

WINTER 2015-16  
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 a large collection of historical artifacts and documents.

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](http://www.elmhs.org)

**E L M H S**  
P.O. Box 305  
Excelsior, Minn. 55331  
952 221 4766  
[info@elmhs.org](mailto:info@elmhs.org)

# The Harborage

## More public hours for archives

The archives will open the second Saturday of each month

Beginning January 9, the Society's archives will open the second Saturday of every month from 10:00 a.m. to 1 p.m.

In addition to our new Saturday hours, we'll continue to open the archives every Wednesday, but with a slight change: we'll open and close a little later, from 10 a.m. until 1 p.m. We'll continue to open at other times by appointment.

The Society's archives contain thousands of historic photographs, diaries, and documents. We maintain a library of books on local history, and files on south Lake Minnetonka people, properties, businesses, and topics. We have an extensive map collection, and a complete collection of microfilmed Excelsior newspapers.

Archives volunteers assist people from around the world – in person and online – doing genealogical research, house histories, school and college papers, newspaper and magazine articles, and other historical research.

Can you help? The Society is looking for long-term volunteers to take shifts on Saturdays and/or



The archives are housed in the Excelsior Public School Building in Excelsior.

Wednesdays. Training will be provided. The ideal volunteer will enjoy conducting research and working with the public, have a basic knowledge of south lake history, and be comfortable using computers and copiers. It is hoped that, in time, we will be able to attract enough volunteers to open the archives to the public *every* Saturday.

For more information, please contact the Society, or visit the archives in the lower level of the old Excelsior Public School building, 261 School Avenue.

# Tapping History programs

Monday, January 11 | 7:30 pm \*  
Excelsior Brewing Company

## Streetcars and Steamboats: the Twin City Rapid Transit Co. at Lake Minnetonka

with Aaron Isaacs

**A**S OUR EXPANDING light rail network continues to gain momentum, we are reminded of an earlier time when public transit was commonplace throughout the region. Tourists and day-trippers to the Lake Minnetonka area relied on an interconnected web of privately operated trains, trolleys and steamboats between 1905 and 1932.

Central to the effort was real estate magnate Thomas Lowry and his Twin City Rapid Transit Company, which connected the metro with a network of streetcars and steamboats. The transportation system soon became the envy of other cities. Big Island Park was one ambitious but short-lived venture of the TCRT, intended to increase ridership at times of low volume.

Historian Aaron Isaacs of the Minnesota Streetcar Museum worked for Metro Transit for 33 years and co-authored the book *Twin Cities by Trolley*.

\* Note this program's special time, 7:30 p.m.

Monday, February 8 | 7:00 pm  
Excelsior Brewing Company

## Historic Maps of Minnetonka

with Paul Maravelas

**M**APS OF LAKE Minnetonka, cherished by collectors and historians alike, are a fundamental tool in understanding how the lake has changed over time.

Early maps show changing topography and varying water levels. They show how the land was divided for settlement, where pioneers established ownership, investors built hotels, and where summer residents built cottages. They show names for features that reflect the people and events of the past.

Historian Paul Maravelas will share images of the historically significant maps of Lake Minnetonka, and discuss what they tell us about the lake's geography at the time they were produced. He'll explore maps made over the past century and a half, beginning with Joseph Nicollet's map of 1843, which shows a body of water in the approximate position of Lake Minnetonka in a period when the lake wasn't generally known to whites.

Monday, March 14 | 7:00 pm  
Excelsior Brewing Company

### The Excelsior Proprietor

with Darel and LaVerna Leipold

FOR MORE THAN 150 years, Water Street comprised the primary commercial district of the south Lake Minnetonka area. While many physical storefronts remain, the characters that operated the businesses within these buildings are often forgotten. These proprietors ran groceries, drug stores, hardware stores, inns, cafes, and the occasional speakeasy. They were small businesses; some succeeded, some failed, and some just got by. Collectively, they built and sustained a town.

As a follow-up to their November 2014 Tapping History presentation on Water Street, long-time merchants Darel and LaVerna Leipold will take a closer look at the historical characters whose establishments constituted Water Street. In telling the stories of The Excelsior Proprietor, they will share images from their extensive private collection.

