

Fountain Point

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The resort's earliest guests were mostly friends and relatives of the family. They traveled from Cincinnati to Traverse City on the Grand Rapids & Indiana Railroad and to the Point by stagecoach or horse and buggy.

In 1892, when the Manistee & Northwestern Railroad reached Traverse City, they rode it for the short distance to Fouch and then on the steam launch, Tiger, to Fountain Point. Tiger made two round trips daily from Fouch to Leland.

In 1900, Lydia Morrison deeded Fountain Point to her daughter, Florence Whitfield. She built the first cottages and a bowling alley south of the hotel. Docks, tennis courts, boathouses and outdoor pavilions were added as well.

In 1906, former Vaudeville actor Albert Meafoy took over the management from Whitfield, and in 1912, he purchased the entire property.

As an actor, he staged a variety of shows and performances over the years and expanded the hotel to accommodate both visitors and performers.

He also built many more cottages, which ranged from one to five rooms. All were fully furnished, with running water and fireplaces or stove heat but no kitchens. The resort, on the so-called American Plan, provided three meals daily.

By the late 1920s, the place looked pretty much the same as it does today.

In 1936, the entire property was sold to Victor A. Gebhardt of Cincinnati, whose family had been coming to Fountain Point

during the Meafoy ownership. He initiated a family tradition that continues to this day. His granddaughter, Susan Jay Nichols, who started coming to the resort when she was 3 years old, became owner and manager in 1987.

Nichols is serious about preserving traditions. The only major change on her watch was the elimination of the three-meal-a-day plan and the installation of kitchens in all the cottages. The resort now serves a continental breakfast at no extra cost.

Fountain Point dares to be different. Over the years, it has made such unavoidable concessions to modernity as hot water and flush toilets. But it still lacks telephones (except cellular) and television (who needs it?).

Lots of people would just as soon do without those noisy contraptions for a week or two in the summer anyway.

But what about the kids? Don't they miss TV? Not so you'd notice.

"Kids find their own fun,"

said Nichols. "We offer them swimming, boating and fishing, tennis, shuffleboard and horseshoes, group games like volleyball and baseball, and hiking in the woods. We have 55 acres of mostly wooded property, and almost 2,000 feet of waterfront. On rainy days, they can shoot pool, play Ping-Pong and other indoor games in the game room. Or they can curl up in an easy chair in the Red Room with a good book from our library. Believe it or not, there are still some kids who like to read."

The Red Room is the old hotel parlor. It has a huge cut-stone fireplace, a big antique grand piano and an open, lofty ceiling. Some of its furnishings date back to the Victorian era.

Most of the buildings at Fountain Point are three-quarters of a century old, and some are older than that. They're old. But they don't *look* old. With their gleaming white shiplap (the hotel), clapboard siding and the red roofs, they look almost new. That's

because they have been so well kept up over the years.

The resort has done very little advertising.

"Our business is 60-70 percent repeat," Nichols said. "Families from all over the country come back year after year, down to the third generation. And they tell others about us. Word

of mouth is our best advertising."

As one of the very few family resorts of its kind still in operation in northern Michigan, Fountain Point is on the State of Michigan Register of Historic Places, and it was recently approved for the National Register.

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