WELCOME TO SOUTH CAROLINA: SEX, RACE, AND
THE RISE OF TOURISM IN MYRTLE BEACH,
1900-1975

by

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ABSTRACT

Though scholars have long focused on the impact traditional industries had on the development of the South, few have looked at the role tourism played in the economic and cultural transformation of the region. Even in South Carolina, tourism, not textiles or agriculture, is the state’s number one industry. This work discovers how Myrtle Beach, the Palmetto State’s biggest tourist attraction, developed and adapted to the nation’s changing cultural mores, all the while trying not to deviate too far from southern values.

The study examines the impact of the tourism industry on the development of the city during a period of immense social and cultural turmoil in the United States, 1954 to 1973. Myrtle Beach leaders, concerned with keeping and expanding the tourism industry, contended with the ramifications of the civil rights and women’s liberation movements, along with the opening of the interstate highway system. All the while, boosters tried never to waiver from their support of the town’s family beach image. What they created though, was a white middle-class men’s vacation paradise complete with golf courses and strip clubs. The city became a place to get away from the racial unrest and growing women’s liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Myrtle Beach was caught between a mythic pre-1960s South of racial harmony and innocence and a modern, racially and sexually open society.

Finally, this project discovers how South Carolina leaders used city boosters’ tourism promotional strategies in marketing the state. Between 1945 and 1970, Southerners began to realize that tourism was an economic force. Southern governors meticulously crafted strategies
to attract tourists to their states, working like their predecessors had before them to obtain northern smokestack industries. South Carolina was no exception. Governors McNair and West treated tourism in much the same fashion. The two leaders hired the most experienced people in the Palmetto State to head up the promotion. Many of these people came from Myrtle Beach. They helped impose the city’s promotional strategies upon the state’s efforts.
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Introduction

That’s not how a family vacation works.

_We do things together while your father has fun without us_ – Marge Simpson to her son, Bart

It was an interesting idea, but entirely unfeasible. On January 27, 1967, South Carolina Lieutenant Governor John West received a four-page memorandum titled, “Proposed Program: Tourist Procurement for South Carolina” from an unknown resident. It was the first letter that he and Governor Robert E. McNair received since McNair announced the creation of the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism (PRT) just three days earlier. “Very Important,” the memorandum read. “Many Southern states have the reputation of having their patrolmen and county officers pull any car with an out-of-state license.” The letter writer hoped that South Carolina could avoid this unfortunate practice. When stopping cars with out-of-state plates, the officer was to approach the car and say, “You were exceeding our speed limits, however, I note that you are from out-of-state. I would like to welcome you to South Carolina and make known to you our speed limits.” The officer then would wish the speeder a pleasant stay in the Palmetto State before offering the law-breaker a pamphlet showing the points of interest in South Carolina. The speeder would not receive a ticket. “I believe that this above all

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1 _The Simpsons_, Season 20, episode 14, first broadcast March 22, 2009 by Fox, written by Matt Marshall.
else will make South Carolina a place that tourists will remember and want to visit.” Palmetto State residents had gone tourist crazy.²

While appealing to tourists was a new practice for most South Carolinians in the 1960s, Myrtle Beach boosters had a long history of attracting visitors. In the 1890s, Franklin Burroughs funded the construction of the first railroad line to the barren strip of sand that would become Myrtle Beach, hoping to mimic the successes of Henry Flagler and Henry Plant in Florida.³ Developers founded the city in 1900 as a resort for white families. The town grew slowly. Less than one thousand residents called the area home in 1930, primarily because of the difficulty reaching the beach. Few roads led to Myrtle Beach and, for much of the first half of the twentieth century, those routes were not paved. Yet, by the 1940s, the city attracted roughly sixty thousand to its shores, many of whom came for family fun. For youth, Myrtle Beach in the 1940s and 1950s was heaven. The beach provided salt water pools, roughly one foot deep at low tide, in which small children could frolic. Older children could not only swim, surf, and climb the dunes, but could dance and roller-skate at the pavilion, which opened its doors in 1948.

More fun for children and families alike was the pavilion’s amusement park. In 1948, Myrtle Beach Farms, the city’s developers, convinced a traveling carnival in nearby Conway to make Myrtle Beach its permanent home. Small at first, the park added attractions yearly, eventually including a wood and steel roller coaster dubbed “Hurricane Category 5,” a carousel with twenty-seven hand carved animals, and a German organ first shown at the Paris World

² “Proposed Program Tourist Procurement for South Carolina,” January 27, 1967, Lieutenant Governor John C. West Papers, Box 6, South Carolina Political Collections, The University of South Carolina.

Exhibition in 1900. Locals and tourists alike flocked to the amusement park every year to try the new rides or just to purchase ice cream from the vendors to eat on the beach. The amusement park and roller rink contributed to the image that boosters hoped to promote: Myrtle Beach as a place for the entire family.⁴

Boosters, however, had bigger dreams for the city. They wanted Myrtle Beach to become a national resort while still maintaining the white family beach appeal. Boosters succeeded admirably at the former; by the 1970s the city was attracting millions to its shores. Maintaining a family beach image proved more difficult. The city has become nationally known, but not as a family location. It transformed into a bachelor’s paradise complete with scores of golf courses and “lousy with strip clubs.” What went wrong? How did the family beach become the home of Hooters Airlines?⁵

Unlike many New South cities, Myrtle Beach’s growth and prosperity did not come from attracting northern investment.⁶ As cities across the South scrambled to lure northern manufacturers to their towns, Myrtle Beach leaders shunned industry. The city has neither port

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nor smokestack. Residents saw factories not as an economic necessity, but as a nuisance that could destroy the area’s beauty. Boosters hitched their economic wagons to tourism and hospitality. The decision left the beach economically vulnerable to both nature, such as Hurricane Hazel, which damaged much of the city in 1954, and to cultural trends. With no alternative on which to fall back, leaders had to adapt to tourists’ changing views on sex and race, and they had to do it quickly. This work will look at how Myrtle Beach, nestled in conservative South Carolina, developed and adapted to the nation’s changing cultural mores, all the while trying not to deviate too far from southern values.

Tourism is an oft overlooked industry, but its importance to the United States economy and culture are unquestioned. From Walt Disney World to New York City and places in between, tourists annually spend billions of dollars at their favorite vacation destination. While travel is not new, historians have only recently begun to focus their attention on the industry. Sociologist Dean MacCannell wrote one of the earliest books on tourism and the most widely quoted on tourist theory. He completed a “study in the sociology of leisure” in which he argues that society is “intimately linked in diverse ways to mass modern leisure.” More recently,

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7 Deciding to promote tourism at the expense of industry is not unique. New Orleans made a similar choice in the years between World War I and World War II. See Anthony J. Stanonis, Creating the Big Easy: New Orleans and the Emergence of Modern Tourism, 1918-1945 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006).


9 With two notable exceptions, South Carolina has largely been ignored in any work on southern tourism. Stephanie E. Yuhl, A Golden Haze of Memory: The Making of Historic Charleston (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005); and Paula Nicole King, “Sombreros and Motorcycles: Place Studies on Tourism and Identity in Modern South Carolina” (PhD diss., University of Maryland, College Park, 2008).
scholars have looked at the rise of the tourist culture and its effect on the nation. Historians John Sears and Marguerite Shaffer focus on tourists’ consumption of scenic wonders, asking what role tourism has played in developing the nation’s culture and identity. These scholars look at “place,” discovering that scenery works to create a sense of patriotism that sometimes blends with religious fervor. Others historians like Cindy Aron, examine tourists themselves, focusing on the early struggle in the development of a vacation culture and what these attractions say about society.

