

BIRCHWOOD VILLAGE



A CENTENNIAL MEMORY
SEPTEMBER 10, 2021

Edited by Scott Freeberg, Village Historian

Introduction

Birchwood first started out in the late 1800s as a weekend retreat for St. Paul residents seeking peace and quiet from the big city. They found that comfort way out in the country at the end of a sand road, in Birchwood on the shores of White Bear Lake. Those residents first lived in tents and later built simple three season cottages. As the collection of cottages and year-round homes grew, the townspeople wisely decided to band together and incorporate as a village in 1921 for the good of the residents. This action cemented the city's successful future as the townspeople, city council and mayor came together to govern Birchwood to solve problems, and make it a better place to live. They created infrastructure like roads, sanitary sewers, safe drinking water, beaches, and parks, as well as city codes for the good of all.

Birchwood Going Forward by Mayor Mary Wingfield

When folks "discover" our town with its narrow, winding roads, beautiful parks and green spaces, and lovely old-growth trees, they often exclaim they never knew Birchwood existed. Their loss.

As someone who grew up here, I can attest Birchwood is so much more. It is a community of people who will offer you a hand, look after you, your family or your dog, or quickly give an ear, a smile or a hug. And it is a great place to raise a family. Second, third, and fourth generations have grown up and then returned to the same neighborhoods of their youth.

The last one hundred years were full of traditions and history that have become our legacy. As we move into the next hundred years, there will be new families, new ideas and new opportunities. To them, I wish you all peace and happiness in enhancing the spirit of this wonderful place we have been so lucky to call home. Mayor Mary Wingfield, September 2021

Acknowledgements

This Birchwood Village 2021 Centennial Booklet was edited by Scott Freeberg, Birchwood Village Historian.

The booklet was written by Birchwood Village resident Scott Freeberg. Thank you for photos provided by Mary Wingfield, Shari Salzman-Hankins, Scott Freeberg, Jeanne Kogl, Rachael Drew, the White Bear Lake Area Historical Society, and the City of Birchwood Village. Thank you to Sara Markoe Hanson, Executive Director of the White Bear Lake Area Historical Society, for guidance and review. Cover artwork by Birchwood artist Rachael Drew.

We give a special thank you to Jeanne Kogl who kindly shared her family photo album with us. Her great grandparents, the Naumanns and the Conradis were Birchwood residents in the early 1900s, and many vintage photos in this booklet are of her family enjoying White Bear Lake in Birchwood.

Much of the historical section was edited from multiple sources including:

- "This is Birchwood", a 1955 manual prepared by the League of Women Voters of Birchwood
- "Birchwood, A Bicentennial Memory" a 1976 booklet prepared by the Birchwood Bicentennial Committee
- Birchwood historical articles written by Scott Freeberg, Birchwood Village Historian, for the quarterly newsletter using material found in the City of Birchwood Village archives.

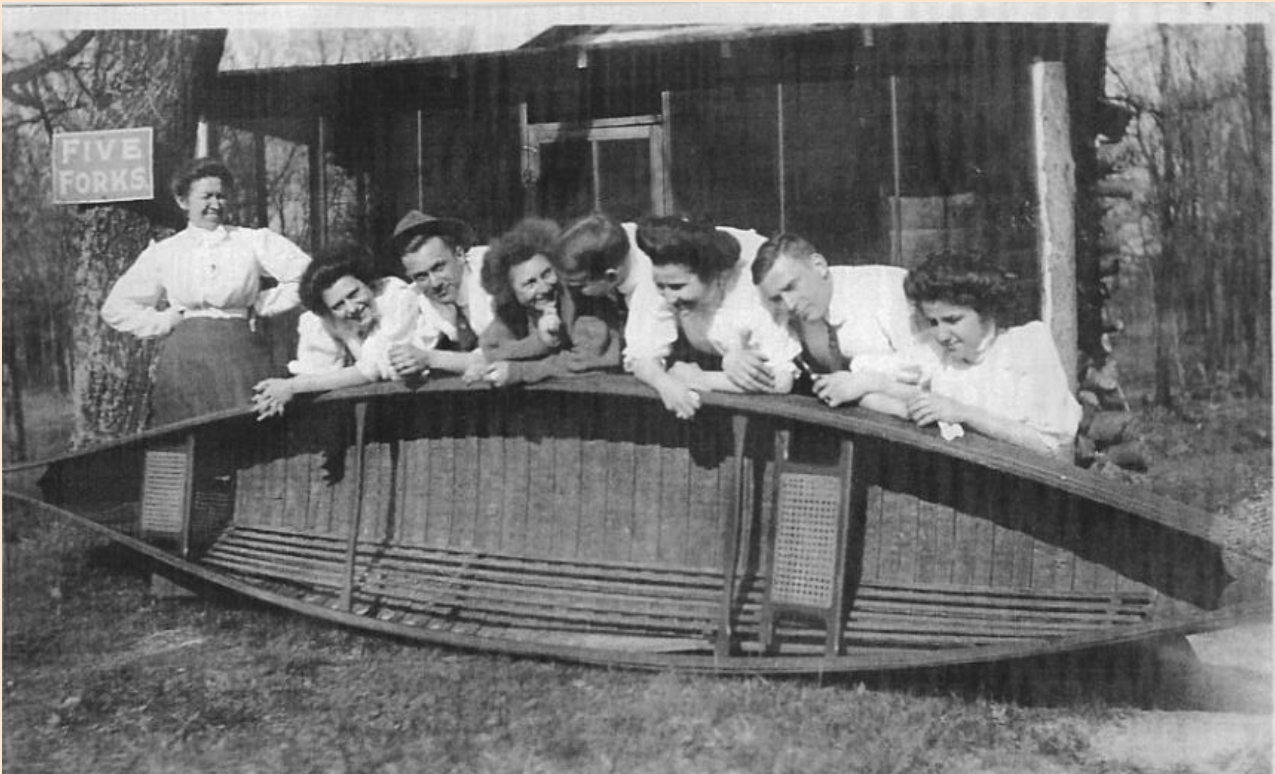
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BIRCHWOOD VILLAGE, A CENTENNIAL MEMORY

