

Brief History of Manitou Beach



The beach attracted many tourists at the beginning of the 20th century. The beach is nestled in a glacier-scooped valley on Highway 365, three miles north of Watrous, Saskatchewan. Manitou Springs Resort is located between the Trans-Canada Highway (#1) and the Yellowhead Highway (#16). It is midway between the Alberta and Manitoba borders, 116 kms south-east of Saskatoon and 185 kms north of Regina. Little Manitou Lake is 14 miles long and about a mile wide.

The east and west beaches always seemed to be competing with each other and became rivals. Some would say this interfered with the growth of Manitou Beach but may also have spurred it on. In the 1920s and 30s, both sides of the beach were busy with

the east beach being more popular.

In the 1930s, Saskatchewan was hit hard with drought, grasshoppers and poor wheat prices. Temperatures reached 100 degrees Fahrenheit. When the depression hit, crowds stopped coming. Those that did come, didn't have much money to spend. They just wanted a cool dip in the water because the weather was hot and dry.

By the 1940s the resort was in deep trouble. Mysterious fires happened. Clinics lost their patients. Many buildings were torn down because they couldn't be maintained anymore. And the lake was receding. The change in travel habits of North American people also caused the resort to decline. Airplanes were invented and therefore long distance travel was no longer a hardship. Tourists were drawn to the warmer coastal or tropical resorts. Recreational vehicles became popular. Holiday travel went on wheels.

Manitou Beach and its activities remained at a lower level for years awaiting rejuvenation in the late 1980s and 90s.

THE WATER

Don't fight it.... relax and you really can float on your back and read a newspaper without getting it wet. The water is also very refreshing. The specific gravity of 1.06 (density compared to water) makes you buoyant.

The chemical properties of the water are unique. The water is many times more buoyant than fresh water, making it very safe for swimming. The temperature of the water is a factor affecting the salinity.

Little Manitou Lake has many of the same natural qualities as the Dead Sea. Visitors take advantage of the buoyancy to do physiotherapeutic exercises that help ease aching joints. It contains more magnesium which is good for the skin and bronchial passages and contains more iodine, which is beneficial for certain glandular



functions.

The minerals in the water make the colour look metallic bronze. There is no research data to prove its healing qualities, but many medical claims speak of how good it is for: - arthritis - rheumatism - joint problems - skin conditions (eczema and psoriasis). If you have the slightest scratch or cut, one dip into the water makes the sore heal up really fast.

Natural oils were extracted from the lake and made into hair tonic and toothpaste. Residents harvested the mineral salts and sold them to drug stores across Saskatchewan. Mud packs were also applied to sore muscles and joints.

BEACH ALIVE



In the 1920s and '30s Manitou Beach was alive. Thousands came to enjoy the mineral waters. It was the most popular summer resort on the prairies, offering an alternative, and became a rival for Banff Hot Springs.

People came by rail when Watrous became a division point of the Canadian National Railway. Excursion trains arrived from the four main cities. The tourists would ride the train to Watrous and then take a shuttle taxi to the resort. Also, thousands of automobiles would be parked in fields on weekends. The beach population would grow from 200 to 15,000 during the summer months.

The bustling resort had lots to offer any vacationer: 3 large dance halls, 2 large enclosed mineral hot bath houses, massage parlours, numerous beach stores and restaurants/cafes, several

boarding houses, hotels and motels, many cottages, 2 drug stores, 3 grocery stores, 2 service stations, boat rentals, a barber shop, 4 ice-cream parlours, a Y.W.C.A. building, a moving picture show, and real estate offices. And yes..... bootleggers and a brothel.

To find out more on the individual businesses, read on or go to the end of the article to order the complete book.

CARLSBAD

It is the mineral waters that connect Carlsbad to Manitou Beach. The beach became known as the "Carlsbad of Canada" and the comparison was apt for a number of reasons. First, its specific gravity is higher than that of the famed Czechoslovakian spa, which means that a body can literally float on top of the water. Secondly, Little Manitou has additional quantities of magnesium sulphate and iron oxide.

PROPERTIES OF THE WATER

The mineral contents of the water in Little Manitou Lake are as follows (in grains per gallon): Note: Properties vary from season to season.

| | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------|-----------------------|---------|------------------|--------|
| Magnesium Sulphate | 308.38 | Magnesium Bicarbonate | 63.42 | Sodium Sulphate | 50.92 |
| Potassium Sulphate | 116.62 | Sodium Chloride | 1405.60 | Calcium Sulphate | 104.96 |
| Oxide of Iron & Aluminum | 0.28 | Silica | 0.69 | | |

THE LEGEND

The Indians discovered the lake and its healing powers long before the 1920s. They claimed it cured smallpox, rheumatic conditions and burning fevers.

