

Living Lightly on the Land
A Harriet Pierson Berman Memorial Walk
White Lake Historical Society
August 28, 2002

Harriet Pierson Berman

Harriet was born 98 years ago in Chicago, Illinois and was the middle child born to Warde and Ann Chittenden. Some of you may remember her brother, Loker Chittenden, who was instrumental in establishing the sailing school at the White Lake Yacht Club, in the late 20's. Harriet's family brought her to the White Lake area as an infant having first stayed in the Sylvan Beach Resort Hotel before purchasing their summer home at Sylvan Beach in the early teens. In those early years, the family arrived for the summers aboard one of the steamers owned by the Goodrich Company which docked at Sylvan where Kiddie beach is now located.

Summer after summer, year after year, she would return with her family - first as a youngster, then as the wife of Henry and mother of three boys: Warde, Duane, and Daka, who died in the early 80's. Upon Henry's retirement in the mid-1960s, the decision to move from Evanston, Illinois to their lake home was made. Because of their previous years of community involvement, it didn't take long before they were contributing their time and efforts to the White Lake area. About 5 years after the death of Henry in 1970, Harriet married Louie Berman - a long-time acquaintance. Between the two of them, they gave 100% of their energies to improving the quality of living in the White Lake area. And, following Louie's death in 1980, Harriet continued to volunteer in some fashion.

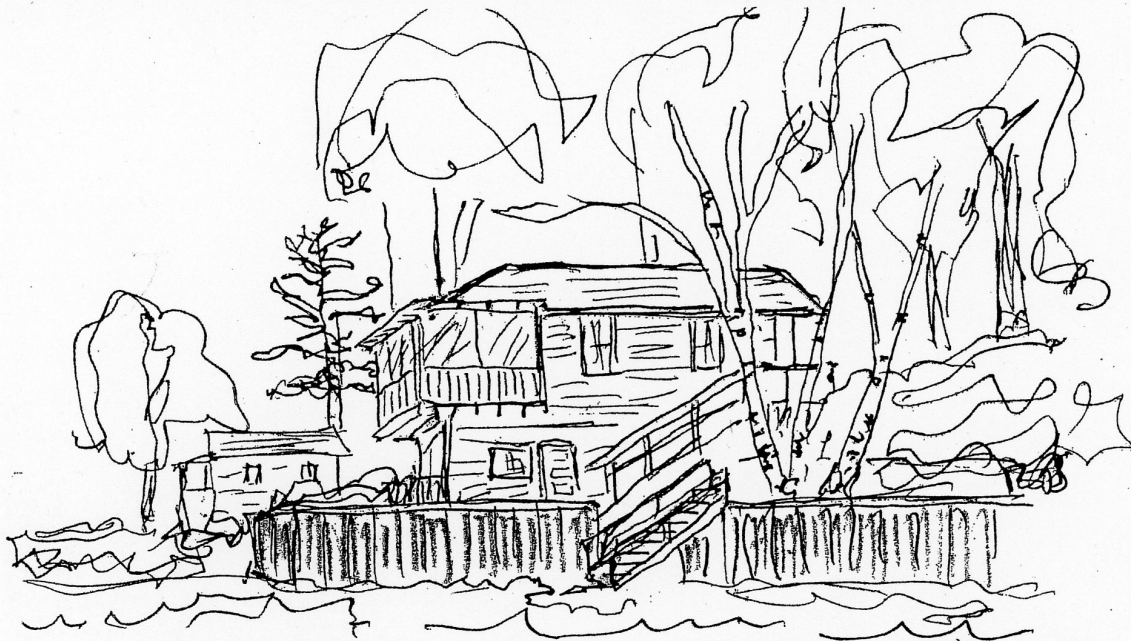
Her environmental interests included: i.e., planting geraniums at the old depot (home to the Chamber of Commerce), beautification of the intersection at Mears and Main Street and at Oakhurst Cemetery. She was very much interested in saving places of historical value; i.e., the Community School House on South Shore Drive and the White River Township Lighthouse - preserved by a well-meaning group of Sylvan residents and later turned over to Fruitland Twp. As a member/volunteer of the Historical Society, she was instrumental in the establishment of the Howmet Theater and saving the Lewis House. For several years, she welcomed ladies into her home to make Christmas ornaments for fund-raising purposes to benefit the Lewis House, etc. She was also a longtime member of the Women's Club, and organized programs to be held at the Senior Center. She became an enthusiastic supporter of the Arts Council. Enhancing the area for others to enjoy was her main objective. This is deeply reflected in the Spring when the Sylvan Beach woods on Murray Road are transformed into a carpet of daffodils which she planted over several years.

