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The First Sportsman's Clubs of the North

By Rick Wiles



First sportsmen's clubs

Three of the earliest sportsman's clubs existed together in the Lower Peninsula



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Three of the earliest and largest private sportsman's clubs east of the Mississippi River, at one time existed together in our Lower Peninsula's "Tip of the Mitt" region, and our area's eastern Upper Peninsula. Two of those clubs are still in operation today.

The oldest was the Turtle Lake Hunt Club of Hillman, Michigan. The second oldest club was the Blaney Rod & Gun Club, located south of the Upper Peninsula village of Germfask, and north of U.S. Route 2's Blaney Park. The largest, and third club to be established, was the Hiawatha Sportsman's Club in the Naubinway-Engadine area of the Upper Peninsula. Only the Turtle Lake and Hiawatha clubs are still in operation today.

Hunt clubs began to form in northern Michigan following the decline of the timber harvesting that took place after the Civil War. By the 1880s, much of the land of the Tapp of the Mitt area of the Lower Peninsula had been cut-over by loggers. What was left behind were soils that, for the most part, were too poor to support any large scale farming. These vast tracts of lands were either relinquished to the state of Michigan for non-payment of property taxes, or sold outright to wealthy individuals who wanted the second growth forests to become their hunting and fishing preserves.



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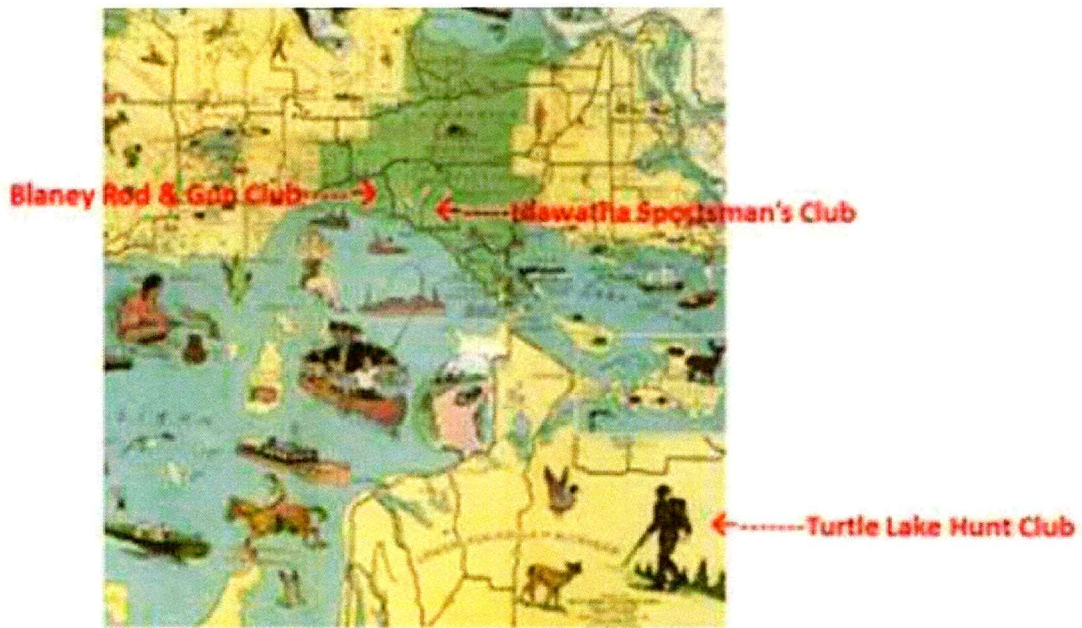
The oldest such hunt club in the Tappan of the Mitt area was the Turtle Lake Hunting & Fishing Club near Hillman, Michigan. It was organized in 1882. The private club grew to encompass 26,000 acres of land in both Montmorency, and Oscoda counties. That amounted to the size of over 40 square miles. Today, the private hunting and fishing club is made up of 20 members who have sole access to the club's seven lakes and 12 miles of trout streams. Members are required to practice "Quality Deer Management" techniques that include harvesting deer bucks only over five years of age. Also, the harvesting of the deer herd's does is undertaken to maintain a 2-1 doe to buck ratio within the club's grounds.