To date, scholarly research on tourism’s impact on locales has focused primarily on its development in the North and West. Changes in the South brought by the tourist dollar, however, cannot be overstated. South Beach, the Outer Banks of North Carolina, and New


Orleans are national attractions bringing in millions to their state’s economy. Smaller sites like Gatlinburg, Tennessee, South Padre Island, and Cherokee, North Carolina, annually attract tourists in droves. Even in South Carolina, a state not first thought of as a vacation destination, tourism, not agriculture or textiles, is the number one industry.

In the last fifteen years, historians have begun to look at the effects of tourism on southern culture. With no comprehensive book on southern tourism, each work focuses on a city or region as an example of the industry’s impact. One of the earliest and best books on the development of tourism in the South is Richard D. Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*. Starnes studies western North Carolina and its transformation from a seasonal vacation destination to a site littered with second homes. Anthony Stanonis accomplishes a similar feat in his study of New Orleans, focusing on business leaders’ choice between tourism and industry. In fact, the Big Easy has drawn particular attention from historians. Alecia Long examines the city’s willingness to regulate biracial prostitution in Storyville from the end of the Civil War until World War I. J. Mark Souther looks at how tourism to New Orleans helped enshrine racial exploitation, leaving African-Americans as cultural actors.

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Several historians document the development of the nation’s biggest tourist destination, Florida. Since the 1920s, the Sunshine State has attracted millions to its shores for vacation or permanent residence. Florida changed rapidly, from a state littered with roadside attractions to one of mega resorts. Historians have paid particular attention to the state’s attempts to cope with the problems associated with the increased population, including the construction of roads and other infrastructure. David Nelson makes a compelling case that construction of state parks in Florida laid the foundation for the state’s tourist advertising program. Other scholars have studied places like Natchez, Mississippi, Atlanta, Georgia, and Charleston, South Carolina, to understand the intersection between memory, tourism, and modern day race relations. Boosters in these cities embellished and white-washed the myth of the plantation South, using a fictionalized history to drum up tourists.

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16 Jack E. Davis uses Natchez, Mississippi’s, “pilgrimage” as a way to look at modern race relations. There, women recreate a plantation to attract visitors. Jack E. Davis, *Race Against Time: Culture and Separation in Natchez Since 1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 2001). A recent dissertation looks a similar attempt to capitalize on the plantation South in Jennifer W. Dickey, “‘A Tough Little Patch of History’: Atlanta’s Marketplace for ‘Gone With the Wind Memory’” (PhD diss., Georgia State University, 2007). Another recent dissertation shows the plantation myth was well established by the 1920s. See Rebecca McIntyre,
This work differs from earlier works in that it does not try to discover what brought visitors to Myrtle Beach’s scenic wonder, its coast. Instead it focuses on the city around the beach, seeking to discover how boosters were able to bring millions of tourists to the area in part by downplaying the beach as an attraction. City leaders had a difficult job. Many northern beach towns were close to a large city that provided much of their clientele. Myrtle Beach boosters did not have that luxury. Instead, they depended on visitors from the small cities and farms across the Carolinas, all the while hoping to attract visitors who frequented Florida or other destinations.\footnote{17}

This dissertation does more than just look at the rise of tourism in Myrtle Beach, although that is its driving focus. It is an attempt to answer David R. Goldfield’s call “for historians to focus on southern attractions such as…Myrtle Beach…and to find out what these places, commonly left out when talking about Southern development, say about the region’s history and culture.”\footnote{18} This work will examine the impact of the tourism industry on the development of the city during a period of immense social and cultural turmoil in the United States, 1954 to 1973. City leaders, concerned with keeping and expanding the tourism industry, contended with the


ramifications of the civil rights and women’s liberation movements, along with the opening of the interstate highway system. All the while, Myrtle Beach boosters tried never to waiver from their support of the town’s family beach image. City promoters, though, could not isolate Myrtle Beach from post World War II cultural trends. In fact, promotion of tourism as the area’s primary industry served only to quicken the pace of change in the city, undermining Myrtle Beach boosters’ efforts to preserve the family beach facade.19

Part of Myrtle Beach leaders’ problems stemmed from their unwillingness create or embellish a made-up past. Myrtle Beach promoters never hid the city’s lack of a past; in fact, they reveled in its newness. In a state that prides itself on its history, Myrtle Beach does not boast an historic district. Nor do area leaders attempt to purchase and revive older buildings. Developers destroy them to build trendier attractions. Myrtle Beach is an ever-changing resort with leaders that are always willing, it seems, to alter its course for profit. Without a historical narrative like that possessed by Charleston, Myrtle Beach leaders needed to stay current and trendy to continue to attract visitors.20

To understand Myrtle Beach’s transformation, one need only to look at the postcards, newspaper articles, and tourist brochures documenting the city’s history. Almost all have one

19 Much of Myrtle Beach boosters’ tactics to attract tourists came from Atlantic City. See Bryant Simon, Boardwalk of Dreams: Atlantic City and the Fate of Urban America (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

20 Hal Rothman notes a similar situation in Las Vegas, Nevada. Here, boosters frequently re-create the city’s image, tempering low-brow leisure with high culture entertainment and art. Hal Rothman, ed., The Culture of Tourism, the Tourism of Culture: Selling the Past to the Present in the American Southwest (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003). John Urry looks at seaside resorts in Britain to understand how tourist attractions are developed. He finds that these places are designed to be different than other sites to make them stand out from everyday experiences. The constructed uniqueness, however, eventually becomes commonplace. New attractions take the older ones places. John Urry, The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies (London: Sage Publications, 1990).
thing in common. As one editorialist put it, “No story on Myrtle Beach would be complete without a photograph of beautiful young ladies enjoying the surf.” The fact that Myrtle Beach promoters used women as a promotional tool is hardly unique. Many boosters of coastal areas up and down the eastern seaboard featured women frolicking along the shore in their advertisements. What differentiated Myrtle Beach from many of its peers was its persistence. Beautiful women were not just an advertising tool, they were a calling card. They became the reason for going to the beach, a part of its culture and its scenery. Women were living, breathing, moving attractions, something that needed to be seen and experienced. Not only did these advertisements and pageants attract thousands to the beach, they created a sexualized culture that glorified beauty and encouraged promiscuity. The racy promotions soon brought in complimentary businesses that catered to white men, namely strip clubs and golf courses.

Today, Myrtle Beach is South Carolina’s home for vice. Fourteen strip clubs call the Grand Strand home; that is roughly one for every one thousand male residents over eighteen years old. Men flock to the area to partake in the steamy nightlife.  

