



# Celebrating 75 Years

**Providing Leadership and Assistance to Protect Our Valuable Resource Since 1946.**



## ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP DRIVE BEGINS

The Prior Lake Association is excited to start its 75th year of community service and lake enhancement in 2021. Behind the scenes, the PLA board is tentatively planning and scheduling events that will occur once the pandemic is abated and under control. In anticipation of an eventful year, the association has launched its important annual membership drive as the PLA enrollment approaches a record of 400 members.

Because of the COVID-19 virus, fundraising during the past 12 months has been limited, but PLA board members are optimistic that Prior Lake families will come forward and once again make a dues donation of \$30. Those much appreciated membership dues, according to PLA President Adam Proehl, are tax deductible and will go a long ways in ensuring that the organization can fulfill its 2021 financial commitments such as the yearly fireworks.

Extra donations for the July 4<sup>th</sup> BOOM Fund are especially appreciated this year. That additional donation, as well as yearly dues, can be submitted online at the groups website: [priorlakeassociation.org](http://priorlakeassociation.org).

"We need everyone's generous support to pay for not only the fireworks, but also for our other priority effort to maintain a high quality water resource that can be enjoyed by thousands of residents and visitors each year," concluded Mr. Proehl.

## PLA Anniversary Marks 75 Years of Lake Improvements

During the drought of the 1930's the water level of Prior Lake became so low that many areas now covered with over ten feet of water, were bone dry. In fact, the lake was divided into numerous small bodies of water. Trees and brush grew up on the lake bottom during the drought while property values dropped.

In the 1940's, with rainfall returning to normal, the lake was restored and actually went to a level of 907 feet above sea level in 1945. (Today's ordinary high water level is 903.9 feet.) But because there was no outlet to remove any unusually heavy run-off in wet years, and a porous bottom in Candy Cove siphoned water from the main lake body, Prior had shown a variation of over 20 feet between the record low and high. In the early 1950's,

with the beginning of another dry spell, water levels again dropped precipitously.

To address these fluctuating water levels, a group of concerned lakeside homeowners formed a loose-knit lake improvement association in 1946. A re-organization of that group occurred in 1947 as the Prior Lake Association entered its second year of maintaining and improving this body of 1,343 acres and more than 20 miles of shoreline.

This year, the longtime, respected community organization, well known as sponsor of the annual July 4th fireworks, is celebrating 75 years of protecting our valuable resource. Those efforts played a major role in making Prior Lake the beautiful and prosperous community it is today.



*Henry LesVisconte, Joe Doyle, Alice Simpkins, Clara Fahey, Catherine, Anna, Bill, Ann and Dennis Simpkins enjoy a Sunday on the lake after church services.*



## Unraveling The Mystery of Candy Cove

# Prior Lake Association Takes On Mother Nature

The drought of the 1930's drastically changed Upper and Lower Prior Lake. Precipitation here in 1937 was only 16 inches compared to a mean of approximately 25.5 inches and trees and brush grew up on the lake bottom. Property values dropped to a vanishing point. Back then, as today, Prior Lake has fluctuated from an extreme high water level of approximately 907.6 feet in 1907 to a low of 883.6 in 1938. A total fluctuation of 24 feet.

According to a report written by Prior Lake Association member Dr. John Coe, studies of the lake indicated that much of the water loss during the drought occurred because of the porous condition of the Candy Cove bottom. In fact, at the peak of the drought the cove was actually divided into two bodies of water.

A dam constructed at the train trestle prohibited water from draining to Lower Prior from Upper Prior and to maintain the already low level of water in the lower lake, another dam was eventually constructed at the opening to Candy Cove. After years of fluctuating lake levels, in 1952, the cove was treated with 100,000 pounds of Bentonite, a form of clay which swells to 15 times its dry size after immersion in water. This joint effort of cove residents and the association, controlled the major leakage. In 1959, 50 members of the organization treated the upper part of the cove with an additional 68,000 of Bentonite.

Because of financial support and hands-on labor of the PLA and other local volunteers, the loss to the entire lake from the cove would be less than eight-tenths of an inch per year. As a result, it was again possible to open an access to the cove for general boat travel. Their work, however, was far from finished.

With the beginning of another dry spell in the early fifties, the young organization raised over \$12,000 for the construction of a 16-inch well, 494 feet in depth, to continually pump thousands of gallons of water into the depleted lake. Maximum usage occurred in 1959 when the pump was run nearly 5,000 hours and added 540 million gallons of water to Prior Lake - the equivalent of 12 inches in depth, at a cost of approximately \$300 a month. Had the PLA not undertaken the pumping operation, the lake would have been more than six feet lower and in 1959 would have begun to resemble the conditions of the 1930's.

