

SPRING 2015

Paul Maravelas, editor.

Founded in 1972, the Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society preserves the history of Lake Minnetonka and the communities of Deephaven, Excelsior, Greenwood, Shorewood, and Tonka Bay.

The Society's museum and archives are free and open to the public, and hold the largest collection of historical artifacts and documents in the area.

The Society regularly presents lectures and programs on topics of local historical interest.

The Society's publications and memberships are available for purchase on our website:

www.elmhs.org

ELMHS
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(952) 221-4766
info@elmhs.org

The Harborage

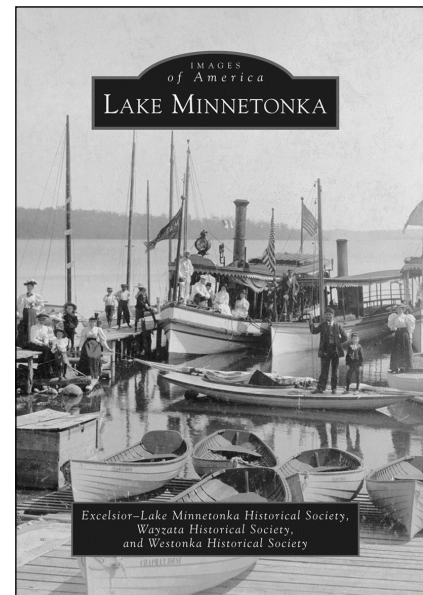
Saturday April 4 | 1 to 4 pm | Wayzata Depot

New Lake Minnetonka book launches April 4

THREE LOCAL historical societies have come together to produce *Images of America: Lake Minnetonka*, which will be published by Arcadia Publishing. The book was written by Lisa Stevens of the Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society, Joanie Holst of the Wayzata Historical Society, and Elizabeth Vandam of the Westonka Historical Society.

The three Societies will celebrate the book's release with a public launch party on Saturday, April 4, from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. in the historic Wayzata Depot, 402 Lake Street East, Wayzata. The authors will sign books, which will be available for purchase at \$21.99 plus tax. Light refreshments will be served.

In *Lake Minnetonka*, the history of the lake is detailed in 128 pages with more than 200 historical photographs drawn from numerous collections. Many images which have never been published before are now available in one place. The authors spent more than two years searching for images and information in their archives, and consulting with other historical



We'll celebrate the release of *Images of America: Lake Minnetonka*, on April 4.

societies, historians, and collectors who shared knowledge and materials. Original sources were studied to re-examine long-held assumptions about the lake's history.

Arcadia Publishing has issued more than 7,000 titles in its Images of America series, about 50 of which relate to Minnesota. The book will be available from the three historical societies, at area stores, and through Arcadia Publishing.

Tapping History programs

Our Tapping History programs are informal monthly presentations on area history. Our April program will be held at the Excelsior brewery; our May program will be held at Cast & Cru Restaurant at the Old Log Theatre. Our programs in June, July, and August will be aboard the steamboat Minnehaha on Lake Minnetonka.

All of our programs are open to the public, and begin at 7 p.m.

Monday April 13 | 7 pm

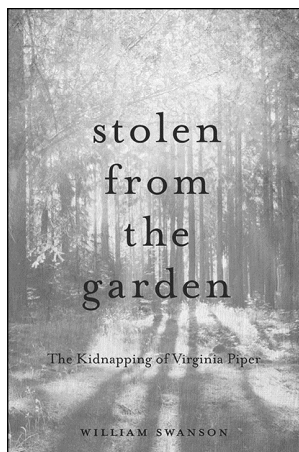
Stolen from the Garden: The Kidnapping of Virginia Piper
with William Swanson

Excelsior Brewing Co., 421 Third Street in Excelsior. Free.

On a July afternoon in 1972, two masked men waving guns abducted forty-nine-year-old Virginia Piper from the garden of her lakeside home in Orono. After her husband paid a \$1 million ransom, the FBI was directed to a northern Minnesota state park.

There, two days after her nightmare began, Ginny Piper – chained to a tree, filthy, exhausted, but physically unharmed – awaited her rescuers.

William Swanson, author of *Stolen from the Garden*, revisits the spectacular 1972 Piper kidnapping and its aftermath, and provides details about the ab-



duction, the massive FBI manhunt, and a family struggling with a shocking event that changed their lives forever. Swanson provides a plausible explanation of what really happened on that long-ago summer afternoon.

Monday May 11 | 7 pm

Head for the Cellar: 50th Anniversary of the Tornadoes of 1965
with Paul Huttner

Special location:

Cast & Cru Restaurant at the Old Log Theatre, 5185 Meadville St., Greenwood.

Free.

On May 6, 1965, the worst tornadoes in Twin Cities history swept across the region, killing 13 and injuring 683. One of the twisters devastated more than 150 Lake Minnetonka area homes. For those who lived through it, it was unforgettable – reshaping lake neighborhoods and obliterating many homes in Cottagewood and Deephaven.

Meteorologist Paul Huttner was a preschooler when the storm swept through his Deephaven neighborhood – a moment he describes as his first living memory and the day he became fascinated by weather. He will revisit this intimidating storm system through photos, audience stories, and the radio broadcasts that saved many lives.

