

# A "LITTLE CRYSTAL BEACH MANOR HISTORY"

By Diane Dower

*Before we start ..... "If in your expert opinion, something here does not seem right, I'm absolutely more than willin' to fix it up as best I might. Person, date, event, or fact ... If I'm wrong, I'll take it back!" ... Diane Dower*


*Facts within are mostly from the combined memories of those who vacationed here or lived in the area. The county courthouse records were also used as reference as well as an article from the Cecil Whig. Some of the memories that I couldn't fit in at this time, I will share with you in other newsletters to come.*

**A Little Background.....** People wishing to go on vacation prior to the advent of hard surfaced roads might have chosen to travel by steamboat or rail. When good roads connecting towns became more commonplace, however, the automobile became the more popular way to travel to one's favorite destination. In our region, folks from Baltimore, Philadelphia, Chester and Wilmington seeking to escape the summer heat, headed for Cecil County. There was plenty of bathing, sunning and picnicking to be found along the scenic Chesapeake Bay at any number of small resorts cropping up here and there to accommodate visitors. Crystal Beach Manor became one such resort. Although I'm told things were fairly quiet down here during WWII, it was otherwise busy with weekend traffic through Cecilton, heavy even in the 1930's. Beaches were crowded with "day trippers" and others staying even longer. These good times continued on until two events caused a long, slow decline at the local resorts. In 1952, the Chesapeake Bay Bridge opened and in 1963 I-95 was completed. It was now reasonable to jump in the car and head for the Atlantic Ocean resorts. Many vacationers continued to come to Crystal Beach Manor and other local resorts, but not nearly so many as before.

**Manor Notes .....** Crystal Beach Manor is situated on a large tract of land called Pearce's Neck. It was a 285-acre farm owned by Barney Reybold in 1880. It may have also been owned at other times in its early history by first the Peorre and then the Uhler families. White Crystal Beach Road, situated between the Archway Inn and the brick entranceway to our beach went down to Reybold's Wharf where there was a deep-water channel, a public landing, and a fishery. Boats came in here laden with fish to sell. One merchant came from Middletown on his horse-drawn wagon with salt barrels on it in which to preserve the fish he bought. The south end of the property was bordered by what is today called Stemmer's Run Creek. It is also known as Pearce's Creek and very early on as St. Alban's Creek. The property's western border is, of course, The Elk River.

In 1914 Dr. Lewis and Mr. John Heldmyer bought the farm and continued operating it as a farm for 11 years. There were peach orchards, wheat fields and cows that walked right down Pennsylvania Ave. to the water. What is the Fireside Restaurant today was the Manor House then. Across the street was the tenant house. Behind the tenant house was a barn and other out buildings. There was a pigpen also on Hilltop. In 1925 the old Reybold Farm was subdivided. Our part was named Crystal Beach Manor and was incorporated in 1926. At this time Dr. Lewis (whose summer home still stands at 46 Bay Blvd.) and Mr. Heldmyer went into the beach resort business.

Although the road from Earleville on down was still dirt, vacationers started coming to Crystal Beach Manor. A wooden gate was built where the brick entrance way is now and a guard by the name of Mr. Reed was posted there to collect a fee to enter. Later the locally famous 'Archway Entrance' was built with cinderblock sides and a wooden top.

Please turn over 

The Manor House became a 6-bedroom hotel in 1932 with a screened-in porch, winding staircase, decorated hallway, and three meals served a day. In 1935 Mr. William Schultz bought out Mr. Heldmyer's share of the manor, and Crystal Beach Manor became the property of Dr. Lewis and Mr. Schultz. By the 1940's, it had a liquor license, country bands on Friday nights, dancing, gambling, and a closing time of 1:00 a.m. that was never adhered to. Rooms were rented up until the early 1960's. It was run at various times by Joe and Kitty Meltz, John and Caroline Brown, Jake and Laura Rittenhouse, and "T-shirt Charlie" and "Black-eyed Dollie" Mowrer from Lancaster.

In 1940 the tenant house was occupied by a lady name Louise Gray who ran the bathhouse that was built on the beach. There was a pump for water outside of the tenant house and later on it became a store selling groceries and gas, and for a short while, a grocery store and small restaurant for serving breakfast and lunch.

Crystal Beach Manor was divided into certain areas. One part of the beach had all state-named streets, another part was a park and picnic area, and one area along Maryland Ave. had tents with or without wooden platforms. By 1932 cabins and cottages were springing up along Maryland Ave and Bay Blvd.

