and their nephew Porter Reed purchased large parcels of land, farmed and became early community leaders.

Ezra (1800-1888) served as the first Kent County sheriff. He lived just west of Reeds Lake, where the Lakeshore Club Condos are currently located (2010). Lewis (1795-1863) settled near present day Argonia and Floral Streets. Lewis served as the Grand Rapids Township Supervisor in 1850 and 1855. He built the area's first schoolhouse on the edge of his property, and his daughter Sophia Reed Davis was one of its first schoolteachers. Porter (1812-1857) built a log cabin, the first on Reeds Lake, circa 1834. A later homestead was situated near the intersection of Lake Drive and Rosewood. Porter was a respected pioneer, farmer and civic leader. He owned two 360-acre farms purchased through federal land grants in 1834, 1835 and 1838. The farmland ran from present day Hall Street on the south, Plymouth on the east, Wealthy on the north and Norwood on the west. The family farm produced fruit and dairy products. Porter and his wife Polly Delong Reed raised four children: Julia (Defendorf), Gibson, Thomas and Ransom.

Porter's son, Thomas Ezra Reed (1847-1910) inherited a portion of the family farm and later purchased the rest from his brothers Gibson and Ransom. At age 16, Thomas lied to Union army recruiters about his age and joined the 21st Michigan Infantry, Company B. He was wounded at the battle of Bentonville, North Carolina and was rescued from the battlefield by his older brother, Gibson. Upon returning home to Michigan, Thomas carried on with the family farm, married Mary Walker, and had four children: Katherine "Kittie" Reed (Morgan), Caroline Reed (Young), Polly Reed (Snow), and William Thomas Reed who died at the age of 19 months. Thomas ran the family farm after his parents died, and resided at his parents' homestead. Beginning in 1905, Thomas owned and operated the Manhattan Beach Club on the north shore of Reeds Lake. He ran the establishment until his death, whereupon it was taken over by his daughter and son-in-law, Katherine "Kittie" Morgan and Charles Morgan. The Beach Club closed in 1927. Thomas was very active in local government, serving as the second East Grand Rapids Village President from 1893-1896, Grand Rapids Township Supervisor in 1905 and 1910, and town treasurer. He also served as Justice of the Peace and was a member of the fraternal organization G.A.R. (The Grand Army of the Republic) and the Court of Honor.



Thomas E. Reed, 1847-1910



Reeds Lake dock - 1915



Municipal Building

Originally, this structure served as the TenCate Hotel. In 1910, the three-story building was purchased and renovated so that the village could have a permanent, centralized location to run its business. The municipal offices were upstairs on the second floor, the fire and police department complete with a jail cell on the first level, and storage area in the basement. In 1936 the building was renovated. The third floor was removed and a cupola was added. Funds were supplemented by the United States government through the Works Project Administration program (W.P.A.). The cupola on top of the building, used for drying fire hoses, was removed during demolition in 1969 when the new city municipal complex and library were built. It stood atop a small gazebo in the front of the D & W parking lot in Gaslight Village for many years.



Michigan Masonic Home at Reeds Lake, circa 1908

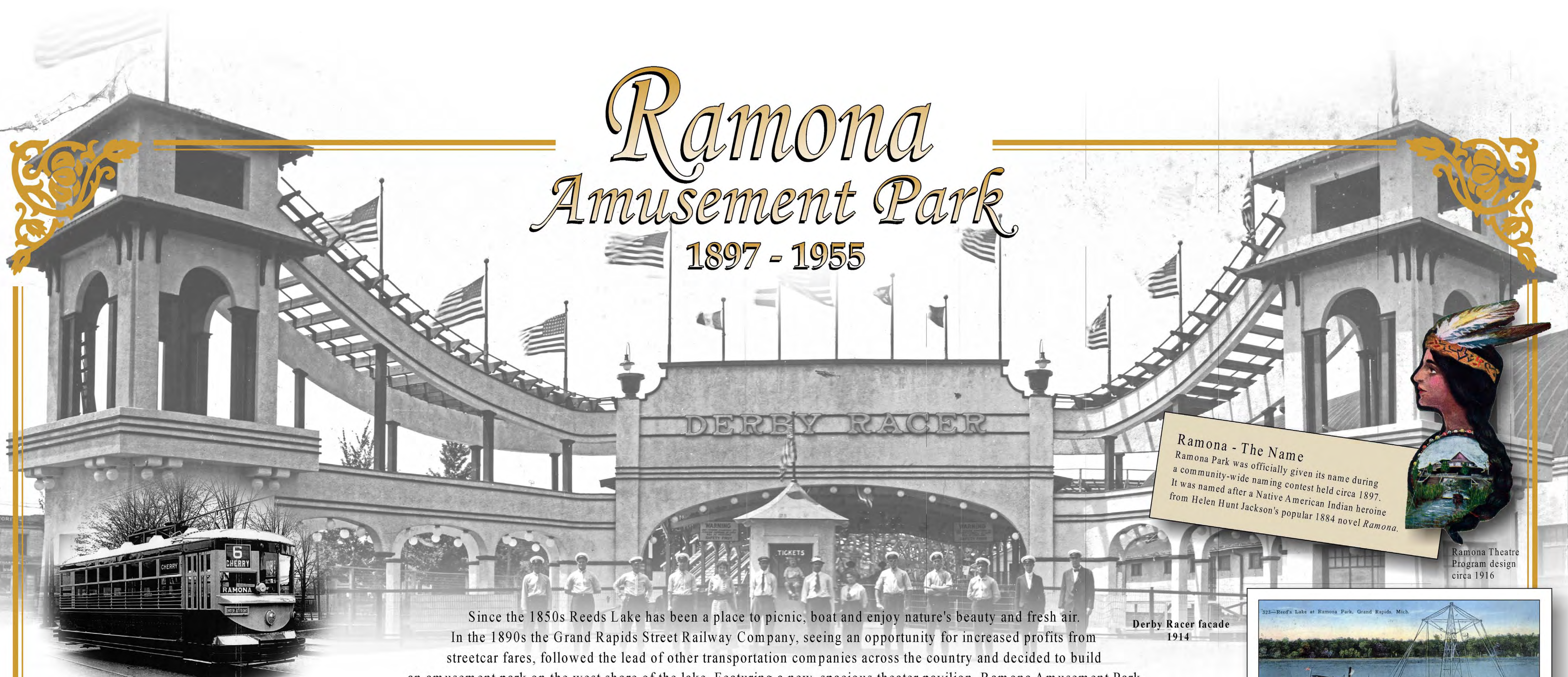
The Michigan Masonic Home Association, Grand Lodge of Masons, proudly laid the cornerstone for their new facility in 1891. It is believed that the association began by purchasing 112 acres of the Burchard Farm property. Parcels of this land were then sold, with the facility placed on the remaining 32 acres. The property included a working farm which supplied food for the residents. The Masonic Home housed needy, aged Masons, their wives, widows and orphans. The Home burned in February 1910. There were no fatalities. The resulting vacant land, known as the Masonic Home Addition, was platted for residential homes. The current Maxwell Avenue that runs through the site of the Masonic home was named after the son of its superintendent, Rial V. McArthur. This Masonic Home had the distinction of being the second such facility built in the United States.



