

Pine Lake Resort (French's Resort)



It was the cabins on the Pine Lake shoreline that caught my eye.

They were almost as big as houses! Not just little log cabins, which I would have expected at a small resort, but full sized cabins, some with over 1000 square feet, a few "natural log" color but many painted in varying pastel colors of green and yellow, complete with running water and electricity.

I was looking at a slide of a view taken on the eastern shoreline of Pine Lake circa 1958. The photographer had been standing and facing north right on the shore of the lake, where the park is now, along the same exact shoreline that all of us see today when we visit Pine Lake Park. The shoreline, of course, looked exactly the same; there were a few less houses on the far shore, but that was the only difference I could see. At first I was almost nonplussed. Where was the resort I'd heard so much about? Then I looked at the rest of the picture, leading away from the shore.



This was Pine Lake Resort, located in what's now Pine Lake Park. Pine Lake was a featured attraction for the early settlers of the Plateau as far back as the early 1900s. About 1917, one entrepreneur realized the lake's potential and built five small cabins on the lake. I don't know the original owners name, but do know that the resort grew slowly—if at all—during the 1920s. At that time, of course, there were few roads in the area, and most of them were dirt; unless you lived nearby, it wasn't particularly easy to get to the resort.

In its earliest years the resort shared space with a schoolhouse which had been moved from a site near present-day Discovery Elementary to the lakeshore, in order to be closer to a source of water. Early in the 20th century there was also a trapper's cabin near the intersection leading out to 228th; on the former cabin site today you can still find rusty tin cans left over by the trapper when he moved on.

Things began to change for the Pine Lake Resort in 1932, when Marion Reiff French bought the 18-acre resort. Unfortunately French—or "Reiff", as he was known--- bought the resort right in the middle of the Great Depression, and for the first few years, there was little money to expand the resort. Another problem with expansion was an ironic one: while there was plenty of lake water, there was limited "good" drinking water on the site— there were four deep well pumps on the site in 1932, but French added two more. One of these wells eventually became the Pine Lake Resort Wishing Well, complete with a sign on top of the well which read "Wishing Well" and underneath that, "French's Foundation Fund".

The resort's fortunes began to improve later in the 1930s. The Depression eased later in the decade. Also by the late '30s, some of the roads had been improved on the approaches to the Plateau and on the Plateau itself, making the Resort easier to get to. Finally French had what he needed to expand the resort.

He did exactly that, eventually building a total of 15 cabins – 16 if you count his— under the tall Douglas fir trees on the land. He named the resort "French's La Pine Resort", but no one called it that; practically everyone, including French, simply called it "Pine Lake Resort". Most of the cabins were along the north side of the road that leads into Pine Lake Park, starting at roughly where the tennis courts are today and leading down toward the lake. There were three cabins on the eastern shore of the lake itself. There were both one and two-bedroom cabins, and the deluxe cabin (number 12)—on the shore, of course-- also had a loft.



French built and ran the resort to cater to families, so he added other amenities to make the resort more family friendly. He built a small grocery store and sold canned goods, bread and milk, candy, fishing supplies and even Rainier beer there. The grocery store was located in the same site that the restrooms are today, but facing south, right along the road. It was a small, natural log store, with a bright red neon "Rainier" beer sign glowing from its front window, a well-stocked popcorn machine strategically located next to its front door, and – to complete the western resort look-- elk antlers above the door.



French's home was built immediately adjacent to the store and in fact was connected to it. A patio at the east end of the house also served as a informal spot where cars coming into the resort stopped to pay their fees. Beyond the owner's cabin, on your way out of the resort, were most of the guest cabins.

French also built a dance hall for the resort, located perhaps 200 feet back from the lakeshore, near the southern boundary of the park. He added a nickelodeon (jukebox), and, as the name suggests, songs were a nickel a tune. Although French built the dance hall primarily for children and young adults, it turned out to be popular with older adults too, and hosted a number of square dances in its heyday.

French built a dressing room along the shoreline itself. He put in public restrooms too, but farther away from shore than they are today. French also built three docks that were a little more elaborate than the dock leading out from today's Pine Lake Park. Three parallel docks stretched out from the shore. These docks were "squared off" with a dock at the end of the three docks which ran perpendicular to the other three docks, which had the effect of creating two swimming areas between the shore and the outermost dock. One of the docks had a "high tower", a sun deck built perhaps ten feet above the dock, where people sunbathed. Not far from the shoreline, a slide slid down into the lake. A pier completed the bucolic scene.

By the late '40s the resort was hitting its stride. The resort typically opened in April with the advent of fishing season and closed after Labor Day. A quarter per head would get you in for the day to swim, rent a boat or picnic;

if you wanted to stay the night, camping was a buck. You could go all out and rent one of the cabins starting at \$22.50 a week, or go up to the deluxe model (complete with loft) for \$50 a week. These rates stayed the same all the way up until the resort closed about 1966.

In 1957, Alvin "Mick" Macko of Sammamish, French's son-in-law, began leasing and operating the resort. By the late '50s, the resort had become so popular that on a busy weekend the resort might have had as many as 4000 guests, according to Macko. Opening day of fishing season was a major event there. Pine Lake Resort was also a preferred site for picnics. Many various Boeing departments had their company picnics at Pine Lake Resort in the '50s and '60s. For several years, the Millionair Club in Seattle picked up a few homeless people off the streets of downtown Seattle and brought them to Pine Lake for a once a year picnic.

One particularly popular event at big group picnics were "penny hunts" for kids. The adults would throw out a bale or two of straw and throw pennies or other coins into the straw for the kids to hunt. "The kids would come out just covered with straw", laughed Macko.

One of French's enduring legacies to Pine Lake began in 1962 when he donated to the Game Department (now the Department of Fish and Wildlife) a 30 foot wide easement from 228th to the lake so the department could stock rainbow trout in the lake. The Department of Fish and Wildlife still stocks rainbow trout each year in the lake, usually late in the winter, and again about mid-spring.

Business at the resort was still going strong in the mid-1960s when King County began buying many area resorts like Pine Lake and converting them into parks. The resort's last year was in either 1966 or 1967—probably 1966, according to Macko. The County bought the resort and had Macko tear down all of the old cabins, the dance hall, and later the grocery store. Macko maintained his cabin (formerly French's home) on the site until demolition of the resort was nearly complete in 1969, then his cabin met the bulldozer too.

There are only two buildings (which were used as kitchens) remaining at Pine Lake from the resort days. Indeed, the makeover from resort to park was so complete that it's difficult, now, to visualize that such a happening place was ever there.

---Phil Dougherty