SEPTEMBER 1921 – SEPTEMBER 2021

WELCOME to the City of Birchwood Village's 100th Anniversary! On September 10, 1921 the Minnesota *Village* of Birchwood was incorporated and now, 100 years later, the *City* of Birchwood Village celebrates its Centennial!



Fun at the Five Forks cottage in Birchwood, 1900s. Photo courtesy of Jeanne Kogl.

The earliest Birchwood visitors lived in tents on the shore of White Bear Lake until cottages were built starting around 1876. From that modest beginning, Birchwood Village has continued to grow, thrive, and yet still retain its small-town charm and character.

This Centennial booklet celebrates the beginning, people, times, and moments from the early days up through today, and shows why Birchwood Village is still one of the “sweetest places on earth”.

Scott Freeberg
Village Historian
September, 2021



Topographic map showing Birchwood on the southern corner of White Bear Lake. Map is courtesy of the Minnesota DNR.

Birchwood Village is a city in Washington County, Minnesota. According to the United States Census Bureau, the city has a total area of 0.3 square miles (0.9 km²) or 214 acres. Cedar Street / Hall Avenue serves as a main route. The Village is on the southern shore of White Bear Lake. Residents take full advantage of the lake and enjoy fishing, sailing, ice skating, swimming, wind surfing, boating, ice sailing, and the many beautiful sunsets.

Our Early History

Long before any cottages were sitting on the Birchwood shores of White Bear Lake, the area was occupied by Native American Ojibwe and Dakota.

For hundreds of years Native Americans migrated through the White Bear Lake area to hunt game in the winter, fish, harvest wild rice, and make maple sugar in the spring. It is said there was a Native American maple sugar camp established on Manitou Island on which the Natives would visit each Spring.

Their early presence is still felt today by oral history and legends, presence of native burial mounds in the city of White Bear Lake, and Dakota names of the lake and lands. The name "Minnesota" is from the Native American Dakota language where Mni = 'water', and sota = 'sky tinted' or 'cloudy'. You may have heard Minnesota referred to as the "Land of Sky Blue Waters" at one time.

The city named Mahtomedi, next door to Birchwood Village, is also from the Dakota language where mató = 'grey bear', and mde = 'lake'. Even today, arrowheads and artifacts are occasionally found by amateur archeologists as well as home owners digging gardens or changing landscaping.

With the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the land where Birchwood Village now sits, came under United States rule. With this acquisition, the US Government encouraged settlement of the new lands. European settlers began arriving in this area in the 1800s and opened up the Minnesota frontier. In 1849, Minnesota became a legal Territory of the United States.

Just 9 years later in May 1858, the Minnesota Territory became the State of Minnesota with Saint Paul as its capital. While St. Paul was a growing and bustling city, the Birchwood area was far out in the country and only reachable in a day's ride by horse and wagon. There are stories of people travelling from St. Paul by horse and buggy on a rough sand road which is now East County Line Road. They would pitch tents on the shores of what is now Birchwood and enjoy the lake just as we do today.

The Beginning of Birchwood

The Village of Birchwood had its origin as a summer haven for St. Paul people. It began quietly in the last quarter of the 19th Century as a sprinkling of summer cottages on the south shore of White Bear Lake.



Sitting at lake at the Naumann cottage in the early 1900s. Photo courtesy of Jeanne Kogl.

The earliest cottages were built around 1876. At the turn of the century, six or seven cottages nestled among the lovely white birch trees that lined the lake shore. These homes, between Wildwood Avenue and the lake shore, and extending east about 500 feet from East County Line, were the nucleus of Birchwood. The only road was East County Line, a narrow sand road leading to North St. Paul.



