

East Twin Lake



Dick Miller, Carolyn Miller and Ted Williams (USF)

This narrative is based on an interview conducted with three East Twin Lake residents, Dick Miller, Carolyn Miller, and Ted Williams on January 24, 2002 at Dick and Carolyn's home. During the interview the three shared their knowledge of the lake's past, described the changes that they see occurring around them, and expressed their hopes for the future of East Twin Lake.

Personal History



East Twin Lake in 1997 (Miller)

Ted Williams, a seventh generation Floridian, moved to East Twin Lake with his family in 1979 in order to “get away from the crush of the people” and enjoy the country. The Williams’ family bought their land from Tom and Elsie Mirro, who had lived on the lake since 1950. Over the years, the family has enjoyed living on the lake as it has afforded them the opportunity to participate in some of their favorite activities. Ted has grown citrus and Christmas trees on his property and his wife has her art studio there. Since moving to the lake, Ted has been very involved in monitoring the lake’s health.

Dick and Carolyn Miller moved to East Twin Lake in 1992 after both retired from their jobs as teachers in Michigan. Similar to Ted, they were drawn to the lake because of its country-like atmosphere. When they built their house, they were careful not to clear out too many trees to preserve the natural feeling of the area. They have also been active in monitoring the health of the lake.

Although East Twin Lake is too small for anything more than canoeing or fishing, Carolyn said that she enjoys living there because it is pretty to look at. Ted concurred and said, “It’s just a nice little small lake.” It is not just East Twin Lake residents who think the lake is beautiful. When the TV-movie “My Son, The Matchmaker,” which is based on the work of local writer Gloria Black, was filmed in the area, producers chose East Twin Lake as the location for many of the scenes taking place on a lake.

History/Information

East Twin is a 22-acre lake located in the Lake Monroe Watershed. The lake is located within both the City of Sanford and in Seminole County, off of State Road 46A. Nearby is West Twin Lake, a 26-acre lake, which is located in Sanford. As far back as 1912, the lake has been called Twin Lake and was a stop on the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad from Sanford to Leesburg¹. Neither Ted nor the Millers know when the two lakes were officially named “East” and “West.”

According to Ted, who has documented the changes in the water level since 1982 with a self-made marker, the water level has typically increased or decreased according to the rainfall. He said, however, that this has now changed since the beginning of construction for apartment complexes on the southwestern side of the lake. Ted said about the situation:



The hydrilla problem in East Twin Lake in 1980 (Williams)



The hydrilla after the carp had been introduced into the lake in 1981 (Williams)



Sandhill cranes on the lake in 1998 (Miller)

“Whatever fell here, we got 3 inches of rain then the lake came up 3 inches because there is no water flowing into it. That took place until these apartments started over here...Low and behold we had in July...a 6.8-inch rain. So instead of the lake going up 6.8 inches, it went up 2 feet...That happened for three successive months. That’s what boosted this lake up much more than any of the lakes in this area.”

Dick described the lake as having a floodplain on the northeastern section of the lake that does not currently have water. He explained how deep the water can get in the floodplain:

“I canoed back in there. It was fairly deep. I tipped over the canoe when I reached to get a branch out of the way. I knew how deep it was. It was about waist deep.”

He continued:

“The lake used to go back to the right, I have pictures of it. The lake could go back there again if it comes up, [but] that’s not going to keep the developers from dredging it out.”

One of the current concerns for Dick, Carolyn and Ted is the recent outbreak of hydrilla. According to Ted, the last time there was a problem with hydrilla was when he moved to the lake in 1979. To address the problem, Ted and Ira Southward, one of men who owned much land around the lake before it was developed residentially, introduced White Amur carp into the lake to eat the vegetation. Within a year the lake was cleaned up. Ted stated that the hydrilla only started appearing recently after construction of the apartment complexes began. He blamed it on an influx of unoxygenated water. Overall, though, Ted believes that East Twin has been a viable lake that might now need another round of vegetation eating carp.

There has been another interesting change in the vegetation on East Twin Lake that occurred about five years ago when the movie “My Son, The Matchmaker” was filmed. Ted told the following story:

“You know that we never had a white lily on this lake until that movie. What happened?...For years we had all those yellow lilies with those little tight cones all over the lake for 20 years. When they made the movie they went out there and put - typical Hollywood - they wanted white lilies and all this romantic moss and all this stuff, you know. They went out and planted these white lilies in these pots out there. Well, hello, after the movie was over they didn’t jerk them out of the lake. Our lake is full of these beautiful white lilies all over the lake.”

