

Marquart's Landing: Modern History
by Audrey Dae Bush



interior view of Marquart's Landing

Many know the Marquarts. And if you don't, you know the Landing—the town's longtime favorite bar, located on the corner of Front and Elm. The brick building overlooks the railroad and Missouri River with an ambiance of pride that comes from 165 years of service.

Of Washington, it's a staple. The Landing's story rode the steam-powered wheels of western expansion before arriving in the hands of Rick and Karen Marquart in 2002. While preserving its treasured tale, the Marquarts continue to renovate and ensure that the Landing gives back to the community that fostered its success. "I know we own it, but there are so many people who have spent their whole [lives] here," says Karen, describing her feelings for her home. "We just occupy the space right now. The Landing is the Landing."

Nonetheless, it wasn't called the Landing back in 1855. A real estate magnate named C.H. Kahmann constructed the building and dubbed it "The Pacific House," referring to the

Pacific Railroad, which hustled in traders and travelers just across the street. The place became a haven for these early settlers, and sometimes those of a less than sterling reputation. The Civil War passed and the building survived, though its reputation remained a bit tarnished.

As the city and industry grew, the building changed hands many times. It was owned at one point by Fred J. Ruether, who would later become the mayor of Washington and see the opening of the famous Washington bridge in 1936. The building changed names as well—calling itself “The People’s Hotel,” “The Exchange Saloon,” “Derringer’s,” and even “Jim’s Diamond Disco,” throughout the 20th century. A third floor was added in 1942, in the middle of World War II, making the building one of the tallest in downtown Washington at that time.

The story goes that, one day a young man named Gary Mense went on a bike ride. When passing the courthouse steps, he happened upon an auction. The building, one Mense knew well, was up for sale for \$55,000. Quite the visionary, he secured the deal and christened the building “Mense’s Landing.” In 1983, when he was only 28, Mense renovated the building and opened it once again to the public and the project took off. East Central College contributed a mural painted by Matt Sellmeyer on the patio walls. (The mural has since been obscured by the construction of doors for a 2011 patio expansion, but remnants are still visible.) The Landing quickly became the toast of Franklin County once more.

In the early 2000s the Landing went up for sale again. Rick Marquart was a serious golfer at the time, but couldn’t play because he was too busy helping his friends. He decided to give restaurant-owning a try when Mense approached him with the offer, expecting the inexperienced Marquarts to fail.

When asked why they *didn’t*, Karen replies, “In all honesty, just good old-fashioned hard work. You can have a great personality, but if your food isn’t great you’re going to do bad,” she said, citing the couple’s principles of cleanliness, quality food (the Landing is famous for not just their historical bar, but their pizza), and having a tight, trustworthy staff.



The Marquarts. From left: Karen, Allie, and Rick

However, the staff would often make note of strange events that took place under the Landing's roof. "Waitresses would get eerie feelings and find their things missing," Karen describes. The family dog would act skittish and foam at the mouth. Even a young Allie Marquart would claim to see an apparition in a white dress, nicknamed "Tess" by the locals. "We only know the folklore," says Karen. "Supposedly there was a murder at the Landing. I asked a priest to come bless the Landing and the 'spirit' never came back!"

The staff, while trained to always listen to their customers, is also trained to not give away Karen and Rick's whereabouts—except for special cases. "Once," explains Karen, "They said, 'There's a lady who wants to talk to you and insists on coming up,' but our home is off limits. Turns out, the lady grew up here as a little girl. When it was a hotel, her mom was the

innkeeper. She came up and explained the architecture of the third floor and why it was built that way. I used to think there was nothing that could surprise me, and then something does. So many people help us—something will break and our customers will fix it. We’ve had small weddings and people coming to renew their vows. We have customers who come here every single day and even have their own cups!” Karen says that her favorite part of the business is getting to meet folks.



night view of the new patio at Marquart's Landing

Nowadays, much of what the Marquarts do centers around giving back. The Landing sponsors the annual Beer Run, the proceeds of which go to downtown Washington. Last year they bought pop-up tents for downtown events. They redid the downtown boardroom, put in landscaping near the red caboose, and added a sprinkler system. The Marquarts also use the new patio space to sponsor live music acts, ranging from lovely local performers to talented Busch Stadium buskers. “We’ve had people from Texas drive up to play,” adds Karen.

The Marquarts are working on adding space. “We see about 205,000 customers a year,” says Rick. Taking care of the bar and its history is an arduous task for the couple, but they haven’t backed down and don’t plan to any time soon.

“It’s definitely fulfilled us,” declares Karen. “The Landing is a landmark. When you see Washington, there’s always a picture of the Landing.” It’s safe to say that the Landing and its history will remain with Washington for years to come.



side street view of Marquart’s Landing as it is today

Marquart’s Landing: Modern History

word count: 989

sources: interview with Karen and Rick Marquart, eMissourian, and visitwashmo.com

photo sources: Karen Marquart

Audrey Dae Bush
graduating senior of Washington High School

audreydbush@gmail.com
(636) 283-4161