Yet another major concern of lake residents was the lack for a natural outlet. The flood of 1960 demonstrated the need of an outlet to address the issue of high water levels. At a 1969 association meeting, members heard from representatives proposing possible outlets to relieve the pressure of high water. It was estimated that a six-foot pipe would take about one-half inch of water from the lake a day. Another alternative was to utilize holding ponds to control high water.

In 1973, at the request of the Prior Lake Association, the Spring Lake Association joined in a petition requesting the Prior Lake-Spring Lake Watershed District, to construct a permanent outlet. That structure and channel was finally completed in 1983 at a cost of \$1,025,000. Normal wear and tear made it necessary to replace the outlet in 2010. The Prior Lake Association's years-long efforts to better control lake levels has finally been attained but only because of the dedication of hundreds of association members over a 30-year time frame.



*Candy Cove circa 1910. It's basin was covered with 168,000 pounds of bentonite in the 1950's to stop lake leakage.*



2021 Is 55th Year of PLA Fireworks!

## Summer's July 4th Blast

Throughout its 75-year history the Prior Lake Association has received recognition for its many accomplishments, but in recent years the PLA is most reknown for its annual sponsorship of the July 4th fireworks. 2021 marks the 55th consecutive summer that the organization has initiated this community-wide celebration which launched with a bang in 1966.

Spectators were directed to the Knox property on the upper lake where fireworks were launched initially. Later the event shot off fireworks in the area of the Willows and, of course, the Fourth of July climax now blasts off at Watzl's Beach in Lakefront Park.



While many have presumed the fireworks show is undertaken by the city, it is actually the PLA which has always been the promoter and underwriter of the yearly program. However, the expensive fireworks today would not be possible, according to former PLA President Steve Reinders, without the financial support of the many businesses and organizations, as well as dedicated, dues-paying members, who donate annually to the firework's BOOM Fund.

"With this being our 55th year of fireworks sponsorship, and our organization's 75th anniversary, we're planning for our biggest and best display of fireworks ever," explained Mr. Reinders. "But this only happens because of the great support our local businesses come forth with every year and I hope our community truly appreciates their commitment."

## PLA Helped Prior Lake Transition To Suburban Lake Community

Prior Lake, like much of Scott County 75 years ago, was heavily agriculture and not densely populated. In 1966, a survey showed the lake populated by 606 habitable dwellings with 370 of them serviced by telephone. Those phone-connected homes were considered year-round residences because of the registration of a phone number.

Unfortunately, some cabins drained their raw sewage directly into the lake. Prior Lake's fluctuations in water levels further impaired the water quality when high water would flood the drain fields and cesspools and leach sewage into the lake. The Prior Lake Association took action by forming a Pollution Committee which reported to township authorities the lakeside polluters whose "cesspool pumpings were left on the lakeshore." 1956 PLA meeting minutes reported a horse barn with manure running into the lake as well as a lakeshore resort and bar "dumping their sewage directly into the lake."

## Boating To The Chapel

Starting in the 1980's, the PLA helped coordinate worship services on Yacht Club Island, known previously as Hog Island. (During the low-water-years, farmer Martin Martinson allowed his pigs to forage on the island.) Local churches rotated the Sunday schedule and the association organized shuttle service as members volunteered as water taxis bringing landlubbers to the island "church."

Many charter members of the Prior Lake Yacht Club, launched in 1964, were also key players in the formative years of the Prior Lake Association. Bob Peterson, the PLYC's first commodore, was the PLA member who initiated efforts to launch the Prior Lake-Spring lake Watershed District. Mr. Peterson scheduled Saturday afternoon sailboats races out of the yacht club in the 1960's.

The A-frame structure on the island was originally constructed on Reed's Island and was moved across the ice in the early 1970's to the present site. A group of investors, led by influential PLA board member Jack Packard, bought the island from the Martinson estate in 1971 and later sold the property to the yacht club.



A 1970 report released by the PLA indicated that a high Coliform bacteria count was due to human waste dispensed by poor drain fields and septic tanks draining into the lake.

In the 1970's, under the direction of then city manager Mike McGuire, efforts were begun to construct 26 miles of sewer and water around the lake. Those forward-thinking plans, controversial in the early eighties, were met by strong opposition from many lakeshore homeowners and residents who balked at the cost and scope of the project. The city's mayor at the time, Wally Stock, and his city council, eventually were successful in garnering the support of the affected township boards resulting in today's sewer system that safeguards our lakes and local water supply.



