

# LaFave's early resorts

By Joyce Laabs

of The Lakeland Times

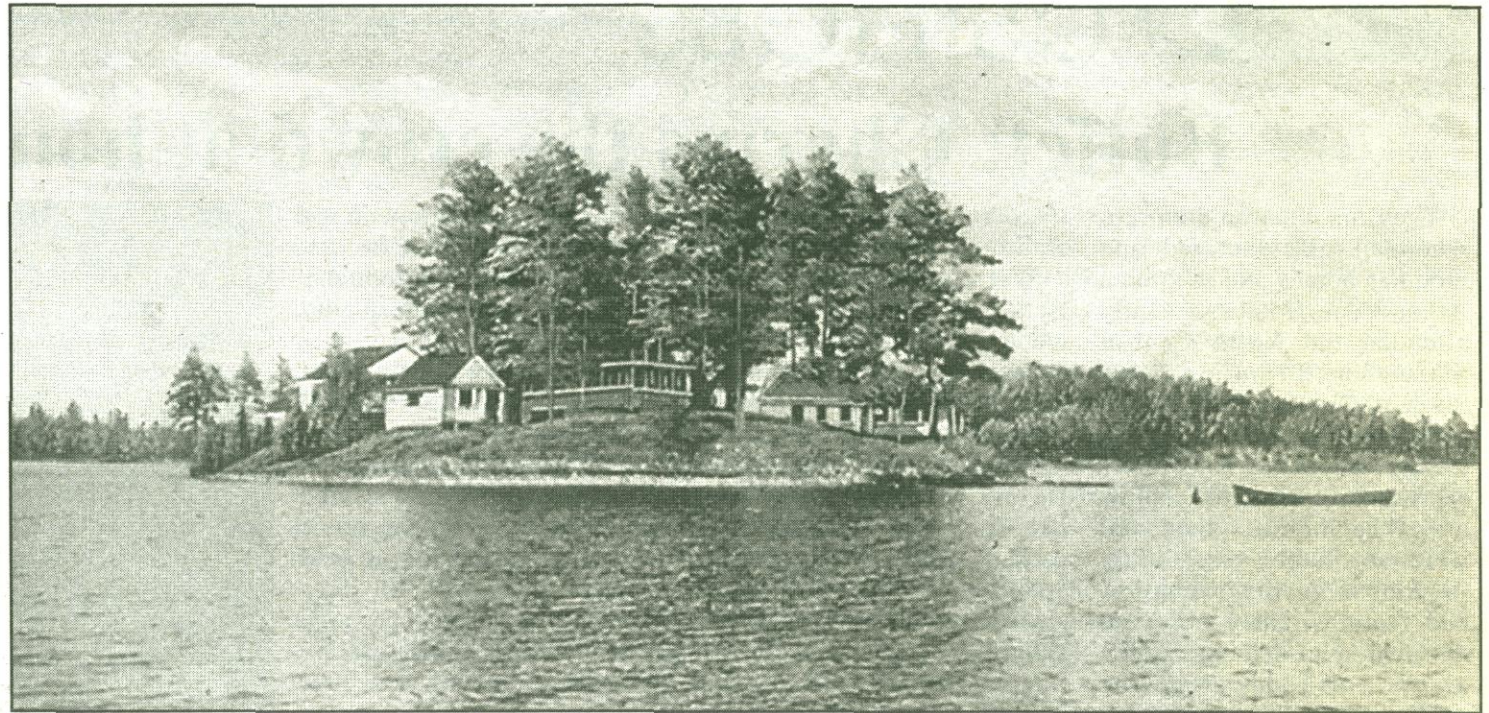
*Editor's Note: Abe LaFave established one of the early resorts in the Northwoods — on Island Lake in Manitowish Waters. We found the following information in one of his old brochures, and learned the details of his life from his grandchildren. In this series, we will draw from "My Memories of Yesteryear — Like on Island Lake In the Early Days." John LaFave — Abe's son who was born to Abe and his wife Sarah in 1901. It will bring back memories to some, while giving others a glimpse into the "pioneer" days in the Northwoods. We will conclude with our interview with Abe's granddaughters — Olive "Ollie" Johnson and Susie Bauer of Manitowish Waters.*

