



COURTESY FORT LAUDERDALE HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

The Amphitrite, unique hostelry serving Lauderdale beaches during 1930's.

THE AMPHITRITE

James Moses

In the 1930's, one of the most unique hostelries in the world served Fort Lauderdale's beach. Its name was Amphitrite. It was unique because it first was a naval coastal monitor, that is, a veteran warship with combat experience.

Amphitrite, the warship, was the second of that name. The first, originally named Tonawandhut, was completed too late for the Civil War but served at the U.S. Naval Academy from 1866 until 1874 when it was scrapped by Harlan and Hollingsworth of Wilmington, Delaware, and Hollingsworth laid the keel of the second Amphitrite.

Unlike the first vessel which was wooden-hulled, the new ship had a hull of Swedish iron. The plans stipulated a length of 259 feet 3 inches, a beam of 55 feet 4 inches, and a draft of 14 feet 6 inches. Two screws, powered by an estimated 1600 horsepower and fueled by 277 tons of coal, propelled her 3,990 tons.

Commissioned on April 23, 1895, Amphitrite served with the North Atlantic Squadron. She was based at Port Royal and Charlestown, South Carolina, from November, 1897 to January 1, 1898. After the start of the Spanish-American War in April, 1898, Amphitrite

assisted in the bombardment of San Juan, Puerto Rico, even though she was towed most of the way because of her limited coal capacity. The action of the swells and the vessel's shallow draft made her gunnery "very bad" according to official reports, but poor gunnery did little to hinder the disembarkation of troops assigned to occupy San Juan lighthouse. The Amphitrite lost one gunner, dead from heat prostration.

Later accounts claim that the Amphitrite participated in the Chinese Boxer Rebellion but the ship's design, the distance to China, and the limited fuel capacity make this very doubtful. It is more probable that she served with relative tranquility on coastal duties until World War I.

The Great War found the vessel in charge of the torpedo nets in New York Harbor. As part of America's demobilization, the Amphitrite subsequently was decommissioned in July, 1919.

Amphitrite, the warship, was purchased by A.L.D. Bucksten on January 3, 1919, for \$35,500. He transformed the coastal monitor into a nautical hotel, which was first docked in Beaufort, South Carolina, and later moved to Saint Simon's Sea Island, Georgia. Here,



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On the deck of the Amphitrite

ownership passed to the Amphitrite Corporation with Henry G. Bulkley, president.

The "Fort Lauderdale News" of January 3, 1931, announced the arrival of Amphitrite to the Fort Lauderdale area. The Amphitrite first stopped at Port Everglades and later docked between the old casino and the Coast Guard Station (near the present day Swimming Hall of Fame). John Needham, manager of the Broward Hotel, operated his floating hotel. Due to his efforts and the practical novelty of the ship itself, the vessel's guest book indicates that the Amphitrite became quite popular with local residents as well as with tourists.

Depression Era brochures from the hotel boast "unique privacy" away from the "land vibration" of passing autos while offering "every luxury found in a modern country club," only "one block from ocean bathing and a swimming pool." Boats called at the hotel for fishing parties and moonlight trips upon the ocean.

The management stressed that the accommodations were bedrooms, not staterooms. There were seventy-five rooms as well as a lobby and a bi-level dining room. If mealtime should slip away, a smaller, casual dining room offered repast. While the climate made a huge sundeck mandatory, steam heat also was provided should its need arise.

"In keeping with the times," said an Amphitrite advertising card, "rates reduced 25%. The American Plan ranged from \$4.50 to a high of \$6.00 per diem or

from \$25.00 to \$35.00 per week. The European Plan ranged from \$2.50 to \$3.50 per diem."

Rates Reduced 25% in Keeping With the Times

AMERICAN PLAN

\$4.50 to \$6.00 Per Day.
\$25.00 to \$35.00 Per Week.

EUROPEAN PLAN

\$2.50 to \$3.50 Per Day.

Breakfast—*a la Carte*.

Luncheon 75c Dinner \$1.00

Special Rates for Guests at Golf Course.

