

THE “DEEP HOLE”

By Barbara Mask

Appropriately labeled as the ‘deep hole’ for many years, this pond of water has been embellished with intrigue, mystique and fantastic rumors. Its reputation for being a bottomless pit and deep enough that a railroad engine toppled into it and disappeared have been bantered around for years. This research was not intended to disclaim those theories, but merely to learn more about the history of the area. As a result, a greater appreciation for the pastoral setting has been realized. This topic has been requested by more readers than any other subject to be written in this column. It was alternately referred to where it was located; namely, the ‘second culvert.’

According to Wayne Bastian, there were two culverts installed under the road known as Route 136 today. It was a path to Morrison first; then the Fulton-Morrison Road, designated the Lincoln Highway and paved in 1921 and following that, the U.S. 30 Highway. In 1846, 11 men were hired to dig a ditch so that the road-bed could be elevated. Later, the men would recall that the soil was ‘sticky, waxy mud.’ There were two bridges built over the pond in 1859 and several years later, Fulton Township built a wooden-bridge there (see photo) which was replaced with a steel one in 1906. The C & NW railroad removed it some time later when an elevated track bed was laid on the north side of the pond. That bridge was moved to another site and became the first culvert. The second culvert remains today at the drainage ditch west of the pond.

OLE SWIMMING HOLE

The small lake was a popular swimming hole. Bastian writes that the swimmers dressed according to the name of the ‘bottomless pit’ and many swam topless, too. Reputation was that the water was always cold; even more than the Mississippi River. It was a popular spot for the transients to camp and there are several news items in the Fulton Journal announcing that a band of gypsies were staying east of town at the ‘deep hole.’ There was a certain amount of anxiety created by the group of strangers. Some elderly residents still recall their fear of the gypsies when they were in town. In the summer of 1930, Edwin Rishell, Fulton School Superintendent, rented the area, installed a dressing room (never needed before by the frequent swimmers) and also had a soft-drink stand installed. Its popularity soared. John T. Cullen, who owned the company west of the pond area, purchased it and continued to share the recreational spot with others. When his dog died, he buried his beloved pet east of the lake/pond.



Summer: 2012. The pond, owned by Carla and Jeff Zajicek, serves as a recreational spot for their family and friends. They use it for swimming, diving, fishing and boating. While not open for public use, they generously share their special bit of paradise with the Boy Scouts and other organizations.



March 12, 2013: The pond is used for hockey and ice skating at this time of the year. The surrounding area is the site of the Zajicek home perfectly designed to complement the setting. This photo allows a glimpse of why it had its original name, the ‘Deep Hole.’

When his dog died, he buried his beloved pet east of the lake/pond.

Alvin Schipper, who purchased the site in 1967, is credited as the individual who revived the area to its natural beauty; much to the delight of many locals who recalled the area with nostalgia. He cut down dead trees, removed the accumulated junk, graded down the abandoned railroad bed and planted some trees. He specifically chose Carla and Jeff Zajicek to become the next owners; a wise choice as they have embraced and enhanced the beautiful spot with their attractive home and loving care of the property. The pond, as the current owners refer to their body of water, which measures about 200' by 200,' is still used as a swimming pool including a diving platform. No diver has touched bottom.

