

# 'Mr. and Mrs. Mac' turned Sunnyside up

By Diane M. Ulrich

Special sections editor

It almost seemed like old times.

"This was Miss Carter's from Aberfoil, Ala.," Mary Munson, 70, reminded her sisters, Grace Penn, 82, and Ruth Ellen Norman, 74, as she pointed out the windshield to a weathered little cottage across from the Gulf of Mexico.

"That belonged to the Carrolls from Ozark, Ala.," she gestured to another cottage circa 1935. "If you know anything about south Alabama, you know they were prominent people from that area ..."

Her narrative continued as she piloted her car down Front Beach Road. "They had a servant's house behind there, as they still have. Everybody came down and brought their wives and children and at least one servant who stayed with them in the summer — the 'richy-richos' we called them."

At that, the sisters giggled. Just like old times.

Grace turned to look out the rear window — there was the little house where she stayed during World War II.

And Ruth Ellen, well, being the middle child, she just wanted to get her two cents in.

"My daddy and I used to

guess where everyone was from just by their accents. We had a game going to see who could guess most accurately. Then we would either ask them or go out and check their license plate. We got so good at it!"

The sisters were obviously enjoying their little trip down memory lane, which began at Munson's cottage on First Street and ended at a weed-choked concrete slab off Front Beach Road — all that remains of the house their daddy, M.E. McCorquodale first built when he homesteaded Sunnyside.

Located at the west end of Panama City Beach just past the "Y" at State 79 and U.S. 98, Sunnyside today is but a shadow of the elite retreat it once was — a halcyon sanctuary carved from a lonesome wilderness where wild cows and pigs roamed, and the only beach inhabitants were sea turtles, pelicans and scrub oak.

It's time, the girls will tell you, that the real story of Panama City Beach's development be told.

## BIG MAC ATTACK

The McCorquodale sisters were 13, 5 and 6 months old and their brother Lawson ("Corky") was 11 in 1925 when their parents — whom everyone called

