

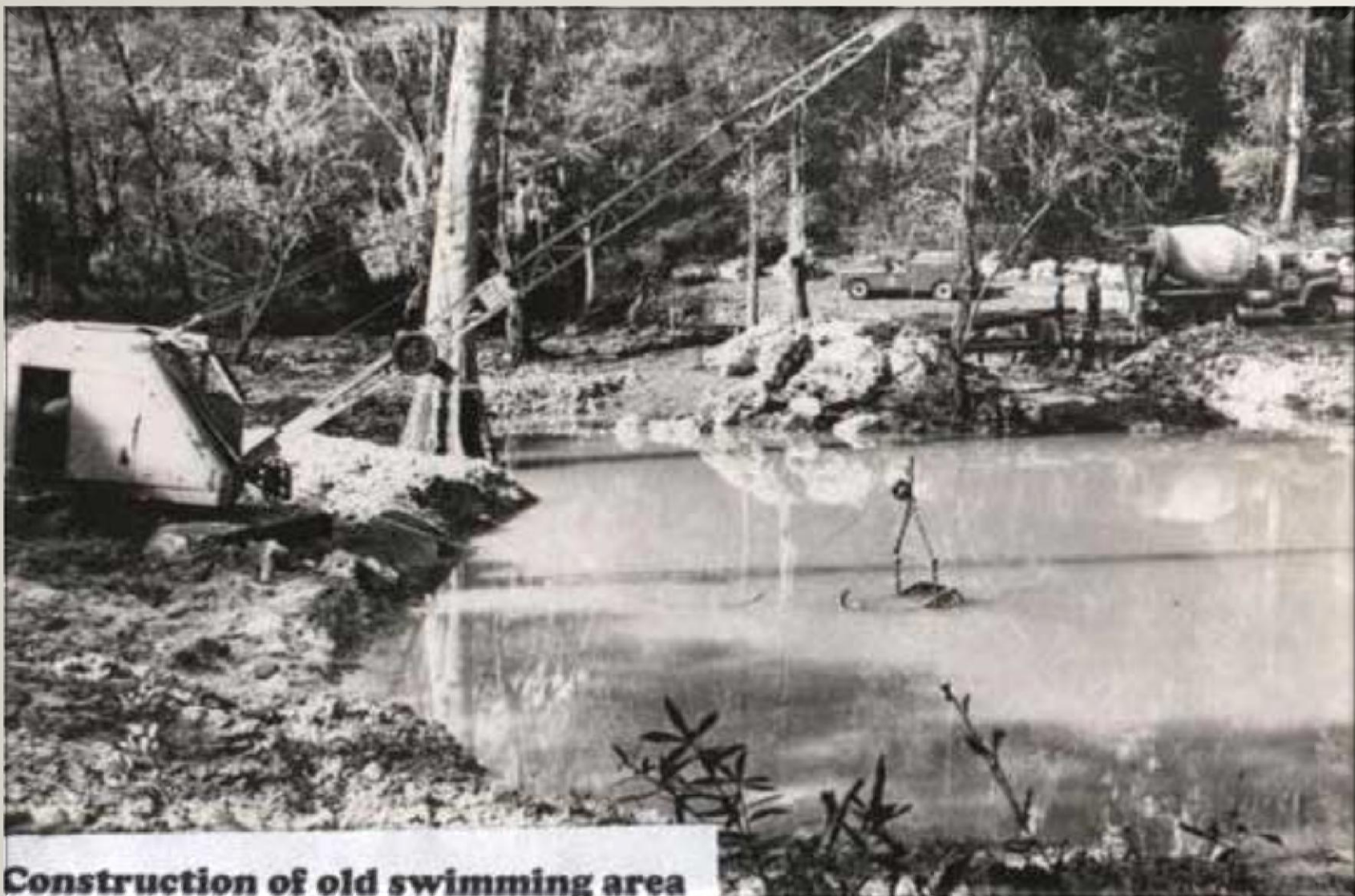
# Delran Historical Society

## The History of Lake Lonnie

July 19, 2011

By Karen and Josh Ruza





**Karl Scott began digging the lake in approximately 1945. He had help from a few of the local Polish – Lithuanian residents in the Cambridge Section of town.**

Karl Scott had learned about building a spring fed lake property from his Aunt Virginia, the original owner of Virginia Lake. More recently it has been known as Olympia Lakes and The Willingboro Nature Preserve, and is now in the process of transitioning to the Burlington County Parks System.

