

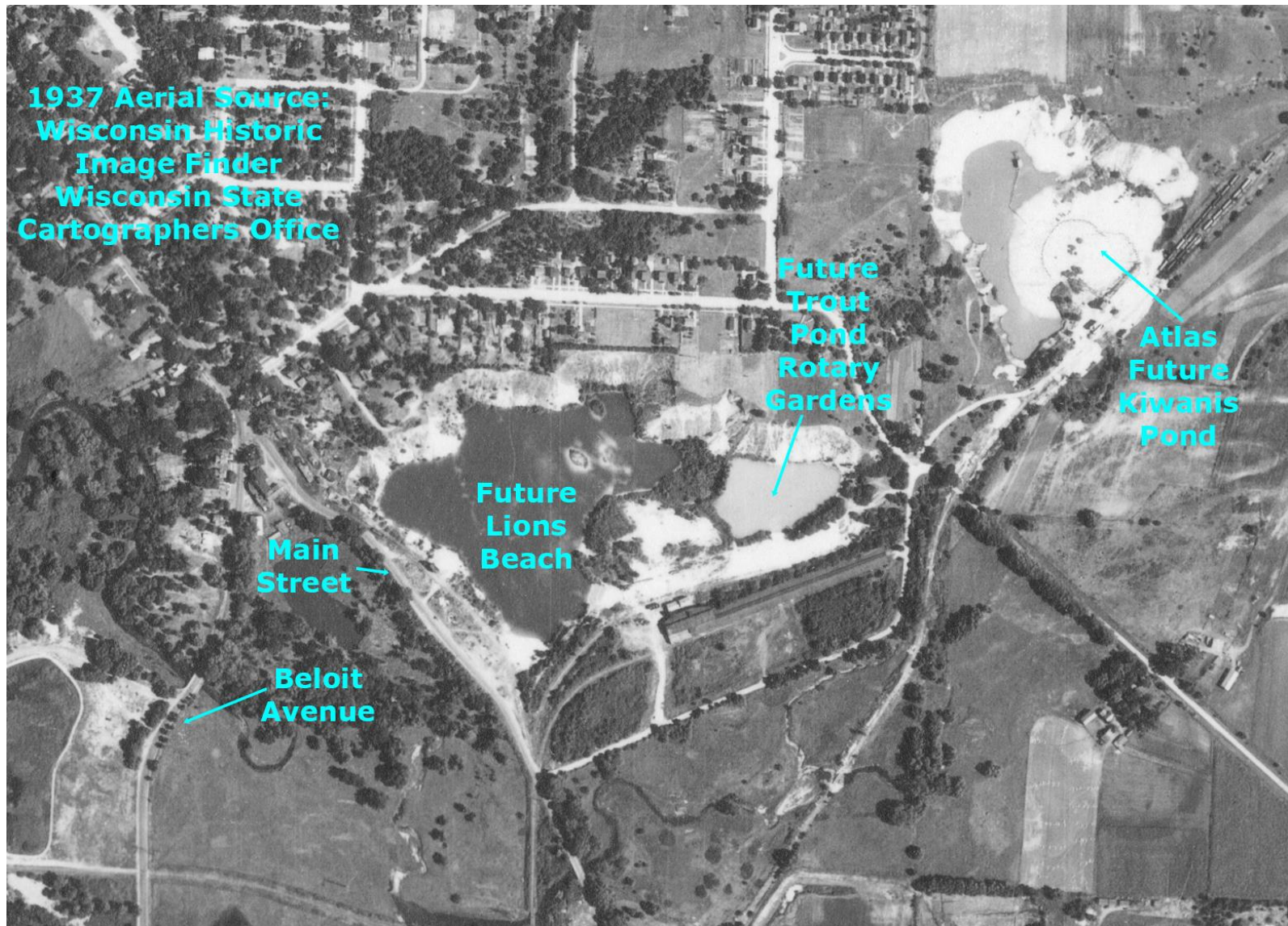
Early History

Lions Beach • Trout Pond • Kiwanis Pond

December 12, 2023 • Ted H. Schaar



Shore of what would become Lions Beach. A building and equipment appear to be in the image though it's hard to be certain. Bushes and trees are visible along the water.