Design by: Earl Wolf, Williamston MI

Ramona Amusement Park

1897 - 1955



Cherry Street Line streetcar, on its way to Ramona Park

Ramona - The Name
Ramona Park was officially given its name during a community-wide naming contest held circa 1897. It was named after a Native American Indian heroine from Helen Hunt Jackson's popular 1884 novel *Ramona*.



Ramona Theatre Program design circa 1916

Since the 1850s Reeds Lake has been a place to picnic, boat and enjoy nature's beauty and fresh air. In the 1890s the Grand Rapids Street Railway Company, seeing an opportunity for increased profits from streetcar fares, followed the lead of other transportation companies across the country and decided to build an amusement park on the west shore of the lake. Featuring a new, spacious theater pavilion, Ramona Amusement Park opened in 1897 on property now (2010) occupied by condominiums, retail establishments, medical buildings and a grocery store. In 1904 the park began to grow under the leadership of the Railway Company's president, Benjamin Hanchett, later an East Grand Rapids Village President. Louis J. DeLamarter was the general manager of the park and the streetcar lines. John J. McElwee arrived in 1914, and built the Jack Rabbit Derby Racer roller coaster, a lovely carousel and other midway attractions. Through the mid-1940s Ramona Park was the place to visit for summer fun in West Michigan. Activities included midway amusements such as the Derby Racer roller coaster, Venetian swings, aero-swings, carousel, flying scooters, bumper cars, Ferris wheel, loop-o-planes, kiddie autos, mystic chutes, fun house and Ramona Park miniature railway.

Derby Racer facade 1914

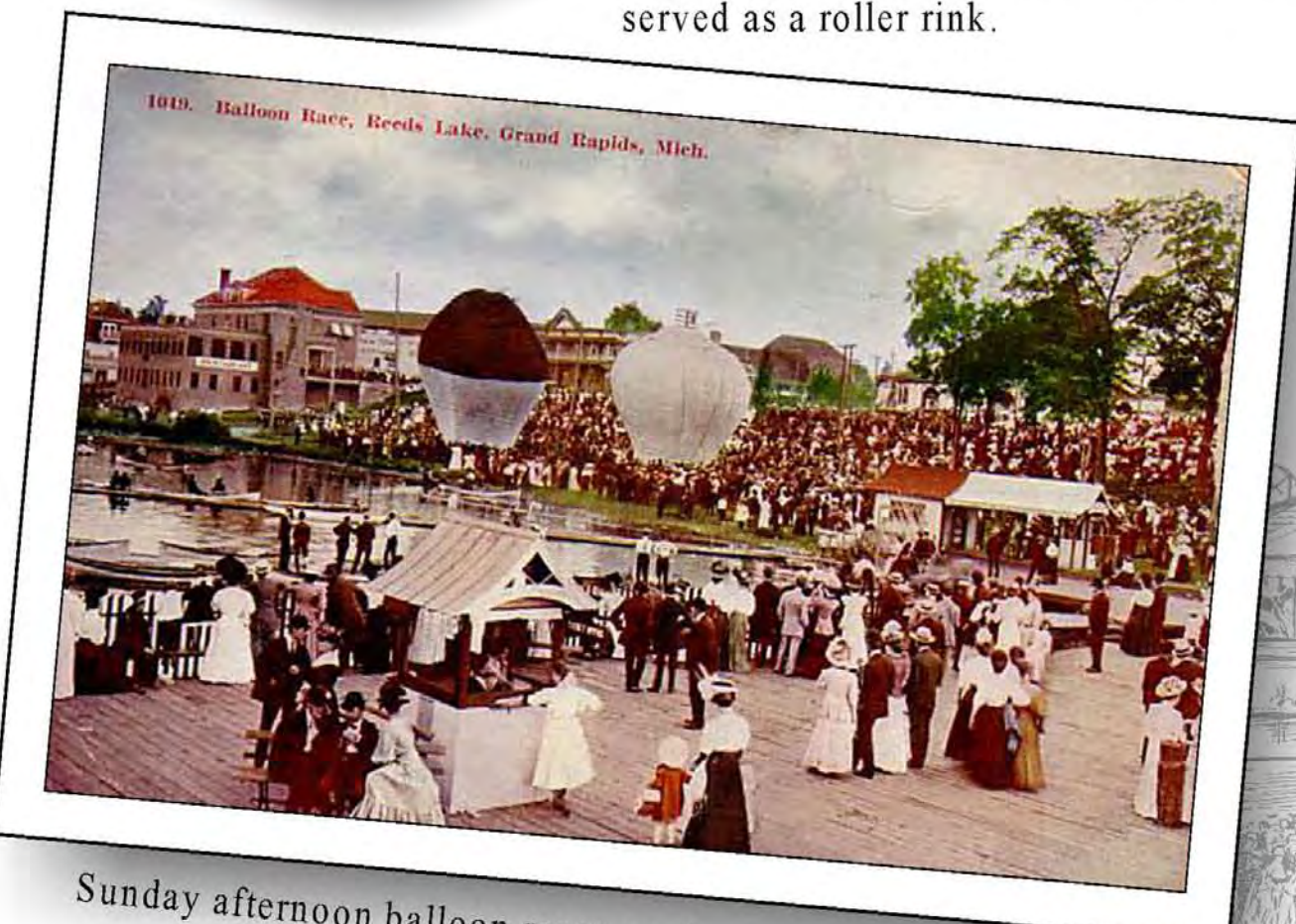


Aero-swings on Reeds Lake - circa 1920's



Ramona Gardens Pavilion
This dance pavilion featured many big bands in its heyday. In later years it also served as a roller rink.