As mentioned, a bathhouse was built with changing rooms, showers, and lockers. There was also an arcade with a wooden plank floor extending out into a small boardwalk and dance floor. An office for Dr. Lewis was built as well as a concession stand located where Reggie and Cheryl's Beach Grill Plus is today. Mr. and Mrs. Shultz ran the concession stand for years. They sold bread, milk, ice cream, soft drinks, and a few groceries. There were also T-shirts for sale and canoe, boat and raft rentals. For a five-year period a couple by the name of Sam and Gladys Felix leased the concession stand from the Shultzs. During this time, the mail was picked up from the post office, brought down to the stand and kept in a box for people to sort through. I've been told everybody read each other's post cards! Another point of interest - Tasty cakes were brought down from Philadelphia and sold at the stand.

In 1945, 21-year-old Alvah Price (twin brother to Alan Price, owner of Twinn's Restaurant in Galena) took over the running of the arcade. He married the next year and he and his wife Hazel ran the arcade with gusto! The building now had a large indoor penny arcade with four-lane duckpin bowling, a gift shop, pinball machines, and bingo. Outdoors there were plenty of rides - a steam train, a small roller coaster, a little Ferris wheel, the "Barrel of Love" ride, a small merry-go-round, and a ride that had automobiles that went around in a circle. At one time there were also pony rides, lifeguards on the beach and a jukebox which provided music for dancing on summer evenings. The large picnic area also held many annual church picnics in its heyday. And, believe it or not - there was a 10 o'clock curfew! The Schultzs continued to run the concession stand while the Prices ran the arcade.

In 1961 Mr. & Mrs. Alvah and Hazel Price bought 100 shares of the beach from Mr. & Mrs. Schultz. Alvah's brother, John Price, bought another 100 shares and Crystal Beach Manor now was owned by the Prices. It is also interesting to note that Miss Lillian, sister to Alva, Alan, and John, worked in the Manor House waitressing and cleaning from the time it opened as a hotel and bar.

In 1970 Gerald M. Exton bought the property. In 1975 Francis H. Gibson purchased it. Eventually, the Brown family of Elk Development purchased Crystal Beach Manor. Unfortunately, all of the old buildings - the arcade, the bathhouse, boardwalk and concession stand burned down one January night in \_\_\_\_\_. But we still have our memories and thank goodness we are writing them down!

*If you have any interesting anecdotes, no matter how trivial, please share them with us. You can call me, Diane Dower (410, 275-2436) or tell us all about them at our August 6<sup>th</sup> brunch and Crystal Beach History/Civic Association Meeting at 11:00 a.m. at the pavilion. Many little memories added up together make for a colorful and rich account of our still vibrant Crystal Beach Manor!*

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For a short while, in the late thirties, Crystal Beach Manor even had its own weekly newspaper – the "Manor Messenger," which featured the Manor Master Team statistics, beach events, church doings, vacationer's social news, local advertising, and goings-on of the Manor Patrol, local history, poetry, household hints, and the occasional international newsflash! Luckily, that tradition continues today with our "Have Your Heard" newsletter and the Civic Association newsletter.

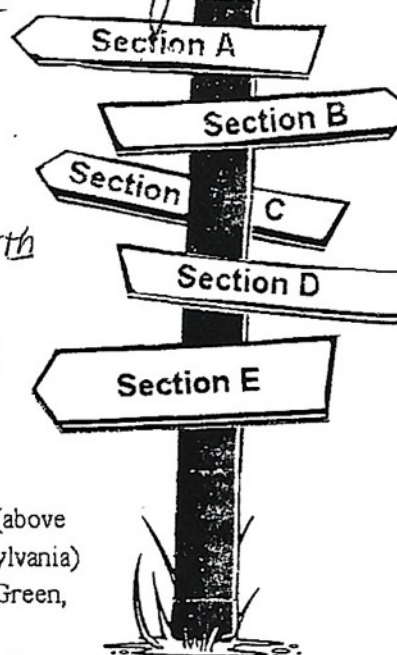
There was also a yearly talent show when Mr. Shultz ran the beach. Edna Weaver (who played piano in the silent movies) played piano at the shows. Elmer Parison on the trumpet and the singing Weaver sisters were big draws to the event.

