

Old Swimming Holes in Lansing Recalled

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The growth of a booming city has certain sad phases, it engulfs old haunts and ruthlessly obliterates old land marks until they become almost forgotten, being only recalled by reminiscent stories, commencing with, "Do you remember?"

Small boys, whose scanty attire encroaches upon the rules of civilized propriety and whose howls of joy as they duck each other jars upon the ear of the heat-tortured pessimist, are once again driven from their present swimming holes to newer selections farther away from the prudish boundaries of the city.

Chief Behrendt's latest edict in regard to certain styles of bathing costumes and regulating the wearer to places farther upstream, brings to mind many of the "old swimmin' holes" prevailing along the rivers years ago, when the city had not assumed such metropolitan airs.



But a very few of these old places ever rose to the dignity of names: they were just "swimmin' holes," though the older generation will remember "Dead Man's Valley," the

“Stone Quarry,” “Dolly Varden” and the “Grand Truck Bridge,” the latter on the cedar river. All of these places were “up town.”

The north end also had a “Dead Man’s Valley,” near the School for the Blind. Boyish lore had it, that many years ago the Indians killed a white man there, and their weird tales of how this ghost used to caper at night, generally had the effect of freeing the swimming hole from the smaller bathers after the shade of night had fallen.

Below what is Piatt’s dam was the other ‘hole’ with the same tradition, but in this “Dead Man’s Valley” there was a large white stone plentifully sprinkled with bits of red formation. Many a larger boy, proud of his stone bruises and of his diving abilities, would explain at great length to his awe-stricken audience of youngsters who had just reached the “paddlin’” stage, the reasons of the red spots. They were suppose to be the blood of a white man who was taken by the heels by some unknown power and brained on the rock, and water was never able to completely obliterate the evidence of eth awful crime.

Between this swimming hole and the Piatt dam was another one, long popular, known as the Archangel, though just why no one recalls.

At the north end there was a deep hole near the Warner farm, much frequented but unnamed. When Lansing was a town of about 8,000 inhabitants, the race offered the easiest and best facilities for a swim and was patronized by hundreds of heat stricken imps who came of the old Schofield saw, mill, where they used to undress, arrayed in a variety of negligee and negligent bathing costume.

The race was the place where hundreds of the older generation learned to swim. It was ideal for this purpose, as it was sop deep and swift and the splash of the divers from the two bridges that used to span it could be heard at all hours of the day, from the earliest spring to late in the fall.

Louis. L. Sattler, now cashier of the north end branch of the States Savings bank, was then the “champeen’ diver and long distance swimmer with many rivals.

No more can be heard the cries of delight or the calls of ‘chaw raw beef’ to some unlucky one untying knots in his apparel. An edict from the police department has left the race in undisputed procession of the musk-rats.

Farther up the river near the wagon works, was another unnamed ‘hole.’ There was one near the wheelbarrow works also the Canfield saw mill being located there at that time, and when Lansing was much younger then she is now, Town Marshal Baker saved many blushes by shaking his club at shameless little bathers who reluctantly left their pleasures for more clothes.

Neat Bement’s plant n the opposite side of the river, was a small grove of oak trees and a deep swimming hole. It was much frequented and often called the “Big Trees.”

Years and years ago, at the foot of South st, was an ideal hole for bathers, and William Hinman, who was the “champeen” swimmer at that time, was there, stirring up the mud of the bottom, diving for white stones, when news of the Lincoln assassination reached the town.

At the Grand Trunk bridge on the Cedar, which was a wooden one then, the boys found a haunt away from police jurisdiction. A peculiar feature about the temperature of the river at this hole was the alternating currents of warm and cold water, caused by springs undoubtedly. Many bad cases of cramps and one of drowning gave this “hole” a bad reputation.

The “Dolly Varden” and “Dead Man’s Valley,” on the Grand, were “swimming holes” that swarmed with tanned and carefree imps during the hot months in days gone past and one case of drowning occurred there.

There were many other swimming holes, but the ones mentioned received the greater portion of patronage. They are now things of the past, and new places farther away from the spreading boundaries of the fast growing city. Must be sought by youngsters today.

The encroachments of progress and growth was being discussed with a retired merchant, who spent his boyhood days in Lansing and who deplored the fact that boys today were not like the chums he played with. He said reminiscently: "The old fashioned boy delighted in his swimming hole, and in the study of animals and nature. He loved pets, and a dog was absolutely necessary. He was a hunter, a born fisherman. His equipments was small and his clothes few. Certain subjects must not be broached to him or his fist was doubled in a jiffy. No tree was too tall for him to climb and no road too rough for his bare feet.

"Boys nowadays," he continued, "don't seem the same. They wear glasses at eight years of age and have seen shows on the country at ten. About the only real violent exercise they take is going without a hat and eating cough lozenges."