

Alexanders Beach Resort

In the twentieth century there were several resorts east of Lake Sammamish (located in eastern King County) in what is today (2006) the city of Sammamish. But none lasted as long or attracted as many people as Alexander's Beach Resort. Alexander's was the largest of all the resorts that were once in Sammamish, operating for 68 years between 1917 and 1985.

Alexander's Beach Resort was located on the southeastern shore of Lake Sammamish, where the Alexander's-on-the-Lake development is today, just inside the Sammamish City limits off of East Lake Sammamish Parkway. To enter the resort you turned in toward the lake just north of where today 212th Way Southeast connects to East Lake Sammamish Parkway. Greeting you upon your entrance to the resort from at least the 1940s through the 1960s was a huge 15-foot-long metal rainbow trout hung over a sign reading "Alexander's Beach."

The property was originally purchased by Thomas Alexander, a native Scotsman who came to Issaquah in the late 1880s to work as a "walking boss" for the Seattle, Lake Shore & Eastern Railroad. In 1902, Thomas and his wife, Caroline, built a large house on their 160-acre property which would later become known as the Alexander House (now located on Northwest Gilman Boulevard in Issaquah and home to Issaquah's Visitor's Center and Chamber of Commerce).

Thomas died in 1910, and a few years later Caroline began running a bed-and-breakfast in the Alexander House. The house was located east of what was then known as East Lake Sammamish Road. In 1917 Caroline decided to open a picnic resort on her property west of the road, closer to the lake, and Alexander's Beach Resort was born.

The resort seems to have done well during the 1920s, although traffic was limited. A few small cabins were built near the lake on the southern end of the property during this time, but most of them disappeared after 20 or so years as the resort catered to larger crowds.

And by the 1930s those larger crowds were coming. Caroline died in 1932 and daughter Hazel Alexander Ek (1897-1982) took over managing the resort. By this time better roads made getting to the resort easier, and Hazel saw the opportunity. Along with husband George Ek (1890-1967) she turned Alexander's Beach Resort into a mecca that many living in Seattle and on the Eastside in the twentieth century remember. As the 1930s progressed the resort became the preferred site for many company picnics, both local and from Seattle. Eastside historian Eric Erickson recalled seeing both Democratic and Republican parties from the greater Seattle area hosting picnics at Alexander's during the 1940s and 1950s.

Hazel's grandson Chuck Olson worked at the resort in the 1950s and early 1960s and lived on the site for several of those years. He painted a vivid description of the summertime company picnics:

"During the summer the resort was usually booked both on Saturdays and Sundays. Some of these picnics were huge. Rainier Brewery had their picnics there, and there was the Issaquah Creamery (now Darigold) picnic and the Italian picnic. The Italian picnic was the biggest one -- it would bring in more than a thousand people."

Although groups could reserve the resort for picnics exclusively on the weekends -- Olson recalled the fee in the 1950s as being \$200 on Saturday and \$400 on Sunday -- during the week the resort was open to anyone, at a cost of a quarter per child and 50 cents for adults.

Olson said the dance hall was on your right when you first drove into the resort. It had a jukebox and a stage and was a popular venue, though Olson did not recall any live bands performing there in his day. As you drove farther in, you passed the concession stand on the right, which was part of a building that housed Ek's woodshop. The road then forked to the left and right at a "T" intersection in front of the "big kitchen." This was an open-air pavilion with a huge 20-foot-by-6-foot oven and four green 40-foot-long tables capable of seating hundreds.

The boat launch was on the northern fork of the road, and Alexander's also rented boats -- big wooden boats in the early years, but by the early 1960s the resort had switched to smaller, lighter aluminum "john" boats. Hydro (boat) races were held on the southern end of the lake during the summer during the 1950s and 1960s, but Alexander's did not actually put the races on -- people simply used the boat landing there as a launching point for their boats. Additional pavilions and a smaller kitchen were also located along the northern end of the resort.

The swimming dock (complete with a 15-foot-high dive) was along the lake on the southern fork of the road, south of the big kitchen. The house dock was just south of the swimming dock. The house dock was popular with people who fished at the resort during the winter, as they could stay warm inside the dock's cabin while they waited for the fish to bite their lines left outside on the dock.

The resort was open year-round for many years, though the winter months were much tamer than the summer. Most of the activity in winter came from people trout fishing from the house dock.

But it was the summertime swimming at Alexander's that many remember, whether it was swimming out to the log booms 50 feet from shore or just hanging out on the sandy beaches that George Ek made sure were kept in top shape. Since sand was not naturally occurring at Alexander's beach, Ek

routinely brought in truckloads of fresh sand to replace sand that got washed away.

Ek sold the property in May 1966, but Alexander's Beach Resort continued to host large gatherings into the 1980s. In 1985 a developer bought the resort, closed it, knocked down the buildings, and turned the property into today's Alexander's-on-the-Lake development.

Sources:

This account of Alexander's Beach Resort, prepared by Sammamish Heritage Society historian Phil Dougherty, is based on Dougherty's 2006 interview of Chuck Olson, whose family owned the resort until 1966. It reprints Dougherty's article, "A Historic Getaway: Alexander's Beach Resort On The Lake" (*Sammamish Review*, August 2, 2006, p. 21), and appears here with the kind permission of the *Sammamish Review*. "Alexander House," *Issaquah Press*, June 29, 1988, p. 12; "Issaquah Family Album," *Ibid.*, May 23, 1990; Phil Dougherty interview of Chuck Olson, February 26, 2006, Issaquah, Washington; Phil Dougherty interview of Eric Erickson, February 26, 2006, Sammamish, Washington.

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By Phil Dougherty, December 04, 2006