Our Tapping History programs are informal monthly presentations on area history, held at the  
Excelsior Brewing Company  
421 Third Street  
Excelsior

Monday, April 11 | 7:00 pm  
Excelsior Brewing Company

### Minnesota Rock & Roll in the Dance Hall Days

with Rick Shefchik & Daniel Gabriel

“IF YOU WERE a teenager during the 1960s, you didn’t have to wait for a rare all-ages show to catch your local faves. In those days, rock ‘n’ roll was still considered such an adolescent obsession that bars rarely booked it at all. Instead, the bands in town played a revolving circuit of neighborhood dance halls.”

So writes Daniel Gabriel in his 1994 *Mpls.St.Paul Magazine* article, “Dance Hall Days.” Excelsior’s Danceland was the premier metro dance hall, the pinnacle venue for a growing roster of local bands including The Trashmen, The Underbeats, The Castaways, and Gregory Dee and the Avanties – to name a few.

Join us for a night on Minnesota Rock and Roll in the 1960s. Rick Shefchik is author of *Everybody’s Heard About the Bird: the True Story of 1960s Rock N Roll in Minnesota*. Daniel Gabriel has written extensively on the Dance Hall scene. He spent much of his youth in Excelsior and has completed a yet-unpublished novel inspired by the town. They will recall a time when music was regional, when local dance halls catapulted Twin City bands to a national stage, and when Excelsior was among the region’s most important venues for new music.

Tapping History programs are free and open to the public.

## Thanks to our Booseum fundraiser volunteers

The Society's Booseum in October is our major fundraising event, and like everything we do, it relies on a generous group of volunteers. We enjoyed another fruitful Booseum this year, thanks to the following awesome people:

Kim and Dan Cooney, Sharon Hartung, Carrie Nicklow, Anna Nicklow, Emme Brooks, Cindy Larson, Bill Brands, Erik Maas, Sue Hocker, Charty Oliver, Alyssa Super & The Super Crew, Pierre LeMere, family and friends, Margaret Allenburg, Teresa Ciacco, Lynn Carlson, Connie Clair, Cindy Scanlon, Joy Meyer, Paul and Carol Prenevost, Mark Endres, Tim and Laura Shallbeter, Mari Braatz, Nina Kvalsten, Todd Bender, Tim Decker, Jim and Karen Kertzman, Jeff Anderson, Tim Crain, Tom Dulebohn, Richard Holz, Elaine Love, Dave McCollum, Ron Neitzel, Gary Phleger, Bill Preiss, Cliff Thomas, Mystic 5 Band, Gary's Car Care, Cub Foods Minnetonka.



Mike and Robert Szmanda of MRJ Security.

## Museum security system

MRJ Security of Minneapolis installed a fire and intrusion alarm system in the Society's museum in November. The project was funded with a grant from the Minnesota Historical and Cultural Heritage Grants program, administered by the Minnesota Historical Society.

---

## Acquisitions of compelling interest received in 2015

---

*A selection of the items donated by community members from January 1 to December 1*

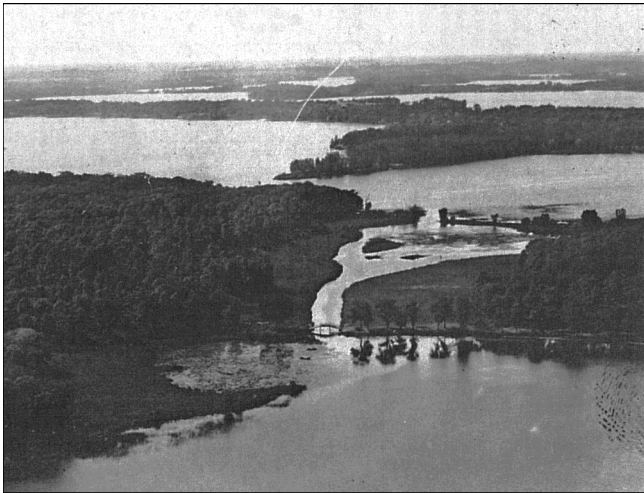
Ice pick marked "Compliments of Morse Brothers," from the family of Dr. Al Schroeder. Photograph of the 1918 Pageant held in Excelsior Commons, from Jean Lyman Meuwissen. Photograph of streetcar tracks being removed from Water Street, Excelsior, 1942, from Nina Stark. 1913 *Hennepin County Atlas*, and 1956 Mark Hurd aerial photos, from Mark Kelly. David D. Tenney's 1896 Lake

