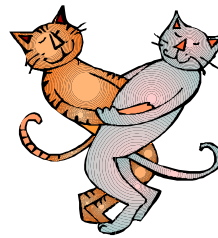


Dance Halls of the Federal Way Area by Dietrick Jones



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The Dance Halls of the Federal Way Area

During the twenties, thirties and early forties there were numerous dance halls in the Federal Way area. Generally these were on one or another of the several lakes in the area and were usually a part of a “park” or “resort”. These terms were generally next to a picnic ground which would include a swimming beach. The dance halls varied in size from minimal to quite large. The music was always live and usually good. As one of the few areas of entertainment the dance halls were well patronized but the extra-curricular activities were sometimes rather unruly. Starting in the north end of the area a brief description is offered of the various establishments.

STAR LAKE: The best known and longest lived business on Star Lake is the Star Lake Inn (it is still in operation but on a much reduced scale). Located on the south side of the lake, it had been owned and operated by the Hanemann family from its beginning until the 1960’s when they retired and sold the inn to new operators. There is also a report that there was a Star Lake Resort on the north side of Star Lake but since no record has been found of that it is not possible to know whether it included a dance hall or not.

STEEL LAKE: There were two dance halls on Steel Lake next door to one another on the southeast corner of the lake. Both of these dance halls had numerous owners over the years and both remained popular. Ultimately these were both acquired by King County and made into Steel Lake County Park (now a Federal Way city park.) Prior to these there was a park on the west end of the lake, but it is not known whether there was a dance hall there or not. This park was originally operated by Leta and Clagt Smith and later by Cliff Holmes.

NORTH LAKE: There was one dance hall on the north end of North Lake which was originally operated by the Goldens. They operated it for a number of years before selling to the Poores who in turn sold to Glen Ryan. Business had been good for the Goldens but began to dwindle during the Poore’s regime. Ryan, however concentrated on the park operation and did well for a while. He finally sold to Weyerhaeuser for the rumored price of \$500,000. Weyerhaeuser burned the dance hall on a New Years Eve in the sixties. I was living in a new house on the south end of the lake at the time. A group of our friends always got together for a New Years Eve party and that year it happened to be at our house so we were entertained by watching the big fire all evening. The North Lake Park was used by large groups such as labor unions, organizations and employee groups for organizational picnics. Living directly across the lake from the park at that time we could clearly hear the broadcasts when the speaker system became operational. The first announcement was usually, “Come and get your free beer.” Upon hearing this one or the other of us neighbors would get in a boat and row over and get enough free beer for all of us.

The North Lake dance hall had a reputation for being the roughest one around. There was certainly much outside drinking going on there. As a matter of fact,

many parents declared it off-limits. It didn't seem like this had a very serious effect on the profitability of the dances since many of the teenagers went there anyway. In fact the ban probably made it all the more attractive. As business began to dwindle, the Poores decided they would like to travel in the wintertime. So in 1951 an arrangement was made with the North Lake Improvement Club for the latter to manage the dance hall during the winter months in exchange for the profits. The early winter months were a disaster. Attendance was poor and the dances lost money. New Years Eve was another story. A huge crowd turned out and the Club made enough money to pay off the lot for a clubhouse with enough left over to pay for most of the clubhouse construction.

LAKE KILLARNEY: There was one dance hall at the north end of the lake before the property became Lutherland, the Lutheran Church Summer Campground. The name is not in the records at this time.

LAKE GENEVA: This lake, though small, enjoyed two dance halls. Jardin's on the north side and Carl Broome's Lake Geneva Resort on the east side. Broome was something of a character that was somewhat active in the community. This alone caused his dance hall to be popular. Both of these parks have now been replaced with housing developments.

FIVE MILE LAKE: Another lake which was blessed with two dance halls. Karl Ulrich's Lakeside Park on the east side which is now another King County Park and Neal's Glendawn on the north side. Neal's was nice because though small it was right on the lake and had a deck on the lake side. Getting there could be something of a challenge, however. None of the roads were outstanding at the time and the one leading into the park was just a one-car lane. It opened from the main road between two very large fir trees and on a dark rainy night it could be a challenge finding it.

There were other places to dance where dancing was incidental. They were first Roadhouses during prohibition - at least for a short time. These included the following:

TROUT LAKE: An old log cabin which, after it was closed down a Roadhouse became Mickey's Chicken Dinner Inn. The log cabin is still there and is now a private home.

BROOKLAKE: There is actually a lake there if one were to stretch a point. It also started as a Roadhouse where one could buy drinks (bootleg moonshine, of course) and dance. The activities expanded to gambling and prostitution which is when the Sheriff shut it down. It was then operated for many years as the Brooklake Clubhouse used by the Brooklake Community Club, the Brooklake Women's Club, the Brooklake Dance Club, etc. It is now operated by a consortium of local civic clubs.

In addition to the smaller local dance halls in or near the local parks there were two large dance halls out of the area which were very popular:

THE CENTURY BALLROOM in Fife. This ballroom was located on what is now 54th Avenue East just behind the Poodle Dog. It was a very large dance hall with an excellent floor. The music was always live and the Century frequently had big bands there. In the summer of 1941 Jan Garber had played at the Evergreen Ballroom on the old highway 99 above Nisqually (destroyed by fire on July 20th, 2000). The Century was packed and the temperature sweltering for Garber's appearance. However, everyone enjoyed himself or herself just standing and listening. Shortly after Pearl Harbor Jan Garber returned to the Century. Due to the timing the crowd was very small. Garber commented on this with some dismay, but he continued to play a full dance program and the few who were there had a delightful evening. The following summer Kay Kaiser was at the Century on another hot evening. By then the tension had eased and the place was so crowded that all one could do was stand - had anyone fainted he or she would remain standing and have to be carried out upright.

Of course during the intermission everyone trooped over to the Poodle Dog which undoubtedly contributed to its prosperity. There was another smaller fast food place diagonally across 54th and 99 called the White Spot but few dared to attempt that crossing. It eventually went out of business.

THE SPANISH CASTLE at Midway at the intersection of Highway 99 and the Kent-Des Moines road was a very popular dance hall. It was large with a very acceptable floor but as typical of the era, no air conditioning. Along with the latter it insisted on very strict behavior. The men had to wear jackets and could not remove them unless the orchestra leader permitted it. The women could not wear slacks or other inappropriate clothing. In addition, no kind of rough stuff was condoned. Any person starting any kind of conflict would find him or herself deposited on the street (perhaps not gently) by the bouncers.

Nearby were a number of eating establishments including the Halfway House, the Blockhouse and the Barn. The latter was interesting because it was originally built like a barn with a markedly sagging roof but it was added to and since there was no way to extend the sag the ridge on the addition on the rear was level making the addition eternally obvious. These were on the same side as the Castle and were very busy during intermission. There were other smaller, less busy places on the other side of Highway 99 and they were patronized by those willing to risk an early demise by crossing the road with its heavy traffic..

Note: The Historical Society of Federal Way is looking for pictures of any of these dance halls. If you know of any please contact the HSFW.