

Lake Max Recreation

An early holidaying hotspot . . .

Lake Max is the largest lake in what is now Turtle Mountain Provincial Park, and as such it was the natural go-to location for summer holidaying.

One of the first events to pull attention to the lake was the operation of the Morton Sawmill on the north bank of the lake, beginning in 1880 (see article on facing page). The mill's operation brought men to the lake to work and established regular activity in the area.

Despite its business-like beginning, activity around Lake Max has generally been recreational in nature. Mr Morton kicked off leisure activities with a small steam launch that he named *Lady of the Lake*. He used this boat to give pleasure cruises to his friends and visitors.

Around the turn of the century, horses replaced oxen and travelling to and from the lake became much less difficult. Several townspeople from Boissevain decided that Lake Max's Arbor Island (then known as "90 Acre Island" – a slight misnomer, as the island is in fact 25 acres larger than the name suggests) would be an excellent place for a summer holiday spot. Bob Hurt, who had been the engineer for Morton's Sawmill, built the first cottage on Arbor Island in 1898. The cabin logs were cut during the winter and hauled over the

1898—Present

ice to the island by horses. Over the next 15 years, 9 other cottages appeared. These—along with many tents—housed temporary lake-dwellers who numbered in the hundreds.

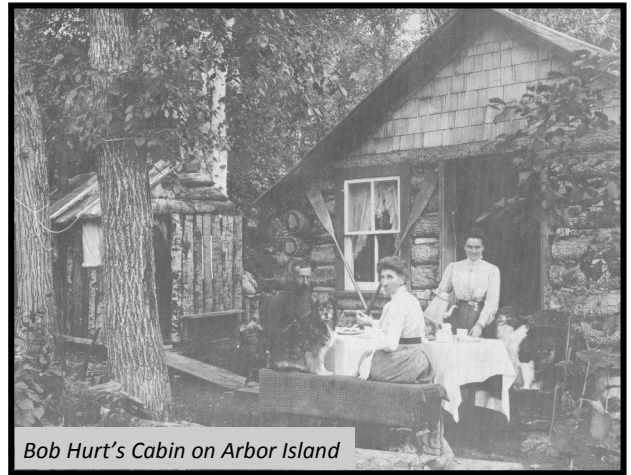
Families began spending weekends or summer holidays down at the lake; enjoying the peace and quiet of the area, a closeness to nature and the chance to socialise with friends. Many happy memories were made on the waters or banks of Lake Max: kids learned how to swim, dive and row a boat; teens and adults rowed across to the mainland to play a game of baseball until dark before returning to the island for a bonfire.

Aside from holidaying, groups of people made trips down to the lake to pick berries. They brought tents, bedding and jam-making supplies along with them so that after staying for a few days of picking they could set up and make jam right there on the spot.

Bob Hurt took over operation of the *Lady of the Lake* which he filled with 20 to 25 passengers before taking a tour around the lake, visiting many of

its hidden beauty spots. Usually someone had a mouth organ or banjo and Bob Hurt would sing. If it was calm, the motor would be shut off and the boat allowed to drift at sunset . . . music floating off across the water.

For the average family, Lake Max was a two hour drive from



Bob Hurt's Cabin on Arbor Island

"The first time I saw the island at the Lake must have been about 1898, when our cottage was being built. We crossed at the northwest corner of the island, in a home made boat of sieve-like quality. Two people baled madly while one rowed, and the passengers prayed. I was terrified."
~Alice Hurt

Boissevain with a team of horses – nothing like the 15 minute journey in a vehicle the same trip would take today. And the road was not the smooth gravel that we enjoy today, either. The only trail to the lake was "paved" with logs that had been laid side to side. The road served its purpose as long as it was dry. After a rain, however, the Turtle Mountain clay got muddy and sticky and the heavy foliage overhead kept the trail from drying out quickly. From the mainland, there were three motorboats, one sailboat and many rowboats to transport people to Arbor Island.

During the drought in the 1930s activity around the lake began to decline. Many cottages were torn down and used for firewood. The lake was so dry that a person could walk from the mainland to Arbor Island in rubber boots.

The lake's resurgence in popularity came in the early 1960's with the construction of six new cabins. In 1962 Lake Max road was gravelled, making the trip faster and easier. Lake Max is still a popular camping and cottage area.

Sources:

Houston, Maureen. "Lake Max and Arbor Island." *Boissevain Recorder*. 31 October, 1984.
Moncur, Bill. "Beckoning Hills Pioneer Settlement: Turtle Mountain Souris-Basin area." *Boissevain's 75th Jubilee*. 1956. Pg 108.
Photos: Outdoor Recreation Fonds. PG8/E10. Boissevain Community Archives.



Rowboats on Max Lake, 1914.