

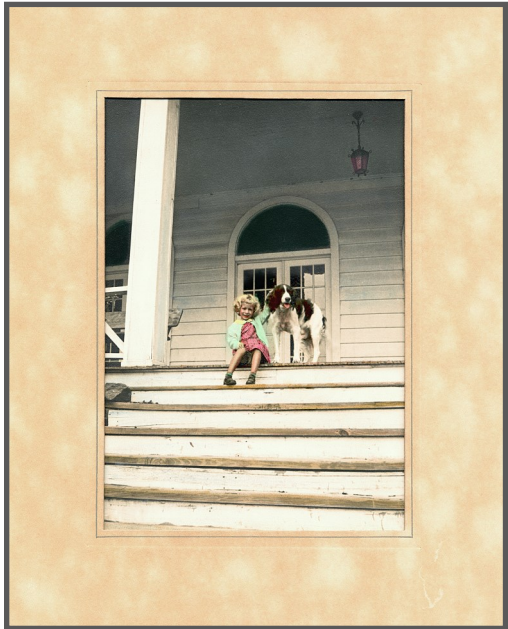


A History of Sunset Lake

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When Margaret Lea Parker first dipped her toe into the 125 acre lake as a child it was already over a century old. It started as an ancient stream that flowed over a natural granite dam for countless eons until it had worn a decisive gap in the stone that lay in its path.

Photo: Margaret Lea Parker's daughter, Ginny, on the steps of the Sportsman Clubhouse (about 1952) with dog, Cathleen.

1822

In 1822 Woodson Clements filled the gap that was formed by the stream and created what was then called Clements Mill Pond. Here he erected a water-wheel powered grist mill to grind corn and small grain.

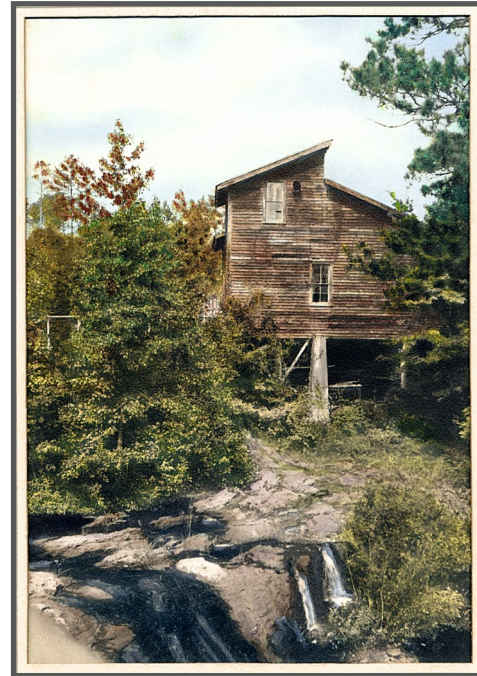


Photo: Grist Mill

1871

Fifty years after Clements created the pond G.B. Alford acquired the property and it became known as Alford's Mill Pond. A gristmill was operated with a big overshoot wheel. In early 1908 he broke the dam, drained the pond and planted rice on the lake bed. This was the only working rice paddy ever in this part of North Carolina. However, only a few rice crops were planted and harvested before the area was given over to planting corn. In time the area became neglected and overgrown with brush and weeds.



Photo: G.B. Alford

1923

The dam was not rebuilt until 1923, after the property was purchased by fifty prominent Raleigh families who make up Sunset Lake, Incorporated.

Photos: Various perspectives of dam being rebuilt



The Lake was to be their getaway, a rural country club of sorts where they could fish, hunt ducks and throw fancy balls at their newly erected, spacious and tasteful Sportsman clubhouse. Prominent members included:

- * C.A. Dillon, owner of C.A. Dillon Supply Company
- * Dabney T. Poindexter, owner of Raleigh Coca Cola Bottling Company
- * Hardy Mills, a local businessman

It was Hardy Mills' wife Jessie who gave the area the name Sunset Lake. Margaret Lea Parker recalls her parents telling her that the group who purchased the area was looking for a name for their club and Jessie Mills said "In the afternoon you can look down the lake and the sun sets at the end of it. Why not call it Sunset Lake?"

The members of the new Sportsman Club rebuilt the dam, restored the grist mill and did extensive landscaping of the area.



Photo: Sunset Lake at sunset

1929-1932

In 1929 the Depression struck a fatal blow to the Sunset Lake Sportsman Club as many of its members suffered dramatic financial reversals. In 1932 one member, Dabney T. Poindexter, bought the shares of the other 49 families at an auction on the steps of the old Wake County Courthouse. The deed puts the purchase price at \$13,301.00.

Margaret Lea Parker's father Fred Lea lost his job and newly-built home during the Depression. However, good fortune turned his way in October 1930 when he moved his family into a small house across the street from Sunset Lake and the Sportsman Club now owned by Dabney T. Poindexter. Mr. Poindexter asked Fred Lea to be the caretaker for the clubhouse and the lake property.



He also ran a boat rental and fishing business at the boathouse on the lake which lasted until the mid-1970s.