Creating a white, middle-class male vacation paradise required more than just a bevy of beautiful and accessible females. Because men can not leer at women all day, Myrtle Beach developers needed some other activity to keep men occupied. Golf was that activity. Golfing’s ranks are dominated by white men. With green fees relatively cheap, white, middle-class men

flocked to the beach in ever-increasing numbers. By the late 1980s, Horry County, home of Myrtle Beach, boasted over one hundred courses.\textsuperscript{22}

The city’s popularity and transformation could not have been achieved alone. Historian David Goldfield laments that no work has answered whether “state political and economic leaders implement(ed) the same strategies for attracting tourist activities as they did for other economic endeavors.” My dissertation attempts to answer that question. Between 1945 and 1970, Southerners began to realize that tourism was an economic force. Southern governors meticulously crafted strategies to attract tourists to their states, working like their predecessors had before them to obtain northern smokestack industries. South Carolina was no exception. Governors McNair and West scoured the globe to lure foreign manufactures such as BASF. They treated tourism in much the same fashion. The two governors hired the most experienced people in the Palmetto State to head up the promotion. Many of these people came from Myrtle Beach. They helped impose the city’s promotional strategies upon the state’s efforts.\textsuperscript{23}

Myrtle Beach boosters did not work in a vacuum. Their efforts coincided with the burgeoning civil rights movement and the break down of Jim Crow. This provided a unique problem. Boosters had to yield to demands of African-American residents just enough to keep them from protesting. Fears of racial unrest would only hinder the state as an attraction to northern tourists. Leaders also had to deal with African-Americans’ substandard living conditions. Since the early 1950s, northern tourists complained about the area’s substandard black housing. The opening of the interstate created a new traffic pattern into Myrtle Beach,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} W. Horace Carter and Jimmy D’Angelo, \textit{Jimmy D’Angelo and Myrtle Beach Golf} (Tabor City, N.C.: Atlantic Publishing Company, 1991), 170.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Goldfield, “The Rise of the Sunbelt: Urbanization and Industrialization,” 482.
\end{itemize}
routing tourists past black homes for the first time. Something had to be done. But boosters also
did not want to push the city too far towards racial equality. They realized that while they were
attracting visitors from all over the country, most of them were still coming from the Carolinas.
Moving the city and state too quickly could cause a local white backlash. The quandary forced
leaders to make compromises, but above all to shield any racial unrest or inequality from public
view.24

For Myrtle Beach, tourism helped bridge the cultural gap between the North and South.
Boosters and businessmen’s economic dependence on visitors challenged them to be more
moderate, or at least less prone to demagoguery. As the resort expanded, residents moved in
from outside the region, infusing the city with new ideas and mores, closing the gap further.
State leaders took note and tempered speeches for fear of an economic backlash.

To be sure, both the city and state struggled with the changing Myrtle Beach. South
 Carolina’s conservative establishment frequently pointed to the city as a haven for vice. State
tourism boosters, however, were undaunted by any problems experienced in Myrtle Beach; they
engaged in a selective cultural modernity that simultaneously attempting to reinforce the white
family vacation concept while promoting sexual permissiveness. In their campaign, South
Carolina tourism boosters coupled the Old South image of Charleston, the state’s other major
tourist attraction, with the modern, provocative Myrtle Beach. Women were shown as
increasingly sexualized, but still pure. They could wear short dresses and go-go boots, yet
politely serve drinks to weary travelers in plantation-style homes. Blacks could be given civil
rights, as long as they continued to work in menial positions and did not demand equal treatment

24 Comments collected from a survey from South Carolina Jaycees, April 1953, W.D. Workman
Papers, Box 23, Tourist Promotion Committee folder, South Carolina Department of Archives
and History, Columbia.
too publicly. Liquor laws were liberalized, but now needed to be enforced. For the sake of increased tourist revenue, the city and the state were willing to disregard much of their social and cultural practices such as segregation, sobriety, and female reverence. Attempting to go too far astray, however, could cause a conservative backlash, crushing the developing trade and forcing promotion back to square one.

Myrtle Beach and South Carolina’s ability to engage in this selective cultural modernity made them the place for middle-class white men. The city became, as historian Alecia Long notes about turn-of-the-century New Orleans, “a geographic and metaphoric safety valve – a place where southerners came to escape, if only temporarily, from the … religious and behavioral strictures that dominated their home communities.” In Myrtle Beach, whites would experiment and act out in ways otherwise unavailable to them. The city became a place to get away from the racial unrest and growing women’s liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Myrtle Beach was caught between a mythic pre-1960s South of racial harmony and innocence and a modern, racially and sexually open society. The city now stands as the epitome of what historian Hal Rothman terms “the Devil’s bargain.” Rothman explains, “Regions, communities, and locales welcome tourism as an economic boon, only to find that it irrevocably changes them in unanticipated and uncontrollable ways.” For Myrtle Beach, this change was the creation of a town that is the polar opposite of the image their boosters advertised.


Chapter 1

The Creation of a White Middle-Class Family Resort: 1897-1948

*I won’t live to see it, and you may not, but someday this whole strand will be a resort*

– Franklin Gorham Burroughs to his daughter Effie Burroughs, 1890s

There are two types of tourist attractions, man-made and natural. Man-made attractions, like Las Vegas, endlessly evolve. New structures are torn down to make room for newer, more impressive buildings. They attract tourists by their constructed uniqueness, bringing in wealth to a community while also forever changing it from its earlier form. Without continued development, tourists would flock to another location. Natural attractions, like the Grand Canyon or Yellowstone, will always draw tourists to their majestic beauty. These attractions, however, have the equally difficult task of building a basic infrastructure. Without this, few tourists could ever gaze upon the vast mesas surrounding the canyon or marvel at Old Faithful’s timeless beauty.

Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, faced both problems. The area is naturally blessed with a beautiful, long strip of beachfront, stable and wide enough that automobiles once rode the sands. Until the early twentieth century, like the Grand Canyon, Myrtle Beach’s remoteness prevented large-scale development required if the area was ever to draw large crowds. Unlike Arizona’s attraction, whose splendor is found nowhere else in the United States, Myrtle Beach has competition for beachfront beauty. Florida has a surplus of beaches, and even local promoters

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never proclaimed that their strip of sand differed from that of Daytona Beach, Florida. Myrtle Beach leaders always monitored their competitors’ (namely Florida and New Jersey) successes and failures, and looked to emulate their rivals. City boosters, therefore, needed to carve a niche distinguishing it from that of the Jersey shore and places south.

Creating that niche was never easy. Often leaders, developers, and boosters pushed the city in a direction that was either impossible to create or uncomfortable for residents. Ultimately, Myrtle Beach residents developed a community identity crisis. In the early twentieth century, Myrtle Beach felt this conflict most acutely when city developers struggled over whether to create a resort designed for the wealthy or one that catered to the masses. During this time, developers built an infrastructure that would satisfy both and still preserve the area’s beauty.

The economic ravages of the Great Depression forced the city to abandon its early dreams of becoming a playground for the rich. Local boosters created a different, but hopefully equally attractive selling point that would turn the area into a resort. Retaining portions of existing promotional material, and drawing upon cultural beliefs and visitation trends, Myrtle Beach promoters created the image of the beach as the perfect destination for the white, middle-class family by 1945. They would cling to this self-constructed image even as it deteriorated before their very eyes.

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In 1857, Franklin Gorham Burroughs, a young farmer from Williamston, North Carolina, was plowing a new field on his father’s farm. The work was difficult. Large stumps from
freshly fallen trees still remained, making the job treacherous. As was his custom, Burroughs wore shoes with the leather around his toes cut out, allowing for the sand and dirt he worked in to flow freely across his feet. Enraged by the rough terrain, the young farmer became careless and crashed his plow into a protruding stump with enough force that he garnered a rather large splinter in his toe. Burroughs sat down and rubbed his injury. Then and there, he vowed never to make a living as a farmer. At age twenty-two, he hitched up his belongings and headed 260 miles south to the struggling town of Conway (then Conwayborough) in Horry (pronounced O-EE) County, South Carolina, to become a businessman. It was here that Burroughs would eventually dream of the resort city that one day would be dubbed Myrtle Beach.  

