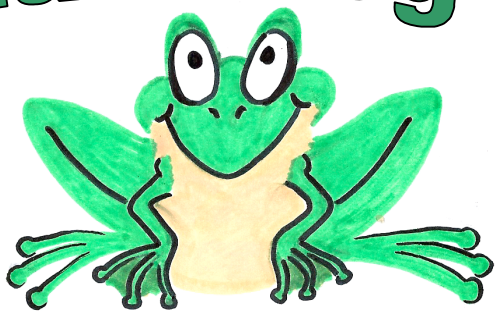
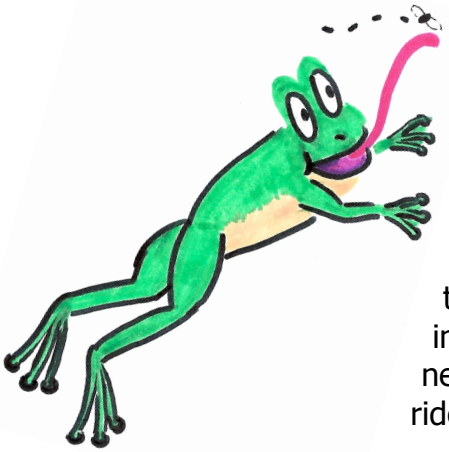
Lake Helen District Welcomes You To

Helena's Frog Walk

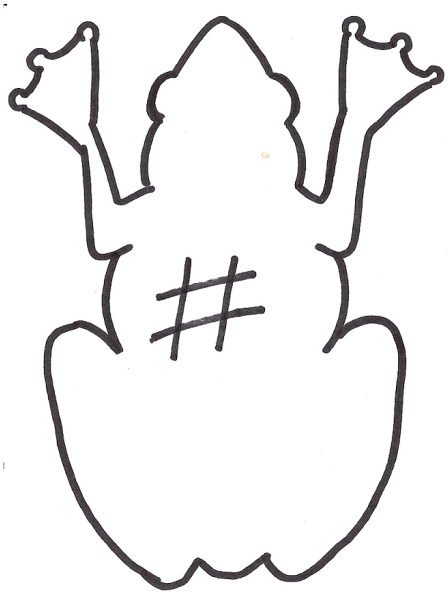


HI, my name is Helena. Lake Helen has provided a great home to me and many of my friends and relatives for many generations. I was told that Lake Helen was born when glaciers that covered much of Wisconsin melted. That was around 10,000 years ago. Although Lake Helen claims to be only 5,000 years old, we all know better. Rumor is Lake Helen was named after the Huntington family's daughter Helen. Helen reportedly drowned while swimming in the lake. All of us in the animal kingdom think that's sad, but a nice way to honor her memory, and I am proud to share her name.



Join me for a hop around the lake and I'll show you some of the natural beauty Lake Helen provides and even some interesting historical points when you humans moved into the neighborhood. The entire hop is about 2 miles. You can walk or ride a bike if hopping is not your thing.

Look for my portrait painted on the road and the number on my back will match the story in the brochure. My body will point you in the direction of what to look at each stop. There is a small map on the back of each brochure to let you know where you are, along with some suggestions on how to make this journey safe and fun for everyone.



Look This Way!

The first stop is right where you are standing. Just open the brochure and we'll get this adventure started.

1. The Park and Boat Landing is our 1st Stop. Portage County purchased the land in 1949. The gentleman that sold the land was said to be quite the entrepreneur. He sold many things, from ice and marl to rented homemade boats. He also managed to move an old school house across the Lake to expand his business.

The big blue sign you see is a reminder to all boaters of the plants and animals that threaten Lake Helen. It offers information on what boaters can do to protect Lake Helen and all her neighbors. There are even human volunteers that inform boaters about the problem and assist to make sure they have no foreign hitchhikers. My family and friends thank them for helping to protect my home from these invaders. You will find my next portrait just below the information sign at the end of the park. So if you are ready, let's get this show on the road (sorry- COL- croaking out loud)

2. The area across the road is a very special area to me. You call it a wetland, but I call it home. It's where I grew up with many of my relatives. It's also home to may other animals (many of whom are trying to eat me- yikes!) and insects (Yum!) These wetlands also act as filters removing nutrients and pollutants so Lake Helen receives only nice clean water for you and me to swim in. I'm a great swimmer, but I only know one stroke, the frog paddle, you call it the breast stroke. *Caution next stop- POISON IVY. Stay on the road.

