



BICENTENNIAL SERIES

A history of Thompson Twp. & Village of Thompson

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THOMPSON — Only a visit to Big Spring, or KITCH-ITI-KIPI as the Indians called it, and one can see the primeval beauty of its surroundings.

The spring, which has also been called the "Mirror of Heaven," is located in the 417 acre Palms-Book State Park and is bounded by the Hiawatha National Forest on the north and west. Many Indian legends and tales surround the spring.

One of the most popular of these legends is that an Indian princess, about to become the bride of a young chief, was carried off by a rival chief while husband-to-be was out hunting. She ran from him at the edge of the spring, leaped in and slowly sank.

According to the legend, she was changed by the magic waters of KITCH-ITI-KIPI into a graceful white deer. That is why no Indian since has ever killed a white deer. Whoever would kill a white deer would be sure to meet with misfortune.

Much of the credit for developing the spring into a tourist attraction is given to John Bellaire. He directed early visitors to the spring by painting white lines around utility poles on the roads leading to it. Early transportation across the spring was by simple log raft which has long since been replaced with a pontoon raft.

Indian Lake State Park No. 1, now called the South Shore Campground, was originally acquired from Russell Watson in September of 1932. To acquire the original parcel the state traded Watson, a lumberman, some timber land for his 88.6 acres on Indian Lake.

The same year and the next year, the state purchased more land from Watson to bring the total acreage of the park to 190 with 2,831 feet of lake frontage.

In making the transactions, former director P.J. Hoffmaster handled the negotiations for the state. When the state was considering buying the land, the area was totally undeveloped. The shoreline was strewn with dead trees, leaves and other debris. After walking barefoot in the water, Hoffmaster went back to Watson and told him that the state could buy land for a park anywhere but only God could make a sand beach like that. The deal was closed the same day.

In December of 1933, CCC and WPA workers began to transform the area into a park. By 1935 the bath house, picnic

shelter, garage, manager's house, sewage disposal system, toilets, parking area and roads and trails were completed and the park was opened.

Pay for the workers wasn't much. A man who was a WPA time keeper on the project claimed to make more money peddling boot leg whiskey to fellow workers than he did on the job.

In 1939 the park area was again enlarged with the purchase of 17 acres from Ed Jewell. In 1942 another 39.5 acres were purchased from William Rowe. These brought the south shore to its present acreage of 285.8 acres.

The state acquired another 213 acres on the west side of the lake in 1939 through tax delinquency. In 1965 and 1966 this land was developed into the West Shore Campground.

In 1919 the area saw completion of another state facility in the township, the Thompson State Fish Hatchery. In 1924, the hatchery was provided with a truck capable of hauling 40 milk cans for transporting fish. Under orders from Lansing, the hatchery would produce one million fish annually for planting in the local area as other locations throughout the state.

In 1929 the second unit of the hatchery was built. It was located about a mile west of the first unit. Here a crystal clear spring produced 1,375 gallons per minute for 45 degree water. This was, and still is, considered one of the best water supplies in the state for incubating trout eggs.

Added to the trout rearing in recent years has been the coho salmon program. This program has added greatly to the revitalization of Thompson with the influx of fishermen to the area in the spring and fall.