

## Hazel Who. . . . .?

Hazel-more, Hazel-less, Hazel-mere, Hazel-who? The city of Fairmont has grown over the years and spread out along its five lakes from its meager beginning in the mid 1850s. That growth included the development of areas that were once called “suburbs” of Fairmont. One of those “suburbs” known as Hazelmere, a name derived from the English, was also at one time referred to as a Martin County “Lake Farm.” So, just what exactly is “Hazelmere,” and where is it located? Most local Fairmont and Martin County residents have probably heard of it and may know where it is located, however, there may also be many that are not be familiar with it.

The Hazelmere area was noted for the “Hazelmere Hotel.” Located just south of Alton Street and west of Albion Avenue on Hall Lake in Fairmont, it was originally the home built by Joseph Ramsdale in 1875. The tract of land known as Hazelmere was initially purchased by Joseph Ramsdale, a member of the “Bean Colony” of English settlers to this area, from E. Banks Hall who settled the area in 1856 and for whom Hall Lake is named. In the late 1800’s, Ramsdale was looking for a place to erect his country home and decided upon this location as being what he considered to be the most beautiful spot in or around Fairmont. He built what at that time was described as a “handsome \$7,000.00 house” in 1875 on what was considered the most desirable “Lake Farm” in Martin County. It is also one of the English homes referred to in the novel, *“Gentlemen From England,”* by Maude Hart Lovelace.

The early time timber and lumber for the home, which “old timers” of that period claimed to be vastly superior to their present day lumber of that era, was hauled from Winnebago, at that time the end of the railroad line. The original fourteen room home was built with the intention of having the Percy Wollaston family live in part of the house. However, finding it unsuitable for two families, Wollaston chose to build at another location. Wollaston, also from England, served as Fairmont’s first mayor even though he was an English citizen during his term.

Hazelmere, originally the Ramsdale family home, was sold to Dan Alton after the Ramsdale family had lived there about twenty years. Alton later sold it in 1901 to E. J. Edwards and J. T. Swearingen for \$9,000.00. This sale included seventy-five acres of land bordering the lake that was to be immediately platted into lake lots. It was then sold it to Fred Cotton in 1904. Cotton made a number of improvements including a dance pavilion, an open air dining area, and a number of guest cottages. However, it should also be noted that exact date as to when it evolved from a family residence into a hotel is unclear.

Hazelmere soon became well known as one of the finest resorts in southern Minnesota, and the Midwest, where entire families could come to spend their vacations while enjoying Fairmont's lakes and other amenities, including the authentic "home cooking" for which it became famous. Sundays were an especially popular day at Hazelmere and attracted hundreds of people. Many simply enjoyed relaxing in the gentle wafting of the lake breezes, while others favored the many other leisure time opportunities available in the area. Attractions the resort offered included tennis courts, bathing facilities, and the fact that the golf course was conveniently located nearby. The cottages were usually filled, which in turn left waiting lists of vacationers seeking reservations. Hazelmere's appeal was further enhanced by the fact that a great deal of transportation at that time was on water via the Concord and other pleasure boats of that era.

It's interesting to note that the Hazelmere site had a somewhat ominous incident occur in the late 1800's when a near riot and attempted hanging took place there. This incident was a result of a group of Milwaukee Railroad employees being quite disturbed by the fact that they did not receive the pay for which they felt entitled. As a result of their discontent, the railroad employees descended upon officials of the railroad who were staying at the hotel. The intent of the railroad employees was to hang the railroad officials. However, a posse was formed in Fairmont that intervened by descending upon the mob, marching them back to Fairmont, and holding them captive in the "Older House" barn under armed guard. The "Older House" was a hotel of that era. Could this incident have served to promote the development of what is today known as collective bargaining agreements? We'll probably never know for sure.

In 1928 Fred Cotton, Hazelmere's owner, announced that the Hazelmere Hotel would be remodeled and converted into summer apartments. A February 3, 1928, *Sentinel* article about the remodeling of the Hazelmere states that, "Bowing before the steady growth of the city and its suburbs, Hazelmere has changed from a summer resort to a suburban residential district," which reflected Cotton's new concept for the use of the property. This article goes on to say that, "Every convenience of a 20<sup>th</sup> century home will be installed, including electricity, gas, and water, a great change from the early days of tallow candles, kerosene lamps, and finally gasoline lamps."