She died on April 14th of this year just as her gift of flowers, bushes, and trees were blossoming.

Irene Pierson

Allen Weary built the main cottage in 1913. The building combines the horizontal design elements of the Chicago's Prairie School with the concepts of the early 20th century arts and crafts movement. The horizontal wooden base and exterior detail along with the painted canvas upper areas create the feeling of campside summer living. The fenestration with its leaded Palladian styled window on the west gable end and the functional bedroom windows (one window for each bunk bed) capture the essence of practical summer living. The adjacent studio building with its shed dormer and ribbon multi paned windows overlooking White Lake is a perfect work spot retreat. Both of these buildings are centered around the earlier hand pump well, which is covered and protected by decorative trellis work. Water.....the source of life and living!

Here on this lands shelf terrace, the Weary family enjoyed the good summer life overlooking the wooded shores of White Lake. In 1952, the Thompsons purchased the property from Mr. Weary's daughter and son-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. De Rocher and built their new home on the high bluff.



• The Branch-Reeves Boathouse •

The Branch/Reeves Boathouse

Built on land purchased from the Potters in 1910, this interesting boathouse was built by Ralph and Julia Branch in the 1920s. It's setting, dominated by huge native white pines, oaks and white birches reads as an "only in Michigan" lakeside scene. The simple rectangular two story structure has living spaces on the upper floor and functional boat storage facilities on the lower floor. The prize of this boathouse is the generous open screened porch that seems to float above the White Lake shoreline below. The flared roof eaves create an oriental image and extend the screened living space out beyond the rectangular boathouse form thus reaching out, one feels, to grab any cooling summer breeze. The interior space includes basic kitchen, bathroom and sleeping spaces. The story have been passed on that this is where Ralph Branch lived when his mother-in-law made her annual summer visit. With views to White Lakes's North shore and the Western sunset channel scene, the boathouse offers a most wonderful Utopian summer living space for the Reeves.

We'll hear some comments from Tom Thompson, Bill and Jeannie Reeves about their properties and then tour the buildings.

Thank you for coming this evening.

Roger Scharmer
ASLA-AIGP

Harriet loved the White Lake area and its history. She felt very strongly about White Lake as a scenic place and contributed her time and efforts to protect and improve the natural, social and cultural environments. The buildings we are going to look at reflect and capture a way of life that existed in earlier days of living along the shores of White Lake.

About the Place and Buildings

Today, our buildings and the way we live, consume great amounts of energy (both electrical and petroleum fuels) and vast volumes of treated water. Septic tank systems and leach lines are designed for homes with 2-4 bathrooms, one hour dishwasher runs, wet bars, washing machines. All this waste-water disposal is on the same property where the well water source is located. We seem to design buildings that require vast amounts of energy, water, building materials and other resources of the world.

Our treatment of the landscape around our homes includes very few plants from the native Michigan landscape. Noisy, gas powered lawn mowers run weekly to control the short clipped, fertilized turf that runs down to the shoreline. Native plants are banished from the scene and replaced by ornamental plants requiring herbicide and pesticide products for good growth. Wildlife habitats are destroyed. The White Lake scene is altered.

Earlier White Lake residents lived more simply and frugally on the land. The Weary/Thompson summer cottage compound and the Branch/Reeves boathouse express the simpler summer life when people lived more lightly on the land.



• The Weary-Thompson Cottages •

The Weary/Thompson Cottage Complex

Allen M. Weary purchased this land from Howard Potter in 1913. The Potters had owned the land since 1888 and later developed their Bonne Vista Resort. Allen Weary, a Chicago architect built the building we see today. A boathouse was destroyed by high water years ago.

In the Chicago 1880s architectural world, there was an architect named Charles A. Weary who designed buildings near the University of Illinois Medical Campus in the city's near West Side. He also designed a stable building in the Douglas Park area for the successful businessman, President of Marshall Field and Company, John G. Shedd. Was Charles A. Weary the father of Allen Weary?



Join the White Lake Historical Society on a tour and talk by Roger Scharmer, Tom Thompson, Bill and Jeannie Reeves. Tour a 1920's boathouse and a unique summer cottage complex consisting of two architecturally distinctive buildings designed by a Chicago architect in 1913 and 1920. A look at early White Lake summer lifestyles when residents lived lightly on the land. Bring some friends. See you there!

