

HISTORY OF MOON LAKE RESORT

By: Cristina Bailey

The March 28, 1924 issue of the Vernal Express published the last of a three part series written by O.J. Grimes: “*Three Weeks Among The Baldies*”. Grimes described the Moon Lake area as follows:

“Moon Lake is the largest body of water in the Uintahs and among the most picturesque. It really is no more than a wide, deep place in the Lake Fork River, lying in a little basin at the portal of a gorge with an old glacial moraine serving as a dam on the south. On the east its waters lave the feet of high steep ridges with timber right down to the water’s edge. To the southwest is a wide gently sloping sagebrush flat. Brown Duck Creek comes down a steep rocky canyon on the west and north of the creek and along the lakeshore is a high, heavily timbered mountain. The surface of the lake is about 8000 feet above sea level. The lake is of a crescent shape, about a mile or mile and a quarter long and probably a half to three-quarters of a mile across at the widest point, and eighty to 100 feet deep. With just a little roadwork it could be made the most accessible lake of the Uintahs and offers alluring possibilities for development as a summer resort. Some automobiles do go to it now, but the last ten or twelve miles are not to be recommended just now for motor traffic”.



Moon Lake 2004



Moon Lake 1950's (Photo courtesy J.Kemp)

Albert E. Blood, Altonah resident and Forest ranger joined Grimes group for the three-week trek. Blood was familiar with the area and no doubt amazed by its beauty. In 1925 he left the Forest Service and according to a Vernal Express article dated October 9, 1925 he acquired one and one-half acres of land under a special permit from the government through the Forest Service on the shores of Moon Lake, with the intention of building a resort. The construction of a log

hotel and other facilities for the use of tourists was scheduled to begin that fall. The chosen site was located close to the mouth of Brown Duck Creek.

When Blood sold the resort in August 1927 a new permit was issued to R. G. Nelson of Altonah. According to Forest Service records Mr. Nelson only had the permit for eight months. There is no documented evidence that either Blood or Nelson built any cabins during the time they had the permit, but the first main lodge was probably constructed at that time.

On April 30, 1928 a new permit was issued to Lee Tatton of Mt. Emmons and L.L. Alger of Consumers, UT. This permit only authorized an area of one acre, half an acre smaller than the original permit. Cris Clark Sorensen, daughter of Cal Clark a former owner of the resort, credited Alger as responsible for the construction of the first cabins in Moon Lake. Alger bought Tatton's share and a new permit dated June 1931 was issued to him. Alger built a headquarters lodge in the summer of 1932 (Vernal Express, 10-13-1932). This building burned down in 1934.

The construction of the new Dam and reservoir beginning in 1935 made it necessary to move the resort to its new present location. Alger operated the resort until 1944.

Cris Clark Sorensen, who spent many summers at the resort from the age of ten and later managed it with her father, wrote:

“In the spring of 1928 Mr. Lee Alger and his family came to Moon Lake from Price, Utah. Lee and another man [Tattom] bought the Forest Service lodge. Four 12'x12' cabins were built on the west beach front near the mouth of the Brown Duck Creek.

A water wheel was built in the river to generate electricity to the lodge and cabins. The electricity ran through a cable and then through a buried copper wire to each cabin. Fresh drinking water came from a nearby spring. It still does today. At the time, the Moon Lake Lodge was said to have electricity before Mountain Home, the town about 20 miles below. Reay Alger, a son of Mr. Lee Alger, said he was proud that ‘Mom was one of the few to have an electric washer’. The effects of the seasonal freezing and thawing of the river eventually caused the wood paddles of the wheel to become warped. This resulted in the lighting of the resort to go from bright, to dim, and then bright again. It was time for a new water wheel. Three water wheels provided electricity during the summer of 1929 until about 1939. In 1934 the Moon Lake Lodge burned down when gasoline, instead of kerosene, was added to a wood-burning stove. The apparently “dead out” coals were still hot and immediately caught ablaze. Fortunately, no one was hurt.

In the same year, Mr. Alger, his young sons, and friends moved the four cabins up from the waterfront to the northwest end of the present resort area. They tried to move the cabins with a Model T. It did not do the job. A team of sturdy horses was used instead.