Finally, each year at the end of the season, vacationers from both White Crystal Beach and Crystal Beach Manor would go out in the water on their boats and serenade each other with bells, horns, and whistles to say, "*So long till the next year.*"

*Likewise, till next time, your History Committee*

Debbie Sherk

# Do You Know Where You Live???



Many years ago Crystal Beach was two separate sections, one of campsites and one of cottages, each having its own civic association. When the two sections merged, one civic association was formed and was incorporated in 1972. Over the years three more sections were added to Crystal Beach including mobile homes which still remain regulated by County zoning. The campsites gradually disappeared, and now wonderfully creative housing is all over the Beach including the mobiles.

Our new civic association found that having these sections was very useful in helping people to get to know one and other and in finding and solving the problems that exist in a community the size of ours. Section directors became elected officers and were included in the bylaws voted upon by the association. Slowly but surely our association has grown now to 197 members representing each section.

• Do you know where you live?

Section A: Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania (to Hilltop), the North side of Delaware (up to Hilltop)

and Bay Blvd. (from Maryland to Delaware Aves.)

Section B: Crystal Beach Blvd., 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and Park Drive + 5<sup>th</sup>

Section C: Florida, Georgia, Carolina, New Jersey, New York, the South side of Delaware (up to Hilltop) and Bay Blvd. (from Florida to Delaware)

Section D: East End, Manor, Lake, Oak and Ash, and Delaware (above Hilltop) and Hilltop (above Pennsylvania)

Section E: 4th, Walnut, Summit, Green, Roberts, Linwood, Beechwood, Elderberry, Glenwood, Softwood, Kent, Cecil, Cedar, Woodside, Birch, Holly, Elm, Reading, Locust, Valley, NoName, Hilltop (from Walnut to Pennsylvania) and Pennsylvania (from Kent to Hilltop)  
So, get in touch with your section director to find out more about your association, discuss problems you may have in your section and ways that you can help.

(Picture reprinted from the Sunday News Journal, November 4, 1979)



Staff photos by Bob Herbert

Sixto Torres, Crystal Beach Manor resident and civic association officer, walks a rutted road that is only one community problem

# CRYSTAL BEACH HISTORY - SECOND DRAFT

(6/06)

*This revised edition of last year's first draft is more detailed and hopefully, more accurate. Please continue to contact me with corrections or colorful tidbits at (410) 275-2436; or mail to Diane Dower, 34 Ash Ave., Crystal Beach, Earleville, MD 21919; or email to bdower@myshorelink.com. This History Committee is especially interested in the location of any of the "Manor Messenger" other than the June 30 and August 12, 1939 copies, kindly shared with us by the Hershey family. We would also enjoy seeing any old photographs, post cards, letters, or any such items of interest. Thank you so much and keep me posted.*

..... Diane

Before hard surfaced roads connecting towns became commonplace, vacationers traveled to the Upper Bay area by water, rail, or horse drawn vehicles. For example, the Wilson Line ran excursions out of Baltimore to Tolchester Beach and Betterton Beach. The popularity of the automobile freed people from the dependence on public transportation, and with improved roads, it became the more popular way to travel to "off the beaten path" summer destinations. In the 1930's Crystal Beach Manor developed into one of these resorts. People from Lancaster, Philadelphia, Chester, and Wilmington came here where there was plenty of boating, bathing, camping, sunning, and picnicking to be found. Weekend traffic through Cecilton became heavy with travelers heading for Crystal Beach Manor and other local spots. Both day-trippers and those who stayed longer vacationed from May to September at Crystal Beach and the other bustling beaches. The opening of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge in 1952 and the completion of I-95 in 1963 contributed to the slow decline of the local resorts in favor of other vacation spots at the Atlantic Ocean. By the 1990's, things picked up again as many people, who had vacationed here in earlier years, decided to make Crystal Beach Manor their permanent home. We now have a vibrant year-round community.

Crystal Beach Manor is situated on a large tract of land called Pearce Neck. Early records indicate that our beach was part, along with White Crystal Beach and Elk View Shores, of a 285-acre farm called St. Alban's belonging to Matthew C. Pearce and his wife. They sold it in 1859 to John Reybold, a member of a distinguished Delaware family. The land was transferred to Barney Reybold and then sold in 1882 to Dr. and Mrs. Uhler, the latter whom was a Reybold by birth. The main house on the farm, known variously as Pearce's Mansion or the Manor House, is today's Fireside Inn. The tenant house was the farm manager's house. The southern boarder of the property was Pearce Creek -- earlier called St. Alban's Creek -- and today also known as Stemmer's Run. The western border was the Elk River. The eastern border was the Woolleyhan Farm and the northern border is the present-day Buttonwood Beach, which, as a matter of local interest, was once the property of Henry Fonda. Elkview Shores at the time was a peach orchard. On the property was Reybold's Wharf (at the end of the present-day White Crystal Beach Road). It was a deep-water channel, which included a public landing and a fishery. Boats came in laden with fish to sell. Merchants came by wagon from as far as Middletown, Delaware to load fish into salt barrels to preserve and sell. Local produce such as tomatoes, corn, grain, and peaches were shipped out of here on smaller vessels that would transport them to larger ships heading for Philadelphia and New York. Some merchants even came in from Baltimore.

