

Monohon



Monohon—the lost East Lake Sammamish mill town from the early 20th Century. Some of our Plateau residents are old enough to remember the town. For the rest of us, if you live here long enough you'll hear about it. The story is a little like the tale of the lost city of Atlantis, although the story about Monohon has its own mystique unique to Lake Sammamish.

The town of Monohon was located on the southeastern shore of Lake Sammamish in the vicinity of East Lake Sammamish Parkway SE and SE 33rd Street. This area is now known as the Waverly Beach Community in the southern fringes of Sammamish, near the small Lakeside Plaza strip mall on East Lake Sammamish Parkway. Although some early maps (and even a few maps today) misspelled the town's name as Monohan, the correct spelling was, in fact, Monohon. We know this because the town was named after Martin Monohon. Monohon homesteaded 160 acres on the east side of Squak Lake (now Lake Sammamish) in 1877.



At about the same time Martin Monohon was homesteading his 160 acres, Simon Donnelly (with his partner, a Mr. McMahon) built a sawmill along the southwest shores of Squak Lake. An abstract on the HistoryLink website says that the town of Monohon was originally named Donnelly and that Simon Donnelly opened the first post office there on February 5, 1885. According to the HistoryLink abstract, on December 10, 1888, the town changed its name to Monohon. There isn't a lot of information about these early events, but it sounds as though Monohon was probably considered part of the town of Donnelly in the 1870s and 1880s, and in 1888 formed its own separate community on the southeast shores of the lake. The mill town of Donnelly remained in and around the site where Simon Donnelly had built his mill, near the present-day site of Timberlake Park on the southwest shores of Lake Sammamish.

In 1889 the railroad completed a track along the eastern shore of what was still called Squak Lake. The Donnelly Mill moved its site to Monohon, and a new company was established with the then princely sum of \$50,000. This new company was named the Allen and Nelson Mill Company, and the mill there would be Monohon's anchor for the next 36 years. Once the mill was up and running, logging operations along the east shore of Squak Lake (Lake Sammamish) quickly began in earnest. One of the mill's first big jobs was to provide lumber for the city of Seattle to rebuild the downtown core that was destroyed in the big Seattle fire on June 6, 1889.



By the 1890s, Monohon was establishing its own identity. After a small population boom in the early 1890s, growth in Monohon slowed during the economic slump of the mid 1890s, and began growing again by the end of the decade as the mill's business increased. Initially the mill's lumber sales were primary local. However, according an article by Eric Erickson on the Issaquah History On-Line website, "by the approach of the turn of the century (1900) the mill's lumber sales reached as far east as Minnesota and north to Alaska and the Yukon", undoubtedly fed by the gold rush to the Yukon and a year later, Alaska.



By 1906, there were twenty homes in Monohon. In 1906 the mill was sold to C. P. Bratnober, John E. Bratnober, and C. S. LaForge. Bratnober was a major player in the Seattle-area timber industry for at least the first few decades of the 20th Century. New machinery was installed in the mill, such

as a modern water system for fire protection and a burner with wire-capped domes. The mill had a cutting capacity of 120,000 feet daily. A steam-fitted derrick was used for the largest timbers. The loading track had the capacity of about 20 cars, and it was possible to have all 20 cars loaded at one time. Eventually the mill would come to own 120 acres of property along Lake Sammamish and up the hill. The adjoining land around Monohon was used for farming and summer homes.

The sale of the mill was extremely beneficial to Monohon. In just a few years beginning in 1906 thirty more homes were built, which brought the total residences in Monohon to 50. Many homes were close along the lakeshore, though there were some homes back in the hills going toward Pine Lake that were also considered at the time to be part of the community. By 1911 the town boasted a population of 300. The town's post office contained 125 letter boxes in the post office. The Butschke Bros. operated a wood-turning shop. And—particularly unique to Monohon--the Monohon Boat and Canoe Company manufactured canvas boats and canoes. This was the only company in the state of Washington to create this type of boats and canoes.



Monohon had a two-room schoolhouse, two teachers and an average attendance of 50 students. Church services were held in the schoolhouse on Sunday afternoons. Reverend Williston of the Methodist Church of Issaquah performed the service, probably coming to Monohon by horse or perhaps by buggy on what was then a narrow track of dirt road from Issaquah, closer to the lake than East Lake Sammamish Parkway is today. Or perhaps he took the train—Monohon had a railroad depot during this time. Eventually, a youth club called The Busy Bees helped construct a building for church services.