The Algers built the new Moon Lake Lodge. The one-story “pool hall” became a very popular meeting place for the local towns people. Construction of the Moon Lake Dam, which began in 1935, brought many laborers and their families to join in the social entertainment as well. The main attraction was the large outdoor dance floor, live music and the annual sagebrush rodeos in mid –June – A cowboy’s reunion”(Cris Sorensen).

The four small cabins mentioned by Mrs. Sorensen were probably cabins numbered 15, 19,20 and 21.

Cabins # 14, 16, 17 and 22 were most likely built at this time as well, since they are architecturally similar.



Moon Lake Lodge in the late 1940's (photo courtesy Joe Kemp)

The bar that was in the old “pool hall and the mirrored back-wall behind it stands in the lodge today.

(Photo courtesy Joe Kemp)



During this reconstruction of the lodge, a two-room cabin was built directly east of the site and served as the temporary Moon Lake Lodge. It is now cabin #6.



Cabin #6, in the 1950's
(Photo courtesy Joe Kemp)

It was later used as a schoolhouse for the Alger children, and for the children of those working on the dam. The children liked to refer their schoolhouse as the Morgan cabin, for it was a woman named Miss Morgan who was their tutor. As 73 year-old Reay Alger recalled with pride, "I was the only fifth grader at Moon Lake" Once the new lodge was completed, it resumed its popularity for social activities and entertainment. (Cris Sorensen, historical account of Moon Lake, on file at Moon Lake Resort).

The Uintah Basin Record dated June 28, 1935 reported: "Moving up to the resort on the lake, additional activity presents itself in the construction of new cabins which are to house the reclamation crew and which will later provide tourist accommodations. A new store, pool hall and beer parlor are now in operation here to accommodate the workers and visitors."

Cabin number 18 drawn in one of the old resort plans was probably never built.



Mr. Kemp finished the upper level construction in the lodge in the early 1950's. Later pictures show the addition of a dormer on this side of the lodge. (Photo courtesy Joe Kemp)

In 1944 Alger sold the resort to Joseph H. and LaVir Kemp who operated it until 1962. Cris Sorensen wrote: “Seven larger cabins with three rooms each were built during Mr. Kemp’s ownership (these cabins are now numbered 7,9,11,12,23 and 24)”. Cabins #14 and #22 were moved to their present location at that time and cabins #7 and #9 were built where #14 and #22 stood before. Around 1940, the electricity that was once provided by waterpower was changed to a gas-powered generator. Overhead power lines were strung from cabin to cabin.

Mr. Joe Kemp, son of Joseph and LaVir Kemp remembers the time when the electrical supply was generated locally providing only 1-2 Kva. The light source was so unreliable that it made the light bulbs flicker constantly. There was a wooden flume that carried the water out of Brown Duck Creek on the side of the hill.

Mr. Kemp remembers many stories on his eighteen summers spent at Moon Lake. He recalls cabin # 10 barely escaped being consumed by fire on at least three separate occasions. Bears were not an uncommon sight, and several drowning and legends of the lake monster spiced many campfire nights.

The resort was sold to Mr. Calvin E. Clark of Salt Lake City and six other partners; Calvin managed the resort until 1994, when Bill and Julie Reardon started working at the lodge. In 1999 the Reardons bought some shares, later becoming majority shareholders, and in 2002 they became Agents and Directors of Moon Lake Resort.



1951 (Photo courtesy Joe Kemp)

Improvements: In a 1989 permit renewal documentation Forest Supervisor Duane G. Tucker wrote: “For years, the Resort has offered marginal facilities and service to the recreating public. Mr. Clark’s proposal for personally managing and improving the facilities beginning in 1989 are a step in the right direction. As we have discussed before, it would not be appropriate to re-issue the permit for the term longer than 15 years.” Clark also called for an Annual Operating Plan to provide a more efficient lodge operation. By 1994, Bill and Julie Reardon were hired to manage the lodge and to prepare a plan to renovate the buildings, since many changes needed to take place. They later bought out most of the shares to Moon Lake Lodge and have operated the

facilities as general managers for the last eight years making several improvements. At the beginning of the 2000 season the Reardons had invested more than \$200,000 to install a new septic system, water, heating, plumbing and construction renovation and the removal of an old underground gasoline storage tank. The Reardons now would like to concentrate on building new, more efficient cabins, preserving the unique character of the Moon Lake area but meeting the increasing demands of the recreation public (Bill Reardon's personal interview).