To counter the cut-over image of the Upper Peninsula after loggers left only barren lands behind, the



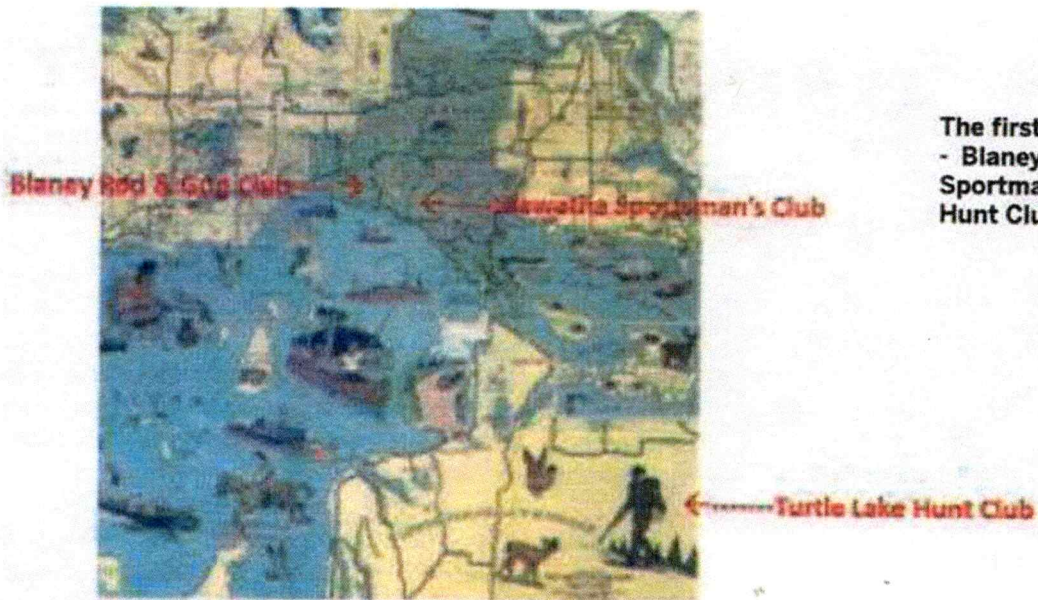
Some Members of the Tuttle Lake Hunting and Fishing Club.

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The first and biggest 3 hunt clubs
- Blaney Rod & Gun Club, Hiawatha
Sportman's Club and Turtle Lake
Hunt Club

Upper Peninsula Development Bureau was formed in 1911. Various businessmen of the U.P. gathered in Marquette to organize a concerted effort to promote the Upper Peninsula as a tourist mecca. They also wanted to rebrand the U.P. as a special place for agricultural expansion, thus they used the name "Cloverland," to suggest to the public that the Upper Peninsula was a "Garden of Eden" waiting for farmers to enter.

When the numerous lumber companies left the U.P. all that was left behind were the pine stumps and a barren, cut-over landscape. Only batches of clover seemed to sprout after being sowed on the land by the horse droppings of the teams used to bring hay to the various lumber camps. Noting the abundance of clover led to the Development Bureau calling the Upper Peninsula, America's "Cloverland." It was said to be a place farmers could settle and grow crops on land that could be cheaply purchased. The lumber companies that had abandoned the land offered it for sale, and the railroad companies that were in place to haul timber, helped to encourage farmers to now use their rails to move their agricultural products. Next came the appeal to mid-western Americans to come north to the Upper Peninsula to enjoy as summer tourists and vacationers.

At the same time the U.P.D. Bureau was formed and began their publicity campaign to bring more farmers and tourists to the region, the automobile was quickly gaining in popularity. By July 1, 1919, the state of Michigan had transformed various county roads in the U.P. into a highway that connected Sault Ste. Marie with Ironwood. It was designated M-12 until 1926, when the United States Highway System was created. It then became U.S. Route 2. The Development Bureau nicknamed the highway the "Cloverland Trail." It was along a stretch of that highway that the Hiawatha



Sportsman's Club was established in 1927.

