

Murray Lake History

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Murray Lake is the largest of over 25 lakes in Grattan Township and is the third largest in Kent County. Its 320 acres consist of 30% shallows and the balance are considered steep drop off with the deepest area over 70 feet. The lake is fed from springs and a stream at the north end of the lake that flows under Five Mile Road. The springs contribute to open water conditions in several areas of the lake that sometimes never freeze throughout the entire winter. The lake bottom consists of fibrous peat, marl, muck and sand. The outlet at the southwest end of the lake was once called Lake Creek and is a tributary of the Flat River. The lake level is controlled by a small dam in the creek that utilizes removable boards.



Until 1846, Murray Lake resided in Vergennes Township.

In 1846, the township was divided into two, Grattan and Vergennes. The following story is how the one township became two: The present area of Grattan and Vergennes Townships was originally just Vergennes Township, but through a legislative petition in 1845-1846 it was divided into two separate townships. The petitioners wanted the north area named Churchtown Township but owing to some legislative oversight it was named Cannon Township. Vioney W. Calulkin, who was later clerk of Grattan Township in 1846-1847 and one of the first school inspectors suggested that the area be renamed Grattan in honor of a great Irish orator and parliamentarian of the last Irish House of Commons. Mr. Caulkin's suggestion was honored and Cannon Township became Grattan Township since the southern part of Grattan had been settled by emigrations from Erin, Ireland. Most of the lake resides in Grattan Township except the area south of Four Mile Road, the Grattan/Vergennes Township line.

Murray Lake was given different names throughout its history. Lake names included Nagel, Nagels, Horseshoe, Eagle (since a resident spotted an eagle's nest in a large oak tree) and finally Murray. Named after James Murray, whose family moved from New York to Michigan in 1848 and purchased a large tract of land alongside the lake. James Murray's Scottish descendants date to the thirteenth century and include Edwin Murray who fought with William Wallace and Robert the Bruce. As Earl of Carrick, Robert the Bruce supported his family's claim to the throne and took part in William Wallace's revolt against Edward I of England. In 1298, Bruce became a Guardian of Scotland alongside his great rival for the Scottish throne, John Comyn, and William Lambertson, Bishop of St. Andrews.

Historically, Murray Lake dates are noted in the Belding Banner Newspaper 1879 – 1915. Articles written included happenings on the lake such as camping, picnics, reunions, and July 4th festivities. Also of mention, was a Boy Scout gathering and school picnics from as far away as Saranac. The north end of the island and an area on Elhart Drive were popular camping and picnic areas. The north end of the lake and the south ends were used as well. A boat livery was located on Lally. On July 15, 1897, an article in the Belding Banner read, "Keep cool through the hot weather by coming to the cool and pleasant grove where you will find tables, seats, stoves and buildings free to all who rent boats. Boats rental at 20 cents a day or \$1.00 a week to campers. We will have a harvest picnic on the afternoon of July 28th with various games to make sport for young and old. Dances in the afternoon and evening."

Around 1907, the Lally family purchased the land at the south end of the lake and the lane that crossed their property from east to west which is also named Lally. For many years, the peninsula that juts into the lake was an uninhabited island and during the summer, farmers transported their cattle by barge to graze. Later, by filling in the shallow area with rocks and other debris, farmers were able to drive their livestock to the island, even though the path was sometimes covered with water. During the depression, one of the WPA (Works Progress Administration) projects was to build the road to the island and one history book indicates that Ionia prison inmates may have assisted in the road project. Causeway Drive was created by filling in the lake between Lally Road and the island.

One of the oldest buildings on the lake is the big farm house on Lally Road which for generations has become a landmark. Thomas S. Lally traded a farm he owned in Bowne Township for the 255 acre farm located at the south end of Murray Lake (including the island) where he raised 5 boys and 3 girls. In 1908 Thomas offered to sell the entire farm for \$10,000, \$1000 down and the balance when he could get it, evidently no one had \$1,000. His last surviving son, George, collected \$50,000 more by selling 150 lots and still had a large portion of the property left. (The Grand Rapids Herald – 1950). Oats, rye,

wheat, beans, hay and potatoes were grown by the Lally family along with raising and selling livestock. The, still standing, big farm house frequently held 10,000 bushels of potatoes in the basement. The Irish and their potatoes were a staple due to the Great Famine, also called the Irish Potato Famine of 1845-48 when the potato crop failed in successive years. The crop failures were caused by a late blight, a disease that destroys both the leaves and edible roots, or tuber of the potato.

In the 1930's, a fisherman donated property to the DNR for public access to the lake. The two public access with boat launches were officially put into service in 1957. The remainder of Causeway Drive around the island was constructed at that time and the Murray Lake Association was formed by property owners in 1957.

In the 1970's, the DNR water quality tests showed high levels of phosphorous that were contributing to rapid growth of algae. The main source of phosphorous was attributed to the septic systems around the lake. In 1982, Kent County and Grattan Township worked together to install the Grattan Sanitary Sewer System. It serves Murray, Big Crooked, Ratigan and Big Pine Island Lakes. The system continues to be upgraded to help keep our lakes protected against algae growth, sewage overflows and other contamination.

In the winter of 1982, a tragic snowmobile event devastated the residents of Murray Lake and the surrounding communities. During blizzard conditions, 5 snowmobiles coming from north of Murray Lake and crossing at Five Mile Road, came over the ice on the east side of the lake moving south towards the south arm or deepest part of the water. With the lake being spring fed, they did not realize that all the lake was not frozen in some areas and of consequence, drivers and snowmobiles broke through the ice and sank. The Kent County Sheriff's Department was not equipped at the time for this type of rescue and Dave Grover of Commercial Diving Services was hired and asked to assist with the rescue since no other company was equipped with "dry suits" necessary for cold water missions. An "A Frame" with winch was built on secure ice and the snowmobiles were recovered. The tragic loss of two lives remains for those who were a part of the community at that time but also impacts those who live here now and are interested in Murray Lake history. Since this incident, The Murray Lake Association donated \$500 towards the cost of a water/ice rescue sled for use on area lakes. The Grattan Township Fire Department continues to use the sled along with a hovercraft. In 1989, the lake association purchased dry fire hydrants for the north and south ends of the lake. Fire apparatus are able to draw water through a pipe that extends underground into the lake.

In the 1990's, natural gas, cable television and internet became available around the lake and the association began a water testing program with the assistance of Michigan Lakes and Streams Association. The public boat ramps, parking areas and outhouses were restructured and improved by the DNR. Street entrance signs were purchased in 2003 and volunteer residents do upkeep and beautification projects of their own choice at those sites.

June of 2017 witnessed the first Goose Removal and Relocation Program with a capture of 38 birds including adults and goslings. The rest of the summer and fall seasons were goose free. The only sightings were of those in the late fall who used Murray Lake as a resting point before they continued their flight south. The Goose Removal and Relocation will be implemented again in June of 2018 and 2019 for the relocation of geese. In 2020 and 2021, Murray Lake will qualify for Goose Egg & Nest Removal which is a DNR program.



The Murray Lake Association, Vergennes and Grattan Townships, Michigan Lakes and Streams, Michigan DNR all work together to have ordinances in place regarding riparian rights, key holing, and land usage. The population of Murray Lake continues to grow to about 360 homes around the lake with about 250 being riparian properties. Murray continues to attract visitors and residents that enjoy the splendor of our beautiful spot in paradise.