The area surrounding East Twin Lake continues to be the home for a diversity of wildlife; however, Carolyn says that it is “nothing like when we first moved here.” Some of the animals that continue to reside near the lake are red foxes, gray squirrels, otters, and sandhill cranes. Over the years, the Millers and Ted have seen the disappearance of wild turkeys, quails, rabbits, gopher turtles, owls, eagles, and turtles. Some of these changes they attribute to the increase in residential development, others to natural events. Ted shares a story about why the turtles are no longer at East Twin Lake:



Low water levels in 2000 (Miller)



The property that belonged to the Southward family (USF)



Some of the apartments being built on the western side of the lake in January 2002 (USF)

“This lake used to be full of turtles; absolutely full. As a matter of fact, I’ve even got a floating raft. It used to be a game to see how many turtles could get on that dock. We’d see 8 - 10 - 15 turtles. They’d all pile up on each other and the raft would tilt and a few would slide off. Anyhow, last year the turtles started disappearing. We didn’t notice it at first, but when we’d walk around, because the water is low, we’d find big turtle shells all along the shore. They were totally eaten out; no holes in them. Not like somebody had shot them or anything else; just turtle shells. Then one day I spied two otters across the lake on this side just playing around and all that and I said, ‘Uh-Oh. I bet that’s the reason.’ I looked up what otters eat and their most favorite food is turtles. I talked to some other people that were out and about more than I was on lakes and they said, ‘If you have otters, you will not have turtles.’ They worry them to death, number one, and they eat them, number two. So that’s why we don’t have any turtles.”

Development

Historically, the area around East Twin Lake was used to grow citrus. As mentioned previously, Twin Lake once served as a stop on the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad.¹ According to Ted, when he moved to the lake, “It was basically all orange groves out in this area.” However, on Christmas Day in 1983 there was a freeze that killed most of the orange trees, many of which, Ted said, were almost 100 years old.

When Ted moved to East Twin Lake in 1979, there were only two homes on the lake, one belonging to the Southward family on the western side of the lake and one belonging to the Burke family on the eastern side of the lake. The Southwards lived in Jacksonville, but had their summer cottage at the lake, which was a red house with a gazebo. Ted estimates that there are currently nine houses directly on the lake.

Another landowner on East Twin Lake was Mr. Dean Shoemaker, who owned a piece of property on the southeastern side of the lake. In the mid-1980s, Mr. Kay Shoemaker, Dean’s father, developed this land into a housing subdivision called Kaywood. According to Dick and Carolyn, who moved into Kaywood in 1992, Mr. Shoemaker “did keep as many trees as he could here in this whole subdivision.” When they built their house, they designed it so that they would not tear down many of the large oak trees present on the property. Ted believes that Mr. Shoemaker’s approach to development allowed the area to retain “a natural look to it.” Dick described the area when he and Carolyn first arrived at the lake:

“We had a dirt road. Oregon was a dirt road. Lake Mary Boulevard was two lanes. Rinehart stopped at the cemetery down here. Now it’s a two-lane all the way to the big mall.”

In late 2001 construction began for a new housing development with the capacity for 35 houses on the northeastern side of East Twin Lake, which was land that was once owned by a man named Mr. Burke. This development was walled off from the rest of the area, with only minimal lake access.

Construction of new apartments and houses was going on at the time of the interview. On the western side of the lake, between East Twin and West



East Twin Lake in 2002 (USF)



The lake in the 1990s (Miller)

Twin, another apartment complex is being built, which neighbors Ted's property. There are plans to continue construction on the western and northwestern sides of the lake. The last phase of the development is to be built directly across from the Millers' home, taking the place of the Southward family's old summer cottage. According to Ted, there are over 1600 apartment units approved for these buildings near the lake.

The Future

Much of the recent residential development near the lake, both single family homes and apartment complexes, will likely have an impact on East Twin Lake and the people who have called it home for many years. One of the concerns that Dick expressed is that the building around the lake will continue, and might take over the northeastern section of the lake that is currently dry. He said:

"The lake could go back there again if it comes up. That's not going to keep the developers from dredging it out. Just like when you came in on the right - the big subdivision that they're building - I've got pictures of it before and after. It was a big swamp area. They just dug it out and filled it in with stuff and built houses. They could do that over there, too."

As for how the new developments and influx of people might affect their quality of life, the Williams and Millers are taking a wait and see attitude. Ted and his wife have already planted shrubs to block out the lights and noise from the neighboring apartment complexes. Dick and Carolyn count themselves lucky for not having cleared the trees and vegetation near the lake, therefore providing them some privacy.

By March 2002 (after the interview took place), the anticipated clearing of much of the trees and vegetation near the lake took place. Dick says that all the trees are now gone from the northern shore, along with the Southwards' old family cottage. Ted describes the northern lakefront as looking "like Daytona at low tide...no trees left."

Even with all these changes, they all plan to continue living on East Twin Lake as long as possible. Ted expressed his hope for the lake:

"I would hope that the developers will take that on as a personal challenge to do what they can for the lake as far as cleaning it up and making sure the residents don't use it as something to go down and throw bottles in. Not have a 'don't care' attitude. I hope they keep the lake clean. It can remain a nice lake. It's not a bad lake now, but it will need some action by owners around the lake to clean up the hydrilla."

Carolyn and Dick's hope for the future is that East Twin Lake remains a beautiful lake that is not overgrown with vegetation. For this to happen, many different people, including residents, developers, and government agencies, will have to work together to ensure a positive future for this lake.

¹ "A Guide to Florida for Tourists, Sportsmen and Settlers" by Harrison Rhodes and Mary Wolfe Dumont. Published by Dodd, Mead and Company in New York 1912.

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