During 1927, the Upper Peninsula Development Bureau had created a new publicity campaign that centered on the U.P. being designated as "Hiawathaland." The Development Bureau News, July 1, 1927, edition, contained the phrase, "Hiawatha Land," which utilized Henry Longfellow's famous character Hiawatha in his 1857 poem, "The Song of the Hiawatha." The name stuck, and soon was being used by the National Forest Service in 1931 to name its National Forest property in the Upper Peninsula. The Hiawatha National Forest was a vast waste land of cut-over and abandoned property that came back to life in the 1930s with help of a large replanting effort by the Civilian Conservation Corps.

In July of 1927, Lansing, Michigan, resident, Dr. William E. McNamara, a well-respected surgeon, and prominent citizen, organized a group of fellow Lansing residents to purchase a cut-over area north of Naubinway, Michigan. The Lansing Land Development

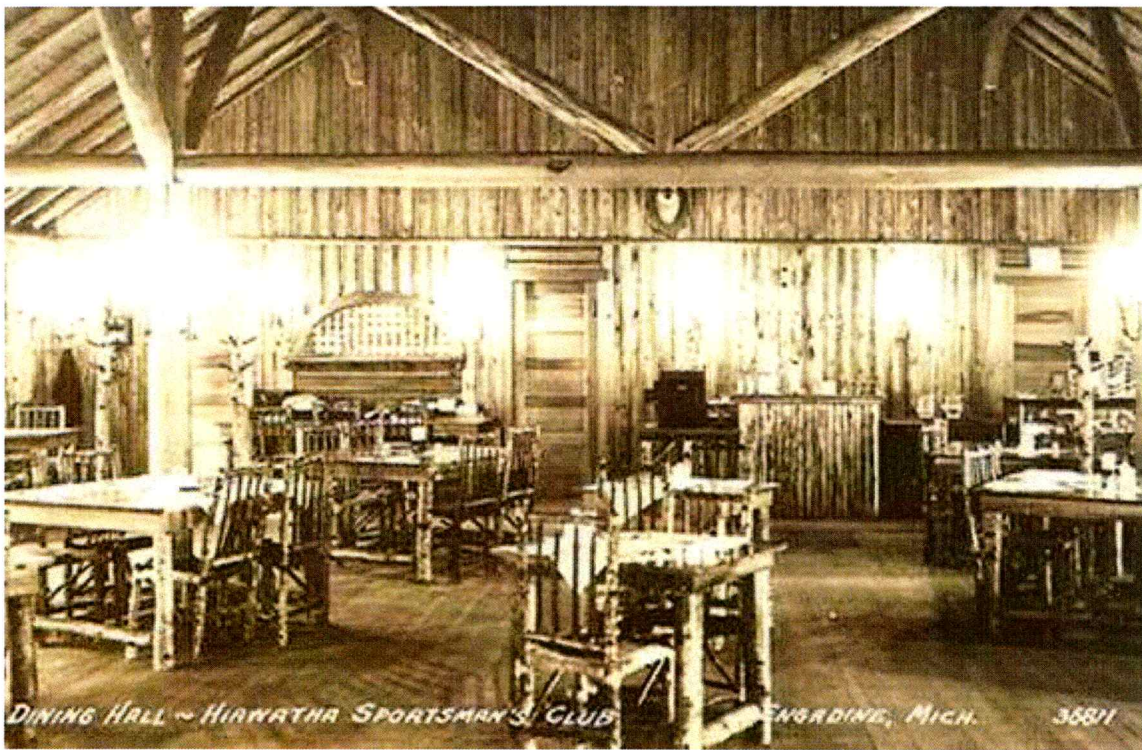


Company was formed and began buying parcels of land in 1930.

It had been a long time dream of Dr. McNamara to create his own hunting and fishing club where sports-minded individuals like himself could relax in a private setting. On one of his many visits to the Upper Peninsula to practice medicine at the various mining camps, he chose the area south of Engadine. The first purchase of land was 160 acres on Millecoquins' Lake, and it included a small 5-cabin resort on the lake called Idlewild. The vast barren stump-filled area east of Engadine and Millecoquins Lake, and north of Naubinway, was owned by the Fiborn Land Company. It encompassed 29,000 acres, all of which, eventually became part of the Hiawatha Club.

