

Ben & Ida Cloes



Ben Cloes was the youngest son of Lake Bluff's first settlers, John and Catherine Cloes from Germany, who in 1836 laid claim to 100 acres near the ravine and lake shore on what's now Bluff Road. They built a homestead, farm and blacksmith shop and went on to have seven children. Ben, the youngest, was two years old in 1850 when his father left Lake Bluff to seek fortune in the California Gold Rush and never returned.

Ben (also sometimes known as B.J.) played a major role in Lake Bluff's transformation from a pioneer settlement to a summer resort to a year-round village with roads, police, a school and more.

After she became a single mom, Catherine ran a brickyard with another early settler, Henry Ostrander, near what are now Birch and Blodgett roads, which Ben helped manage when he himself was a young man. When Methodist businessmen began scoping out the area as a location for a summer resort in 1875, Ben sold 40 acres of his family's lakefront property to the Lake Bluff Camp Meeting Association. Soon after that he opened his own real estate office.

Ben was an original member of the Lake Bluff Camp Meeting Association's executive committee, and he and Ida were influential in the summer resort era's business and social life. Ben also played a considerable role when

residents set out to incorporate Lake Bluff as a Village in 1895. Indeed, the first election of Village officers was held in his real estate office on Center Avenue, and he became a Village trustee a year later.

When their wood house on Scranton Avenue burned to the ground in 1886, Ben and Ida built a new home for their family on what is now Maple and Washington. Not surprisingly, that home was made of bricks – and it is still standing.

After all of their hard work transforming Lake Bluff from a wilderness to a suburban village, Ben and Ida moved to California and bought a ranch in the early 1900s, where they lived until their deaths.