

HOTEL DeCRAB

Only one picture exists of the Hotel DeCrab with two Sneakboxes tied up to the porch, canvas sails up. It was found in an old scrapbook; a copy has been given to the Seaport. The small hotel in Beach Haven, NJ was so primitive, and so basic, that no woman would stay there. It was a rooming house for boat captains, hunters, and fishermen.

Originally built as a House of Refuge on the beach in Harvey Cedars, NJ in the 1860's, it was floated by barge down to the Beach Haven bayfront in the late 1880's. Captain Tilton Fox facetiously named it the Hotel DeCrab. Iron beds were lined just a few feet apart on the second floor. What would one do if someone snored?

Behind the lattice on the outside porch was the outhouse. Meals were served from a kitchen on the first floor, depending on who was staying there. The porch and first floor became the gathering place for both visitors and locals alike, as Tilton Fox was known to be a phenomenal storyteller.

The Hotel DeCrab was built (a better word might be secured) on cedar pilings over Mud Hen Creek, which led from Little Egg Harbor Bay almost up into the center of Beach Haven. By 1900 there were a handful of "cottages," numerous houseboats, smaller homes, and two large hotels, the Baldwin and the Engleside. On an ebb tide Mud Hen Creek was filled with raw sewage.

The Hotel DeCrab became a hub for the sporting types who were probably happy to get out in the water and have a day or two away from their wives. As indicated in the picture, Sneakboxes were tied up to the porch rail ready to be sailed out to the bay for a day of hunting or fishing. Others were propped against the porch or literally left upside down in the marshes.

Captain Tilton Fox had a larger Catboat, which he used to bring mail back and forth Beach Haven. Just sailing over to the mainland, picking up the mail in a leather pouch and sailing back, must have been a day's trip. One can easily imagine that he had a companion or two along for the sail, listening to his yarns. His wife cooked and tried to keep the place up as best she could.

By the 1940's the Hotel DeCrab was outdated. It was turned into a private home, the porch was enclosed, and a few rooms were rented during the summer. During the 1960's it was the local hippie house. By the 1980's it had become an eyesore; the owner was ordered to either fix it up or tear it down by the board of health. No one wanted the Hotel DeCrab so it was torn down.

A way of sporting life was gone forever. But the Seaport's re-creation brings back memories of the Hotel DeCrab. Numerous pictures line the walls showing old wooden hotels "down the shore," most of which are long gone today.