

BEFORE GOLF--When Fishing Was Fishing

"Well sir, that fish was that long or I'm Napoleon, an' the way he dragged on that line, I'd say he weighed all of 20 pounds! Shucks, if it hadn't been for that anchor rope I'd had him sure!"

Fifty years ago Birmingham housewives had to swallow that story and scores of others better and worse. Fish markets were too scarce to put alibis out of the running, and the fine art of fishing was perhaps the most popular diversion in the village, so anglers, with slim catches had to bring home more than a weebegone look, regardless of the ill-fortune of the day's sport. But there were many better days when weary, sun-burned villagers would return with heavy creels, and kitchen chimneys would give forth appetizing aromas from frying pans sizzling about a big four pounder. The popularity of the sport caught many prominent villagers during the late summer of 1878, and it soon became apparent that an organization of the enthusiasts would stimulate interest to no slight degree. With this decision came the original plans for the "Birmingham and Wing Lake Fishing Club," an association which soon grew from its original and somewhat insignificant form into an organization of considerable importance in Birmingham social circles.

Upon the heads of J. A. Bigelow, Jack Bodine and L. B. Peabody, well known citizens of the Birmingham of half a century ago, rests all praise for the work necessary prior to the formal incorporation of the organization. Each of the triumvirate was an ardent fisherman of no mean ability, and it was altogether appropriate that the charter members should be of similar calibre. Captain John (as Bigelow was known) and Jack Bodine accordingly rounded together some prospective members, and in early September they signed on the dotted line in the official record book of the club the following 25 signatures:

J. Allen Bigelow, L. B. Peabody, Walter North, P. H. Sherman, Thomas Middlemiss, Joseph S. Stockwell, J. O. Beattie, R. E. Trowbridge, J. B. Atchinson, John F. Durkee, J. P. Gibson, Luther Stanley, John Bodine, William Satterlee, G. Lord, Lewis Simpson, Josiah Alger, Frank Hagerman, John Irving, Melvin Sly, George E. Daines, Melvin Rose, George Blakeslee and John Trask.

Under the colors of the "Birmingham and Wing Lake Fishing Club," by-laws were drawn up in a strictly legal manner, dues were arranged, officers elected and club property designated. Prompt action resulted in the building of a worthy boat house on the shores of Wing Lake, following the construction of which the members declared it propitious to build a few boats. Tucked orderly away in the archives of the club a receipt for six dollars for "dressed lumber for building of two boats," is sufficient evidence of the maturity of their plans.

The corporation had as a working capital the sum of \$250 which was forthcoming from 25 shares of stock held by the charter members. Dues were fixed at fifty cents annually, and no little space in the by-laws was devoted to the complicated procedure involving expulsion if these dues remained long unpaid.

Of the early activities of this initial organization but little is known save what may be gleaned from the record book of the regular meetings of the club. Of the 25 charter members only two are living today, one of whom is a resident of Birmingham. They are Walter North and Frank Hagerman, the latter a prominent villager who speaks of the club as a 'favorite spot during the warm summer months.' Despite its evident popularity the location became unworthy of ambition of the fishermen. Wing Lake no longer har-



bored the 'big ones' in its depths, and the anglers' wives were all too futile. So a move was decided upon, and a general reorganization took place. The new charter held only 10 names, 2 of which were not seen in the older document. E. Miller and Ira Slade became the neophytes in the club which now adopted a new and somewhat pretentious title: "The Birmingham and Pine Lake Fishing and Shooting Club." Says article number three in the organized record book, "The objects for which this association is organized are boating, rowing, fishing, shooting and preservation of game and fish in season."

To the eastern shores of Pine Lake upon the site where Wiley Bell's cottage now stands the boat-house built six years before at Wing Lake was carefully moved, and in the early days of August 1884, members with their families and friends drove to the new site behind Dobbin, Nellie or Dollie for a day or two in that area then recognized as the great open spaces. When Birmingham sizzled under summer sun migrations became

popular, and it was not unusual to see a half dozen large tents pitched under the big shade trees along the club's Pine Lake Frontage. The demand upon the club property as a hot weather rendezvous became so great that limits were placed upon the duration of stay, and members were forced to take their turn.

For the ensuing four years the club records tell of the success the enterprise, of the many happy days spent on the cool lake shore and of the general prosperity of the organization. (This latter condition perhaps being traceable to the increased annual assessment which had grown from the original fifty cents to the sum of \$2.50!) It was not unusual for two or three entire families to unite for an outing of a fortnight at the club. With the help of Bub Burns who was indispensable in the transportation of all camping equipment, the party would traverse the seven miles between Birmingham and the Pine Lake shore via horse and surrey, or, in later years, the electric street car line. Residents of the village who remember the pleasant days

HE FORECAST AIRPLANES

Every effort to get a photograph of Dan Bray, one time town marshal, airplane prophet, and stone-thrower extraordinary, has failed, and we must resort to a graphic description, in words as is possible to offer.

