

Lake Charm



Barbara Shaffer outside her current home (USF)

The following narrative was derived from an interview with long time Lake Charm resident, Barbara Shaffer on August 24, 2001. In it, there is a great amount of historical reflection on not only Lake Charm itself, but also the surrounding Oviedo area. Barbara Shaffer has lived on the lake, on and off, for her entire life.

Personal History

On November 8, 1928 Barbara Shaffer was born in Sanford, Florida and came home to live on Lake Charm in Oviedo where her grandmother lived along with many of Barbara's aunts and uncles. Barbara's father was born on Lake Charm in 1892. It was Barbara's grandfather who brought the family to live near Lake Charm as he lived about 300 yards from where Barbara lives now as a child. As he got older, Barbara's grandfather became involved in real estate, but dabbled with orange groves as well. Through such business endeavors, he came to own a significant amount of property around the Lake Charm area, which is why Barbara's family has such strong roots there.

As a child, Barbara swam in Lake Charm all the time. She says, "I love this lake and have taken advantage of it from early childhood." In her youth, Barbara learned to fish, swim, and boat on Lake Charm. However, later in life she left Lake Charm for a while to join her husband in Europe, Thailand, and various places in America as he was stationed from town to town as an Army officer. During the summers, however, Barbara and the children would return to Lake Charm to visit family and friends. Barbara says:

"I always brought the children back here for at least six weeks every summer and my mother wrote me, believe it or not, every day when I was out of Oviedo. So I kept up with everything that was going on in the area."

When Barbara's husband, Don, retired from the Army in 1979 the couple returned to Lake Charm permanently and have been there ever since. Barbara did not realize how pretty the lake was until she left, then came back. She says, "I suddenly realized, this is a beautiful spot and it really is."

History/Information



Historical marker posted at Lake Charm (USF)



Ducks mingling at Lake Charm (USF)

Lake Charm is a 19-acre lake located in the Lake Jesup Watershed of Seminole County in Oviedo, Florida. According to a historical marker posted at Lake Charm, Martha Gwynn, daughter of early settlers of the area – Walter and Mattie Gwynn, named Lake Charm because she believed that it possessed healing properties and was thus, charmed.

In terms of wildlife supported by Lake Charm, Barbara reports abundant animals and unique vegetation. According to Barbara, a man named Mead, for which nearby Mead Gardens was named, brought exotic flowers to the Lake Charm area, that were not known to Florida at the time, but are common today. Barbara says that over the years, vegetation on the lake has changed. She shares:

“Before some of the less desirable vegetation came, we could walk around the edge of the lake and the water was clean. It was great for swimming and walking. Then, we began to get such things as these primroses that grow so thick and fast and you couldn’t get down to the edge of the lake. Then we began to get hyacinths in the lake, which we didn’t have before. We always had pretty water lilies, now we’ve got the yellow ones. Cattails and other wild plants came in and the turtles became scarce.”

Animals spotted by Barbara over the years include a few alligators, anhinga, also known as water turkeys, some ducks, owls, cranes, and one time a Canada goose. Barbara says that the anhinga nest in the big oak trees near her home. She claims the birds prefer the lush foliage of the oaks to that of other trees. About the rare Canada goose, Barbara explained:

“He was crippled and when he finally got well enough, he flew away. He made the funniest noise. I woke up and I said oh, I’ve lived in Maryland, I know that noise. That’s a Canadian goose. I went out and sure enough, it was one. He hung out for about 3 or 4 months until he felt he was healed enough to fly away. Isn’t it strange how they just know?”

There are also various fish in the lake, that according to Barbara are clean enough to eat. She had two catfish in the freezer at the time of the interview, but said she was not sure when she would eat them as she was not fond of the catch. Overall, Barbara thinks Lake Charm has more wildlife now than when she was a child. She says:

“We’ve kept the lake so that it’s conducive to it. Nobody bothers them. We get pretty angry if anybody comes messing with the cranes or throwing things at them, we stop them.”

