

It's hard to picture Forest Lake without homes along its banks, but that's just the way it was around 1935 when Harold and Ruth Blackwell came out from Chicago for the first time. The couple found themselves in Illinois and while camping in Long Grove, they discovered the newly offered plots of land for sale in an area named Forest Lake.

It was appropriately named by its dedicator, Mr. Hilding N. Johnson because it is truly surrounded by a forest of stately oak and hickory trees. Located in Ela Township northeast of Lake Zurich.

Arthur T. McIntoch and Co., developers, offered the lots. Except for the McIntosh place at the gate and a real estate shack on Ravine, it was all vacant land.

The Blackwells explored the 30-foot ravine near the lake and bought two lots there. They bought two more later and then another two.

Theirs was one of the first houses at the ravine end of the lake and it was a year-round one from the beginning. The first summer they lived in a tent-while a garage was built, which they occupied for a year and a half.

They moved into the basement of the house and had to live there six years before able to complete the rest because World War II had started. The first floor was ready for occupancy about 25 years ago (Sept 23, 1971 paper). They put a flat roof on their basement and lived there while searching for some good wood that would not rot in the northern Illinois weather extremes. Blackwell was working with the railroad at the time and searched out some fine, southern kiln-dried lumber in Tennessee. This he had shipped, freight free, to Lake Zurich where a truck brought it to Forest Lake. The Blackwells built their warm home out of the good Tennessee timber. They did a lot of the rough work themselves and an apartment was added upstairs for income.

By now, many other people were becoming interested in the Forest Lake area. More than a few of these new settlers were buying lots on which to build summer homes. There was, however, no county agent near enough for these weekly workers to obtain building permits. Blackwell recognized this need and made a trip to Waukegan, where he was appointed temporary agent.

Now the red tape was cut, and Forest Lake began growing like a weed. Homes began centralizing

around the lake. Forest Lake is an unincorporated man-made lake which was formed by damming up a lowland which was then owned on the north by the Skinner family and on the west by the Blums. The Schwirmer family did the work on the damming project.

The Ray Littfins and Blackwells were the only families in Forest Lake with school-age children the first year. The youngsters went to the one-room school across from St. Matthew, which was a long walk, because there were no busses.

When the children were past the primary grades, Leroy Volling "bussed" them via car until Lake Zurich schools added bus service.

It doesn't seem possible, but the Forest Lake area didn't have electricity until about 1938 and no telephone until late 1939. This was a system of eight-party lines, and Ruth Blackwell said you could listen in to hear all the neighborhood news. Lake Zurich's population was only 350 at that time.

As the community began to develop, there soon came the need for control of lake use and the necessary organization of a community group. In 1935, the Forest Lake Community Assn. was formed with five

members presided over by Harold Blackwell, who was the first president and served till 1937.

At a cost of \$25 to each family, Lake Zurich provided fire protection which consisted of a truck with a large tank. This limited water supply soon was supplemented by the community pipe to pump water directly from Forest Lake.

The new settlers of Forest Lake found themselves with Prairie View addresses. The mail was then routed through the Half Day area.

The years of 1937 and 1938 found Forest Lakers sleigh riding hay wagons for entertainment.

Although there were wells at Forest Lake (two-one at each end) the water was "rusty", according to the Blackwells. Because of this problem, all drinking water was hauled from Lake Zurich - the fire department or the filling station. In 1945 the Blackwells put in their own well and still ^{were} furnish ^{ing} 13 families with water. The Blackwells' water came from a 253-foot-deep well that reached the Nicaraguen rock formation which extended from Minnesota to Southern Indiana and back into New York State. This formation provides cool, unpolluted

water to many of the current residents of the area.

To get fire protection, they and other Forest Lakers paid \$3 per to be served by the Lake Zurich Fire Department. If you didn't belong, you had to pay \$25 per call. The department occasionally had test runs to make sure the hoses were long enough. Hoses were hard to get in those days.

The only businesses ever in the community were a grocery store owned by Am and Dean called Forest Lake Foods and a tavern on Lakeside Drive called Forest Lake Tavern owned by Esther Froelich. The grocery store burned ^{down} ~~several years ago~~, and now only the tavern-restaurant remains.

Ruth Blackwell helped make a survey at her end of the lake in the early 60's when a gas line was run along Quentin Road and residents wanted to hook into it.