Our pond is the source of considerable amusement and gratification. In the spring, as the ice melts and flowers start to bloom, its waters again begin to flow and couples walk by the shore and enjoy the feel of nature’s rebirth close at hand. Summer with its warmth and light gives us a lush water park for little girls and boys with fishing rods and dads with baby boats. Close by birds and animals nurture their young as closely as we do our own. Come autumn, the now cool waters host flocks of geese as they journey down the great Midwest flyway. The bright red and gold leaves reflect wondrously in the dark green pool. The sound of ice skates, hockey sticks and snowballs round out the cycle; perhaps winter on the pond is the most fun of all. We all enjoy our little lake in our own way. We think we understand and know it - but it has secrets all its own.

Our pond was born some 30,000 years ago. A by-product of the last great glacier retreating during the early Maumee period. The glacier had advanced from the southeast leaving the Defiance moraine to the north of us. During the melt, prehistoric Lake Maumee filled to a depth of about 30 feet. Today, we live in Lake Maumee's dry lake bed. The water took thousands of years to drain off and is gone now - except for our pond. The depression it occupies was shaped by the hand of that glacier as it gouged through the prehistoric suburbs. Fed by runoff streams as ancient as itself it lives with us today. A little reminder of the powerful dynamics of our planet.

Back about twenty-five thousand years ago our pond became a watering hole for animals large and small. One day a young mastodon came by for a drink. Illness or accident befell it, and on the edge of our then new pond it died. The massive carcass was probably dismembered by prehistoric carnivores, the bones scattered by the elements and interred in the organic layers of marl beneath the calm waters. The eons passed, as they do. Further layers of marl covered and protected the sturdiest of the remains. They lay there undisturbed for some 250 centuries.

Map showing the glacial features of the area and the location where the Bloomfield Mastodon was found.
In September of 1934, during the Great Depression, a WPA project was under way to dredge the pond and construct a stone wall around its perimeter. The workers were digging with a steam shovel near the south end when one scoop held a curious surprise; bones, very old bones. A worker on the project suspected they might be dinosaur remains and asked the Cranbrook Institute for identification.

Careful excavation proceeded. A layer of peat, two or three feet deep, covered a thick layer of sticky gray shell marl that contained abundant shells of small fresh water gastropods and bivalves, pieces of decayed branches of evergreen trees and other organic debris. The area around the initial find was explored by thrusting a long iron rod into these soft pond bottom layers. While some additional bones were located near the surface of the ground, others were found beneath five feet of marl using the probe method. In this way the skull, lower jaw and a few vertebrae were located and then exposed by digging into the muck with shovels and trowels.

Our specimen turned out to be a young mastodon still retaining the last of its milk teeth. The tusks were about half the size of an average full grown individual. While most of the remains had decayed, broken or not been found; the skull, jaws, ribs and a few vertebrae were removed from the pond site. The parts were taken to Ann Arbor, freed from the adherent marl, hardened and then reassembled. Apparently the remains were on view at the University Museum for awhile but last attempts to find them were fruitless.

Mastodons in Michigan are not a rarity. At least eighty specimens have been uncovered over the years and probably more are still waiting to be found.

Curiously, their teeth and jaws were best adapted to a browsing style of eating, much like deer and goats, so it seems they preferred our lowlands and swampy areas with an abundance of leaves, twigs and small branches to eat. Since these areas were invariably wet and soft many mastodons remains were successfully preserved by nature; as was ours.

The next time you drive or walk by our pond squint your eyes a little and see if anything moves. Perhaps if you let your imagination go just a bit, you’ll see a large brown shape on the south side near the waters edge. The trees might rustle as if a thick trunk were pulling off leaves and branches...or maybe its just the wind.