

## DUNE ACRES CRISES: PART I THE 1960's

### DUNE ACRES HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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In the 1960's and 1970's, Dune Acres was buffeted by the various forces trying to control the southern shore of Lake Michigan (and through most of those years by the rising level of Lake Michigan itself). The changes created by industrialization and the National Lakeshore brought unforeseen side effects for the town. For example, the St. Lawrence Seaway (then newly opened) provided a route into the Great Lakes for alewives, who died in droves off shore and whose remains heaped up on the beach. Again, construction of the Bethlehem Steel plant drove out a beaver colony which migrated east and found a happy home in Cowles Bog, adjacent to Mineral Springs Road. Their dam caused flooding on the road, producing pro-beaver and anti-beaver factions among the human residents (new neighbors can be difficult). In 1966-1967, and for some time after, there were reports at most Town Board meetings about what was being done about the alewives and the beavers.

The alewives were annoying and a hard problem to solve; the beavers were either cute or a menace, depending on your point of view. But these were minor problems. There were, on the other hand, five major crises for Dune Acres between 1960 and 1980:

1. Creation of the National Lakeshore in 1964.
2. The South Shore Railroad's plan of 1967 and 1968 to construct a marshaling yard across Mineral Springs Road, effectively blocking exit from town.
3. NIPSCO'S attempt to obtain a license to build a nuclear generating plant at Bailly, a process which continued from 1970 to 1981.
4. A suit by Owen Crumpacker, a Hammond attorney, against the Town and Town officials, filed in November, 1974, claiming that Dune Acres had no legal basis for its existence.
5. The National Lakeshore expansion bill of 1979 which included all of residential Dune Acres.

Of the five major crises the first -- legislation in Congress establishing the National Lakeshore -- has been described in Occasional Paper # 7. This paper will relate the story of the South Shore marshaling yard. The three remaining crises will be dealt with in subsequent papers.

But lest the reader think all was doom and gloom in those years, we might pause to look at other aspects of Dune Acres life at that time. It was, for example, a great time for tennis. Indoor courts were springing up all over Northwest Indiana and groups of Dune Acres residents, both men and women, were members and playing weekly. In town, additional courts were built and tournaments were held. The courts were as popular a social center as the beach. At the beach, something new was added. A number of residents bought small sail boats and summer weekends were devoted to racing. The bridge tournament, also, was started. The pace of life, as elsewhere in those decades, was often tense and somewhat frantic. In the interviews with residents, preserved by the Historical Commission, residents from those years often comment with some amazement on the amount of drinking that took place at town parties. It was the age of the martini, occasionally pushing over to straight gin on ice. Ladies wore floor length gowns on such occasions, and the standard dress for

men was bright plaid pants and a blazer. Somewhere along the line, the pace slowed down. The martini gave way to the 'little glass of white wine', Chablis at first, then in one of those strange and sudden waves of changing taste, Chardonnay became the favorite.

It was not all tennis, boats, booze and bridge, however. Ordinary life went on, the Town grew, new houses were built. One significant development was a closer relationship with Chesterton. Primarily, probably, this was because, for almost the first time, a number of families active in Chesterton life moved to Dune Acres. In the summer, teen age dances were held at the Clubhouse, with young people from Chesterton invited. In earlier times, Dune Acres residents of high school age had most often gone away to a boarding school and some still did, but most were now attending Chesterton High School. Demographically, Dune Acres still drew heavily from the Calumet region for residents, but the number from Hyde Park and the University of Chicago increased substantially and for the first time, a number of residents of Chicago's Near North Side purchased homes to use for weekends and in summer.

Now, to get back to that South Shore marshaling yard . . . Dune Acres residents had ambivalent attitudes toward the South Shore Railroad: they were all for bolstering up the lagging passenger service, but were indifferent or hostile to the freight side. The railroad, on the other hand, made a profit from freight, and lost heavily on passengers. Without governmental subsidies, the railroad suffered from chronic sinking spells, lurching from financial crisis to financial crisis, without ever quite giving up the ghost. Railroad officials wanted desperately to drop the passenger service, but the substantial number of commuters in Dune Acres (and up and down the shore) were anxious it should continue. In this already tense situation, the President of the South Shore, James McCahey, dropped a bombshell in late summer of 1967. He announced plans to build a freight yard for switching cars of coal destined for Bethlehem Steel to be located over Mineral Springs Road. Twelve or more tracks, with a proportionate number of switching trains, would stand between residents of Dune Acres and Highway 12. Today, we can be held up at that point by one train switching; imagine that multiplied by twelve.

Town officials conferred with McCahey, though to no avail. Judge Luther Swygert, chief Judge of the U. S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Chicago (a year round resident at 4 Shore Drive) was enlisted to be part of the negotiating team for the Town. Jim Halley, President of the Town Board, was adamant that the railroad would have to build an overpass over the marshaling yard. But plans were also drawn to build an alternate road out of town, running down Pine Lane to Porter Beach and then to Waverly Road.

By mid-July of 1968, the Town Board, feeling completely blocked, decided to seek advice from the Park Service. Events then took a surprising and distressing turn. Far from being helpful, the Park Service revealed that they themselves were considering closing and eliminating Mineral Springs Road so as to restore the integrity of the bog. (Here the beavers and their dams were sympathetically mentioned.) They proposed a new exit from Dune Acres, again down Pine Lane. At a meeting of the Lakeshore Advisory Commission on November 22, 1968, attended by Town Board member Dan Jenkins and Judge Swygert and Ann Sims as well, the Commission "requested the National Park Service to give high priority to . . . the construction of an alternate access road for the Town of Dune Acres. It is desirable that Mineral Springs Road . . . be removed to restore the full ecological integrity of Cowles Bog." It was pointed out at the meeting that the Commission's recommendations were generally adopted and implemented by the National Park Service.

So what happened next? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Why are we not leaving town via Pine Lane? All that is rather mysterious. A new Superintendent of the National Lakeshore arrived shortly after that meeting. Dan Jenkins asked him about the project and the Superintendent replied that he had never heard of it. About the same time, the South Shore found that, contrary to all previous protestation, it could move the freight yard further west, leaving Mineral Springs Road

unobstructed. It was widely believed that Judge Swygert and his friend Senator Birch Bayh had had a hand in this result.

Thus the great marshaling yard crisis came to an abrupt end to the town's satisfaction, and Mineral Springs Road still stands as our link to the outside world. What happened to passenger service on the South Shore? Things were not rosy for a while. Service was curtailed in 1971. In 1975-76, the railroad sought permission to drop passenger service east of Gary. But federal and state subsidies were in the offing, and those governmental programs were the salvation of the commuter service. Down the line lay the Northern Indiana Commuter Transport District. Eventually there were even new cars, not very attractive or comfortable as it turned out, but still all talk of dropping passenger service stopped. As a postscript, the Dune Acres stop was eliminated. But you can't have everything.

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