

ROWLEYS BAY GAZETTE

LOOKING BACK IN TIME

In time past, many tribes of Native Americans lived here and throughout Door County. Many artifacts collected in the Rowleys Bay area affirm this. Several early settlers and traders reported dealing with them in exchange for white man's treasures.

1680: Father Andre, a French Jesuit Priest, erected a wooden cross for his worshipers on the end of the point across the small bay. Remains of the cross and the stone steps leading to it were still visible in 1900.



In 1979, a replica was erected at the resort to commemorate this memorable part of our history.

1840-42: Peter Rowley and his family lived in a log home on the shore where he fished and hunted. The Bay was duly named after him because he was such an interesting character. Whenever he saw the smoke of another settler, he repeatedly moved on. His next abode was also named after him, Rowleys Point, close to Two Rivers, Wisconsin.

1860's: Osborne-Cogswell, Inc. of Racine, a logging business, built the first dock for shipping lumber, wood, posts, poles and ties to other ports. They owned hundreds of acres throughout the northern one-half of the county and operated in other bays as well.

1874: S.A. Rogers from New York State bought substantial acreage and the dock from Osborn and Cogswell and began his own enterprise. He proceeded to buy more land from Door County



for unpaid taxes. He also inherited some acreage from his father-in-law Doctor Blawis, who had received it by government patent for his service in the Civil War.

1882: A trading post (general store) was built to include a post office and doctor's office for Dr. Blawis. The post office intermittently existed until 1904.

1882-85: More buildings were built adjoining the store including a 40x60 foot barn, a carriage building, horse barn, a chicken coop pigpen and a seven-bedroom house.



A sawmill, icehouse and shingle-mill were also built later.

1902: Jay Rogers, S. A. Rogers' eldest son, was given power of attorney by his father to be in charge of his estate with seven children as beneficiaries. In the ensuing fifty years, about 2000 acres of outlying land was sold and the funds distributed to his assigns. Author H. R. Holand once wrote of Jay: "He is a farsighted business man of keen sagacity, correct in his judgment and enterprising in all he undertakes." Jay died in 1951 at 79 years of age. His wife, Hanna, died in 1968 at 90.

1904: S. A. Rogers and his wife, Julia moved back to New York. After his wife passed away in 1914 he moved back to Rowleys Bay. When Mr. Rogers died in 1921, his body was shipped back to Greenwich, New York to be buried beside his wife.

1910: Gustave Albin Erickson purchased the "point" across the small bay and divided the property into lots for his children. Some of his heirs still spend their summer seasons there.

1947: Clinton Rogers, Jay's eldest son, then purchased the remaining 367 acres, with the intention to develop a resort. His dreams failed to materialize because his wife got cancer and died. His life's savings dwindled; he eventually took over his parent's retirement home in Ellison Bay with his new wife, Rosie.

1948: Lou Casagrande, a Spaniard by origin and a former diamond dealer from Milwaukee, purchased the acreage from Clinton, which he named Rowleys Bay Resort. Lou, along with several local craftsmen, remodeled the old buildings.

The trading post was transformed into an attractive dining room with log-lined walls and quaint paintings. The artistry and décor were by Frank Gospaderek, a sign painter from Sturgeon Bay. The log paneling and paintings were re-installed in the new restaurant entry in 1993. The horse-barn, carriage-shed and chicken coop-pigpen was remodeled into 18 meager rooms. One shower and one toilet cubicle served up to five rooms.



Mike, a test pilot, was killed in a solo flight in May, 1968.

The Van De Hei's didn't change the property except to hire R. B. H. Excavators to deepen the boat harbor and begin an airstrip along Mink River road. They also started RB Boy's Ranch, which did not survive.

1964: Newport State Park's 2400 acres were purchased by the state of Wisconsin from various landowners. It's now almost 3000 acres. It remains undeveloped except for a manager's residence, the utility buildings and sixteen walk-in primitive campsites. Much of the park's shoreline and pristine forest are in clear view from Wagon Trail Resort.

1969: Niel Nilson, his nephew, Earl Erland and their wives then purchased the property from Verna and proceeded to continue the operation. After trying to operate their business with several family members, some at long distance, they were ready to sell after 18 months of ownership.