Photo: Lea's Boathouse Rental



Photo: Fred Lea's family across the road from the Sunset Lake boathouse

1935-1941

After Dabney T. Poindexter's wife died in 1935 he spent very little time at Sunset Lake. Fred Lea continued to oversee the property. In 1941 Dabney Poindexter decided to sell all of the lake property to Fred Lea for a small amount (\$10,000.00) due to the friendship the two men shared. Poindexter died shortly after the sale at the age of 65.

During the early years of Lea's stewardship of Sunset Lake the restored mill ground corn for the area farmers. Bags of cornmeal were adorned with labels designed to resemble the logo on the Sportsman Club's membership card.

1953

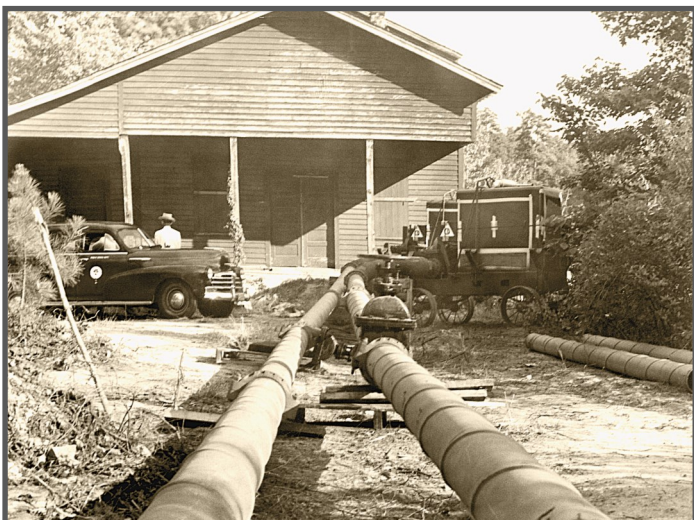


Photo: Pumping water to Raleigh—1953

In 1953 Sunset Lake was the saving grace of the city of Raleigh when a severe draught threatened to deplete the city's water supply. Arrangements were made with Fred Lea to use Sunset Lake's water. Raleigh obtained \$40,000.00 worth of pipe and pumps from the Federal Civil Defense warehouse in Atlanta. Nine railway cars were used to transport the supplies to Raleigh. Crews worked 13 hours a day to install four miles of pipe from Sunset Lake to the Rand Mill Watershed south of Raleigh.

When installed the pumps were pulling water from the lake at a rate of two million gallons a day. Disaster struck, however, one evening when a 19 year old employee of the city's department started a fire at the grist mill while trying to pour gasoline into the mill's generator. The fire caused an explosion and the mill was destroyed, never to be rebuilt. According to newspaper accounts it took only one day to make enough repairs to the pipeline so that Raleigh could once again start drawing water from Sunset Lake.

1979-1982

Fred Lea died in 1979, having never left his beautiful Sunset Lake property since 1930. Margaret Lea Parker has been quoted as saying "If someone had walked up to my dad and offered him a million dollars for Sunset Lake he would not have taken it. He never made more than a thousand dollars a year, but he was perfectly happy. It was his paradise." Fred Lea's wife Ford died in 1962.

1985-2001

Margaret Lea Parker inherited Sunset Lake after the death of both her parents. In 1985 she sold all but her parent's home and 25 acres to a group of developers, D. R. Bryon and partner R. Reed Allan Jr. & Associates, who promised to keep the Lake's name. The developers also allowed Mrs. Parker to participate in the plans for the new development that we now live in and enjoy today. Her comment at that time said it all: "I didn't know how it would turn out, but I never thought it would turn out like this. It has been so beautiful in the past and I see it being that way again."



Photo: Sunset Lake Shoreline

In 1985 the clubhouse was restored and a new boathouse was constructed after Fred Lea's old boathouse was demolished by a falling tree.

In 1988 a new deck and screen porch were added to the clubhouse and an antique bar was brought to the U.S. from England and installed inside.

In 1989 the deteriorating asphalt bridge over the dam was renovated and widened from 3 feet to 6 feet.

In 1988 the sale of Sunset Lake property began in earnest with 85 lots on the South side of the Lake and another 83 lots in Sunset Lake Village on the North side of the Lake being offered. The lakefront lots cost from the high \$90,000 to \$125,000, compared to \$75,000 to \$85,000 for lots with some Lake view and \$49,500 for lots furthest from the Lake.

In 1999 the lots at the Estates of Sunset Lake became available for sale.

2001-Present

From its humble beginnings as a grist mill through its stately days of grandeur serving as a private club for the elite of Raleigh, Sunset Lake has endured the test of time. Today the waters of the Lake no longer power the wheels of a mill but Sunset Lake still remains a source of beauty and pride to all of us who live here.



Photo: Sunset Lake Lodge



Photo: Sunset Lake Rebuilt Boathouse—2003

RESOURCES

Resources used by Nan C. Williams from the collection of photos, land deeds and local newspaper articles collected by Margaret Lea Parker:

Raleigh Times: 1927

The Cary News: September 7, 1988

The Independent, Fuquay-Varina: July 13, 1988 & August 24, 1988

Connoisseur: September 29, 1988

The News and Observer: October 15, 1988 & June 13, 1993

Sunset Lake Lot Inventory: August 11, 1993

Sunset Lake News: October 1993