At 1,154 square miles, Horry is the largest county in the state. The state’s northeastern-most county, it is surrounded by water on three sides: the Pee Dee River to the south and west, and the Atlantic Ocean to the east. Its northern boundary is the state line. With the exception of Myrtle Beach, Horry County’s cities are small and have not grown much since the depression. Few knew about the area that would come to be known as the Grand Strand before Burrough’s arrival. This fifty-mile crescent-shaped beach begins at the North Carolina border and runs southward towards historic Georgetown. Before Hurricane Hazel struck in 1954, at low tide, the beach was five hundred feet wide from water to brush, giving visitors plenty of room for camping and sunbathing.

Before Burroughs arrived, Horry County had seemingly little to offer. The county had no natural port like Wilmington, North Carolina, to the north or Georgetown to the south, nor much

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2 Ibid., xv-xvi, 1, 6.

3 Myrtle Beach Sun and Ocean Beach News, “Grand Strand Tagged to Describe 50-Mile Area of Carolina Coast,” March 25, 1959. The Chamber of Commerce official endorsed the term “Grand Strand” to describe in March of 1959. Locals had sporadically used the term for years prior.
in the way of industry. It did not have any major city like Charleston, or points of historical interest other than a brief stay by George Washington on the strand on his way south. Unlike much of inland South Carolina, Horry was largely either too sandy or swampy for plantation-style agriculture. Because of its geographic defects, the county remained sparsely populated and all but forgotten. Until the 1890s, its hardy white population mainly consisted of subsistence
farmers and those engaged in the naval stores trade. What little was produced for sale was shipped down the Waccamaw River to the ports of Georgetown and Charleston.⁴

Compared to other counties in South Carolina, Horry had few black residents. In 1850 Georgetown County, which borders Horry to the south, had 2,193 white residents and 18,253 slaves, making the county almost ninety percent black. Horry, on the other hand, had a much smaller population of 5,522 whites and only 2,075 blacks. Only Pickens County in the South Carolina upstate had a smaller proportion of slaves than did Horry. Slaveholding patterns were also different than those in the rest of low country. Fifty-six percent of Horry slaveholders held four or fewer slaves as compared to 37 percent in the rest of the state. Five masters owned nearly 20 percent of the slave population. Horry County would never have a black population in proportions equal to its low country peers.⁵

Horry County’s isolation and relatively small black population differentiated it from the rest of the state and shaped its development. Its peculiarity helped the county earn the nickname “The Independent Republic.” When this moniker first came into being is unclear, but it seems to have come from the county’s political past. Some argue that nickname came from the Reconstruction era when Horry County became the first in the state to wrest their government away from “scalawag mis-government.” The area’s few black residents made resorting to fraudulent elections unnecessary. Democrats reclaimed political power and independence easily. Others credit Robert Barnwell Rhett with coining the nickname. Horry district state senator


Benjamin Gause, a Whig, was a staunch unionist and refused to relent to the fire-eaters’ request for secession. Rhett, exasperated, snapped, reportedly yelling at the senator, “We’ll make the little Pee Dee your border and let you have your damned independent republic.” Letting the county secede would have been a mistake. The swampy outpost county to the northeast did have one jewel that would bring enormous profits to South Carolina in the twenty-first century, its beach.  

Burroughs never intended for Conway to be his final destination; he planned only a short stay before moving to Memphis, Tennessee. Before leaving North Carolina on his way to the Volunteer State, his father persuaded him to travel to his cousin Jim Pulley’s home in Conway. There, young Burroughs hoped to learn a trade and earn money for his trip to Memphis. But Burroughs never made it to Tennessee. He earned little with Pulley and began to grow desperate, even contemplating spending the money his mother gave him for an emergency. Luck, however, was on Burrough’s side.

His good fortune came from an unlikely source, a killing. In 1859 an Horry County jury condemned a man to death for first degree murder. The poor, remote county, though, had no town gallows. Burroughs quickly stepped in and agreed to build the scaffold. The money he secured for the project along with the fifty dollars he won in a bet on the outcome of a local election gave him enough funds to purchase property in the area. Burroughs remained a Conway resident for the rest of his life and gained considerable wealth in the tar and navel stores trade.

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7 Milliken, *Burroughs & Chapin Company*, 1-5.
The business boomed until 1861 when he enlisted in the Civil War, serving as a private in the Western Army of Tennessee.  

After Burroughs returned home he tried to restart his business, a difficult undertaking in the post-war South. The conflict devastated the southern economy and specifically the naval stores business. While the demand for turpentine picked up briefly during the Franco-Prussian War, 1870-71, it once again dwindled in the mid 1870s. Burroughs and his new partner, Benjamin Grier Collins, expanded their business during this recession, building a sawmill in 1874. Owning both a naval store operation and a timber business gave the burgeoning company increased flexibility that would enable it to weather economic downturns. When demand for turpentine was high, like it was in 1882-1883, Burrough’s company could turn a tidy profit by producing the sticky substances. Burroughs purchased, not leased, like most proprietors did, floundering turpentine lands and used the timber in his sawmill if the turpentine business slowed. This process allowed Burroughs to acquire large tracts of land in rural coastal Horry County, including the area that would come to be known as Myrtle Beach.  

His growing business acumen and fortune brought him prominence in Conway. Burroughs hosted both an annual town barbeque and a yearly two-week excursion to the largely unpopulated stretch of beach fifteen miles to the east. The popularity of these trips gave him the idea to turn the land that he loved into a tourist destination. Before his death in 1897, Burroughs

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reportedly said to his daughter Effie, “I won’t live to see it, and you may not, but someday this whole strand will be a resort.”

It is quite possible that Burroughs’s decision to turn Myrtle Beach into a resort was not solely his own idea. Northern locales such as Atlantic City and Cape May were already attracting hundreds of thousands to the beaches of New Jersey, and Standard Oil executive Henry Flagler was showing that the southern coastline could prosper as well. Flagler recognized the potential economic boon of southern beaches in the 1880s, building the Ponce De Leon Hotel in St. Augustine, Florida. Flagler wanted more. Exploring the coast of Florida, he happened upon the sparsely populated island of Palm Beach. In its temperate climate and beautiful scenery Flagler saw “a veritable paradise.” In 1893 the entrepreneur paid $75,000 for a large tract of land and announced his intention to build the largest resort hotel in the world. In addition, Flagler promised to construct a railroad down the east coast to connect the Florida Keys and Palm Beach to the rest of the United States. On the west coast of Florida, Henry Plant pursued a similar undertaking. What had been seemingly isolated, worthless land only ten years prior was now worth hundreds or even thousands of dollars an acre. Flagler and Plant proved that southern coastal tourism could be big business. Perhaps Burroughs heard of the entrepreneurs’ success; nevertheless he believed his little strip of land along the South Carolina coast could become the next Palm Beach.


Like southern Florida, isolation proved to be the biggest obstacle to developing Horry County. When Burroughs arrived in 1857, there was no transportation system. In 1887, this changed. Developers constructed a new rail line that ran down the east coast passing through Conway and transforming the county. Horry County’s population nearly tripled after the railroad was completed. Conway’s population alone went from 575 to 3,011. The new rail line made exchange of goods easier, encouraging farmers to improve their land and move away from subsistence farming to the more lucrative commercial farming. Cotton was the county’s first major crop until almost 1920, when the boll weevil infestation forced farmers to diversify. Most turned to tobacco. The prickly weed quickly became the most important crop for farmers and Horry County became one of the biggest tobacco producers in the country. Black sharecroppers flocked to the region to tend the fields, and their population increased by over one-third. The railroad’s completion made Horry County economically and demographically more like the rest of the state.12

The coastal edge of the county, however, remained largely untouched. No roads or tracks went to the beach. Travelers had to navigate through thick woods and swamps reach the ocean. With no amenities along the coast, families hauled essentials required for a week’s stay away from home, including dairy cows, chickens, and goats. Exhausted after the journey, coastal visitors would set up tents and sleeping blankets and start a fire to prepare meals while their children played in the ocean. Despite the hardships in both travel and accommodations, the beach attracted a throng of poor and middle-class families each summer.13


13 Milliken, Burroughs & Chapin Company, 38.
With his keen eye for investment, Franklin Burroughs recognized the area’s tourist potential during these trips. The waters were calm and the beach was long and wide. Gentle breezes from the Atlantic made it a cooler location than Conway. The warm water of the ocean provided an escape from the relentless summer heat as well as a place to frolic. It was unlike any other place on the South Carolina coast.

