

Resorts – Idlewild

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The Idlewild Resort was located on the southeast corner of Lake Street and Main on White Lake at the site of the first Swedish settlement which came to be known as Swedentown.

The Johnson and Sorenson families had built a log cabin on the site in 1856 and lived there during the winter. The next year the Johnson family built a house across the road which later became the White Lake Villa.

Hans Sorenson and his wife Anna farmed the land. A house was later built to replace the log cabin they had been living in.

Hans Wilhelm Sorenson was born in Norway on 16 September 1822. In May 1855 he came to America and settled in Michigan. He engaged in lumbering for several years and afterwards kept a meat market. In 1859 he married Anna Peterson and they had seven children, four of whom were still living when he died on 13 February 1895. His wife Anna died on 1 January 1899.

In December 1882 one of the Sorenson girls, Julia, married Jules Vigneaux. At the time, he claimed to be a famous French lecturer. They moved to Iowa where they had five daughters, one of whom died in infancy. It was only after the birth of their last child in 1894 that Vigneaux revealed his true identity as Luther Wesley Shear.

Shortly after the deaths of Hans and Anna Sorenson, the Shear family returned to the area, took over the property referred to as Idlewild, made some general improvements, and used it as their summer home.

In June 1902, while living in Muskegon, Luther W. Shear, District Insurance Agent for Northwestern Mutual Insurance Company, a trustee of the First Congregational Church, and one of Muskegon's most prominent figures in social and business life mysteriously went missing. A letter to his wife indicated that he would never be heard from again.

In July 1902 Shear filed for Bankruptcy. The exact amount of his indebtedness was not specified but it appeared all his assets would fall short of meeting the claims of his creditors. In October 1902, Shear was sentenced to 12 years in the state prison.

They divorced in March 1903 but remarried in 1911. Julie died in 1913 and Luther died in 1915.

In 1903, the property was sold to Fred Schmidt from Chicago, an enterprising hotel keeper who converted it into a hotel much like that of the White Lake Villa. Fred was born in Germany in 1871 and immigrated to America. He married Sidonie Dorstewitz of Chicago on 10 July 1895, and they had a daughter Violet.

Schmidt built several cottages along Lake Street. By 1915 they had remodeled all their buildings and doubled the size of the hotel. They offered tennis and shuffleboard courts, as well a swimming across the street. The resort became one of the best resort hotels on the lake.

In November 1920, Schmidt sold Idlewild to Elwood Shelhamer and his son-in-law Walter R. Kemp and his wife Elmay (ne Shelhamer). Elwood Shelhamer died suddenly in December 1921.

Walter Kemp and his wife Elmay continued to operate the resort and added several more cottages during their ownership. Walter died in June 1929. Mrs. Kemp then operated the resort by herself. In July 1934 she married Charles C. Kern and they together they operated the resort.

In 1943 guest rates at the hotel started at \$22 per week. Guests staying at the cottages paid \$17 to \$42 per week.

In 1945, Elmay Kemp-Kern sold the resort to her brother Samuel Shelhamer and his wife Sigrid. Together they both operated the resort until 1968.

In July 1948 it was reported that all of the cottages at Idlewild were rented for the season. The season ran from May 15 to November 1, longer than any of the other summer resorts.

In 1950 the Shelhamers added 4 motels – three of them had three rooms and the other had two. They were furnished for housekeeping.

Ads appeared in the paper in 1963 indicating that motels and cottages at Idlewild were available as fall, winter and spring rentals. A 2-bedroom furnished unit could be had for \$50 to \$60 per month.

By 1975, due to their advanced ages, Samuel Shelhamer was 89 and his wife was 83, and other health issues they were unable to keep up the resort.

In February 1975 Samuel Shelhamer ran an ad for the sale of the Idlewild Resort. At the time it was described as a large hotel, with a large furnished dining room to seat 70. It also included a large

furnished kitchen, office, parlor, 2 bedrooms, and bath. There were 10 furnished rooms on the second floor and an extra-large enclosed front porch. There were four furnished cottages that faced the lake and two others on the property, in addition to a garage and 3 small buildings and a laundry building with 3 rooms on the second floor. The size of the property was 210 feet on the lake front by 180 feet deep. The asking price at the time was \$49,000.

Samuel Shelhamer died in April 1975. His wife Sigrid died July 1975.

The resort property and its contents were eventually sold, and the buildings removed.

Beginning around 2008, several new homes were constructed on the site of the former Idlewild Resort.