Abe LaFave's two resorts — The Island Resort and the Mainland Resort, both on Island Lake — were touted to the tourist in his brochure in this manner:

"This is a place for outdoor sportsmen — real folks, who come to the northwoods country for golfing, tennis, fishing, boating and swimming, or for just a quiet, restful vacation in which they can forget the exacting requirements of social obligations. Wear your fishing togs, if you wish, from the time you get up till you're ready to go to bed again. The first rule of the camp is comfort."

The brochure also assured guests they would meet the right kind of people.

"You will meet people of wealth and people of moderate circumstances, but you won't be able to tell which is which, because there is no 'Who's Who' register at Island Lake Resorts. Nevertheless, our



A painting of the resort from many years ago.

The rates were as follows:

- Cottage with bath — \$30-\$32 a week per person.
- Cottage without bath — \$25-\$27.50 per week per person.
- Children under 10 years of age, half rate.

All rates included meals which were prepared by Abe's wife.

Abe also had a sideline. He had homesteaded much property and sold some lake frontage lots which he declared was some of the most choice frontage in Northern Wisconsin.

A few years before Abe's son, John LaFave, died at age 71, he wrote anec-

On the way up the river, we had paddled within four feet of a deer lying in the water under some alder brush on the river's shoreline. We passed the big doe about the length of a canoe upstream, neither of us seeing it at first. It must have wiggled an ear or move slightly after we passed it, because something attracted my attention, and I turned to look back downstream only to see the big doe's head sticking out from under the alder bush. Our canoe had passed within four feet of the doe without disturbing her; she probably knew she was well hidden.

I was amazed and stopped paddling as

waited for George to return with the mail.

He was extra late that night because after he had carburetor trouble in the old Model T Ford only a half-mile from our mainland house. As he crawled under the Ford in the dark and fixed the carburetor well enough to get home, he heard the wolves howling. He didn't know that about 20 wolves had encircled our house as we played the piano and sang.

I often wondered if singing and playing the piano attracted the wolves. Some singing, eh? Well, anyway, the howling of the wolves drowned out our singing and piano music. And since it was my



guests are selected with greatest care to eliminate classes that may be objectionable to other guests.

LaFave traveled a long road before he established his resorts – the Island Lake in 1897 and Inland Lake in 1920.

He was born in Canada in 1860, the son of Jean Baptiste Lefebvre and Magdelene Duval. As a small boy he began working in the cotton mills of Massachusetts and stayed until he was 19. He moved to Point Sable, Mich., where he began work in the lumber industry as a logger and general employee until 1888.

He then moved on to Vilas County and worked as a guide for John Mann on Trout Lake for a short time. However, he returned to the woods and worked for Chippewa Logging Co. at Grandfather's Dam for the next four years. He then moved on to Price County and spent another three years in logging.

In 1895 Abe married Mary Fernette who died in childbirth in 1896. Her son, Thomas, survived. In 1897 he married Sarah Noonan. It was her second marriage. Sarah brought three children to the union, Patrick, George and Dora. Together, Sarah and Abe had six children: Frank, Wilbert, John, Marie, Charles and Angela.

He finally came out of the woods, bought a camping outfit and worked as an independent guide for fishing parties. This took him to 1897 when, along with his wife, he established his first resort, the Island Resort in Manitowish Waters.

His Island Resort offered a main lodge and five cottages, and he maintained it was mosquito free. The Inland Resort was on 80 acres of land and had a main lodge and four cottages.

Island Lake is the highest lake in Wisconsin – 1,400 feet above Lake Superior – and was known for its fine fishing.

doles and short tales of his life on Island Lake. They were compiled, exactly as he had written them, by his son-in-law Forrest Johnson (married to Olive). We shall publish them as a part of this series.

