

Resorts - White Lake Villa #1

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In July 1904, Mrs. Elizabeth Blake of Chicago opened a resort hotel in the former William M. Peck house located in Maple Grove. She named it "White Lake Villa".

The large roomy, two-story home-like summer retreat was situated on a plateau and offered the finest view of White Lake. The Villa was surrounded by majestic shade trees and spacious grounds.

The rooms of the Villa were large, airy, and well furnished. The table service was second to none. You got all this at the reasonable rate of \$1.00 per day.

In 1909 the exterior of the house had been painted white with brown trim. A dormer window had also been added to the south wing of the house.

In early December 1911, it was reported in the local paper that Mrs. Blake had closed up her summer home and returned to Chicago for the winter.

In the early morning hours of Saturday, December 23, 1911, the summer home and resort hotel of Mrs. Blake was burned to the ground with all its furnishings.

When first noticed around 3:00 A.M., the large wood frame structure was a mass of flames illuminating the area. It was out of reach of the village water works system, so no alarm was sounded, and nothing could be done to extinguish the disastrous progress of the flames.

The origin of the fire was a mystery. Articles of clothing were found at various places along Prospect Street (now Old Channel Trail) leading toward town. Authorities speculate that the house was first ransacked, looted and then set on fire, either accidentally or intentionally.

Local officers worked on the case but no clues were found.

Deputy Sheriff Collins from Muskegon was in town for a couple of days trying to find the individuals responsible for the fire. He had certain people under suspicion and hoped to get more tangible evidence.

In January 1912, Mrs. Blake advertised a \$50 reward to anyone furnishing information that would lead to an arrest and conviction of the party who broke into and set fire to her residence. (Today that would be about \$1,407.23.)

The residence was insured for \$1,800 and the household furnishings for \$1,000.

In July 1912, it was reported that Mrs. Blake was running a hotel at Crystal Lake in Rapids City near Kalkaska.

In mid-September 1912, she and her daughter had returned to the area and was occupying the Haehnel house in Maple Grove.

By 1913, she was associated with the Catalpas Resort which she operated until around 1918 when she returned to Chicago due to ill health.

The house was originally built by Mr. Joseph Heald of the lumber firm Heald, Crippen & Murphy (1854-85) who operated the largest sawmill on White Lake at the time. The house was then owned by William M. Peck, son of Franklin House hotel owner William Peck. Mrs. Blake had made substantial improvements to the house while she had it and, with the assistance of her daughter, had established quite a good summer hotel business.