Mayor Wally Stock



## PATROLS, BUOYS, LAKE OBSTRUCTIONS WERE PLA PRIORITIES

Today, during winter and summer, Scott County deputies patrol our lakes and portions of the Minnesota River to ensure residents are safe and following Minnesota rules and regulations and local ordinances. But prior to law enforcement officers patrolling Prior Lake, the Prior Lake Association took it upon themselves to promote boat safety and “address the noise pollution from the hydrofoils speeding on the lake.”



*Former County Sheriff Bob Moody and Lake Deputy Gordon Gehlay*

In 1965 County Sheriff W.B. “Rip” Schroder informed the organization that he would train and deputize PLA members to safeguard lake users, as long as the group would pay the

insurance, boat fuel and supply the boats! As a result, 20 PLA members received training and instructions and carried the authority of deputy sheriff. It was the Prior Lake Association’s members who stepped up to assist in ensuring the safety of all lake users until the Scott County sheriff eventually took over the patrolling of our lakes.

In the 1950’s the association took it upon itself to further improve lake safety by removing “dangerous stumps, trees and big rocks” and, in an effort to mark channels, pushed painted wood poles into the lake bed to mark channels.

In 1964 the association role in providing home-made floatation buoys started when a soft water conditioning firm provided used fiberglass tanks that were then painted, anchored and installed by club volunteers. Eventually the PLA began purchasing the many modern buoys you see today on the lake although the sheriff’s office is responsible for installing and removing the 60 buoys now aiding boaters on Prior Lake.

In 2013, when current Sheriff Luke Hennen was overseeing the water patrol function, Scott County began applying for buoys and chain through the Federal Equipment Grant and since then they purchase approximately ten buoys each year.

Throughout the years the Prior Lake Association has contributed graciously for the cause of lake safety. That included the group’s donation in 1987 of a custom-built \$3,500 enclosed trailer to house and transport the sheriff’s water safety equipment, some of which was also donated or paid for by the PLA membership.

## PLA STARTED CARP BATTLE

The formal fight against invasive carp was launched in 1953 when a “bulletin” issued by the PLA in August of that year declared: “The Association has declared war on carp.” The first step in that battle was to obtain signed petitions from property owners bordering the lake with signatures presented to the Division of Game and Fish. The group lambasted residents who did not sign and submit their individual petition. “The cost is just a three cent stamp,” exclaimed the PLA memo. “You who have not returned a completed petition, are delaying the whole project. WHAT IS THE MATTER!”

With state approval, traps were initially placed in shallow bays with the result of 59,000 pounds of carp removed in 1956 alone. In 1960 the PLA worked with the state’s conservation department to have carp traps installed at the inlet from Spring Lake and the other between the two bridges. Success was limited as exemplified by a monthly meeting member who in 1962 observed: “These carp are so well educated, the hoop nets have been unsuccessful.”

In later years the lake improvement organization conducted carp fishing contests. In the summer of 1972 contestants harvested more than 5,500 pounds of the bottom-feeding, damaging pests.

The PLA also strived to improve fishing by promoting fish stocking. In 1954, they worked with the state to establish a spawning ground here for northern pike. The Conservation Department “dropped 15 bushels of sunfish” in our waters in 1958 and stocked walleye here since 1979. With urging from the PLA, the DNR established a northern pike rearing pond here in 1982.

## Prior Lake’s Grainwood Hotel

Initially the site of a hunting cabin for W.E. Hull, the Grainwood House was opened by the Hull family on May 15, 1879. Mr. Hull made his fortune on grain and wood - hence the name of the hotel.

The popular Grainwood catered to wealthy socialites and could, along with lakeside cabins, accommodate 150 guests. It had its own railroad station (below) and water tower and provided endless lakeside activities, until it burned down in 1894.

It was immediately rebuilt, bigger and better and renamed the Grainwood Hotel. The new tourist destination featured tennis courts, a bowling alley, concerts and dancing. Unfortunately, catastrophe struck again in 1930 when the hotel burned to the ground and never rebuilt.







## Prior Lake Association President Adam Proehl

Preparing to celebrate our 75<sup>th</sup> year gave some members of our board a chance to review the PLA archives to see what seven-plus decades of service to this community looks like.

As a board, we truly are standing on the shoulders of many great leaders who played a critical role in shaping the lake community we all enjoy today. In reading the newsletter, I hope you'll appreciate these historical insights as much as we enjoyed the research.

