

MUD LAKE

By Sam Lovall

in collaboration with

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Susan Lovall, Mark Nimphie, and Terry Sack

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Meet the Authors

Sam Lovall (lead author and illustrator) has over 35 years of professional landscape architectural experience in design, construction, and grant writing for park, riverfront, trail, urban, and environmental planning projects, in addition to teaching Landscape Architecture classes at Michigan State University. He served as Project Manager for numerous riparian planning projects in southeast Michigan, including the development of master plans for the Rouge River Gateway, the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge Gateway Site, and multiple habitat restoration projects in the Lower Detroit River. In 2020, Sam received the Environmental Law Institute's National Wetlands Award for Local Stewardship. Sam has always found Mud Lake to be a special place for enjoyment with family, close friends, or alone. Every visit was unique based on seasonal changes and slowly evolving environmental conditions. This interest in the natural world is what lured him into the study of landscape architecture.

Bridget Booth is an eighth-grade science teacher at Haslett Middle School and a certified environmental educator in Michigan. She got her start at Woldumar Nature Center in Lansing, Michigan, and has been taking students outdoors to learn ever since. She is past president and board member of the Michigan Alliance for Environmental and Outdoor Education and now leads their Climate Education Action Team. Bridget, her husband, and two sons spend spare time reading, playing in the woods, and exploring places like Mud Lake and the Great Lakes.

Chris Earley (Cricket) is a retired social worker for the state of Michigan. Chris provided a public service to mostly underprivileged citizens of Michigan for more than 40 years, rooted in an understanding of how large-scale natural processes are greater than us and can impact our lives. Of his four children and 11 grandchildren, several continue exploring and fishing at Mud Lake.

Becky Goodman served as Downtown Director for the City of Petoskey, Michigan, for the past 19 years, previously having directed downtown activities for the city of Lake Orion, Michigan, for another five years. Mud Lake was where her brother would go for long periods of time and not be around

to tease or taunt her and her friends. While collaborating on this book, the importance of Mud Lake resonated. The swampiness, the bugs, the snakes, and even the mud subliminally led her to a career in downtown development—a meaningful part of the circle.

Beth Hagenbuch is a landscape architect who was raised on the edge of Mud Lake's surrounding marsh where some of the mud stuck, fostering a life-long interest in the environment, ecology, and our place in it. After living in a variety of incredible environments including the Rocky Mountains, the Yucatan peninsula, Texas, Florida, Great Britain, and California, she now lives in Farmington Hills, Michigan, where her work allows her to focus on sustainable landscapes, local food systems, and urban design.

Susan Lovall, Grandmother and Mud Lake Enthusiast, grew up on a farm six miles from Haslett, Michigan. Her parents' best friends farmed the property near Mud Lake, but it wasn't until her acquaintance with Brent that she became fully engaged with the lake. Their relationship revolved around an appreciation for natural landscapes, consuming their free time as young adults. Susan is responsible for passing that passion on to their three children and seven grandchildren and conceiving the idea for the book *Mud Lake*.

Mark Nimphe is a retired mechanical and electrical engineer. After Mark's involvement with design and engineering management for General Motors, followed by Ford Motor Company as Product Planning Director, he owned and operated a restaurant in Mackinaw City, Michigan. Early training for his accomplished career as a youngster, at primarily his mom's expense, included fun in water and mud near a swampland that was visible from his home's living room—that being Mud Lake.

Terry Sack worked in sales for the medical industry before enrolling in nursing school at age 48 to further his passion for human wellbeing. He also provides security, promotions, and support to nationally touring musical acts. Serving as a volunteer fireman, umpire, and special education substitute teacher are part of what came out of his engagement with the marshlands surrounding Mud Lake and Lake Lansing in the greater Haslett area.