An early Birchwood cabin, early 1910s. Photo courtesy of Jeanne Kogl.

Birchwood Growth Comes with Wildwood Park

The growth of Birchwood was due partially to the construction of Wildwood Amusement Park in Mahtomedi, on the south shore of White Bear Lake, just to the east of the present city limits.

Wildwood Park was established in the early 1890s and was later acquired by the Twin City Rapid Transit Company in summer of 1898. It offered such pleasures as a roller coaster, Ferris wheel, merry-go-round, bowling alley, fun house, pavilion, dance hall and restaurant. These drew eager crowds, as did the picnic grounds and swimming beach with long slides into the water.

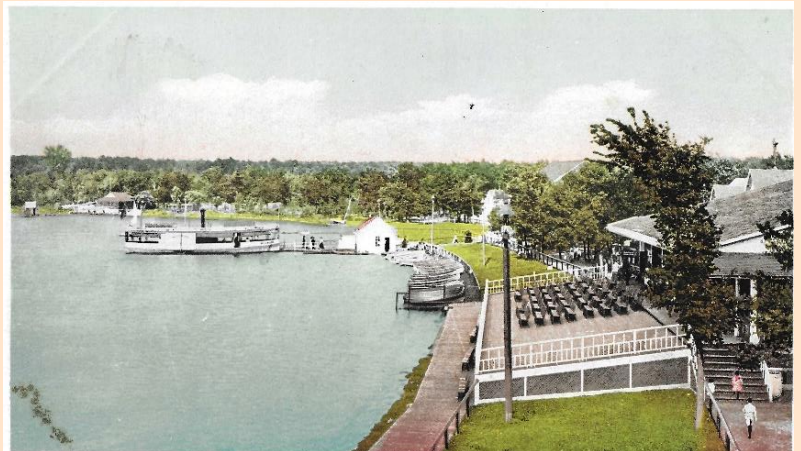
In 1904 the electric streetcar line was extended from Wildwood Park to the Village of White Bear Lake, and passed through Birchwood. This brought dependable transportation to residents.

In addition, two side paddle lake steamers, christened the "Wildwood" and the "White Bear" traversed White Bear Lake between the Village of White Bear and Wildwood Amusement Park, and would stop at Birchwood to take on or discharge passengers when needed.



3840. PADDLERS AT WILDWOOD, WHITE BEAR LAKE, ST. PAUL, MINN. COPYRIGHT, 1905, BY DETROIT PHOTOGRAPHIC CO.

A postcard of families wading in White Bear Lake. Postcard courtesy of Scott Freeberg.



8839 LAKE SHORE AND PAVILION AT WILDWOOD ST. PAUL, MINN.

A postcard of the steam driven paddle wheel boat parked at Wildwood Park. Postcard courtesy of Scott Freeberg.



Margaret and Adolph Naumann, Anna and William Conradi. Dated 1915. This is believed to be the Conradi cottage. Photo courtesy of Jeanne Kogl

Growth in the 1900s

When Allen S. Libbey, later to be the Village Treasurer, came to Birchwood in 1903 he noted that only two other families were living here through the winter. The area was a tangle of woods and swamps with a bicycle path along the lake as the only way through.

In 1906, a W.T. McMurran platted the land he owned along the lake as the Lakewood Park First and Second Divisions. At that time maps showed the name Birchwood applied only to the homes then built near the lake along Birchwood Lane and Wildwood

Avenue. McMurrin lived at what is now 339 Wildwood Avenue.

Prices for lots ranged from \$600 to \$750 for those on the lake and \$300 to \$450 for those in the area away from the lake.

Descriptions of Lakewood Park states

“White Bear Lake is one of the most beautiful spots on earth. It is about three miles in diameter and has about thirteen miles of shore line. It is about ten miles distant, and 40 minutes ride by electric line from the center of St. Paul. The lake is unexcelled for sailing, rowing, bathing, and fishing. Since the advent of the new Electric Line from St. Paul to White Bear, many summer cottages are being converted into permanent residences for winter as well as summer use”.

The land in Lakewood Park Second Division was described as:

“a beautiful tract of land overlooking White Bear Lake, and consists of large lots varying in size from one to five acres. All the land is high above the lake and commands a beautiful view, and each tract, as platted, contains a high knoll admirably adapted as a site for a Country Home”. A second division brochure announced that the “tracts are intended for those desiring gardens, orchards, small fruits, vineyards, or chicken ranches”.

Tighe-Schmitz Park on Lake Avenue was a peat bog, home to pheasants and smaller birds. During an especially dry period, the swamp caught fire and the peat smoldered all summer. Village Council records from September 1925 show that \$7 was paid to William Priebe for watching the fire in the swamp.