3. Those three leafed plants across the street are POISON IVY. Do not touch or even get too close. It can produce an itchy rash that will spread the more you scratch. Trust me; I will never hop in there again! Let's get out of here!

4. The 2-story house you can see through the trees is the original house of the Pliska/Gilmeister farmstead. It covered much of the east side of the Lake. One of the boys was an avid trapper of Muskrats and minks on the east and south end of the lake as well property to the north and south of the lake. I am sure glad my family doesn't have fur-whew!

5. This stop is one of my favorites. It's what I call my lake home. It is home to many plants, animals and insects. It can get very busy here but I don't mind sharing the land, except for those that want to eat me! Some of the residents are ducks, loons, geese, hawks, blue heron, muskrats, salamanders, snakes (Yikes!), turtles and dragon flies (Yum!)

6. At one time in the 1930's, if you stood in this spot you would have been knee deep in the Little Wolf River now called Flume Creek. In those days, the only reason you would have been here is for the sucker fish spawn that occurred one or two nights in spring. Around 100 people would camp along the lake and river to the right and harvest spawning suckers by hand with lanterns and flashlights. (Talk about hand to fin combat!) If you are quiet walking in the wooded, hilly part of the trail, you might just see a deer or hear different birds. (Shh!)

7. Congratulations, you are at about half way around lake (Are you tired? Tell me about it. Try hopping this far next time!) From here it gets kind of hilly. So if you are not ready to climb a few hills, you may want to turn back. But, if you're ready, let's hop up to our next stop.

8. I heard the smaller inner part of the cottage was the original office of the Campfire Land Company that sold most of the lots on West Lake Helen Drive in the 1960's. I heard you could buy a lot for $500-$1000. I bet it was a quiet place to work. A couple small hills to go and then it's all downhill from here.

9. My family was hibernating at the time, but I was told about a winter ski hill in this area. I also heard that a boy named Clarence Palmer has the record to date of a 60 ft. jump back in the 1930's. My best effort is 3 feet and that was for a juicy June bug. (yum!)

10. At one time in the 1930's, this was the end of the road going around the lake. If you notice the white pipe sticking out of the ground, that was part of a long series of pipes used to transfer sediment to the other side of the highway when Lake Helen was dredged. Dredging is a process of removing decades of sediment that slowly fill a Lake. Left alone, Lake Helen would slowly fill in and it would eventually turn her into a swamp. Good for frogs like me, but not much fun for you boaters and swimmers. The fish seem to like it, so I guess that's OK -if they would just stop trying to eat me!

11. Take a look at the top of the house just to the right. See how the peak of the roof is rounded instead of pointed? This was a WW2 veteran's house moved here from Appleton. In the process of moving, the house was too tall for the power lines crossing the road. Since they couldn't move all the lines, they had to cut off the top of the house so it could travel underneath the lines. It must have been an interesting moment when they met the 1st power line. (COL- Croaking Out Loud!)

12. This is our last stop. The trees across the road are called Tamaracks. They are considered a deciduous conifer. That means they look like an evergreen, except they shed all of their needles in the fall, but not before the needles turn from green to a brilliant gold. Its wood has been used for house frames, railroad ties and fence posts due to its ability to withstand moist conditions. Native Americans used many parts of the Tamarack tree in medicines, baskets, snowshoes and goose decoys. When I see the golden needles, it tells me it's time to find my winter hibernating place.