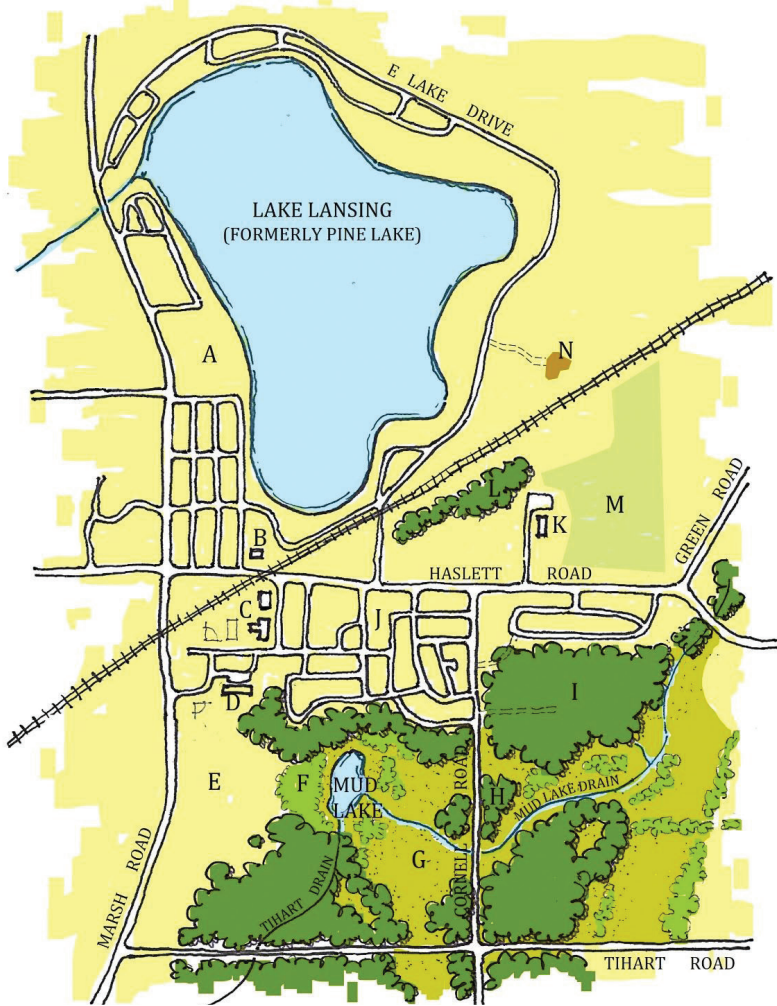
Prologue

About 11,000 years ago, a deep freeze hovered over North America, lasting for centuries. A one-mile-thick ice sheet sluggishly slid over the landscape, redefining the topography. It was the last continental glacier making a slow departure. As gigantic blocks of ice broke away from the retreating ice pack, they often became buried in sediment. And as they melted, the depressions became water features, geologically known as “kettle lakes” or glacial lakes. Depressions not filled with water are known as “potholes”—the namesake for craters found in our roads every spring. Although nothing to do with glaciers, they also result from ice in the northern United States.

As the glacier crept northward, the land revegetated. Various plants supporting a wide spectrum of insects and wildlife embraced the new water bodies. Eons of seasonal growth, dieback, and decay enriched surrounding soils with organic matter, further enhancing the plant and animal environment. The process began slowly, but with every brief millennium, life on land and in water became more diverse and plentiful.

One of these glacial lakes in central Lower Michigan sits near the community of Haslett, south of the town’s residential area. It’s not a big lake, only a little over five acres. Known as “Mud Lake” until acquired by Haslett Public Schools along with surrounding land to construct a new high school, it was cleverly renamed Wildlife Lake. Unlike its larger counterpart to the north, Lake Lansing, Mud Lake offers little related to typical recreational activities. There are no sandy beaches, no public boat access, no nearby bars or restaurants, and it never had an amusement park with a towering roller coaster ride on its shore.

Mud Lake is exactly as its name implies. With only a few areas deeper than eight feet, its murky, black bottom is hardly visible. Shallow edges are mostly covered by lily pads, and the surrounding beach is a wet marsh that pretty much precludes foot traffic except by young kids experienced in stepping over soft, soupy terrain covered by waist-high plant growth concealing sinkholes and snakes. This marshy perimeter is expansive, stretching more than 1,500 feet on the lake’s east side to Cornell Road before continuing further on the road’s opposite side. Likewise, this sea of wetland extends south and beyond Tihart Road. The marsh is much narrower to the west,



