

History of the Garden and Sea Inn

New Church is one of the older settlements in the area, founded around 1770.

The basic structure of the Inn building (the present dining room and the Merlot Guest Room above it) was built in 1802 as the Bloxom Tavern – so hospitality was the name of the game already in those days. The kitchen section was added a little later in the 1840's.

Soon after the Civil War, probably around 1875, Mr. W. H. Marshall purchased the tavern and converted it into his private residence. He added the porches to the old structure (they are part of the dining room today) and the section facing the street with Parlor, Foyer, Chardonnay, Nelson and Chantilly room. He was a businessman and had the General Store on the (nowadays abandoned) lot directly south of the Inn.

Marshall died around 1890. The store was taken over by John Nelson and Earnest Johnson. Nelson purchased the Inn as his private residence, Johnson lived in the brick cape cod (build about 1928) right across the street (now Nelson Road).

They also operated a saw mill in New Church and Nelson had a farm which eventually encompassed over a thousand acres in 1892.

Mr. Nelson married in 1896 and had the house remodeled before the wedding. He wanted a Victorian house – and he felt the house was too close to the street. So the front half of the house was cut off and the three stories Victorian façade was added, which is what you see today.

The other half of the building was moved north to where Nelson Road intersects with Route 13 (Lankford Highway). This two story white house became the Nelson Farm manager's residence and was still in his family until it was sold in 2009. It is still there – it is the last house on your left on Nelson Rd right at the intersection with Hwy 13.

Nelson retired from the store in 1943 and died in 1951. The house remained in his family.

In the early fall of 1988, Jack Betz and Victoria Olian bought the main Victorian House and five acres of land from Ruth Nelson, Johns granddaughter.

The Inn started out in 1989 as a restaurant. Jack was the maitre d' and Victoria was the chef. The first lodging rooms (Chantilly and Nelson) were opened in 1991. The bathrooms were added at this time also.

In October 1988, the Garden House was moved to its present location from the corner of Depot Street and Nelson Road (a new double wide is now sitting on this spot). It was remodeled and opened as a part of the Inn in the summer of 1993.

In June 1994, Tom and Sara Baker took over operation of the Inn. Their first expansion was the Chardonnay room in 1996. This room had been a private dining room opening off the main dining room. The bath room was added at that time.

The next addition was the yellow house in the back in 1999. Bakers moved into one of the apartments in the first floor, the other one was occupied by Tom's mother. The second floor was designed to be a guest room - the Chablis suite. Baker's former quarters in the Main House turned to the present Merlot Room. And the Attic Room was added.

We, Dorothee and Thomas Renn, bought the place in March 2008 from the Bakers. Searching for about 6 months and considering about three dozen properties we finally picked the Garden and Sea Inn. We came from Germany to the U.S. to buy and operate a Bed&Breakfast. Both of us had very busy jobs in the past and we were looking not for retirement, but for a slower pace and for a change in lifestyle. Doro was working as a purchaser for women's clothing for a German store chain, Thomas was working as IT Director for a German company group. We took over operation on April 1st, 2008.

After having renovated it, we are living in the apartment Tom's mother was in. And we turned the former Innkeepers quarters to the new Shiraz suite.

Several parts of the inn were in urgent need of a renovation, so we spent the first year renovating the Garden House exterior, porches, Parlor and the Staircase as well as the Main House Dining room and Staircase. On top of that we did some minor repairs on several other guest rooms.

In the Winter 2009/2010 we renovated the Garden House rooms (Champagne, Sandpiper and Lighthouse) and fixed the bathrooms. And we renovated Nelson and Chantilly bedrooms and did some minor repairs in the Chantilly and Merlot bathrooms.

The schedule for summer 2010 is basically repainting all the wood around the main House including the front porch.

We see the beauty of this place and are willing to restore it to its original beauty. This project will take a while and cost some money, so we can't do everything within a few weeks or months. So please be patient with us and check frequently how we are doing ☺. You will see improvements every time you visit us – promised!