The Inn at Shearer Cottage, est. 1912
Oak Bluffs, Martha’s Vineyard

General History

Opened in 1912, The Inn at Shearer Cottage (the “Inn”) has been continuously owned and operated by members of the Shearer Family. The Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture (Washington D.C.) and the Martha’s Vineyard Museum both feature the Inn’s story in permanent exhibits. The property is the first stop on the Martha’s Vineyard African American Heritage Trail.

Early Photos

See attached exhibits for early photos of the Inn.

History of Renovations (based on oral family history)

4 Morgan Avenue was purchased by Henrietta and Charles Shearer in 1903. At that time, the property consisted of a single family home (the “Main House”). Soon after this purchase, a concrete slab was laid next to the Main House to operate an “open air” laundry business. In 1912, the Main House was renovated (presumably expanded) to include twelve guest bedrooms, several shared bathrooms and an industrial-quality kitchen facility. The laundry business closed in 1917 or soon thereafter.

After 1912, the property went through three significant changes. First, sometime between 1925 and 1930, the concrete slab originally used for the laundry business was enclosed and converted into several guest rooms and shared bathrooms (the “Bungalows”). Second, in the early 1950s, the Shearer family purchased 7 Highland Avenue (approximately 21,000 square feet of undeveloped land), which sits directly behind and abuts 4 Morgan Avenue. Soon after this second land purchase, the Main House was expanded onto 7 Highland Avenue to accommodate onsite laundry, storage and a staff bathroom. A two-room building was also constructed on 7 Highland Avenue directly behind the Main House (innkeeper quarters and additional storage). And finally, in or around 1970, the interiors of the main house and the bungalows were converted into six “efficiencies” equipped with kitchenettes and private bathrooms. The Inn ceased offering food and beverage services after this most recent renovation.

The Shearer family is not aware of any other major renovation or reconfiguration of the property.

Operations

The Inn accommodates overnight guests and private gatherings. Historically, private gatherings have included reunions, retreats, intimate weddings, bridal showers, commemorations, conferences, workshops, fundraisers, lectures, and similar cultural experiences. All such gatherings were by invitation only.

Upon reopening, the Inn will offer daily, weekly and monthly rates, “whole house” packages and private event rates during months May through October. During the off season (months November through April), the Inn plans to offer whole house packages and private event rates only (no daily rates). To the extent practicable and depending on demand, the Inn may operate at daily rates year round.
All private gatherings held on the property will begin after 9am and end before 8pm. All outdoor gatherings with magnified sound (e.g., cultural experiences, lectures) will be limited to Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays between 12noon and 6pm.

**VTA Passes**

To encourage the use of public transportation and to ease the need for private transportation while guests visit the island, the Inn will explore purchasing VTA daily passes in bulk and offering them to overnight guests.

**Employee Housing**

Historically, the Shearer family operated the Inn and usually owned separate private residences within close proximity to the Inn. The “staff” generally consisted of members of the Shearer family and local island contractors. However, from time to time and as necessary, a Shearer family member or other individual has lived onsite to support the Inn’s operations.

After renovation, the Inn expects to continue its existing relationships with local island contractors. For smooth operations and guest convenience, the Inn may hire one or more dedicated hospitality managers and may provide onsite housing as part of an employment agreement. The Inn may also barter with other local business owners who seek housing for their senior staff members.