Main Lodge

History of the Buildings

Summary

The original lodge was built between 1925 and 1927 at the mouth of the Brown Duck Creek. This lodge burned down in 1934. The new lodge was built starting the following year. *“This lodge, along with later additions is what stands here today. This lodge is a 2x4 stick framed structure with nearly ½ round log siding, giving a good illusion of a full log structure. The first addition, which today serves as a staff kitchen area, was added to the original structure prior to the 1940’s. The western addition and covered porch, as well as the finishing of room space in the upper level of the original lodge was completed by Joe Kemp in the 1950’s”* (Bill Reardon, paper on file)

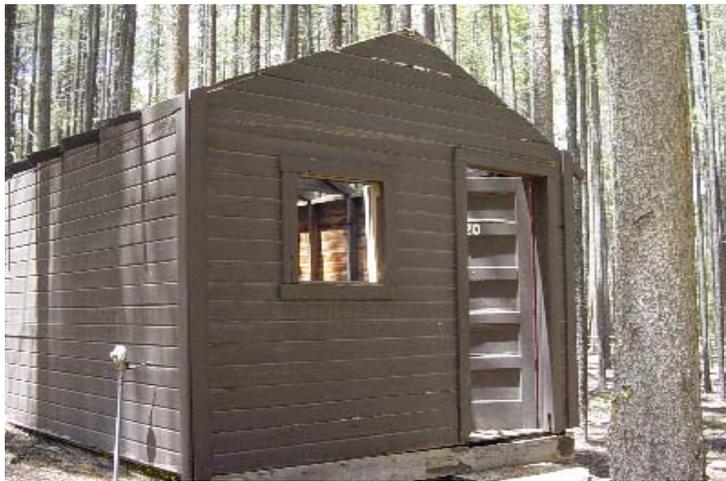
Cabins # 15, 19, 20, and 21 were the four original cabins built by Algiers in 1928. They were moved from the mouth of Brown Duck Creek to the Northwest end of the present resort in 1934. In 1937 and 38 they were moved to their present location.



Cabin #19



Cabin #15



Cabin #20



Cabin #21

Cabins 16 and 17 were probably built at the same time based on their similarities.



Cabin #16



Cabin #17

Cabins # 14 and #22 don't have toilet facilities or running water. They were probably built at the time the original cabins were moved to the present location.



Cabin #14



Cabin #22

Cabins # 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10 were built to accommodate the crew working at the dam site in 1935, during Alger's administration.



Cabin #1



Cabin #2



Cabin #3



Cabin #4



Cabin #5

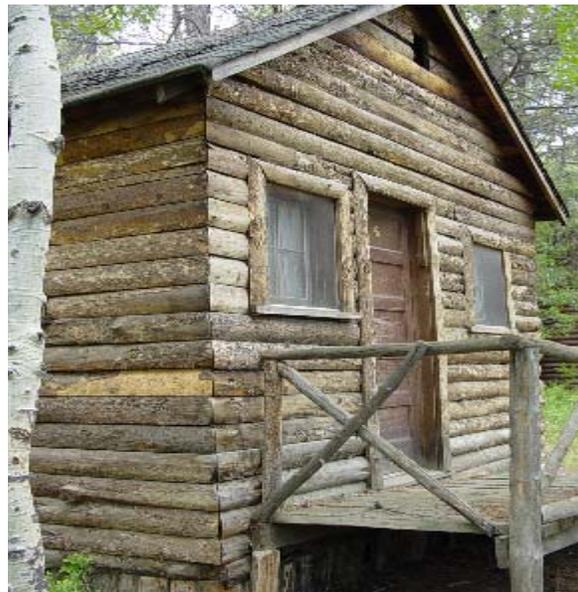


Cabin #8



Cabin #10

Cabin # 6 was originally used as the main lodge and later as a schoolhouse for the children of the crew working on the dam.



