

White Bear Lake History Fact Sheet

Businesses

- The first businesses around White Bear Lake were hotels and resorts. Many hotels also had restaurants, dance pavilions, and bowling alleys.
- Boat building and ice harvesting were other important lakeside businesses. There were four important boat-building companies in the late 1880s. Johnson Boat Works is probably the most famous. They built boats that could win races and had different designs.
- Ice harvesting was common way to keep food cold during the summer. Companies would cut the ice from the lake in the winter, keep it frozen in large insulated storehouses, and then deliver it on hot summer days. Children liked to suck on the small chunks of ice from the delivery wagons - sort of like an ice cream man, but with just ice!
- The *Lake Breeze*, White Bear's first newspaper, began printing in 1887. It was followed by the *White Bear Life* in 1896 (now called the *White Bear Press*).
- To buy food in White Bear Lake a hundred years ago, shoppers had to go to different places. Butchers sold meat and cheese, and grocers sold other types of food like flour and sugar. The first meat market, called Milner's, opened in the 1860s, and the first grocery, Troseth Grocery, opened in the 1890s. Before refrigerators were invented, people had to go shopping several times a week in order to buy fresh food.
- Banks have been successful in White Bear despite some difficulties. The First State Bank opened in 1903 and the White Bear State Bank opened in 1915. Together, the two banks were robbed four times in thirty years!
- If you enjoy sweet food, you would have had many options in White Bear Lake. There were at least five sweet shops, ice cream parlors, or drug stores open in White Bear by the early 1920s that sold candy, ice cream, and soda.
- Mercantiles or dry goods stores carried fabric, farming tools, shoes, dinnerware, and other necessary items. The first mercantile was the Daniel Getty store, which opened in 1870. A building called the Getty Building opened in 1889. It held Getty's store, the phone company, electric company, newspaper offices, and places for the town to meet. Another Dry Goods store opened in 1882, followed by the Home Trade store in 1915. Parenteau's clothing, opened in 1949, was a major business in White Bear Lake until it closed in 1997.
- White Bear Lake businesses also changed over time. For example, Smith's Livery began in 1895 as a stable for horses and ponies. In 1914 they changed to serve cars instead of horses, repairing them and selling them.

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Foundations

- The first settler in the White Bear Lake area was named V. B. Barnum. He built a small cabin on the southwestern side of the lake in 1852. He had to use logs instead of plywood for his house because it was too hard to get the lumber from St. Paul (how long does it take you to get to St. Paul?). Other settlers soon followed, often from St. Paul or French Canada. Later, many Germans and Swedes moved to White Bear Lake. By 1860, about 250 people lived by the lake.
- The first school opened in White Bear Lake in 1857. It was a simple log cabin building with only one room and animal skins instead of glass windows. The first post office was in the home of the first postmaster, James C. Murray.
- The first church in White Bear Lake was St. John in the Wilderness, an Episcopal church that began holding services in 1858 and constructed their building in 1861. After they built the church, the train tracks came on the other side of the lake, so the town started to grow there. The members of the church thought their church should be where most of the people lived, so in the winter of 1874 they raised the church building, put it on round logs, and carefully brought it across the frozen lake to its new home in the middle of town. Other early churches include the First Presbyterian Church and St. Mary of the Lake.
- A new school building was constructed in 1868, called West Side School. This school was only for younger students, and anyone who wanted to go to high school had to go to St. Paul until the first high school opened in the 1890s. The public library opened in 1889.
- White Bear residents also organized ways to have fun. Washington Park (originally named Railroad Park) has always been a place to gather, and a bandstand has been a place for music since the 1880s. The Lakeshore Players, a community theater group, was formed in 1953.
- Other times people gathered at the lake. The White Bear Yacht Club, formed in 1889, held yacht (boat) races on the lake. In the winter, a popular ice-fishing contest was held every year from 1947 through 1982. Thousands of people would come to White Bear for the day in an attempt to catch the largest fish. The boundaries of the contest were marked in the snow and showed a different design every year. Ice from the lake also helped the planners of two Winter Carnivals in White Bear Lake. In 1935 and 1993, the carnivals featured big ice castles made of ice from the lake. Even the ice castle from the St. Paul Winter Carnival in 1890 used ice from White Bear Lake!

