

Museum Around the Corner

The Georgetown County Historical Society Museum

Tuck 'Em Inn' ©

One of the most delightful books about the early days of 20th Century beach life is "Rum Gully Tales from Tuck 'Em Inn" by Pratt Gasque. Every summer, beginning in 1914, the Gasque family began their annual trek from Marion, SC, to the Sunnyside section of Murrells Inlet for their summer retreat. Not many families populated this idealic resort in those early days, but it did not take long for other families from Marion to discover its charms and it became known eventually as "Little Marion".

The Inlet house built by the Gasque family was finished in June of 1914. A "camp-style cottage" of three bedrooms, a large screened in porch that served as dining room and living room, was without electricity or hot water. Artesian wells brought clean water to the tub in the single bathroom and to an outdoor shower. If a hot bath was desired, water was heated on the stove. No entertainment was brought with them, except maybe a few books, but a young boy could fill his days exploring the marshes and inlets, playing with other children of the neighborhood, fishing in the teeming waters, observing nature in the flora and fauna of the verdant area, and using one's own imagination to dream up scenarios of bygone days. Much interest was given to the ebb and flow of the tides. Folklore was related about the natural phenomena of many aspects of ocean side living. As Pratt states in his book, "There were pirate stories, sea stories, murder stories, ghost stories, fish stories, love stories and an occasional true story." These tales and many others filled the evenings sitting on the porch after supper and from these came lifelong memories and a few life lessons.

The preparation for departure from Marion was a frenzy of gathering basic needs, packing them to fit in a Model T automobile and into a rack on top of the cloth roof. Everything but furniture was brought including bedding, curtains, clothes, kitchen utensils and supplies, and even a crate of live chickens was strapped to the running board. The crowded passenger seats were filled with Mr. Gasque driving, 5-year-old Pratt and his mother in the front seat, an aunt and cousin in the back seat with the baby, and two servants. Foods were to be found at the inlet from the glorious seafood to fresh eggs and vegetables from the bounty of local farms. This scene was being played out in many households in Marion as folks began to look forward to their summer adventure.

Rising very early in the morning to prepare for the journey, the loaded Model T began its day-long trek. Roads were poor, speed was kept to a minimum on account of the ruts and bumps jostling everyone aboard. Frequent stops were necessary to put water in the radiator and check the tires which were prone to going flat. If rain was imminent, a stop was made to put up cloth curtains on the sides. A river crossing was necessary at Peachtree Ferry near Conway over the Waccamaw River and a long wooden bridge over the Socastee Creek signaled that the journey was almost over.

Arriving in the late afternoon, the house was unlocked, the car unpacked, and the shutters unbolted. A bright summer lay ahead for a young boy that would instill in him a love of the inlet and all that it holds.

In 1915, the local school burned down. In a few months, work was planned for the building of a new two room schoolhouse. It required the clearing of a forested acre, filled with large oak trees and once this was accomplished, the stumps of the immense trees proved a problem for the playground for the students. Small attempts were made by locals and the students to dig them out proved futile. It would

cost money to hire the work done, so as a fundraiser, the Murrells Inlet community decided to have a play. "Hiawatha" was being studied in the school at the time, so prominent local, Genevieve Wilcox Chandler took on the role of adapter, planner, and director of this ambitious project. Since there were no telephones, radios, or movies in the Inlet, people gathered on Sundays for Sabbath services and at funerals. It was through the school that the children spread the word about the project and soon almost every family was represented at the initial meetings to plan the play. Costumes were created using whatever was on hand, music was ordered and practiced, scripts were written following the original Longfellow poem, "Hiawatha". Preparations lasted almost a year, wigwams were erected, costumes sewn by the hundreds for both children and adults, engineering of methods to simulate a descent from heaven (small pine trees were planted early and a ramp was constructed from their tops to the ground which was very effective), and thousands of sheets of tissue paper and newspapers were cut into small pieces to resemble the snow storm which was an important part of the story. Even the creek became Gitche Gumee resting by the "Big-Sea-Water". How perfect was the setting with the dark forest at hand. At one point in the play, cars had been arranged so that their headlights formed a semicircle of lighting, as effectively as any footlights in any stage.

This was the first outdoor drama performed in the Carolinas. The second year, the Kaminskis sent their yacht from Georgetown and the steamboat *Ruth* arrived filled with Conway guests. Every house in the Inlet was filled with visitors, two to a bed, every floorspace occupied, and more sleeping on cots and hammocks.

As a fundraiser, the goal was certainly met to "stump the schoolyard". Sadly, only the two performances were ever held. World War I intervened, carrying with it many of the young people in the cast, who found themselves fighting in faraway places. Murrells Inlet memories sustained many of these brave men and women and coming home after the war included a trip to the marshes and creeks that brought them the joy of a peaceful childhood.