

The Tanska Resort and Family



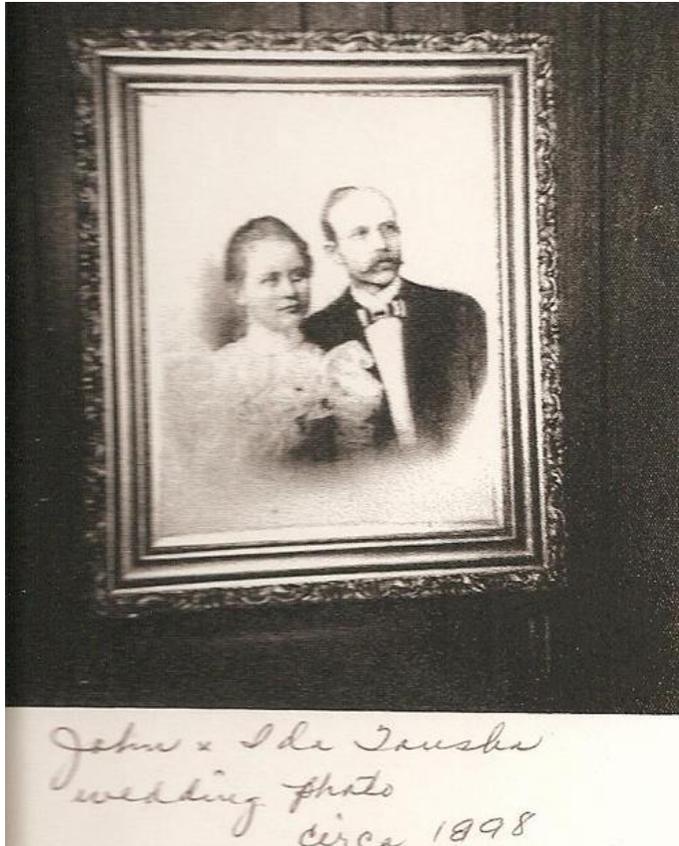
Tanska Auto Camp

The Tanska Auto Camp was an early twentieth-century retreat located on the northwestern shore of Pine Lake on the Sammamish Plateau (King County), operating from about 1918 until 1940. The camp consisted of two separate areas: a 10-acre auto camp on the lake shore where people could park their cars, pitch tents and camp in a field, and an adjacent 10 acres located just north and east of the camp, stretching out along the shore of Pine Lake, with 10 cabins available to be rented year round. The family also owned another 20 acres immediately north of the camp, which from the 1920s until the 1950s was a chicken ranch. This account, prepared by Sammamish Heritage Society historian Phil Dougherty, is based on an April 2007 interview of John Tanska's granddaughter, Lou Tanska Bischoff (b. 1930).



From Finland to Ballard to Pine Lake

John Henry Tanska (1869-1940) was born in Finland and immigrated to Minneapolis via Canada in the 1880s or 1890s. In Minneapolis he met Ida (1879-1953), also a Finnish immigrant, and they were married in 1899. In 1902 they moved to Ballard. They had two sons, Leonard (1900-1964) and Eino (pronounced A-no) (1905-1958). John was a tailor and Ida worked as a nanny and a housekeeper.



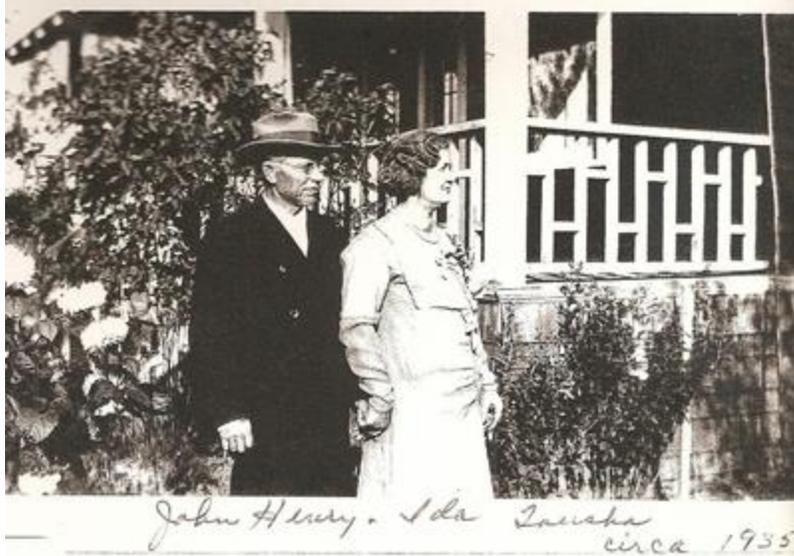
About 1912 John bought 40 acres on the northwestern shore of Pine Lake from the Lindstrom family. But he did not move his family there right away. The land was completely undeveloped, and the Tanskas had to first clear it and then build what they needed, a process that took several years. Initially the Tanskas kept their house in Ballard and stayed in a tent when they stayed at the Pine Lake property. Then John built a one-room cabin where the family stayed periodically. With help from the locals and from friends from Seattle, the Tanskas worked on building their home (then located near today's [2007] 212th Avenue SE and SE 25th Street in Sammamish), and developing the camp between 1915 and 1918. In 1918 the Tanskas permanently moved to Pine Lake.



The Tanskas were not the only Finnish family who moved to Pine Lake and the surrounding area in today's southern part of Sammamish during the early twentieth century. Indeed, enough Finnish settlers and their descendants settled there that some informally called this area "Finn Hill." It was also the scene of huge "Finn Picnics" during the 1910s, sometimes fetching 100 people, no small number given the transportation limitations of the day.