At first, the beach’s isolation from the rest of the state and county prevented commercial development. Before his death, Burroughs solved this problem, surveying a line that would connect the coast to the rail line running through Conway. In 1900 the tracks opened and the first passengers made their way to the beach. The cost: 50 cents for adults and 25 cents for children. The first paying tourists arrived on May 1, 1900, and Myrtle Beach was open for business.

The trip, however, was far from tourist friendly. The train, dubbed The Black Maria, sported a wood-burning engine and the passenger cars, shipped in from New York, were open aired. Embers and soot showered down upon the riders, leaving their clothing singed during the hour-long ride from Conway. The embers that did not hit the passengers sometimes set the vegetation along the route ablaze, forcing the train to stop to extinguish fires. If the wood burning engine did not cause delays, farm animals did. On numerous occasions the train would stop and engineers would try to coax grazing cattle off the tracks. Passenger service continued until 1955.14

Visitors soon purchased land along the coast. Soon after the railroad initiated service, the Burroughs and Collins Company began selling oceanfront lots ranging in price from $25 to $100. Settlers constructed the first ocean front lots in 1909. The eight-year delay in house construction after the completion of the railroad was probably due to locals’ fears of a natural disaster. In 1893, two hurricanes swept over the area. By 1909, the lure of living on the beach was too great and fears of hurricanes had subsided. Settlers began constructing cottages.

When the lots closest to the ocean sold, future residents bought houses on the second row. Knowing that it was the beach that made visitors desire to be homeowners, the company designed the second row with an unobstructed view of the Atlantic. The front row and second row were intended to fit like two pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. In between each front row lot was a house-wide strip of sand perfectly constructed for the second row’s ocean-viewing pleasure.

The real estate venture proved to be a success. Nevertheless, the two Myrtle Beach developers needed an investor to help improve the city and make it a more desirable place to reside. They found their financier in Simeon Brooks Chapin, who spent his winters vacationing in Pinehurst, North Carolina. Chapin visited the area in 1911 and considered investing in the town, but decided against it, coming to town personally to inform Burroughs and Collins of his decision. During the meeting, the two Myrtle Beach developers convinced Chapin to change his mind. On October 24, 1912, the three created the Myrtle Beach Farms Company and began selling stock at $150 per share. The purpose of the company was to clear timber, improve real estate, build an amusement park, lay out a drainage system, and engage in commercial farming.

 Appropriately, locals called the settlement New Town. They built small wooden cottages with wide porches. Settlers placed the bedrooms on the south side of their cottages, hoping to mitigate the summer heat by catching the prevailing winds. Cabins were built on top of or in
front of the dunes. Now when travelers arrived at the beach aboard the train, they saw the
beginnings of a town. By 1926, over two hundred residents called the new development home.15

Many of those who bought land and constructed houses intended to use them as summer
residences or to rent out their dwellings. Women owned many of these homes. Between 1925
and 1926, as many as fifteen women had purchased property in Myrtle Beach and rented out
their houses to tourists and construction workers building the town. These boarding houses gave
guests a closer tie to the community than hotels and at a more affordable price.16

In 1901 the first hotel in Myrtle Beach, the Seaside Inn, opened. Taking only four
months to build, it would be the only hotel in the emerging town for over twenty years. Like
many coastal hotels around the country, the Seaside Inn was set far back from the ocean,
obscuring the view of what all the tourists came to see, but giving it a modicum of protection
from tropical storms. High sand dunes forced tourists to climb to the cupola on top of the hotel
to get a glimpse of the sea. In addition, the building lacked plumbing and only had only gas
lighting until the installation of electricity in 1909. Windows had screens and beds had canopies
to ward off mosquitoes.

Not as ornate as the massive hotels to follow, the three-story wood-frame Seaside Inn still
impressed Horry County residents. Horry Herald editor Henry H. Woodward remarked on the
“delightful sense of coziness,” and saw the building as having been blessed by “the magic touch

15 Gragg, The Illustrated History, 62; Edward E. Burroughs, “The Beginning of Myrtle Beach,”
The Independent Republic Quarterly 5, no. 4 (1971): 4; Reesor, “A Myrtle Beach Album,” 21;
Lilliefors, America’s Boardwalks, 143; and Stokes, Myrtle Beach: A History, 16-17, 133.

16 Stokes, Myrtle Beach: A History, 34-35.
of a refined woman’s fingers.” Rooms were two dollars a night and included dinner. A
boardwalk led to the ocean and the beach’s biggest family friendly attraction, the pavilion.¹⁷

After a day frolicking in the surf, tourists dressed up and walked down a wooden
boardwalk to the pavilion, an octagonal building that became the entertainment centerpiece of
the city. The structure served as a dancehall and gathering place for residents and tourists alike.
Under kerosene lamps, sunburned youth performed the foxtrot or the waltz while their parents
watched. Musical accompaniment consisted of a piano, a Victrola, and an orchestra in the
summer. On other nights, black musicians, who also served as waiters, played for the crowds.
Families danced the night away.¹⁸

The boardwalk also provided entertainment for children bored with the beach. For young
men, it was a place to scare and meet girls. Stanley Coleman, who visited Myrtle Beach during
this era, recalled tormenting female passersby. He would hide under the boardwalk and tie a
black sock to a fishing line. As a girl passed by, he would move the line in the fashion of a
snake, making the girls scream. Other forms of courtship were more effective. Teens used the
privacy underneath the boardwalk to “nuzzle a little bit.” Myrtle Beach’s reputation for sexual
openness was born. As the town grew the along the coast, so too did the boardwalk. It expanded
north and south, connecting cottages with each other and the pavilion. Until 1954, the wooden
walkway served as a structure that tied all to the city.¹⁹

¹⁷ Milliken, Burroughs & Chapin Company, 49-50; Barbara F. Stokes, Myrtle Beach: A History,
1900-1980 (Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 2007), 98; J. Marcus Smith,
“Pavilion has Always Been Big Attraction,” Myrtle Beach Sun News, April 20, 1991; Reesor, “A
Myrtle Beach Album,” 19; and James Lilliefors, America’s Boardwalks: From Coney Island to

¹⁸ Smith, “Pavilion Has Always Been Big Attraction,” Myrtle Beach Sun News, April 20, 1991;
and Gragg, 66.
The first road connecting Conway to Myrtle Beach opened in 1914, although it was not officially completed until 1921. Until it was paved in 1927, it was more of “a cow trail.” Local James D. Sanders talked about how difficult it was driving to the beach. “One of the skills of driving the Model T,” he remembered, “was to be able to hear the other car and blow the horn first. He got off the road and you went by.” Drivers, mainly Horry county residents, needed such skills navigating the treacherous, muddy road. The difficulty in getting to the beach did not end here. This route was indirect. The road went several miles south to the town of Socastee before making a ninety degree turn towards Myrtle Beach. Highway 501, the direct route from Conway, was not completed until 1948; it would cut the journey by fourteen miles. Others came to Myrtle Beach from Charleston or Wilmington by way of the Ocean Highway (Highway 17). Although not paved in many parts, it became the main tourist artery to the city until 1968.20