It took approximately 3 years to dig the lake using various forms of equipment. He had put up barbed wire all around the property, during construction to deter unwanted visitors. During this period, Lover's Lane was located at the end of Fifth Street so people knew work was going on.

**In addition to excavation of the 9 acre spring fed lake, Mr. Scott also built a 30' X 120' open air pavilion, a concession stand, two bath houses with restroom facilities and a ticket booth accessed from Leon Avenue.**

**After returning home from service in World War II, Karl's cousin Mr. James Jordan took on the job of building 4000 linear feet of 6' high chain link fence around the entire property, after installing posts every ten feet.**

**Karl had made a purchase from the U.S. Navy of hundreds of 200 pound shipping ballasts made of Belgian block, formerly used to balance ships for their travels back across the ocean. He carefully laid them making a bulkhead at the top of the beach to deter erosion from the grounds above.**



Undated View (1953-1976?)



In approximately 1953, Karl Scott opened the lake property, calling it “Lake Lonnie”. He had decided to name it after his wife Yolanda Bontivoglio, whose family owned Camden Iron and Metal in Camden. Karl called her “Lonnie”.

First of course he hired a series of lifeguards, who’d obtained their Red Cross Lifesaving Certifications.





**On the weekdays when less guests were present, the lifeguards were also responsible for the upkeep of the property.**





**The ticket booth has seen better days, but can still be found in the woods off of Leon Avenue.**



**As many as 15,000 guests would arrive over the course of any one season during the time period that Karl Scott ran the lake property from 1953-1968. Some current neighborhood residents will tell how the cars would be lined up for blocks and blocks all the way down to the railroad tracks, waiting to enter Lake Lonnie.**



**Visitors were directed to park in the grass and sand lots, where the wooded areas and the meadow currently lie.**







**Many visitors enjoyed the lake, picnic and playground areas, telling their friends what a bargain it was. Large groups frequently came from the Tacony and Fishtown areas of Philadelphia to get away from the heat of the city.**

**Lake Lonnie was open from Memorial Day through Labor Day each year. Friends and families enjoyed catching up with each other there.**





**- 1966 -**

**Delran residents Susan, Tony & Mike Melchiore really enjoyed spending their days at Lake Lonnie.**

**They had fun swimming, playing on the beach and finding a rare species of tiny toads nearby.**





**Air conditioning wasn't widely available in the early years.  
Lake Lonnie was well known as a great place to cool off.**

# Tartan lets you Tan never burn!

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It was a nice  
place to catch a  
tan too.



The beach  
was raked  
weekly to  
maintain a  
safe and  
comfortable  
walking  
surface.





There were six  
manned lifeguard  
stands and three  
diving boards at  
the lake.

Kids really  
enjoyed showing  
off their skills,  
and secretly  
planned to be a  
lifeguard one day.



The 10' X 30' float held 4 ladders to provide lots of opportunity to dive and splash.





**The joys of  
Lake Lonnie  
in the  
Summertime !**



The beach was just a great place to relax !







Lifeguards take  
breaks too !



