



1. Center Street leading to the beach, the pier and the pavilion in the 1930s. Courtesy of Bill Egan

2. Mares saved lighthouse, circa 1955. Courtesy of Mares Island Coast Guard

3. South of Lily weavers, 1921. Courtesy of The Charleston Museum

4. Jimmy Conner, Jr., Jimmy Conner standing on the boardwalk, circa 1954. Courtesy of Jimmy Conner

5. The Fog Pie, circa 1984. Courtesy of The Charleston Museum

6. Swing ride at the amusement park in the 1930s. Courtesy of The Charleston Museum

7. Springhouse Dennis 'Mac' Mickelwin, circa 1946. Courtesy of Tim Mickelwin

8. A car parked on the beach, circa 1950. Courtesy of The Charleston Museum

9. The McKewen's Surfing Team, circa 1970s. Courtesy of Tim Mickelwin



The Golden Age of Folly



The Edge of America in the '40s & '50s

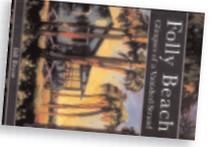
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Folly Beach for many years, to many residents of the Carolinas, the name was synonymous with fun. The whole point of going to the beach was to get away from the daily grind, to let your hair down, to escape city life.

Folly Beach in the 1940s was the place to go.... There wasn't any place around that looked like Folly. Other nearby islands offered innumerable attractions, but none had the feel of Folly. That's it! The *feel* of the place.... Who cared if the famous Folly's Pier had lost most of its paint and had become weathered through years of relentless sun, surf, and storm? Who cared if the cottages were primitive to a fault with sloping floors, rickety steps, and lack of paint? What was more wonderful than to have the tide wash up to the front steps? In some cases, the tide washed right under many of the houses....

The general appeal of the place was felt far and wide. Forces of nature combined with a generally lax building code and even laxer enforcement with a don't-give-a-damn attitude—to produce a what? An odd little community by the sea? A haven for the down and out? A place for romance and fun? All of these and more.

Folly was, during the 1940s and 1950s, that rare sort of place one happily stumbles upon and cherishes until one day he finds it no longer exists.



Text excerpted from *Folly Beach: Glimpses of a Vanished Strand*, by Bill Bryan, Henry Press, 2005

Watch an interview with Bill at www.charlestonmuseum.com.



The Pier & Pavilion

The timeless wooden structures that became the very definition of Folly Beach

Folly's Pier was an institution—the most memorable fixture on the island. It jutted into the Atlantic at high tide. It was not as elevated as the present fishing pier, but was built a little closer to the ocean. When rough seas came along, the ocean was mesmerizing as the waves came roaring ashore.

The dance floor was enormous. The pier itself was dark Spanish moss was often draped from the rafters. There was a big stage for the band. Nothing was more romantic than a dance at the pier, especially if there was a full moon.... Folly in the 1940s was the biggest draw by far on the Carolina coast. All the big bands played the pier, and during the rock era the trend continued. Among the entertainers were Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, Benny Goodman, Count Basie, The Ink Spots, and Dinah Shore....

At the end of Center Street on the right was a large, open pavilion and bathhouse.... The pavilion sold all the normal beach foods—hot dogs, hamburgers, french fries, sodas, and beer.... There was always a jukebox playing on the pavilion and, of course, there was dancing. But the real place to shake a leg was the pier to the left of the amusement park, just a skip away down the rickety wooden boardwalk.

As rock mania took hold, naturally the dances changed, too. But the shag was still the dance of choice, as it had been during the 1940s. Shagging at the beach had its genesis somewhere along the Grand Strand, probably Ocean Drive. But Folly was a shagger's haven. Just like the pavilion at Pawley's Island, the pier at Folly was *the* spot to strut your stuff. Or all the colorful dance halls along the coast, Folly's pier clearly stood out. It had atmosphere that was hard to beat. What young couple wouldn't succumb to the unbreakable combination of sea, sand, and suds? (Even if the beer served on tap was Pabst.)

