



Rowleys Bay Resort founded in 1948

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The northernmost cove on Door County's Lake Michigan side is named after Peter Rowley, a man who searched for solitude. If another settler pitched camp a few miles away, Rowley went packing and searching for a new homestead. Making his way up the Door Peninsula in the late 1830s, his last stop was Rowleys Bay.

The reclusive and cantankerous Rowley had two female companions at the time — his wife, Alice, and another woman thought to be a sister or mother-in-law. Rowley and the women lived on Rowleys Bay until 1842, when they departed again for more solitary grounds. Over the next 30 years, the area housed a collection of lumber camps that pumped out mass quantities of telegraph poles, railroad ties and cordwood.

In 1876, New Yorker S.A. Rogers purchased the dock and about 4,000 acres, much of it swampland, from Osborne-Cogswell. He acquired additional lands from Door County for unpaid taxes, built a large sawmill, a more spacious dock, a trading post, a school and other buildings to accommodate the needs of his growing enterprise. About the only thing Rogers could not make money on was the copious amount of cedars that were too small even for fence posts. That hurdle was overcome when he teamed with Milwaukeean J.H. Mathews, who was an expert at extracting cedar oil.

In 1892, Rogers traded a couple hundred acres of his Rowleys Bay empire for a farm in Missouri, and after a subsequent trade, the land fell into the hands of Ditlef C. Hanson from Tacoma, Wash. With the timber stripped bare and land too wet for farming, Hanson planned to build a townsite as he reasoned Chicago was built on a marsh.

Although a spade of dirt was never turned, elaborate aerial lithographs of Hanson's Tacoma Shores were produced showing a bustling town with citizens active on the elegant boulevards. An artist rendering showed a park, post office, library and other stately buildings, and the lazy Mink River was seen as a flowing stream emptying into Lake Michigan over a stunning waterfall. Not surprisingly, some were hoodwinked into purchasing lots sight unseen. When the new owners realized they had purchased swampland, they abandoned the lots and stopped paying taxes, and the land reverted to county ownership.

Rogers' son, Jay, sold off much of the family's land holdings in the early 1900s, with the final 367 acres purchased by grandson, Clinton, in 1947. Clinton had dreams of building a resort on the property, but personal tragedy interrupted his plans, and the land was sold to Lou Casagrande in 1948, when Rowleys Bay Resort was founded.

Rowleys Bay Resort, formerly the Wagon Trail

www.rowleysbayresort.com

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