



History of  
Sylvan Shores  
Property Owners Association

by Del Hoppe

harvested, the sandy soils in these areas were left unprotected, increasing the erosion, and gradually filling the streams with sediment. By 1877, the water level had fallen to a point that only very small water craft could navigate the Long Prairie River on a regular basis. The result is the very much smaller streams we have today.

In late 1877, H.D. Orendorf cut a road down the west side of the river from Turtle Creek to Motley. For many years this was the only road down the river valley.

The next entity which had a significant historical impact on what is now Sylvan Shores was the railroad industry. To encourage development of the nation's interior and to promote the construction of rail links across the country, the Federal Government deeded land to the states and territories to, in-turn, be deeded to railroad companies for the construction of railroads. For each mile of track laid, a railroad company would receive one section of land (one mile square).

Subsequently, four separate acts of congress dated, March 1857, July 1866, March 1871 and June 1874 deeded land to the Territory of and then the State of Minnesota. On May 1, 1877 The State of Minnesota deeded much of the land that is now Sylvan Shores to The Western Railroad Company of Minnesota. In May 1883, The Western Railroad Company of Minnesota changed its name to The Saint Paul and Northern Pacific Railroad Company. In June of the same year, The Saint Paul and Northern Pacific Railroad Company transferred its holdings to the Northern Pacific Railroad Company.

Not all of what is now Sylvan Shores was railroad land. Some of it was homesteaded. Some of it was deeded by the government for schools. Most of it, however, was railroad land.

The Northern Pacific started selling off its land in 1901. At that time C.S. Mellen, President of Northern Pacific Railway Co. executed a deed to Minnesota Land and Colonization Company.

During the next sixty-eight years, the land was divided, assembled, re-divided, sold, foreclosed on, re-sold etc. more than fifteen times.

The 60's were a decade of planning. The U.S. government was funding comprehensive city, county and regional plans for any community that asked for them. The housing boom of the 50's had spawned planned communities like Levittown NJ. City planners were now designing new towns that incorporated living, working, shopping, and recreating all in the same community. New towns like Reston Virginia, and Columbia Maryland were the wave of the future.

By the second half of the 1960's, the United States was twenty years beyond WWII and ten years beyond the Korean War. The Baby Boomers were growing up. The unprecedented housing boom of the fifties had slowed somewhat. A new middle class was emerging. The GI bill had produced a new generation of professionals and entrepreneurs.

They engineered and built all the roads. They ran in all of the utility lines (most underground), designed and built the clubhouse with a swimming pool and the campground. They built a beach house on Turtle Lake for the use of all property owners and built boat launch ramps on Fawn and Turtle lakes. They added tennis courts, mini-golf, shuffle boards, playgrounds and picnic areas for recreational use.

The developer used all local contractors for the work. Frank Kobliska and Bob Sanders built the roads. Fred Becker built the clubhouse and beach house. Doug Grossman was the electrical contractor. Giza Plumbing and Heating did all the plumbing heating and air conditioning work. Japke Decorating did all the painting. All of the construction and site preparation work was under the watchful eye of the superintendent of construction, Jon Roan of American Central. The fact that all of the infrastructure is still in very good shape today is a tribute to how well it was done originally and how well it has been maintained over the past forty years.

American Central marketed Sylvan Shores as a family oriented recreational complex. Their marketing style was aggressive, much the same style as time-share complexes are marketed today. They offered various types of incentives, such as merchandise and trips, for prospective buyers to visit and meet with a sales person. They even brought in busloads of people to visit Sylvan Shores.

American Central sold individual lots in Sylvan Shores to build single-family homes. To control the type of development that occurred and to protect the investment of the new property owners, the developer drafted a Declaration of Restrictive Covenants and filed these with Todd County. By filing these covenants with the county, these restrictive covenants legally dictated how the properties could be used by the new purchasers. The covenants specified that the property could only be used for residential use, specifically disallowing any type of commercial activity on the property. The covenants specified the minimum sized structure that could be built on the property. They prohibited camping on individual property. On six of the eight subdivisions, they prohibited mobile homes from being used on the property. On two subdivisions, however, they did allow mobile homes, and marketed those areas accordingly.

American Central Corporation, the developers of Sylvan Shores were on the scene for only ten years. Along with building all of the Sylvan Shores infrastructure, including, roads, utility lines and recreational facilities, they also engineered and surveyed more than twenty-two hundred lots, and then created and platted eight subdivisions. They wrote covenants and deed restrictions covering every lot and filed them with the county. In addition to all of these things, they created the Sylvan Shores Property Owners Association. Each and every one of these activities was done exceedingly well. Almost all of their creations have carried through and still exist today.