LEGEND

- A LAKE LANSING AMUSEMENT PARK (Formerly Haslett Park)
- B POST OFFICE (Formerly the Train Station Site)
- C JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL AND VERA RALYA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
- D HIGH SCHOOL (Later to become the Middle School)
- E O'BRYANT FARM (Later to become the High School site)
- F SCRUB SHRUB
- G MARSH
- H SAND HILLS
- I THE WOODS
- J LAKEVIEW HEIGHTS SUBDIVISION
- K WILKSHIRE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
- L THE PINES
- M PINE LAKE COUNTRY CLUB
- N THE DUMP



SCALE IN FEET

**Greater Mud Lake Area
circa early 1960s**

Figure 0.1. Map of the Greater Mud Lake Area

although still formidable. Here, it transitions to a scrub shrub area before reaching the new high school development that replaced farmland in the early 1970s. To the north, the marsh is equally narrow, ending at the foot of a wooded slope descending from a little-brick-house residential area.

This book conveys the importance of wetlands like the one surrounding Mud Lake, which are now known to provide valuable ecosystem services. With emerging evidence surfacing about earth heading into another period of mass extinction based on the consequences of climate change, there is consensus among scientists calling for immediate actions to halt and reverse human transformation and degradation of natural ecosystems. This means large swaths of wetlands, forests, and other natural areas must be set aside to help mitigate climate change and provide habitat for wildlife to thrive.

In 2019, the United Nations Environment Programme released a report on biodiversity indicating one million species already face extinction—many within decades. Their 2021 report echoes this concern and outlines a scientific blueprint to tackle climate, biodiversity, and pollution emergencies as part of a worldwide cultural change to make peace with nature. Wetlands are identified as the most degraded ecosystem type, making them one of the largest challenges to rethink. Fortunately, Mud Lake and its surrounding wetland survived a 200-year period of natural area destruction based on gradual but extensive land transformations initiated in the United States by European settlers. A brief historical account of how this happened in the greater Mud Lake area is presented here.

Prior to the mid-1800s, Mud Lake saw almost no human activity. It simply accepted water flowing overland from the east and emptied to the south, eventually finding the Red Cedar River on its way to the Grand River and Lake Michigan. With its rich surroundings of wetland plants, it offered incredible habitat for fish and wildlife including wolves and bears. Early human activity in this area congregated around the neighboring, larger lake, known by newcomers Europeans as Pine Lake. Native Americans, most recently including the Chippewa, resided here for thousands of years, making use of its abundant fishery, nearby fertile soils for crops, and forests for wild game. The area was a hub for trails heading in several directions toward other places near lakes and rivers offering similar life-sustaining resources.

In 1836, Obed Marshall was the first settler to purchase property near Mud Lake in the newly established township of Meridian, eventually to contain the unincorporated communities of Okemos and Haslett. He acquired nearly 500 acres for a sum of \$318.08 from the U.S. Land Office.

It included 160 acres between Pine and Mud Lakes, the nucleus of what later became Haslett. Other settlers followed, seeking inexpensive land and homes in the wilderness. While farms sprung up on high ground, the community center remained near the south end of Pine Lake.

The Pine Lake Hotel, constructed on the lake's north shore in the 1870s, featured a dance hall, a bathhouse, boathouses, and an icehouse, along with swings and other waterfront amenities under a cooling tree canopy. A small steamer was launched in 1876, hosting rides for 150 people and providing transportation to the hotel from the lake's south end. Excellent boating and fishing opportunities attracted up to 6,000 people on the best summer days. The railroad came through the area in 1879/1880, fueling even more popularity for the lake as a recreational site. After completing the inner-urban trolley from Lansing to Pine Lake, the area quickly transitioned into a trendy summer destination.

In the late 1800s, a group known as the Michigan Spiritualists began holding meetings on the lake's southwest shore. As attendance grew heavy, a flurry of land swapping occurred until James H. Haslett, a haberdasher from Port Huron, acquired most of the land for these gatherings. Later to become known as Haslett Park, the 20-acre parcel showcased a beautiful grove of oak, hickory, and elm trees, greatly enhancing the charm of this lakeshore site. Objectives for the park sought by Mr. Haslett included:

1. Offer an attractive resort for all disciples, professors, or inquirers about Spiritualism and related philosophically and religiously considered materials or manifestations.
2. Teach Spiritualism—discuss truth and freedom against error and superstition.
3. Provide a beautiful spot for outdoor meetings—also for those seeking pleasure only.
4. Establish a home for aged people and orphans.
5. Establish a sanitarium.
6. Develop an art gallery—include work by spirit hands.