circa 1920's



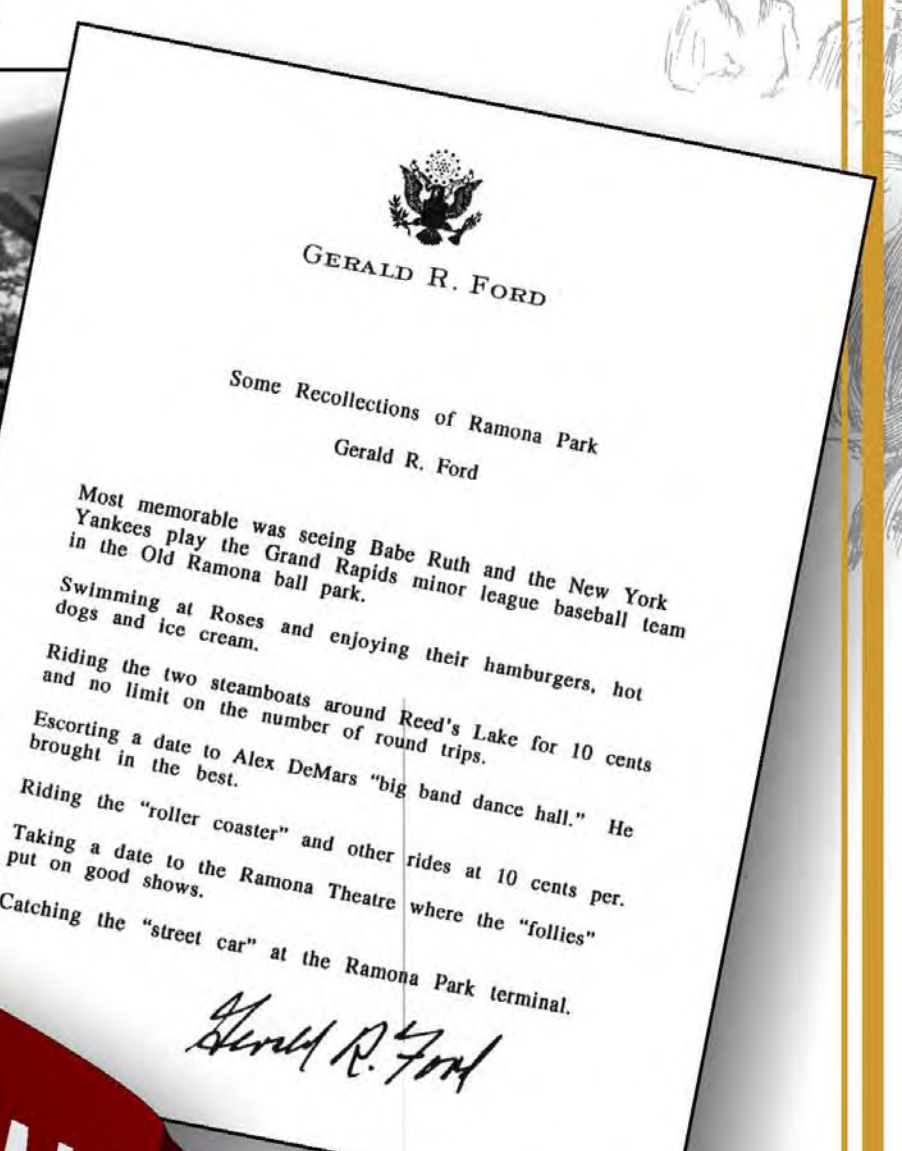
Sunday afternoon balloon races on the west shore of Reeds Lake circa 1910



Ramona Miniature Railway - circa 1914
Made to scale locomotives were owned and operated by Rock Island Railroad conductor Harry Glidden