**The open air pavilion was a great place to get out of the sun for a little while, to cool off.**



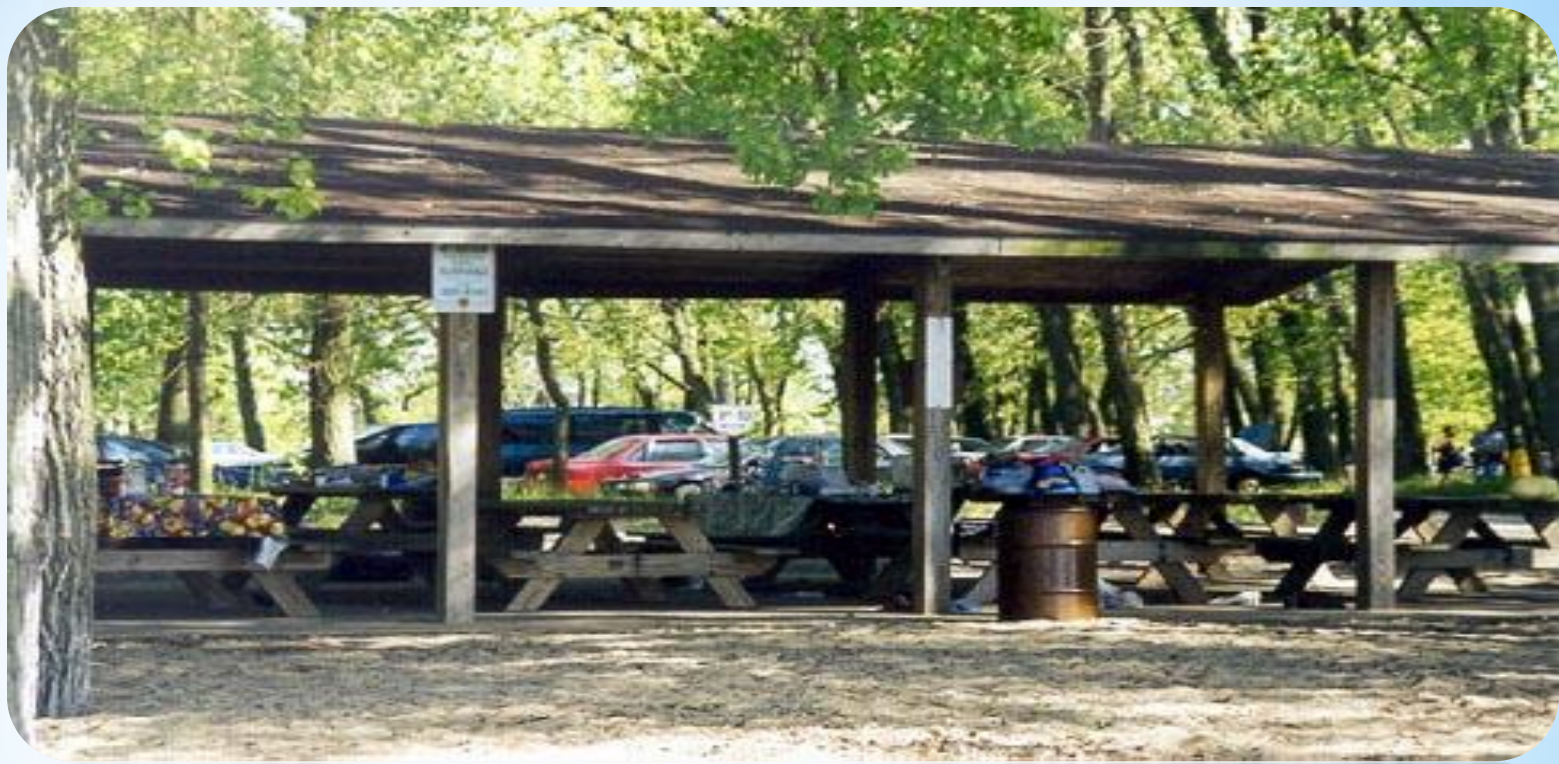
**Teenagers enjoyed meeting each other at Lake Lonnie from all of the surrounding towns. It was one of four swimming lakes in the area, but many considered it a best kept secret.**





**The concession stand was a great place to recharge.  
You could get a Coke and a smile there too.**





**There was a sound system for music and special announcements. Four hundred picnic tables were laid out across the property, and ample trash cans were available for refuse.**





**Park benches can still be found around the upper edges of the beach in some locations, usually in front of the Belgian block which is still in remarkably good shape.**





**It was a nice place for a birthday party, in days gone by.**

Families enjoyed  
picnicking together.  
There were eight  
charcoal grills and a  
barbeque pit  
available for use.





There was a climber and a sliding board to use for the next hour after you ate lunch, because you knew your parents weren't going to let you swim then.