Dan Kennedy, an Assiniboine on the Montmartre reserve tells of the legend. It goes something like this: "In 1837 there was a small pox epidemic. When the Indians were fleeing from the plains to try to get away from the scourge, they passed the site of Lake Manitou. When two young men in the group were unable to go any farther, a small tent was erected in which they could spend their remaining days. After the rest of the tribe had departed, the young men were so consumed by thirst that they crawled to the shore of the nearby lake, and as well as drinking from Lake Manitou, they immersed themselves in the water. Apparently it cooled their fever, and they spent the majority of the next few days bathing themselves on the beach. Within a few days they were recovered, and were able to take up the trail of their party. It was from this that the Indians have come to regard the waters of Lake Manitou as having great therapeutic value."

Medicine men called the lake "Manitou" because it means God to them, believing that it came from the Great Spirit. It became known as the "Lake of the Healing Waters," or "the Lake of the Good Spirit." Warring tribes never carried on their feud when visiting the lake. They laid down their weapons before entering the water. Tribes from as far east as the Great Lakes and as far west as the Rockies came to the lake which became famous for healing among the tribes.

ARCADE PAVILION

The Arcade Pavilion was a dance hall, octagonal in design, 90-100 feet across with an elevated orchestra platform in the centre which supported the building. Every evening dancers danced around the centre bandstand. The fox trot was very popular.

At one time the Arcade was used as a convention centre for rallies and meetings. A rectangular building was later added to the Arcade where an ice-cream parlor was located, then the O.K. Economy operated a grocery store for several seasons. Colonel Saunders was store manager for a time.

In 1943, the Arcade building was used as a roller rink which permanently damaged the hardwood floor. It was also used as a movie theatre at one time.

Later renovations were made to the dance hall to make it into a health clinic. In 1947, just before the official opening, it mysteriously burned to the ground.

CHALET SWIMMING POOL / MANITOU SPRINGS RESORT

The Chalet opened in 1929 or 30. The pool was built on the west beach and operated for a year without a roof. It was the largest indoor pool of its kind in North America. Admission was 25 cents to take a dip and then stay all day.

An advertisement on July 6, 1933 read: "Canada's Finest Resort Natatorium. Endeavors at all times to maintain a high standard of efficiency, pleasure and sanitation. To ensure this standard the pool is completely drained, scrubbed and refilled every Monday morning - 80,000 gallons circulating daily. Programs for Holidayers, Pillow Fights, Water Polo, Living Statues - stunts every Sunday, and Tub Races. Admission: 25 cents - no equipment; 40 cents with suit. Children under 14 - 15 cents."



In October of 1983 the Chalet Pool was destroyed by fire. In December of 1987, the Manitou Springs Mineral Spa, which is still operating in 1996, opened to the public as a four-season facility. Water was channeled from Little Manitou Lake, filtered, cleaned, then pumped into three pools. Each pool is heated to a temperature ranging from 94 to 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Whirlpool jets are

also installed. Since the Spa started to filter the water, there are no more little shrimp swimming around you as there had been in the Chalet.

The Spa was so successful that in July of 1990 plans to build a new 60-room hotel and convention facility were underway. The new Manitou Springs Hotel opened its doors for business on September 1, 1991.

WHITE'S POOL



White's Pool was built on the east beach in 1918. Wellington White's construction company was hired to install a water supply system for the Town of Watrous but Watrous ran out of money because of taxes in arrears due to the tough times for the farmers. So Mr. White was stuck with a heap of pipes and other materials. This is when he decided to build the swimming pool.

The pool opened June 1922. It had 98 individual cubicles, each with its own little door where you could change. Each cubicle had its own mirror until they were stolen. The pool was 25 x 60 feet and held 253,000 gallons of salty lake water. The temperature of the pool was 80 degrees Fahrenheit, heated by a H.P. steam boiler. Admission was 25 cents a swim (35 cents with a towel).

A sunlit fountain was built in the shallow end where a fine spray of fresh well-water spurted from its top.

There were diving boards, barrels, logs, and other platforms on which to play. The most spectacular thing at the pool was the trapezes. They were rings hanging on chains, five on one side and seven on the other. The idea was to grab one, swing, grab another, down the whole length and back. If you fell in the water you were considered an amateur. The pool was so crowded in those days that you had to wait your turn.

White's Pool was demolished in 1953.

MANITOU LAKE PROVINCIAL PARK/ CAMP EASTER SEAL

In the early 1930s, the government decided to construct a luxurious resort hotel as a relief project, using almost exclusively local materials. The Park Chalet was constructed in Manitou Lake Provincial Park by unemployed workers using fieldstone from local quarries. The original buildings had thatched roofs made from reeds and rushes. The resort consisted of 290 acres and was located on the west beach. It was operated as a commercial hotel until the early 1950s.