The pavilion went up in a blaze of smoke in April 1957. Its replacement was built in a matter of months and was much smaller than its predecessor. It was new and bright and clean but lacked the faded appeal of the old building.



Then & Now: A recent picture of Eban Hippolitus Cassano on the Folly Fishing Pier. Cassano's family owned several businesses on Folly during its heyday, including the Hi-Top snack bar. "When we were girls, my cousin Maria Cassano and I would make money shagging in the dance pavilion," she says. "People would throw quarters at us while we danced. We would make anywhere between \$5 and \$10 dancing."

Photograph by Jim Brantner
Watch an interview with Eban at www.beachliving.com.

1. Unidentified woman posing around on the beach. Courtesy of Bill Bryan
2. Built in 1926, the cement pier and bathhouse replaced the wooden structure. Courtesy of Bill Bryan
3. A 1988 postcard of the Folly Beach Pier. *Private collection of Bill Bryan*
4. Marie Cassano at the Folly Dance Pier in the 1950s. Courtesy of Jimmy Cassano
5. A circa-1930 pier brochure. Courtesy of Bill Bryan
6. Rescued of the Ocean Plaza development in the 1980s. Courtesy of Bill Bryan
7. Postcard of the pier circa 1958. Courtesy of Bill Bryan
8. Folly Pier with white roof in the 1950s. Courtesy of Robert Knight
9. Sam and Bessie Wilson, employees of the Folly Pavilion Soda Fountain in the 1950s. Courtesy of Jimmy Cassano
10. A postcard of the pier and pavilion from the 1950s. Courtesy of Bill Bryan
11. This 1946 photo taken by Robert Riley from the pier was the last of its kind. Courtesy of Bill Bryan



1. Pinned cars line the beach in 1938. Courtesy of The Charleston Museum
2. A postcard of the pavilion and the car ramp leading to the beach. Date unknown. Courtesy of Bill Bryan
3. The pier and boardwalk in the 1980s. Courtesy of Robert Knight
4. Cars on the beach, circa 1920. Courtesy of Bill Bryan
5. Jimmy Owsen and his cousin George swimming at high tide along the groins. Tom He 1965s. Courtesy of Jimmy Owsen
6. Aerial view of the east end of the island. Courtesy of S.C. Historical Society
7. Watching the sun. Courtesy of The Charleston Museum
8. The base of a 1938 car ramp on the beach. Courtesy of The Charleston Museum
9. Highway cranes. Courtesy of The Charleston Museum
10. The pavilion and car ramp onto the beach from Center Street, circa 1940. Courtesy of The Charleston Museum
11. A crowded day at the beach in the 1930s. Courtesy of Robert Knight
12. Center Street pavilion and car ramp to the beach in the 1940s. Courtesy of The Charleston Museum
13. Fish Beach in the 1980s. Courtesy of The Charleston Museum

The Beach

Folly's sun, sand, and salt water have always been the major attraction

In the late 1940s and '50s the beach was crowded all summer long, especially on holidays.... Folly used to have boxing matches (and drag races) on the front beach. It was all very simple and seems odd to the sophisticated beachgoer of today. A few wooden ramps led from the boardwalk to the beach. You had to balance yourself carefully in order to navigate the ramps. The beach in this area always seemed to be washing away. (And it did practically every winter only to rebuild somewhat during summer.) Because the beach was in such a flux, the ramps often were raised several feet above the sand and you had to jump down to reach the shore.

At low tide, during the 1940s (and decades before), cars would drive onto the beach and park. A wooden ramp extended from Center Street onto the beach. Cars lined the beach for several blocks. Many got stuck when the tide came in.

Back then, the area now known as the Washout was an isolated, lonely stretch of shoreline, relatively unknown to many folks who went to Folly for the day. Most vacationers stuck to the main section of town, but the Washout was known to birders, fishermen, lovers, and those who sought solitude. It was a popular spot to catch crabs. The Washout was one of the best spots to steal a kiss, away from the crowds and prying eyes.