..... See **SUNNYSIDE** page 6

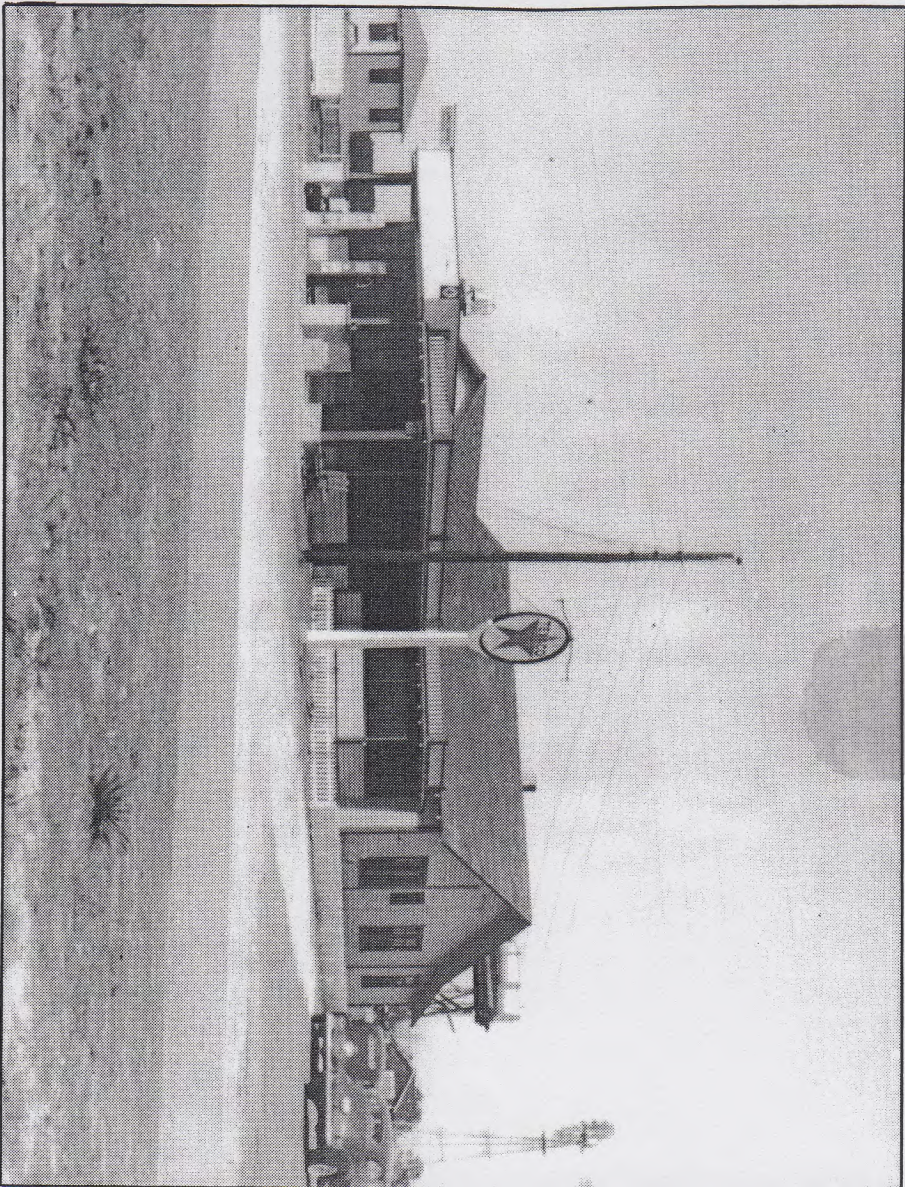


Photo submitted

The McCorquodale house, replete with grocery store, post office and Texaco filling station was the central gathering place during the halcyon days of Sunnyside. The McCorquodales were the catalysts for the development of Sunnyside into a beach resort area from an area where wild cows and pigs roamed.

# SUNNYSIDE: Bay resort sprang from wilderness

From page 4 .....

"Mr. and Mrs. Mac" — filed a claim to homestead a parcel of land along the Gulf of Mexico. Per the homestead agreement, McCorquodale had to cultivate a certain percentage of the land and live on it for at least 14 months.

He moved his family from Chibley to the land, he called "Sunnyside." At that time, there was no road access there — just a promise of a highway built all along the Florida coast. McCorquodale used two oxen to clear away the thick cover of prickly pear and palmetto with "roots that reached to China."

The wild pigs running through the palmetto were "jarred up," Penn recalled. Her father planted peas, corn, okra, sweet potatoes and "watermelon like you would not believe."

Corky often went down to the beach with a large pan and offered the commercial fishermen a quarter for a pan full of fish from their nets. It was the girls' job to chase their cow, Brans, whenever she escaped her pen to romp with the wild bulls on the "The Big Hill."

"My mother and father were really pioneers, but we all sacrificed," Penn said. Without a bridge into Panama City, the family relied on what it farmed, found or bought from West Bay,



Photo submitted  
M.E. and Mary Emma McCorquodale developed Sunnyside.

Chibley or Bonifay.

"We didn't make a living down here," Norman added. "We lived off what we made."

Fourteen months came and went, but M.E. McCorquodale remained.

"He saw the possibilities of a resort there," said Penn. "As everyone said, he really was a visionary."

But his dream had to wait. The McCorquodales left their homestead for two years until the late summer of 1933, when the Gulf Coast highway — Road 10 — finally edged up to the "y." Mr. Mac himself pitched in on

the construction to hurry along the project and raise money to develop his property, which he had platted and divided into lots and streets.

When the highway was finally complete, McCorquodale built six rental cottages and hauled in clay and gravel for side streets.

"We had to warn visitors to stay on the main roads; otherwise, they'd get buried up to their axles in the soft sand," Norman recalled.

"A... still they got stuck," Munson chuckled.

McCorquodale promoted Sun-

nyside to families from south Alabama and north and west Florida as a place to spend their summer vacations. Somehow, in the midst of the Depression — and without a phone, running water or electricity — his idea worked.

"He was an excellent salesman," Norman said. "He sold this area. The folks from Panama City never considered the beach valuable at all. He tried to tell them what it was going to mean to the whole area if they would help him get it developed."

McCorquodale built a tall windmill, dug a well and put up a tank to pump water into the cottages. Then he convinced Panama City officials to bring electrical wiring down to Sunnyside and hang it on the utility poles he paid for out of his own pocket.

A survey of Panama City's beach resorts, published May 11, 1936 in *St. Andrews Bay News*, described Sunnyside as "so marvelously developed." It exalted its "beautiful scenery, brilliant sunshine, gorgeous sunsets, exhilarating breeze and health-dealing salt atmosphere." It was "the place for the tired business man with a family, where he can thoroughly enjoy all the comforts of home, relax, fish, bathe and just lie around and take life

easy."

## GLORY DAYS

Sunnyside was The Place in the late '30s and early '40s. Thus began the "second steading era," when McCorquodale convinced visitors to purchase lots and build permanent vacation homes there.

"He liked the bank prettier and owners of companies forth, because they were only ones that could afford it," Munson said.

But Mr. Mac never away anyone who loved beach as much as he. He bartered off some of his trading for lumber, pipe, gravel and other building materials. To those who had not trade or who couldn't afford homes, he offered to rent property out for a small fee — a modest price even by 1930s standards.

