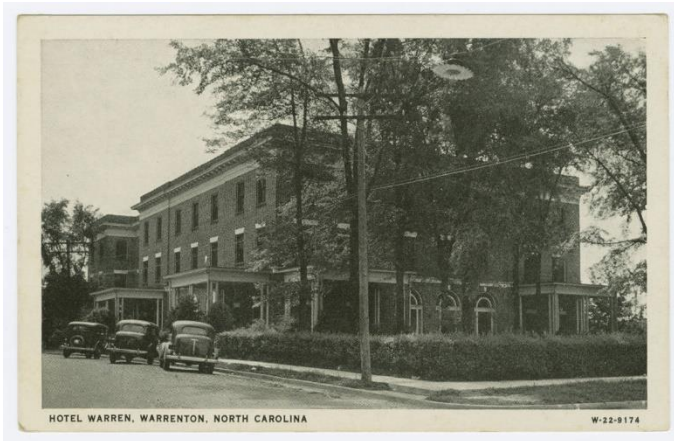


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## Warren County Historical Tidbits: Warrenton, “The Town That Owns Itself” Part II

Here’s the “rest of the story”...

When we last left the story of our venerable “Hotel Warren”, it was the summer of 1959. Due to mounting operating costs, needed renovations and fewer visitors needing rooms the Town decided to close the hotel on August 1, 1959. Now, I honestly believe that if this had happened in just about any town or city across the country, that would have been the end of the story...and likely the hotel would have sat abandoned for a number of years until falling victim to a random fire or the elements and then being torn down sometime in the 70s or 80s. But remember, **this** story took place in Warren County. What happens next is the stuff of Hollywood movies and a shining example of what makes life here in Warren better...



At a moment’s notice that summer, a group of Warrenton residents gathered and formed a non-profit **Hotel Warren Committee** to keep the Hotel open and running. Now, let that sink in for just a moment...rather than lose the town’s (and county’s) only remaining hotel that had served the community for 40 years...rather than lose a meeting place for nearly every civic group in town...rather than lose a restaurant that residents depended on daily (and especially for Sunday Brunch after Church)...and rather than just accepting

that the Town would lose thousands of dollars in property taxes and income...a group of citizens gathered together and said, “We’ll run the Hotel...and do it at a profit!”

The remaining telling of our story is thanks to The Warren Record (who donated space for a weekly column for at least a year, possibly two, for this citizen’s committee to promote the fundraising efforts for the hotel & the Warren County Memorial Library for their absolutely incredible archives containing personal papers and account of this chapter in the life of our Hotel.

It seems that in August 1959 several immediate needs were very obvious. First, in the prior 10-15 years the physical state of the hotel had depreciated. Rooms needed painting, furniture needed repairing, drapes were worn and faded, decorative “niceties” were needed. Second, as a result both cash and decorative items – and more importantly labor – were needed for the hotel. And finally, someone needed to run the hotel and the restaurant.

From what I can read, and infer, from the newspaper articles, the Hotel Warren became a unifying cause for the community unlike any other in many decades. General Claude T. Bowers served as president of the Committee and his wife jumped in with talent, money and hard work. Their first fund-raiser netted the project more than \$2,700 in much needed

cash, but even that tidy sum wouldn't have gone very far if they had to pay for labor and paint and bedspreads and pillows and...and...well, you get it.

This is when the story really gets good! Thanks to a notebook kept by Mrs. Bowers and several Warren Record articles, we have the names of at least 58 neighbors who stepped up with their time and talents and furnishings to renovate this hotel. And not just individuals, but it seems every club in town from the Lions to Rotary to the Little Garden Club to the Warrenton Woman's Club and more made the Hotel Warren "their" project. And what about the businesses? Well, whenever lightbulbs were needed for the exterior parking lot, a quick trip to W. A. Miles got a free replacement...one of scores of donations from businesses I found.

And then, what I found in reading truly made me stop in wonder...this hotel became almost an extension of people's private homes when the call went out to every lady in town, "Do you have old lamps or tables or bedspreads or anything you're not using? Donate it to the Hotel Warren and help decorate a room." And people did in droves! In fact, from my research it seems that each of the 32 rooms were eventually redecorated, along with the common areas, with fine furniture and accessories from County attics.

What a great lesson...local people took their time, talent and things they didn't need and gave them to a cause bigger than themselves...and ended up keeping a business running and saved a treasure for future generations. It's something we need to remind ourselves today when we're faced with a challenge: we already have the knowledge, experience and skills here in our neighbors, we just need someone to step up and lead the charge.

<i>Colonial Lodge Dining Room</i>	
GOOD MORNING. THIS IS YOUR BREAKFAST MENU.	
FRUITS (In season)	JUICES: Small .10 — Large .20
GRAPEFRUIT ----- .25	ORANGE
CANTALOUPE ----- .25	GRAPEFRUIT
GRAPEFRUIT SECTIONS - .25	TOMATO
CEREAL ----- .25	PRUNE
<b>No. 1</b> .75	<b>No. 2</b> 1.10
Two Eggs With Bacon, Ham or Sausage Toast, Butter and Jam Coffee or Tea	Two Eggs with Country Ham (when available) Toast, Butter and Jam Coffee or Tea
<b>No. 3</b> .60	<b>No. 4</b> .60
One Egg With Bacon, Ham or Sausage Toast, Butter and Jam Coffee or Tea	Two Eggs With Toast, Butter and Jam Coffee or Tea
<b>No. 5</b> .45	<b>No. 6</b> .90
One Egg With Toast, Butter and Jam Coffee or Tea	Colonial Lodge Special One Egg With Two Hot Cakes Toast, Butter and Jam Coffee or Tea
<i>1960's Colonial Lodge Menu</i>	
Bacon, Ham or Sausage Syrup and Butter Coffee or Tea	Hot Griddle Cakes With Syrup and Butter Coffee or Tea
<b>No. 9</b> Juice, Toast, Butter and Jam, Coffee or Tea .40	
Coffee or Tea .10 — Sweet Milk .15 — Buttermilk .10	

But is that ALL of the story, Craig? Good question! And the answer is no, but the history is getting harder to track down. From what I can tell, the Hotel Warren Committee ran the hotel successfully until about 1964 showing a profit each year. Around that time it was either sold or management transferred because in '64 and '65 stories appeared in the Warren Record about the Colonial Lodge (I had wondered when that name officially came to be). It still seemed to be partially a hotel for a number of years, but gradually changed into full-time apartments (its role today)...maintaining a very popular restaurant for a number of years. The last "official" sale I can find occurred in 1993.

So thanks to "The Town That Owns Itself" in the 1910's and 20's...and neighbors taking charge in the '60's, in just 5 years we'll be able to celebrate once again as a community when the grand old Hotel Warren turns 100. Wherever you turn in Warren County we have a jewel...

"Warren County Historical Tidbits" is a project of The Chamber of Commerce of Warren County.