Canoeing at Birchwood. Photo courtesy of Jeanne Kogl

Adolph and Margaret Naumann Cottage

An article in the St. Paul Dispatch newspaper dated 1913 talks of Adolph Naumann building a cabin by himself in Birchwood on White Bear Lake. He completed the construction in time for his wedding to Margaret Conradi. The article goes on to say that while Mr. Naumann was busy building a window seat, Mrs. Naumann was busy inside painting the pantry. He declared “publicity fussed him” and that he didn’t like it (the newspaper article on the cabin).



Believed to be the Adolph and Margaret Naumann cottage built in 1913. Photo courtesy of Jeanne Kogl.

A Sweet Memory of Birchwood from Long Ago

Eleanore Conradi (sister to Margaret Conradi Naumann) shared her memories so charmingly that we quote verbatim from her account.

“Birchwood was just a streetcar stop in 1913 when as a child of four I visited with my grandparents, Anna and William Conradi. They lived on the lake at Glenview, the stop before Birchwood. Most of the homes were summer cottages which were closed in winter. Some of the homes were all year homes and Grandpa’s neighbors, the Dornfelds, Klostermans and Halls, lived there summer and winter. Directly across the dirt road (Wildwood Ave) was a rental. The Dixons rented it several years. Down the road also were the Gibson rentals. Grandpa’s daughter, Margaret Nauman, my aunt, built a cottage on Grandpa’s property It later burned to the ground. They purchased the home across the road and made it a year-round and lived there many years. It was sold to the Lester-Mamples. Adolph and Margaret Nauman moved to his mother’s Birchwood property and built a home where they lived their last years.

“I spent part of every summer with my grandparents until graduation from high school. I swam many times a day in clean beautiful White Bear Lake. I learned to swim at age four with water wings. To the west of the property was the Water Pump Station. There was a right of way path to the lake from the road. Grandpa and I went fishing in a row boat about every day. There was no limit on fish and we caught burlap sacks of Sunfish. Grandpa cleaned them and wrapped a dozen or more to a package and I delivered them to the neighbors. I am quite sure some of them thought “not again”. Grandma and I visited the Prins and Stevenson families who lived up the hill by Glenview station. We also walked the winding path up the hill to ride the streetcar to Wildwood Park and visit friends in Mahtomedi. At age 16, 17, 18 I went with friends on a Sunday afternoon to dance in the lovely Wildwood Pavilion. I enjoyed the ride on the streetcar from St. Paul. It really rolled. We would wait at the switch-off for the streetcar from the other direction as it was mostly on track all the way. The streetcar had hourly service.

“I recall how still and dark it was as I bedded down on the porch. I also remember the beautiful stars I watched when I was supposed to be sleeping. There were so many more than today.

Is pollution hiding them? I know the wildflowers are gone from the hill as houses cover them and the path to the streetcar is no more. The hill was covered with ferns too. What happened to the Good Old Days? The Conradi home was at 145 Wildwood Avenue.”



Unidentified rower in Adolph Naumann’s duck boat, early 1910s. Photo courtesy of Jeanne Kogl



Adolph and Margaret (Conradi) Naumann sitting on their dock in Birchwood in the 1910s. The Peninsula can be seen in the background. Photo courtesy of Jeanne Kogl.

Lester Mample, 146 Wildwood Avenue, was a resident since 1923. Birchwood in the summer was a continually growing colony of visitors to the many cottages built here. But in winter it was a relatively deserted place, with the few year-round residents finding companionship at card games and such.



Sailing in Birchwood Early 1900s. Photo courtesy of Jeanne Kogl

Lester's grandmother, Mrs. Frederick Mample, and her daughter were pioneer summer residents here, first visiting the area in 1904. Visitors often lived in tents for a few years before putting up a cottage.

Summer residents at the east end of the Village formed a group they called The Birchwood Association. This group first met in 1901. The Association members were concerned with problems of pure water, having an adequate supply of ice in the community ice house during the summer, road conditions, and damage to trees and property. The group met yearly until 1934 when records ceased.

Streetcars

All through this period the streetcar line was a vital means of transportation. The fare was 15 cents to travel from St. Paul to Wildwood Park, and 5 cents more to go on to White Bear Lake. Along the route from Wildwood Park to White Bear Lake there were stops in Birchwood called "Jay Street", "Lakewood", "Glenview", and "Birchwood" (at East County Line Road).

A popular conductor known by all regular riders was "Mac" McWilliams. Cars ran hourly and it is said that the whistle "blew like the devil". Passing from Birchwood to White Bear the tracks were set on a

trestle over what is now the property at 4101 East County Line Road.

In the mid-1990s Village Historian Scott Freeberg spoke to an elderly man from Wisconsin who grew up in North St. Paul in the 1920s. His father was one of the conductors on the streetcar that went from St.



