

Palm Pavilion, Clearwater Beach History

According to local historian Michael Sanders, author of *Clearwater: A Pictorial History*, "Local residents in 1910 still reached the island by boat as a bridge was yet to be built. Naphtha launchers, so called because they used naphtha fuel, were available for round trip excursions to the island for the exorbitant fee of \$2.50."

The city built the first wooden bridge to Clearwater Beach. Completed in 1917, it made the island more accessible to the public and opened the island for development.

Nine years later, the Palm Pavilion began. On May 31, 1926, it was incorporated in the state of Florida for the purpose "...to operate a bathing pavilion or pavilions..." by Frederick C. Nelson, Jesse C. Smith initially of Tampa and later of Clearwater, Clay Costigan, John A. Farmer of New York City and later of Madison, New Jersey, and Eugene W. Murray of New York City and later of East Orange, New Jersey. By 1932 the business, Palm Pavilion, located on north Clearwater Beach, listed its main purpose as "bathing pavilion and accessories".

In 1947, Jesse Smith and Nathalie Smith are shown as the officers of the company and the general nature of the business is "public bathhouse and retail merchandise." Records from October 1955 indicate, in addition to being a bathhouse, the Palm Pavilion was now selling sportswear and operating a snack bar.

A year later the snack bar was described as a "Lunch Room." In 1960 John Abner of Clearwater, Florida, joined the organization and by October 1961 the business is no longer described as a bathhouse, but as offering bathing accessories and having a lunch room.

In 1964, the Palm Pavilion was purchased by Howard and Jean Hamilton of Clearwater Beach, Florida and continued the business much the same as the previous owners.

According to Howard Hamilton, "Travel to the beach was much more involved back then. From the 1920s to early 1980s beach pavilions provided changing rooms. Visitors would come to the beach in their street or work clothes, rent space to change into beach attire and store their clothes. When finished on the beach, they could change back into their regular clothing and leave the island."

"Society and dress codes were much more formal then. Wearing a bathing suit any place other than the beach or pool was, well, something you just didn't do," said Jean Hamilton. "Beach pavilions were just a way of life."

In the early 1980s the demand for beach pavilions changed and the Hamiltons removed the bathing houses from the 'Palm,' but continued to maintain their other services.

The day-to-day business is now in the hands of the second generation of Hamiltons. This first major renovation/expansion occurred in 1995 when an outside deck was added to accommodate outside dining and weekend entertainment. In early 2000, the Palm Pavilion further expanded its outside deck seating area and interior group event space, as well as opened a new state-of-the-art kitchen and expanded its menu.

According to the state of Florida, the Palm Pavilion is the oldest operating beach pavilion in the state.

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