### Early Childhood Days

As I think back at our early childhood and teenage days, Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer had nothing in pleasures that we didn't enjoy as well. We have many, many pleasant and unforgettable memories, cherished as well, I suppose, by all young people who were reared in the country among beautiful lakes and forests. Not that we weren't poor as church mice, moneywise, and not that we didn't have trying times, but the many pleasant memories far overshadow what most people today call discomforts and hardships.

In the old, wood-burning days, with kerosene lamps, uninsulated houses, even before old hand water pumps – we didn't even have a water pump in our early days – we drank lake water from the many lakes, and it was pure and clean.

At our first Island Resort we hauled spring water from the lakeshore about a mile away for our guests' drinking water. Many such springs seemed quite abundant in the old timbered days that long since have disappeared. Not that this still isn't a most beautiful country, but, like all over the world, changes are taking shape. Absolute privacy was but one example that belonged to any individual roaming this area of lakes, streams and woods in the early nineteen hundreds.

To further illustrate what I mean, one day a summer resident and I went on a day's fishing trip to three small bass lakes to which we portaged a canoe, fishing each lake for a couple of hours, then returning home by way of the same river we had paddled upstream in the morning.

I asked Mr. Clemons to look back at what we had passed. He turned and likewise couldn't believe his eyes. As we had passed the deer, unaware of her presence, we had been continuously talking in a normal tone. Remarking now that the deer must be wounded, I said, "Well, what will we do?" At about that moment the forward movement of the canoe stopped and it started to slowly float downstream with the current. The canoe hadn't moved over four feet when the doe turned, splashed out of the river, and gracefully bounded back in the woods' thick brush. We didn't see anything of the deer after the second graceful leap. It had only been hiding and probably had a fawn nearby, and deer flies probably pestered it to its underwater haven.

Finding fawns in the woods, born only moment before, and seeing hungry wolves, etc., are but a few of the many, many beautiful things of the forests. One night after dark, my wife, Sai, went with my dad and others to bring home a couple of deer that they had shot earlier in the day and hung in balsam trees. With a boat full of hunters, they had to return later for the deer.

When they arrived at the scene with a lantern, since it was after dark, wolves had pulled down one of the two deer and were so hungry and intent on eating it, they didn't leave until the last second. One of the wolves, in hurrying to escape, brushed against my wife's leg.

One time about 1918, my half-brother, George Schroeder, drove a Model T Ford to Manitowish to get the mail. Since the day's work at our Island Resort was over, Mother suggested that we boys, the two girls who worked in the dining room, and she get into our launch and go to the mainland house and play an old piano we had acquired, while we

first encounter with howling wolves so close, and being the oldest male there for the moment (about 18 or 19 years old), I wasn't too brave. In time, the Model T drove into the yard and the wolves disappeared, or at least no one saw them and they stopped howling.

George assured us that the wolves would not bother us, as we gingerly walked with the women to the boat landing about three hundred feet away. Since George had a deer rifle in the house, he encouraged me to stay on for a while after my young brother Charley took Mother and the girls back to our Island Resort in the launch. George and I would return later in George's boat, as we all slept at the Island Resort.

We had no sooner left the women at the shoreline when the wolves started howling intensely and had actually followed us part way down the hill to the boat landing. We had only a dim flashlight, with a battery almost worn out. As we returned and approached the top of the hill to the house, the howling wolves graciously granted us the right of way. I was happy to shut the door behind me as I entered the house. My half-brother, who was much older than I, had encountered wolves since he was 12 years old and wasn't a bit alarmed. He wanted to try to get a shot at the wolves but as yet we didn't see them; only if they had come out in the open clearing would we be able to see their shadowy forms in the dark.

After a while George said we should turn off the kerosene lamp we had left lit in the house, open the back door a couple of inches, and await the wolves coming out in the open yard. We did just that, and after a while the wolves started howling intensely again to the west of the house. Suddenly, it dawned on us they were after

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the chickens in the chicken coop fifty feet to the west of the house.