Ferris Wheel

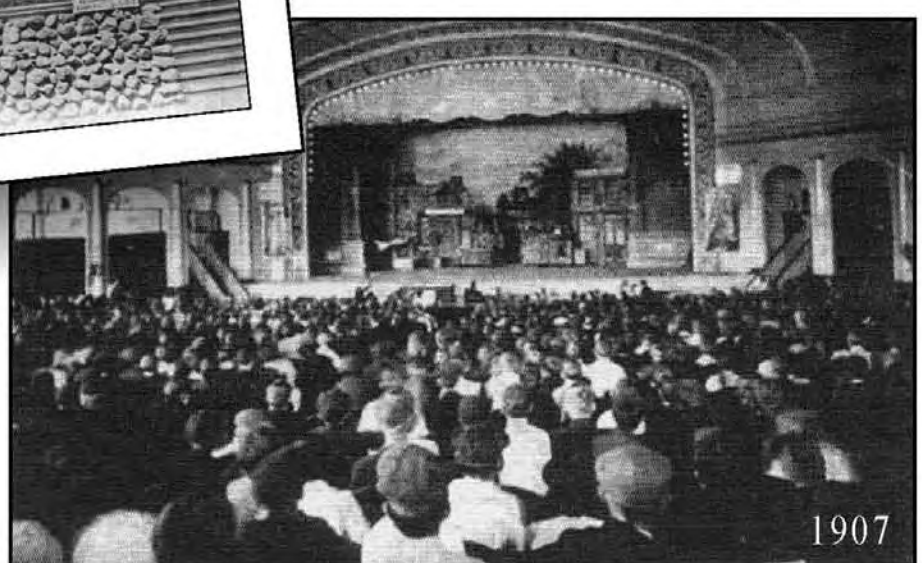


Copyright of the East Grand Rapids History Room

Ramona Theatre

1897 - 1949

This summertime venue began as an open air theater. It was enclosed in the early 1900s and was a popular park attraction. At its zenith it could seat 1700 audience members. Many fine vaudeville acts performed during the 1920s and 1930s and celebrities such as Edgar Bergen, the Marx Brothers, Jimmy Durante, Joan Davis, Jack Benny, Fred Allen and Will Rogers plied their talents at the Ramona Theatre. The A.B. Marcus traveling stage shows were extremely popular during the 1930s and 1940s. Troupes of beautiful women sang and danced for captive audiences. These stage shows were originally priced at 10 to 50 cents each.



1907



Ramona Theatre - circa 1909



AERIAL VIEW OF WEALTHY-LAKESIDE INTERSECTION 1932

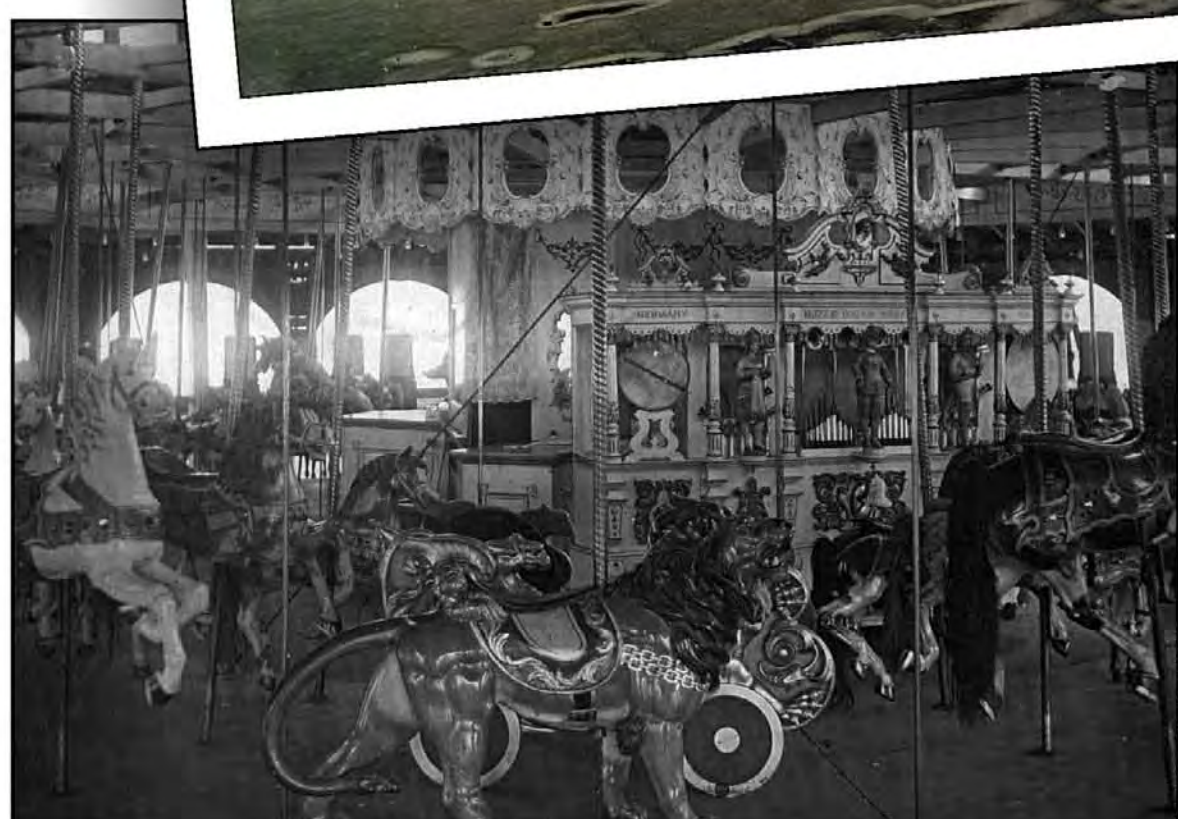
There were concession stands for refreshments and games of chance for prizes. The picnic area was a lovely, shady place to rest between park activities. The Ramona Theatre was a popular summertime venue to see live acts, plays and musicals. The Ramona Gardens Pavilion was a dance hall in which many park goers thrilled to the sounds of the big bands. And of course, a day at the park would not be complete without a trip around the lake on the steamship Ramona!

1955 - Park Closed

The end of WWII began a new era. More people owned cars and could travel to Reeds Lake without relying on public transportation. Slowly, Ramona Park became less popular, as folks could easily drive to Lake Michigan or other more distant places of interest. Television and movie theaters also had an impact on patronage at the park. The park began to show its age. Owners had a difficult time paying utility bills. In 1954 East Grand Rapids citizens voted for a zoning variation that permitted a shopping center and apartment complexes to be built on park property.

This was the beginning of the end for the S.S. Ramona, the last passenger steamboat on the lake.

With the loss of Ramona Park patronage, gone too were the crowds that used to spend the day enjoying lunch, the view or Sunday afternoon entertainment on the Steamship Ramona. The park closed in 1955 and shortly thereafter, the old steamer, which began its run in 1923, sailed its last voyage around the lake.