As one of the respected town marshals in Old Birmingham, Dan was not given a single opportunity to exhibit his abilities. Hence we must pass rapidly over this phase of his life, and turn to more pertinent facts.

A small crowd on a street corner 50 years ago was liable to be centered around Dan Bray. And Dan was certain to be discussing the possibility of "men flying like birds." As sad as it may seem Dan received more jeers for his trouble than anything else, but his prophecies continued. Heartless youths of the village, would purposely arouse Bray over the subject just to get an opportunity to booh and ridicule the thought of man ever taking to wings, at least while life still remained within his body.

Secretly Dan worked, during his spare time, on a pair of mechanical wings which he finally announced were ready for trial. Confident of their factor of safety, he climbed upon the roof of a high barn near the outskirts of the village, adjusted straps and other paraphernalia while a goodly crowd stood in great awe below, and jumped, flapping the cloth covered wings vigorously. Whether the wing-flapping was too feeble, or the force of gravity

too great was never ascertained, but that Dan descended with great rapidity was unquestionable. A broken arm failed to dampen his enthusiasm, however, and to Bray's dying day he held fast to his belief that man would take to the air in the not far distant future. Might he only know Lindy today.

But Dan's greatest achievement was not in aviation circles. The following story is vouched for by more than one eye witness:

Dan, and a group of farmers were gathered on the west shores of Wing Lake one summer day taking a respite from the hard labor involved in running a thrashing machine. Said Dan, "I can throw a stone across this lake." The lake being about a half-mile wide there were plenty who laughed at the statement. Whether wagers were made or not is unknown, but Dan sought and found a handful of stones, walked to the edge of the lake and threw them, one at a time. According to the aforementioned witnesses the day was exceptionally calm, with the surface of the lake unrippled. Across the expanse of water immediately in front of the Thurber farm splashes made by the stones could be plainly discerned only a few feet from the eastern shore.

So that was Dan Bray, one of the few, in Birmingham, who forecast the advent of the airplane, and one, in fact the only one who has semi-officially thrown a stone all the way across Wing Lake.

on the shore testify to the angling skill displayed by many of the members' wives, an ability which often arose to the occasion when the evening meal threatened to omit the fish course. But their zeal at the sport was, on at least one occasion, a trifle too great, and in addition a bit expensive, may we believe the chroniclers of the record:

"August 1, 1886. Treasurer authorized to purchase new oar to replace one broken by member's spouse while endeavoring to land huge perch."

Of the many enthusiastic fishermen in the village during the late '70's and early '80's three figures stand out most prominently in the minds of old timers. Arm in arm, in rain or shine Sam Mills, Jack Baldwin and J. Allen Bigelow led the field in the earliest trips to the lakes, and these same three were last to leave in the fall. Sam alone survives to recount fish stories which know no equal.

"Jack Baldwin's wife was a particular woman," confided Sam. "She'd never let Jack go fishing with anybody but me. And Jack sure loved to fish. Well, whenever the urge came I'd drive down and get Jack and we'd drive back to Bigelow's store, call to him and out he'd come, climb in the buggy and away we'd go good weather or bad."

"Captain John and I used to shoot the big pike in the spring when they'd run into shallow water. We'd carry heavy army carbines that'd shoot a bullet as big as your thumb. If you could manage to put a shot under a fish the concussion would kill him even if the bullet missed him clean. Well, as I said Captain John and I did a lot of it in the old days. One day we went up to Porter's Lake and started around a swampy section at one end. The big pike run in and stick their noses into the swamp grass and if you keep sharp eyes you might see their fins wiggle in the shallow water. I noticed a funny ripple out in the open water a little ways and started to wade toward it thinking it might be a big fellow. After wading quite a ways toward the disturbance I saw a big black back swish the water almost under my nose. You can't hit a fish when you're so close to him so I backed away slowly a few yards, took a good guess at where his head ought to be and let go with that cannon. Well sir, I hit that fish right over the eyes with the first shot and was reaching out to get it when a half dozen other good sized ones—came floating to the surface stunned by the shot. I called to Captain John and we had a lively time getting all those fish ashore before they got their second wind!"

So Sam Mills was long on the strings he brought home and short on the alibis! He can tell stirring tales of the old jack-light days of spearing, "fore all the restrictions," of the days when Oakland County lakes were veritably swarming with the kind you read about now, and hearing him it requires no imagination to conjure the ancient and honorable sport of Waltopish hue, in which Birmingham citizens of 50 years ago evinced so great an interest.

"Captain John" once mailed the following almost formal invitation to W. H. Brummit, a Pontiac friend, with whom he often shared fishing glories:

"On Wednesday morn at nine o'clock, You'll please be ready at the dock At Orchard Lake—yourself and wife, To change the hum-drum of this life, With fishing tackles and your dimmers, Participate with saints and sinners, In such a way that you'll remember, Wednesday, the Sixth day of September,

—J. Allen Bigelow.