In 1937, when this aerial was taken, Main Street continued past the abandoned and flooded sand and gravel pits that later were converted to Lions Beach and the Trout Pond (Rotary Gardens). At upper right, Atlas Sand and Gravel, incorporated three years earlier,¹ was a going concern.

¹ *Janesville Daily Gazette* April 6, 1934 page 2.

FUEL ADDED TO SAND AND GRAVEL BUSINESS

In addition to its sand and gravel business, the Howard Sand, Coal & Gravel company entered the coal business in November, 1921. The company was formerly the Federal Sand & Gravel company. Its plant, thoroughly equipped for the extraction, sifting and grading of sand and gravel, is at the foot of South Main street. Business for the last year was fair, the company says.

Janesville Daily Gazette
January 14, 1922 page 22

Names of businesses that operated the pits that became
Lions Beach and the Trout Pond (Rotary Gardens).

New Swimming Beach Assured

Acquisition of the sand pit on South Main street on which are located two bodies of natural water has been completed by the Lions club, it was announced today. A proposition whereby the property may be obtained by the city will be presented to the council Monday night.

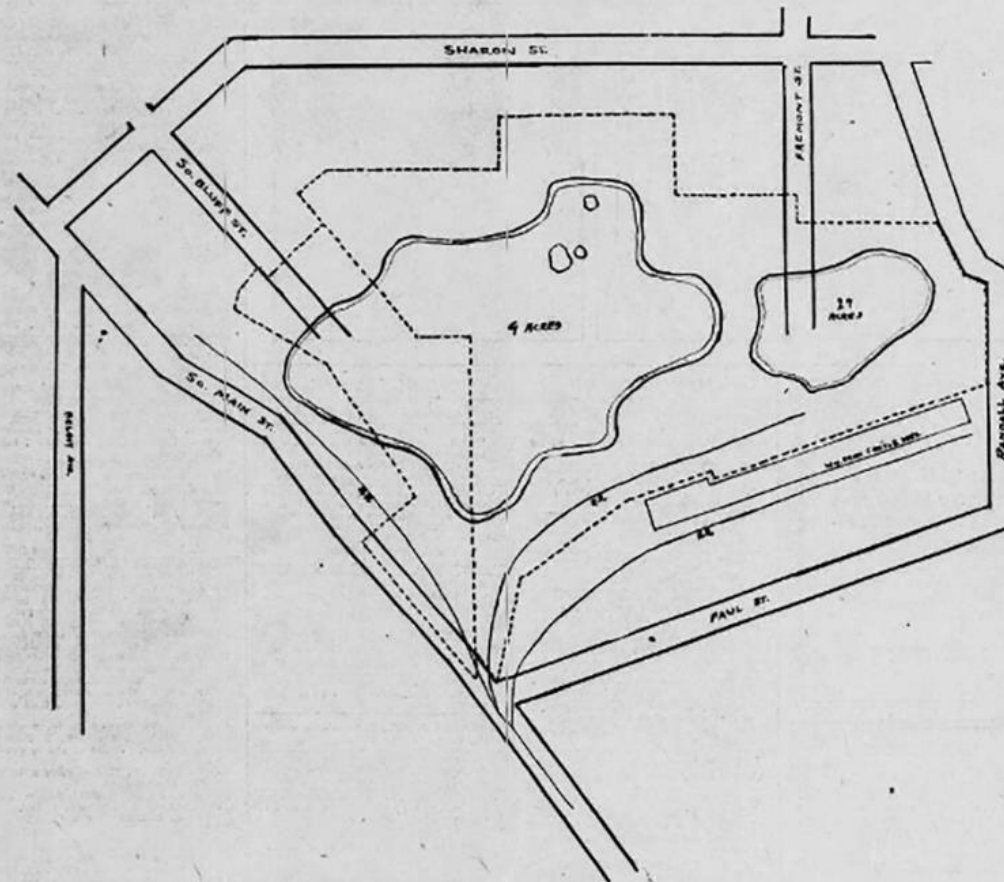
The property was purchased by the Lions club from the Moulding-Brownell corporation of Chicago, which formerly operated a sand pit there, and Councilman Frank M. Britt.

The property contains two ponds, one of 9 acres and the other 1.7 acres. By joining the two a lake of 10 acres may be established. The two ponds are fed by springs and drain by seepage.

