

The story of Ocracoke's Island Inn begins with the construction of a meeting house for Lodge No. 194, Independent Order of Odd Fellows, in 1901. And the story of the Odd Fellows Lodge is directly tied to the story of Michael Lawrence Piland (1861-1920), a Gates County, NC, native, the son of a farmer, who moved to Ocracoke Island when he was in his early twenties. Oral history indicates that he left Gates County after his fiancée abruptly canceled their wedding. After moving to Ocracoke, Piland was recruited by members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, as their choir master. He introduced new hymnbooks (with musical notes) which precipitated a division in the congregation. A new church, affiliated with the Methodist Episcopal Church (islanders referred to this as the "Northern Church"), was soon established. Piland continued to play an active role in the life of his church.

In 1887, when he was 26 years old, Piland married a well-to-do widowed Ocracoke native, Lucretia Wahab Farrow (b. 1848), and soon established himself as a prominent citizen and entrepreneur. By 1888 M. L. Piland was owner of the oldest general merchandise store on the island which housed the island Post Office. He was appointed postmaster on February 28, 1888.

In 1897 Piland was instrumental in the establishment of Ocracoke Lodge No. 194, of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, a non-political and non-sectarian international fraternal order founded in 1819 by Thomas Wildey in Baltimore, Maryland. The fraternity's motto, *Amicitia, Amor et Veritas* (Friendship, Love and Truth), is symbolized by three interlocking links. Lodge No. 194 was instituted on September 28, 1897, by Achoree Lodge No. 14 in Elizabeth City, NC.

By 1900 Lodge No. 194 was sufficiently established that the trustees purchased from James and Zilphia Howard a one-acre tract of land "for use as a Lodge room or such other purpose as they may deem proper." A two-story wood frame "Greek Revival" building, the center section of which later became the main section of the Island Inn, was built in 1901 by island carpenter Charlie Scarborough. Formal By-laws were adopted on October 21 of that year. The building housed the Odd Fellow's Lodge on the second floor. A poster displayed by Lodge No. 194 stated, "Our Wildey Has Not Lived in Vain. We Command you to Visit the Sick, Educate the Orphan, Relieve the Distressed, Bury the Dead." Public school was held on the first floor.



Ocracoke Lodge No. 194 and Schoolhouse, ca. 1901, Elizabeth Howard Collection, Ocracoke Preservation Society

Few early records of the Lodge survive, but we know that M. L. Piland served as the Chairman of the By-laws Committee in 1901, and as an early Noble Grand (Presiding Officer). In 1907 sixty-two island men, including business owners, entrepreneurs, clergy, and a railroad/steamship agent were members. Weekly meetings were initially held on Mondays; later, on Fridays. Lodge No. 194 continued to thrive for two decades, until shortly after Michael Lawrence Piland's death in 1920, when it became dormant.



I.O.O.F. Ceremonial Stole,  
Ocracoke Preservation Society  
Collection

According to the "Proceedings of the Grand Lodge, May, 1921," "For the past two or three years we have been putting forth our best efforts to revive several of our dormant lodges. We have had considerable correspondence with the officers of these lodges and in some instances have succeeded in getting them to resume work, but we have found it necessary to take up the charter... of [several, including] .... Ocracoke [Lodge], No. 194...."

