

Artesian Park

Artesian Park on Sheridan Road in Lake Bluff looks like the typical small town recreation area with little guys playing baseball, children racing to swing sets, and teenagers playing tennis. What most people don't know is that at its inception, Artesian Park was actually a 10-acre lake!

The history of Artesian Park began in 1888 in the wake of Lake Bluff's campground construction and the building of the large Hotel Irving. There was a need for water to supply all those buildings. The logical solution was to dig a well.

An artesian well was dug just south of Center Street, approximately where the police and fire station now sit. Underground wooden pipes sent the water flowing to the hotels and the Tabernacle grounds east of the village. A Concrete dam was also built 500 feet west of Evanston Avenue to create what was appropriately called Artesian Lake.

The lake was connected by a footbridge to an area called Swan Island. Thus, as Elmer Viet said in his *First 100 Years of Lake Bluff*, "Solomon Thatcher's dream for a 'lake in the meadow' was fulfilled. People had a spot to "row boats, fish, and stroll about, enjoying the scenic beauty." In the winter, ice-skating was a popular activity. Ice, cut from the lake, was stored in an icehouse nearby to be saved and used in the summer. When the water supply began to dwindle, a pump was installed to keep the water flowing for another 20 years.

As the Village continued to grow and an electric trolley line was installed, a new station had to be constructed with an underpass for access to the station.

Unfortunately, the underpass was several feet lower than Artesian Lake, and a drain was necessary. The water drained southeast and discharged into a ravine east of Ravine Avenue. However, after the drain was completed in 1904, villagers were dismayed to discover one morning that the dam had burst, and Artesian Lake had literally gone down the drain. What had once been a much-loved park used for recreation and picnicking, deteriorated into a refuse dump. Residents were charged \$15 per household to drop their refuse into what had once been a beautiful lake. For the next 30 years, the village dump graced the area, except for a small piece of land to the north that was reserved for skating during the winter.

In 1923 Jacob Crane, a municipal engineer, was hired to develop a plan to govern zoning, subdivisions, and building in the Village. Crane recommended that the Village acquire land to form a green strip along the east side of Sheridan Road. The old tennis courts that had been located there had to be destroyed, and new ones were constructed on what is now the north end of the park.

In 1928 the Village Board turned Artesian Park over to the Park Board with the provision that it be retained as a dump for 10 more years. Eventually, the area evolved into the pleasant and busy place that we enjoy today.