

SHORE HAVEN'S INTERESTING HISTORY



The Verona model as shown in the 1923 Sears catalog. The Mayer family purchased one and called it Shore Haven.

Sears, Roebuck and Co. sold over 100,000 prefabricated homes between 1908 and 1937, and the Sanibel Historical Village is proud to have two of them. With 450 Honor Bilt designs, from mansions to summer cottages, Sears hoped to sell the furniture to fill them. Brothers Ross and Martin Mayer of Erie, Pennsylvania, had visited Sanibel in the 1920s and bought bay-front acreage. The family business was construction and eventually both brothers would build their individual Honor Bilt homes.

In 1924 Ross and Daisy Mayer ordered the Verona, a Dutch Colonial design home. Elinore Mayer Dormer related that her parents paid about \$4,000 for the seven-room, one bath pre-cut home. As the home arrived in phases, Ross Mayer completed the house with the help of several workers. The home had a garage, servants' quarters, rain water cistern, and an outdoor laundry. Eventually both homes, Shore Haven and Morning Glories, would share a generator, an artisan well, a long dock and a bathhouse. And of course most of the furniture was from Sears.

Ellie Dormer remembered that the house came with a leather bound instruction manual. On the stormy day that the barge arrived, some of the bundles of wood slid off the barge and the Mayer children walked up and down the shore looking for the pieces. Every piece of wood was cut and numbered as to its place in the house. The barge unloaded at the Bailey dock and Model T's brought the bundles to the site. After the house was framed, the next shipment arrived with windows, then shingles, trim, wiring, plaster, plumbing fixtures, and enough paint and varnish for three coats. Ellie remembers having extra

paint and nails for years. She also remembered that the plaster walls and ceilings did not hold up well in the Florida heat and humidity. It simply fell off in chunks and eventually the Mayers replaced the plaster with Masonite and lattice strips.



Shore Haven as it looked February 28 of this year, in place at the Sanibel Historical Village

The second house was soon built (Morning Glories, a Springwood model, cost a modest \$2,211) and the Mayer families used them as winter residences, enrolling the younger children in the Sanibel School. These were years of troubles as well as adventures. The hurricane of 1926 left their new home unscathed, and Bailey's General Store and Miss Charlotta's Tea Room were their new neighbors. Then, in the early 1930s, the Mayer's Pennsylvania construction business failed as the country went into the Depression. Ross Mayer passed away, leaving his widow with debts and two young children. The older children pitched in and made sure everyone got a chance to go to college and two of the five graduated. Daisy Mayer refused to declare bankruptcy and sold their Erie properties to pay their debts. Daisy Mayer returned to Sanibel when she could and by WWII she moved back permanently. Isaiah and Hannah Gavin were caretakers for the Mayers and for a while stayed in the two-room guest house. After Daisy Mayer passed away in 1969 the home was often empty.

In 1977 the home sold to Doris and Robert Potts who were careful to preserve the original details of the house. They did change the main entrance of the home to be on the south side, as the bay road, now Bird Lane, ran south of the property. Harrison and Mary Hummel bought the property in 1983 and enlarged the sun room.

Larry Thompson bought the property in 2004 and lived there with his family. His intention was to build a bigger home. They eventually moved to a larger home in Fort Myers. Terrance and Brenda Cassaday bought the home in 2008. After being seasonal residents, they decided they needed a larger home and in 2012 they donated Shore Haven to the Sanibel Historical Museum and Village.

As the Historical Village celebrates its 30th Anniversary this year, much work is under way to make the village better than ever. A 30th Anniversary Campaign is in progress with a \$200,000 goal. A dollar-to-dollar Challenge Match has begun for all gifts made from February 1 up to \$45,000. All are invited to participate.

The campaign will culminate in a party March 20 beginning at 6 p.m. on the village grounds. In addition to cocktails, dinner, and a live auction, music will be provided by Island Jazz. Victor Mayeron will serve as master of ceremonies. Reservations are required by March 17, and tickets are \$150 per person. To make a reservation, call museum manager Emilie Alfino at 472-4648. Seating is limited, so don't delay.