

White Lake
Mary Johnson

The Great Lakes which surround Michigan and the thousands of smaller lakes, hundreds of rivers, streams and ponds were formed as the glacier ice that covered the land nearly 14,000 years ago was melting. The waters filled the depressions in the earth. The glaciers deposited rock, gravel and soil that had been gathered in their movement. This activity sculpted the land creating our landscape.

In section 28 of Springfield Township, Oakland County, a body of water names Big Lake by the area pioneers is the source of the Huron River. It is also the headwaters of the Shiawassee, Clinton and Thread rivers. This area is now referred to as the Huron swamp. It may have originally consisted of a grouping of small melt water ponds. The Huron River flows in a southerly direction into the northern part of White Lake Township.

The ice age was waning, the climate was warming, and mammoths began moving northward as the ice receded. They were followed by the Paleo-Indian who were in search of food and clothing. Evidence of their existence here was determined by the discovery of some fluted projectiles, common to their culture. Their trails crisscrossed the township. Known campsites at this period of time were on the shores of White, Lime, Oxbow and Cooley Lakes. The skeletal remains of the Groleau-White Lake Mastodon were discovered in March of 1968.

During the early 1800s, the Potawatomi Indians were inhabiting White Lake. The environment for hunting, fishing and trapping was ideal. In 1830 the first permanent settlers arrived in White Lake and began to share the natural resources with the Indian.

There was a plentiful water supply and the woodland areas provided a natural haven for the animals to live in. Wild strawberries, blackberries, and elderberries to name a few were growing amid the flowers and other plant life. Deer, elk and an occasional bear were hunted as well as smaller game like rabbit and squirrel. Furs and skins were used for clothing or trade, the meat for eating. The swamps and marshes provided a nesting place for ducks and other waterfowl. Fish were abundant; beaver and muskrat were trapped. Indians used the bark of certain willow trees as an analgesic when they were ill. Snakeroot was a tranquilizer, cranberry bark was used for medicinal purposes and Pokeweed berries were used for dye. There was a cranberry bog whose location was near the present Pontiac Lake.

In 1926 a twenty foot dam was built across the Huron River. The waters were dammed up to make Pontiac Lake. A number of pure water springs add to the volume of the lake. As the Huron River exist Pontiac Lake it winds its way to Oxbow Lake. At the point the river leaves Oxbow Lake there is sufficient water fall for the operation of a mill. In the 1850s Erastus Hopkins and son Ralph were the proprietors of a planing and saw mill.

Next the river flows into Cedar Island where it winds westward to Brendle Lake. The river then flows south into Commerce Township.

The Huron River drains 900 square miles of southeast Michigan as it journeys approximately 115 miles from its origin in Springfield Township and flows into Lake Erie.

