

# *Santa. Ducks. And Baked Bread A Christmas Memory!*



The Holiday rush is once again in full swing. Halloween ghosts and ghoulies scare us. Thanksgiving turkeys fill us. And the twinkling lights of Christmas thrill us. These festive times are filled with family, friends and the joy of holiday memories.

Many of those memories are wrapped in a pretty package of delightful smells. Candy corn. Pumpkin pies. And oyster dressing, thick with bell peppers, parsley, and smoked sausage. Come Christmas, the air's filled with the sweet scent of cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, and evergreen.

But there's another smell that conjures Holiday memories—fresh baked bread! For those of us who were privileged to have been born and reared on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, we know that smell came from only one place: the old Colonial Bakery.

The Colonial Bakery, once located in Gulfport on Pass Road, was opened in 1946 by Mr. Patrick Murphy. By 1948, the bakery had grown into an “organization with employment for 100 persons and an annual payroll of \$300,000,” the Daily Herald stated. The paper also stated that “One of the outstanding features of the Colonial organization is the excellent relationship that exists between

employee and employer. It is the result of work on the part of both management and labor, with each group willing to share in building a growing, prosperous business.” And grow and prosper it did!



For the next forty years, the Colonial Bakery was one of THE most popular local sites to visit. Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops, along with local clubs like the Pentagon Club, the Gulfport Tourist Club, and the Rotary Club, called the place home. The old bakery was famous for it conducted plant tours, along with baby loaves of bread that were handed out once the tour ended. The bakery's



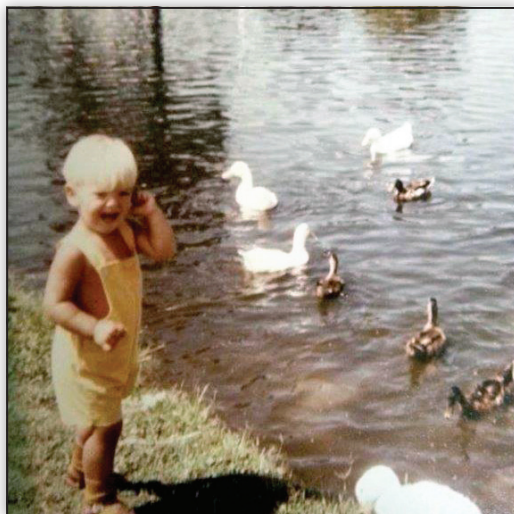
spacious grounds and picnic sites were also one of its calling cards. According to the Herald, the bakery garden had been “a pleasant spot to look at since 1946 when founder Patrick Murphy conceived the idea for the grounds.” The Herald also noted that the people living around the bakery called the grounds Colonial Park.

Over the years, Colonial Park had several gardeners, who kept the grounds manicured all year round. One of the earliest was Mr. Otto Moody. Under his leadership, graceful pine trees and shady live oaks were planted. They lined paths that meandered through the gardens while towering azaleas danced around them. Pansies, with sweet faces, and golden chrysanthemums (all in season of course) boarded the paths with bouquets of color.

But Mr. Moody’s most striking creation were his rose beds. They were filled with sweet-smelling roses of all types. The Herald reported in April 1953 that the bakery would be “staging its own rose festival in what is one of the city’s most striking floral sights. A collection of all patented roses, numbering more than 2000 bushes, fills the pattern of beds practically surrounding the plant...” The Herald stated that many of the roses measured “seven inches across the face.”

Mr. Moody, not content with magnificent roses, set his sights on other enchantments. One of them was an ornamental lake. “One of the sights of the garden is the small lake surrounded by brilliantly hued beds visible from Pass Road,” the Herald stated. In addition to the lake, Mr. Moody built two cabins near it. The cabins were available to employees in the Gulfport plant. Each cabin had facilities “for sleeping four persons, with ice box, gas stove, sink, built-in cabinets, open fireplace, dining table and chairs, bath, and screened porch.” The cabins were popular, but not as popular as the lake’s inhabitants – ducks.

Many Coastal children remember feeding the ducks, all of which were



*Photo courtesy of Suzanne Carron Collums of her baby brother, James "Jimmy" E. Roberts, age four, in 1974.*

not put there by Mr. Moody. Many of them were “donated” to the lake’s duck population, especially after Easter in the days when ducks were a popular Easter gift. But Glenda Young of Atlanta remembers her duck, Charlie, for another reason. “One day he was gone,” she stated. “My parents told me that he missed his family and went back to live with them at the bakery. Every weekend we would stop there so I could visit Charlie. Of course, all I did was chase the ducks because they all looked the same to my four-year-old eyes.” Years later in her teens, Glenda learned the sad truth of Charlie’s demise: he’d been killed by a possum. “I love that my parents tried to keep the ugly truth about his death from me,” she said. “That has always been a special memory for me.”

For many Coastal children, the spectacular Christmas decorations are a special memory. A December 1950 Herald headline stated “Rudolph, The Red-Nosed Reindeer, Noses into Act At Colonial Bakery.” The article went

on to say that Rudolph and the other reindeer “delighted scores of youngsters and their parents on the spacious lawn of Colonial Bakery. Otto Moody announced that nine, life-size reindeer and Santa’s sleigh form an attractive 60-foot display.” Other Coastal residents remember the grounds looking like a Christmas fairyland, with multi-colored lights and silver and gold tinsel. Each Christmas, the hearth of the ground’s brick picnic grill was decorated to look like Santa’s throne, and many a child whispered their Christmas morning wishes into his ear.

But as we know, times change.

The manicured lawns and glorious flowers are gone now. The picturesque lake and its “donated” ducks are gone too, along with the cabins and the picnic grounds. The Christmas lights have dimmed, and the reindeer were carted off to the city dump long ago. Colonial Bakery survived into the early 90s, but governmental changes finally caught up with the once-popular site. The immense cost of replacing all of the bakery’s ovens, due to their asbestos linings, help seal the bakery’s fate. There were also rumors that the excellent relationship that had once existed between employer and employee had broken down. The old bakery building still stands, though, the last remnant of a glorious past. But come the Holidays when children, now grown, smell fresh baked bread, perhaps they will smile. And remember sparkling lights, a jolly St. Nick, and ducks swimming atop a placid lake.

*Please remember to keep our troops in your prayers. May God bless you and keep a song in your heart.*

*Kal*



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