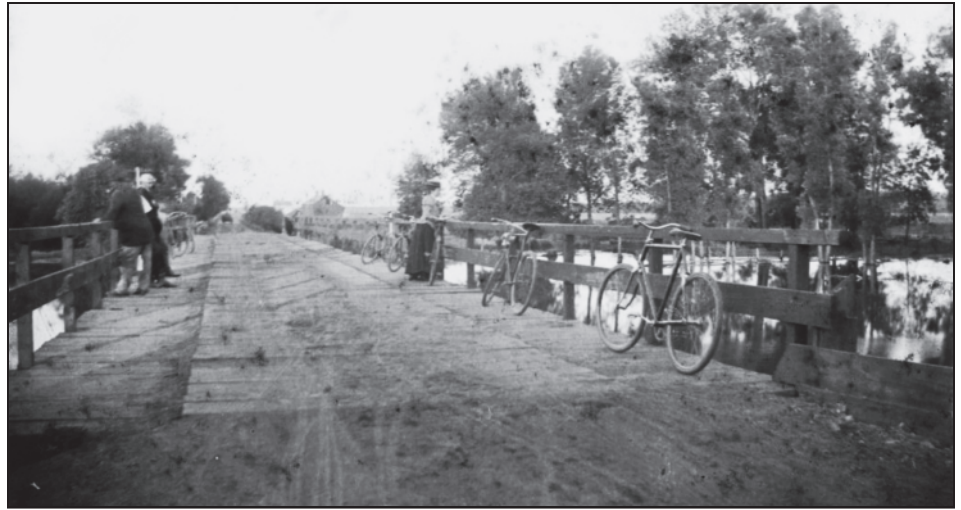


Photo from the Fulton Museum Collection: This vintage photo (circa pre-1900s) shows the wooden bridge that was built across the lake at this site. There were heavy side rails. The bridge floor was made from planks laid straight across and a second layer imposed in the center for the entire length of the bridge. It appears to be about 16 feet. Only bicycles and pedestrians are seen on the bridge.

BAPTISM BY SUBMERSION

The Assembly of God Church was organized in Fulton in 1935. It is the practice of their church to baptize by submersion and the pond was the chosen site. Ruth Bailey Bos recalls her baptism there in 1937. She was 16 years of age and several other teenagers were baptized the same day. Ruth recalls that it was a beautiful place to swim. Other Fulton residents baptized there were the Wade sisters: Evelyn, Donna, and Genny (Wade) Bogle.

DROWNINGS

The death of J. Justin Snyder, son of Dr. W. C. and Mrs. Snyder, was on July 15, 1904. The Fulton Journal announced the tragedy, "While Swimming Friday Night In the "Deep Hole" East of Fulton He Sank to Rise no More." The article went on to state that he was drowned in the pond known as the 'second culvert' east of Fulton. He was 45 years old. When a boy of 14, Justin and two of his companions, Charley and Arthur Brown, were in a boat that capsized in the Cattail Slough. The Brown brothers drowned, but Justin was able to keep hold of the boat until rescuers arrived. He had visited with his mother, Mrs. Isophene Snyder, prior to his horse-back ride to Morrison when he spontaneously decided to take the late-night swim in the 'deep hole.'

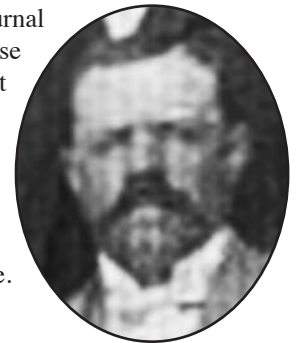


Photo of J. Justin Snyder in 1899

The drowning of Everett Shear, age 38, occurred on March 20, 1936 when he was swimming alone. He was a W.W. I. veteran.

CONCLUSION

The bottomless hole is NOT bottomless. It measures 17 feet deep. There is no railroad engine or railroad car in the bottom either. There is, however, a phenomenon called 'seeping or sink holes' that are created by streaming water into the lake/pond. That causes the water to have an unpredictable pull around it so it appears some of the respect/fear of the area as a swimming hole was legitimate. Most everyone that I spoke with who either owned it or spent a considerable amount of time there thinks the pond was created as a burrow hole. The original ditch that was made for the railroad bed made it deeper, but there was always water in that spot and at one time, covered much of the farm land on the south side of Highway # 136. Jeff Zajicek stated that there are bluegills, frogs, turtles, big carp, gar, walleyes and crappies and that the variety of fish changes from season to season which leads one to believe that there is a direct connection with the Mississippi River. The water table in east Fulton is very high and one wonders what all is going on just below the surface of the road and properties in the area. Additional information on this topic is welcomed and appreciated.

Sources: Wayne Bastian articles, Vada Baker, Kenny Balk, Ruth Bailey Bos, Maurice Rogers, Gene Field, John Wierema Bill Balk and Carla and Jeff Zajicek.

OWNERS OF THE PROPERTY AT "THE BOTTOMLESS HOLE"

(Fulton Township; Pt SE., T22N R3E S27)
 First recorded owner was Jackson F. Martin who sold it to Dr. Leander Smith in 1869
 Elisha Lockheart purchased it in 1894
 R. A. Porter in 1918
 Wm. K. Farley in 1919
 Louis DeVries in 1925
 Nick Doffing in 1926
 John W. Platt in 1929
 John T. Cullen in 1943
 Corneil Baker in 1956
 Leslie Bailey in 1956
 Alvin Schipper in 1967
 Jeffrey Zajicek in 2002