Boats call at Hotel for Fishing Parties and Moonlight trips on Ocean.

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Guests dined well. A menu from March, 1931, offers filet mignon, oysters, or fricassee of chicken, appetizer, vegetable, soup, fish, salad, beverage, and dessert - for \$1.25. A month later, a similar menu of lamb, or tenderloin with mushrooms, and fresh strawberries and cream cost only \$1.00.

The Hurricane of 1935 blew Amphitrite across the Intracoastal Waterway and beached her in the little cove at Idlewyld (at S.E. 26th Avenue and Las Olas

Boulevard). But the floating hotel continued to be caught in a storm long after the winds subsided.

The controversy began when the Idlewyld-Riviera Corporation, representing the residents adjacent to the cove, petitioned that the Amphitrite be moved. The Corporation received reinforcements in November 1935 when the State Board of Health recommended that the ship not remain at her present position because of the absence of freely circulating tidal waters, usually depended upon to remove the ship's waste. On the strength of this judgment, Amphitrite was declared a public nuisance and ordered to be removed within thirty days. An appeal by the ship's owner resulted in a stay of execution until May 1, 1936. Another extension was granted until June 1. A meeting of the City Commission on May 12 and a resolution on May 26 gave Amphitrite permission to operate until May 1, 1937. April 27, 1937, saw another extension to June 1 for a consideration of \$1,000. Additional one year extensions were granted in May, 1938, April, 1939, and again on June 1, 1940.

Meanwhile, in 1938, Henry Bulkley, Amphitrite's owner, leased the vessel to a Maine hotel owner named Burns, who restaffed both hotel and restaurant with employees from his Northern establishments.

In February, 1940, City Attorney J.E. Ross called the City Commission's attention to an agreement with the State Road Department which granted Fort Lauderdale a limited easement for a municipal park on the property adjacent to the Amphitrite. Ross feared a violation on the grounds that the city continued to grant permission for use by a commercial enterprise. To Amphitrite's defense came a citizen's petition in April, 1940, asking for another year's reprieve and maintaining that the property was properly managed. The petition also pointed out the ship's lure for Northern investors. What loomed more important, however, was that the hotel brought winter tourism (*Cue's Guide* of 1940 referred to the restaurant-hotel as an attraction of some renown). In short, the old Amphitrite directly contrib-

uted to the support of local business. The ship stayed.

But time grew short for the Amphitrite. A meeting on July 13, 1942, granted an extension only until July 21 due to the entrance of the United States into World War II. A final extension set the date of August 21, but before the time had expired, the Amphitrite left Fort Lauderdale.

On a July night in 1942, Amphitrite was moved into the Atlantic and towed into the Potomac River via the Intracoastal Waterway, for War use. When this intention did not materialize, the ship proceeded to anchorage at Elizabeth City, North Carolina, for the duration of the war.

After the War, Bethlehem Steel purchased Amphitrite to use as a floating residence for workers who were building the nearly eight mile Chesapeake Bay Bridge.

In May, 1951, James Hughes, Incorporated, of New Brunswick, New Jersey, representing Patapsco Scrap Corporation of Baltimore, Maryland, bought the aging vessel. The original bill of sale states that the ship would be sold "as is and safely afloat off Sandy Point, Maryland," for \$70,198.08. (The odd amount of \$198.08 reimbursed half of the watchman's service while the ship was off Sandy Point.) The circuitous route for sale is explained in that Bethlehem Steel was parent company of Hughes, Inc., and Patapsco.

Title to Amphitrite officially passed to Patapsco on May 10, 1951. The converted warship and retired restaurant-hotel arrived off Sandy Point on June 12, 1951. Within a short time, Juragua of Pennsylvania, another division of Bethlehem Steel, scrapped Amphitrite.

It may be of some comfort to those of sentiment to know that Patapsco fell to corporate salvagers in the early 1960's and that Juragua became known as the Fabricated Steel Construction Division of Bethlehem Steel before it, too, was gone.



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