From the Washout to the Coast Guard base, the beach stretched on and on. There weren't many trees on this little sliver of sand, and the winds were forever shifting the dunes from day to day. One year it could be broad and flat and extend out into the sea for miles. It could all vanish by the time you returned the next year.

Like the Coast Guard base on the east end, a public county park makes up the island's west end counterpart. The section of beach contains some of the finest scenery around. On one side is the Atlantic. On the other, the marsh and the Folly River. As on the east end, erosion plays a major role here. Old pictures show giant dunes lining the beach in the 1940s and '50s. What a magnificent stretch of beach it once was. Some of the tallest dunes on the island could be found here.



Then & Now: *Marlene Estridge* longtime Folly resident, city clerk, and devotee to island history. "Pretty much everyone on the island knows me one way or another," she says. "Someone even wrote a song about me." Photograph by Jim Brecheer

Watch an interview with Marlene and listen to the song "It's Marlene" by Dale Folly singer-songwriter Rick Hill at www.dalefolliesong.com.



The Amusements

Carnival rides and roadhouses, the beach was only where the fun began

Between the pavilion and the pier stood a small amusement park, about a block long. It had a sign that read: "Welcome to Folly's Playground." Crammed into this space were a merry-go-round, a Ferris wheel, swings, a popular ride called "the Whip," and perhaps another ride or two. There was a small wooden refreshment stand that sold standard beach fare, especially ice-cream cones and sodas.

To a child, though, it was magic. From high atop the Ferris wheel, the beach spread out before you. A wooden boardwalk connected Center Street to the pier in front of the amusement park, just a spot of sand wedged between the street and the Atlantic Ocean.

Most of Folly's major attractions were jammed along Center Street and adjoining streets for several blocks. A bowling alley was across the street from the carnival. Center Street was lined with eateries and bars, but the carnival was *the* spot for children of all ages. It set up every year at the beginning of beach season and was pulled down after Labor Day.

To the left and the right of Center Street for several blocks stretched an array of beachside cottages, a hotel, eateries, and music bars. Many seaside bars sizzled from the pier. Their names changed over the years, but they all dispensed beer in copious quantities....At one time the nearest bar to the pier was the Seaside Grill. It was one of the wilder spots with outdoor decks and pool tables inside. It had the most colorful clientele of all the bars....

Next to the Ocean Front Hotel was an area known as Rainbow Corner. It was a cluster of colorful buildings nestled in a grove of palm-trees right on the ocean. There was an area for dancing and drinking. It was one of the most popular spots on the front beach. In September 1959, Hurricane Gracie battered Rainbow Corner, and the entire complex was demolished to make way for the massive and ambitious Ocean Plaza development of 1960....

Two structures that escaped the developer's eye were two old, abandoned beach houses a short distance from the former Rainbow Corner. They were joined in the 1970s to create what came to be called the Atlantic House and OTO (Over the Ocean) Bar. The hurricane of 1940 had done excessive damage to these two grand dances. But they withstood Gracie in 1959 and David in 1979, only to be destroyed 10 years later by Hugo....



Then & Now: Longtime Folly resident Robert Knight on the Folly Fishing Pier. As a teenager, Knight worked at the pavilion, operating the amusement rides. When I graduated from the swings to the Ferris wheel, I felt like I was top dog!" he says.
 Photograph by Jim Bruchner

Watch an interview with Robert at www.charlestonliving.com.