History characterizes the Hazelmere Hotel as a quiet hotel, catering to what was referred to at that time as "the better trade," apparently meaning that their clientele was considered to be of the upper echelon of local and Midwestern society. It also served as a center for numerous social functions, a meeting place for the Fairmont Whist Club, and its popular "family style" meals further served to compliment its growing popularity. Fred Cotton continued to operate the property until his death in 1937. Cotton's

daughters, Wilhelmina and Gertrude Cotton, sold the Hazelmere property to Art Stade in 1939. It was demolished in 1939-1940. The former site of the Hazelmere Hotel, south of Alton Street and west of Albion Avenue in Fairmont, is now a residential area.

To learn more about “Hazelmere” and Joseph Ramsdale, visit the Pioneer Museum in Fairmont.

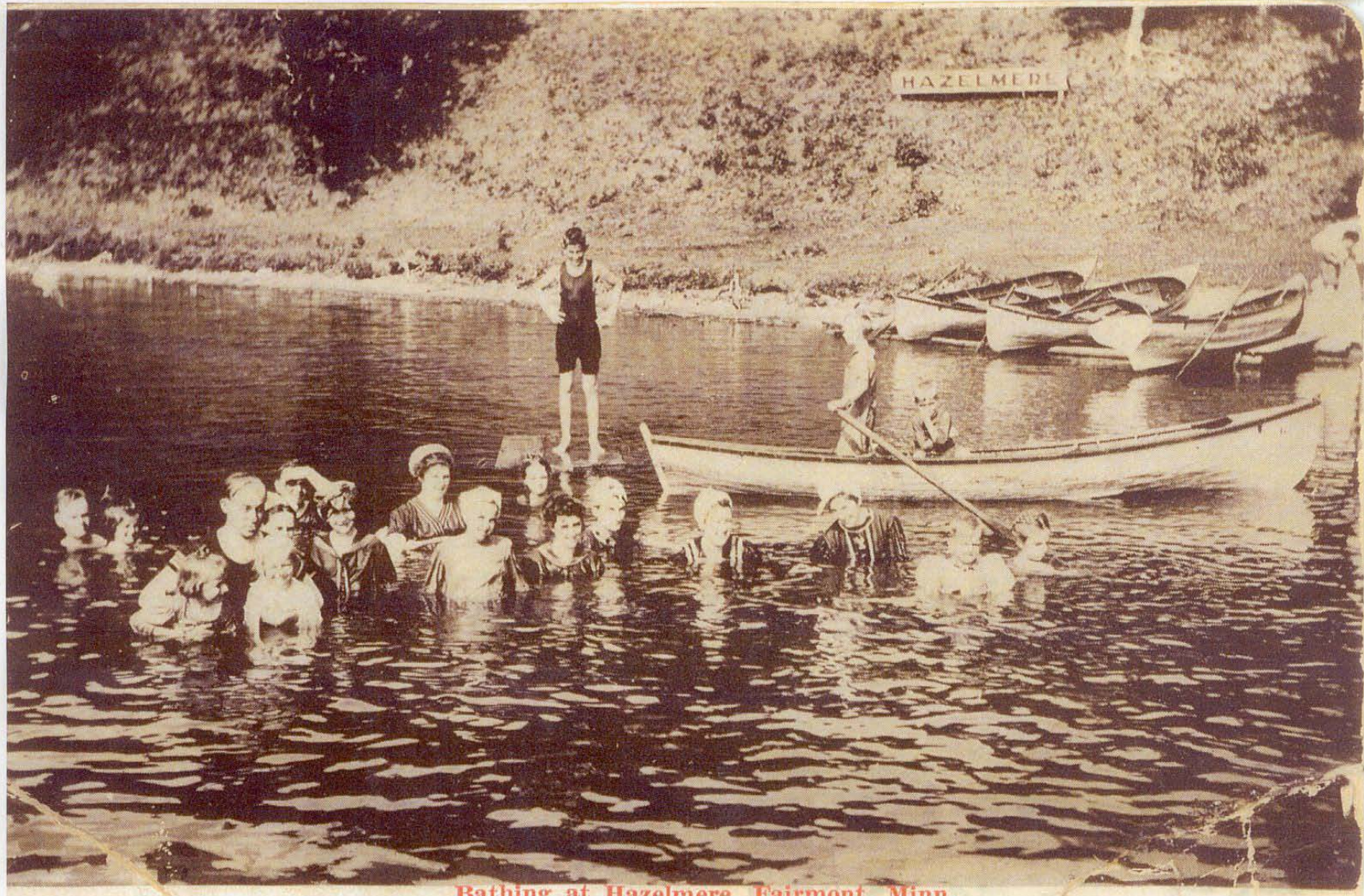


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COTTAGES AT HAZELMER'S FAIR, ONT. MOUNTAIN



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HAZELMERE HOTEL, FAIRMONT, MINN.



Bathing at Hazelmere, Fairmont, Minn.