Barbara and the other residents of Lake Charm truly do their best to maintain the quality of Lake Charm and its surrounding area.

Development



Lake Charm (USF)

The beginnings of the development of Lake Charm can be attributed to extensive landowner Walter Gwynn mentioned in the History/Information section of this narrative, who moved to the area in the mid 1800s. According to Barbara, another person involved with the early development of Lake Charm is Dr. Henry Foster. Dr. Foster, a friend of Barbara's family sponsored the Lake Charm Improvement Company in 1888 (Source: Early Days of Seminole County, Florida, 1984). The results of this initiative were instrumental in the growth of the area. It was from Dr. Foster that Barbara's grandfather bought land from during his real estate endeavors.

Traditional land use around Lake Charm was primarily agricultural, switching from orange groves to celery after the great freeze of 1895. At that time, Barbara remembers only 12 homes around Lake Charm and the population of the town of Oviedo was reportedly around 250. Barbara shares:

"At one time, it (Oviedo) was reportedly the largest celery growing city...it grew the most celery of any place in the United States [which might be city legend]. Although Sandford was known as the celery city because it started growing it first, Oviedo had tremendous acreage right behind Lake Charm. Back in there is Black Hammock all the way to Lake Jesup there were tremendous celery farms. Now it's mostly sod, but there used to be large celery farms out there".



Old church, now a home (USF)

Barbara shares what she knows about the development of Lake Charm in those early days:

"Around the lake, this was a tourist area where the people from Clifton Springs, NY came. However, it became more native after the big freeze of 1895. Then other people began building lots and putting houses on the lake. Most of the houses that are out here are not real old houses. Many of the old houses were tore down and replaced by new ones. There are probably only two and with this old church here (now a home), three structures that are over 100 years old. A lot of these houses have been built since WWII."

About the number of houses on the shores of Lake Charm, Barbara says, "The number has been pretty consistent [at roughly fourteen]". Barbara shares her memories of the course of residential development around Lake Charm:

"The houses just went up one by one whenever anybody needed a house. So it would happen. Some children got married and they needed a house and if the parents owned some property on the lake, they'd build a house. The property was owned by very few people, but then as those few people had children grow up, the land was split and more houses went up."

Barbara would like to see the number of dwellings around Lake Charm remain consistent. To help ensure this, she recently sold one of her lots across the lake to two families that own homes on either side of it. She said, this meant there would not be another house built because the lot was split and there was not enough room for either of the families to build. Barbara said, "the fewer houses, the better".

The Future



View of Lake Charm from Barbara's house (USF)

The future of Lake Charm seems sound. Any issues that might be detrimental to its health appear to be in control. As president of the Homeowner's Association of Lake Charm, Barbara Shaffer makes sure every resident's annual fee of \$50 pays for a lake doctor to come out and monitor the health of Lake Charm. Barbara says:

"Once a year or so, we have a potluck supper on someone's lakeshore or home. The man across the lake is the man who takes care of contacting lake doctors, I don't do that...I just call the gang together when I need to and it's time to call them now. I need to do that. But as long as the money comes in, he makes sure that the lake doctors are paid."

Barbara says mostly everyone takes and follows the advice of the water experts and as a result, the community as a whole does a good job of maintaining the health of the lake. She reports, "Most of us are very careful about fertilizing our yards. That is, do it very lightly or not at all". Barbara says, the residents truly want to make the lake "ecologically correct." The neighborhood has also made sure the one lane road circling Lake Charm is not expanded. Barbara says:

"I don't know how many times, the city wanted to put a two-lane road and we've blocked it. It makes the traffic go slower and its not a thorough fare. We're kind of jealous of what we have. We want to share it. We want people to be able to enjoy the lake, but we don't want them to desecrate the lake...just visit."

With such continued efforts, Lake Charm is sure to continue providing its residents with a peaceful view as well as a place to fish and swim. Perhaps, the lake is charmed.

Written By: Deanna Barcelona, M.A.