

Lake Hobbs



Bernice Combs Teske with her grandmother, cousin, and mother at Lake Hobbs in 1944. (Teske)



Marida Combs (Bernice's father), age 4 or 5, at Lake Hobbs in 1919 (Teske)



The orange grove near Lake Hobbs in 1935 (Teske)

The following narrative is based on an interview with James and Bernice Teske in their home on September 30, 2004. Bernice shares with us her childhood memories of Lake Hobbs in the 1940s and 1950s.

Personal History

Bernice Combs Teske first started visiting her grandmother's home on Lake Hobbs when she was just a child. While growing up, she would spend many school vacations there and even lived on Lake Hobbs for a short period of time before marrying her husband James in 1961 and moving to their home on Cedar Lake. Bernice explains:

"I spent time out there with my grandmother in the 1940s. My mother was a single working parent; so my grandmother would take me to her house from time-to-time to permit my mother to have a break in parenting. This occurred mostly on school holidays and in the summertime. I spent a lot of time at her house in my early school years. There was a time when my aunt and uncle lived in the garage apartment; that was kind of nice having a lot of family around, 'making over' me. This lonely ol' grandchild got a lot of attention. I was the first grandchild in our family, so I got the lion's share of playtime with the adults."

Bernice's grandmother moved to Lake Hobbs in the early years of the last century, a time when very few people inhabited northern Hillsborough County. Bernice describes her grandmother's life:

"She was born in the 1890s, married quite early—everyone did then, and the newlyweds acquired the land—about 30 acres—with an old existing run-down farm-house on the property. All of her children, three boys—my father, the eldest—and two girls, one that died in the flu epidemic of 1918, were born in the old house. Trips to Tampa were rare and when necessary they hitched a horse to a farm wagon and that was their mode of transportation until the early-1920s. The house that I remember was built in the late-1920s. Eventually she learned how to drive on the dirt roads in the area. The orange grove was planted the in the 1930s and that produced fruit and a modest income for her until she died in 1973. She was truly a pioneer of her time."



Bernice's grandmother's house when it was built in the 1930s. Lake Hobbs is to the left. (Teske)



Bernice and her sister in 1945 playing in front of the garage that had an apartment on the second floor (Teske)



Dottie (Bernice's sister), Bernice and cousin Patricia in front of the grove in 1944 (Teske)

Bernice moved out to her grandmother's house in the late-1950s when she began working at the then new University of South Florida. Bernice was one of the first people hired by the new school as a library assistant. This job would not only allow her to live on Lake Hobbs, but to meet her husband James, who was also employed by the university in its early days.

One of the great advantages to living on a lake is the close proximity of nature. For Bernice, like many others, the joy of living on a lake as a child meant finding a home of her own on another lake. After James and Bernice were married, they moved to Cedar Lake. James attributes Bernice's desire to live on a lake, to her fond childhood memories of Lake Hobbs. Bernice comments:

"Now that Lake Hobbs was a real lake! I spent a lot of time on Lake Hobbs as a child and it was wonderful, you know, to spend time on a lake—to have that nice wilderness entirely surrounding you, along with the groves, was an excellent way to live. My family all fished, and Lake Hobbs was a big fishing lake, my uncles always kept a little pole there for me to fish with."

Bernice also enjoyed the advantages of lake life as an adult. Bernice remembers:

"When I moved out to Lake Hobbs in the mid-1950s, I would come home after work, change into a bathing suit and go for a refreshing swim or maybe, dig a few worms and fish until dark."

History/Information

Lake Hobbs is a 60-acre lake located in the Rocky/Brushy Creek watershed. It is in an area of Hillsborough County known as Lutz. The area was first populated by a colony of German Catholics who established a settlement known as Stemper in the 1890s. [Lake Stemper, almost twice as large as Lake Hobbs, is located just south of Sunset Lane and slightly east of US 41.] The turpentine industry soon followed, dominating the area by 1910.

In 1911, the North Tampa Land Company purchased 32,000 acres of land around Lutz Junction and began an advertising campaign that drew people out to residential lots along the railroad line. By 1918 Lutz had four general stores, a canning factory, and Florida's second largest plant nursery. In 1921, State Road 5—later renamed US 41—was paved, providing a direct route to the City of Tampa.

