

Map Activity

Background information for teacher

Businesses

- It should come as no surprise that the first businesses around White Bear Lake were hotels and resorts, including the Barnum House, the Leip Hotel, and the William's House. Various restaurants, dance pavilions, and bowling alleys were associated with these hotels.
- Boat building and ice harvesting were other important lakeside industries. Leaman's Boat Works company was the first to open in 1873, followed by three others in the 1890s: Ramaley Boat Works, Amundson Boat Works, and Johnson Boat Works. Johnson Boat Works became well known for race-winning boats and innovative designs, and when it was closed in 1998 it had existed for over 100 years. Ice harvesting was a popular option for residents who wanted to keep food cool 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. Henry Long, the East Side Ice Company, and the White Bear Ice Company all provided this service around the early 1900s.
- The *Lake Breeze*, White Bear's first newspaper, began printing in 1887. It was followed by the *White Bear Life* in 1896, which became the *White Bear Press*.
- White Bear Lake residents usually bought their food from small grocers and butchers. The first meat market, called Milner's, opened in the 1860s, and Troseth Grocery opened in the 1890s. Other important groceries included Hardy's (1890s), Vincent's (1911), LeVasseur's (1915), and Long's (1917), as well as the Reif & Clewett Meat Market (1882), Henkel & Co. Meat Market (1888), and Flandrick's Meat Market (1903).
- The banking industry has been successful in White Bear despite some challenges. The First State Bank opened in 1903 and the White Bear State Bank opened in 1915. Between the two establishments, there were four bank robberies within thirty years!
- Citizens who wanted to indulge had many options. Several "sample rooms" (bars) opened around 1900, and there were at least five sweet shops, ice cream parlors, or drug stores open in White Bear by the early 1920s.
- 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 and went through several different names and owners. The Getty Building, which housed Getty's store as well as several services like phone companies, electric companies, the newspaper, and town meeting places, was built in 1889. Another Dry Goods store opened in 1882, followed by the Home Trade store in 1915. Paranteau's clothing, which opened in 1949, was a major business in downtown 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 started focusing on cars, both repairing them and selling them. Fournelle's Auto Livery (1913) and Auger Bros. car shop (1921) had similar transformations from repairing and storing cars to selling them.

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Foundations

- The first settler in the White Bear Lake area was named V. B. Barnum, who built a small cabin on the southwestern side of the lake in 1852. He was probably attracted to the area by the same things that caught the eye of James Goodhue, the editor of the *St. Paul Pioneer* newspaper. Goodhue wrote in 1850: “White-bear lake [is]... a beautiful region, of rich land, diversified with meadows, hills, valleys, oak-openings, lakes, timber, and partial prairies.” Other settlers soon followed, often from St. Paul or French Canada. Later, Germans and Swedes made up a large component of the population. By 1860, there were about 250 people living around the lake.
- The first school opened in White Bear Lake in 1857. It was a simple log cabin building, and the first teacher was an English woman named Lady Laura Paul, who came to White Bear with her husband due to family disgrace back in England. The post office opened in 1858 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. The church was originally located on the southwestern side of the lake, but the location of the train tracks in 1868 and the general trend of settlement meant that the church would have been better used on the other side of the lake. So, in 1874 the church was transported across the frozen lake to the corner of Clark Avenue and First Street.
- Another early church was the First Presbyterian Church, which began meeting in various locations in 1864. They completed their church building in 1872, and used it until they moved to a new building in 1959. St. Mary of the Lake church was the third church to be built in White Bear Lake. Visiting priests had served Catholics in the area for several years before a parish was built in 1880.
- A new school building was constructed in 1868, called West Side School. The school system continued to grow and expand, and the first high school classes were offered 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 organization, was formed in 1953.
- The lake was a crucial component of several organizations. The White Bear Yacht Club, formed in 1889, held yacht races on the lake and encouraged recreational boating. 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, as they both featured ice castles constructed out of lake ice. The 1890 St. Paul Winter Carnival even used White Bear Lake ice!

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Indigenous People

- Originally, the White Bear Lake area was primarily inhabited by two American Indian tribes: the Dakota and the Ojibwe.
- The title Dakota refers to a particular geographic/dialectic branch of the Great Sioux Nation (others include the Nakota and Lakota), and is generally the most acceptable term. The Ojibwe are also called Chippewa, especially in the United States, but Ojibwe is more common.
- The Dakota are longtime residents of this area. Their nearest ancestors, called the “Woodland Culture,” were a semi-permanent agricultural society which began the concept of building mounds for burial. A Dakota village dating back to 1680 has been found in Minnesota, and a letter from a researcher held in the WBLAHS society archives claims that there is ample evidence that Dakota tribes lived around WBL from 1600-1860s.
- The Ojibwe came later to Minnesota. They tended to be hunter-gatherers who harvested wild rice and maple sugar, fished, hunted, and trapped. They slowly migrated westward from the East Coast, and settled for a while around northern Michigan/Ontario before being pushed further westward by the French around 1650. By the 1730s, they were in Minnesota, and conflict tended to arise between the Dakota and Ojibwe as the Ojibwe tried to force the Dakota westward. Manitou Island is reported to be the sight of several such conflicts.
- In 1837, the Ojibwe signed a treaty opening up their land east of the Mississippi to the United States for development and settlement, including the WBL region. The Ojibwe were still, in theory, allowed to hunt and fish on the land.
- In 1852, William Sweeney became the first white man to lay claim to Manitou Island. Through the 1860s, however, the Dakota and Ojibwe presence remained very high. For example, the Ojibwe are said to have returned every spring to gather maple syrup. Tensions between the Dakota and the white settlers spiked when the Dakota Uprising of 1862 took place in southern Minnesota, but no violence took place in WBL. The first house was built on Manitou Island in 1866, and the Dakota and Ojibwe seem to have faded away after that.
- One of the signs of the Dakota presence were the burial mounds the lined the shores of White Bear Lake. There were reported to be about 10 mounds in existence, but the largest, located at Lake Avenue and Shady Lane, was demolished in April 1889 to make room for a safer road along the lake. Some of the artifacts found inside were taken to the Minnesota Historical Society, and the bones were interred in Union Cemetery. Other mounds were removed when Hwy. 61 was widened in the 1930s. One mound remains and will be protected against further development; it is located at the intersection of Hwy. 61 and Lake Ave.