In 1956 the provincial government sold the Park Chalet to the Saskatchewan Society for Crippled Children for \$1.00. It became a summer resident camp for the handicapped. The 290 acre property was divided. 100 acres went



to Camp Easter Seal and 190 acres were kept for Manitou Lake Regional Park. A brochure was published, promising a park with picnic grounds, camp kitchens, playgrounds, a tennis court, a 9-hole golf course and a mile long sandy beach - with free indoor showers to wash off the salt.

Saskatchewan Society for Crippled Children (Camp Easter Seal) was established and in 1996 is still operating the facility as a summer camp for the handicapped.

DANCELAND



In 1928 Wellington White built "Danceland" pavilion on the east beach. It replaced an earlier Danceland built before 1919. There are two floors, a sub floor and a hardwood floor. Between the two floors is a layer of horsehair (bought from local farmers and imported from Quebec) six to ten inches thick. No nails were used to construct the floor. The unique construction of the floor gives it a flexibility (spring) which makes it easy to dance on. You actually feel the movement of the floor as couples dance.

Jitney dances were popular in the 1920s. ("Jitney" means a nickel.) Danceland would get 500 people in attendance. The hall was open every night, including a "midnight frolic" on Sunday. Admission was 10 cents a dance or 3 for a quarter.

"Art Harmony 7" band (Guy Watkins, a blind musician) used to broadcast concerts over CFQC Radio. Later Ken Peaker, Mart Kenny and his western gentlemen, Don Messer, Wilf Carter, Sammy Kaye, Bobby Gimby, The Inkspots, Gene Dlouhy, Norma Locke, and The Silver Tone played there.

In 1996-97 Danceland is still there and open all year round.

MARTIN'S TOURIST HOTEL / HIAWATHA LODGE

Martin's Tourist Hotel was originally built in 1923. Josiah Martin was assured by a real estate firm that a sanatorium was to be built, but it never materialized. Mr. Martin believed the lake had remedial, health giving properties, and therefore, provided mineral baths and treatments for many years. He is believed to be the first person to extract oil and crystals from the lake. He acquired legal claims and sold the product commercially. The oil treated burns and skin irritations, including eczema.

In the early 1960s, Wardley Brine Shrimp Co. bought Martin's Hotel. Frank Debevc harvested, froze, packed and shipped tiny crustaceans to pet food stores as tropical fish food. Crustacean, artemia salina, or brine shrimp grow naturally in very salty water. When full grown they are about one third of an inch in length, with 11 pairs of swimming legs and two stalked compound eyes.

Hiawatha Lodge was built in 1927 by William Martin as a health resort. His wife, Dr. Bertie Martin, also gave chiropractic treatments. The resort was in operation until 1956.

In 1964-65 it was renamed The Village Inn by owners Frank and Vera Debevc.

Both the hotel and lodge had dining rooms, treated patients, gave chiropractic treatments and mineral baths.

The tables in the dining rooms were set with linen and fine china. In 1996-97 the hotel and lodge are still there.

MEDICAL HEALTH CLINICS / WHITMORE HOTEL

The Manitou Mineral Products Manufacturing Company was formed to use mineral extractions from the water to produce oils, salves and salts. At one time they investigated the possibility of using it as an antifreeze.

In 1933 the building which housed Manitou Mineral Products Company was purchased by Dr. Stipe and Dr. Hixon, and became the first clinic at the beach. The clinic was well equipped and a stream of patients from all over Canada and south of the border stopped for baths and treatments. In 1943 the clinic was destroyed by fire. The patients, nurses, physiotherapist, cook and other staff were moved to the west side of the Whitmore Hotel and business resumed as usual.

The first Whitmore Hotel, known as the Meuretania Hotel, was built in 1919 by Bill Whitmore. Dr. Stipe rented the hotel for the rest of 1943 season and then purchased the building in 1944. Later Dr. Stipe also purchased the Arcade Pavilion and rebuilt it into a clinic. In operation for only a short time, the clinic was destroyed by fire.

Mr. Gustav Uhmman, a physiotherapist, worked for Dr. Stipe when he arrived in 1942 with his wife Gertie. In 1947 Mr. Uhmman bought Dr. Stipe's property and operated his own health spa. He considered the waters to be the best in the world for soothing the pain of arthritis and rheumatism. At the clinic you could have hot mineral baths and massage treatments.

Tough luck struck the new clinic; from a nearby well the basement was flooded with water which ruined the building. The main part of the hotel had to be demolished and the remainder was remodelled into a health clinic. Unfortunately there were no more in-patient quarters and no mineral baths. The clinic was strictly for physiotherapy.

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