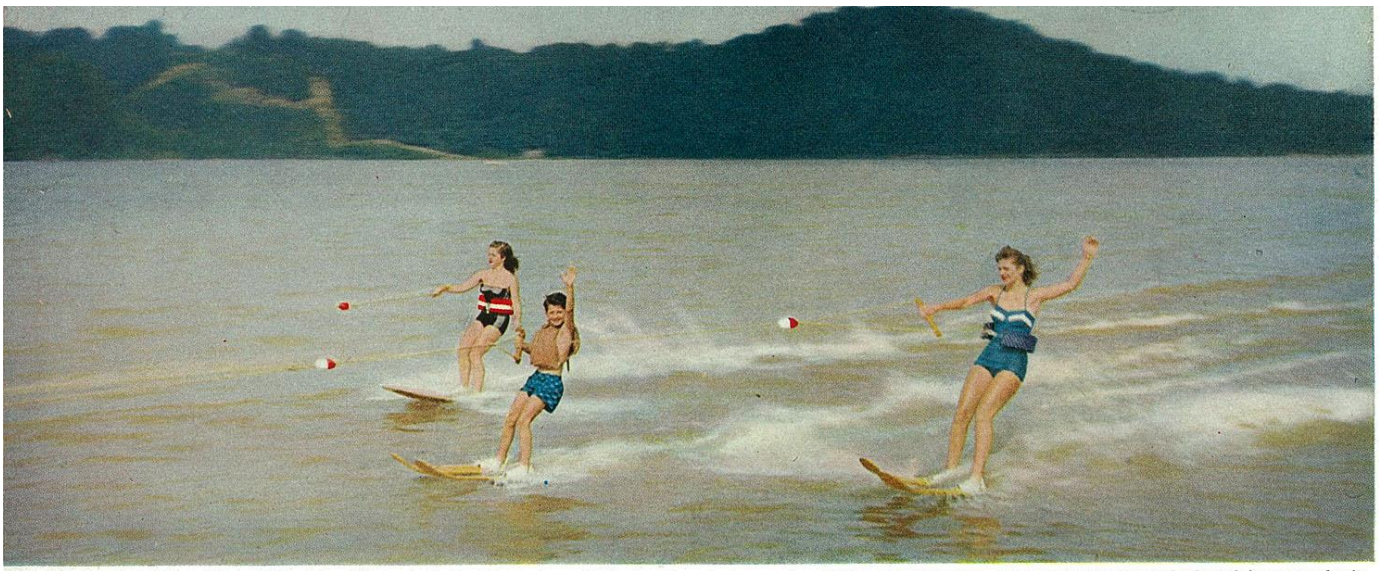

On Bean Blossom Lake, water skiers now frolic where cows used to graze. Bloomington now has all the water it needs to drink and wash with, with plenty left over to play in.

Beth Kinser, 4, accepts a lemon drop from Mayor Lemon, who won the lake for the city.

Town With a Homemade Lake

Long plagued by a critical water shortage, the citizens of Bloomington, Indiana, brought billions of gallons to their doorsteps. Now they're enjoying an unexpected dividend.

By JEROME ELLISON

A farmland family and their guests relax by the lake. The house above is on Doctors' Row, a shore-front strip of luxury dwellings.

A lakeside picnic under way at Riddle Point. The city, noting that private developers were rapidly gobbling up shore properties, quickly reserved this breezy, wooded site for public use.

Nautical centers like the Knob Hill Marina (above) share a $500,000 bonanza in boating business. They provide a wide variety of services to the lake's 650 skippers.

If a city, like a person, can enjoy a wish come true, Bloomington, Indiana, is the lucky town, thanks to a lake called Bean Blossom. You can't overestimate, old-timers are saying, how much the new homemade lake has done for the place.

Bloomington, like many another city in the nation's "water-deficiency belt," was dying of thirst. On three occasions in one decade, water had to be trucked in to meet day-to-day needs. Because of the dearth of water, new industry had stopped coming. The town was dwindling to the status of an outpost, its principal activity a state university.

The new lake saved Bloomington's life as a first-rate city. It created a smart new residential district, a recreation area of state-wide fame, a $500,000-a-year business in boats, and enough water to quench the city's thirst for 100 years. It has already attracted one large new factory, it dangles prettily as a lure for others and is indirectly responsible for the biggest building boom the town has ever known.

Like most things marvelous, the lake did not fall easily, like a great blue dewdrop, on the city's brow. It had to be fought for and won. Dragons had to be slain, in the best fairy-tale tradition, by a knight on a charger—or, to be more up-to-date and also more accurate, in a bright-yellow squad car. For the hero of the Bean Blossom story is an energetic mayor named Thomas L. Lemon, who likes to ride in police cars and admires the bright color for which he is named.

