

Charley and Inez

To leave their 'PEA' Patch

By Joyce Laabs
Lakeland Times feature writer

It was cold on April 27, 1961. That was the day that Charley and Inez Pea arrived in Manitowish Waters from Alameda, Calif. It was their first visit to Wisconsin, and it was to be a permanent move.

If they had known the weather was going to get even worse, they might not have stayed, for they had both been raised in warmer climes; Inez in Shelby, Miss. and Charley in Sayre, Okla.

"I was just flabbergasted when I saw snow on the ground," said Inez. "I had never seen snow and I only had summer clothes. Then, on May 17, there was a snow storm that the natives said was the worst they had ever seen. I had a hard time, and I really thought I was going to freeze to death."

They had come to Manitowish Waters to take over the ownership and operation of the Win-Mar Resort and Tavern, a place they had never seen.

"My brother-in-law owned the Little Star Garage and when I was trying to decide what to do when I was discharged after serving 20 years in the Navy, he told me about Win-Mar and said it was for sale," said Charley.

Winnie Zimmerman and Marie Young, known to all in the community as the Win-Mar girls, were getting up in age and wanted to sell their operation and retire.

Charley and Inez bought the tavern and

resort sight unseen.

"Not only was the weather strange, but we had never served a drink, and didn't even know how to make most of them," said Inez. "We bought lots of books and when someone ordered a drink, we would go to the book. Our customers were very patient with us. They were just so happy that we bought the place and kept it open. It was the first bar in Manitowish Waters.

"I remember the first time someone asked me for a screwdriver, I went into my tool chest and got him one," Charley continued. Finally Jerry Wonderling came down from Mercer to help out. He taught us and worked as bartender, staying with us two or three years."

After settling in, they renamed it the Pea Patch and began their 'round the clock work.

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Inez and Charley Pea

up close
& personal

Profiles...

PEA: Days and nights of endless work

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"We'd get up at 6 a.m. and go to bed at 3 a.m. We had seven cottages that we rented out: four, two-bedrooms and three, one-bed-

rooms. I cleaned them all with no help and both Charley and I would clean up the tavern after we closed at 1 a.m. We were closed completely on Wednesday and that was the

day we scrubbed the walls and floors.

"We served ham sandwiches that first year, then added hamburgers the second year and finally added pizza.

"Winters were quiet times. It seemed like they rolled up the streets in winter. There just wasn't anyone out."

Peas remembered there wasn't much in Manitowish Waters when they arrived.

"La Portes had the IGA and Cal really helped us out. He was so good to us, and even kept our beer in his cooler until we got our own. Hanson Hardware was here; the Sampler (later the Ox Yoke) Rudy's (later Erich's Bavarian Inn), the Cricket Cove and Rod and Reel.

"We were very careful about serving anyone we thought might be drunk for the cops really watched in those days," Irene concluded.

According to the Peas, the Pea Patch was the hangout for those who worked at Little Bohemia and Deer Park.

"They'd come over after work and dance the polka until the floor undulated. So much so that it would move the arm on the jukebox and the record would play again. We always told Emil Wanatka that it was because he was so heavy. We had a bowling machine in the tavern and they liked to play that."

Inez continued.

"We were very good friends with Emil and Doreen Wanatka. Many times we'd all go up to Hurley after we closed and see the girlie shows. Then we'd have breakfast before we came home.

Charley remembered when Ralph Capone visited the Pea Patch.

"He'd come in, lay \$100 bill on the bar, and buy drinks for everyone. Then he'd leave whatever was left out of the \$100 as a tip.

"I remember another time this guy came into the bar and wanted me to give him \$40 to buy a shovel. He claimed he had a map that showed where Dillinger had buried the money and said that after he dug it up we would split the loot evenly between us. I didn't give him the \$40."

Inez remembered the night that they had a BBQ and dance outside. The Trapps brought the grill over in a boat and it ended up in the lake.

The Pea Patch Tavern and Resort, as well as the Pea's home is located on Vance Lake.

"It was named after Pete Vance, an early settler," said Inez. "People call it Vance Lake if they catch fish, otherwise they call it Dam Lake, because of the dam.

"This is a good fishing lake," said

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Charley and Inez display their most prized possession. An oil painting of the Pea Patch tavern by a Madison artist. It will be prominently displayed in their new home.

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PEA: Spent many years serving their community

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Charley. It has sturgeon, muskie, northern, walleye and bass. It's a 50-acre lake and flows into the Manitowish River, which goes into the Flambeau Flowage which connects to the Mississippi. You can get to New Orleans by water from here."

Charley and Inez met in Memphis, Tenn. He was stationed about 20 miles from town at Millington Naval Air Technical Training Center where he was an aviation metalsmith, and Inez worked at the Goldsmith Department Store in Memphis.

"I had a date with a gal named Josephine and she asked if she could bring a girlfriend along. That girl was Inez."

They didn't marry until after the war and Charley almost didn't return. He was on the aircraft carrier, the Lexington, when it sank in the Coral Sea.

"We were hit on May 8, 1942. We took five torpedo and two bomb hits. I was lucky. I was only in the water just 35 minutes before I was picked up by a destroyer. We lost 292 men in that battle. It wasn't a big number considering we had 3800 men on the ship."

Inez and Charley married on March 6, 1948, but when they celebrate their 50th anniversary next year, they will be settled in their home in Shelby, Mississippi where Inez grew up.

"We had a chance to sell out and we took it," said Inez. "We decided enough was enough. We were tired. We sold the tavern in 1978 and the resort in 1979. The resort was run for a couple of years and that was it. It was finally bulldozed. We do have one of the cabins left that is on our property."

Now we have our home and the last of our property on the market; 150 feet of frontage on the lake and 150 feet of frontage on Hwy. W, and the move to Mississippi will be permanent. Why Mississippi?

Inez explained.

"I'm 82 and Charley is 79 and we have had enough rough winters. There is just too much snow here in the winter. We spent last winter in Mississippi and it was wonderful.

"My mother died in 1981 and my brother has her farm and house. The house is now vacant, so we are going to move in there, put on an addition to the house, build a two car garage and some storage space.

"We are also making the move to Mississippi because that's where family is. My brother and his wife, my nephew and his wife, their three children and my oldest sister all live there."

Charley continued.

"We will be leaving many good friends behind. I've always tried to serve Manitowish Waters and enjoyed doing it. The year we arrived here was the first year they sold stock to build the community center, so we've seen lots of changes."

Charley went on the election board in 1962 and served until this year. He was a member of the Manitowish Waters Fire Department for 25 years.

"I became an EMT in 1974 and Charlie Rayala and I took most of the calls. This community has a great ambulance. It has everything in it."

Inez too was active.

"I always collected for the Eagle River Cancer Society. I've been active in my church, Our Lady Queen of Peace and active in our Lioness Club. Manitowish Waters has the largest Lioness Club in the state, with over 100 members. We are getting more young members now as they move to the area."

They will not be idle in Mississippi. They will have a two-acre yard which Charlie will keep in shape, and he will also help Inez' brother with the five-acre pecan orchard. Inez will have the big garden she's always

wanted.

"We will carry away lots of fond memories of the area," they both agreed. "We got to know everyone who came into the bar and enjoyed that. It was a good life here in Manitowish Waters, but now it's time to

move on, or back we should say.

"We will never forget our days in Wisconsin's Northwoods, the friends we made and the people we have known.

"Most of all we will remember our little patch of the area; our very own Pea Patch."



The Pea Patch as it looked when they bought it from the "Win-Mar girls."

"H E A T" GOT YOU DOWN?