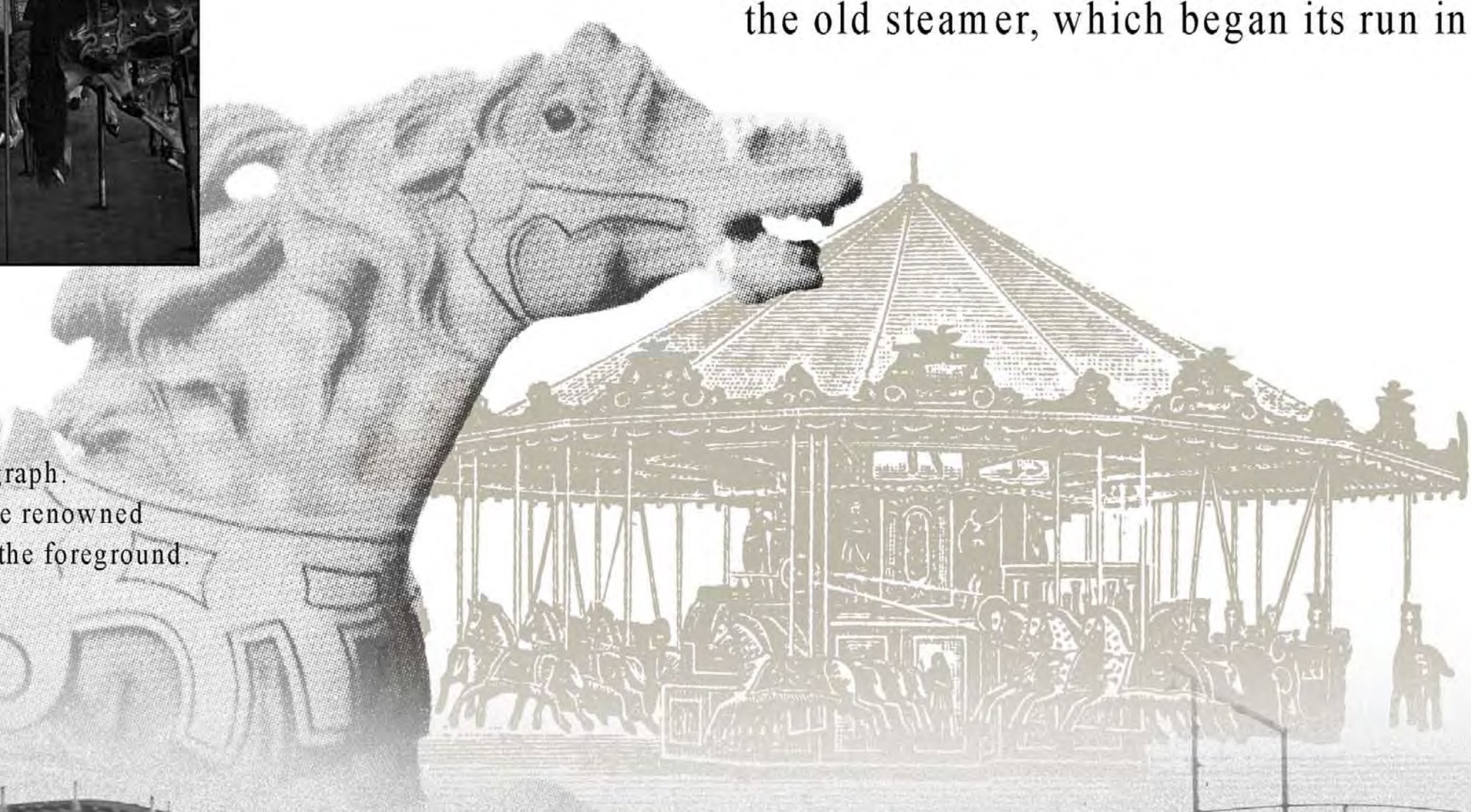


The Carousel and its pavilion were owned and operated by John J. McElwee

The Carousel

1914 - 1955

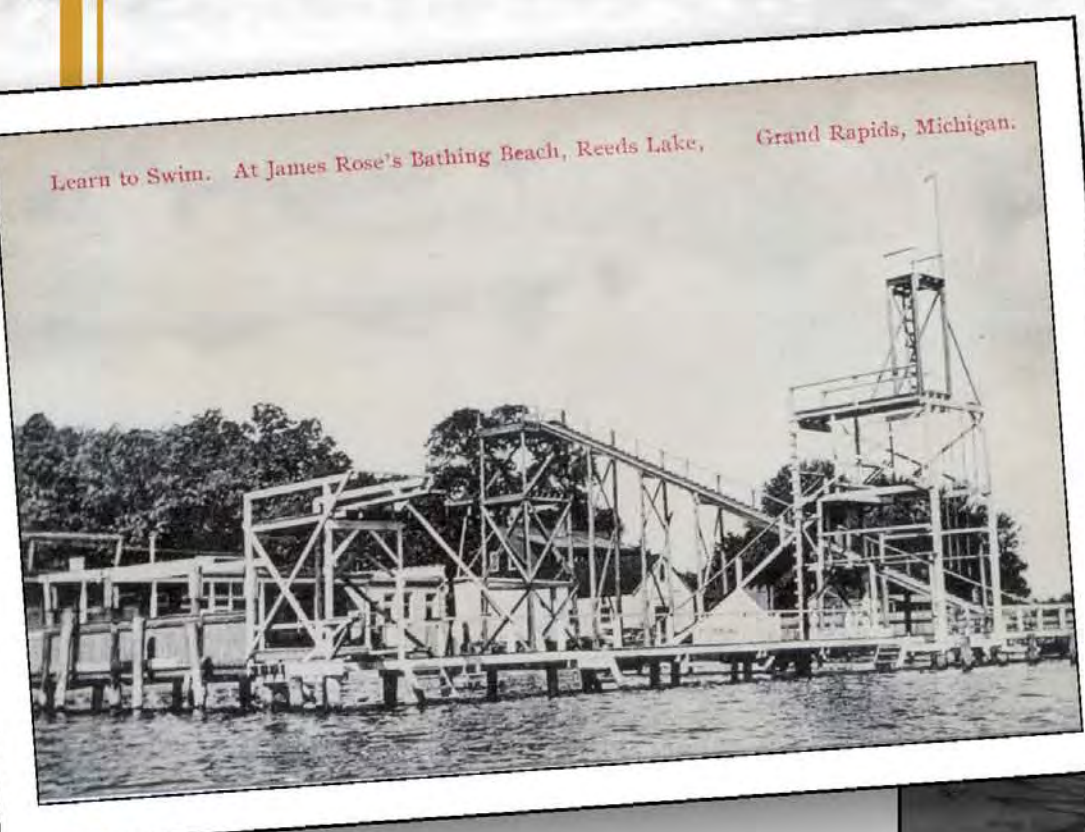
The carousel had two band organs, Big Bertha and Sadie Mae. Big Bertha, a Limonaire Organ made in France in the late 1800s, is featured in this photograph. Several animals in this menagerie were carved by the renowned carousel artist Charles Looff. His lion is featured in the foreground.