In America's thirsty, dusty inland, triumphs like Lemon's—and Bloomington's—loom large. Of our 200-odd cities having more than 50,000 residents, about a third were short of water in recent dry years. Some have been pressed to extremes to get an adequate drink. Denver has to pipe water over a mountain range. Boston brings it seventy miles by aqueduct. Los Angeles has to reach out 250 miles. Cities of the Southwest, such as Dallas and Wichita, are nearly stumped during drought periods, and large areas of the Midwest have lesser but locally troublesome problems.

Edward A. Ackerman, well-known consultant on water resources, now in Washington with Resources for the Future, Inc., has recently pointed out (Continued on Page 69)

Photographs by Gus Pasquarella

Part of Bean Blossom's scenery is provided by coeds from nearby Indiana University. From left: Sherry Pelz, Nancy Griner, Marilyn Du Valle and Brenda Ely.

Town With a Homemade Lake

(Continued from Page 23)

that water shortages are not national, but local. People in America tend to live where they want to, and not necessarily where the water is. Less than a fourth of our population, resident in water-deficient states, uses more than half our water. Many local problems have combined to make a national one.

Bloomington, before Lemon's first term as mayor began in 1948, had a population of about 30,000—of whom 10,000 were students—and was among the driest of the thirsty cities. There were no big rivers or lakes within reach. The three nearby creeks were dry in times of drought—and there were nine serious droughts in the first half of this century.

When rain did fall, the land held it poorly. What water didn't run off the hard surface clay seeped out of town through the porous, cavernous limestone beneath. As population grew, back-yard wells became polluted. A five-year typhoid epidemic began in 1885, serving

... ...

First Birthday

By Elizabeth Landeweer

It's no secret that the host
Created quite a scandal,
He tossed the frosting right
and left,
And ate the birthday candle,
His mother lost her self-
control
Before she got him mastered,
And everything got out of
hand,
And all the guests got
plastered.

... ...

grim notice that new water sources were needed.

Water-wise, Lemon's arrival as mayor ended a sixty-year comedy of errors. Even in the 1890's, a university geologist, E. R. Cumings, was urging that lakes be built to the north of town, toward Griffey and Bean Blossom creeks, where the sand-silt-clay soil would hold water, instead of to the south, on limestone.

But the city fathers were not to be fooled by bookish meddlers. In 1894 they built a reservoir on limestone. It leaked. In 1907 they built a second to catch the leakage from the first. That leaked too. They built a third and, in 1941, a fourth, which held water no better.

By that time the town elders had begun to entertain the possibility that Cumings might have been right. In 1924 a private group had independently built a reservoir on Griffey Creek, which had held water all those years. Its only shortcoming was its small size.

Upon this scene burst young Tom Lemon in 1948, during a drought. On a water platform, he unseated a Republican regime that had held the city hall for twenty-two years. "I promised I'd get them water," Lemon says, "and I did."

So popular has the new lake become that it's hard to find anyone around town who'll admit he was ever against it. Research reveals, however, that Bloomington's great blessing squeaked through by the narrowest of margins. There were times when even the colorful new mayor was not sure a lake was worth fighting for.

Lemon figured that with a name like that—sheer, joyous sport for political rivals—you had to keep a jump ahead of punsters in the other camp. Instead of playing down his name, he flaunted it. An early official act was to order police cars painted yellow. He put a large glass jar of lemon drops on his desk and announced that any kid in town could help himself.

Lemon knew local water history thoroughly—he'd been raised on it. Born in 1915, one of a local farmer's six children, he'd ended his formal education with high school. He went to work manufacturing floor wax, then a special wax used for munitions during the war. He studied municipal administration on his own and developed a grasp of the subject that is respected throughout his state.

In 1948, two schemes were current for bringing water to town. One was to pipe it fifteen miles from the White River Valley. The other was to throw a dam across Bean Blossom Creek, seven miles away, and make a lake. At first, Lemon would not commit himself to either. Any plan for water would require money, he pointed out, and it was on this issue that the first battle line was drawn.

To float a bond issue, the project would have to yield enough revenue to pay interest and reduce principal. But the water rates, ranging from thirty-seven cents a thousand gallons for small amounts, down to seven and a half cents a thousand for large quantities, were too low to swing it. When Lemon proposed an increase, the biggest water users—the university, a railroad, a hotel and several manufacturers—brought strong opposition. The

rate hike was unnecessary. "All you had to do was raise Griffey Creek dam" and there'd be plenty of water at trifling cost.

Lemon blasted back in press interviews and on the air. Even if you raised Griffey dam as far as it would go, it wouldn't store enough water for Bloomington's future. He accused old-line business firms of using a water shortage to keep out new industry and hold wages down. More water, he promised, would bring more work, higher wages for the "little people."