If you're interested in sharing your story during this event please contact Brianna DePauw: brianna@elmhs.org. If you would like to lend tornado artifacts or photos for this event, please email: info@elmhs.org.

Monday June 8 | 7 pm

**The *Onawa* and Lake Minnetonka's
Sailing Legacy**
with Tom Burton

.....
Steamboat *Minnehaha*

\$20 ELMHS members / \$35 non-members

Purchase tickets at elmhs.eventbrite.com

Board at Bayside Grille at 6:45 pm

687 Excelsior Blvd. in Excelsior

In 1882, Hazen Burton and other yachtsmen founded the Minnetonka Yacht Club, today one of the oldest yacht clubs in America. It was the start of a rich sailing tradition on Lake Minnetonka, and occurred at a time when sailing was considered a salt-water sport. Soon after, Hazen commissioned Excelsior boat builder Arthur Dyer to build a new type of racing boat which would sail over the water instead of through it. Hazen's son Ward debuted the mysterious craft — the *Onawa* — in 1893. The *Onawa* won every race Burton competed in by anywhere from seven to sixteen minutes, and was the first class sloop champion of 1893. It didn't take long for eastern yachtsmen to take notice of the "Wraith of Deephaven." Western boat builders and yachtsmen gained the respect they deserved, and Minnetonka became a notable sailing destination.

Deephaven resident Tom Burton, Hazen's great-grandson, is a fourth generation Minnetonka sailor and accomplished inland racer. He will share his memories of the Lake Minnetonka sailing scene and discuss the mark the *Onawa* and the Minnetonka Yacht Club have made in the sport of sailing.



Onawa

ELMHS

Monday July 13 | 7 pm

**Raising the *Minnehaha*: Restoring a
Streetcar Boat**
with the Volunteers of the Museum
of Lake Minnetonka

.....
Steamboat *Minnehaha*

\$20 ELMHS members / \$35 non-members

Purchase tickets at elmhs.eventbrite.com

Board at Bayside Grille at 6:45 pm

687 Excelsior Blvd. in Excelsior

In 1906, the Twin City Rapid Transit Co. expanded its line of streetcars to include a fleet of six yellow torpedo stern "streetcar boats" to ferry residents and visitors to destinations across Lake Minnetonka. With the rise of the automobile, the

Minnehaha was one of several boats dismantled and sunk in the deep waters of the lake.

More than sixty years later, with the memory of the streetcar boats fading, a local diver discovered the scuttled remains of the *Minnehaha* north of Big Island. The

discovery started a fifteen year journey to restore the *Minnehaha*. The effort required a legion of passionate volunteers and a variety of tradesmen.

The volunteers of the Museum of Lake Minnetonka will take us inside their restoration effort with help from some key volunteers who worked hard to get each of its critical components just right.

Monday August 10 | 7 pm

Big Island Park

with Paul Maravelas

Steamboat *Minnehaha*

\$20 ELMHS members / \$35 non-members

Purchase tickets at: elmhs.eventbrite.com

Board at Bayside Grille at 6:45 pm

687 Excelsior Blvd. in Excelsior

As a tool to increase weekend ridership on its streetcars and streetcar boats, the Twin City Rapid Transit Company purchased 65 acres on Lake Minnetonka's Big Island and built a grand amusement park destination. In August 1906, with construction still underway, the ambitious but short history of Big Island Amusement Park began.



Before its closing and abandonment five years later, the park accommodated 10,000 guests on its busiest weekends. It featured picnic grounds, electric lights, a movie theater, a 1,500 seat music casino, a tall light beacon, and Mission style structures designed by Leroy Buffington. It may have been the only amusement park in the country requiring a ferry ride, and it offered one odd and unique amusement feature, the Trip to Yellowstone.

Historian Paul Maravelas has spent much of his life fascinated by Big Island and its history, the subject of his forthcoming book. While cruising along the island's shores, Paul will share his reflections on the quick rise and fall of this interesting landmark.



Above: The tower on Big Island built for the amusement park in 1907. The park operated only for a few years; this photo shows the tower when the park had closed.

Left: This staff dormitory from Big Island Park stood until the 1980s.

Annual member meeting

Thursday, June 25 | 6 pm

The Commons Workplace in downtown
Excelsior

540 Lake St. Excelsior

(in the lower level of the Post Office)

Come and celebrate the year's challenges and accomplishments, review the Society's finances, and elect the next board of directors. We'll start with a half hour of appetizers and socializing and enjoy highlights from a rarely seen episode of TV's "Route 66," shot in Excelsior and featuring the Commons and Excelsior Amusement Park in 1963.



Speaker

Seated
audience

Bar



Our Tapping History programs are popular affairs

More people are attending our Tapping History programs than ever, and we thank all who've helped make these events a success, especially Bri DePauw and Dan Johnson, our program people. We're aware that these events are crowded, and we've added more chairs and more aisles among the seating. We anticipate great interest in our May tornado program, so we've scheduled that event in a larger venue.