Minnetonka sailing album, from Susan Tenney. Artifacts, documents and photographs from various Excelsior establishments, and 1854 plat of Excelsior, from John Sweeney. Chair from Danceland, Excelsior, from Elizabeth Glaccum. Photograph of 1965 Casco Point tornado damage, from Leone Akins McGlone. Various Excelsior assessor's documents and photographs, from Rolf Erickson.

# When was the Big Island Channel created?

A brief history of a popular boating amenity on Lake Minnetonka, dredged some time around 1900

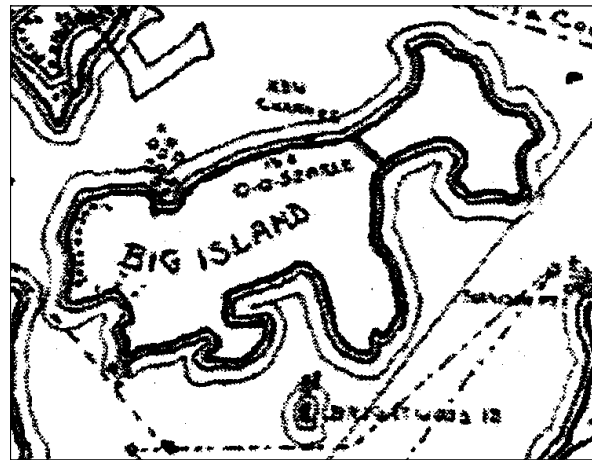
No surviving source describes the creation of the channel which transects Big Island. Olaf and Dagmar Searle, well-known figures in Lake Minnetonka history, began dredging west of



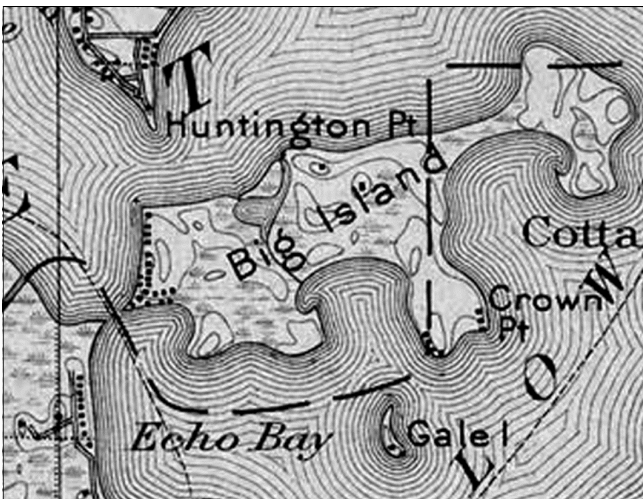
1920 aerial photograph of the Big Island Channel, taken by Preston Haglin, Sr. The channel was deepened and straightened in the late 1950s.

their Big Island home in 1893, in order to open “a tiny lake on the island itself” to the main lake. This work probably created Mahpiyata Island on the north end of the channel.

The channel itself was created a little later by the Searles, apparently as a landscape feature. At two of the channel’s three openings, ornate footbridges were built, one of which can be seen in the photo at left. The channel was shallow, and the Searle family considered the whole waterway private.



1893 map of Big Island, showing the channel – not yet a reality – east of its actual position.



1905 U.S. Geological Survey map. This is the first map to show the actual channel.

The channel first appears on a map in 1893, when it was being planned, above. It appears as an actual feature in 1905 on the map shown at left. Because written sources are silent on the digging of the channel, this is a study which must rely primarily on the information contained in maps.