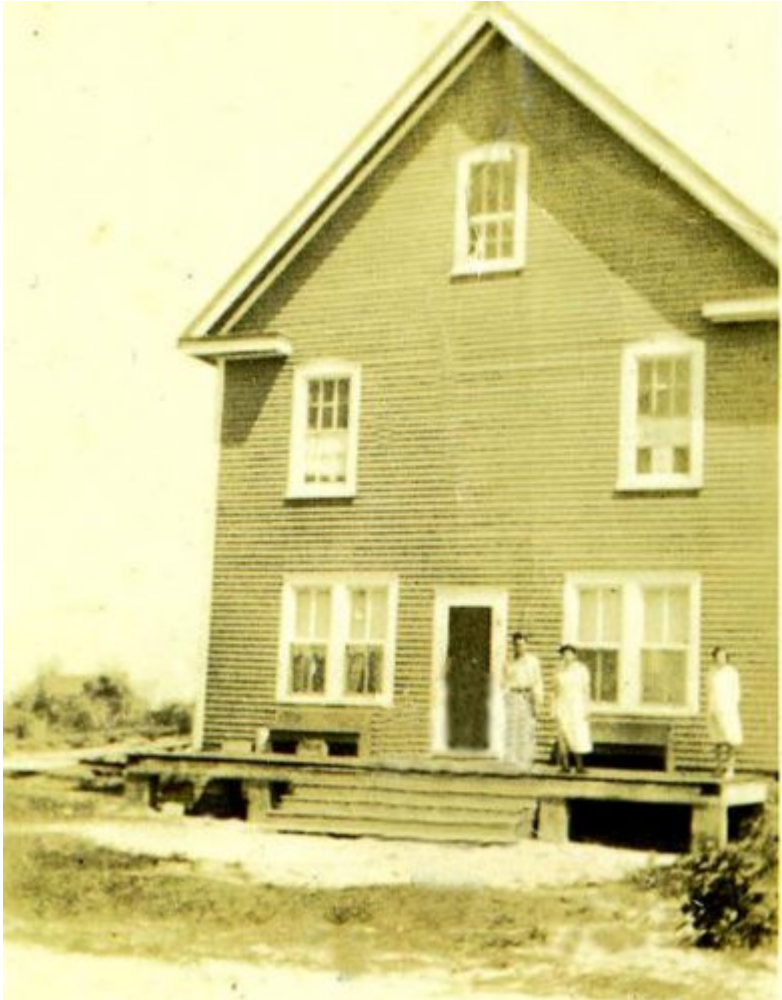
Shortly thereafter, according to the *Annual Session of the Grand Lodge of North Carolina Independent Order of Odd Fellows* for 1923, "Ocracoke Lodge No. 194, at Ocracoke in Hyde County was reorganized May 11, 1922, by Past Grand J. R. Jinnett, special deputy." Almost immediately, "A communication [to the Grand Lodge] was presented from Ocracoke Lodge No. 194, requesting permission to sell a part of their lot for \$15. It was stated that this land

was only good for pasture and was of no service to the lodge. On recommendation of the committee on Appeals and Grievances the Lodge was authorized to complete the sale.”

The continued existence of Lodge No. 194 was short-lived, however. The Grand Secretary’s Report of May, 1925, stated that “Other lodges that have ceased to function since [April 1, 1924 include] Ocracoke No, 194....”

In a letter from W. L. Whitley, Supervisor, dated April 13, 1925, to Brother S. L. Whitmore, Grand Master Greensboro, NC, Whitley writes, “Ocracoke Lodge was defunct at the time of my appointment, and no effort to revive it seems to have been availing. Its active membership has transferred to the lodge in Beaufort.”

Soon after the dissolution of the Lodge, islander Benjamin O’Neal (1880-1939) bought the building for use as a private residence for his family. He contracted with Charlie Scarborough to move it about 600 feet to its present location. When the O’Neals moved to Morehead City, in about 1940, another island native, Stanley Wahab (1888-1967), bought the building for \$700.



Home of Benjamin O'Neal and Family

Soon thereafter Stanley Wahab opened the first commercial business in the building, the Wahab Coffee Shop, with soda fountain and ice cream bar. It quickly became a popular island gathering place. Rooms upstairs became a boarding house. During WWII (1942-46) the upper floor was rented as a Navy Officers Club called the " Crow's Nest."