We'll continue our work to improve the experience. Please bear with us as we try new ideas. We're fond of the Excelsior brewery and enjoy superb support from them, and we feel it's the best fit for us at present.

– Paul Maravelas, ELMHS President



THE TORNADOES of May 6, 1965, devastated parts of the Lake Minnetonka area, as seen in these views from the collection of the Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society. We'll commemorate the 50th anniversary of this event on May 11 at the Cast & Cru Restaurant at the Old Log Theatre; details are on page 2. We're interested in stories, photos, and artifacts relating to the tornadoes; learn how you can participate on page 2.

MEMBERSHIP

Members shape the Society's policies and programs, and support our work in preserving the area's history.

Annual member benefits include:

- Members-only special events
- Discounts on certain events
- Newsletter and Society mailings
- Voting privileges

Membership Levels

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$15 Senior | <input type="checkbox"/> \$250 Gold |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$25 Individual | <input type="checkbox"/> \$500 Platinum |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$50 Bronze | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 Silver | |

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Mail to ELMHS, Box 305, Excelsior Minn. 55331. Make checks payable to ELMHS.

This membership is a gift for:

Name _____

Address _____

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Email _____

The recipient of your gift membership will receive a hand-written card acknowledging your gift. You will also receive an acknowledgement.

Museum will open June 6

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

2015 hours: Tuesdays 2 to 6, and Saturdays 10 to 3.

Opening day for our museum will be Saturday, June 6. We are changing our weekday hours to correspond with those of the Excelsior Farmer's Market and the Excelsior Streetcar, which will both be operating on Tuesdays this year.

The museum is located at 305 Water Street in Excelsior. It features, among other things, artifacts from the Excelsior Amusement Park, artifacts from some of Lake Minnetonka's steamboats, and the legendary 1893 sailboat *Onawa*.

We invite you to volunteer to help staff the museum. It's pleasant duty, and we guarantee you will meet interesting people from the area. Contact Kathy Endres: endreska@yahoo.com 612 419 7296.

The University's old apples

The University of Minnesota's Horticultural Research Center is about to release a new apple variety, and has asked the University community to vote on its name. There are nineteen names under consideration, including Starstruck, Hurrah, Sparkler, and Cool Burst. The University's first apple breeding project began in 1878 at Tonka Bay with Peter Gideon at its head, and continued there until 1889. The breeding moved briefly to St. Paul, and then to its present location near the Arboretum in 1907. Professors from the U often took the streetcar from the St. Paul campus to Excelsior or Tonka Bay, where they were met by automobile or truck and chauffeured to the station. Of the many apple varieties introduced by University breeders, five have names from the Excelsior area: Minnewashta, Manitou, Tonka, Deephaven, and Zumbra.

Thanks to our members and contributors

Platinum Level

Joseph Schwartz

Silver Level

Cheryl Ahlcrona & Carl Floren
Rick & Joan Ahmann
Scott & Joey Dake
Dodie DuToit
Katharine & Orville Fisher
Craig & Maureen Shaver
Gretchen Wahlstedt

Bronze Level

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Scott Carpenter
Cindy Gables
Betsy & Charlie Jones
Bill & Steph Naegele
Bruce & Jodi Noll
Dean & Rebecca Salita
Roger & Jane Stein
The Wetzel family

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Sue Brakke
Conley Brooks
Tom Burton
Tim & Bev Decker
Kelly & Loretta Dunn
Juli Englander
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Kirsten Halloran
Lyle & Mary Hathaway
Pamela Honzl
Miki Huntington
Bryce Johnson
Patrick Johnson
Richard J. Knapp
Rebecca Lembrich
John & Charlotte Lundquist
Kimberly Macey

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John Jones
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Margaret Kaufhold
Tom & Carol Knowlton
Paul Maravelas & Joni Scheffel
Alice & John Reimann
Nick & Kathy Ruehl
Tom Skramstadt

The Society acknowledges the receipt of two anonymous gifts, and a matching gift from the General Mills Foundation.

This list of members and contributors covers the period August 1, 2014 to February 28, 2015.

Stop whining: Minnetonka flooding was worse in 1882

The level of Lake Minnetonka was high in 2014, and many docks and areas around the shore flooded. On June 5 the Lake Minnetonka Conservation District mandated that all boats on Minnetonka be operated at closed throttle to reduce wakes and protect the shoreline. The mandate was retracted on August 4.

The water level reached a



high of 930.58 feet above sea level on June 1, a few days before the mandate was imposed. It continued to rise until June 23, when it reached 931.11 feet.

Some organizations called this “a historical high.” But water level records on Minnetonka, which began in 1881, show that the highest recorded level was actually reached in 1882, when the lake rose to 932.66 feet.

Board of Directors of the Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society
Paul Maravelas, president; Lisa Stevens, vice president; Joe Schwartz, secretary; Betty Peck, treasurer; directors: Bri DePauw, Kay Derner, Ben Duininck, Kathy Endres, Drue Gisvold, Patrick Hanson, Jerry Holl, Cate Honzl, Molly Loomis, Tad Shaw, Amy Vasina.

Excelsior Minn.
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