Monohon continued to rapidly grow and acquire more services as the first decade of the 1900s drew to a close. In 1908 a two-story 36 foot wide by 78 foot long meeting hall was built for the Monohon Building Association. By the end of 1909 the mill had completed a new water system for the community—this was a big deal in the days of well water and outhouses. The mill also built a 20 room hotel in Monohon which was called the Lake View. There were other amenities to be found in Monohon: a telegraph station, summer homes, and a dock used as a shipping point for lumber and dairy. History also records that the Lake View Club, a literary group, was in Monohon during this time. Monohon had so many amenities that it earned the attention of an area magazine: the June 1909 issue of *The Coast* declared Monohon "a model mill town."

The mill was, of course, the major employer in Monohon. Eric Erickson's article says that "the 1910 census shows 94 employees working at the mill in jobs ranging from blacksmith, carpenter, car loader, engineer, filer, gagger, lather runner, lumber piler, sawyer, slab loader, teamster and the usual assortment of foremen, bosses and managers". As noted above, Monohon's entire population was 300 in 1910.



Lake Sammamish near Monohon

Here's an interesting description of Monohon that was published in the October 1911 edition of the R. L. Polk King County Directory: "Population 300. A town on Lake Sammamish and Seattle division NPRy 38 miles by rail southeast of Seattle, (there were no roads then coming out of Seattle to the eastern shores of Lake Sammamish) county seat and banking point, 4 miles north of Issaquah, express and telegraph station. Ships lumber and dairy products. Pac Tel & Tel Co. Mail daily. Allen and Nelson Mill Co; C. P. Bratnober Pres., C. S. LaForge Sec., saw and planing mill, loggers and general merchandise, Bennett Logging Co. LaForge, CS Postmaster. Monohon Canvas Boat & Canoe Manufacturing Company, Slunderhauf & Kingsbury Proprietors."

Monohon continued to grow during the 1910s, though the pace slowed a bit as the decade went on. By 1911 the Allen and Nelson Company was operating a pig growing operation in conjunction with its farm and barn. The Norwegian Club of Monohon was also formed during this time. And—in a nod to the progressive labor movement which was particularly strong in western Washington during the 1910s—the Allen and Nelson Company started eight hour work days at the Monohon Mill in March 1918. Prior to then, ten hour days had been the norm.

By 1925, Monohon had about sixty homes. The town briefly made the news on March 11 of that year when King County sheriff officers, acting with a search warrant, raided a ranch located between Lake Sammamish and Pine Lake in search of moonshine whiskey. In 1925, Prohibition was in effect in the United States, and it was illegal in this country to make, sell or consume alcohol. The HistoryLink abstract on this particular story (taken from "Liquor Search Documents" in the Washington State Archives) says that deputies found 50 gallons of moonshine whiskey at the ranch which was located

between the present day streets of SE 15th Place and SE 20th Place, and 196th Avenue SE and 203rd Avenue SE.

Sadly, this story may have been one of Monohon's last hurrahs. On June 26, 1925, Monohon was destroyed by a fire that started in the sawmill. All that remained in the community after the fire was a large steel sawdust burner and perhaps ten company homes and the horse barn building. (Witnesses said the only reason those buildings survived was because of a last second wind shift as the fire consumed Monohon). Everything else—mill buildings, Lake View hotel, meeting hall, post office, railroad depot—gone. If there was one bright note to the fire, it's that apparently no one died because of it. I found no historical information about any fatalities as a result of the fire.

The mill did rebuild, although the town never came back. By the time of the fire in 1925, the mill was under new management—the Bratnober Lumber Company. Bratnober partially rebuilt the mill and resumed logging operations. But the mill's bad luck continued. Only a couple of years after it reopened, the Great Depression struck in 1929. The resulting economic collapse forced the mill to close for 3 ½ years in the early 1930s. The mill was later sold to several different companies and was repeatedly damaged by fires (including a noteworthy one in 1944 that destroyed the entire sawmill portion). After the last mill fire on the Monohon site in 1980, the mill was closed for good. All that remains of this once thriving community now are about three or so Allen and Nelson mill homes that were not destroyed by the 1925 fire.

Pictures of Monohon in its heyday survive today, but they only provide a glimpse of what must have been a vibrant life in this little community. When you look at the pictures and read the stories and descriptions of life in Monohon, you can't help but believe that it must have been a special place indeed.

---Phil Dougherty

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