Chapman Pond

In the early twentieth century, the Western Knitting Mills (once called the Rochester Woolen Mills) built a dam (later called McAleer Dam) on Paint Creek to raise the water level in the creek and pond. The water would be used to provide power to the Western Knitting Mills. The new dam formed a millpond and was known as Chapman Lake (or Pond). The name probably came from Western Knitting Mills vice president Charles Chapman or his brother William Chapman who was the treasurer for the company. In 1901, the lake was expanded to 12 acres and the dam improved. A 25-foot fall provided power for the mill. The lake was located on the east side of Main Street, just north of Fifth Street. It ran from Oak Bluff, Charles Chapman’s home, to the bottom of Elizabeth Street. On the west side of the lake was the Detroit United Railway (D.U.R.) car barns, freight house and power plant.

There was a small island in Chapman Lake, which was called, “Scout’s Island” because it was often used for Boy Scout excursions and was also a popular fishing spot, offering a serene location for boy scouts and fishermen alike. During the winter, citizens would skate on the frozen lake. The Western Knitting Mills was in possession of the lake until after World War I when the mill was sold to different parties. It was closed in 1927, due to declining business, reopened, and closed once again in 1931. The Bradley Knitting Company of Wisconsin bought the factory, repaired and altered it, but did not alter the lake. The mill was reopened in 1933 to make mittens for the Civilian Conservation Corps. It too closed in 1939 until the McAleer Manufacturing Company bought the mill in 1941.
Several companies occupied the mill after that but from 1941 on, not one of the companies used the dam to generate power because generators were installed to transmit electric power to the mills.

On June 18, 1946, heavy rainfall caused a dam to burst at Rudd’s Mill (near Lake Orion). It was not long before the flood reached McAleer Dam causing the land around it to give way and unleash Chapman Lake (the dam remained standing). The eastern side of Rochester was flooded; Chapman Lake’s waters damaged several homes and businesses, railroad tracks, and even killed one woman. Efforts to force the lake’s waters back into the channel were unsuccessful. In the late summer, the lake site was filled with sand and gravel from an old hill and the water drained. The leveled hill became apartments and homes on Elizabeth Street and other streets overlooking the old millpond. The drained land was called Olde Towne and East University was extended across Paint Creek and on to Elizabeth. An Elks Lodge was built near the old millpond site and today, where Scout’s Island was once located, stands the Rochester Hills Public Library.