

Early Buildings

It is difficult to pin point the location of early buildings for comparative newcomers because landmarks keep changing. Old timers still talk about "Nettie's Place," the "old barber shop," and Denman's store, all of which have been gone for a number of years.

Nettie's was the first restaurant on the Beach and it stood directly on the Gulf at about the end of Palermo Drive. Shellers, bathers and beachcombers in general stopped barefooted and bathing-suited for a bit of Italian food and a cold beer at Nettie's. The site of the building was on a tract of land owned by the "five Pavese brothers" each of whom had a small cottage in a cluster of buildings. Rocco Pavese operated a barber shop in Fort Myers but each Sunday he came down to the Beach and, in a tiny wooden structure, cut hair for the early residents who, even then, believed in the slogan, "save a trip to town." This shop and a similar one next to it served as the starting point for several businesses, one of which originally housed Harriet's Treasure Chest. When the Hurricane of 1947 damaged Nettie's Place, and the small tropical storm of '52 demolished it, Nettie's daughter Rose and her husband Eddie Pacelli built the Surf Club on the same property, but they erected it safely on the Boulevard.

At First and Crescent Streets Frank Green, father of Charlie and Dave, built a small grocery store. The 1926 hurricane put Frank out of merchandising but the store was rebuilt by the Denmans who operated it for many years. Because of age and ill health, the Denmans gave up the store and sold it, along with the adjoining properties, to D.W. Ireland who erected the modern grocery store near the old store site, and put up the gas station on the corner. Now a very modern motel also graces the plot.

Another of the older structures is the Pelican Building. C. L. Yent, in '33, built a wooden store on the site and operated a small grocery for a few years. Yent traded the property to Harry Steel in 1938, and Steel built the present stone building and installed a very up-to-date grocery and market. Subsequently it has housed a photo shop and a bakery as well as serving as post office for several years. The Cotton Shop now occupies the building.

In the trade for the store, Yent was given Pearl Street (both sides from

Boulevard to Bay), and the wood from the old building. From this developed the earliest cottages of the Beachcomber Court.

The first hotel on the Island was built in 1912 by Dr. and Mrs. William Winkler and was called the Winkler Hotel until it was sold to H. A. (Bert) Waite in 1930 and the name changed to The Beach Hotel. Dr. Winkler realized long before most people that the warmth and the salt air was definitely curative, so his original idea was to promote a health resort on his seventy-one acre tract which reached from Gulf to Bay. Later this acreage was subdivided into the Winkler Addition.

As there was neither road nor bridge to the Beach at the time, all materials for the hotel came in by boat and barge. In fact, most of the supplies for the whole Island were delivered by a Koreshan boat which made regular trips from Fort Myers to Estero. The Hotel guests were brought in from Punta Rassa by boat by Joe Williams who maintained this service for the Doctor. At the time the Hotel was constructed, very few people lived on the Island-- Hugh McPhie, the Sanders family at the boat yard, and the H. C. Case family on Shell Mound, perhaps were all.

One of the oldest buildings on the Beach is the Pelican Hotel which was originally a honeymoon houseboat owned by Mrs. Anna Turner. "Ma" Turner moved the boat on to the land at the present site in 1933 and since then, many additions and improvements have been made. Mrs. Gene Bartholomew bought it from Mrs. Turner and operated it until the summer of 1955 at which time Don Zimmer and Garrett Reasoner purchased the building and "Attic" and Esther Reasoner assumed management