

Noreast Lake



View of Noreast Lake in January 2003 (USF)



Noreast Lake and the Meares' back yard (USF)

This narrative is based on an interview with W. Murray and Ruth Meares in their home on Noreast Lake on January 17, 2003. Both are lifelong Hillsborough County residents and have witnessed many of the changes that have occurred in the county. In this narrative, they reflect on their experiences on Noreast Lake and in northern Hillsborough County.

Personal History

W. Murray and Ruth Meares first came to Noreast Lake in 1955, but both have a long and rich history in the area and the state of Florida. Murray's family history in America spans back to the 1700s. He explained his family's migration to Florida:

"We came in to Florida through Key West from the Bahamas. At the time, the Meares family was in North Carolina during the Revolutionary War and they didn't want to separate from England. They were Tories, if you want to call them that. As a result, [they] were ostracized and criticized and went down to where the British were still in control, which was the Bahamas. They were there many years and then went over to Key West for more years and finally, by schooner to the Florida coast near Indian Rocks Beach. A little community called Anoma was organized after they arrived. So our history goes a long way back."

Ruth, who is a part of the Robles family, has family history in Florida that dates back to the 1800s. Murray shared a bit of Ruth's family history:

"[Ruth's] great-grandfather [Robles] came from Spain to St. Augustine. Eventually [he] went up into Georgia and married a girl up there and came back to Florida and moved from the county north of us down to here. They were pioneers in that county and it is reported at Dade City, where they have quite a bit of historical background in that area. They were there when the area became Pasco County [and] when the area was beginning to develop. And then they came on down here and, like a lot of people who came to Florida, went to other areas first and then came into the Tampa area as it developed. He had large acreage in the area that now includes Robles Park."

Ruth's parents, John Horace Robles and Mattie Platt-Robles, raised Ruth and her sisters, Mary Louise Smith and Maurine McTyre, on Platt Lake in northern Hillsborough County. It was on Lake Platt that Ruth was born in a house that her father had constructed from two schoolhouses. (See the Platt Lake Narrative for more information about the Robles family history: http://www.hillsborough.wateratlas.usf.edu/upload/documents/lake_platt.pdf)



The original Platt family home (Mary Louise Smith)



Shoreline of Noreast Lake in 2003 (USF)

Ruth and Murray's parents were good friends and the two have known each other their entire lives. Murray spoke about the connection between their families:

“Ruth and her family and my family were friends, and very close friends even before we were born. It goes way back. Her father was literally living in a room in my folks’ place in Tampa when he married. My mother tied his tie and went to his wedding and all that sort of thing... My people would go out to her place and pick oranges. Not pick them; they’d give us a call and say ‘We’ve got a lot of fruit down.’ It would fall off the trees because of climatic conditions; we’d go out there and fill our bags full of that fruit and bring it in here. We’d stay at their place and look after it when they’d go away to North Carolina or Chicago and wherever they went. She and I have known each other since we were children.”

Murray and Ruth had three children together, in addition to Murray's son from a previous marriage, when they found the land on Noreast Lake. Murray described their discovery of their property on the lake:

“We were driving along and saw a sign out here that said ‘Three Lots for Sale.’ We were looking for a place to put our house and we bought those three lots. We paid \$600 a piece for those lots... We kept those lots for a while and then came in there and had to landscape it and bulldoze it and do things like that in order to bring in the house.”

The Meares brought in a house from the barracks in Drew Park. Their children attended nearby Lake Magdalene Elementary School and would spend their free time swimming and fishing in Noreast Lake.

Murray and Ruth continue to live on and enjoy Noreast Lake. They realize that many people in Florida are attracted to lakefront property. However, the regular inquiries from real estate agents have yet to be enticing enough to take them away from Noreast Lake.

History/Information

Noreast Lake is an 8-acre lake located in the Curiosity Creek Watershed. Although he moved to the lake after it was named, Murray presumes that the name refers to the term *Nor'easter wind*. Murray describes the lake as shaped like a “dumbbell,” with the lake being deep at both ends, but not in the middle. Murray described the lake:

“When the water is low, you can walk across from one side to the other at about waist-deep. It’s only about that deep in the middle. On the ends it is deeper. Possibly because some of it, in the old days you could pump out of it in those areas and build up your own beaches. Things like that. Some of that went on that helped to contribute to deeper ends.”

The lake has experienced vegetation problems in the past. Some of the aquatic vegetation includes cattails and lily pads. Murray attributes some of the lake's vegetation to the lake's shallow depth in the middle:



The highest water level of Noreast reached this tree (USF)



The Blue Sink area of Curiosity Creek in 1998 (Katherine Elder)



The Blue Sink area covered with algae in 1980 (Katherine Elder)

“Well, you see that this has a lot of lily pads. In some cases where lakes are fairly shallow they grow lily pads all over the whole lake and then they have to come in there and, in the past, treat that to kill them out. Some of the lakes that are north of us, especially Cedar Lake, were laden with these. They had a company come in and spray it or whatever they did and it killed all the lily pads. That hasn’t been done here. But considering the problem, the reason why they don’t grow as much over there is because it is deeper over there. It’s shallower over here. There’s a layer of muck like this on the ground. It allows the growth to develop and those roots down there are big roots. I have made efforts in times past to clear them out and have a place where fish could come in and be fed. I would throw out bread.”