Haslett Park became the meeting place for the “Haslett Park Club Circle,” an 1890 support group for the Spiritualist camp. In promoting camp meetings and events, the club aspired for Haslett Park to become America's mecca for Spiritualists—a vision that would attract followers from around the entire country. But it never happened. The dream fizzled in 1891 when

James Haslett passed away. With his leadership gone, most attendees soon refocused elsewhere.

The 60-by-96-foot, open-sided meeting pavilion, constructed of heavy timbers, was repurposed in 1934 as the “Dodgem,” a wild bumper car ride, when the grounds became an exciting amusement park. The Pine Lake Hotel burned down in 1929 but was replaced by the Dells Ballroom where many big-name bands of the day performed. This continued into the 1960s, featuring names like Bill Haley and His Comets, Chuck Berry, and Rare Earth, while Lake Lansing Amusement Park thrived as the main attraction for over 40 years. Amusements included a state-of-the-art, wooden roller coaster, an ornate carousel, pony rides, a Ferris wheel, a mini-railroad, concession stands, arcade games, high-twirling airplanes, a Tilt-A-Whirl, dodgem cars, picnic grounds, and more.

By the early 1900s, Pine Lake was ringed with seasonal cottages and became a vital destination for summertime fun. The amusement park and dance hall attracted folks from nearby cities by offering a needed reprieve, particularly in the Great Depression years. During this time, another off-shore nightclub supported by wood piers, accessible only by boat, doubled as a speakeasy. Known as the “Izzer Club,” it was equipped with a trapdoor for disposing booze if lawmen were seen to be approaching. Throughout all this mayhem, Mud Lake continued providing ecosystem services for birds, insects, fish, turtles, frogs, and snakes. Although having few human visitors, its life-support rating registered extremely high.

Following World War II, a housing boom for homecoming servicemembers and their families swept over the county, and Haslett was no exception. In the early 1950s, several new subdivisions appeared. Lakeview Heights was sandwiched between Mud Lake and Haslett Road, the main drag through town, and Wilkshire popped up a few years later not far to the east. Hillbrook Park came during this same time a little west of town.

With new homes numbering in the thousands, you could not travel in any neighborhood without seeing kids everywhere on bikes, playing games, socializing in groups, or just wandering about. They organized their own sports and play without parental involvement or supervision. The schools were bursting at the seams, and classrooms could not be built fast enough. Two new Haslett elementary schools were needed to accommodate the crowd.

Many fathers were veterans of World War II or Korea, and for the most part, mothers were homemakers. For young boys, play often mimicked recent wars. Playing “army” could mean fighting Nazis or choos-

ing sides to reenact the Battle of Gettysburg, reflecting the ongoing Civil War Centennial recognition. And don't forget the Alamo! Davy Crockett was a hero among seven-year-olds flaunting jackknives and coonskin caps. Diverse places of employment for Haslett folks ranged from factory work at Oldsmobile or Motor Wheel, to making use of Ph.D.s at Michigan State University, with all sorts of businessmen, doctors, and lawyers in the mix.

How Mud Lake and its natural surroundings impacted the lives of these young families carries a repetitive theme. Short adventure stories expressing shared, underlying messages fill this book's early chapters, characterized by youngsters experiencing the natural world during the 1950s, '60s, and early '70s. The stories illustrate how natural spaces enriched spirits and served as learning laboratories. The unfolding of historical events during the 1960s are summarized, giving context to how people perceived the natural world and how they prioritized environmental quality during these times. The concept of circular energy is identified and found worthy of further investigation. This cosmic energy field fueling the movement of celestial bodies, glaciers, water, carbon, and life itself is examined and provides a basis for big-picture explanations. After the kids in adventure land advance their mobility modes from bicycles to automobiles, a glitch in the carbon cycle becomes apparent that upsets the forecast for everyone's future. As our atmosphere becomes overloaded with carbon emissions, it is clear that earth is embarking on a climate change. Circular movements associated with climate change are presented along with strategies for mitigation and adaptation. Mud Lake and its surrounding natural area stand out as guiding examples for future restoration work based on their long history of sustaining wildlife and profound effect on human lives.

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