Jack Rabbit Derby Racer, 1914
Built and operated by John J. McElwee



Reeds Lake



circa 1910

Rose's Bathing Beach and Swimming School

1901 - mid 1960s

Located on the west shore of Reeds Lake where the current (2010) Rose's Restaurant stands, James Rose founded the swim school/bathing beach in 1901. The bathhouse, toboggan slide and swimming area provided years of fun for thousands. It remained a swimming school and beach into the 1960s. After the facility closed, James' grandson, Bub (John) Rose, ran a marina and popcorn shop at this location until late 1980s. The cement foundation and exterior cinder block walls of the Gilmore Collection's Rose's Restaurant are the last vestiges of this popular bathing beach facility.



circa 1916

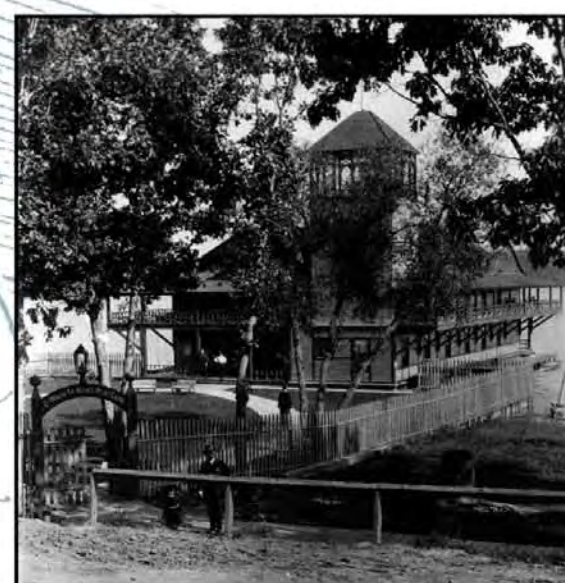
As early as the 1850s there was recorded history of steamboats, barges, sailboats, launch and livery boats on Reeds Lake. Names recognized with the livery businesses on the lake include John Paul, Hobart B. Miller, H. J. Thompson and John H. Poisson. Charles W. Seidel and Frank Johnson were a few names noted for building small boats. They all supplied the pleasure seeking public with skiffs and rowboats for fishing and an enjoyable day on the Lake.



circa 1908

Lakeside Club

Located on the north end of what is now Collins Park, the first, more ornate Lakeside Club was built in 1895 and burned in 1903. The rebuilt club is pictured above. The Lakeside Club disbanded around 1908/09. Shortly thereafter, the club tried to unite as the Colonial Club, but that too failed. In 1910 the structure was used to house the residents of the nearby Masonic Home after it burned. In 1914 the building was revived as the O'Wash-ta-Nong Club by its members, only to be destroyed by fire in 1918.



O'Wash-ta-Nong Club

1886 - 1892

The club was located on the north end of what is now Collins Park. Built for \$12,000, it was used during the summer months only, as the 500 club members held winter meetings in downtown Grand Rapids. The club had a boat house, bowling alley, billiards, verandas, ballroom, dining room, reading room, library, gymnasium and cafeteria. The wooden structure was taken down after six years because the membership could not support the club building. Lumber was sold to pay debts.



circa 1910

Phoenix Club

Located on the current (2010) site of the G.R. Yacht Club, this Greek revival structure was first known as the Phoenix Club. It was later owned and operated as a restaurant and saloon by Raymond Kahler and was often referred to as Kahler's Saloon. There were two stories, a banquet hall and a basement that was lake accessible. This building served as an elementary school in the mid 1920s and for city offices in the 1930s. In the 1930s it was known as the Naval Reserve Armory Building. In the late 1930s or early 1940s it was torn down and replaced with the G.R. Yacht Club.

West shore of Reeds Lake circa early 1890s

L-R: Poisson home, dock and livery, S.S. Major Watson, Theater, Miller's Boat Livery, fancy pavilion, S.S. Hazel A., O'Wash-Ta-Nong Club



Manhattan Bathing Beach

1884 - 1927

This summer spot was located on the north side of the lake at the current location of the western cul-de-sac of Manhattan Road. In 1876 it was known as the Pioneer Club Grounds. Circa 1884 Charles S. Seidel, Pittsburgh native, leased the land from property owner Walter J. Pierce and opened the bathing beach. In 1905 this property was purchased by Thomas Reed, son of early settlers Porter and Polly Reed. The facility was enlarged, improved and was very popular. It included bathhouses and a restaurant. The steamboats made Manhattan Beach one of their stops. Katherine "Kitty" Morgan and her husband took over the operation after the death of her father, Thomas Reed. Manhattan Beach closed in 1927 and the land was sold for residential use.



1916

Vera Johnson, a girl from the Village of EGR, sits in a wooden clinker boat made by her father, Frank Johnson. The S.S. Hazel A. is in the background.



Maurice Bellelaire
Vaudeville strongman
and acrobat

Frederick Paulo
Stage name of
Frederick Mongeon,
eccentric French song
and dance man.