Even without paved roads, by 1921 the Conway Chamber of Commerce began promoting Myrtle Beach as a resort equipped with easy automobile accessible for the masses. “From practically any point in North or South Carolina,” an early pamphlet concluded, “those who wish to visit the beach may avail themselves of sand and clay turnpikes which offer a continuously comfortable trip.” The chamber chose not to mention how often those “turnpikes” washed away in the soggy Myrtle Beach summers. The difficulty in getting to the beach and its relative obscurity made it a place visited almost solely by poor and middle-class white locals. Here they


could spend time with their families, secure that the town’s isolation made the town safer than its urban counterparts.\textsuperscript{21}

Despite the occasional support from the Conway Chamber of Commerce, the new town received few visitors. The developing Horry County coastline was hardly known even in South Carolina. That changed in 1924. Horry County leaders invited the South Carolina Press Association to hold its annual meeting at the beach. Sixty members, taking a circuitous route because of bad road conditions, arrived at the beach twelve hours after leaving Columbia, today only a three-hour trip. They stayed at the Myrtle Beach Hotel, the new name for the Seaside Inn. The highlight of the excursion was an hour-long speech by local conservationist James Henry Rice Jr. Rice talked about the beauty and possible development of the coast. But while the trip gave the resort state wide press coverage, the event was dwarfed by what followed just two years later.\textsuperscript{22}

The biggest development in Myrtle Beach’s first fifty years occurred in 1926 when Greenville, South Carolina, businessman John T. Woodside, bought 64,488 acres (over one hundred square miles) of land from the Myrtle Beach Farms Company for $950,000. The deal gave Woodside all of the Myrtle Beach Farms Company’s holdings except for the coastal residences and downtown district. He went into this venture alone, not telling his brothers, also his business partners, about the purchase until after the sale. “A good General,” Woodside wrote, “never tells his plans.” Not having the money upfront, he agreed to pay the entire sum in six yearly payments. Burroughs and Chapin jumped at the chance to sell. A recent report

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} C.B. Berry, “1924 Press Meeting Spurred Beach Growth,” Myrtle Beach Sun News, December 29, 1990.
\end{itemize}
commissioned by the company found that without better access to the area Myrtle Beach would never prosper. Myrtle Beach Farms was cutting its losses.  

John T. Woodside was an unlikely entrepreneur. After recovering from an admitted “semi-invalid” childhood, he began to build his fortune as a grocery store owner. Although his business succeeded, Woodside dreamed of owning a textile plant. In 1902, he accomplished this feat using money he received by selling subscriptions to build Woodside Cotton Mills in Simpsonville, South Carolina. His venture was an immediate success and in the next year he tripled the number of spindles from 11,000 to 35,000. As his profits kept rolling in, Woodside, who enlisted the help of his brothers, bought the Fountain Inn Manufacturing Company in 1906 and organized the Simpsonville Cotton Mill. By 1933, Woodside controlled 230,000 spindles. His power and wealth made him friends with energy guru J.B. Duke and worthy enough to receive a yearly Christmas card from John D. Rockefeller. His connections even reached the White House where a letter from Woodside to Secretary of the Treasury William McAdoo prompted the public official to encourage banks to buy cotton mill paper.  

When Woodside purchased the land in Myrtle Beach, he sought to transform the quiet beach into a lavish family-oriented resort, a southern version of wealthy Newport, Rhode Island. Along with the beach, Newport offered its vacationers other luxuries to keep affluent socialites busy, including tennis, yachting, and polo. By the 1890s extravagant homes commissioned by the Astors and Vanderbilts dotted Newport’s coastline. The city’s lack of hotels meant that only those with tremendous wealth or connections came to the area. Historians Lena Lencek and


Gideon Baker found that visitors needed an annual income of at least $50,000 to afford even a brief vacation in Newport. Many visitors, however, spent $250,000 per season. Woodside understood that if he could mimic Newport’s success, even on a small scale, it would bring him untold riches.²⁵

Woodside dubbed his proposed development Arcady, after the mountainous region of ancient Greece known for its innocence, peace, and simplicity. Its crown jewels were the Ocean Forest Country Club golf course and the Ocean Forest Hotel, which when completed was the tallest structure in Myrtle Beach. Woodside built these on the coast several miles north of downtown to give guests a sense of seclusion from the rest of the world. The resort was far removed from the hustle and bustle of city streets and from the northern megalopolises that continued to expand both skyward and into the suburbs. It promised visitors a simpler life.²⁶

Arcady investors privately published a book outlining the area, its attractions, and the benefits of vacationing in their soon-to-be completed resort. *ARCADY: A National Playground Where the Leaders of Contemporary Life May Sustain Their Capacity for Work by Bringing to its Utmost the Art of Rest and Recreation* was the first attempt to market Myrtle Beach to a northern audience. It paints Myrtle Beach not as a remote strip of sand, but as an easily reachable, yet quiet, vacation paradise equipped with any amusement a wealthy family could desire. “No matter what your favorite pastime may be,” the developers argued, “golf, horseback riding, tennis, fencing, baseball, trap shooting, swimming, polo, archery, fishing, hunting, even yachting and aviation---it will be found in ARCADY.” Like Newport, Arcady was to be a

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²⁵ Lencek and Bosker, *The Beach*, 149-153.

“playground” for the rich, a wholesome resort for wealthy, white families. Unlike Newport, though, Myrtle Beach’s warm climate made it suitable as a year-round destination.\textsuperscript{27}

Arcady officials understood that touting the city’s warm weather as an excuse for wealthy white northerners to abandon Newport had one flaw. Florida was attempting to lure those same tourists south and was no doubt warmer than Myrtle Beach. Because developers saw themselves in competition with Florida they needed a way to compete with Florida’s main draw, its weather. In the era before air-conditioning, Myrtle Beach boosters claimed that Florida was \textit{too} far south to be enjoyable for long. The only “really enjoyable far-South season begins in January and ends in March.” Myrtle Beach, promoters professed, had two enjoyable or “semi-tropical” seasons, fall and spring, and a “delightfully mild” winter. Even in the dog days of July and August, developers noted, “the nights are tempered by the prevailing southwest breezes which, due to the coastal formation here, sweep in over many miles of the cooling waters of the ocean, bringing comfort and pleasurable rest.” Rest, after all, was what they wanted their northern visitors to get.\textsuperscript{28}

Better weather was not the only reason to choose Myrtle Beach over Florida. Proximity to northern locales was another one of the resort’s key selling points. In fact, Myrtle Beach pointed out that their resort town was half way between New York and Miami. Promoters argued that if visitors chose Myrtle Beach over points south, they could spend more time relaxing and less time travelling to their destination.

\textsuperscript{27} ARCADY Executives, \textit{ARCADY: A National Playground Where the Leaders of Contemporary Life May Sustain Their Capacity for Work by Bringing to its Utmost the Art of Rest and Recreation} (New York: privately printed, 1929), 6-7.

