

Hatfield Lake was coolest spot on hot summer days

By Rebekah Davis
Limestone County Archivist

It has been closed for decades now, but the mere mention of it can start a wave of nostalgia for folks from all over who remember spending hot, lazy Alabama summer afternoons floating in Hatfield Lake.

“My mom would take a day off work during the summer and her and my brother and me would be there by the time the gates were opened and stay all day,” Melissa Belt reminisced. “She couldn't swim but she would lay out big blankets and pack a cooler and sit and watch us. Best bologna sandwiches I ever had came from those days.”

Belt was one of many who have shared memories of Hatfield Lake, Drive-In and Roller Rink each time photos of the summer fun venue have been posted on Facebook sites like “You know you are from Athens if...”

“The best place ever for teenagers to hang out,” said Brenda Johnson. “It is sad our children and grandchildren don't have a place like this to hang out. Loved Mr. Hays Moore, Travis Schrimsher and Milton South. They were such a good influence on kids.”

For Tracy Brooks, a trip to Hatfield was a money-making opportunity.

“My mother and dad would take me there when I was a young kid,” Brooks said. “My mother would give me \$1.00 every time I jumped off the high dive.... I miss those days. Life was so easy then.”

Hatfield Lake was named for Jim Hatfield, who in the 1930s dug the swimming pool – at one time billed as “the largest concrete swimming pool in North Alabama, fed by pure spring water” – with the assistance of a mule and a man named James Thomas Strain.

Long before Hatfield dug the lake, the 120-acre property was one of the first to be settled in Limestone County, by a family named Keyes who came from South Carolina in 1820. Ten years later, Howell Featherstone bought the property and his son, John Featherstone, built a two-story home there for his bride. After John was wounded in the battle of Gettysburg, he sold the house and property to William G. Johnson in 1869.

After Johnson came the Getty and Hively families... and rumors of oil on the land. Neighbors saw wagons carrying cable to the property and when a “for sale” sign went up, they said the owner spent so much money in his fruitless quest for oil that he was forced to sell the property. N.C. Braly bought the land in 1924, made improvements, and then sold it in 1930 to Hatfield.

Hatfield was the first to capitalize on the recreational potential of his man-made lake, adding campsites and a large picnic area. When William Myers bought the property in 1936, he added the skating rink that was the site of many a match-making for couples still together today, including Athens Mayor Ronnie Marks and his wife Sandra.

Fred Rainey also owned Hatfield Lake before selling it to Hosea Bartlett in 1962. Bartlett ran the lake for 10 years.

“I grew up at Hatfield and still wish it was open,” said Sandra Bartlett Scott, Bartlett’s daughter. “I skated all winter and swam all summer. Wonderful childhood memories, and lots of friendships to cherish.”

It was likely during Bartlett’s ownership that this picture postcard was printed.

“Don't know the year, but if it was after 1957 and before 1971, I was probably somewhere in this photo,” said Thomas Clem. “I lived there in the summer.”

Hatfield Lake eventually closed in the early 1980s, while the lake technically is still there today, it is now an overgrown and rusted ghost of its sunny history.

Note: Some information in this article came from the book Treasures of Athens and Limestone County by Betty L. Taylor.

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