1895

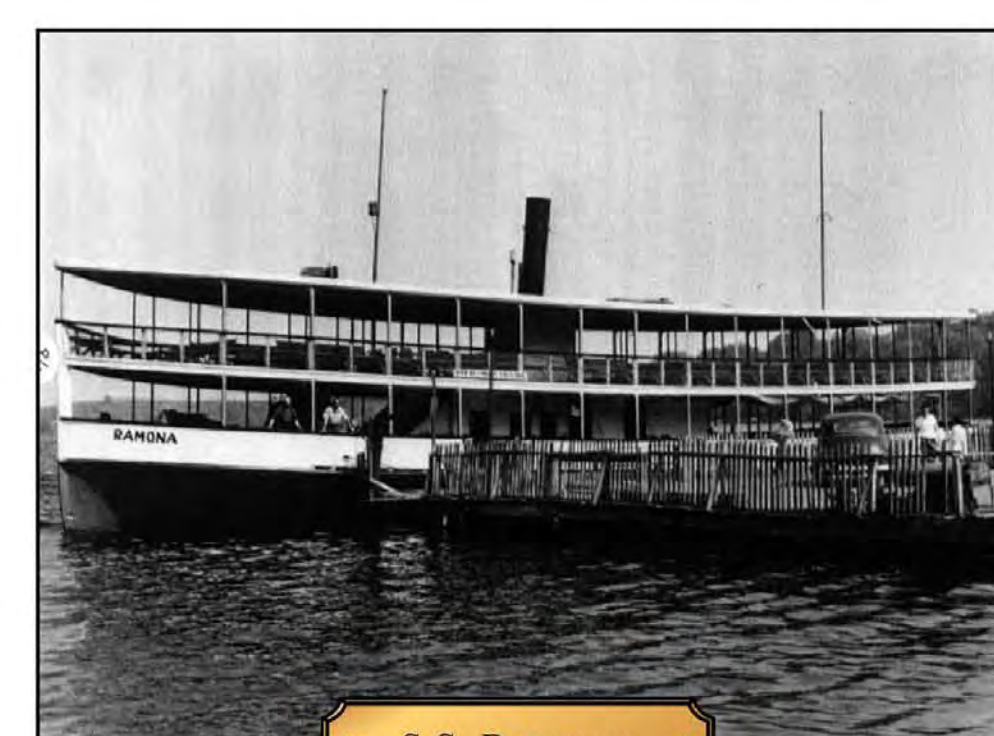
Point Paulo Summer Resort

circa 1900

This resort was located on the point just east of the East Grand Rapids Middle School. It had 12 small cottages, which were rented to artists and actors who worked during the summer at the Ramona Theatre. Boat docks allowed the residents to travel to Ramona via launch boats. The main home served French dinners to the renters of the cottages and families from the village. The land and homes were owned and operated by Frederick Paulo and Maurice Bellelaire, who performed at the theatre. Their large home, known as "Chateau Paulo", was built high on the bluff overlooking the lake. In 1927 the resort closed. Chateau Paulo is still standing as well as one of the small cottages. The streets Frederick and Bellelaire were named for these two entertainers/entrepreneurs.



Reeds Lake Dock; Ramona Theatre in background

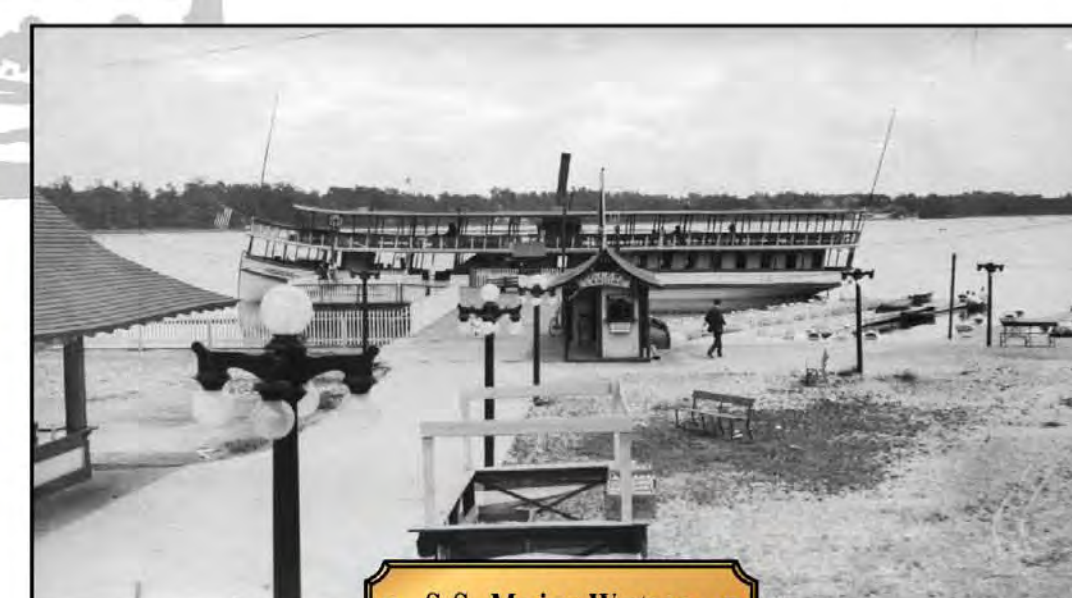


S.S. Ramona

1923 - 1955

110 x 26 foot steel hull; maximum capacity 435 people
The Ramona was owned and operated by Charles Poisson, son of John. Its last captain was William Poisson, grandson of John. On Sundays a band or a player piano entertained passengers.

In early years, lunches were served on board or you could bring your own. Folks could ride all day for one fee - 15 cents for adults and 5 cents for children in the 1930s. In later years, the fee was 25 cents for adults, 10 cents for children. After Ramona Park closed there was not enough business for the Ramona to keep running. Steel was salvaged from the boat and the rest was burned out in the lake.