The Lutz population reached 685 in 1930 and Bernice's grandmother could be counted as one of them. By the time Bernice was playing along the shore of Lake Hobbs in the 1940s the population of Lutz had nearly tripled. ¹

The home of Bernice's grandmother was located on the eastern shore of Lake Hobbs, close to US 41, the road that probably brought her out there in the first place. Bernice's grandmother had, like many others would have in the years to come, a citrus grove producing a variety of citrus fruits. Bernice remembers what life was like on Lake Hobbs:



Marida Combs (Bernice's father) in front of Lake Hobbs in 1930 (Teske)

“The water was so clear you could lie on the dock and look down through the spaces in the planks with the sun lighting the fish swimming around under the dock and seeing the little turtles paddling by. The water was so clear there and the lake bottom was white sand. Maybe it was where Mr. Hodges, the next-door neighbor, had dredged the shore and the bottom edge of the lake, out from his house. His dock was the dock I went over to play on. His grandkids and I would lie on the dock watching the little fish and the baby turtles for hours. We would very carefully pick up the little turtles and place them on the cypress stumps to sun. We entertained ourselves without spending a cent!”

James also has his memories of the lake:



Bernice and her grandmother with Lake Hobbs to the left in 1941 (Teske)

“The beach at her grandmother’s was very nice, very private, with many cypress trees and clumps of long, wild grasses naturally positioned. The house was a wooden, circa-1920s bungalow, one-and-a-half-story, with a single upper level room surrounded with windows. This room was Bernice’s childhood bedroom where she remembers looking out at night seeing the moon-shadows cast by the trees below and listening to the train’s whistle as it passed on the nearby tracks west of US 41. Tall queen palms spaced by yellow-flowered allamandas bordered the driveway to the house; banks of red poinsettias, red and yellow crotons and bushes heavy with hot red peppers surrounded the foundation of the house. Big camellia bushes were planted away from the house in large beds. There was a detached wooden two story, two-car garage with the typically large, hinged, swinging garage doors of the era, sitting about a hundred feet behind the house. This garage had the upstairs apartment that was Bernice’s single-adult living space she had mentioned earlier. I thought, ‘Wow what is this, a big lake with very few visible houses, ringed by cypress trees?’ I was just this guy from Ohio, where there were maybe six lakes the size of Lake Hobbs in the entire state and I was quite impressed that this was where Bernice lived.”

Bernice’s clearest memories of wildlife at Lake Hobbs were of the fish and turtles she enjoyed watching and playing with as a child, but she also remembered stories her grandmother told her about playful otters that would sometimes swim in toward the land and climb up onto the dock. Bernice never saw them herself but doesn’t doubt her grandmother’s story.

Development



Bernice Combs Teske's grandmother's house being burned in a training exercise in 1994 (Teske)



A shot of Bernice's grandmother's house being burned. The picture was taken from where the grove once stood. (Teske)

By the 1970s, citrus dominated the area. Others began to see the potential of living in the Lutz area, especially those working at the nearby University of South Florida. By 1990 Lutz had become a bedroom community of Tampa with a population of 10,552.²

On a recent visit to Grandma Combs' house and Lake Hobbs James noticed changes to the property surrounding the lake:

"It appears that what was her grandmother's grove is now nothing, no trees just overgrown pasture land. You can now clearly see the railroad tracks and beyond to US 41, the view that had been obscured by her grove. There are houses in front of where her house used to be, with more houses bordering the road that would take you to number 125 Lake Hobbs Road—her house."

The home in which Bernice had spent so much time growing up no longer exists; it was intentionally destroyed by firefighters as part of a training exercise in 1994. The story of the firefighters and their training fire was pictured and reported in the Tampa Tribune.

The Future

With her grandmother's house gone, Bernice and James have little reason to visit Lake Hobbs on a regular basis anymore. Bernice hopes that Lake Hobbs will remain healthy for others to enjoy, but today she is happy in her home of 44 years on Cedar Lake where she has planted many cypress trees around the lake creating the view she remembered from her youth; she continues to leave nursery-grown trees in her neighbor's driveways for them to plant on their lakefront with the hope that everyone will, one day, desire the surroundings of nature that she had enjoyed as a child on Lake Hobbs.

(Endnotes)

¹ Hillsborough County Historic Resources Survey Report. 1998. Prepared by Hillsborough County Planning and Growth Management.

² Hillsborough County Historic Resources Survey Report. 1998. Prepared by Hillsborough County Planning and Growth Management.

Written By: Alexis Broadbent-Sykes and James Teske