



ARTICLES ABOUT THE DLIA

DLIA Was Organized 100 Years Ago

History of the DLIA By Dr. Gordon Yadon of Delavan - 2/21/05

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This is the centennial year of a notable community organization, the Delavan Lake Improvement Association. Over the past century, the DLIA has championed numerous beneficial programs pertaining to the betterment of the Delavan Lake area. It currently has a membership of 320 families and business firms representing over 580 individuals.

Since its 1895 inception, the DLIA has taken a leadership role in the implementation of such significant lake projects as: purchasing of grist mill rights to stabilize water level, weed control, sanitation and improvement of water quality, fire protection, road improvements, emergency services, fish stocking, working with the assessor to adjust equalization of lake property valuation, enforcement of liquor laws, boating regulations, distribution of numbered plates for lake properties, zoning matters, purchase of fire and rescue equipment, tree planting, active role in sewer and lake rehabilitation projects and more recently, conducting studies for possible creation of a lake management district, water-quality and lake use plan.

On Aug. 7, 1893, two years before the DLIA was organized, Edward F. Tilden conducted a meeting in Chicago's Rookery building to discuss making Delavan Lake a haven for retired Chicago area businessmen and their families. The main topic of conversation was stabilization of the lake's water level during the summer months. At the time the water rights to Delavan Lake were owned by William H. Horton, proprietor of the Delavan Milling Company, located adjacent to the Mill Pond in the village of Delavan. Whenever water power was needed to activate his grain grinding equipment, Horton would open the gates of the outlet dam, sending a torrent of water down Swan Creek into the Mill Pond, lowering the lake level accordingly. During dry summers when milling operations were conducted on a daily basis, the lake level dropped considerably, causing problems at the various resorts and for swimmers, fishermen, yachters and steamboat operators. Although there was considerable discussion, no remedial action was taken.

After a lapse of two years, the DLIA was officially organized on Aug. 10, 1895, at a meeting held at the Log Cabin Resort on Willow Point. Philo R. King was elected president and Walter E. Wells, secretary-treasurer. A week later a meeting was held at the E. Latimer Bank in Delavan at which Horton, the mill proprietor, was invited and requested to present an offer to relinquish his right to control the dam at the lake's outlet.

Horton's initial offer to sell the water rights for \$35,000 was rejected with little or no discussion. He then offered to sell partial water rights for \$20,000, limiting the drawing of lake water during the months of June July and August. This also was declined by the committee comprised of King, Wells, G. E. Rickcords and J. H. Witbeck. The water rights issue remained in limbo for the next 12 years until Tilden was instrumental to incorporating the DLIA, May 4, 1902. The object and purpose of the incorporation, filed with the secretary of state, was to promote and encourage public and private improvements around Delavan Lake. No capital stock was provided by the articles of incorporation as the organization was not for financial gain with no member to profit the membership.

Following DLIA's incorporation, Horton presented an offer for partial water rights during the summer months for \$8000. Since it was not organized with capital stock, a DLIA Auxiliary was formed with \$10,000 capital stock at \$25 per share. A total of 343 shares were resold to 80 individuals. Leading stockholders were: Tilden, H. P. Farling, Charles A. Stevens, Fred B. Jones, Charles A. Sage, G. E. Rickcords, O. F. Kropf, E. S. Conway, P. R. King, and A. H. Allyn. After purchasing partial water rights from Horton, many lake problems were lessened. On Jan. 26, 1935, George W. Borg purchased full water rights from Jacob Herzel, then the grist mill's proprietor.

Over the past 100 years, the DLIA, in addition to promoting and supporting various beneficial projects, has served a "watch dog" by identifying and alleviating problems.

From 1976-1987, the DLIA sponsored an antique show and sale at Lake Lawn Lodge, later at the Wisconsin School for the Deaf. The first 12 shows raised \$63,500, which was utilized for various DLIA programs.