Tanska Auto Camp

By 1918 the Tanska Auto Camp was open on the southern half of the Tanska's 40 acres. Located northeast of the Tanska home, the camp itself was a field where people simply pitched their tents and enjoyed the great outdoors. But John also took over 10 cabins that were left over from an earlier logging operation (probably by Bratnober), all the same size and located on pie-shaped 50-foot lots with the wide end of the lot on the lake. These cabins stretched northeast away from the camp and ended near today's intersection of 216th Avenue SE and SE 24th Street in Sammamish.



John Tanska's granddaughter Lou Tanska Bischoff recalled that from almost the time the camp opened the same families -- usually from Seattle -- used the same cabin year after year. Rentals were by the month or the year, but no written rental agreement was necessary: "This was when a handshake told you what you needed to know," said Bischoff. The cabins consisted of one large room with a screened in porch. There was a wood stove for cooking, but until the 1930s, the cabins had no electricity. Nor was there running water in the cabins -- people got their water from the lake -- and no indoor plumbing (but there were plenty of outhouses).



The camp was open year round. Bischoff said that summers were the big months at the camp; swimming and boating in rowboats were the most

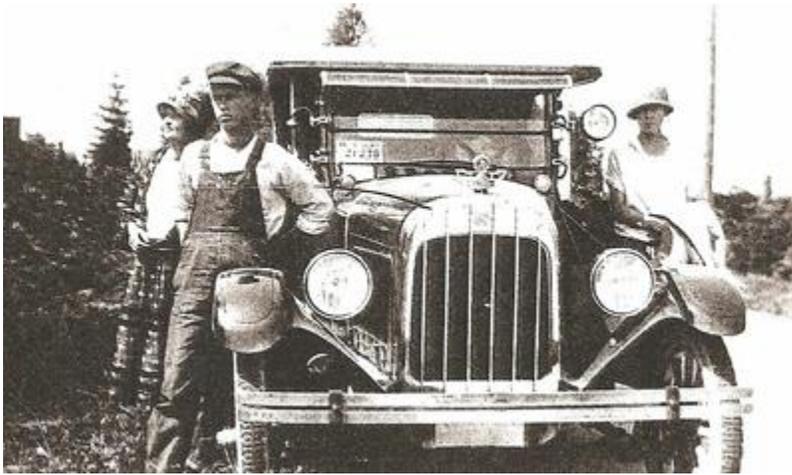
popular sports, and there was, of course, the requisite fishing pier. But there were winter sports too. Pine Lake froze more frequently in the winter during the early 1900s than it does today, and people often formed ice hockey teams, both formal and informal, and played ice hockey on the lake. The Tanska Auto Camp itself had a dance hall which saw a lot of action in its day. The dance hall featured Scandinavian dances, usually with a three-piece band playing a polka or a schottish (similar to a polka, only slower) and "there was always an accordion or two," added Bischoff.

The Tanska's Finnish Sauna

But the camp was particularly known for its Finnish sauna. Bischoff explained, "Finns have got to have their saunas. That's one of their requirements -- get in there and sweat out those impurities. It was a big deal, especially to people coming from Seattle." Saturday was the big sauna day, especially in the evenings. It soon became so popular that it became necessary for a family to schedule a time in advance that they would use it, because on any given Saturday at least 10 families took turns visiting the sauna. Visits were limited to an hour.



The sauna, located between the Tanska house and barn, was a two room building consisting of a dressing room and the sauna itself. This sauna room consisted of benches and a fireplace with stones in it. Every Saturday John or one of his boys would build a particularly hot fire to get the stones hot. People using the sauna poured water on the stones to create steam, and used willow switches that were kept in the sauna to switch each other's or their own bodies to draw out the impurities.



Agriculture, 1920s-Style

The Tanskas maintained a farm and cows on their property, and in the early 1920s John's sons Leonard and Eino built a chicken ranch on the northern end of the 40 acres, which eventually grew to include, at its peak, perhaps 20,000 chickens. (Despite this impressive number, Bischoff said Tanska's chicken ranch was only the third largest such ranch on the Sammamish Plateau.)

Ida Tanska sold milk, butter, yogurt, eggs, and chickens (and berries in the summer) right out of her dirt-floored home basement to visitors. John was known to have his young visitors from Seattle come into his barn while he milked the cows and to squirt warm milk directly from the cow's udder into the visitor's mouth.

While the camp was open to all, it was particularly popular with Seattle's Finnish community. Bischoff recalled life in the camp itself as a young girl during the 1930s and hearing and speaking more Finnish than English. "If you didn't speak Finnish, you couldn't communicate very well," she explained.



End of an Era

The camp remained a popular draw through the 1930s. But by the late 1930s John's health was failing. He died in January 1940. Ida was unable to maintain the camp, and Leonard and Eino were busy with their chicken ranch, so she closed the camp and sold the cabins the same year. She sold the cabins for \$500 apiece, primarily to the Seattle families who had so faithfully rented them for so many years. Ida died in 1953; Leonard's and Eino's chicken ranch carried on into the mid-1950s, but then it too closed. The Tanska home still stands today, though it has been moved south of its original site on the Tanska property. All traces of the camp are long gone; many of the cabins themselves have been remodeled into year-round residences.

Sources:

Phil Dougherty interview of Lou Tanska Bischoff, April 22 and 24, 2007, Everett, Washington; Obituary of John Henry Tanska, *Issaquah Press*, January 4, 1940, p. 2.

By Phil Dougherty, June 07, 2007