\textsuperscript{28} ARCADY, \textit{A National Playground}, 7.
The New York market intrigued Arcady executives the most. The reason for this was three-fold: demographic, practical, and financial. New York was the most populated city in the United States. Marketing Myrtle Beach to a city the size of New York allowed promoters to get their message out to the most people for the fewest advertising dollars. Also, New Yorkers already flocked south. In 1937, Georgetown County counted cars crossing its newly completed bridge to determine the traveler’s origins. Of travelers from out-of-state, most cars sported North Carolina tags, followed closely by New York. Travelers from New Jersey finished third. Myrtle Beach’s New York market was already visiting. Developers just had to give them a reason to stay. Woodside bet that his resort would give them that excuse.29

Woodside targeted those in New York and other cities who had desk jobs, a relatively small population composed mainly of white men. Only people who had both freedom from work and wealth, “leaders from the contemporary life,” as its pamphlet’s title suggests, could take weekend trips to Myrtle Beach from New York City. “You can board a Pullman in New York City at seven o’clock in the evening and by noon of the following day be in the surf at ARCADY; returning, you can leave ARCADY in the afternoon and be at your desk in New York early the following day.” Although the resort’s promotion was intended to convince these “leaders” to vacation in Myrtle Beach, Arcady developers did not intend for men always to come alone. Arcady was intended for the family.30

Developers promised activities for every visitor, including women and children. “There is one human touch in the scheme which is peculiarly its own,” the booklet reads, “This is that each membership is a family affair, as much for the baby of the household as for the head of the

29 Talbert, So Much to be Thankful For, 212.

30 ARCADY, A National Playground, 6-7.
house. Instead of considering provisions for women and children secondary, ARCADY will do as much for them as men.” The development promised to offer youth swimming pools and indoor play areas and additional golf courses designed for women and children. In addition, ARCADY officials assured would-be land owners and visitors that they would construct special high quality educational facilities so parents could relax at the beach or the soon-to-be-completed golf course. Providing quality education would be a difficult task. In 1946, a survey conducted by the George Peabody College for Teachers found Horry County’s educational system seventy five years behind the national standard. But ARCADY promised to spare no expense. Developers meant the enterprise for the whole family, as long as that family was white and wealthy.31

ARCADY was to be built in two phases. The first phase included the centerpiece - a hotel and golf course. These were created to lure wealthy men to the area in an effort to convince them to settle permanently. Phase two consisted of selling land to those wanting to live at the beach. Woodside expected to make his money on land sales. New Yorkers, so awed by the resort’s attractions and scenic beauty, the developer believed, would rush to invest in summer homes. While the second part of Woodside’s dream never became a reality, the first phase was completed in grand fashion.32

The Ocean Forest Hotel, dubbed the “Million Dollar Hotel” by locals because of the large purchase price, opened on January 15, 1930, to much fanfare. Woodside spared no expense in the construction. Italian marble laced the ballroom and reading rooms. Chandeliers imported

31 ARCADY, A National Playground, 6-7; Jennifer Amor, “From Turpentine to Tourism,” Leisureguide: The Grand Strand, (1977), 12; and Lewis, 149.

32 Gragg, The Illustrated History, 69.
from Czechoslovakia adorned the ceiling. Potted palms littered the indoors, giving the hotel a tropical feel. The Ocean Forest was ten stories high, and the builders claimed it was fireproof. Luxury did not stop in the lobby. The hotel boasted two hundred rooms with a view of the outside, each with a private bath.33

The Ocean Forest’s premier featured an invitation-only dance and dinner with guests from as far away as New York. Visitors dressed up for the event and uniformed doorman greeted them upon entrance. Those lucky enough to have a room could utilize the innovative baths where they could choose to bathe in fresh water or salt water piped in from the sea. Guests could also take advantage of the gold-plated gazebo, and indoor and outdoor pools. Stables were provided for those who came via horseback.34

During the day, guests of the Ocean Forest could relax on the golf course. Robert White, the first president of the Professional Golfers Association (PGA), designed and managed the course. His stamp gave the course a professional feel. Its twenty-seven-hole design featured a dozen lakes and a colonial-style clubhouse. The prospect of winter golf lured the likes of the Rockefellers and the Vanderbilts. It was one of the few golf courses in the South and the first in Myrtle Beach.35


Unfortunately for the city, developers could not have picked a worse time to open a luxury hotel. While the golf course opened in 1927, the hotel was not ready for business. Its lavish grand opening in 1930 was also its last great night. In its nearly forty-five-year history the hotel never turned a profit. With the onset of the Great Depression in 1929, few visitors traveled to the resort. By 1937 only sixteen golfers, all locals, belonged to the Ocean Forest Club. The course received some business from nearby cities, but not enough to thrive. Golf just was not that popular in the South yet; it was a wealthy man’s sport. The region’s dearth of professionals meant that the resort needed outside visitors to turn a profit. During the cash-strapped Great Depression, this proved impossible. The hotel closed its doors in 1932. Woodside would never reopen the hotel. In 1933, Woodside forfeited on the mortgage to the land and it reverted back to the Myrtle Beach Farms Company. The Ocean Forest Hotel and Country Club were bought by another owner and reopened.  

Not everyone suffered when Woodside’s dream of Arcady died. During his seven year investment, Woodside greatly improved the land he purchased from Myrtle Beach Farms. He paved many of the roads in town and improved the water and sewer systems in the area. Myrtle Beach Farms could now develop the property cheaper and thus quicken the pace of economic growth. Unlike the Ocean Forest Hotel, the area’s guesthouses turned a profit as they became the place to stay along the coast for tourists and workers engaged in building the area’s infrastructure.

Most importantly, despite its failure, Arcady marked the birth of the concept of Myrtle Beach as a family-oriented beach, the backbone of its promotional image. Not until the 1970s would boosters attempt to attract large-scale investments like Arcady. Instead, city leaders chose

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to bring in small hotels and motor courts. Safety, namely from hurricanes, was a major selling point, as was the development’s numerous and varied activities. The only catch: visitors had to be both white and willing to spend money. This was Arcady’s lasting legacy.

Myrtle Beach grew slowly during the 1930s. The Great Depression hurt the economy but government support and tourist revenue blunted the financial sting. Four developments provided economic stimuli and made the area more tourist-friendly. First, the government constructed the Intracoastal Waterway. The United States Army Corp of Engineers cut a route that ran mainly through the rivers and swampland situated two and a half miles behind the oceanfront. The completion of the project instantly made Myrtle Beach an island separated from the rest of the state. Second, Myrtle Beach developers built a small municipal airport in 1938. While tourists still primarily arrived by automobile, a growing number of visitors who lived beyond a day’s travel could take weekend excursions to the area. Thirdly, in 1934 Myrtle Beach Farms donated a swath of land on the coast for a state park. The decision, as generous as it appeared, was self-serving. Myrtle Beach Farms knew that the state park would bring tourists to the area, thus benefiting its business. The state quickly improved the area. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) built facilities and cabins, transforming the improved land into a vacation destination for middle-class whites. Myrtle Beach State Park has since become the most visited park in South Carolina.\(^{37}\)

Most importantly, in 1938 the *Myrtle Beach News*, launched only three years earlier, posed the question that would shape the course of the area’s development: “Chamber of Commerce, or Not?” The newspaper unabashedly supported its creation. Until 1938, each rental

\(^{37}\) Talbert, *So Much to be Thankful For*, 212-217; Moredock, *Banana Republic*, 9; and Gragg, *The Illustrated History*, 78.
property owner and hotel operator privately publicized their establishment and the beach. The paper concluded that Myrtle Beach’s economic difficulties could be solved by creating a chamber of commerce and operating it as a tourist board. The chamber would combine all its efforts into one promotion targeting middle-class tourists. Housing operators would be left only to compete among themselves for interested renters lured in by the chamber. Myrtle Beach leaders understood that the increased publicity would cause a skyrocket in the number of tourists, bringing wealth to everyone. The newspaper hoped that through the chamber of commerce’s leadership the city would become a destination, not just a stop over between New York and Miami. The chamber formed later that year.38

Beginning in the late 1930s, Myrtle Beach’s development permanently veered away from that of other southern towns. Whereas state and city boosters across the region used the promise of cheap labor, tax incentives, and anti-unionization sentiments to lure industry, Myrtle Beach promoters shied away from such ploys. The economic health of the city would rise or fall with tourists.

