



A Good Days Catch – Part I

Fishermen and Their Catch The Lake Erie watershed is a fisherman's paradise. Fishermen have found success fishing the waters of Lake Erie for centuries because the lake offers a variety of species of fish in great abundance. About 140 species of fish inhabit Lake Erie, with perch, bass, walleye and trout being the most important to local fishermen.

The Lake Erie watershed includes many [tributary streams](#), several of which run through Erie County. An abundance of trout flourish in many area streams, such as Four Mile Creek, Twenty Mile Creek, Conneaut Creek and Trout Run.

From the Erie Indians to Erie County's first settlers to modern-day sport fishermen, the people of the region have benefited from the abundance of freshwater fish found in Lake Erie and its tributary streams. The first people to fish along the shores of Lake Erie were Northeastern Woodland Indians, which include the Erie and Iroquois Indian tribes. Using spears, traps and *weirs* (enclosures set in waterways), Native American men fished the many lakes and streams of the region beginning in the spring. Springtime catches were often quite large, and the surplus fish were smoked or dried for use throughout the year.

Today, thousands of residents and visitors enjoy fishing in Erie County each year. Families picnicking on Presque Isle are seen toting fishing poles and fish baskets. Sport fishing competitions bring nationally known anglers to Erie's bay. Fishermen line the banks of Conneaut Creek and other streams the first day of trout. Erie is a fisherman's paradise!

The 11th Largest Lake in the World Erie is the smallest of the Great Lakes in volume (119 cubic miles). Measuring 241 miles from end to end, and 57 miles across, the lake's surface area is just under 10,000 square miles.

Erie is the shallowest of the Great Lakes and has an average depth of only 62 feet, which allows the water to warm rapidly in the spring and summer, and frequently freeze over in winter. It is divided into three [basins](#). The Eastern Basin extends from Buffalo, New York to Erie, and contains the Long Point [Escarpment](#), the deepest part of Lake Erie (210 feet). The Central Basin extends from Erie to Sandusky, Ohio. The Western Basin is the shallowest of the three basins with an average depth of 24 feet, and extends from Sandusky to the western edge of the lake.

The lake was formed when large [glaciers](#) moved south more than one million years ago. As the glaciers moved, large areas of land were hollowed out. Thousands of years later, temperatures became warmer, the glaciers receded, and plants and animals returned to the region.

Eco Challenge (Poster Contest)

Lake Erie is the Great Lake most affected by industry and agriculture. Lake Erie's shoreline is 871 miles long, and is dotted by [rural](#) and [urban](#) areas. Water from agricultural areas in Ontario, Ohio, Indiana and Michigan, and industrial pollutants from Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio and Ontario drained into the lake during the 1960s and 1970s. The lake became so polluted it was sometimes called a "dead lake." Fish populations and other marine life decreased because pollution of the lake's water worsened. Today, Canadian and American laws protect Lake Erie from pollution, and the water quality and biological life of Lake Erie have improved. **What happens to water quality and marine life when industrial and agricultural pollutants drain into the lake? How does this affect fishermen and their catch?**

Draw It! Create a poster showing the dangers associated with polluting Lake Erie.

King of the Peninsula: Joe Root

Not much is known about Joe Root, the man known as the “Hermit of Presque Isle” and the “King of the Peninsula.” He is one of the most mysterious and unusual characters in Erie’s great history.

Just over five feet tall, Joe had a bushy beard and mustache, always wore an old felt hat and vest, and walked with a limp. As a young man Joe Root left his job as a fisherman and permanently moved to Presque Isle, where he lived in a small shack constructed from old boxes and driftwood. He found food by fishing in the bay and hunting, gathering wild fruits and berries, and joining families picnicking on the peninsula.

Visitors to the peninsula enjoyed Joe’s ventriloquist abilities, especially children. He would entertain children by pretending to speak with his fairy-like friends, the Jee-Bees, and by carrying on conversations with trees and flowers.

Joe was also known for his many bizarre business ideas, which he shared with the people whenever he came into the city. One idea was to build a hot air balloon business on the peninsula. He planned to use hot air balloons to transport people from Erie to Cleveland and Buffalo. He also dreamed of opening a feather factory and a circus on the peninsula. Joe wanted to attach a tightrope from the peninsula to the mainland and wheelbarrow animals across the bay along it. Although he shared his business dreams with the people of Erie, no one stepped forward to support him financially, and Joe’s business ideas never materialized.

The peninsula was Joe’s home until he was removed from Presque Isle in 1910 and taken to the Warren State Hospital where he died two years later, never having seen the peninsula again.

Find It! Map It!

Using the websites www.fishusa.com/FishErie/ and www.seagrant.wisc.edu/greatlakesfish/LakeErie.html, answer the following questions.

What kinds of fish live in Lake Erie? What kinds of fish live in the streams that flow into Lake Erie?

What are the names and locations of Erie County’s best fishing streams?

Draw a map of Erie County. Label Lake Erie and at least thirteen tributary streams.

Fish Facts

Carp

- Brought to North America in the late 1800s by the U.S. Fish Commission
- Feed on submerged vegetation.

Lake Herring

- Eleven to fifteen inches long
- Feed on plankton, fish eggs and insects

Lake Sturgeon

- Grows to 3 – 5 feet in length
- Prized for its eggs, which were used to make caviar

Walleye

- Can live up to seven years
- Weigh 1 – 5 pounds

Yellow Perch

- Known for its good flavor
- Grows to 6 – 10 inches

Word Wizard

basin – **a.** a large or small depression in the land **b.** land drained by a river and its branches

escarpment – a long cliff or a steep slope

glacier – a large body of ice

urban – typical of, or being a city

rural – lightly populated areas

tributary stream – flows into a larger stream or river or lake