Charles Winton's, Winton Lumber Company, had logged the area and had then created the Fiborn Land Company to dispense with the cut-over acreage. Over time, the Hiawatha Club bought all 29,000 acres and added another 6,000 acres, to create the largest privately owned sportsman's club in the state of Michigan, and east of the Mississippi River. Over 54 square miles of land are contained in the club's 35,000 acres. Their property extends from six miles of Lake Michigan shoreline at Naubinway, north almost five miles in distance, and over three miles in width to the east of Engadine.

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The Hiawatha Development Company had 500 members quickly join beginning in early 1928, and their memberships helped finance the growth of the Sportsman's Club. Memberships cost \$1,000 apiece, and were to be sold only to professional people. Originally the number of memberships was set at 5,000, along with the same limit on the number of allowed cabins. The cost of lots to build cabins on varied according to location. Lake Michigan lots, inland lake lots, and stream access lots were the most expensive.



The Blaney Rod & Gun Club came into existence with the Wisconsin Lumber Company's opening of Blaney Park resort in 1928. The company, headquartered in Fond Du Lac, Wisconsin with a large hardwood flooring mill located in Hermansville, Michigan, had purchased the land at Blaney in 1909 during a bankruptcy sale. The 22,000 acre tract of land was then added to 11,000 acres previously purchased in the area in 1907. Cutting of the timber on the 32,000 tract at Blaney ended in 1926. Prior to that, in 1918, the Wisconsin Lumber Company had sold a portion of the Blaney area land to the Blaney Land & Cattle Company. By 1921 the company was in court over non-payment of bills. Its attempt to raise Hereford steers failed.

The Earle brothers, Harold and Stewart, decided to convert their vast piece of property in Schoolcraft County into a year around resort. Starting in 1927, the old Mueller mansion, built by the land's previous owner, William Mueller, was converted into an inn. An airport was built, along with a nine-hole Bear Creek Golf Course. Bridle paths were cut, and by 1931, shuffle board and tennis courts built, along with a large

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Blaney Park 33,000 acres of vacationland **Blaney Park, Michigan**

swimming pool that had underwater lights was added. The brothers named their new venture the Blaney Park Resort. Blaney had been the name of the lumber town when the William Mueller Lumber Company began operations in 1902. The company's superintendent was former sailor Captain Neal Blaney who had been a commodore for the Mueller Lumber Company's fleet of ships.

Resort was only 25 miles from the Hiawatha Sportsman's Club which was also getting started in 1927. The Blaney Rod & Gun Club was one of the components of the new resort. Blaney Park began with a dedication ceremony held on August 30, 1927. While the Hiawatha Club was private membership only, the Blaney Rod & Gun Club offered full membership status, as well as daily and weekly membership opportunities. While Blaney Resort began with a somewhat restrictive membership-guest policy, it was openly catering to tourists, vacationers, and resorters who would come for weeks at a time. By 1948, Blaney Park advertised itself as, the "Most Outstanding Resort in the Mid-West." It was a "33,000 acre playground" serving a "refined clientele," with accommodations for 200 in overnight cabins, the Blaney Park Inn (built in 1934), deluxe suites, apartments, and housekeeping cottages. The Blaney Rod & Gun Club offered its members controlled hunting in the fall and outstanding



fishing year around.

The first advertisement for the resort appeared in December of 1928 in Upper Peninsula newspapers. "Mr. Traveling Man, Stay overnight ... 1 mile from U.S. Highway 2 .. , Highway 2 open all year ... Rates \$1.75-\$2.00, Meals \$2.50 per day at the Bear Creek Lodge.