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Indigenous People

- Before anyone else arrived, there were two types of American Indian tribes that lived around White Bear Lake: the **Dakota** and the **Ojibwe**.
- The **Dakota** have lived in Minnesota for hundreds of years. Their ancestors, called the "Woodland Culture," were farmers who are famous for building mounds to bury people. Historians found a Dakota village in Minnesota built in 1680. Dakota tribes probably lived around White Bear Lake from around 1600 until the 1860s. They left several burial mounds around the lake.
- The **Ojibwe** came later to Minnesota. They harvested wild rice and maple sugar, fished, hunted, and trapped. They slowly moved from the East Coast and came to Minnesota around 1730. The Dakota and Ojibwe tended to fight over land, and maybe even had battles on **Manitou Island**.
- In 1837, the Ojibwe signed a **treaty** opening up their land east of the Mississippi River to the United States, including White Bear Lake. This meant that other settlers could come and live there.
- In 1852, William Sweeny became the first white man to claim Manitou Island. Many Dakota and Ojibwe stayed in the area through the 1860s. The Ojibwe returned every spring to gather maple syrup. The relationship between the Dakota and Ojibwe and the white settlers was mainly peaceful. The first house was built on Manitou Island in 1866, and the Dakota and Ojibwe faded away after that.
- The Dakota **burial mounds** have mostly been destroyed. The biggest one was removed in 1889 to make way for a safer road along the lake. The bones and artifacts found inside were taken to the Minnesota Historical Society or buried in Union Cemetery. One mound still exists and will be preserved. It is located at the intersection of Hwy. 61 and Lake Ave.

Fact Sheet

Resorts and Summer Homes

- People came on vacation to White Bear Lake almost as soon as settlers started living here. In 1854 a man named Villeroy Barnum built a hotel on the lake. It was called Barnum's Hotel, but when William Leip bought it in 1866 he changed the name to Leip's Hotel. In the 1880s, the Leip Hotel served dinner to as many as 800 guests! The hotel burned down in 1896, but by then there were many other hotels along the lake, like the Williams' House and the Chateaugay Hotel.
- Other summer visitors came for a longer time. Many people built summer cottages along the lakeshore. White Bear Lake was about a three-hour drive away from St. Paul in a horse-drawn carriage. (If you have a cabin, how long does it take to get there?) Because air conditioning had not been invented yet, people liked to get away from the city and vacation by the cool water of the lake. They built their houses with lots of windows and screened-in porches for eating and sleeping so they could stay as cool as possible. The Fillebrown House is a good example of a summer cottage.
- Boarding homes were another option for travelers. Long-term guests could rent a room in a family's house and stay there.
- Many people used big boats called steamers to cross the lake and get to their destination. They were sort of like buses for the water!
- The White Bear Yacht Club provided lots of summer fun for visitors. It was established in 1889 and hosted yacht (boat) races and golf and tennis tournaments. Guests could also rent rooms at the Yacht Club; one famous guest was F. Scott Fitzgerald who came in 1922. He was an author whose books are still read today.
- Ramaley Pavilion was a huge hall that hosted plays, concerts, and dances, sold food. It also had a water toboggan slide, a ride that let children ride down a tall wooden slide on a wheeled sled into the lake. It was the biggest building on the lake until it was torn down in 1908.
- Wildwood Park was another popular summer destination. It was an amusement park that was open from 1899 until 1938. People could have picnics, ride on roller coasters, swim, dance, and enjoy the sunshine - and admission was free! Children loved the water toboggan slide, the figure-8 roller coaster, and the first-ever Tilt-a-Whirl.

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Railroads and Streetcars

- Trains first came to White Bear Lake in 1868, and the town had a big celebration when the first train arrived. The trains could bring people, supplies, and mail to and from St. Paul and Duluth. Eventually, many train companies came to the White Bear Lake area. James J. Hill, a rich railroad company owner from St. Paul who is also famous in Minnesota history as well, brought one of the newer train services.
- At first the train stopped at the depot in White Bear Lake, but by 1870 they built the tracks to go further around the lake, into Mahtomedi and Dellwood.
- The trains that came were usually steam trains, meaning they ran on water power. Workers would burn coal and heat water, and use the steam to move the train.
- Being able to ride the trains made it much easier for tourists to come and spend time at the lake. A wagon trip from St. Paul to White Bear Lake would take about three hours over rough roads; the same trip took only twenty minutes by train.
- By 1887, just twenty years after the first tracks were built, there were thirteen tracks in White Bear Lake. There were also depots at Lake Shore, Tenth Street, Bald Eagle, Dellwood, and Mahtomedi.
- The trains stopped coming so much in the 1920s, and people started using buses, cars, and streetcars. Most of the depots were closed. The White Bear depot was torn down in 1935 and a new smaller depot was built across the street. The railroad companies finally stopped using this, and it's now the home of the historical society.
- Streetcars were another way to get around. In 1899 the Twin City Rail Transit Company began service to Mahtomedi. They purchased a quiet park along the shoreline in Mahtomedi and turned it into a very popular amusement park named Wildwood Park, hoping that people would ride the streetcars to get there. And they did - thousands of people took the streetcars and visited Wildwood Park.
- Streetcars started to become less popular as more people used cars. The Twin City Rail Transit Company ended the streetcar line to White Bear Lake in 1932 and closed the park in 1938.