1970: Leonard and Alice Peterson then bought the property and, together with some of their children, changed the name to Wagon Trail Resort. The resort has since been a continuous operation. Members of the family, a great staff and a host of friends have contributed to its success and popularity.

1971: Wagon Trail Homesites. Twenty-two 1-1/2 acre lots were platted bordering Frontier Drive and were sold to our clients. A couple years later the 3 1/2 and 5 acre homesteads and estates took shape along Homestead Drive. Hundreds of spruce and pine trees were planted along the borders of the lots, some now grown to mature heights.

1971: Wagon Trail Campground was developed by the Peterson family. They operated it for five years when it was then sold to Jim and Ronnie Robinson.



In 1994 it was resold to Dick Bartlett and his wife, Cheri Ault. The Peterson's have felt a rich kinship with both of these couples and appreciate them for their stamina and cooperation.

1974: Wagon Trail Cond-home-inium association was organized and began development. Thirty sites were finally established with construction of the common roads, wells and septic system. Home construction followed for the next twenty years as the sites were purchased.



It is now complete. Most of the owners rent their Vacation Homes through our reservation system at Wagon Trail Resort.

1977: Nature Conservancy began purchasing property along the shores of the Mink River Estuary. They now own almost 1800 acres and most of the Mink River shoreline.

1978-79: The First Lodge, with the pools, was constructed over that winter and opened for the '79 summer season. The new lodge had 20 rooms and 2 suites,

a 60-seat restaurant (now the bakery), and some offices. A small conference room, game rooms and a laundry were also a part of the new venture.

1983: An Addition to the resort consisted of more offices, a styling salon, (now our group sales office), and our gift shop which has since moved to its present location.

1984: Another Addition to the resort comprised 23 rooms, a larger conference room and a new laundry. This addition allowed Wagon Trail to accept larger groups and conferences.

1986: High water up to the top of the dock brought new challenges for the dock and shore frontage. The water level later neared an all time low in 2000-03. In the last century the levels have changed several times as in ages past.

1988: Alice Peterson, Leonard's first wife and co-founder of the resort, died suddenly on January 10th of a heart problem. Leonard married his second wife, Irene Rossman, on August 27, '88.

1991: The book, Rowleys Bay, "Reliving the Heritage of Northern Door County," was self-published by Leonard Peterson. More details of this timeline and history are disclosed in its 286 pages with over 100 pictures and illustrations.

1993: The Latest Addition consisted of a new 100-seat dining room, gift shop, second-story banquet/conference room, elevator, and 36 additional lodge-rooms, including suites, balcony and whirlpool rooms.

2000: The Lodge Lobby Was Enhanced with the construction of the model train and scenery display by brothers Bob and Bill Appel. In the second floor east hallway they also created a photographic historical timeline of Rowleys Bay and surrounding areas. You are welcome to enjoy them anytime.



2000: Dock renovation involved new steel corrugated sheet piling and substantial concrete work, electric, and water supply for the floating pier slips.

Extensive dredging also occurred both in the harbor and in the channel from the harbor to the lake.

2001: New pavement was installed on the entire parking lot along with some additional landscaping.

2003: New owners take over. On Leonard's retirement in September, the resort and outlying lands were sold to Bob and Jewel (Leonard's daughter) Ouradnik, and Bob Czerniakowski CPA. All three of them have been involved in the resort's management since 1992.



The New Owners

2004: The Wagon Trail Tradition:

We trust Wagon Trail Resort and staff will continue to be, as it has been since 1970, an inspiration and a joy to all our visitors and guests.

We hope you will often make it:

“YOUR HOME AWAY FROM HOME”

~ The Wagon Trail Family ~

PLEASE GREET
THE FOLKS BACK HOME &
COME BACK REAL SOON

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Wagon Trail
Resort & Vacation Homes
On Rowleys Bay

ROWLEYS BAY GAZETTE

A TIMELINE OF EVENTS
INCLUDED IN THE BOOK

— **ROWLEYS BAY** —
RELIVING THE HERITAGE
OF NORTHERN DOOR COUNTY

BY: LEONARD PETERSON
FOUNDER OF
WAGON TRAIL RESORT
RESTAURANT & BAKERY
CAMPGROUND
COND-HOME-INIUM
MARINA • TRAILS
HOMESITES
HOMESTEADS & ESTATES

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