

Velvet Beach Resort – “Miami of the North”

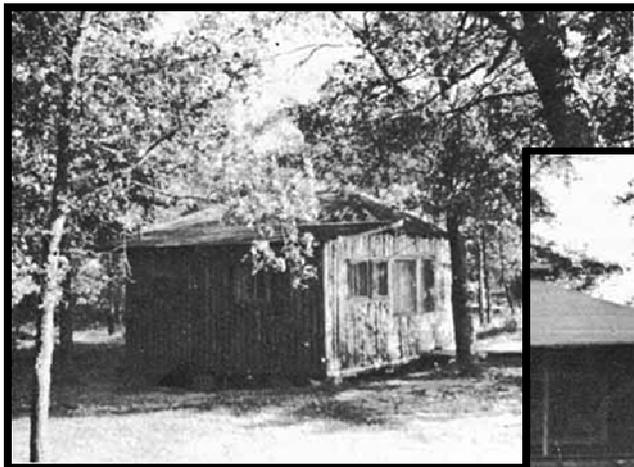


Having been either a guest or a resident on Pelican Lake for over 50 years I know where all the sugar sand beaches are and Velvet Beach on the eastern shore of the lake certainly has one of the finest. For years I passed by the Velvet Beach sign on Hwy 3 driving into Cross Lake. Last summer I stopped in to see what was hidden behind all those trees.

Velvet Beach Resort was established on the eastern shore of Pelican Lake by Isaac “Ike” Miller and his wife Anna sometime prior to 1913. The resort, located on the west side of Hwy 3 on Sections 18 & 19, had 12 one-room log cabin cottages, two ice houses and a general store. A barn located

on the property served as the Miller’s laundry area and also housed cattle, sheep and chickens. Resort guests coming to Velvet Beach in the early days had to take a train to Brainerd and then hire a horse and buggy to take them the 18 miles to Pelican Lake. By 1918, a Model-T could take guests directly to the lake. Following Ike’s death in June 1923, Anna platted Government Lot 6, Section 18 along the lake into nine lots, each about 100 x 400 ft.

After Anna’s death in May 1924, the property was sold to John A. “Fred” Fannon. The resort was then known as Fannon’s Velvet Beach Resort. In the late 1920s Fannon developed tuberculosis and after spending some time in a sanatorium in 1928-29, he and his wife Cecelia, decided to relocate permanently to the Velvet Beach area. His TB flared up again in 1938-39 requiring him to enter the sanatorium in Deerwood.



ABOVE -This log cabin, constructed in palisade style, was typical of the other resort cabins.

BELOW - The log cabin lodge was built by Ike Miller c. 1915. It burned in 1969.





Fannon's Velvet Beach Resort
ON BIG PELICAN LAKE

Come to Minnesota's Finest Bathing Beach . . . and you'll come to Fannon's on Big Pelican Lake. An ideal family resort . . . where the children can enjoy beach sports without fear of drop-offs or deep water. Excellent wall-eye, bass and crappie fishing. Good, safe boats, bait.

Our housekeeping cabins have electricity, innerspring mattresses, water, fuel furnished with each cottage boat and ice. Reasonable rates. Write now for further information, to

J. A. FANNON
Fannon's Velvet Beach Resort
18 Miles North of Brainerd on County Highway No. 3
Paved All Way from Twin Cities
P. O. Address—Merrifield, Minn.
Brainerd, Minn.—Phone 50-F-15

Fred Fannon operated the resort about 20 years until he sold to the Hart's in 1949. This ad was published in the Brainerd Dispatch on May 31, 1940.

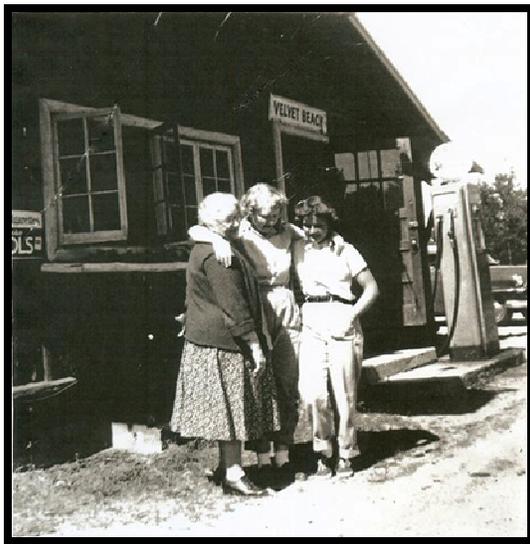
old Halvorson farm that was part of the site.

Activities on the project continued in early 1935, but by the end of the year little had been accomplished other than construction of the transient camp site on Halvorson Bay. Time passed and by December 1935 several people in the Cross Lake area and those with properties on the Whitefish Lake Chain were opposed to the plan. In March 1936 the original plan to divert water from Cross Lake to Pelican was deemed not to be feasible by State officials and the project was terminated. The camp buildings were taken apart and moved to Lum Park in Brainerd where they were repurposed for public use.

Beginning in the late 1920s and extending into the 1930s drought conditions across Minnesota resulted in a significant lowering of lake levels in the Brainerd Lakes area. Conditions on Pelican Lake were such that it was nearly impossible for boaters to get out of Jones Bay into the main part of the lake. Pelican was now composed of nine smaller lakes with small underbrush covered islands dotting its surface. As a result Minnesota officials approved a plan to bring water from Pelican Brook into Pelican Lake. This appears to have been a separate project from one that in 1937-38 diverted water into Pelican Lake via a one-mile long diversion ditch from Ossawinnamakee (then called Long Lake). Fred Fannon turned over his entire resort in November 1934 to provide free housing for some 55 men engaged in building a campsite on the north shore of Halvorson Bay. The plan was to construct a group of 17 buildings, including 10 bunk houses, a mess hall, recreation building, office, tool house, and supply warehouse for some 100 men who would be engaged in the water diversion project. F. N. Thorsen, camp superintendent, also planned to have a garden, cows and chickens that were to be kept on the

Pelican Lake's water diversion project would finally gain a new life in another year and be completed in April 1938, four years after a plan to correct low lake levels was initially proposed.

Fred Fannon continued to maintain the resort in a rather primitive state. Kerosene lamps provided lighting in the cottages and hand pumps were used to draw water from shallow sand points. Fannon died in October 1954 and Velvet Beach Resort once again had new owners. Marvin and Marian Hart purchased the resort in 1949 and in 1984 converted it to an RV trailer park. The log cabin lodge burned in 1969 and today little evidence of the original resort remains. Marvin died in 1993 and his wife Marian passed on in 1999. Today the old resort site is marked by an attractive sign along Hwy 3 where the present Velvet Beach Park association is located.



Hart's store at Velvet Beach, c.1955. Courtesy of Ray Holmes.