In the spring of 1929, the Michigan Department of Conservation brought a large flock of Mallard ducks to Blaney Park to be raised in its designated 7,000-acre game refuge. The banded ducks were to be part of a controlled study involving duck hunting. Besides ducks, deer, partridge, loons, beaver, and other wildlife abounded on the property. A damn had been constructed on Beaver Creek in 1928 to create Lake Anne-Louise out of former swampland. It was then stocked with game fish, with boats and canoes made available for fishermen. On the old Simmons Lumber Company property (called Simmons Woods) that was located in the Mackinac County part of the complex trout rearing ponds were created to help stock the Crow River located southeast of the small hamlet of



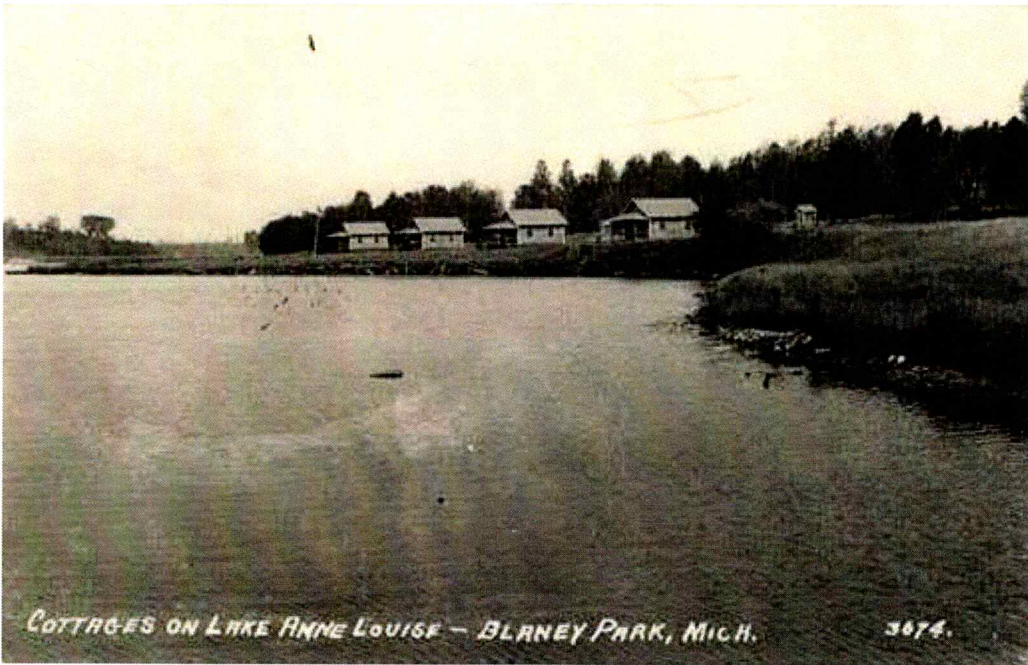
Gould City.

There were 7,000 acres of virgin forest within the Blaney Park Resort boundaries. Nearby a private deer farm was fenced in to provide hunters sufficient game each fall. An extensive reforestation program was undertaken by 1930 with spruce, Norway pine, jack pine being planted. The fields that had been used earlier by the Blaney Land & Cattle Company were mowed to provide winter hay, clover and alfalfa for the deer herd. Only 70 to 100 bucks were allowed to be



DINING ROOM - THE INN - BLANEY PARK, MICH.

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harvested depending on a recommendation each fall by the Blaney Rod & Gun Club's gamekeeper. Each fall archers were given a 5,000 acre tract to deer hunt, while rifle hunters were given 6,000 acres.

By the late 1930s, early 1940s, Blaney Park had an active guest list of about 10,000 per season. Most came in the summer months but there were also those who came in the winter to cross country ski, snowshoe, ice fish, and toboggan. At its height, Blaney Park Resort was comprised of over 100 (108) buildings, possessed a 5-truck fire department, post office, and in 1937, the Paul Bunyan Lumber Museum, and the New Camp Nine was built on the US Route 2 Highway. It was composed of six Cape Cod tourist cottages. Blaney Park Resort, and the accompanying Blaney Rod & Gun Club, known together as the "Playground of Paul Bunyan," closed Nov. 22, 1965. Times had changed.■

Richard Wiles is a retired history and reading development instructor at Petoskey High School and a retired graduate research instructor for Spring Arbor University. His research papers are filed at the Petoskey Public Library and include: Summerset-The Robison Murder Case, Fireball in the Sky-The B-52 Crash, and The Woodland Indian National Park Wiles holds a Bachelor's degree in history from the University of Toledo, a Master's degree in reading development-psychology from Michigan State University, and an Educational Specialist degree in community leadership from Central Michigan University. He can be reached through the Mackinac Journal.