

THE VILLAGE OF MASSABESIC

Written by Matthew Normand, City Clerk

In the late nineteenth century, the City of Manchester began a serious push to purchase land from the Village of Massabesic, a small neighboring community closely intertwined with Manchester. Before Lake Massabesic became the primary and protected source of Manchester's drinking water, the Village of Massabesic was a thriving community complete with its own post office and a railroad line that went straight through the center of the village.

There were various neighborhoods in the village with names such as Tudor Park, West Lake Park, Greenwood Park, Trolley Block and Bog View. While Massabesic Village functioned as its own town, most of Massabesic Village was considered part of Manchester with its inhabitants voting in Ward 6.

Massabesic Village proved to be a source of amusement and entertainment for the citizens of Manchester, especially in the summer months when, in the 1900s, electric street cars ran throughout the night to accommodate the never-ending parade of people flocking to destination sites such as the Massabesic Hotel and various parks scattered throughout the village. Around the lake, "The Parade" area allotted bikers a quarter mile of track while various boat clubs provided anchor for sailors. Aside from the natural amenities that Lake Massabesic provided such as swimming and boating, individuals could utilize two roller skating rinks or listen to concerts by Rainey's Cadet Band or the Military Band of Walter S.H. Jones (from L. Ashton Thorp's Manchester of Yesterday). The files of the New Hampshire Room at the Manchester City Library also reveal that there was a floating dance hall as well as a dance hall that had a tame bear that was considered much nicer than the owner of the dance hall.



Massabesic House, 1880

Photo courtesy of the Manchester Historic Association

General Charles Williams was the owner of the Massabesic Hotel as well as the Manchester Street Railway. He assumed control of the Manchester Horse Railroad on February 16, 1889 and on July 19, 1889, changed the name to the Manchester Street Railway. General Williams was an

enthusiastic supporter of electrifying the railway system, and this goal was accomplished in 1895. The Lake Massabesic line was inaugurated on August 3, 1895. According the booklet entitled *Manchester Street Railway* by O.R. Cummings: “Car 57, a 9-bench single truck open, with Charles Sawyer as motorman and S.R. Nutbrown as conductor carried 27 passengers on its first trip, which left Elm Street at 2:10 p.m. and arrived at Massabesic Lake at 2:28 p.m.”

Mr. Orrin E. Kimball, proprietor of a tannery, owned a large area called Kimball’s Point complete with a so-called cottage dubbed Oakland. According to the booklet “Lake Massabesic: Then and Now”, Oakland functioned a summer house for Mr. Kimball. His home was considered a center of the lake’s summer social life.

Beginning in the late 1890s, the Manchester Water Works began acquiring land on Lake Massabesic. The land of Charles Bunton called “Battery Point” was purchased during the year 1895-1903. Brown’s Island which had been Deer Island was purchased from James F. Brown in 1903 for \$4,000. The Grape Islands were purchased in 1913 for \$600. Manchester Coal and Ice Company, which had traditionally used the lake as a source of business since 1896, sold 1.86 acres of land to the City on December 28, 1929, for \$9,400. The land of General Charles Williams sold for \$85,000 and the owners of Kimball’s Point were paid \$17,800.

The City of Manchester’s push to puzzle together the Village of Massabesic within the City limits allowed Manchester to acquire a striking landscape for its residents to enjoy year round. Today, the Village of Lake Massabesic no longer exists, but Manchester still benefits from the uncompromising beauty of Lake Massabesic’s natural splendor.

An 1896 atlas detailing the village is available for viewing at the Manchester City Archives.



First Electric Car, 1896

Photograph from The Mirror's Pictorial Manchester, 1846-1896