

Deale Area Historical Society Archives - 2011.9.4

Wards Living and Working on the Waterfront of Rockhold Creek in Deale, Maryland

In 1928 Luther Leroy Ward, later know as Captain Roy, and his brother James Ward invested money to start a business on Rockhold Creek. The business started as a fishing shanty from which fishing parties would be supplied with ice, chips, sodas, beer and sometimes sandwiches. Keeping the drinks cold was always a challenge. There was no refrigeration and ice had to be order from Woodfield's. A small ice shed was constructed as air tight as possible with heavy timbers and placed near the back door. Ice was delivered in rectangular shaped blocks about 5 feet long, 2 feet wide and weighing over a hundred pounds. It would take two or more men to get the blocks into the ice shed. Once the ice was delivered, James Ward and/or some workers would take an ice pick and pick across the ice to make small blocks. The smaller block would be about 25 pounds and could be carried with ice large ice tongs. The picking would cause enough vibrations to crack the ice. The first thing, early in the morning during the fishing party season, was to "get the beer and sodas iced." Beer and soda bottles, there were no cans at the time, were carefully stacked in bins. A block of ice was placed on top of the drinks and then carefully picked and shaved into smaller pieces, which fell into the bins around the drinks. Care was required to keep the ice clean. Louie Ward would always rinse the ice before putting it in the bins. Depending on the weather and the drinks consumed re-icing was sometimes required. Running out of ice because of hot weather or ice deliveries not made or late was a small disaster if income or goods were lost. It was a seasonal business operating mostly in the summer months. Deale was one of the few places that boats on the bay could pull into for refueling and food. Their businesses thrived.

After a few years, the Ward brothers added a screened in porch. There were no windows. At night and during the off-season boards on hinges were lowered and latch with a hook over the screens. Later this part of the business became known as the Herring Bay Inn and later still as Happy Harbor by which it is still called today. The business at first catered mostly to fishing parties coming mainly from Washington D.C. Isabelle Ward, mother of Leroy and James would make the reservations for fishing parties. Information was kept on a sheet of paper posted by the telephone. For example: a party of 5 for the "Isabelle", party of 10 for the "Vivian". The brothers had 5 boat docks and 4 to 6 working boats. Some of the boats were the "Isabelle" captained by Gilbert Ward, the "Vivian" and the "Lee" captained by Leroy Ward, and the "Gwenie F." captained by Louie Ward. People would also pay to dock their boats at the Ward's piers. The Lee family who owned funeral homes in Washington D.C. kept their yacht at one of the piers for many years. James maintained the yacht.

The brothers started operating the business year round. It also became a place that locals, not just fishermen, enjoyed. It was a 'beer joint' with a jukebox and slot machines. Supposedly, things would get a little noisy on Friday and Saturday nights and Clifford Windsor, who lived across the creek, would call Luther and Isabelle Ward, parents of the brothers, complaining about the noise and asking them to do something about it. Isabelle or Luther who lived right across the street from 'The Place', as the family called it, would walk over and let their sons know that the noise was disturbing some people.

Around 1938 windows replaced the screens and the porch was enclosed. The original shanty became the kitchen. An artesian well was drilled right on the edge of the shore under the kitchen. A pipe took the water into the kitchen. Outside a goose neck shaped spout protruded from the pipe. Fresh water constantly ran from the spout. Lester Ward recalls being told to fill a bucket from the spout underneath the kitchen. He had to walk in the water to do so and cut his foot on a broken

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beer bottle. The spout was high enough that it would not be covered by high tide. Around this time, a large barn like structure had been built right across the road from 'The Place' that provided curbside service to people in automobiles. As more and more people got cars in the 1930's, there was a demand for "fast food" and curbside businesses became popular. People could order drinks and lunches from their cars and the orders were brought to them. The curbside business only offered meals for lunch, which were most often sandwiches wrapped in waxed paper. Isabelle Ward became known for her chicken salad sandwiches. Crabs cakes and fried chicken could also be ordered at times. Drinks included water, sodas and beer. Ice cream was also available. The wives of the Ward brothers helped in the cooking and serving. Luther and Isabelle Ward's home became the "bank" for the Ward brothers' business. A supply of money and change was kept in a suitcase under Isabelle's bed. Lester L. Ward, son of Leroy Ward, remembers running errands from "The Place" to his grandmother's house to exchange bills for coins so the business had change for its customers.

During World War II there was a shortage of beer. Distributors allocated so many cases to the various vendors. The Ward brothers' business was allocated two cases, that's 48 beers, which were delivered on Sunday. Beer only came in bottles at the time and customers drank from the bottles. Glasses or paper cups were not used at the time. Empty bottles were put back in cases and returned to the distributors. Loss of bottles meant loss of profit. The comical aspect of this was the beer drinkers' deep concern for running out of beer. Conversation included other places where one might go to get another cold one. Locally the lack of beer could cause a business to close its doors temporarily.

James Ward mainly took care of the business in 'The Place' and curbside service. Leroy Ward mainly took care of the boats, docks, and fishing parties. One of Leroy Ward's various jobs during the years 1932 to 1935, was delivering newspapers, the Times-Herald out of Washington, over to the eastern shore by boat from Deale. Before daybreak, the papers were delivered by truck and loaded on the boat and then ferried over to Tilghman Island by Leroy. The Washington Post was a minor publication at the time and the two popular evening publications were the Evening Star and Daily News. On one such delivering he took Lester. Lester stated that he was about 5 or 6 years old. On the return trip a sudden storm came up on the bay. Lester remembers his father putting him down in the cabin and telling him to stay put. Lester said he knew then that the storm was really bad and remembers being frightened. All the brothers were involved in some way with boating, crabbing, fishing and oystering on the Bay.

Just before the World War II Louie Ward took over the part of the business operated by his brother James. Louie continued to run the business after the war and until it was sold in 1958 to Ernie Wood, a jockey. This is when Herring Bay Inn became Happy Harbor. The curbside business lost popularity after the war and the building was torn down to make room for a parking lot. Leroy Ward continued to operate boats and take out fishing parties until he retired in 1990.

This information came from Lester L. Ward, son of Luther Leroy Ward and grandson of Luther and Isabelle Ward. Compiles and record by Mary Ward Dindino, daughter of Lester L. Ward.
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