The streetcar as it passes through the Village of Birchwood

Paul to Wildwood Park. On Saturdays he would meet the streetcar as it passed through North Saint Paul and then ride with his father out to Wildwood Park. There the St. Paul passengers would disembark, his father would park the streetcar, and the boy and his father would have lunch at Wildwood. After lunch his father would restart the streetcar, pick up any returning Wildwood passengers, and return to St. Paul. He remembers seeing the trolley stops in Birchwood while travelling from Wildwood Park to the Village of White Bear Lake.

Birchwood Incorporates in 1921

Birchwood was incorporated as a village on September 10, 1921 and it was said it came about primarily because of school taxes. Only two or three children went to school from Birchwood but if the community did not incorporate everyone would be assessed. By incorporating, only those who sent their children to school would pay tuition.

The first Birchwood council meeting was held on December 20, 1921 at the home of Lee Hall, 194 Wildwood Ave. Mr. Hall was chosen to be the first council president, (the office we now call mayor). Mr. A. Naumann was chosen to be the first treasurer.

Our Village Hall – The Community Gathering Spot Since 1932

In the May 1927 council minutes, the city treasurer was authorized to secure plans and estimates of cost for a community house, and to arrange with the county commissioners for permission to erect a community house on the east end of the Public Parkway, Wildwood Avenue. But in September 1927 it was decided that the village would purchase from Lee Hall, for the sum of \$661.40, the land upon which the hall now stands.

In 1928 the first levy of \$1000 for the purpose of building the hall was entered into the Village budget. In July 1931, it was reported that the general contract for the hall had been awarded to Edward Andersen of Saint Paul for the sum of \$3900. The architect, Magnus Jemne, an award-winning architect who studied under Cass Gilbert, was chosen to design the building. The first council meeting was held at the village hall on May 3, 1932.

Over the years our village hall has hosted city council meetings, Girl Scouts and Boys Scouts, family reunions, holiday parties, club meetings, sing a-longs, lectures, classes, yoga and all kinds of social gatherings. And it will continue to do so.



Birchwood City Hall prior to 2021 Renovation. Photo courtesy of Mary Wingfield

In 1973 the Village Hall was resided to replace the original rustic look with a more modern appearance. In 2021 that siding was removed due to wear and rot

and the original vertical pine siding that remained underneath was restored. In addition, the windows were returned to their original form and the front door was recreated to its old form, including its well-remembered squeak. A new ADA sidewalk and gardens were added a few years ago.

Streetcars End in 1932, End of an Era

The growing popularity of automobiles caused a drastic decline in streetcar riders. A turning point in Birchwood's history came in March 1932 when the St. Paul and Suburban Railway Company was granted permission to abandon their line from Wildwood to White Bear Lake. Protests were to no avail and the track was removed. By 1939 hard surfaced streets seemed a necessity and bonds were issued in the amount of \$5000, after a referendum at which 25 ballots were cast, all in favor of the project. Street signs were purchased and installed at all intersections in the village. It was recommended that all houses be numbered and the clerk was asked to establish numbers for assignment. Later the village purchased the section of streetcar property now known as Hall Avenue, and with the aid of Washington County, constructed the present road known as Hall Avenue.



Streetcar Heading to White Bear. Photo courtesy of White Bear Lake Area Historical Society

South Shore Transportation Club in 1942

In May 1942, the South Shore Transportation Club had been granted permission to operate a bus on a designated route through Birchwood to White Bear Lake. Membership in the Club was \$1.

Mrs. Ruth Babcock, a Birchwood resident from 1942 to 1963 at 127 Birchwood Avenue, remembers the convenience of taking the bus to White Bear with about an hour to shop before the return trip, all for a dime. She recalls the attractive green bus that was first used, later replaced with a school bus.



South Shore Transportation Certificate. Certificate courtesy of Ruth Babcock

World War II and the Emergency Bells

On December 18, 1941, Council members suggested the purchase of a siren for civil defense in case of foreign enemy invasion. The cost was prohibitive for a small community so instead three bells were borrowed from schools near Centerville Road, one of brass and two of cast iron. The Village Clerk and three members of the Civil Defense Team went to get one of the bells from the bell tower atop the school. After climbing up to attach ropes, the tower began to sway and the men feared that they and the bell would end up on the ground together. Luckily the bell was lowered without mishap and brought to Birchwood.



One of the warning bells hanging from a tree limb. The bell was put up during World War II to warn the villagers if the USA was attacked. Photo from the Birchwood Village archives



The Bells were hung from low tree branches at three points in the village where they could be heard by residents in case of emergency. Residents were instructed to black out their homes if the signal was given. Fortunately, these safety precautions never had to be put into

operation. One cast iron bell remains and currently

hangs in front of our village hall thanks to a 2019 Eagle Scout project. You can occasionally hear the bell ringing today.

In 1974 Birchwood Becomes a City

In 1974 the State of Minnesota changed the laws to abolish "villages", forcing Birchwood to become a full-fledged "city". The residents voted to change the community's name from the "Village of Birchwood" to the "City of Birchwood Village". The word "village" seemed an important tie to the nostalgic past.