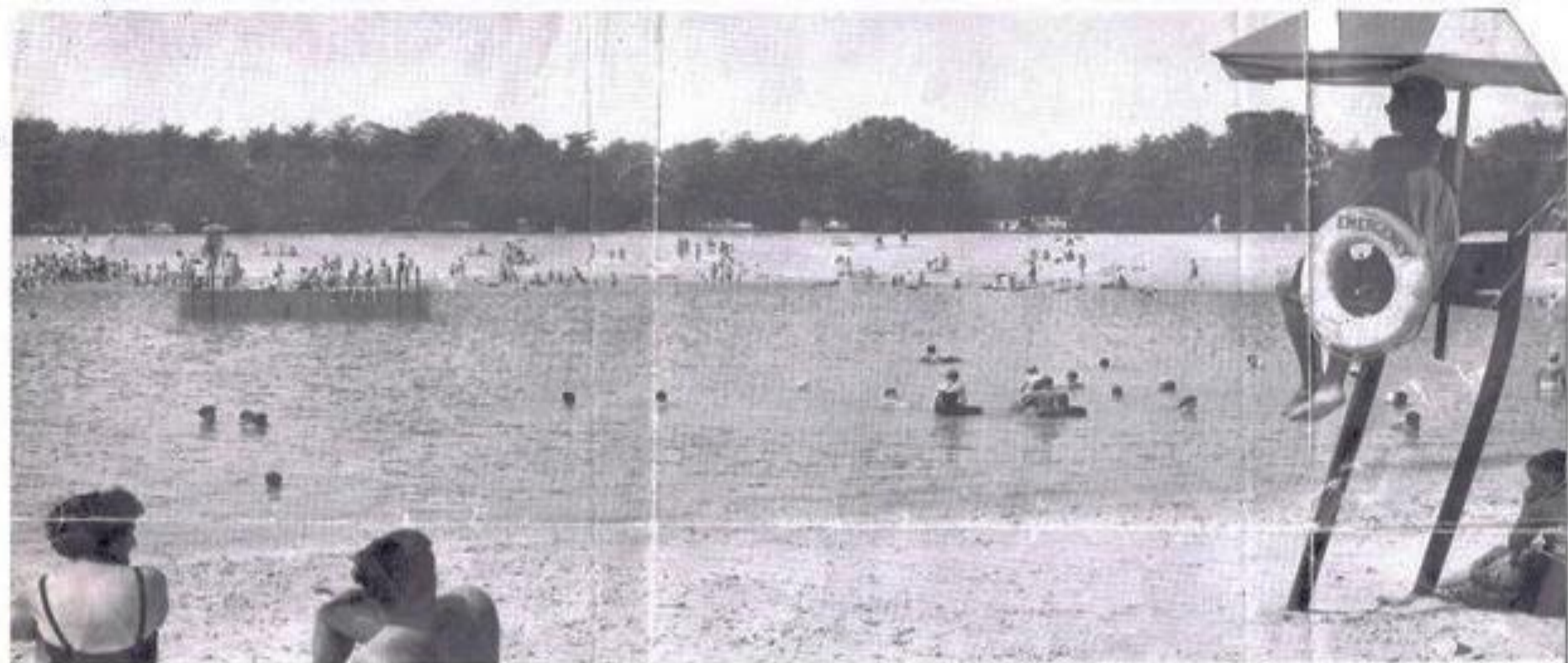
Nine swing sets were in place as well.



**As time went on it became harder and harder to find adult or college age life-guards who would stay throughout the entire season as they promised they would when they were hired. Over time it became necessary to hire younger staff members.**







### COMPLETELY EQUIPPED — READY TO OPERATE

COMPLETE WITH FULLY EQUIPPED REFRESHMENT STAND •  
 2 BATH HOUSE BUILDINGS • 35' x 120' STEEL FRAME  
 PICNIC PAVILLION • APPROX. 500 PICNIC TABLES •  
 10' x 30' FLOAT WITH 3 DIVING BOARDS AND 4 LADDERS •  
 6 LIFEGUARD STATIONS WITH UMBRELLAS • ALL NECESSARY  
 SIGNS • MAINTENANCE STORAGE AREA • SOUND SYSTEM  
 • WATER, SEWER, GAS AND ELECTRIC ADJACENT TO  
 PROPERTY • FENCED ON 3 SIDES • 2,230' ST. FRONTAGE.