The Lions club purchased the land for \$2,000, which has already been paid and the deeds are now in the name of the club. It is planned to sell the land to the city for \$1,500 with the only provision that the name of the Lions club be used in the name of the new park or in the swimming beach. The club plans to aid in the development of the area.

With Goose Island swimming beach in the northwest section of the city, the new property with its lakes and fine beach, will offer a fine swimming place for residents in the southeast section of the city. It already is a popular place for swimmers though not yet officially recognized as a beach. No life guards are assigned there.

Map Shows Site of Property Offered by Lions Club for New Beach



The above diagram shows the proposed swimming beach and park purchased by the Lions club for \$2,000 and offered to the city for \$1,500.

The plot contains two natural spring lakes, one of nine acres and the other of one and seven tenths acres, both created by the removal of many tons of gravel. The area inclosed in dotted lines is that purchased by the club. That on the left was purchased from F. M. Britt; the larger area on the right was obtained from the Moulding Brownell company of Chicago. Mr. Britt has retained the frontage on South Main street extending back 120 feet, including a portion of the larger lake.

Three railroad tracks enter the area, only one of which crosses the beach grounds proper. One services the Britt coal yard, the second the Wisconsin Dairy Cattle Market and the third goes into the sand pit. The latter tracks will be removed. Entrances to the area, however, will not cross tracks.

If the city purchases the property it is planned to join the two bodies of water and to construct a bathing beach approximately 500 feet long. Sand will be sluiced in to the pond to provide shallow water for beginning swimmers and those not too proficient while expert swimmers may enjoy the deeper water. Buoys would be placed marking the beginning of deep water.

Janesville Daily Gazette
July 17, 1937 page 16

See next page for an easier-to-read version of the text.

The above diagram shows the proposed swimming beach and park purchased by the Lions club for \$2,000 and offered to the city for \$1,500.

The plot contains two natural spring ~~fed~~ lakes, one of nine acres and the other of one and seven tenths acres, both created by the removal of many tons of gravel. The area inclosed in dotted lines is that purchased by the club. That on the left was purchased from F. M. Britt; the larger area on the right was obtained from the Moulding Brownell company of Chicago. Mr. Britt has retained frontage on South Main street extending back 120 feet, including a portion of the larger lake.

Three railroad tracks enter the area, only one of which crosses the beach grounds proper. One services the Britt coal yard, the second the Wisconsin Dairy Cattle Market and the third goes into the sand pit. The latter tracks will be removed. Entrances to the area, however, will not cross tracks.

If the city purchases the property it is planned to join the two bodies of water and to construct a bathing beach approximately 500 feet long. Sand will be sluiced into the pond to provide shallow water for beginning swimmers and those not too proficient while expert swimmers may enjoy the deeper water. Buoys would be placed marking the beginning of deep water.

Janesville Daily Gazette
July 17, 1937 page 16

Janesville's New \$88,000 Bathhouse Offers Deluxe Quarters for Bathers

Janesville Daily Gazette
August 19, 1950 page 18

(Picture on page 14)

By PERRY O'BRIEN

Designed to provide deluxe quarters for Janesville bathers for many years to come and to be the center of the city's new Blackhawk park, the new Lions beach bathhouse will be open Sunday afternoon for public inspection. It will not be used as a bathhouse this season however. Tours will be conducted from 2 to 5 p. m. Sunday by beach attendants, according to Pat Dawson, city recreation director.

The beautiful Lannon stone building was designed by City Engineer Joseph Lustig with a view to reducing the maintenance costs based on his many years of experience with public buildings. Although it is designed primarily as a bathhouse, there are facilities included to make it a suitable central building for the park which is planned for that area of the city. Eventually there will be tennis courts, ball diamonds and other recreational facilities in Blackhawk park.

The bathhouse has been under construction since last fall when E. E. Kjørnes, Janesville builder, was awarded the general contract for about \$88,000. It was to be ready for the 1950 bathing season but due to delays in shipments of materials the job was prolonged through the summer, with the final touches put on Thursday. The building will not be completely furnished until next spring when it will be opened for public use.

Entrance On Paul Street

Fronting on Paul street, the building is entered from what will be a service drive connected to parking areas in front of and to the east of the structure. The lobby, a 14 by 42 foot room, is finished in red tile flooring, plaster and salt glazed tile walls.

Doorways lead down two corridors around the checking rooms and there are service, dressing, first aid and life guard rooms off the corridors.