As we move forward, we'll do our best to live up to the legacy of those past generations who led the way. We're excited for 2021 and will work hard to again schedule the activities you've come to expect from the PLA.

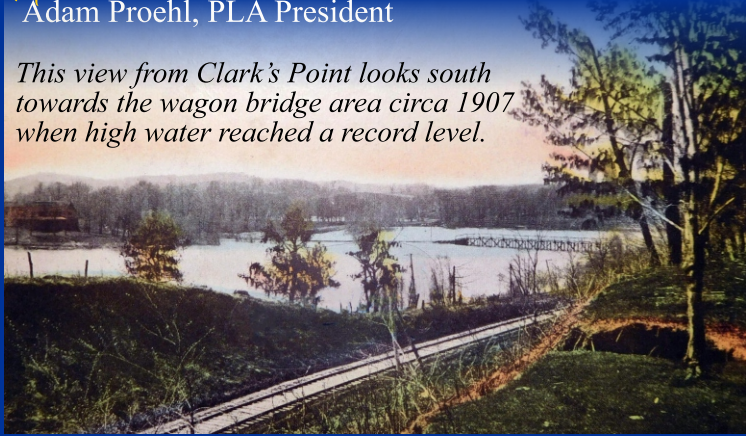
Regarding events, this is also our 55<sup>th</sup> year of hosting the 4<sup>th</sup> of July Fireworks. Thanks to the generous support of so many local businesses and members, the 2020 show was the biggest ever and we're going to try and top it this year so stay tuned!

Thank you for your past support! It's our pleasure to serve this community and we couldn't do it without you and our many members! If you have not done so already, I strongly urge to renew your membership today.

*Adam Proehl*

Adam Proehl, PLA President

*This view from Clark's Point looks south towards the wagon bridge area circa 1907 when high water reached a record level.*



## TRADING BAIT FOR PLA MEMBERSHIP

Martin Fixin's PLA membership in May, 1954 made Chatonka Beach the only area on the lake with 100% of its property owners signed up and dues paid with the association. However, he apparently did not have the financial means of paying the required membership dues. In lieu of the \$10 fee, the organization accepted his offer of 12 containers of fishing bait which were then sold at that monthly meeting for \$1 each netting the group a total of \$12. (It is doubtful that his donation of worms were used as a charitable tax deduction.)

## Association Opens Channel

# PLA Battles Milwaukee Road

It was originally known locally in 1855 as "Credit Lake," but by 1871 when the railroad laid its tracks here, ours was one body of water renamed Prior Lake. The new railroad grade, however, in a sense divided the lake into two parts. Although the bridge was originally as wide as the channel opening, pilings and fill were added over the years as the trestle was replaced and repaired thus narrowing the passageway.



*The 632 of the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad steams across the Prior Lake train trestle, circa 1910.*

Even after the tracks were abandoned and removed, pilings and rocks remained in the channel limiting navigation when water did cross from one body to the other. Making matters worse was the drought of the 1930's when water levels dropped further because of water draining from Candy Cove.

Because of that leakage, competing interests tampered with the trestle channel. At one point a dam was constructed in order that residents of Upper Prior could maintain their water level. Lower Prior residents, meanwhile, retaliated by removing dam portions in order to fill their basin which, in 1940, was four feet lower than the upper body. At the time, Upper Prior had 96 cottages on its shores and five resorts along with approximately 150 boats, while the lower lake was populated with 90 cottages, two resorts and more than 150 boats.

In 1940 the railroad wanted to completely eliminate the channel under their bridge but association efforts turned back that attempt. The PLA pressured the Minnesota Department of Conservation and the railroad to clear the channel "so that it will be at its legal level." Even after the railroad abandoned the line, obstructions remained so the PLA built, from military surplus, a 28-foot-long barge pushed by a motorized boat. Over the years it was also used to remove bridge pilings as well as trees, stumps and other obstructions and open channels throughout the entire lake. The lake association also used its barge to clear the lake's public access of underwater obstructions and also to remove debris that prohibited the successful seining for carp removal.

In 1977 the channel depth was estimated at no more than three feet and only one boat at a time could traverse the opening. Over the years association members contributed thousands of dollars and countless hours of hard labor and dredging that resulted in today's wide channel. The last meaningful dredging was financed by the PLA in 1989 when neighboring landowner and former PLA President Jim Space donated adjoining property and John Turner donated his excavating company's equipment.

