

The Nansemond, a popular Ocean View resort hotel for more than 50 years, began in 1907 when Mr. & Mrs. C.A. Baker opened their residence to lodge a few out-of-town visitors to the Jamestown Exposition. The Bakers so enjoyed the innkeeping business that they added 15 rooms to their home and christened it The Nansemond. The original hotel burned in 1920 and was rebuilt as The New Nansemond in the

summer of 1928, under the direction of Otto Wells, owner of Ocean View Amusement Park. A grand structure of Spanish design, it was advertised as "a bit of old Spain" with 115 bright sunny rooms at \$5-\$9 a day, American plan, open year-round.

In 1942 the Nansemond was taken over by the federal government and became headquarters to the Amphibious Training Command, Atlantic Fleet. Troops stationed there conducted embarkation and landing exercises day and night on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay and more than 40 successful assaults on enemy beaches were planned and practiced there, including Operation Torch, the invasion of North Africa.

The Nansemond returned to civilian life in July 1945. Many long-time Norfolk residents will remember attending high school proms in the hotel's ballroom, watching the stars from the colonnade on a summer evening, or visiting the Torch Room, a museum dedicated in the hotel's lobby in 1969 to commemorate the role that the Nansemond played in World War II. The Nansemond's charm gradually faded and, by the 1970s, many of its residents were the indigent, working odd jobs in exchange for room and board. The hotel was destroyed by fire in 1980.

Pages from Norfolk's Past are researched and written by Peggy Haile McPhillips, City Historian