1. The Ferris wheel and Ferris wheel at the pavilion amusement park, circa 1950. Courtesy of The Charleston Museum
2. The hand-cranked Rainbow Corner dancing pavilion, circa 1950s. Courtesy of Robert Knight
3. Robert Knight, working the Ferris wheel in 1956. Courtesy of Robert Knight
4. The Ferris wheel and other amusements, circa 1950. Courtesy of Robert Knight
5. At night the rides were awash with white lights in the 1950s. Courtesy of The Charleston Museum
6. A portrait from the 1940s of the pavilion, likely sitting Folly's distance from Charleston as 10 miles. Courtesy of The Charleston Museum
7. A early 1980s postcard of the mature golf course and other amusements at the Ocean Plaza. Courtesy of Bill Bryan
8. The Ocean Plaza, circa 1980. Courtesy of Robert Knight
9. The Atlantic House Restaurant in 1986, the year before it was destroyed by Hugo. Courtesy of Jimmy Condit



1. A makeshift outdoor dance on the beach circa 1940. Courtesy of the Charleston Museum
2. Owners Foyers's Doug Stone, Jess and Foyersa Thomas. Courtesy of Robert Knight
3. Ted McKelven surfing near the pier in 1958. Courtesy of Tim McKelven
4. Beachy center owner Rachel Hendon at a Folly Beach Chamber of Commerce picnic in 1946. Courtesy of S.C. Historical Society
5. Robert Knight and his wife, Bixbee. They couple met at a dance on the pier in May, 1967. Courtesy of Robert Knight
6. Elio Jan Stampo swims on the beach circa 1957. Courtesy of Amanda Smith Mack
7. Local children in front of the Community Center in the 1930s. Courtesy of Robert Knight
8. Spectators watch one of the first surfing contests held at Folly in 1958. Courtesy of Tim McKelven
9. An unidentified surfer in the water in the 1950s. Courtesy of Chris Thomas
10. Labels beer and Paul Bards on the beach circa 1950s. Courtesy of Chris Thomas
11. Miss Charleston Foyersa Hendon casts the net for the Miss Charleston beauty pageant in 1950. Courtesy of S.C. Historical Society
12. A team on Center Street from the 1930s. Courtesy of Robert Knight
13. A woman on beach from the 1930s. Courtesy of the Charleston Museum
14. The Folly Beach Pier, after which to make another trip from downtown, circa 1950. Courtesy of Robert Knight
15. Eamon Kelly and Robert Hendon on the beach circa 1950. Courtesy of S.C. Historical Society

The People

Famous and infamous, Folly has always been home to the creative and the colorful

Folly always has had a bohemian air, attracting those who advocated a laid-back lifestyle. Sullivan's Island was too straightforward for these carefree souls. Folly's free-wheeling ways attracted legions—it was a bastion for the nonconformists and remains so to this day.

Folly was also home to a somewhat cosmopolitan mixture. The Greek community exerted a strong influence. They ran many of the most prominent attractions on the island and invested heavily in real estate over the years. There was also a smattering of Jews, including the beloved illegard Jack Nathan, who struted his physique near the pavilion. There were many Roman Catholics who built a charming church on Center Street. Folly was also home to retired folks who came from all over the country. There were even a few foreigners who somehow found their way to Folly's shores.

Dubose Heyward, perhaps Charleston's most famous author of the 20th century, had a summer home on West Ashley Avenue. He called it "Follywood." It's still there, hidden behind a high fence a recent owner put up. When Gerstwin stayed at Folly—where he wrote the music for *Porgy and Bess* in 1934 in a cottage on West Arctie—the often was entertained by Heyward and his family. Gerstwin's impression of Folly summed up much of the appeal of the strand. He said it reminded him of a battered South Sea Island.

For a time, one of the FBI's top-10 most wanted, known as "Trigger" Burke, lived on Folly and was captured there in a rather spectacular manner right in the heart of town. Burke, whose real first name was Elmer, was wanted for "murder in New York, for the ambush-shooting in Boston of a Brinks robbery suspect, and for a sensational Boston jailbreak."

Elizabeth O'Neill Verner often painted at Folly, as did other artists of her day, including the nationally prominent Edward Hopper. There were countless others, including the late Sally Aymar, who summured at Folly for half a century.