Alfred Bloomquist Village Constable

In the 1950s and 1960s Birchwood had its own constable to keep the peace and the Birchwood kids in line. The Village Constable was Alfred Bloomquist, a long-time village resident and a man the kids playfully nicknamed "Alfie". It was Al's job to police the city, corral the speeders, and drive the school bus. He was well known for his beautiful gardens. His gladiolas and sweet corn (which was sold fresh daily) were his pride and joy. Another fond memory was every kid in Birchwood made their way to Alfie's house for Halloween where they gave out Cracker Jacks. Here is a photo of Al in uniform directing the start of the July 4th Birchwood Parade by Jack and Polly Shank's house.



Constable Al Bloomquist supervising the 4th of July parade at the intersection of County Line Road and Birchwood Avenue

The 1976 Bicentennial Celebration

On July 4th 1976, Birchwood celebrated the Bicentennial (200 years) of the American Revolution in a huge way with Bicentennial parties, a street dance, an old-fashioned melodrama entitled "Desmond's Dastardly Deed", quilt making & raffle, a picnic, an arts and crafts show, a baseball game, and of course the famous Birchwood 4th of July Parade.

Hanging in our city hall is a Bicentennial Quilt made in 1976 to celebrate Birchwood life. The quilt was the work of 25 Birchwood women and depicts facets of Birchwood life. The quilt was raffled off to raise money for the Birchwood Park Development Fund. The winner of the quilt raffle gave the quilt back to the city, and it is now on display behind a glass case in village hall.



*Bicentennial patch from Birchwood's celebration.
Photo courtesy of Scott Freeberg*



Birchwood Quartet singing during the July 4th 1976 Melodrama Presentation of "Desmond's Dastardly Deed".

Birchwood Village Today in 2021

Birchwood Village maintains several public parks and open spaces for use by residents

Tighe-Schmitz Park is located at 410 Lake Avenue. The Park hosts a large grassy field that is used for various sports such as soccer, baseball, and football. For the young at heart, there is also playground equipment. It has a paved hockey rink that can be used in the summer as well as the winter. It also has an ice-skating warming house to warm up while skating. The Park is named after Lucy Tighe and Clara Schmitz, both long-time Birchwood residents and village officers.



Tighe-Schmitz Park. Photo courtesy of Scott Freeberg

Bloomquist Park is located at 210 Birchwood Avenue. It has a small playground, two flex-surface tennis and pickleball courts and a natural walkway between Cedar Street and Birchwood Avenue. It is named after Alfred Bloomquist who was a beloved Village Constable in the 1950s and 60s.

Polly's Park (previously known as Nordling Park) is located at 12 White Pine Lane. It is an undeveloped natural space and features a walkway between Birchwood Avenue and White Pine Lane. It is named after Polly Shank who was a long-time Birchwood resident and champion of the village.

Curt Feistner Memorial Preserve located on the lake at 4110B East County Line Road. It is named after Birchwood resident Curt Feistner who perished in a military helicopter crash while training to secure our country after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.

Wildwood Park is located at 220 Wildwood Avenue. It features a long grassy space with picnic table, bench and flagpole. The annual Birchwood Village Fourth of July celebration takes place at this site.

Birchwood Village maintains five beaches for public use. All beaches have a swimming dock and plenty of canoe/kayak racks for rent. Most beaches have motor boat spaces that residents can lease for the year. The beach easements were originally fire lanes that allowed firefighters to pump water directly from the lake.

Ash Beach is located at 143B Wildwood Avenue, and has canoe/kayak racks and a grassy hillside.

Birch Beach is actually two lots and is located at 199B Wildwood Avenue. It has a large natural space, rain garden, bench, and canoe/kayak racks.

Elm Beach is located at 285B Wildwood Avenue, and has a quaint pathway down to the beach, a bench, and canoe/kayak racks.

Dellwood Beach is located at 407B Lake Avenue, and has a large grassy space, picnic table, and canoe/kayak racks.



Dellwood Beach. Photo courtesy of Shari Salzman-Hankins

Kay Beach is located at 495B Lake Avenue. It features a grassy space, picnic table, bench, canoe/kayak racks, and a public swimming dock. Motorized water craft are prohibited at this beach.

City Paths

The city maintains several short paths throughout the city. The paths are a chance to see nature up close and personal while out for a walk in the city.

Ash Path is located just west of 107 Birchwood Avenue on the south and 128 Wildwood Avenue on the north. It provides a natural walkway between Wildwood and Birchwood Avenues.

Birch Path is located between Birch Street on the west and Owl Street on the east and provides a cut through between Birchwood and Wildwood Avenues.

Bloomquist Path is located along the far west side of Bloomquist Park and provides a natural walkway between Birchwood Avenue on the north and Cedar Street on the south.