The argument went to the state Public Service Commission, which by law must O.K. local bond issues. Hearings lasted two weeks. The commission approved the rate increases and backed the mayor's hand in advising a search for new sources of water.

A new scrap now developed over the question of wells versus lake. For a time the mayor leaned toward wells, until he learned that wells near the limestone region produced very hard water and required a daily movement of 12,000 tons of water over a ten-mile stretch. That meant a whopping electric bill. Moreover, when you pump from deep wells, you lower the regional water table, but when you store it on the surface you may tend to raise it.

City engineer (at that time) Ross Buck is credited with clinching it for the lake. By damming Bean Blossom Creek, Buck pointed out, you'd make a lake whose water could flow by gravity, free of charge, all the way to the city's water system. That sold the city council and, late in 1949, it sold Lemon. "It was a big day," the mayor says, "when I went up to the underwriters in Chicago and came home with a check for a million dollars."

The next hurdle was procuring the land—2000 acres of it, all inhabited by either the living or the dead—a cemetery had to be purchased and the bodies moved. Farmed-out homesteads that had been available at fifty dollars an acre acquired new agricultural, historical and sentimental values. Newspapers as far away as Indianapolis, fifty miles to the north, lamented that "fertile land will be flooded and families turned out of their homes." Bean Blossom Valley landowners formed a protest organization, denounced the lake and threatened legal action.

But by now the lake movement had too much momentum. Besides, the 1951 state legislature sped Lemon's program with a timely bill clarifying the right of cities to condemn land for public works. The city got its land for a little over $100 an acre.

Engineers calculated it would take two years, from the completion of the dam in 1952, for the lake to fill. It filled in six months—a blue jewel of a lake in the wooded Southern Indiana hills, six and one half miles long and a mile and a half across at the widest point, fifty feet deep at its deepest, 630 feet above the sea, holding 5,500,000,000 gallons of water, draining an area of eighty square miles, with enough runoff and storage to meet the city's needs for another 100 years of normal growth.

Relieved at last of anxieties about water, local industries, old and new, as well as the university, have felt a new freedom to proceed with long-planned expansions. At the same time, home building is booming—not only around the lake, where values have risen from as little as fifty dollars to as much as $4000 an acre, but throughout the city and its fringe areas.

Tom Lemon, as it turned out, was not to have a seat at the victory feast. He was swept out of office in the 1952 Eisenhower landslide. His successor, a Republican named Kelly, refrained from painting the squad cars green, and restored them to a sedate official black. Also, he presided at the dedication of the lake. Lemon sent a telegram from his desk in Sanford, Florida, where he'd found a job as city manager, congratulating his rivals on finishing the job.

Today there remains but one final squabble—naming the lake. When the project was still only a dream, a Democratic city council passed a resolution that it be called Lake Lemon. The Republican council in office during its dedication named it Lake Bean Blossom. But Tom Lemon is back. After two years in Florida, he brought his wife and two sons back to Bloomington, set himself up in the real-estate business and, in 1956, ran the Republicans out of city hall again. This time he let the squad cars remain black, but has allowed no one to forget the name a Democratic council long ago decreed.

So, at city limits, a yellow sign reads LAKE LEMON. A few miles down the road, a black-and-white sign points to LAKE BEAN BLOSSOM. An editorial in the student daily has suggested: "Why not call it Lake Lemon Blossom? It combines aesthetic charm and political immortality." And there, for now, the matter rests.

Many believe the remarkable thing about the lake is neither its name nor its value as a utility, but its phenomenal popularity as a resort. The recreational development came as a whopping extra dividend, and as a complete surprise. More than 650 boats were licensed to sail its waters during the third summer after it was opened. Licenses are fifteen dollars for sail or power, five dollars for rowboats. After the state stocked the lake with bass and bluegills—twenty-one-inch bass have been caught—over 2000 fishing licenses were issued at two dollars each.

The town, which a few years ago was waterless, has gone nautical with a will. Not so long ago, the classified directory did not contain the word "boat." Now it lists seven boatyards, six of them maintaining dock facilities at the lake. The bigger ones, like the bustling Knob Hill Marina, do over $100,000 of boat business in a season. Trailer, boat and motor combinations range from $1500 to $5000. Ship's bells, anchors, marine pumps, port and starboard lighting fixtures—all sprout in windows of downtown hardware stores which once displayed rakes, shovels and hoes. Outboard-motor mix is a standard item at gas stations. Those who can't own a boat, or don't care to, can rent a power rig at Boyd's or Chitwood's, and take the family on a cruise in the summer twilight for the price of a movie.

Almost before the lake was full, handsome homes were abuilding on the shore, many of them sporting an open-air patio, outdoor fireplace and sail-in boathouse. On "doctors' row," along the north shore, you could almost muster a quorum of the county medical society. Other summer residents match the chamber-of-commerce roster: Roger Black, lumber; George Carpenter, plumbing; Merritt Calvert, clothing; Mike Sansone, food. Indiana University maintains a dock on the south shore for its sailing club.