S.S. Major Watson

circa 1900

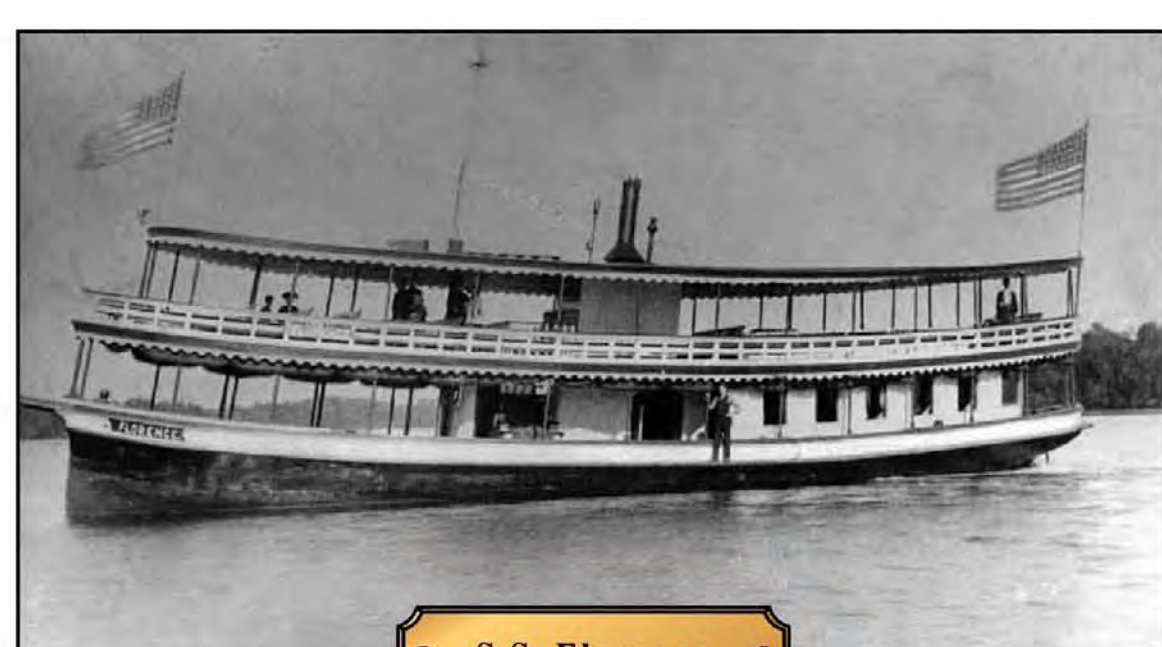
1891 - 1921

Drew 7 feet of water; maximum capacity 450 people
The boat was named for Major Amasa B. Watson, a Civil War major, Grand Rapids businessman and prominent citizen. Major Watson was a friend of Captain John Poisson. Watson's widow supplied international flags that were placed around the top perimeter of the boat. In 1921, the Major Watson was docked at the boat ramp and no longer used as an excursion boat. It served for a time as clubhouse of the Furniture City Post of the American Legion. In 1923 it was declared a hazard and dismantled. Its hull was sunk and anchored by a metal post in Reeds Lake near the channel between Fisk and Reeds Lake.

Steamboats - Poisson legacy on Reeds Lake

1882 - 1956

The Poisson family originated in Three Rivers, Quebec, Canada. When John H. Poisson came to Grand Rapids, he worked as a tailor, but failing eyesight forced him to give up this profession. In 1882, he purchased the S.S. Florence and began the first regularly scheduled steamboat rides around Reeds Lake. John's son Charles and grandson William followed in his footsteps as steamboat owners and captains on the lake. John's son Joseph also spent several years owning and piloting the S.S. Hazel A.



S.S. Florence

1883 - 1902

54 foot steel hull

Originally built with a single deck, the boat was later lengthened and a second deck was added. The Florence was built in Frankfort, Michigan and sailed up the Grand River to Wealthy street, from which teams of horses pulled it to Reeds Lake. It was removed from the lake in the late 1880s for a few years and was later returned to the lake where it sailed until 1902.



S.S. Hazel A.

1893 - 1926

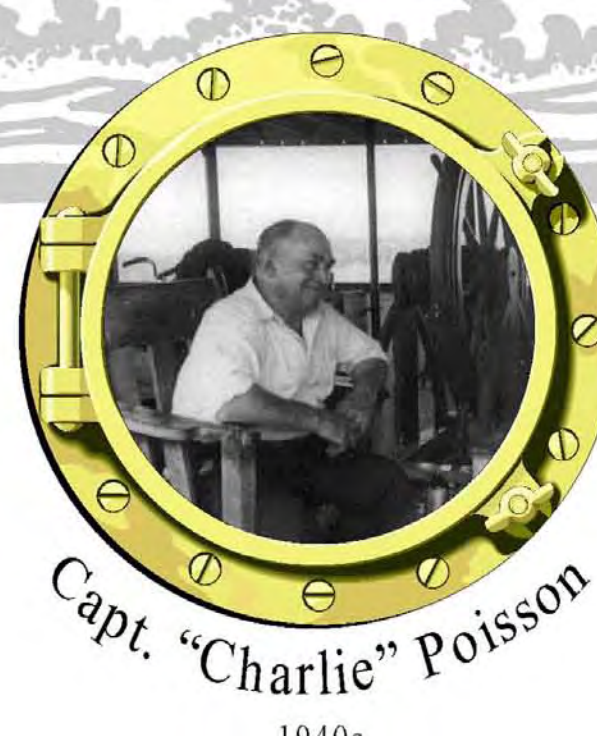
100 x 26 foot wooden hull
Maximum capacity 300 people

The boat was originally built and owned by Captain Michael McCarthy on Reeds Lake. History tells us that there was docking competition between Captain Poisson's steamboat, the Major Watson, and Captain McCarthy's vessel the Hazel A. This boat sank after a suffering a leak in 1901, but was purchased and restored to working order by John Poisson in 1905. In 1923, when the engine was removed for use in a newer boat, and the decks dismantled, a strong wind blew it out in the lake where it sank again. Its hull is now located in 50 feet of water, straight out from Collins Park.



Capt. John Poisson

circa 1900



Capt. "Charlie" Poisson

1940s



Capt. "Bill" Poisson

1953

