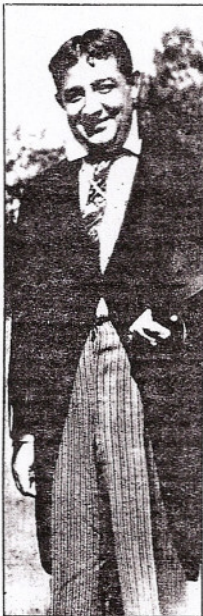




Dan Plutchak/The Week

THE COMO CLUBHOUSE



First prize for men during a Gay '90s costume party held in 1942 was won by Secretary-Treasurer, Leo P. Wols. The club yearbook said: 'Notice the congenial smile on his face as he carried away the honors.'

By Linda Godfrey
Writer/Artist

“A farmer rode his horse right into the dance, and everyone almost flipped.”

So goes one of Ella PickensLemar's favorite memories of the old Como Clubhouse, an area landmark currently receiving an inside facelift and renovation.

“That was in the '40s sometime,” she said. “They did a lot of pranking around here.”

And dances were held so regularly that PickensLemar couldn't remember exactly which one it was that was crashed by the horse rider. But it could have been the dance held for the “Victory Party” in 1942, when a \$25 War Bond was given away “absolutely free” according to one advertisement.

Those were the days when social acceptance was so important to people that the Lake Como Beach Association had a yearly “Miss Popularity” contest at the clubhouse. But the contest was only the centerpiece of a host of social events attended by eager Chicago vacationers. At the 1934 event, for instance, there was a waltz contest, horseshoe pitching, and rowboat racing.

All this heady excitement made the clubhouse “the” place for Como residents to social-



ize back in its heyday. And the building, erected in 1926, became an important meeting place for association members as they fought for clean water, better roads, and sanitation rules.

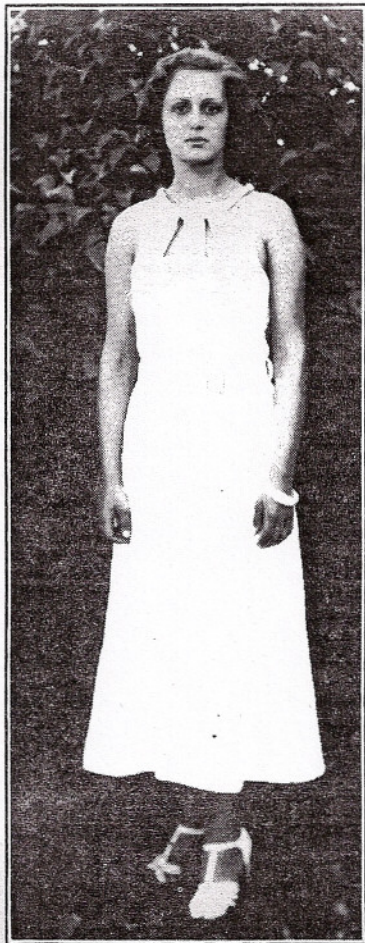
The Como subdivision first emerged around the finger-shaped little lake in 1925, when the Chicago Evening Post divided the property and put up the elegant clubhouse. The first cottages appeared in 1926, when most lots were sold to vacation homeseekers flocked to the small, crystal clear lake, not realizing the Post had cut back the lake's thick weed growth only the year before.

The area's location was an incentive, too, with easy access from Chicago provided by the Chicago and Northwestern train to Lake Geneva.

Winners of the Contest of 1933



MISS ELEANORE SUTTER



MISS JEAN ANTONSEN



MISS MARGUERETTE BEHRENS

va Station, and bus service to Lake Como. Buses also ran daily direct from Chicago to Como.

But in 1927, the new lake property owners had a nasty surprise when the weeds reappeared. "The true condition of the lake was very noticeable," remarked a writer a few years later in the property association's 1934 year-book. The owners investigated the cause of the weeds, continued the writer, and discovered the dam at the outlet was not capable of holding the lake level.

Homeowners on the south side of the lake were already bolstering up the dam each year with rock and cement bags. At first, the association just pitched in with those efforts. But by 1930, the group submitted plans for a new concrete spillway and clay dike to the Railroad Commission at Madison. The plans were fine,

they were told. The only problems were money and acquiring easements to the necessary properties.

By the summer of 1932, the association knew something had to be done. That summer was desert-like, causing "tons of pickerel" to die in the lake. But the group lacked easement rights to the necessary area, which was owned by one J.O. Young of Lake Geneva. "With Mr. Young we encountered a stone wall," reads the year-book. "He refused to sign."

The group tried the recalcitrant Mr. Young again in 1933, and he still refused to sign, despite pleas by the president of the Town Board of Geneva Township. So the association got tough and formed a plan to have Young's property legally condemned. Judge Luce decided in the group's favor, and a commission allowed Mr. Young \$210 as damages for the two

and one tenth acres being condemned.

The association had hoped one of the Depression-era public works groups would be able to do the labor, but were turned down by at least four different government agencies for various reasons.

As a last resort, they called a meeting of all property owners, pointing out "the odor of decayed vegetation and dead fish is becoming a detriment to health." Also the lake had sunk to a record low, and property owners saw their lifetime vacation dreams about to go up in sultry summer lake steam.

But PickensLemar remembers all the owners rolled up their sleeves and doggedly pursued ways to earn enough money for the dam. "The women's club had parties," she said, "they held

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