Lake Lonnie is favored by thousands of New Jersey and  
 Pennsylvania families because of its ease of access, parking  
 for more than 1,500 cars and its healthy and attractive





In or around 1967, Karl Scott saw that the number of visitors had begun to decrease, from the 5000 or so people that he had come over the course of one weekend, in its heyday. There was a lot of advertising being marketed for the NJ Shore. Also, air conditioners were becoming more popular.

Mr. Scott became interested in building a 400 acre marina in Maryland. The Lake Lonnie property was eventually sold to his cousin, Jim Jordan in 1968.

Mr. Jordan was a builder who had plans to sub-divide the property.

**After Mr. Jordan had sub-divided twelve lots, he began building ten homes on Leon Avenue and two homes on Fifth Street. He was unable to be at the lake continuously, but was nearby if a problem arose. This is the home now, that was then the Jordan's home at the corner of the two streets.**



**Lake Lonnie was an entire family operation for the Jordan family. Mrs. Jordan was the cashier at the ticket booth and their 3 daughters all helped out. They have fond recollections and say that they really enjoyed running the lake property. Mr. Jordan stressed though that it was a 365 day project to keep the park well cared for, not just the 11 weekends that many people believed. Insurance also was carried year round.**

**After their Red Cross certifications, Mr. Jordan would test each of the lifeguards in May to confirm that they could swim to the bottom of the icy cold 13 feet of water and fetch a rock. He also hired a foreman to oversee the lifeguards , and to make sure the property was kept up to par. Mr. Jordan still made sure that the water was tested for contaminants, he made sure that the supplies were available for the concession stand, that the beach was raked and any rocks and debris were removed weekly. The float, lifeboats and surfboards needed maintenance as well.**



**In the beginning, season tickets would cost only \$20 for adults,  
and just \$5 for kids 12-18 !  
If you were younger than 12, it was free.**

**As the cost of liability insurance, lawyers and accountant fees rose,  
the lake's seasonal rate rose to \$40 over time.**

**Now and then there would be a problem with  
teens breaking into the concession stand after  
hours, who would steal the ice cream, candy,  
hamburgers and hotdogs. Each year the family  
added another lock to the stand.**

**They used a hand signaling system to contact the police if trouble arose. The Jordans both laughed about one time in the 1970s when Mrs. Jordan alerted her husband to look out on the float. Eight men had taken their clothes off and were out there dancing and prancing.**

**Mr. Jordan used his hand signal to alert his wife to call for backup, and he warned the men to get their suits back on or that it probably would cost them \$200 a piece if the law caught up with them first. Seven of them found their suits, but kept the eighth one's hidden. After some convincing from the police they finally gave it up, and they were all escorted out of town.**



**In the early 1970s, Delran Township officials approved of plans for The NJ American Water Company to drill a water pumping station on Leon Avenue 500 feet from the spring fed lake. Gradually, only 9 feet of water was available in Lake Lonnie.**



**By the end of August that year, the float was pulled from the water and 2 feet of sand was scraped out of the water below the entire lake. This was a normal part of maintaining the lake and was done every few years. However, no matter what steps were taken to improve the water flow and bring the sand back up on the beach, the water level never increased.**

**It became unsafe to allow anyone to jump from the diving boards, which were removed. This caused the visitor numbers to drop considerably as word got around.**

**With competition from the other swimming lakes, the many area residents having added swimming pools in their yards and now this, Mr. Jordan began applying for his 2<sup>nd</sup> round of home building on his property wishing to add 55 more homes. His plan was to build the homes surrounding the lake, with those closest to the lake being most valuable.**





**After a four year court fight with Jim Jordan, the Lake Lonnie property was acquired by Delran Township in 1976, via the Green Acres Land Acquisition and Recreation Opportunities Act, robbing Mr. Jordan of his dream.**

**At the time, Delran Township Mayor Lorraine Schmierer played a large part in obtaining the property through a Green Acres Grant. It was a part of the land being acquired on both sides of the Swedes Run Stream running across from the Willow Brook Country Club on Bridgeboro Road in Moorestown, all the way to the railroad tracks along St. Mihiel Drive.**