“Historic Maps of Minnetonka” will be the subject of our Tapping History program on February 8, described 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**

- \$15 Senior
- \$25 Individual
- \$50 Bronze
- \$100 Silver
- \$250 Gold
- \$500 Platinum

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 \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

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

**Membership makes a nice gift**

Looking for a meaningful & unique holiday gift? Why not give the gift of an Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society membership so that your friends and family can enjoy our newsletters, programs, and special events with you, all year long! When you buy a gift membership, the recipient will receive a hand-written note to acknowledge your gift, along with a full year of membership in the Society. To purchase your gift, contact Membership Chair Molly Loomis:

[molly@elmhs.org](mailto:molly@elmhs.org)

Happy Holidays!



The iceboat *Reindeer* on Lake Minnetonka, with the Solberg bridge between Excelsior and St. Alban’s Bays in the background. The *Reindeer* came to Minnetonka in about 1889. Iceboating was not for the faint of heart: Ward Burton’s *Zero* was clocked at 105 miles per hour. This is one of thousands of historical photographs in the collection of the Society.

# Thanks to our members for their support

*New and Renewed Members, and Contributors*

*June 1 to December 1, 2015*

## MEMBERSHIPS

### Platinum Level

Dane Doescher

Joseph Schwartz

### Gold Level

Laura Berghoff

### Silver Level

Elizabeth Becker

Jennifer & Tim Caron

Peter J. Hartwich

Dan & Brittney Johnson

Steve & Judy Krause

C. Duffy Larsen-Abramson

Paul Maravelas & Joni Scheftel

Doug Schmidt

John Strandell

Greg Sweet

### Bronze Level

Jeff Bailey

Rolf & Jean Erickson

Douglas McDougal

Debra & Brent McNamee

Dr. Edmund A. Post & Linda Wishart Post

Susan Queen

Alice & John Reimann

John Rudberg

Roger & Jane Stein

Jim Stiller

Justine Supple

### Individual Level

Dan Austin

Lori Cherland-McCune

Erika Craparo

Tarah Cummings

Brianna DePauw

Kathy & Mark Endres

Bruce Hedblom

Cate Honzl

Dr. Douglas & Martha Jolstad

James Moffet

Dr. George R. Noren

John Purdy

Julie Rodriguez

Pam Ryan

Philip Schneider

Roger Smith

Tim Soboleski

Jill Sotirin

Janet Sullivan & Gary Reins

Susan Tenney

Liz Vandam

### Senior/Student Level

Mary A. Ashley

Dawn Bjornstad

Diane & Gordy Bowers

Carol Carmichiel

Francis "Butch" Colby

Jane Cox

John & Carole Cranbrook

Sandy Curtis

Roger W. Cuthbertson

Marybeth & Bill Darusmont

Kay & Bob Derner

Elaine Dunn

Patrick Dupont

Drue Gisvold

Dave Hebson

Kathy Johnson

Gibson Kallstrom

Bruce & Judy K. Kobs

Kathryn Kucera

Jim LaHaye

Janice Leafer

Dennis & Diana Marhula

Ernest Olson

Linda Putnam

Allan M. Schneider

Katherine Severson

Will & Kathleen Skadsberg

Margaret Smith

Nina Stark

Nancy Steege

Lee Webster

## MATCHING GIFTS

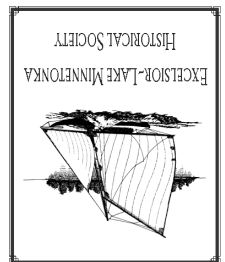
General Mills Foundation

# Electric light almost encircles lake

“The Northern Power Co. of Excelsior has extended lines to the south and east, and to Wayzata and the Upper Lake, including the Longyear place.”

“Electric Light Almost Encircles Lake,” *Minnetonka Record*, September 11, 1914, p. 1.

Board of Directors of the Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society: Bri DeKathy Endres, president; Lisa Stevens, vice president; Joe Schwartz, treasurer; secretary: Erika Craparo, Kay Demer, Jerry Holl, Cate Honzl, Francesca Landon, Beckie Lembrich, Molly Loomis, Paul Maravelas, Betty Peck, Tad Shaw, Jacob Westman, Gibson Kallstrom, student representative.



PO Box 305  
Excelsior Minn.  
55331