

ELMHURST HISTORY HIGHLIGHT: The Elmhurst Swimming Hole

Swimming has always been a favorite summer activity in Elmhurst, first taking its roots at the swimming hole in Salt Creek, at Graue's Woods that was north of North Avenue.

Early issues of the Elmhurst Press have numerous reports of picnics being held at Graue's Woods. The United Evangelical Church at York Street and North Avenue had its annual Sunday School picnic, in July 1918, with buses transporting people from both the church and from the Chicago & North Western train station to Graue's Woods. The graduates of Immanuel Lutheran School had their class picnic at the woods in June 1919, and there were also private picnics and parties held there.

A former Elmhurst resident, Henry Hobein, recalled hiking out to the woods to swim at the "old swimming hole." There was a large rock in the middle of the creek there.

William Strand described Salt Creek in 1915 as a "beautiful country stream that flowed gently in the summer". Although warned not to swim in the creek as it passes through Elmhurst or to the south, due to pollution, swimming at the Big Rock was considered far enough north of Elmhurst to be free from contamination.

Swimming at the Big Rock continued to be a popular summer pastime well into the 1930s. Page one of the Elmhurst Press (July 8, 1937) featured a photograph of swimmers at the Big Rock and a headline, "They Still Swim in Salt Creek." Part of the appeal of the swimming hole was its location at a bend in the creek that protected swimmers from the view of nearby highways of North Avenue and Route 83. However, the article does mention a growing problem of water pollution.

Fortunately, at the time the article was written, the young people of Elmhurst had an alternative to swimming in Salt Creek since the Elmhurst Park District opened a swimming pool at East End Park in June 1937.

Due to an expansion of Route 83, the Big Rock from the Graue's Woods swimming hole was moved to the south lawn of the Elmhurst History Museum in 1976 and it remains there today.



Stanley, Louis, and Alice Whitford at the Salt Creek swimming hole, circa 1916. M2011.1.40

By Nancy Wilson, Elmhurst History Museum Staff, Updated October 2021