PROPOSED ACQUISITION MAP  
OPEN SPACES  
DELRAN TOWNSHIP  
BURLINGTON COUNTY  
NEW JERSEY

**Revised October 24, 1973**

← Railroad Tracks

Swedes Lake →  
a.k.a. "The Race"

Lake Lonnie →

Route 130 →

← Bridgeboro Road

← Willow Brook Country Club





**As a part of the National Park Service and through the Flood Hazard Area Control Act, Delran was empowered to control development within flood hazard areas to reduce flood damage along Swedes Run Stream.**

**This sign is posted beside the old gate on Leon Avenue.**





**When Delran Township took ownership of Lake Lonnie, many of the picnic tables were sold to the Polish American Citizens Club on Main Street in Delran by Jim Jordan. It is believed that they are still there today.**



**In 1980, Delran hosted the  
Township's Centennial Celebration.  
A parade featuring the Broomall String Band began at  
Haines Mill Road and Conrow Road, crossed  
Route 130 onto Chester Avenue and then  
proceeded to the Lake Lonnie property.**

**There were disco skaters, belly dancing, and the  
Dixieland Jazz Band was there as part of  
"The Delran Centennial Music Festival".  
A family style picnic on the shores of Lake Lonnie was  
held with what was billed as "the world's largest  
meatball sandwich". There were also softball games  
and water sports. Fireworks were shot off  
from behind the pavilion.  
Admission was free.**

**What many Delran Township residents never knew is that Janice Kerrigan who was in charge of coordinating the Centennial Celebration, had invited each of the U.S. Presidential Nominees. She got an acceptance from Former President Gerald R. Ford who was to arrive with her at Lake Lonnie via a Hot Air Balloon.**

**Many Secret Service agents had been to town to prepare for his safe passage. Shortly before the celebration though, she was notified by President Ford himself that he had to express his regrets and to decline. It turned out that this was when he had made a decision to allow Ronald Reagan to take the lead in the Republican Race to regain the White House from Jimmy Carter, and he no longer felt that it was appropriate to attend.**





PHOTO BY JIM MACINTYRE

## Centennial Celebration

Delran Mayor Lorraine Schmierer and her niece, Heather Van Sciver, 3, dress in 19th Century garb for yesterday's reenactment of the first township meeting held on March 11, 1880. The celebration was part of the township's Centennial Celebration.

Many Delran residents attended the celebrations, and had a great time. Most of the plans were announced beforehand in *The Trenton Evening Times*, *The Burlington County Times* and in *The Little Paper*.







**These concrete tables were added prior to the Centennial Celebration, and were made with a mold, on loan from another township. The accompanying benches did not survive over the years.**

**Back in the Summers of 1980-1981, Mr. Jeffrey Hatcher, our current Township Administrator was employed by the township as a lifeguard and supervisor for the Lake Lonnie property. “They had attempted to keep it open since it was kind of a resort,” he said.**

**He explained  
that the property was just  
about ready to be closed down then.  
Since many Delran residents had added  
backyard pools or they knew someone who had,  
most did not return to spend time at the lake  
anymore. The cost of Delran’s Public  
Works Crew that was needed to  
maintain the lake and to take  
care of the large volume of trash  
was more than the township figured on  
during the acquisition, and it did not seem appropriate  
to keep it open. They were having a lot of  
trouble trying to keep the spring areas clear.  
Reportedly, nine out of every ten  
vehicles arriving at the lake were  
from North East  
Philadelphia.**