Mr. Kemp built cabins 7, 9, 11, 12, 23 and 24 in 1943.



Cabin #7



Cabin #9



Cabin #11



Cabin #12



Cabin #23



Cabin #24

Between 1929 and 1939 three water wheels provided electricity for the lodge and cabins. They were not built at the same time, but each set replaced its predecessor. There is no traceable evidence of these wheels at present time.

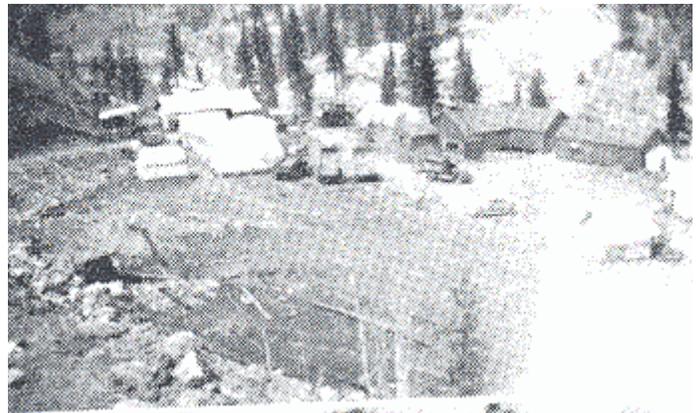


Main Lodge in the 1940's (Photo courtesy Joe Kemp)



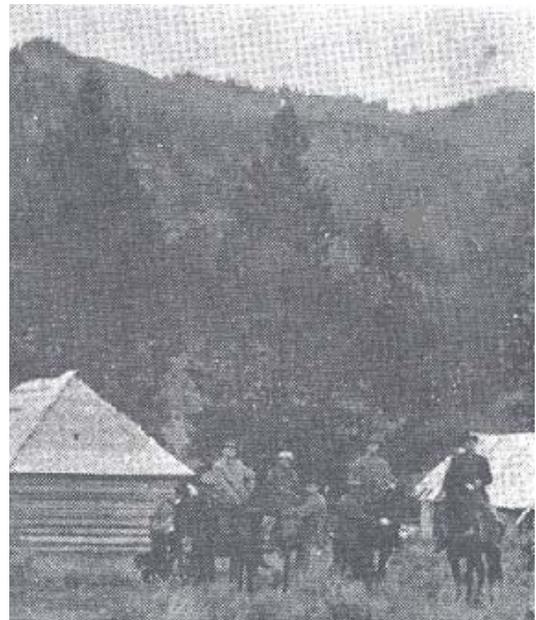
Main lodge in the 1950's. Mr. Kemp added the dormer on the upper level.
(Photo courtesy Joe Kemp)

Mildred Miles Dillman published the photograph to the right in "*Early History of Duchesne County*" in 1948. According to Albert Potts, who worked for the Forest Service at Moon Lake, Civilian Conservation Camp workers or the crew working on the dam probably built the structures in this picture.



Top Photo: *Early History of Duchesne County*, compiled by Mildred Miles Dillman, p.169. This camp was dismantled after construction ended.

Bottom Photo: Ashley National Forest, Moon Lake 1917. This area is underwater at present time.



Acknowledgments

Our sincere appreciation to:

- Joe and Lynda Kemp
- Cris Clark Sorensen
- Bill Reardon
- “Snooks” Roberts
- Albert Potts
- Dale Hamberg
- Eleta Creutz
- Pam Helms
- Uintah County library Regional History Center: Ellen S. Kiever and Janet Taylor
- Roosevelt Chamber of Commerce
- Roosevelt Senior Center
- Duchesne Visitor Center
- Duchesne Senior Center

Thank you for sharing information, photographs and knowledge for the preparation of this document.

Bibliography

Dillman, Mildred Miles, *Early History of Duchesne County*, 1948.

Uintah Basin Record, 6-28-1935

Vernal Express, 10-13-1932