



# Long Branch Green Team & Environmental Commission



## Spotlight topic: the Saga of the Stone Hut at Ross Lake Park

The Stone Hut is located within Ross Lake Park, 20 Elinore Avenue, on Ross Lake, part of the Takanassee Lake chain. The hut presents an intriguing image when viewed from the park's native plant and pollinator garden where people have begun to spend time walking on the garden trail. They sit on the shaded bench and gaze at the 127-year-old stone hut which may be one of the oldest preserved structures in Long Branch.



### History of the Stone Hut



This 1900's postcard, looking southeast, shows the original wooden bridge to the stone hut from Red Oaks Drive.

The hut is a fine representation of the late 1800s "Golden Age" in Long Branch. The short history below by Veronica Ditko provides some background on its construction.

*The land around this part of the Lake was the Woolley Farm and is split down the middle by the Whale Pond Brook. Owen Woolley sold 30 acres of farmland to a Dr. Dennis. Dr. Dennis then sold the property to P. Sanford Ross of Newark, New Jersey 10 years later in 1896.*

*P. Sanford Ross was a wealthy contractor who inherited the business from his uncle, Peter Sanford. A Long Branch family history reveals that everyone in the family for generations has had the middle name Sanford in honor of P Sanford Ross bringing their great grandfather over from Germany.*

*Ross and his wife spent summers vacationing in Long Branch. Ross was a popular fellow. He was President of the Elberon Beach Club in 1900 and then a founding member of the Brook Lawn Country Club in 1908.*

*As a contractor by trade, and a long-standing member of the Essex County Park Commission, Ross was extremely knowledgeable about construction and making parks.*

*In fact, in April 1897, The New York Times announced Ross was "making a large lake near his cottage on Norwood Ave." He achieved this by damming Whale Pond Brook. That same year he built the small hut on the island which the family used as a clam house, roasting them for parties.*



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This map, from 1873, shows that there was no lake on the Whale Pond Brook in that area. In addition, Takanassee Lake was still called Green's Pond. Many longtime residents and historians believe the pillars that can be seen on Highland, Van Court, and Norwood Avenues were entrances to the estate. Old steps can be seen also on Norwood Avenue.



## Stone Hut Restoration

Over time, the hut was abandoned, and both the island and the banks on the shore became overgrown. Preliminary cleanup efforts started in 2011, led by the Whale Pond Brook Watershed Association, and supported by the Environmental Commission, Green Team and the city. At right is a picture from April 2011 when volunteer cleanups began. Notice that the entire island is completely obscured by the growth on the Elinore Ave bank. Local residents didn't even realize there was an island until the growth was cleared from both the island and the mainland!



In December 2013 the Long Branch DPW cleared 250 feet of land on the north side of Ross Lake and removed dead trees from the lake.



That February Monmouth County and Long Branch City jointly funded the dredging of Ross Lake.



In 2013 the Whale Pond Brook Watershed Association secured a Monmouth County Historical Commission grant to restore the beautiful stone hut. The City of Long Branch provided matching funds.

The restoration proceeded in phases. Phase I, 2013-2014, involved tree/root removal. In the before photos at left, notice the trees growing out of the roof.





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Afterwards, the roof was cleared, however many of the stones either fell off or had to be removed to get to the roots. The mason, Ken Manzi, kept all the stones to be used in Phase II. He built a raft to transport his men and supplies. Afterwards, volunteers used the raft to haul brush from the island to the mainland.



In Phase II, 2015-16, mortar and stone on the north side of the hut was restored.

During Phase III, spring 2017, damage was discovered on the eastern side of the roof. As you can see, a lot of the stones and mortar fell out when the tree roots were removed in Phase I. In November 2017 the entire stone hut was covered with a tarp to help protect it from damaging freezing and thawing. Between the "john boat" loaned by Monmouth University and the raft made by Kevin Manzi, the mason for Phase I, II and III, 10 people were taken over to the island to cover the hut and stake down the tarp.

Phase IV of the restoration was completed in 2023. Scott Cardalfe, Rock Masonry, was our mason for the fourth and final restoration phase. He began by removing all the vegetation from the roof, again. Then, after hunting down more peanut stone, they finished the eastern side.







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## Why we love the Stone Hut



We love this stone hut for many reasons, one being that the craftsmanship of the stone masons is abundantly evident and demonstrates a love of the craft. There are three beautifully arched doorways and 4 arched windows.

The stonework around the doors and windows forms a beautiful pattern. There is a huge fireplace in one room. Stones are arranged in a flower pattern in the room behind the fireplace.

So, come on over if you want a little relaxation, a little education about native plants and a great view of the stone hut. Perhaps you'll see an eagle or an osprey or a great blue heron. There are also wood ducks and our constant companions, the Canada geese.

Helping protect and preserve local history and historic places is part of the mission of the EC & Green Team. If you are interested in joining our GT/EC History Committee, please contact us.