The east side of the building is for boys. There are rest rooms for bathers, for the general public and in the dressing rooms. Similar facilities are provided on the girls' side of the building. The rest rooms for the general public are entered from outside the building. Bathers enter from the beach.

In the boys' dressing room, there are dressing stalls around the entire wall plus an open area in the center of the room. There are 10 showers in one corner, sinks and drinking water near the entrance. There will be a bathing suit wringer in the center of the room near the entrance. The girls' dressing room wing has the same appointments plus a powder room.

Center Open For Sunlight

The dressing rooms offer sheltered stalls but the center section of the roof is open to allow natural sunshine sanitation. Public officials say steam and other moisture in such rooms are better dissipated by sun rays. This open area will be closed during the winter months.

The large center section of the building is enclosed by wire screening and counters and will accommodate the clothes checking service. Baskets will be reconditioned and moved from the present bathhouse but there will also be wardrobe hangers with special pockets for shoes and other items.

There are rooms in the building for the caretaker, his supplies, for the water heating system and electrical controls.

Life guards will have special dressing rooms overlooking the pool and first aid facilities will be installed in these rooms, one for boys and another for girls.

Glazed Tile Finish

The salt glazed tile is used extensively throughout the interior of the building and in the dressing rooms. Officials state that defacing is practically impossible on this tile and any writing which might be put on it can be imme-

diately washed off without harm to the finish.

A special mixture was used in preparing the concrete for the flooring of the building. All floors in the corridors, dressing rooms and walks around the exterior of the building are "slip-proof." The mixture used is said to prevent the slipping of wet feet even if the floor is covered with water.

The building is completely wired for electricity and for a public address system reaching every room and out over the large beach area.

A special touch has been given to the exterior of the building on the beach side where there are drinking fountains for boys and for girls. Tablets done by a noted stone sculptor have been built into the exterior walls at these places to add beauty to the building.

Landscaping Comes Later

Only rough grading of the grounds has been completed at this time but black dirt will be hauled in this fall to provide a base for landscaping the front section and just before the next bathing season the new, and greatly enlarged, beach—will be covered with an 18-inch dressing of velvety sand. The entire beach area will be rounded out this fall when the old bathhouse is razed and when completed it will be more than three times larger than the beach which has been in use for the past 12 years.

Future plans call for improving the section of the beach along S. Main street but for the present there will be a beach area 450 feet in length and about 200 feet in depth. The island will be beautified and fitted out as a picnic area and the bank across the water from the bathhouse will be planted to evergreen trees, according to engineering department plans.

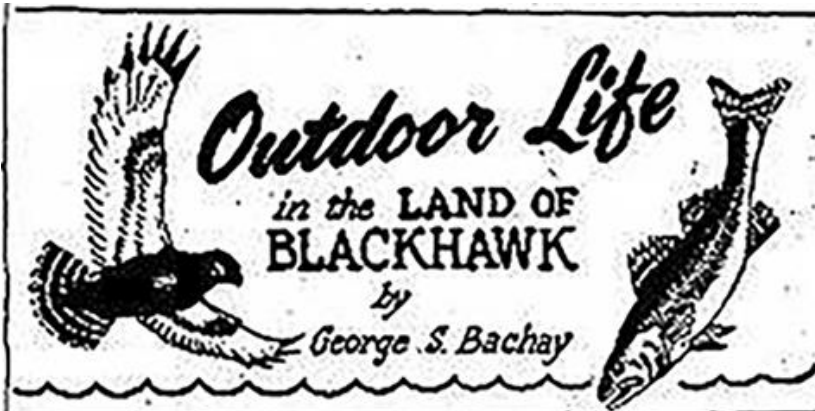
Before it is opened for public use next summer, the entire beach area will be enclosed by a cyclone fence so the only entrance to the swimming area will be through the new building.

Public to Tour New Bathhouse



This picturesque scene is a bather's-eye view of Janesville's new bathhouse at Lions beach in Blackhawk park. The beautiful Lannon stone and natural wood building, offering deluxe quarters for bathers, will be open for public inspection Sunday afternoon but will not be equipped for use until the 1931 swimming season. Members of the beach staff under the leadership of Recreation Director Pat Dawson will conduct the tours from 2 to 5 p. m. The bathhouse overlooks a greatly enlarged and improved beach and will be the only entrance to the water when the area is enclosed by high fences. Parking areas will be provided in front of the building.