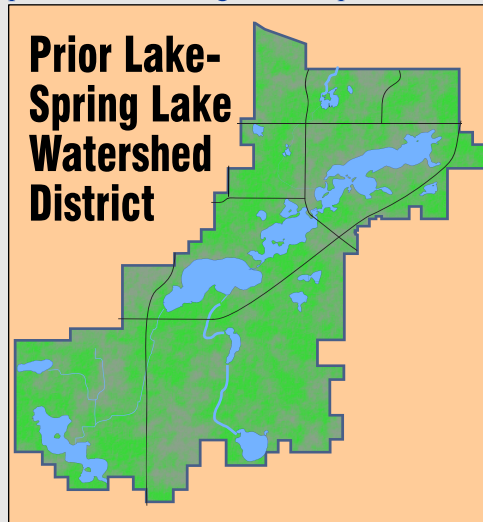


## Watershed District Initiative Started in 1964

# Association Spawned Watershed

When the Scott County Board of Commissioners refused to take any measures in the 1940's to maintain the water levels of Prior Lake, a group of concerned citizens banded together to form the Prior Lake Association. Their 1946 goal: maintain and improve the lake as a source of beauty and recreation.

From the drought years to high water years, water fluctuation on Prior remained a serious problem. Thus, in 1964, with a PLA-sponsored lake pump working around the clock, and lake pollution becoming a visible problem, the August meeting of the



PLA discussed the establishment of a watershed district. PLA members Bob Peterson and Tom Battis spearheaded the initial efforts to contact the State Watershed District Board, obtaining signatures for a petition to form a district and expend funds to obtain the necessary surveys. This would prove to be a lengthy and major campaign.

The end result, however, is indisputable as lake level stability and water quality are greatly improved because of these PLA efforts.

By 1967, this dedicated group moved to include Spring Lake in the proposed new watershed and by 1968 Scott County Commissioners were on board and would lend their support.

Mailings, studies and countless hearings made up the action plan to establish the watershed district and address the growing problems facing the lakes. Those issues being the constant threat of high water or low water and the difficulties created by each of these extremes, as well as increased lake pollution, high algae content and siltation, fish kills and ramifications of the expanded County Ditch 13. Finally, on March 4, 1970, in response to the petition launched by the Prior Lake Association, the Prior Lake-Spring Lake Watershed District was established.

That entity now protects 42 square miles of water resources and is based on the physical watershed which drains into Spring Lake and Prior Lake. It is charged with improving water quality, reducing flooding through operation of the lake's outlet and creating upstream stormwater retention areas. The completion of the lake outlet and seven mile channel into the Minnesota River is one of the many projects undertaken by the local watershed that originated, because of PLA members.

Today numerous restoration projects filter incoming water, iron-enhanced sand filters capture phosphorus from stormwater, aluminum sulfate reduces phosphorus levels, cooperation with local farmers reduces nutrients in streams and carp management that reduces bottom disruption and improved fishing are all realities because of foresight of the Prior Lake Association board and its dedicated membership.



Former PLA President Bob Peterson

# Thanks!

## Fireworks Contributors

### PLATINUM \$1000+

Prior Lake Rotary  
Chris Rooney Home Experts  
Lund's & Byerly's  
Mechanical Contractors  
Tippie Family Charity Fund  
Great Outdoors Services  
Karen Stiles & Paul Bothof Remax Advantage  
Prior Lake Lions  
Knotty Oar Marina

### GOLD \$500+

Busse Transportation  
Aerchigo & Stokka Personal Attorneys  
Morgan Babcock Dentistry  
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Complete Family Eye Care  
Pro Service Auto Repair  
VFW Post 6208  
Viking Liquor Barrell  
Chirofit Health & Wellness  
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Prior Lake-Savage Optimists

### SILVER \$250+

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Paulson Brothers Custom Remodeling  
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Village Liquor  
PAC usa  
Turning Leaf Landscapes  
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### BRONZE \$100+

Speedpro Imaging  
Carlson ACE Hardware  
Spratt Chiropractic  
American Family Insurance  
DRUMM, Inc.  
Jen Longhenry, Prandium Real Estate  
James Omeara  
Lakeside Recreation  
Mtero Cabinets  
Minnesota Valley Electric Coop  
PLate Resturant

### CONTRIBUTORS \$50+

Haugen Financial  
Island View First Addition  
2019 PRO SPC Local

Join the Prior Lake Association today!  
Sign up during our 75th anniversary at:  
[www.priorlakeassociation.org](http://www.priorlakeassociation.org)