

History of the Red Feather Lakes

By Wayne M. Akin

As written in a letter to Joan Day (Fort Collins historian) ... on July 10, 1988

It was good to hear from you and I enjoyed the clipping and program for the Red Feather play. Am I correct that they made a TV cassette of it? If so, I'd like to see it and if you want a copy for the museum, I'd be glad to buy it and give it to you after I've looked at it.

You asked about the history of the lakes and their names. As I remember it, the lakes were made about 1885-88 by a man named Jake Mitchell (who diverted water from the North Pine Creek and thus created the water rights for the lakes). They were called Mitchell Lakes. The individual lakes were — Big or West Lake (Hiawatha), House Lake (Ramona), and South Lake (Red Feather).

About 1889 the South Pine was diverted by Frank Gartman (a local rancher) to form Twin Lake (or West Lake) and Dowdy Reservoir. The whole group were combined and called Mitchell Lakes.

In 1902 a group, including former Governor B. H. Eaton, Jake Mitchell and Frank Gartman planned a resort, but it fell through. Frank Stover and Nettie Poor purchased the lakes and she built her home on the so-called House Lake and developed a business supplying trout to Pell's Oyster House in Denver.

In 1904 my father and Jesse Harris purchased the lakes and surrounding land and then added the adjoining properties to make up the ranch where we lived during the summer months.

Lady Moon was an Irish girl, Catherine Lauder, who came to work at the Elkhorn Lodge located a few miles southeast of the lakes. It served the miners who worked in the area. She married a local rancher, Frank Gartman, whom I mentioned above. I do not remember what became of him but later she married Lord Cecil Moon — who was one of the many younger sons of English nobility who came to the western U.S. about that time. She divorced him but remained on the ranch and kept the title "Lady Moon". She was a remarkable cantankerous woman who made life very interesting in the neighborhood.

To return to my point of departure — about 1918 or so my father sold forty acres and South Lake to Dr. D. O. Morton (our family doctor) and L.C. Moore, President of the 1st National Bank. They built summer homes there. Dr. Morton was a friend of composer Charles Wakefield Cadman and thus through him, our family became good friends with him. Tsianina was not a princess but she was a very talented Indian girl who won a

scholarship to study music in Denver where Cadman met her. He became her “mentor” and later composed an opera with her singing the lead role. There is a long story about her concerts when my sister Eunice was her accompanist. However, the point here is that Cadman and Tsianina visited Dr. Morton at the summer home and he asked her if the name meant anything in English. She replied Red Feather....* Dr. Norton had been trying to think of a more romantic name than “South Lake” and this seemed to be perfect. So his lake became Red Feather Lake.

So a few years later when the developing was started it was natural to choose the name Red Feather Lakes Association and give Indian names to the other nearby lakes. **

I’m delighted that you are taking on the very big job of fostering the museum. I hope you get the necessary funds. A museum can be very important and valuable historical material will be lost if the search is interrupted at a time when this generation of pioneers is about to disappear.

There are a couple of little books about Red Feather which must be in the library and you should have copies in the museum. One is “Red Feather Lakes; The first Hundred Years” by Evadine B. Swanson and Ted Dunning.

I do not remember the other one’s name or author, but I think its name is simply “Red Feather Lakes.”

Also there is another about the general area — “Memories of an Old Timer” by Wesley Swan. My recollection is that it has a lot of information valuable for a Larimer County Museum.

I hope this gives you something you wanted — if not, ask more questions. Maybe it will stimulate an old memory that certainly needs stimulation.

Best wishes — as ever. Wayne

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** Several of the "Indian" names for the lakes come from the epic poem "Song of Hiawatha" by the 19th century American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, including Hiawatha and Nokomis (prominent lake names in Minneapolis, MN also), and possibly Shagwa which appears in Longfellow's long poem as Shuh-shuh-gah, meaning blue heron and is also close to the name Shagawa which is the name of another lake in Minnesota near Ely.

Dear Joan / October 23, 1989

In going over old papers I came on to these stock certificates. The Redfeather Mountain Lake Assn. is long gone but these may have some interest.

Wayne M. Akin
 1232 East Palo Verde Drive
 Phoenix, Arizona 85014

Guarantee Certificate

(NOT TRANSFERABLE)

The Redfeather Mountain Lakes Association

(Incorporated Under the Laws of the State of Colorado)

GENERAL OFFICES, FORT COLLINS, COLORADO

THE REDFEATHER MOUNTAIN LAKES ASSOCIATION guarantees the following statements to be true, and agrees to refund to the original purchaser, within a period of two years, the full amount paid with six per cent interest, provided the following statements are established by the purchaser after personal inspection, not to be as herein stated:

The Association guarantees that it has marketable title to the land included in its official plat and that the size of each site conforms with said plat on file in the office of the Clerk and Recorder of Larimer County, Fort Collins, Colorado.

Every site is guaranteed high, dry and suitable for a mountain summer home, with a right of way to each site.

Abundant mountain water is available for all domestic purposes on the Association's properties.

Included within, bordering on and adjacent to the Association's properties is a series of eight named lakes, and several smaller lakes unnamed.

The lakes are heavily stocked with rainbow and brook trout and will be so maintained.

The North Fork of The Lone Pine runs thru four miles of the Association's properties.

This stream also is heavily stocked with native and brook trout and will be so maintained.

Every site owner is given free access to lakes and streams with fishing, hunting, bathing and boating privileges.

The properties are reached by automobile highway from Fort Collins, Colorado.

The Association's properties are situated approximately forty-five miles northwest of Fort Collins, Colorado.

The properties of the Association are entirely within The Colorado National Forest, a Government Forest Reserve comprising over 850,000 acres.

The Association guarantees that any time within two years the purchaser can transfer to any other surveyed and platted site which may be unsold and available, and will credit the full amount paid on the original purchase.

Relying only on the statements contained herein, and in my application for purchase, I have purchased property from The Association, and in the event I visit said property, I hereby agree to call at the office of The Redfeather Mountain Lakes Association on the properties, for the purpose of verifying these statements.

Representatives have no authority to negotiate options, leases, or make offers of re-sale without the written consent of the Association. Any written additions or alterations to this guaranty shall render it null and void.

I have read and understand the above conditions and statements and I agree to waive claim to any statement or condition made to me that is not contained or referred to herein.

Applicant:

Carl H. Gunther

I hereby acknowledge receipt of duplicate copy of this certificate.

THE REDFEATHER MOUNTAIN LAKES
ASSOCIATION



President

