

First Lake Dwellers

The "Man," actually a skeleton of a 15- or 16-year old girl, was believed to have drowned in glacial [Lake Pelican](#) sometime during the Pleistocene age, perhaps 20,000 years ago. The bones were found by state highway workers digging a roadbed on what is now State Highway 59. This was the first prehistoric skeleton discovered in North America complete enough to be adequately studied.

Some writers have over the years disputed the age of the find, contending it was actually a modern Sioux Indian and a fairly recent death. However, the primitive shape of the bones differed from modern humans, and new conclusions reaffirm the age of the skeleton.

It is probable, then, that human beings roamed the Sugarbush lake area 20 millennia before the birth of Christ, and they roamed very close to the cold trailing edge of the retreating glacier.

More modern residents of the Sugarbush area were Sioux (Dakota) Indians and later Chippewa (Ojibway) Indians who arrived around 1750. Those Indians were particularly interested in the wild rice and maple sap for syrup, still plentiful today in or around Big Sugarbush Lake. The entire area was designated as a reservation in 1867. Here is an explanation taken from a granite marker on [Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge](#), a tract of cutover forest land comprising 42,500 acres in 1963, and covering much of Sugarbush Township:

In 1889 Congress passed the Rice Treaty which assigned allotments of land within the reservation to individual Indians. The passage of the Clapp Act in 1906 permitted Indians with mixed blood to dispose of their allotted lands.

Thereupon, most of the Indian landowners quickly sold their lands--many of the tracts holding stands of virgin white and red pine. Logging companies proceeded to remove the valuable timber and then allowed many of the tracts to revert to the county for delinquent taxes.