Sally, along with her pharmacist husband, Harold, was one of the most colorful and delightful of Folly's residents. Sally not only enjoyed watercolors, she also took part in every facet of Folly life. She knew everyone on the island. She was a repository for facts and folklore. Together, they were part of Folly that slowly has slipped away. Most of the old-timers are gone now, and with them a trove of memories.



Then & Now: Longtime mayor and city councilman Bob Luvile. "Folly has come a long way since the '60s and '70s... so to speak," he says. "There have been some really good changes, and some that have not been so good. If we could go back to those days, when Folly was just about fun, I'd turn back the clock right now." Photograph by John Borenkover



Center Street

The gateway to the beach, Folly's main drag was always the center of the action

1. Stephen's 5 & 11 store from the 1930s. Courtesy of Robert Knight
2. A view down Center Street away from the beach, circa 1960s. Courtesy of Robert Knight
3. Folly Drive Store, circa 1950. Courtesy of Robert Knight
4. Folly Vans rental cottages in the 1930s. Courtesy of Robert Knight
5. The hi-top snack bar at the pavilion in the 1930s. Courtesy of Chen Hingpoo Casino
6. Lucie's eatery at the newsstand to the left, circa 1950. Courtesy of Liam Kennedy
7. Street Market on Center Street from the 1950s. Courtesy of Robert Knight
8. Center Street looking towards the pier, circa 1960. Courtesy of Robert Knight
9. Pavilion Snack Bar, circa 1950. Paul Knight, Robert's father, is on the far left. Courtesy of Robert Knight
10. Chelsea Inn Restaurant in the 1930s. Courtesy of Robert Knight
11. Center Street facing the ocean, circa 1940. Courtesy of Robert Knight
12. Center Street in the 1960s. Courtesy of Robert Knight
13. The Sander's Restaurant on Center Street in the 1930s. Courtesy of Robert Knight

The trip from town was relatively short but seemed like an eternity. Along the causeway, small islands were scattered here and there, breaking the vast panorama of the marsh. As you crossed the last bridge you were on Center Street, the main drag of the island. The street was several blocks long and ended abruptly—in the Atlantic Ocean.

Center Street splits the island in two. To the left, the beach is called the east side—to the right, the west side. Center Street was lined with eateries and bars. Everywhere you looked there were places that sold food. There was always a little corner store on Center Street or nearby. These little stores did a brisk summer business and relied on the few permanent residents during the winter.

But the spot to get a good seafood dinner was not on the beach itself, but just across the river—Andre's. It had atmosphere in spades.... Another favorite seafood place was the Sandbar.... It sat perched among live oaks, across the river from Andre's and docks with shrimp boats. Its setting was stellar.

Tom and Kitty Wierges ran the newsstand at the corner of Center Street and East Hudson. This was the place to go to grab your paper or a popular magazine and hang out with all of the locals—a community gathering spot. You could grab a good bowl of soup here and catch all the gossip. (And there was always something to talk about!) Wierges was a real create agent and handled many of the rentals in those days. He knew everything there was to know about Folly. Tom and Kitty are gone now, as is their little newsstand.

To the left and the right of Center Street for several blocks stretched an array of beachside cottages, a hotel, eateries, and rustic bars. There were several tiny cottages, often little more than a room or two, to rent. These clusters of huts are mostly gone, but one such complex still exists just west of Center Street, between West Ashley and West Cooper avenues. It has withstood attempts at modernization and assaults from countless storms. It remains one of the few landmarks from an earlier era. Years ago (like most of the houses on the beach) the cottages were painted white. Today they are green.



Then & Now: Tom McKelvin in front of the historic surf shop on Center Street. "Things have really changed down here over the years," he says. "There are a lot more places for people to shop and eat, because there are so many more people here now, than the old days, when things were a lot slower, when there weren't so many people on the island at the time. It just seemed a little more fun then. But it's a trade-off. With all of the pop-up, business is better, but I'd happily sacrifice a little business for things to be more like they were." Photograph by Jan Bruehler