

History of Glass Club Lake

The end of the Civil War brought westward migration of individuals and families alike from the southern states to Northeast Texas. Among those included James W. Glass (1852-1920) who was born in Virginia and at age 23 found his way to what is now Omaha, Texas. In 1876, Glass married Alberta Farrier (1858-1916). Alberta was the daughter of Dr. Henry Farrier. The Farrier family was among the first settlers to arrive to the area in 1870 from Alabama. James W. Glass died on August 29, 1920 and is buried in the Omaha Cemetery.

James and Alberta Glass had several children including daughter, Ruby Glass (1882-1953) married in about 1906 to Lewis Edward Parham (1884-1936). Ruby Glass Parham died in 1953. The gravesites of the Parham's may be visited at the Omaha Cemetery.

Northeast Texas has always been a favorite hunting and fishing ground. In the early 1920s Ruby and Lewis Parham decided to build a "Club Lake" on the outskirts of Omaha. The lake was to be constructed with funds raised by the sale of stock and land to be leased to club members. Heirs of James W. Glass including H.M. Glass, J.M. Glass, Mrs. Pearl Fain, joined by her husband, Logan Fain, and Mary Bain joined by her husband Tom Bain sold 90 ½ acres to Mrs. Ruby Parham for one dollar. The next year, J.M. Glass sold 64 ¼ adjacent acres to Lewis Parham for six-thousand dollars.

During the summer of 1921, Glass Club Lake became a reality. Memberships sold for one-hundred dollars with dues ranging from five to ten dollars yearly. The Parham's borrowed money from the Omaha Bank to complete the project and contracted with local laborers to build a dam across Village Creek by using mule teams and scrapers.

The Parham's leased the lake and surrounding land to the Club for a \$500 yearly fee. The lease was to run for a period of fifty years ending in 1971. The club members were to have access rights to the lake and a "space for fifty feet on the outside of the water around the lake, and also a road or passage over other land" belonging to the Parham's being used for pasture. In addition, it was agreed that land would be made available for a club house and other suitable structures. The lease further agreed to the "right to lay off a suitable ball ground in said pasture, and construct thereon suitable grand-stand for the purpose of baseball and other games, golf-links and things of that nature that might be used by the club". By 1924, the first log cabin was built on the west side of the lake.

In Gunnar Brune's book, *Springs of Texas* he states "in some woods on the east side of Glass Club Lake"... are springs "enclosed by a large semicircular stone wall, they formally flowed at a higher elevation". Morris County "spring waters are usually of

calcium or sodium bicarbonate type, quite fresh, soft and acid. The iron and manganese content is often high.” There are several natural springs located on the property.

On December 2, 1932 the articles of incorporation were signed and Glass Club Lake, Inc. was granted a charter by the Texas Secretary of State on January 5, 1933. According to the document, the Club was formed “to establish and maintain a fishing, hunting and boating club, to protect, preserve and propagate fish and game; to purchase and own such lands and bodies of water as may be desirable in connection therewith; to erect suitable improvements thereon; and to raise such livestock for profit only as the preserves of the club will maintain”.

Lewis Parham was the first caretaker also called the “Keeper”. Members were issued cards and according to early bylaws required to “present [the membership card] upon demand by the Keeper, President, or to any active members on Club property.” Guests were also required to check in at the Keeper's house and sign a “guest book before they shall be allowed privileges of the lake.”

In 1933 there were 100 members with the capital stock of the association valued at \$10,000. Three years later on May 12, 1936, two-thirds of the stockholders voted to decrease the capital stock to \$2,500. The charter was for 20 years and was extended for another 50 years in 1953.

Bordering the south end of Glass Club Lake are train tracks first laid out by the St. Louis, Arkansas, and Texas Railroad. Steam locomotives traversed a narrow-gauge line from Gatesville, Texas to Decatur, Illinois and later became part of the Cotton Belt Route. A Depot was located in nearby Gavett [now Omaha] by 1870. In modern times the main line of the “Cotton Belt” continues to be an important part of the Union Pacific Railroad system connecting the Midwest with the Southwest.

In 1934 and 1935, Ruby and Lewis Parham deeded land adjacent to the railroad to the State of Texas for the building of a new state highway. The Parham's lived on the property and their house was moved a short distance north to accommodate the highway construction. (The Parham house has often been referred to as the “Caretaker's House” and is presently situated on Lot 9). State Highway 1 (SH1) was also known as the Texarkana, Dallas, Ft. Worth and El Paso Highway. SH1 was one of the original 26 state highways and became part of the transcontinental “Bankhead Highway”.

In September of 1936, the local camp of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) enjoyed a barbeque and dance at Glass Club Lake. The CCC was part of the “New Deal” program initiated by President Roosevelt and provided employment for young men who had difficulty finding jobs during the Great Depression. The *Mt. Pleasant Times* reported “the affair was arranged by the commanding officer, Captain William F. Cox, as a reward to the company for their efforts in trying to win the district efficiency flag, a coveted honor among camps”.

Also, in 1936, two acres of land was “cut-out” at the Southeast corner of the original tract of lake property and was sold to J.E. Parham (1889-1962) for the sum of \$600.

In March of 1941, Glass Club Lake was recognized as a social and recreation club exempt from federal income tax under the Revenue Act of 1916. The exemption had been justified by Congress on the premise that “the practical effect of the exemption is to allow individuals to join together to provide themselves with recreational or social opportunities on a mutual basis without further tax consequences.”

In 1967, the Texas Legislature passed the Water Adjudication Act requiring landowners to secure permission from the state for the use of surface water. Prior to this time no “water right” was needed to build a dam on private property. In 1973, the Texas Water Rights Commission, predecessor agency to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), granted a permit to use State water for recreational purposes including swimming, boating, and fishing. Glass Club Lake, Inc. was given authorization to “maintain an existing dam and reservoir on an unnamed tributary of Village Creek having an impounding capacity of 500 acre-feet” (The volume of one acre of surface area to the depth of one foot.) or the equivalent of 162,925,713.5 gallons of water.

By 1971, the lease agreement with the Parham Family had run its course and their heirs wanted out of the contract. By this time sixty-seven houses had been built by club members around the Lake. According to court documents “No club house for common use of the members has ever been erected but a bath house for common use and six or seven boat houses for individual use have been built.” Three of the houses were full-time residences and one member “keeps some kind of livestock or chickens”. Two of the houses were reported in disrepair. Nancy Parham, May Benefield and Joe Marvin Parham, Jr. sued not to renew the lease and retain the property; however, in 1976 a Texas appellate court ruled that the Club was entitled to renew the lease for another fifty years.

Subsequently in 1977, the Parham heirs sold the property to Glass Club Lake, Inc. for \$60,000. Club members each paid \$600 to purchase a common interest in the land, issued stock certificates, and given exclusive rights to a real estate lot as well as shared rights to common areas. In 1978, annual membership dues were \$50.

In 1978, the Gulf Interstate Exploration Company purchased oil, gas, and mineral rights to the lake property for \$160. The lease was for a five years period. Presumably, no oil or gas was ever found!

Today, shareholders of Glass Club Lake are primarily limited to homeowners of a residential lake community. However, a few non-resident shareholders continue to have access to the lake and common areas. Each year in June, stockholders, including some descendents of the club's forefathers, and their families come together for an annual dinner and shareholders meeting.