



An aerial view of Holden Beach in 1950 shows the Old Hotel, center foreground, the first pavilion to its left, and John F. Holden's family home, far right, destroyed in Hurricane Hazel of 1954. Only a handful of cottages had been built on the beach and the first paved road (the narrow dark strip in

the center of the picture) extended north from the Intracoastal Waterway to a point where it turned west toward Supply.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF JOHN F. HOLDEN

## BOOK REVIEW

# Island History Stamped With Personality

BY MARJORIE MEGIVERN

There is history that is dust-dry and irrelevant, little more than lists of dates, names and events.

There is also history that is bloody and turbulent, weighted with the lives of men and women who change the world.

Somewhere in between is the kind of history you'll want to read about a special island that is home and vacation haven to thousands of people all over the country. It is personal, authentic and full of charm.

This is "Holden Beach History," as experienced and written by John F. Holden of that island community. Published in April by New Hanover Printing Company, the little book is as delightful as it is informative.

Holden is a descendant of Benjamin Holden, to whom the 100-acre island was granted in 1756 by the Royal Governor Arthur Dobbs for 50 shillings.

Bounded by Lockwood Folly's Inlet and Bacon Inlet on east and west, by the Atlantic Ocean and a small creek on north and south, the island first began to be developed as a resort by the author's grandfather, John Holden Jr., who built the first hotel there in 1926.

Among the book's 22 chapters, few are as evocative of the past as those in which Holden reminisces about his beloved grandfather, whose big home, beach fishery and store were favorite childhood haunts.

The post-depression era, when Brunswick County was without industry, jobs and money, is described in memorable detail as the starting-point for island development. We see people trading corn or pigs for fish,

traveling all the way to Wilmington for jobs with the railroad or the cotton mill, losing their life savings, committing suicide.

We see hospitality and kindness at its best, too. Holden tells of his grandparents' taking in a needy teenager to raise and of services he and his father provided when they took over Holden Beach development about 40 years ago. "We gave mail service and sightseeing tours, delivered messages and picked up trash. These were done gratis, as hospitable gestures," he said.

An entire chapter is devoted to entertaining anecdotes about his experiences with island guests. He was, at one time or another, an emergency vet, removing a fish hook from a dog's mouth, an amateur fireman, and even a "cattle rustler."

But this modest history is factual, as well, outlining the progress that has occurred on Holden Beach from the first pavilion built in 1939, when there were 15 cottages on the island, to completion of the present high-rise

bridge in 1986.

In between there were ferries, bridges, even an airstrip that served as transportation links from the outside world.

Slowly, painfully through the 20s and 30s, John Holden Sr., then his son Luther, and finally grandson John F., created the family beach that was John Sr.'s dream. Progress came step by step, with the first telephone, the first power line, the first restaurant, and in 1951 the first U.S. post office, presided over by John F.'s wife, Johnsie.

No island history in the Carolinas would be complete without attention to Hurricane Hazel who dealt her

death blow in 1954. Holden devotes a long chapter to his personal experiences with this lethal lady and her rearrangement of his island.

Only 12 Holden Beach cottages were left standing on their foundations after that October day of Hazel's visit, but the author's 70-year-old father miraculously survived the storm.

It is clear through this narration that the writer has great affection for his hometown and the people who have helped it grow into a thriving resort area. His fondest memories include the island's bird population and his own bluebird house project, as well as a nylon bag groin project he

spearheaded in 1971 to control erosion on the east end of Holden Beach.

Those who live in this community, those who own property there and visit regularly, those who pass this way on rare occasion, all will cherish "Holden Beach History."

John F. Holden has left a valuable document for these people, but also for history. His eye for detail and for accuracy has given future citizens of Brunswick County an important road map to the past, as well as an engaging story of those who blazed the trails.

## Holden Beach Regulations

The town of Holden Beach prohibits the following:

- Climbing or operating motor vehicle on or removing vegetation from dunes;
  - Motor vehicles and wind-powered vehicles on the strand;
  - Open fires;
  - Littering on the strand, roadway or private property;
  - Loud or offensive noise, including music, profanity or obscene language;
  - Pets not on a leash;
  - Surfboards on the strand or in the water within 500 feet of any fishing pier;
  - Use of skateboards on Ocean Blvd. or the bridge or bridge ramps;
  - Discharge of firearms;
  - Hunting, with or without dogs;
  - Use of paths through the dunes or crossing over private property.
- Visitors are urged to:
- Obey speed limits;
  - Fish with nets in accordance with regulations, available at the Town Hall;
  - Use designated public or private beach accessways only;
  - Park off the pavement in unpoted areas only;
  - Cook on the beach only in containers made for the purpose, such as B-B-Q cookers.

## Holden Beach

Holden Beach is the combination of two land masses, separated by an inlet, that were filled in by Hurricane Hazel in 1954. The portion from the east end to the pier was known as Holden Beach until incorporation in 1969, when the west end, including Robinson's and Colonial Beaches, was included.

The pre-Hazel beach had been a land grant, given to Benjamin Holden by the King of England in 1756, and it passed thereafter to his son Job, grandson John, and great-grandson John. It was then divided among John's six children, one of whom was Luther, father of John Holden, now living on the beach and father of reator/developer Alan Holden.

Development was slow until tourism began to be a factor in American life after World War II.

The first bridge was built across a creek to the mainland in 1925, but construction of the Intracoastal Waterway in the 40s eliminated it. Ferry service connected the island and the mainland till 1954 when a turnbridge was built. In 1986 a curving highrise replaced the old bridge.

Holden Beach now has a permanent population of 342 and 1,587 housing units.

## Holden Beach Information

Town Hall	842-6400 and 842-6060
Town Administrator	Tom Birmingham
Building Inspector	Dwight Carroll
Mayor, John Tandy	842-2834
Commissioners:	
Gay Atkins, Mayor pro tem	
Guilford Bass	
Georgia Langley	
William Williamson	
Bob Buck	
Police Chief, Raymond Simpson	842-6707
Tri-Beach Fire Dept.	842-6668
Coastline Rescue Squad	842-2222