

Historical Clippings

Three Lakes Museum

August 2024

What a Difference a Bridge Makes

Today Three Lakes residents and tourists are able to navigate with relative ease through the natural maze of lakes, both on the water and by land. Early in Three Lakes history though, travel to the outermost reaches of the lakes was possible by water, but travel on land posed a real if not insurmountable challenge. It took time but roads, just like electricity, eventually was available to everyone. Five bridges have connected people and the lakes to the town.

Originally the Burnt Rollways Dam and Boatlift, built in 1911, was crossed by a tote, or wagon road. In time, with dam upgrades vehicle traffic could cross the thoroughfare on this triple purpose bridge.

In 1930 the Long Lake Bridge taking O'Neill Road to the north shore of Round Lake was privately funded after the town refused to pay for it. By 1939 the bridge failed and the town voted not to repair it, instead voting to construct the nearby Island / Little Fork crossing that became the Blue Ribbon Bridge. Today O'Neill Road comes to an end at Long Lake where the road had crossed the water. For many years the crumbling pilings marked the spot.

The same year the Long Lake Bridge was closed, the town voted to continue Highway X across the waters of Island and Little Fork Lake at Blue Ribbon Point where Roderwald's Blue Ribbon Resort had been lost to fire after the tornado of 1924. The continuation of X led to the construction of Reed Road and Preacher's Point Road to the east and Long Lake and the Lower Chain to the north.

State Highway 32 runs from the southern to the northern border of Wisconsin and today runs consecutively with many highways. Some sections in places even follow the path of the historic Military Road. Looking at the map you can see the junction of 32 and Military Road road meet at the location of Hi Polar's Trading Post where 32 then continues south. Construction of 32 began in the early 1900's and crossed the waters in Three Lakes at the junction of Deer and Big Stone Lakes. The early bridge was called the "Iron Bridge".

The last water crossing was on Big Lake where the Thunder Lake Narrow Gauge Railroad ran a trestle and parallel to that was the North Big Lake Loop Road bridge.