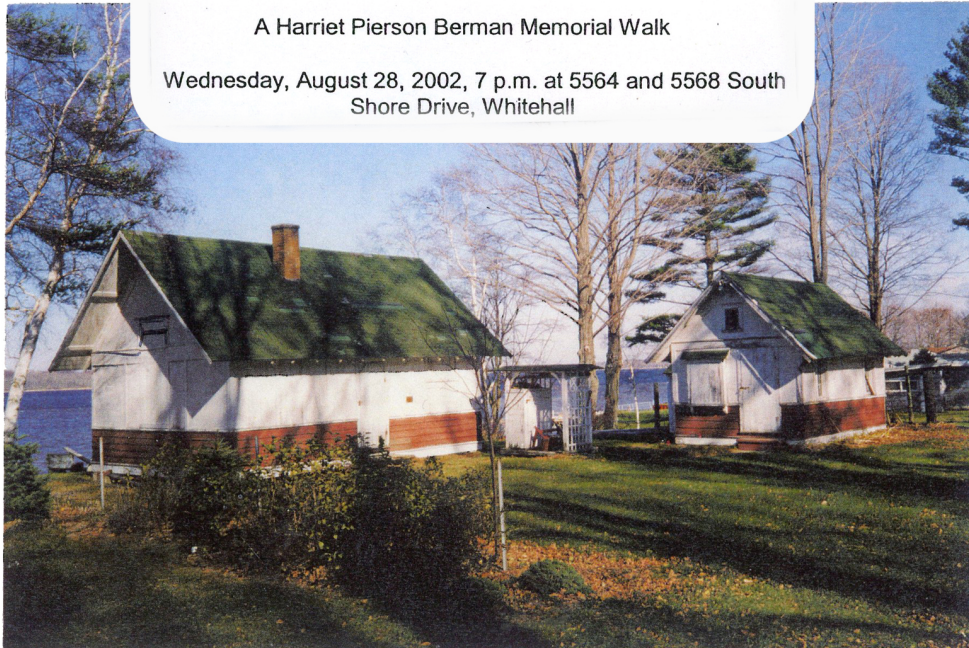
Parking at 5564 and 5568 South Shore Drive. For those unable to handle steps, transportation to the lower White Lake land shelf and meeting site can be provided at #5564. More info, call Roger, 894-9603.

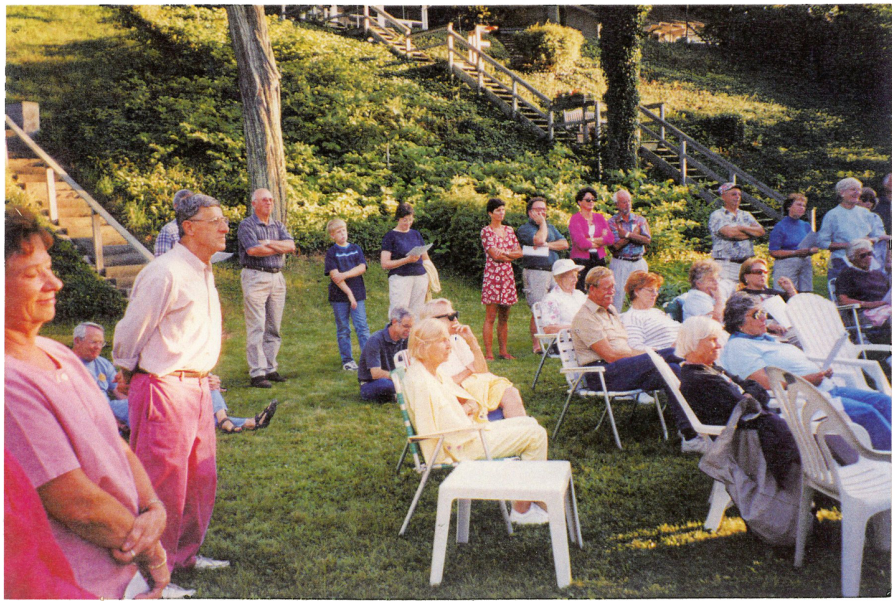


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Wednesday, August 28, 2002, 7 p.m. at 5564 and 5568 South Shore Drive, Whitehall





Ruth Pitkin