Wahab Coffee Shop

After the war Stanley turned the building into a hotel. He called his enterprise the Silver Lake Inn. In 1948, Stanley moved decommissioned former Navy barracks to the property, and attached them to the southwest side of the building for use as a dance hall (dubbed the Beachcomber's Club), and later, apartments. In the 1950s he added a two-story wing on the other side of the building for more guest rooms and a dining room. Stanley advertised the "New Silver Lake Inn" as offering "rooms with private or connecting bath, studio apartments furnished for housekeeping, complete restaurant, and excellent cuisine." Liz Styron and Muzel Bryant were the first cooks.



Silver Lake Inn

During the war Stanley Wahab hired mainlanders, Mr. & Mrs. Godfrey, to manage the Inn. Mrs. Godfrey was murdered while on a visit with family and friends on the mainland. The crime was never solved. Mr. Godfrey remained at the inn for a while, but claimed his wife returned nightly to haunt him, and he soon departed. In subsequent years guests at the inn frequently reported strange encounters with Mrs. Godfrey's ghost.

In 1957 Ruth and Bill Cochran moved to Ocracoke to manage the Silver Lake Inn for Stanley Wahab. Bill also operated a charter plane service on the Outer Banks. In the winter he cooked breakfast for guests at the inn. During the warmer months he flew so frequently that he had no time to cook. At that time Wilbur Gaskill worked in the kitchen. Gaynelle Tillet and Geneva Odom were two of the waitresses, and Lizzie Scarborough served as housekeeper.

By 1960 entrepreneur Doward Brugh had purchased the property and re-named it the island Inn. He owned the inn for only a few years. Pennsylvania natives, George and Emilie Wilkes were the next owners. They operated the inn from about 1965 to 1970, then sold the inn to Bill and Helen Styron. JoKo, a popular artist who owned property on the island, decorated the dining room in a piratical-nautical theme. Walls were stained to look like the inside of a sailing ship, fishing nets and buoys were hung from the ceiling, and two large paintings (one of Blackbeard holding his severed head in his hands, and a beach scene) adorned the end walls.



Island Inn ca. 1965

In 1978 native islander, Larry Williams, and his partner, Foy Shaw, bought the Inn. One of Larry and Foy's first major projects was to add a modern apartment on the back of the building. They made a number of other changes, including redecorating the dining room. The fishing nets and other nautical decorations were removed, and for a while an aviary (with a parrot, parakeets, and peacocks, as well as plants and vines) was installed on the porch. In 1978-79 Alan and Liz Piper, an English couple who had sailed to Ocracoke in their 48' ferro-cement ketch, managed the restaurant. When Alan and Liz returned to England the next year island native Chester Lynn was hired by Larry and Foy to manage the restaurant. In 1986 Chester leased the restaurant and dubbed it the Dew Drop Inn. The restaurant thrived under his oversight. In 1988 Larry and Foy had luxury suites and a swimming pool built across the road. The suites were later converted to condos.

In 1990-1991 two couples, Buffy and Ann Warner and Bob and Cee Touhey, leased the Island Inn. Chester's lease of the restaurant was not renewed. One year later Buffy & Ann Warner bought Howard's Pub, and relinquished their interest in the Inn. In 1992 Bob and Cee purchased the property outright. Cee's sister-in-law, Sally Newell, was enlisted to help manage the inn and restaurant.

Over the next several years personal, financial, and banking issues conspired to jeopardize the Island Inn. A foreclosure auction in 2010 threatened the future of the property, but Thomas Storrs, a member of the extended family, purchased the inn. Family members



operated the business for several years, but by 2015 the inn was again on the market. Unfortunately, major repairs and renovations to the century-old structure were now necessary, and the island community feared the historic building would be torn down by new owners, and this iconic example of Ocracoke Island history would be lost forever.



Island Inn ca. 2015

In 2018 an ad hoc committee was formed to save the Island Inn from destruction. As of this writing in April, 2018, negotiations are on-going for Ocracoke Preservation Society, with help from Hyde County and the Ocracoke Occupancy Tax, to purchase the Island Inn.