

## Pieces of the Past: Familiar Places

### Latonia Lakes: weekend hideaway for city folks

It was planned as a weekend hideaway, a place where city dwellers could buy a small lot, build a cottage and escape for a few hours.

It was to be nestled between Taylor Mill and Independence, then little more than stops along the road. Organizers formed a lake for swimming, complete with beach and bathhouse. They built two smaller lakes for fishing and platted a gridwork of streets.

That was more than 50 years ago. Today, Taylor Mill and Independence have exploded with subdivisions and apartment complexes.

But the summer hideaway is a distant memory. The swimmers who filled the beach and the dancers who filled the clubhouse are gone.

The community today is Latonia Lakes.

It has evolved into a close-knit, working class city with a special pride in its older residents and its children.

That pride has allowed Latonia Lakes to cling stubbornly to its independence despite a flood of obstacles.

Plans for a community were made in January 1931, according to records on file at the Independence Courthouse.

The plat, drawn by civil engineer Robert L. Meek, showed a large lake — Lake Latonia — along with smaller “twin” lakes and a pond. The plat also listed 18 streets — Clubhouse, Hilltop, Lakeside, Lakeview, Fairvalley, Ash, Birch, Cedar, Locust, Grove, Oak, Twin, Dogwood, Elm, Forest, Hemlock, Irving and Jericho.

That plat, filed April 30, 1931, was amended a few months later to add Pine, Maple and Walnut.

“The first time I was out there was about 1931 or ’32, and there really wasn’t much to see,” Samuel Womble said. “I think we went out for a party and the building the dance was held in wasn’t much more than just a shell.”

Womble, a Covington resident, liked the area. And like a number of others, he bought lots and built a cottage in Latonia Lakes.

C. Arch Ott and Arline Ott were listed as the project trustees on the plat, but the early developers were Cincinnati attorney Saul Goodman and Realtor Carl Schaub.

A newspaper advertisement in the early 1930s offered “summer and year around home sites; drive out Taylor Mill Road five miles; see the opportunity you have waited for; then act, don’t wait. All lots are priced \$77, small payments down, \$3.50 monthly. Choice locations still available. See Carl Schaub or phone Main 4439 for information.”

The name, Latonia Lakes, apparently came from the popularity of the city of Latonia and the Latonia Race Course, the nearest landmarks several miles north on Taylor Mill Road.

Getting from Latonia to Latonia Lakes, however, wasn’t an easy ride.

Taylor Mill Road, now almost a straight shot south from Latonia to Latonia Lakes, took a longer, winding route in those years.

What is now Old Taylor Mill Road was part of that road and long-time residents describe the old route as a narrow, country road with several dangerous, one-lane bridges. A dirt lane known as Ridge Road followed part of what is Taylor Ridge Road. But that road was something only a thrill-seeker might challenge, according to one old-timer.

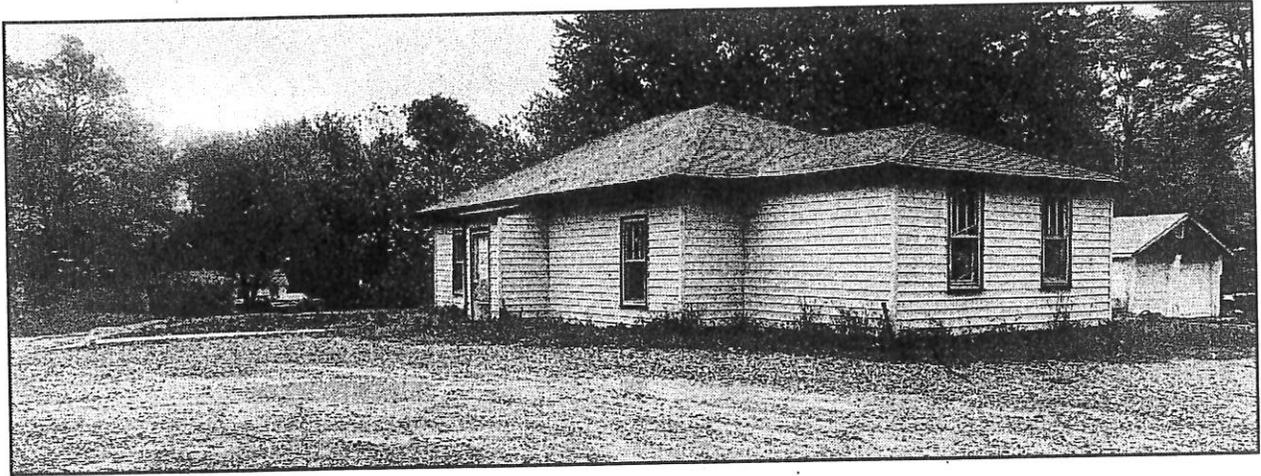
“In the beginning, most of the people just had camps out here,” said Mrs. Madge Miller, a long-time Latonia Lakes resident. “They built a clubhouse for dances and they had a beach on the big lake with a diving platform out in the middle of the lake.