—Gazette Staff photos.



There is good news for those who like to catch trout. In addition to Cronin Creek, Janesville anglers now have a new place to fish for trout. Trout fishing now is available in the two sand pits north of Cronin Creek known as Lions Beach. More than 1,000 rainbow trout were planted there recently. Some of the rainbows are 15 inches long.

"More trout will be planted, providing our game warden turns in a favorable report," Bob Blumreich, Janesville, told us. "Vandals have destroyed signs put up by the Janesville Conservation Club," Blumreich said. "Twice we put up signs to inform anglers that trout fishing does not open until April 30, but each time they were destroyed, and violations continue."

The two ponds cover about eight acres and have a maximum depth of 18 feet. The ditch running between the two pits is seven feet deep. The smaller pond is spring fed, providing clean, clear water to the larger pond. Lions Beach pond contains bluegills, perch and black bass, plus the 1,000 rainbow trout recently planted.



Black Bass and Bluegill

production, a pond provides water storage for irrigation, and fire protection for buildings, just to mention a few. With proper management, a pond can provide cover and shelter for game birds and animals, songbirds and furbearing animals.

To provide fishing, a pond must be stocked with the proper numbers and kinds of fish if maximum production is desired. In a fertilized pond, 1,000 bluegill fingerlings and 100 black bass fingerlings per surface acre is a good mixture. Crappies can be substituted for black bass, and bullhead in place of bluegills. The ratio then should be 25 crappies and 25 bullheads per surface acre. The bluegill-bass combination will produce 200 to 300 pounds of fish per acre each year.

Mixtures containing crappies and bullheads may produce more pounds per acre for a few years but the pond is likely to become overstocked so that yields of mature fish will be greatly reduced in a few years.

By operating under a licensed fish hatchery, a farmer can make as much or more money from a fish pond as he can from a crop of potatoes. At the same time he can make many a boy happy.

"We believe a successful trout pond such as Lions Beach will relieve much fishing pressure from Cronin Creek," Blumreich said. "But first we have to do something about the stunted fish in the pond to provide better fishing for the public. Incidentally, the conservation club will resume additional stream improvement work on Cronin Creek beginning this week."

Lions Beach pond has produced some big bass, according to Maynard Peck, Janesville. "I've caught many large bass there," Peck said. "One of the largest was a 7½-pounder."

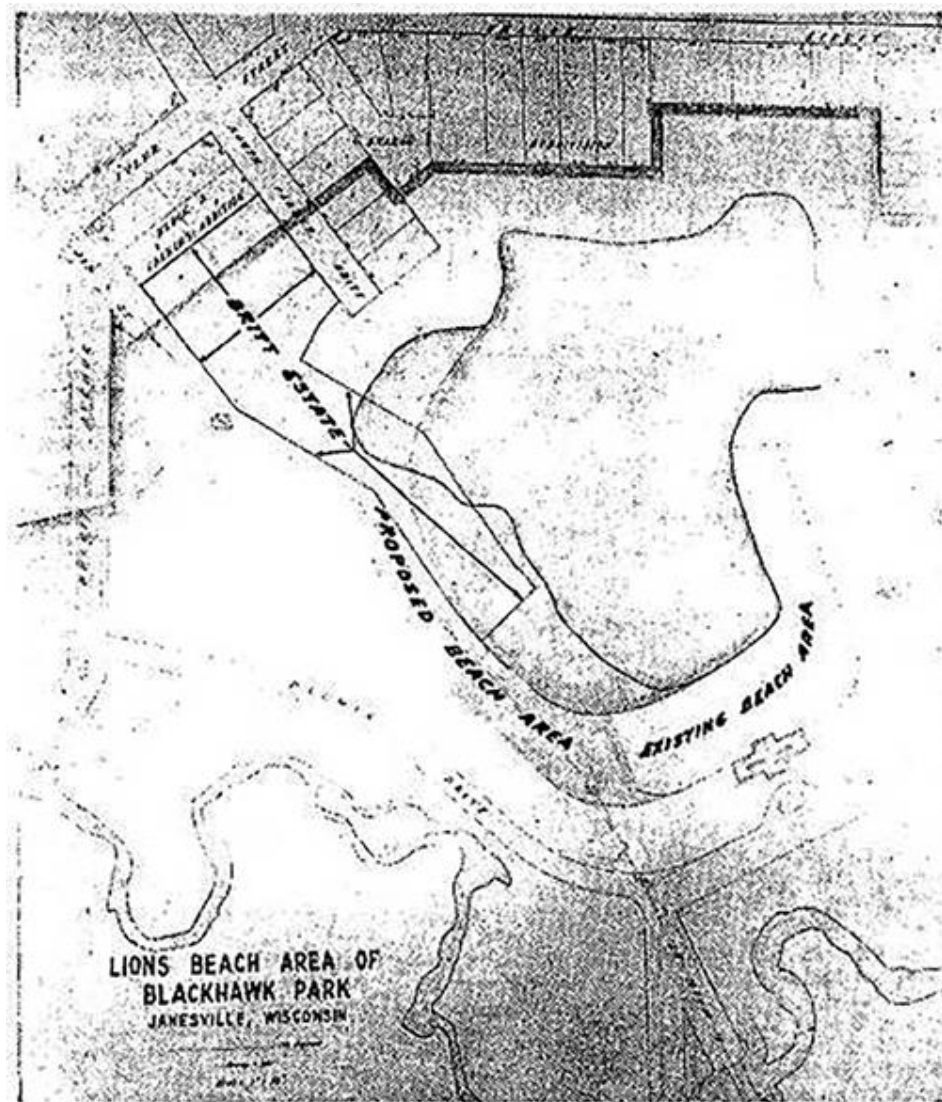
Bill Allen, Janesville, said there are a lot of big bass and bluegills in those ponds. "I've caught many 12-inch bluegills in the sand pit. Years ago, Lions Beach pond was known as Atlas gravel pit."

