



Galt and Speakman's plan for drawing village water from Oak Lake.

ice boxes and no doubt the water of the lake was used for washing. For a time in the early 1900s the lake also served as a meeting place for a religious group which often used the lake for baptismal services.

Throughout the early part of the 20th century, Oak Lake gradually acquired the status of "summer place" as well-to-do Stirling families built cottages on its shores. With the newly relaxed rules regarding swimming pool apparel, Oak Lake became a haven for all folks who wanted to get away from the heat of a summer day. At the beach across the road from the Searles homestead, Burt and Annie Searles' summer resort featuring a dance hall and a slide which reached well into the lake, quickly became popular with crowds from the surrounding area. Birds Beach on the lake's southern shore also provided respite from summer heat and humidity. However, as automobiles became faster and more reliable and with the burgeoning popularity of provincial parks at the Sandbanks and North Beach, summer crowds at the Oak Lake beaches dwindled. Today, only one public beach (the former Bird's Beach) remains open, the lake is surrounded by cottages and summer homes and the community surrounding the lake is a much quieter place than it was during the 1930, 1940s and 1950s.

We return to 1898 for our story about a much more utilitarian purpose for the lake's resource.

Stirling was a village of roughly 800 inhabitants in 1898. The daily need for water for most of the population of the village was served by wells. Few houses, if any, could boast indoor bathrooms although many did have a cistern and pump. Outdoor privies still figured prominently in village back yards. Stirling politicians reasoned it would be wise to have a more dependable and ready water supply. Several disastrous fires, especially the one in 1883, pointed up the need for more modern firefighting equipment and hydrants. There was no doubt, Stirling would benefit greatly from water supplied in large enough volume to accommodate firefighting equipment and the laun-

dry and bathing needs of village residents. And there, but a scant few miles to the south, lay Oak Lake. The hills below the lake sloped gradually toward the village and the 300-foot drop meant gravity and strategically placed pumps would provide adequate means to pipe water to Stirling. It was simply a matter of approaching the various property owners involved, come to some agreement regarding the leasing or buying of property, lay the pipe and turn on the water. It sounded deceptively simple.

The fall of 1898 saw hectic activity in council chambers. A bylaw was drafted and published in the village weekly paper, *News-Argus*, for weeks prior to a plebiscite held Friday, September 23. The bylaw authorized the borrowing of \$20,000 through debentures and allowed for the repayment of the principal and interest in 30 years. Ardent supporters of the project filled the paper during the weeks prior to the plebiscite with letters extolling the virtues of the system and promoting schemes which would enable quick return on the investment. It's known there were detractors but few of their letters appeared in print.

Almost as an anticlimax, a small item appeared on the back page of the Thursday, September 29, edition of the *News-Argus* announcing the result of the polls; the vote was 92 in favour of the waterworks bylaw and only 41 against. "Those who were in favour of Waterworks have good reason to rejoice ... it will be the beginning of an era of more prosperous times for the village."

By April 28, 1899, consulting engineers Galt and Speakman had prepared plans and specifications; it seemed all was set for renewed prosperity.

The simple plans show a pipeline laid on the floor of the lake in a little bay at its north end. A ten- or twelve-inch pipe then follows the grade to a point roughly the same location as the present spring on the west side of Highway #14 just north of the Golf Club Road. Provision was made here for an overflow valve and a Pelton wheel or turbine which could develop 50 horsepower; where that power would eventually be