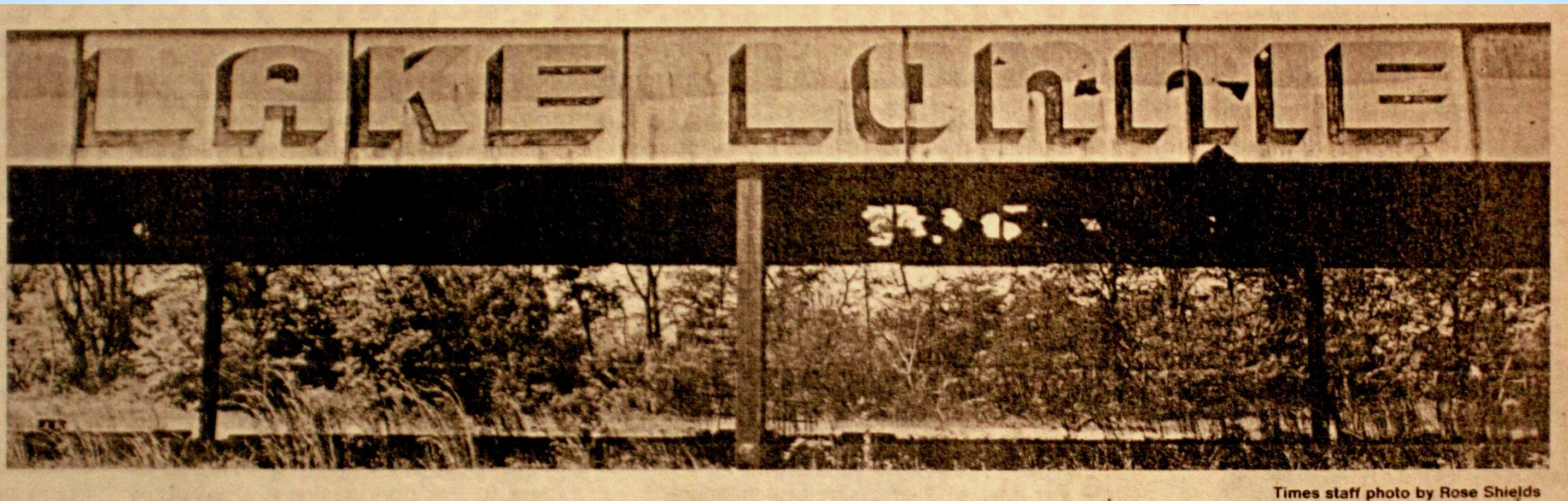
**The Township closed the property to swimming in 1985, calling it a casualty of the drought the previous Summer.**

**Eventually the playground equipment was unearthed, and the pavilion was torn down and later sold for scrap in the late 1990s.**





Per a *Burlington Counter Times* news article by Kevin G. Keane from May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1986 which is titled **“future of Delran’s big, white elephant up in the air”**, the number of visitors was down to 10,000 for the season in 1983 – the last year statistics were kept. Mr. Keane called the former 30 acre recreational lake “a large suburban mud hole.”



Times staff photo by Rose Shields

**Closed in 1985, Delran’s Lake Lonnie now is “not much more than a sinkhole,” according to one township resident.**



More of the old playground equipment  
burial grounds, found today





**This sign is posted at the head of a hiking trail at the end of Howard Street. If only everyone would carry out what they carry in, or find one of the trash cans by the bath house for trash, the park would be a nicer place to visit these days.**

**Unfortunately, the park land is no longer cared for by Delran Township employees as it once was.**







**Telephone and electric poles can still be found in the wooded areas,  
but have been disconnected for many years now.**



**Wind storms and time have taken their toll on a lot of them.**







**Although very tough to see, this is the foundation of the old concession stand, rest rooms and bath house. The building burned down in approximately 1984-1985.**



Old hydrant pipes can be found here and there in the woods, where drinking fountains once cooled the park visitors.







**Can you believe it ? This is a baseball field backstop found in the woods, in which many, many trees have attempted to overtake.**



**During a hike along the trails, you might be able to locate this base to one of the old charcoal grills.**







**Here is the beach today, which has become overtaken by marsh grasses.**





**The seat has become covered with sand on one of the park benches as you depart from the lake. Please don't forget that back in the day, almost none of the trees on the property existed either.**



**The winter of 2010 was devastating to the property.**







**Only the deer knew the way through this fence opening !**





**The Delran Township Public Works Department came in to cut the fallen trees down in the front area and to bring down those that had become hung up in the tree canopy. There was no man power or budget available however to cut up the trees, but they did find a way to make it as safe as possible under the conditions.**



**With all of the hazards, it was not a good idea for the local Boy Scout Troop to camp under those trees.**





**The boys weren't going to let that stop them,  
so they set up their winter camping trip  
at the top edge of the beach.**





**As Spring arrived, so did plans for two Eagle Scout projects at the Lake Lonnie property. One project included painting the bath house, building 2 picnic tables and benches, and 4 bat houses. Also arrangements were made to have the adults cut up the trees that had been brought down by the Public Works Department, with many of the smaller branches and shards put through a wood chipper.**



**A 2<sup>nd</sup> project was planned that Summer to trim the overgrown branches which had a tendency to scratch you while walking along the trails.**







Also, adult volunteers were again requested to cut up the fallen trees along the trails in the rear and on the sides of the property.