What American Central did not do well was sell lots. Most major recreational developments built around lakes, would allow their sales staff to sell only one expensive lake lot for every ten or more less expensive non-lake lots. The lake lots were usually used as incentives for the sales staff to sell less prime lots. American Central did not do

The remaining 430 unsold lots reverted to Norwest Bank to satisfy the mortgage they held on the lots. They made a cursory effort to sell the lots but had little success. In 1982, the remaining 400+ lots were turned over to Todd County for back taxes. The taxes due on the properties were frequently \$1,000 or more. Without the dedicated sales effort that had been in place, there was no market for the properties at that price. In 1983, Todd County bit the bullet and in an effort to put the property back on the productive tax rolls, reduced the price to as little as \$200 per lot. Some of the lots were sold, but even at the new low prices it was not until 1999 that all of the lots were sold.

As was mentioned earlier, as a developer, American Central did almost everything well. A good example of the things they did well was the establishment of the Sylvan Shores Property Owners Association. The SSPOA was established on November 22, 1974 to "conduct activities that will promote the recreation, general welfare, community welfare, and social life of persons owning or residing on real property known as Sylvan Shores."

The first meeting of the SSPOA was held on December 11, 1974. Bylaws and Restrictive Covenants for the organization were approved and filed on July 29, 1976 and amended the following March. The first annual meeting of the organization was held on October 30, 1976.

Initially, the president of the SSPOA, the Board of Directors, along with the other members, were employees of American Central. Over the next several years all of the Board positions were elected and turned over to the Sylvan Shores property owners.

In March 1977, all of the common areas of Sylvan Shores were turned over to the SSPOA. This included the club house and grounds, the campground, the beach house, access points on Fawn Lake and Turtle Lake, eight large out lots, several parcels of low ground and miscellaneous smaller parcels of land.

From the outset, the Association has been multi-faceted.

On one hand it has had to conduct the business of running the Association and maintaining the significant holdings it had inherited. To conduct the business of the Association, a professional manager has always been employed. The manager has always worn many hats. In addition to collecting the dues, dispersing the proceeds and supervising the maintenance staff, the manager has had to be in information director, a salesperson and an arbitrator. Additionally, the manager has had to be the liaison with township supervisors, county departments and the DNR. Internally, the manager has had to co-ordinate the staff, board members and numerous committees.

On the other hand, it had to provide entertainment and entertainment opportunities for its members. From the very beginning the Association has been active. It sponsored a Christmas Party in 1974 which was attended by 400 guests, and created a tradition which continues today. Numerous other social events are sponsored by the Association throughout each year.

usage. The study proposed increasing the campground by forty spaces, with at least partial water and electrical hook-ups for all forty. It was further determined that to make the expanded campground more appealing, a swimming pool at the campground was essential. The study determined that if implemented, in the ten-year period from 1991 to 2001, revenue would increase incrementally until by 2001, the campground would enjoy 85% occupancy and realize an estimated \$126,700 per year income and an Association profit of \$71,700. The study promoters proposed it as a public campground. This proposal was not voted on by the membership.

Despite the lack of membership authorization, the campground was expanded and a pool was built and the Association incurred a debt of \$120,000. The increased camping revenue has never materialized. Since 1991, the campground has only shown an annual profit only twice, \$1255 in 1991, and \$7399 in 1999. The resulting debt load of nearly \$120,000 and high interest mortgage almost bankrupted the Association. To reduce maintenance costs in the early 90's the Board turned over the boat landing on Turtle Lake to the DNR. It is now a public landing rather than a private facility.

Throughout the 1990's, a major issue for the Association and the Todd County Commissioners was the disposal of the tax forfeit lots in Sylvan Shores. Both the Association and the County were suffering from a lack of revenue produced by an escalating number of lots that were abandoned. In 1991, an organization named Sig Development from Minneapolis was given the right by the Board of Directors to develop the tax forfeit lots in Sylvan Shores. Con-Sig produced a slick glossy four-color brochure promoting the beauty and recreational potential of Sylvan Shores. They submitted a proposal to the Todd County commissioners to develop a championship golf course in Sylvan Shores. Nothing ever came of the proposals.

In 1996, the Sylvan Shores Board of Directors submitted a proposal to the Todd County Commissioners to jointly advertise the forfeit lots in local papers and in the Twin Cities Metro area. Once again, nothing happened.

In 1997, there appeared to be an interest for a conference center located in Sylvan Shores. It never materialized.

In 1998, the Board authorized development of an internet web site for Sylvan Shores. The web site was approved. It has been updated over the past ten years. It promotes Sylvan Shores, with a beautiful photo gallery, maps and information about Sylvan Shores. The web site is accessible at: [www.sylvanhores.com](http://www.sylvanhores.com).

In 1999, through an ad in a Minneapolis paper, a realtor from Minneapolis found out about Sylvan Shores and all the vacant lots. She had clients, friends and family who were interested in the area. All 600 tax forfeit lots in Sylvan Shores were sold in a short period of time. Some of the lots have subsequently been built on.

Since the turn of the century, Sylvan Shores has enjoyed a significant upturn in interest and activity. More than fifty new homes have been built between 2002 and 2007. Real