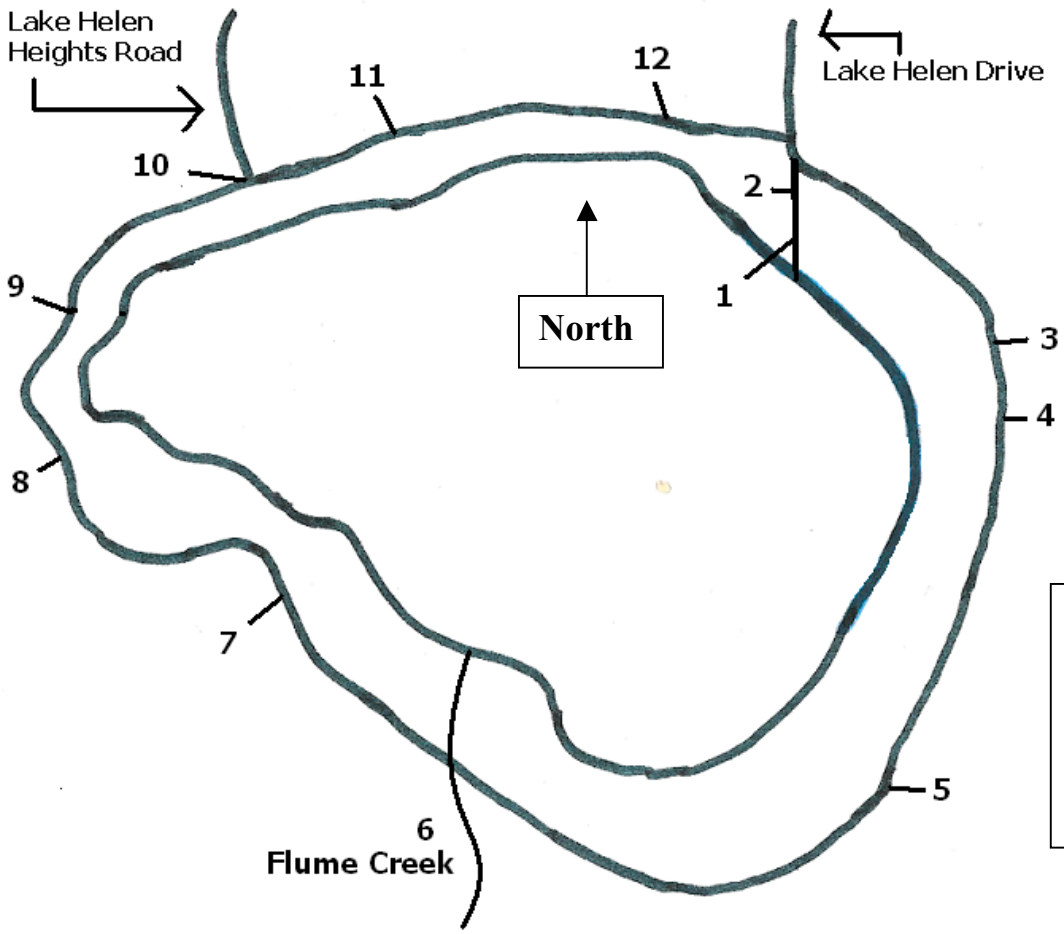
I hope you had as much fun learning a little bit about Lake Helen as I had giving you a tour of my home. Lake Helen is a great place for all of us animals to live, but we need your help.

- Make sure your boat is clean of weeds and mud and all water is drained before entering and after leaving any lake or river.
- Don't dump left over bait or snagged weeds back in the water.
- Please don't litter
- If you go boating, please give us animals a break and travel your boats at "No Wake" between 4pm and 10am. For most of us, that's supper time. Some of us eat later than others. (The geese, ducks and fish had to get their 2 cents in!)

Thank's for visiting, your BFF, Helena

TRAVELING SUGGESTIONS!

- Along the way please be courteous and cautious.
- Stay to the side of the road and watch for cars. (I've already lost too many of my family and friends to those things)
- Stay on the road's edge and don't walk in people's yards. (You might step on one of my friends or a juicy bug I've been saving for supper!)
- Please don't pick up any plants. They are most beautiful if left alone for everyone to see.
- **Please**, Please don't litter. (YUCK!)



NOTE: Total distance of the road around the lake is approximately 2 miles.

**Members of the Lake Helen Lake Walk Committee wish to thank the members of the Lake District for sharing their stories and artwork.
We also wish to thank Palmer Myhra for his wonderful stories from his book A Country Boy's Depression. If you are looking for an interesting perspective of life in the local area from the 1930's, please check out his book. **