Grotto Path is located between Hall Avenue on the west and Tighe-Schmitz Park on the east. It features a staircase at Hall Avenue and a shortcut into Tighe-Schmitz Park.

Jay Path is located between 613 Wildwood Avenue on the west and Hall's Marsh on the east. It has some lovely old-growth hemlock trees, and provides a scenic walkway between Lake and Wildwood Avenues.



Ash Path. Photo courtesy of Shari Salzman-Hankins



Jay Path Along Hall's Marsh. Photo courtesy of Scott Freeberg



Wildwood Park Flag Pole and Bench. There is a monument at the base of the flagpole honoring Arthur Johnson. The Johnson family donated the flagpole, bench in his memory. Photo courtesy of Scott Freeberg

Other Spaces

Hall's Marsh is located just east of Tighe-Schmitz Park.



The Beauty of Hall's Marsh in August. Photo courtesy of Shari Salzman-Hankins

Water tower – The original village concrete water tower from 1920 still stands at 133 Birchwood Avenue near the City Hall. It is privately owned and non-functional. Lake water was pumped from the Ash easement up the hill to the tower with the assistance of a one-cylinder water pump. The cement was hand-mixed on the ground and then hoisted up the steep walls, pail by pail, using a pulley and rope. The builder would sit atop the rising walls and recite “*And how can man die better than facing fearful odds ‘mid pails of the liquid rock and reinforcement rods*”.



Hidden behind the foliage is the original 1920 water tower as seen in 2021. Photo courtesy of Scott Freeberg

Birchwood Traditions

Traditions are an integral part of our community culture. We build on those that were started long ago and continue to create new ones, as well. Many of the programs and amenities that we enjoy today are a result of the community social and civic groups developed as the year-round population grew. The Birchwood League of Women Voters was organized in 1940 and the Birchwood Women's Club in November 1947. The Women's Club offered fellowship to all the new residents and helped raise money for needed items at the hall. A Garden Club was begun in the 1950s and continued for some years. A playground program was held summers at the village hall starting in 1956. The Birchwood Community Club sponsored numerous events over the years, including the Fourth of July Parade, which has been a fixture in the community since 1952, along with the Children's Christmas Party. Other events include the Marian Johnson Across the Lake Swim, the 1976 Bicentennial Celebration, and community pot lucks. Some of these traditions continue, and we continue to create new ways to celebrate community.

Marian Johnson Across the Lake Swim

In the 60s, Birchwood resident Marian Johnson started the Across the Lake Swim and it continued for many years. In this event the participants were boated across White Bear Lake to the peninsula, and then swam back to Birch Beach. The swim was just under a mile, but it was hard for swimmers to stay straight due to wind and a lack of markers or buoys, so swimmers were given credit for swimming at least a mile. Each swimmer had an escort boat for safety. There were no awards, just the glory of the achievement! Recently this event has been cancelled due to liability concerns.

Holiday Christmas Party for the Children

Children of all ages visit Birchwood City Hall during the Holiday season to have a special visit from Santa and enjoy crafts and cookies with fellow residents. It continues to be a magical way to get our youngest citizens together. The Children's Christmas party has been going on for as long as anyone can remember.

Music In the Park

A new tradition that started a few years ago is the "Music in The Park". In this city sponsored event, musicians, bands, soloists, perform on Sunday evenings at the various parks from June through August. These outdoor concerts are free of charge and open to the public. Bring your lawn chair and join your neighbors and friends for an evening of music. Enjoy a picnic snack and a glass of wine – the City Council has approved consumption of beer and wine during the concerts.



Across the Lake Swimmers



Birchwood Village Children's Christmas Party



Music in the Park. Photo courtesy of Shari Salzman-Hankins

4th of July Independence Day Celebration

Since 1952 Birchwood has celebrated Independence Day with a children's parade along Wildwood Avenue up to Wildwood Park. The celebration includes the parade which is filled with vintage cars and trucks, dignitaries, floats, colorful wagons, residents dressed up in various outfits, decorated bicycles, balloons and streamers everywhere. Parade participants throw candy towards the children lining the parade.

The parade is led by the famous Birchwood Village marching band. The band is comprised of Birchwood residents who meet up once a year just before the parade, for a brief practice session. Louis Hauser was the band leader for 50 years.

At the park, while standing around the flagpole, the band leads the community in the National Anthem. The flag is raised and the Pledge of Allegiance follows. The ceremony is conducted with an Honor Guard salute and a few words from the emcee.

Afterwards, there are games, including a water balloon toss, raw egg toss, tug of war, and sack races. Cotton candy, ice cream, popcorn, pop and lemonade are handed out to young and old while neighbors catch up with old friends.

All the events are put on and supported by the Birchwood Community Club. The annual dues are \$4 and have stayed that amount for as long as anyone can remember.



4th of July Parade. Photo courtesy of White Bear Lake Area Historical Society



Birchwood kids celebrating the 4th of July in the parade. Photo courtesy of Mary Wingfield.

