

DUNE ACRES HISTORICAL Commission
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Before World War II, Dune Acres was primarily a resort community with perhaps a dozen year-round families (population in the 1940 census: 46) and thirty to forty weekend or summer homes, ranging in quality from well-built second homes to beach shacks. Clarence Elder, in a brief memoir, recalled a cottage on East Road (#87) which he rented for two years. It was built on posts, and had no electricity, running water, or indoor plumbing.

The center of community life at that time was the Guest House and Clubhouse dining room, which did well during the Depression. The town was governed, then as now, by an elected Town Board whose chief task was to run the Guest House and dining room and maintain the roads. The Board moved in leisurely fashion. In August of 1938, a committee was appointed to gather data on the cost of building a tennis court. Three years later, in May of 1941, the committee produced a report. The Board then decided the project was too expensive and dropped the idea. (The first tennis courts were built in 1954.)

The small community was not free of personality clashes. In December of 1938, the Town Board record shows that one member, S. M. Hunter, sent a letter to his fellow Board members, Burgess Snyder and Leo Johnston, formally asking to see the Guest House Register. It was his third request, but no action was taken. Subsequently Mr. Hunter voted against all motions at all meetings until he disappears from the records after the next election. At that election, by the way, the polls were open from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m., "which gave everyone the opportunity to vote."

Dune Acres changed rapidly after World War II. A dozen year-round houses were built between 1946 and 1950, several designed by the distinguished Chicago architectural firm of Keck and Keck. The Keck brothers "modern style" with low horizontal lines and floor to ceiling windows (or sliders), replaced the pre-war favorite, the log house. All the log houses are from before the war, the last one built in 1937. Summer "shacks" were either remodeled for year-round use, or were torn down. In some cases they were replaced by new houses (the Richardson Wildlife Sanctuary replaced one on West Road) or the land of the small lots on which they had stood as added to the adjacent lots. Building has continued through the years, and there are now 151 houses in Dune Acres. Of these, about two-thirds are occupied by year round residents.

A notable change took place as the West End opened up. Just before the war a Chicago lawyer, William Tackett, built a substantial house (now the Wheeler's) at 58 West Road, reached from Mineral Springs by what the record calls "Tackett's Road." After the war, plats were recorded for Hill Drive in August, 1952, for the farther end of West Road in 1956, for Summit Drive in 1958, and for Willow Lane in 1968. Developers of these various areas were Dune Acres, Inc., Burgess and Mary Snyder, Tom and Katherine Washburn, Lloyd and Mildred Warner and Beegee and Sharon Snyder. Unusually, the Summit Drive area was owned and platted by a non-resident, Dr. Peter F. C. DeBruyn, a Netherlands-born professor of anatomy at the medical school of the University of Chicago.

Development of a different and less sensitive type threatened the Town in this period as commercial builders saw opportunities in the beautiful woods and beaches. At that time, the southern boundary of Dune Acres was an East-West line running through the junction of East Road with Mineral Springs Road. The land south of East Road to Cowles Bog was owned in two large parcels, totalling 150 acres. (One of these parcels extended west along what is now West Road almost to Hill Drive.) The owner of the larger parcel, a Chicago real estate developer named Elmore, indicated in 1952 his intention to subdivide the land which now includes the playground and tennis courts. Residents were alarmed, and after much discussion of alternative moves, voted to raise money from the residents to buy the property, with the understanding that it would remain forever parkland. The Town itself did not have the taxing or bonding capacity to raise funds. The price was \$50,000. Property owners were asked to contribute their pro-rata share based on the ratio of the assessed valuation of their property to the total assessed valuation of the Town. The sums were large, but over 90 per cent of the homeowners contributed their share. Almost at once the owner (a Mr. Edgren) of the 24 acres on Mineral Springs Road in the area where the marshal's office now stands put his property on the market for \$9,500. The ability of the townspeople to raise money was exhausted. But a solution was found. It was decided to sell the 18 acres of the Elmore land which lay west of of Mineral Springs and north of West Road in four parcels, each to be the site for only one house, a restriction to that effect to be included in the title. These lots were sold and the Edgren property purchased, extending the southern boundary of Dune Acres to Cowles Bog, and also making possible the lightly populated section on West Road where the M. Harris, Putnam, and Ritchie-Brannan houses now stand. (Numbers 6, 20, 28 West Road.)

The character of Dune Acres is revealed by the unspoiled, wooded entrance to the town on Mineral Springs, where the first view of human habitation is of the tennis courts and playground. All of this we owe to residents in 1952 whose financial sacrifice was substantial. The Park Purchase set a precedent for later public subscriptions for civic purposes: building the playground and tennis courts in 1954, the defense against the Crumpacker suit, erection of steel pilings to safeguard the water supply, and the fight against the Bailly nuclear site. In recent years, the formation of the Dune Acres Civic Improvement Foundation has provided an institutional structure for the Dune Acres tradition of financing improvements through personal contributions. Additional protection for the water supply, and an important part of the recent renovation of the Clubhouse (the new windows and new kitchen in particular) are among the improvements which have been carried out through the Foundation.

As the town was expanding geographically, it was also changing in other fundamental ways. The Fire Station was built and fire hydrants were installed in 1945. Both the Guest House and the Clubhouse dining room and kitchen had run down so badly during the war that it was decided in 1948 to close them. It was proposed that the Clubhouse be used for town social gatherings; in fact, the first Social Committee had been appointed in the previous year. Thus began another Dune Acres tradition. An ordinance was also passed which for the first time provided for hiring deputy marshals, and coverage at the marshal's office was increased (although still not to 24-hour coverage). Nobody seemed to be able to do much about the telephones, however. New families sometimes had long waits for a phone, and everybody was on a party line. Some idea of the standard at that time can be seen

from a complaint to the Public Service Commission of Indiana that the telephone company was providing five-party lines and charging a four-party rate. Think of that when you can't remember where you put down your cellular phone.

In 1949, serious trouble loomed and a confrontation began that would trouble the town and the region for decades. At a town meeting in July, it was reported that the Corps of Engineers would hold a hearing in Gary in regard to constructing a harbor at Burns Ditch. The report of this meeting states, "If it were to go through, it would bring an industrial area extending close to Dune Acres." A committee was appointed to attend the meeting with a view of protesting vigorously the proposed harbor plan. The first shot had been fired in the long battle over industrial construction, a battle which would concern Dune Acres for years to come,

Dune Acres Historical Commission

Gertrude Conklin
Margaret Doyle
James Newman

(Material for this paper drawn from the Dune Acres Town Board Records, vol. II; a memoir by Clarence Elder and a report by Richard J. Smith, chairman of the fund raising drive in 1952, entitled The Park Purchase Plan.)

(Note and query: There are references in the Town Board meetings in 1947 to efforts by a Mr. Calef to de-annex his property from Dune Acres. This was apparently in the West End. Anyone know anything about this?)