Some families, like the Robert Youngs—radio-parts manufacturing—are strictly power people. Young's runabout, with twin thirty-five-horsepower outboards on its transom, is one of the few boats on the lake which can exceed the twenty-five-mile-an-hour speed limit with ease. His teen-age son and school-age daughters, like most children of lake families, like to be towed astern, riding surfboard, water skis or disk at a spanking clip, throwing spray. Young has constructed an odd craft known variously as The Thing, The Weegee, and Emergency Rescue Craft Number One. By virtue of its broad and

stable deck, maintained afloat by oil drums welded together, it is Mayor Lemon's favorite craft. "I like to just sit there in the sun and watch the lake," the mayor says.

Other families, like the Ace Marshalls—manager, J. C. Penney store—prefer sail. Five of the Marshalls' six children—one is married and gone from home—battle for turns at the helm of the fourteen-foot day sailer they put together from a kit. They are convinced, like most of the canvas crowd, that power is a passing fad. "You're down the lake and back in a few minutes," Mrs. Marshall, who sometimes decrees herself a turn as skipper, asserts, "and then what do you do? With sail, up and down the lake a couple of times makes a fine morning's cruise, full of adventure."

In the complex encounter of the inlander with water, a number of things remain to be worked out. For example, the official attitude about swimming is ambiguous. Elmer L. (Red) Richardson, the lake's full-time, power-patrol policeman, has stated the policy: "People around here don't like the idea of drinking water that's been swum in. So swimming is prohibited. But we don't really mind, so long as swimmers don't get in the way of the boats."

Since lake authority hasn't really decided, family management at the beach takes a peculiar turn. In a law-abiding family group consisting of pa, ma, junior and Bessie, you're likely to overhear dialogue something like this:

JUNIOR: Hey, ma, can I fall in the lake now?

MA: Certainly not; it's against the law.

JUNIOR: I mean, by accident. (*Splash*)

BESSIE: Can I fall in now, ma? Junior did.

MA: He's older.

BESSIE: (*Splash*)

PA: I'd better fall in and watch her. (*Splash*)

MA: Oh, well. (*Splash*)

JUNIOR: Isn't this nice, ma?

MA: Heavenly.... Pa, is that the police boat?

On hot summer Sunday afternoons the lake attracts visitors from a hundred-mile radius, and even from neighboring states. The record crowd so far was tallied in July, 1956, during a water-safety show and ski exhibition. "The lake road was blocked solid—cars four-deep for a mile," Richardson says. "We figured four thousand cars all together." The next biggest turnout that year was for a speedboat race. Parking facilities are still being extended.

Policing the lake at peak season is a big job. Each of 200 or more boats must be checked for license tag, seaworthiness and life preservers. There's at least one capsizing a weekend, with a boat to be towed ashore and bailed, and people to be dried out. This reporter witnessed one such rescue—the salvage of the outboard runabout Merry Martins, owned and skippered by Charles Martin, of Indianapolis.

"We were just going along in a gentle turn," Martin explained, "and all of a sudden, flip"—a gesture of the hand—"and we're in the water." The accident occurred at 11:40 A.M. Five minutes later, Martin and his two passengers were aboard an auxiliary police boat. A few minutes later the cumbersome, capable Weegee was standing by. An hour after it turned over, lake police had the Martin boat ashore, bailed out and on its trailer. "Big water or little water," Red Richardson says, "it's safety, safety, safety all the time."

On weekends, Richardson is assisted by eight volunteer deputies, all boat owners. They include Capt. Charles Fox, of the Bloomington police force, and three of his patrolmen. The city furnishes the gas, the men donate their services. "Their reward is the fun they and their families have on the lake," Mayor Lemon explains.

Richardson's preoccupation with safety is in order; the lake has already claimed two lives. On a Sunday afternoon last August a young woman from Indianapolis, teetering on the gunwale of a rented boat, went overside. She wasn't wearing a life preserver and didn't know how to swim. Her escort shouted to the occupants of a nearby boat, then went after her. It is assumed he struck a submerged obstacle; neither came up alive.

Red Richardson and his wife live at the new police post on the lake and are on the job all year round. The lake is not just a summer thing, the Richardsons say. "We've seen this lake just blanketed with wild ducks in the fall." In the winter, people come to fish through the ice when it's thick enough, and also to skate. Some families use their weekend places throughout the year. The Marshalls go sailing right up into November. Robert Young, a year-rounder, says, "We come out whenever we can. It's a different world. Quiet. Peaceful."

The inland city is learning to enjoy a lake. A lot of water, as the mayor likes to say, that the city got with a little Lemon aid. THE END

THE SATURDAY EVENING POST

"—and this is Fred's recreation room!"