“I’ve swum in a lot of places in my life and, as far as I’m concerned, their lake was the best one I’ve ever been in,” Mrs. Miller said.

Latonia Lakes in the 1930s was basically a private club. Unlike the Ryland Country Club, which catered mainly to the very wealthy, the people who bought at Latonia Lakes were middle class people from Covington, Newport, Ludlow and other Northern Kentucky cities.

However, Latonia Lakes was almost deserted during winter.

Mrs. Miller said a family from Ludlow was among the first year-round residents. They were forced out of their home during the 1937 flood.



This is the old clubhouse at Latonia Lakes.

But by the early 1950s, when Womble bought his camp at Latonia Lakes, more cottages were being converted into permanent homes.

Part of the trend stemmed from the housing shortage after World War II.

"I paid \$450 for five lots and built a three-room cottage," Womble said. "Most of the places out there were like that."

Womble said the cottage was nothing fancy, just a place to get away to.

"We used to have some pretty good parties out there," Womble said. "We'd have square dances . . . and dinners in which everyone would bring a dish and then share everything they'd brought."

The civic association formed after the developers moved out was active for a number of years, keeping up the resort atmosphere. The association maintained the clubhouse; widened Clubhouse Drive, which is the main thoroughfare; and periodically spread gravel on the side roads, most of which are still gravel.

The ladies auxiliary also was active, holding bingos in the clubhouse and scheduling the dances. The nearby Oak Ridge Volunteer Fire Department used the clubhouse for some of its events.

And when interest waned, the association pulled a publicity coup by buying one of the first television sets in the area. Womble said the novelty drew big crowds to the clubhouse to watch the newest electronic marvel.

But eventually everyone was getting television sets and the interest died.

People began to complain the swimming lake was polluted, although no one could pinpoint the cause, and the fishing in other lakes dropped off.

Womble said it became harder and harder to get people to pay their \$10-a-year dues and conditions in the community deteriorated.

Women in the area waged a campaign to incorporate Latonia Lakes as a city to give the city the authority to levy taxes.

The incorporation effort succeeded in 1953.

But Latonia Lakes has a small tax base because of its small homes, many of which are still cottages; the lack of an expandable business district; and its land-locked boundaries.

Growth also has been stymied by pollution regulations that make many of the city's undeveloped lots unsuitable for construction. The city has no sewers and guidelines on the use of septic tanks require large leach fields. The city's population has increased from 369 in 1980 to 410 in 1990.

Because of its size, Latonia Lakes must depend on others for some services. Emergency police calls are handled by Kenton County Police, while fire and life squad calls go to the Taylor Mill Volunteer Fire Department.

For many years Covington provided a full-time fire and life squad service from a nearby firehouse, but that service eventually became too costly for Latonia Lakes.

During negotiations over fire service, some Covington officials expressed an interest in annexing Latonia Lakes, but the idea was not received well in Latonia Lakes.