Many hours were put in by volunteers,  
who dug up and removed an old  
appliance that was somehow dumped  
there years before.







**Various other debris was removed, along with 10 bags of trash found in the woods and along the trails. The Public Works Department was very thankful for all of the help cleaning up the park, and came to retrieve it for proper disposal.**





**As an extra touch, one of the Eagle Scout projects included the donation of 2 large and sorely needed trash cans which were labeled as well.**



**Visitors are beginning to notice that the park has had some recent care.**

**They say that they now find that it's a great place to walk your dog.**







**Summer is a nice time of the year to camp at Lake Lonnie too.**









As a part of a Cross-Over Ceremony, the boys found a way to add a true cross over into the program.





Preparations for the upcoming ceremony





You never know who you might come across.





There are a number of geocaching booties to be tracked, and traded with, between the Lake Lonnie and the Swedes Lake properties.





Swedes Run Stream is located along the trails to the southern end of the lake.



**An old culvert can be found at the end of Fifth Street, which is rumored to have been known as the “Bridge to the Second Wood.” You can still see a couple pilings if you look hard, but the bridge no longer exists. It would have led to Taylors Lane, crossing Swedes Run Stream.**







Some pretty weeds found along the stream



Most areas, you just wouldn't want to cross.







**Although the Jordans were very proud that there were never any fish or turtles there when it was a swimming lake, Lake Lonnie is reportedly now a nice place to fish. There are also many toads and some turtles too.**



Ducks tend to favor Swedes Lake, but can be found at Lake Lonnie as well in the Spring.





Only one swing set remains.





A photograph of a picnic area in a forest. Two wooden picnic tables are visible, one on the left and one on the right. The ground is covered with grass and fallen leaves. Many trees are in the background, creating a dense forest. The text "A nice day for a picnic at the old Lake Lonnie property" is overlaid on the bottom left of the image.

**A nice day for a picnic at the old  
Lake Lonnie property**





**Remember, you never know who you might meet there.**



During a recent visit in June of 2011, a new sandbox was found by the swing set area. What a nice surprise !





**Mr. Anthony Ogozalek, Sr. has played a large part in the history of Lake Lonnie. He originally helped Karl Scott, his mentor, as a laborer before the property was opened and later he became a lifeguard there for 3 years. He was one of the 1<sup>st</sup> Delran Township Police Officers who came out when the Jordans had a problem. Here, he is accepting the two trash cans and two signs donated to Delran Township through one of the Eagle Scout projects. He was a Delran Township Committeeman at the time.**





It was really fun to take part in this historical research project, and to learn of all of the happenings that have taken place at the Lake Lonnie property over the years.

It is our hope, and that of most of those people whom we have met along the way that at some point in the future the Lake Lonnie property can begin again to get more attention from the Delran Township Officials. To find a more functional use for the community.

NJ state regulations mandate that areas purchased with Green Acres monies must remain open space.

Over the course of our interviews we were told that when the property was being acquired, maybe soccer and / or baseball fields would be considered there but were never put into place. With the current shortage of AA fields in our town these days, we wonder if these ideas will be reconsidered.



We wish to gratefully thank the following people for their help in gathering the historical information we have compiled:

**Interviews: Mr. Jeffrey Hatcher**

**Mr. James and Mrs. Lillian Jordan**

**Mr. Anthony Ogozalek, Sr.**

**Mrs. Lorraine Schmierer**

**Articles, Pictures and Other Helpful**

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**Mrs. Elaine McCabe**

**Mr. Mal Anderson**

**Mr. Brian Burridge**

**Ms. Susan Syty**

by Karen L. Ruza and by  
Joshua T. Ruza of  
The Delran Historical Society