Some of the fish that live in Noreast Lake include bass, speckled perch, Nile perch, and catfish. In the past, there have been shad and jellyfish, but they are no longer present.

Noreast Lake is located in an area with many lakes. Some of the lakes surrounding Noreast Lake include Lake Pine, Lake Cedar and Cedar East Lake. Murray explained the connection of Noreast Lake to the surrounding water bodies:

“The lakes from Lutz coming this way were a chain of lakes and in the olden days, they naturally drained from one to another and they came into Lake Platt...from there, they went into what’s known as Curiosity Creek and drained on down underground and many instances went all the way to the Hillsborough River. Development, of course, changed all that.”

According to Murray the connection between the lakes and Curiosity Creek was especially important because of the underground waterways that brought the water to the river. One of these important areas was called the *Blue Sink*, a natural retention area that is a part of Curiosity Creek, located near the present intersection of N. Florida Avenue and W. Fowler Avenue. Murray illustrated what the *Blue Sink* was like before the development on Florida Avenue:

“It was possible in the old days to get there and it was quite a swimming hole. The creek itself was so large and flowed so heavy that there were gar fish in there as long as that table [a coffee table]. I’ve seen them personally. I know that they were there. That, of course, was when the lakes were still draining in that direction through the underground waterways that went all the way down to the river.”

Development

Residential and commercial development has greatly affected the areas around Noreast Lake and Curiosity Creek. When Murray and Ruth first moved to the lake in the mid 1950s there was very little development in the area, except for the Forest Hills residential area. The Forest Hills subdivision had been developed by Burks E. Hamner and his brother W.E. Hamner in the mid-1920s.¹ This housing development did not engulf Noreast Lake; however, according to Murray, there was one house on

the west side of the lake that had been a part of the original Forest Hills. Murray described the development in the area during the 1950s:



Vegetation on the shoreline of the lake in 2003 (USF)

“The Forest Hills development took place prior to the time that we moved here. The golf course – Babe Zaharias Golf Course – was in place. Homes were built in that area and that was one of the prime areas for development during the boom time. The boom time was in the early ’20s and the ’30s when the boom failed. Money was galore in those times and then vanished after the boom failed. [That] particular area was developed. This wasn’t. This was out of that area at the time.”

Murray went on to say that beyond the Forest Hills development, the area was “thinly populated.” Nearby North Boulevard was only a shell road at the time when the Meares family first moved to Noreast Lake. In fact, the lack of paved streets in the neighborhood posed a problem during the transportation of their home from Drew Park. Murray shared:

“In order for them to bring this house in from Drew Park, they had to bring it through the streets of the area here and it ran out. There were no streets and they had to bring it through the ground area. The people who were moving it didn’t know really what they were doing and the tractor they were using bogged down and they damaged and tore out the transmission in their equipment and had to repair it; then tore it out again and finally got a bulldozer to pull it in and put it into place.”

Soon after moving to the lake, North Boulevard was paved. As the years progressed, so did development on the lake and in the area. Directly on Noreast Lake, Murray described the development as being “almost continuous,” with a few lots still currently undeveloped.

The development of the area and its impact on the lakes and Curiosity Creek is of great concern to Murray. He believes that the drainage of the water into the Hillsborough River has been obstructed by the development. Murray shared:

“Once it [the water] gets over there [to Curiosity Creek], it goes through everything, just all kinds of obstacles before it finally gets down to what is known as the Blue Sink. Well, the retention area that is below Blue Sink, which is considerable, a large area like 10 acres or more that lie in there to retain the water. I don’t think much of it still goes underground because all the sink holes going up along Florida Avenue, and there were many, that are [now] mostly all built up and closed over. They filled them with concrete and built businesses all along there.”

The Future



Undeveloped land on Noreast Lake in January 2003 (USF)

The future of Noreast Lake likely depends on what occurs in Curiosity Creek, as well as the neighboring lakes. The future plans for Curiosity Creek concern Murray:

"I am very much concerned about what would happen when they route all this water from other areas into this lake and don't clean out Curiosity Creek so that it readily moves out. It will have an effect on this lake; there's no question about it. At least 6-8 years ago, or more, an engineering company in Tampa was given the job of analyzing Curiosity Creek and what to do in relation to that. There was over \$200,000 paid to that company to get the information and nothing has been done about it. Is it just put on hold and they're waiting for the money? If that's the case, then it might be another 50 years before anything is done. But if they did nothing more than to get in there and clean out all the shopping carts that have been dumped in there, parts of automobiles, things of that nature and cleaned it up so that water could move through it, what naturally accumulates in the area and do some things further in moving the water across to the river. That would be a big help for this particular area as it goes out there. That would be something that needs to be looked at."

However, with active citizen and government involvement, it is hoped that the future of Noreast Lake and Curiosity Creek will be positive.

ENDNOTES

¹ Grismer, Karl H. Tampa: A History of the City of Tampa and the Region of Florida. 1950. St Petersburg, FL: St. Petersburg Printing Company.

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