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Resorts and Summer Homes

- White Bear Lake's resort history began almost simultaneously with the arrival of the first white settlers. Villeroy B. Barnum was the first to arrive in 1852, and he opened his home as a hotel in 1854. William Leip bought this hotel in 1866 and turned it into a booming business. By 1881, Leip Hotel served up to 800 guests at dinner! It was destroyed by fire in 1896, but already several other hotels had established themselves along the lakeshore, such as the Williams' House and the Chateaugay Hotel.
- Other summer visitors came for a longer time. Many residents of St. Paul and Minneapolis, among other places, built summer cottages along the lakeshore as a way to escape the stifling heat of a city summer. Summer homes often had screened porches for sleeping and dining, and windows strategically located to take advantage of the lake breeze. The Fillebrown House was originally built as a summer cottage before it was winterized. It is still a good example of the type of homes that were built along the lake.
- Another option for travelers were boarding houses, smaller homes that usually hosted long-term guests.
- Many people traveled on steamboats, also called steamers, to cross the lake. The largest steamer could hold up to three hundred passengers. The steamer *Maud* burned in 1901, but generally steamers were a safe way to travel. They faded out of use in the 1910s.
- The White Bear Yacht Club, established in 1889, had a clubhouse in Dellwood and hosted yacht races and golf and tennis tournaments. Visitors could also rent rooms at the Yacht Club; one famous guest was F. Scott Fitzgerald, his wife Zelda, and their daughter, who stayed for a few weeks in 1922.
- Ramaley Pavilion opened in 1890 and was supposedly the biggest pavilion in the west. It hosted concerts, dances, and plays, and a restaurant was attached. It also had a water toboggan slide (which involved a ride on a wheeled toboggan down a steep wooden slide into the lake), as well as a 40-room bathhouse.
- Wildwood Park was a popular summer destination as well. The amusement park was built in 1899 and remained open until 1938. During the thirty-five plus years that the park was open, thousands of visitors from the Twin Cities bought streetcar tickets to come and enjoy the attractions at Wildwood. Guests could have picnics, ride on roller coasters, swim, dance, and enjoy the sunshine – and admission was free! There were, of course, numerous small charges for everything from swimsuit rental to dance hall admission. 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

- The Lake Superior and Mississippi Railroad (LS&MRR) was the first company to bring trains to White Bear Lake. They began laying the tracks and building a depot in 1867, and the town welcomed them with great fanfare when the first train arrived on September 10, 1868. The LS&MRR began regular passenger service about a month later. Eventually, other train companies added lines through the White Bear Lake area, including James J. Hill's St. Paul and Duluth Railroad, later renamed the Northern Pacific Railroad.
- The railroad extended its line around the northern edge of the lake in 1870.
- The trains that came were usually steam trains, meaning they ran on water power.
- 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, bringing passengers, supplies, and mail to and from St. Paul and Duluth. Depots were added at Lake Shore (1885) and Tenth Street (1893), as well as Bald Eagle, Dellwood, and Mahtomedi. The original White Bear depot was remodeled several times. In 1893 a large shed roof was added, and in 1906 the entire building was expanded.
- The railroad industry declined in the 1920s as buses, cars, and streetcars became more popular. Most of the depots were closed, and the White Bear Lake depot was torn down in 1935 to make room for Highway 61. A depot was built on the other side of the train tracks that same year, but it stopped being used by railroad companies for passengers in the late 1960s, although they continued to use it for freight trains through the 1980s. It is now the home of the historical society.
- Streetcars were another important form of mass transportation. 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. During the thirty-five plus years that the park was open, thousands of visitors from the Twin Cities bought streetcar tickets to come and enjoy the attractions at Wildwood. Guests could have picnics, ride on roller coasters, swim, dance, and enjoy the sunshine – and admission was free! There were, of course, numerous small charges for everything from swimsuit rental to dance hall admission.
- The Twin City Rail Transit Company had built Wildwood to encourage passengers to ride the streetcars, and when riders declined in number, so did the park. Service ended to White Bear Lake ended in 1932 and the park closed in 1938.