The 2020 4th of July Parade was held, but significantly shortened due to the Covid-19 virus pandemic. A short "socially distanced" parade was held around Wildwood Park by a small group of folks who came out with masks. The National Anthem was sung and the flag raised. Residents were asked to "parade in place" and decorate their yards to celebrate the day.



4th of July yard Parade in Place display from the Drew family following 2020 parade cancellation. Photo courtesy of Mary Wingfield

Flag Day and Veterans Day

The Birchwood Community Club places flags along Hall Avenue and Cedar Street for Flag Day and Veterans Day. Flag Day celebrates the adoption of the Stars and Stripes flag as the official US flag in 1777. Veterans Day honors the sacrifices of our military veterans in servicing the United States. Flags are hung on Wildwood Avenue for the Fourth of July celebration. Flag placement and removal are not paid city services but rather performed by civic minded volunteers. Mayor Wingfield is a driving force of this activity; it was her mother Skip Wingfield's idea. Skip was the volunteer treasurer for the Birchwood Community Club for 28 years.

The painting of Veteran's Day flags is by Rachael Drew who was inspired to paint this after helping to hang the flags.



Flags lining the roads in Birchwood from Cedar Street facing East County Line Road. Used with permission from artist and resident Rachael Drew.

2021 City Council

Mayor: Mary Wingfield

Council members:

Jonathan Fleck

Kevin Woolstencroft

Mark Foster

Justin McCarthy

Population in
1940

91

Population in
1950

312

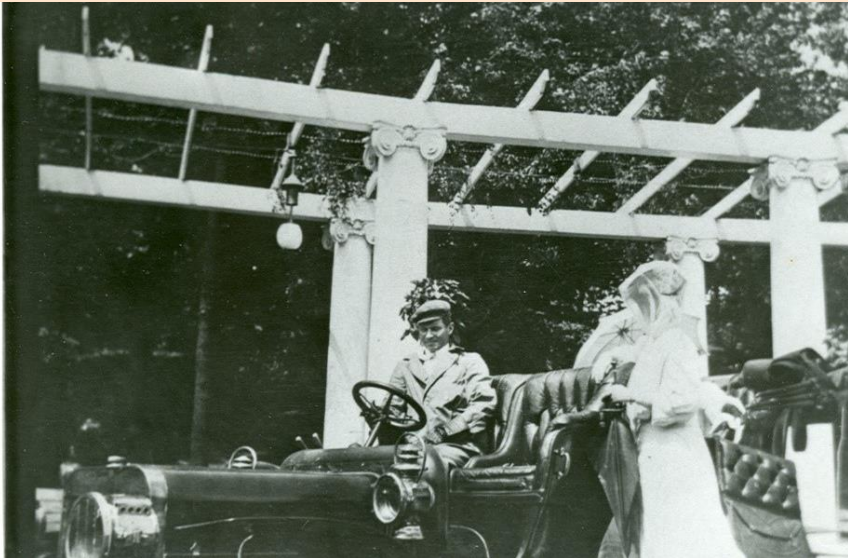
Population In
1960

583

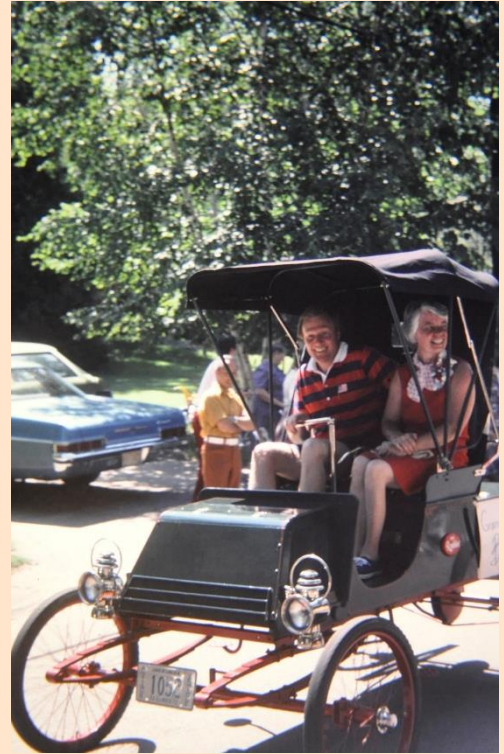
Population in
2021

874

Some Interesting Birchwood Photos



Elegance in Birchwood. Photo taken at Nullhurst cottage on Birchwood Avenue, later the Shank house, and now the Ford house.



Birchwood Fourth of July Parade Marshal Beverley Bosse in the 1970s, believed to be 1976.



Fourth of July Parade fire truck 1970s.



Birchwood Gals on the dock in 1910s. Photo courtesy of Jeanne Kohl



Birchwood Village Hall, 1961. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society



Birchwood Village City Hall, 2021