

Historical Marker - L2212C - West Michigan Summer Resorts / Jewish Resorts (Marker ID#:L2212C)



Significant Date:

Two World Wars and the Depression (1915-1945)

Registry Year: 2009 Erected Date: 2010

Marker Location

Address: 265 North Shore Drive

City: South Haven

State: MI ZipCode: 49090

County: Van Buren

Township: South Haven

Lat: 42.40975400 / Long: -86.27701400

Web URL:

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West Michigan Summer Resorts

After the American Civil War (1861-1865) a new wealthy class arose with the time and means to escape the grime of industrialized cities for the summer "Season." In the 1870s the Little Traverse Bay region became one of Michigan's first popular resort areas. Early vacationers came by passenger steamer on the Great Lakes. Railroad companies later developed their own resorts. By 1922 improvements on the West Michigan Pike and state parks made the dunes of West Michigan much more accessible. Inexpensive automobile travel enabled the rising middle class to vacation in Michigan. Many were immigrants from Chicago and modest cottage resorts catering to a specific ethnic population soon dotted West Michigan's shore.

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Jewish Resorts

During the 1880s, Jews fled persecution in Eastern Europe for the United States with a dream of owning their own land. Some received loans from the Chicago Jewish Agriculture Society to buy farms in the South Haven area. Around 1917 these farmers found themselves renting rooms to the growing surge of auto tourists vacationing in the area. At the time, Jews had difficulty finding places to stay because facilities excluded certain ethnic, racial, and religious groups. South Haven's Jewish farmers converted their farms to resorts to meet the demand. Their success led others to open Jewish resorts, most along North Shore Drive. By the late 1920s more than sixty Jewish resorts were operating in South Haven, resulting in its nickname "The Catskills of the Midwest."