In 1914, Dr. Lewis and Mr. John Heldmyer bought the property and continued operating it as a farm for eleven years. In addition to the Manor House and tenant home, nearby there was a barn, different outbuildings, and a pigpen on what is now Hilltop Drive.

In 1925, the old Reybold Farm was subdivided. Our part was named Crystal Beach Manor and was incorporated in 1926. At this time, Dr. Lewis and Mr. Heldmyer went into the beach resort business.

A wooden gate was built where the brick entranceway stands today, and a guard by the name of Mr. Reed was posted there to collect a small gratuity for entering. Later, the locally famous Archway entrance was built with cinder-block sides and a wooden top.

At first, visitors pitched tents around Hilltop and Pennsylvania Avenues. Some were elaborate with wooden floors. Cattle meandered about, making their way down Pennsylvania Avenue and then to the water. Eventually, the cattle had to be roped off and finally moved due to B-B gun incidents. The beach became divided into certain areas. Beyond the tents, it was still all woods. The streets between the Manor House and the Elk River were named for states. The section next to White Crystal Beach became "the Grove" where the concession stand and a picnic area were built. In 1932, cottages began springing up here and there along Bay Boulevard and Maryland Avenue. By 1934, according to the "Manor Messenger", the Manor had "90 houses and 50 camping shacks in the Grove." Original lots were twenty-five feet wide. Some had shallow twenty five foot wells and just about all had outhouses.

By 1942, space rental fees were \$25.00 a year. Fresh water came from a pump at the tenant house and another pump at the bottom of Hilltop. Rainwater was also collected in fifty- five gallon drums or cisterns as it was channeled off the rooftops. Coal oil was used for fuel and kerosene for lighting. Rural electrification did not take place until 1947. The first fifty foot lots began on Delaware Avenue. Dr. Lewis built a house at 46 Bay Boulevard, which still stands. Mr. Heldmyer's house was built at the corner of New York and Bay Boulevard. The roads were oiled to keep the dust down. John Warwick, who owned a lumberyard, built the three log cabins still standing on Bay Boulevard. Our famous "Noname Street" apparently did have a name at one time - Gulleg Lane. The beautifully restored small stone house on First Avenue was originally built as an open-ended dirt floor firehouse. There was a gate near Dr. Lewis' house on Bay Boulevard. At that point the government land began with an open field, a spillway, and then woods. Reading Avenue was named for a family of great singers who lived there. Judging by the lovely line of Sycamore trees on Fourth Avenue, it was the main entranceway to the beach.

In 1932, the Manor House became a six-bedroom hotel called the Manor Inn. It had at least two fireplaces, a screened-in porch, a winding staircase, decorated and wallpapered hallways, a newel post with the date the house was built, several rooms downstairs, and just two bathrooms. It quickly developed a reputation as a place for fun and frolic. According to the recollection of Miss Lillian Price who worked there as a waitress from the beginning, "It was a good hide-out for honeymooners, lovers and gangsters." There also was a boot closet, a laundry, and a kitchen from which three meals a day were cooked and served. By the 1940's, the Manor Inn had a liquor license. There were country bands and dancing on Friday nights with a closing time of 2:00 a.m. that was never adhered to. There were slot machines and roulette wheels that were conveniently hidden in local cottages when necessary. Card and dice games were also held at the Inn and tenant house.

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*Likewise, till next time, your History Committee*

## Crystal Beach Manor Civic Association History Committee

When did you first come to this area?

Where did you come from?

How did you get here?

What was here then?

Do you know anything about...

...the original farm?

...the tenant house (store)?

...the hotel (Manor House)?

...the beach?

...the amusement park?

...the roads (condition, etc.), what houses, tents, etc.,  
were here?

Do you have any old photos that we could borrow, scan on  
the computer, and return to you?

Any other personal memories that you would like to share?