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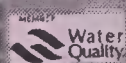
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The Clam Digger: A Landmark Inn

By Phyllis Makuck

The Inn at Pine Knoll Shores continues a tradition

HISTORY STORIES

Reflections of Pine Knoll Shores

The Clam Digger (also spelled Clamdigger) Inn has new owners. This season, it has a new roadside sign identifying it as "The Inn at Pine Knoll Shores." Therefore, the time seems right for an update of a September 2008 Shoreline article entitled "The Birth of a Landmark." The following contains revised information from the earlier printed piece as well as new information. It is posted with additional graphics at pineknollhistory.blogspot.com.

Imagine the western section of Pine Knoll Shores without Beacon's Reach and without any major landmarks other than the old Iron Steamer Pier, and you have a good picture of the site Melvin Mansfield Sr., and his wife, Edna, selected for a hotel in 1973, one year before the town officially incorporated. Attracted by dense maritime forest and an unspoiled beach, the Mansfields purchased land from the Roosevelt family. The plan was to build a nine-story hotel and name it The Clam Digger. Two unexpected events made the Mansfields change their plans.

Building height restrictions passed while the hotel was under construction forced the first change and limited the hotel to seven floors. Actually, the initial building height ordinance passed in 1974 stated: "No building or structure of any kind shall exceed five stories or fifty feet in height, exclusive of elevator shafts, air-conditioning or other necessary mechanical equipment, the height of which shall not exceed ten feet." However, probably because the Mansfields had already begun construction, their inn exceeded this limit. In fact, a 1983 *Shoreline* feature article claimed it was "not only the tallest structure in PKS, but the highest in Carteret County"—a claim that if true then is no longer true for Carteret County.

After construction was completed came the second change. The Mansfields decided to affiliate with a national franchise, so instead of opening as The Clam Digger, the hotel opened as a Ramada Inn.

In 2006, operating the business as a Ramada seemed no longer financially beneficial. Heirs of the original owners decided to return to their parents' initial plan, give up the franchise, and rename the hotel The Clam Digger. Today's owners advertise as "The Inn at Pine Knoll Shores," but the restaurant and lounge retain their original names: The Clam Digger Restaurant and Cutty Sark Lounge.

The Mansfields' land purchase extended east of the inn and included a lot across the street, where the Beacon's Reach wastewater plant is now located. They sold this property back to the Roosevelts around 1977, but retained rights for hooking up to the sewer system, which the Roosevelts had planned. The Inn has retained this right.

The height, central location and popularity of The Clam Digger have made it a Pine Knoll Shores landmark. When giving directions to visitors, locals often describe a turn-off location as a certain distance east or west of The Ramada/Clamdigger. Beach walkers use it as a destination and turning-around point. Boaters talk about it not only as an orientation point for cruising along the beach but also as a navigational marker for crossing from the Intracoastal Waterway to an interior channel. One route according to local lore is about 100 yards west of buoy 12: "Take a hard right and put your bow on the old Ramada Inn."

Over the years, the Mansfields expanded the hotel's restaurant, upgraded guest rooms and added meeting space, but the building remained relatively unchanged. It has survived several hurricanes. The worst from the hotel's perspective was Floyd in 1999, which caused extensive interior water damage and exterior siding damage, forcing the Ramada to close for one month.

In February 2015, a fire broke out in The Clam Digger laundry area, which is a building separate from the hotel. The room was unoccupied, no one was injured, and fire damage was repaired.

The Inn has 102 rooms, a full-service lounge and restaurant, an outside pool with a bar, and meeting facilities for up to 160 people. Its beach is a popular sunning, swimming and fishing site. Evening light shining from the main building across the ocean attracts thousands of seabirds, an almost mystical site for nighttime beachgoers.

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