Around the west and north sides of the chicken coop was thick hazel brush. George told me to follow him as he approached with the rifle toward the chicken coop, and he told me to hold the flashlight over his right shoulder to light the sights of his gun. The closer we approached the chicken coop, the more intense became the howling of the wolves – and also the weaker became the flashlight. It seemed to me that the wolves were within twenty to thirty feet of us, and I was so scared. I begged George not to get any closer.

With the intense howling, I wondered if he could hear me. Finally, the wolves stopped howling at which time I begged George, “Let’s go in the house!” He calmly assured me that one rifle shot would send them frightened and running away, but I wasn’t so sure.

George anxiously awaited their coming out in the open, yet we never saw a wolf or heard a twig crackle. After a few more minutes they started howling about 300 to 500 feet from us in the woods, possibly chasing a rabbit or a frightened

deer, as their howls gradually faded off in the distance. Personally, I was much more satisfied than George, who was disappointed and wanted so badly to get a shot at a couple of wolves. We returned by boat to the island, as it was late.

On another occasion at the same mainland house, we kept a couple of large pigs we had fed all summer in a pigpen near the boat landing. This late fall day, my younger sister was in the house. (We lived here in the winter months in recent years.) I came up from the Island Resort and asked if she had seen Charley, our younger brother. She told me he was in the garage, a distance of over 300 feet away, working on a Model T car. My sister also said she had heard wolves.

Since it was a most disagreeable day, with a north wind and heavy wet snow, geese had been flying south all day. I assured her she must have heard geese squawking and honking and that there were no wolves around. I started to walk out to the garage to talk with Charley when after walking about 100 feet, I heard wolves over the hill down by the pigpen. I ran to the house in which we always keep an old 38.55 rifle.

I told my sister she was right, and she, too, heard several wolves down by the pigpen. The pigs squealed as the wolves

howled. I shot into the treetops in the woods over the pigpen that was about 200 feet away. I never did know how many wolves there were as I only saw two dart across the trail making tall tracks for the woods after I shot. That was the last we saw of the wolves before butchering the pigs that fall. Many, many times I’ve listened to wolves howling in the distant woods, but only on two occasions had I encountered them close enough to be frightened.

One time, before Dad was married, he followed the river log drivers as he worked in the lumber camps. The first day of the drive from the main camp, the crew hadn’t made much headway downstream, as they blasted several bad log jams; so the first night they were supposed to return to camp several miles distant up stream.

Dad thought he knew a shortcut to camp, so he set out across country by himself and got lost. As darkness approached, he decided it best to build a fire and sleep out for the night, as it wasn’t too chilly with a good fire. As he was building the fire, wolves started howling in the distance, so he had a torch and continued to build two additional fires from big dead log rampikes and whatever he could find. He said wood was plentiful, so he finished building

three huge fires.

He tried to keep awake and said you could look in any direction and see fiery wolf eyes, and the howling was maddening. He knew as long as there was a burning ember the wolves wouldn’t attack. He also knew that the big log he had put on the fires would continue to burn until morning, so he felt safe but still intended to keep awake all night.

The wolves stopped howling and, through sheer exhaustion, Dad fell asleep between the burning fires. Just about daylight he awoke with a start, dreaming a wolf had him by the leg. As he awoke, he found his pants were burned where one of the fires had followed a dry root and burned under his leg while he was sleeping, burning a hole in his pants. The wolves were gone.

With sunrise, he knew the general direction of the camp and soon recognized certain hills, etc. Upon arriving at camp, the boss gave him the day off to rest, but the crew all laughed at his black, soot-covered face that he had acquired handling and poking at the burning fires.

*Next week John LaFave’s “First Christmas I Can Remember,” “Early Highway 10” and more.*

*Joyce Laabs can be reached at [features@lakelandtimes.com](mailto:features@lakelandtimes.com).*