In Rock County there are 78 lakes. Of these seven are named lakes and 71 are unnamed. Most of these smaller lakes or ponds do not contain fish, but fish could be planted in most of them. A natural pond on a farm is a valuable asset. In addition to fish

Janesville Daily Gazette
April 21, 1955 page 8



Image: Hedberg Public Library



PROPOSED LIONS BEACH EXPANSION—A drawing by the Janesville city engineer's office shows proposed layout for the expansion of Lions Beach. The greatly enlarged bathing and beach area will be made possible by purchase of nearly four acres of land from the Britt estate. The wavy line in the water area shows the present shoreline. That would be extended back about 150 feet to the easterly edge of the present roadway that leads from S. Main Street. Under the new arrangement, traffic would be routed into the beach area by way of Beloit Avenue.

Visiting Lions Beach for the first time with my dad and brother is among my fond, early 1950s memories. Everything about the place was impressive to a five-year-old: water, sand, piers, and the unusual open-air dressing room.

We lived about a mile away on Putnam Avenue and while a single-digit boy, I was allowed to walk to the beach with friends. Along with many others, I learned how to swim there, and every year would line up to buy an elastic wrist band that secured free admittance for the summer. We had a great time not only at the beach but getting there and back. Along the way we discovered an abandoned train trestle across Spring Brook and found a deep pool west of its south end. Had a lot of fun diving off the ties into the clear water.

Also visited the Trout Pond regularly and was usually present for the annual opening day of the season which occurred on a Saturday in early May at the stroke of midnight. Underage drinking and rowdiness increased over the years until 1965 when the *Gazette* reported a "virtual riot" occurred.² I was there. It was crazy.

Later we discovered Atlas Pond, began fishing it, and caught many bluegills. At the time, some excavation equipment was still present.

Decades later living in Brookfield 75 miles to the east I wrote an article³ about a defunct sand and gravel pit in the middle of a residential area two miles from our house. Operations ceased when digging reached the water table and the cost of pumping water out was greater than the value of the sand and gravel. With excavation halted in the early 1970s, water filled the excavated cavity and formed a lake. Trees and brush grew on the surrounding mounds and soon the lake was impossible to see from nearby homes and roads. After a while, it was called Hidden Lake. The experience made me wonder about the repurposed pits I visited growing up in Janesville, so I researched Lions Beach and Atlas Sand & Gravel but didn't find much more than what appears on pages one through 11.

* * *

² Janesville Daily Gazette May 8, 1965 page 1.

³ <https://tswrites.com/brookfieldshiddenlake.html>