Mrs. Mac and the girls busy building a grocery business on the beach. They sold vegetables brought in from Florida and south Alabama. They bought milk, butter, eggs to sell to residents.

"All this time, Papa is working on getting a post office," Munson recalled. "He makes

See RESORT page 8 .....

# RESORT:

From page 6 .....

trips to Washington with his lawyer, Barry Brown, and talks to Bob Sikes, the congressman who is a good friend of his and, finally, he did get it." Mrs. Mac became the first postmistress of Sunnyside.

"My mother was behind everything," Norman grinned.

The McCorquodales gabled an addition onto their house for the new post office and burgeoning grocery store, replete with Western Union service, weather station — a flagpole where they ran up squall and hurricane warnings — a Texaco gas pump and "the only pay phone on the beach."

Business tycoons weren't the only summer residents at the resort. Schoolteachers and ministers were also attracted by its "family atmosphere," where children could play safely and liquor was not allowed.

A devout Presbyterian, Mrs. Mac invited visiting ministers to speak on Sunday afternoons, bringing prayer services and Sunday School classes right into her living room. The "pews" were her sofa, dining room chairs, and the front porch swing. Sometimes, crowds spilled into the street, especially when dignitaries like Judge

See HOME page 10 .....



Photo submitted

Some of the original cottages from the McCorquodale era of Sunnyside still stand today.

# HOME:

From page 8

Leon McCord spoke, or during World War II when gas rationing kept many church goers from driving into Panama City.

"My mother and father believed everyone should be true to their country and true to their God," Norman said. The McCordquodales were posthumously honored for helping bring the Presbyterian faith to Panama City Beach, the forerunner of the Gulf Beach Presbyterian Church today.

As a patriotic gesture, Mr. and Mrs. Mac organized a voting precinct in Sunnyside. They opened their rental and private cottage to wartime shipyard workers which, Munson hinted, had its side benefits.

"We got to meet all the cute boys," she smiled.

She recalled nightly beach bonfires and get-togethers at her parents' home.

"Whichever one of us Papa didn't have doing something else would run around to all the houses and tell them to come up at a certain time and they could meet all the young people," Munson said. "Everybody got to know each other. That's why they always came back."

Even today, Munson occasionally runs into someone who remembers meeting at the old Mc-

Corquodale house to sing songs around the piano, play games or listen to the radio.

Throughout the boomtown era, McCordquodale maintained his political correctness.

"He was an ecologist before it was popular to be one," noted Munson. "He didn't want the beach destroyed by building on the sea hill, with palmetto and scrub oak and sea oaks on it. He said, 'If you leave that vegetation there, the sand is going to stay there. If you destroy it and put buildings on it, it's going to erode and you're not going to have a beach.'"

He dedicated the beach to Sunnyside property owners, which set the precedent for two other dedicated beaches, Bid A Wee and Laguna Beach. **CALLING THEM HOME**

By 1945, all the cottages and lots were sold. The war had changed the esprit de corps of Sunnyside. And, Mr. Mac's allergies were getting the best of him. He sold the grocery business and moved with his wife to Savannah, Ga.

M.E. McCordquodale died in 1953; his wife followed in 1960. Lawson "Corky" McCordquodale passed away in 1965; his widow, Catherine Balcom McCordquodale lives in McLean, Va. She has a sister in Panama City Beach whom she and her three daughters visit every summer. Mary Munson is the only Mc-



The News Herald/Tom Needham  
Sunnyside circa 1994, as it appears from the site of the old McCordquodale homestead.

Corquodale left at Sunnyside. She and her husband, Dr. Ed Munson have a primary home in Clinton, La. They have three children and, she quickly adds, "they all love the beach."

"I have never missed a summer in Sunnyside," she said. And, judging by the "wall to wall cots" she's set out over the years, neither have many of her relatives.

Ruth Ellen lives in Austin, Texas. Her husband, T.A. Norman passed away; she has two children.

Grace has three children: she lost her husband, Donald Penn 34 years ago. After living in Washington D.C. and other parts of the country, she finally settled in Tallahassee.

"I've always wanted to live in a home where you lived for generations and didn't move," she mused. "And I have gone from pillar to post."

But wherever the McCordquodales may roam, you can bet Sunnyside is never far from their thoughts.

"Sunnyside is home, and yet

it's not the old home," Norman shook her head. "The old is gone and the people knew for so long are not anymore. But the beach is — it always is home."

Time hasn't dulled her memory of her father's proud words:

"Every time I'd come to he'd say, 'Looks more like York City every day, doesn't it? One of these days, maybe, it's going to be built solid from here to the bridge

**Renter insurance  
is important.**

**Page 21**

**New Home  
Showcase.**

**Page 32**