Tourism seemed to be the perfect industry because it required no northern investment. Most guesthouses, restaurants, hotels, and small businesses were locally owned, so virtually every dollar visitors spent went into the pockets of South Carolina residents. Because vacationers’ needs were so great, including food, shelter, gasoline, activities, and memorabilia, the benefits of the industry were shared across the community. Tourism was a different, but potentially far more profitable, New South industry.

The city’s neighbors took a different path. For much of its lifetime, the chamber leaders were not concerned with bringing smokestack industries into town and shunned northern businesses. This was an uncommon choice, even for coastal towns. Kure Beach, North Carolina, allowed Dow Chemical to build a bromine plant in the early 1930s. To the south, American Cyanamid began producing aluminum sulphate and other industrial chemicals in Georgetown. Myrtle Beach leaders understood that such industries, while good for the immediate local economy, could threaten the scenic beauty and image of the area.39

The decision to create a chamber of commerce that would serve the interests of the tourism industry greatly benefited the city, but Myrtle Beach had a long way to go before it would become a favorite resort. Simply forming a chamber did not guarantee economic wealth or independence from Northern business interests. The chamber required a unified vision for the future of the city. Myrtle Beach residents struggled with what this new city was and what it was to be. The town’s population hovered around two thousand and had only a few services available to the local population, much less to tourists. Commercial establishments included a movie theatre, two bars (the Rathskeller and the Silver Dollar Café), a drugstore, an Exxon station, and a grocery store operated by one of the developers of Myrtle Beach. Myrtle Beach did not even have a dentist or a hospital. Those seeking medical attention had to travel bumpy

roads to Conway. As the 1940s dawned, Myrtle Beach was still just a sleepy, underdeveloped southern coastal town.\textsuperscript{40}

Worse yet for tourism, Myrtle Beach was far from a refined vacation destination in the 1930s. Wildlife surrounded the area and sometimes ventured into town. Early residents remember wild hogs grazing around the beach and cattle from local farms venturing to the shore to take a dip. Most of the lots were undeveloped and the first paved street to Myrtle Beach was just completed in 1940. Rural landscape dominated the area west of Highway 17. Myrtle Beach hardly looked like a tourist attraction.\textsuperscript{41}

Yet some saw the wild beauty as a tourist draw. Like Arcady promoters years earlier, many viewed Myrtle Beach as a place for respite, a spot to recoup one’s strength before going back to the stresses of the modern world. Its ruggedness, coupled with the glamour of the Ocean Forest Hotel, could bring in a unique and wealthy city-dwelling clientele. “With the proper promotion, adequate advertising, and good management,” Charlotte resident Mrs. Will O’Mae Adams believed, “Myrtle Beach could in a short-time become one of the most famous health resorts.” The city’s lack of dust, smoke, and gasoline fumes, coupled with the temperate climate would provide the visitor “instant relief” from arthritis, heart ailments and other physical ailments.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{40} Jimmy D’Angelo, interview by Don Millus and Catherine Lewis, December 4, 1992, transcript, Horry County Oral History Project, Coastal Carolina University, Conway, S.C.; and Gragg, The Illustrated History, 76.

\textsuperscript{41} Amor, “From Turpentine to Tourism,” 15; and Gragg, The Illustrated History, 77.

\textsuperscript{42} Myrtle Beach News, “Mrs. Adams of The Charlotte News Enthusiastic About Climate and Opportunities Here in Interview,” January 5, 1939.
The chamber of commerce, however, never tried to portray the beach as a health resort, possibly because of the historic obstacles they were sure to encounter. Since the antebellum era, South Carolina’s white coastal residents had always fled to the mountains during the summer, leaving their plantations in the hands of a slave driver. The coastal region’s warm temperature and swampy geography was a breeding ground for disease-carrying pests like mosquitoes, which carried yellow fever and malaria. The advent of air-conditioning did little to temper the fears of insect-born illnesses. As late as 1938, when residents created the chamber, the newspaper advised locals to puncture every can and bottle thrown away. Stagnant water collected in these cans would provide a place for mosquitoes to breed. Given the environmental challenges, promoting the beach as a health resort would be difficult if not impossible.43

Instead, the chamber of commerce looked to its promotional predecessor, John T. Woodside. Like the Arcady promotions a decade earlier, the chamber claimed their city was a sporting paradise and a scenic wonder, ideal for the wealthy elite. In 1939, Myrtle Beach boosters distributed one of their first tourist brochures. It read just like the earlier Arcady booklet. The cover shows the pavilion with the beach as a backdrop. Inside, the pamphlet informs potential tourists about the new horse track and the miles of riding trails for horse enthusiasts. It continues, “your mornings may be spent…playing tennis, shooting, fishing or boating; your afternoons in golfing, surf-bathing, or visiting nearby state parks, nationally famed gardens and beautiful plantations rich in the history of the old south.” At night visitors “sleep

peacefully, lulled by soft breezes and the song of the Ocean.” Myrtle Beach, city boosters wanted everybody to know, was still a playground for the elite.\textsuperscript{44} Attracting the wealthy to Myrtle Beach was both shrewd and necessary during the Great Depression. Outside of locals, only the wealthy could afford to travel to the area. Myrtle Beach did not need to provide any additional resources for the benefit of the elite. The city’s coastal location made boating and fishing an easy lure, while the area’s rugged landscape made horseback riding and hunting possible. In addition, the Ocean Forest Hotel already had the resources, golfing and tennis, to cater to those with more leisure time. Attempting to attract a wealthy clientele also made sense for a city with such limited resources. Myrtle Beach could not yet house nor feed hordes of visitors like Coney Island and Atlantic City to the north. A week-long stay by a Vanderbilt or a Rockefeller could somewhat offset this deficiency.

Whether it was the economic problems caused by the depression, Myrtle Beach’s relative obscurity, or the rugged nature of the city, the wealthy did not visit, save for an occasional round of golf. The failure of this recruitment strategy taught Myrtle Beach a lesson that altered the course of its development. High-class attractions and accommodations did not match Myrtle Beach’s current and future clientele, mainly farmers from the area and upstate textile mill-workers. In fact, one of the city’s biggest events was Farmers Day, when local growers received free admission to the new horse race track. Here they could relax after the long growing season and hopefully win some money betting on the races. Myrtle Beach boosters, while trying to promote the destination as a playground for the wealthy, could not ignore that visits from white middle-class men provided the backbone of the city’s economy.

\textsuperscript{44} Myrtle Beach News, “A Brochure,” March 23, 1939.
Those who could afford to spend their summers in Florida would continue to do so, largely ignoring South Carolina’s coastline. Florida offered wealthy northern whites something fresh and exotic. Faced with this reality, by the early 1940s Myrtle Beach promoters abandoned their plans to become a playground for the elite. Instead, city boosters would focus on building an infrastructure that would be able to handle a large quantity of visitors who each contributed small sums of money into the local economy rather than attracting a wealthy clientele with more disposable income. Myrtle Beach would cater to the masses.45

Although Myrtle Beach promoters moved away from touting itself as a playground for the rich, the city still attempted to adopt the developer’s image of the city as a family beach. Like Woodside, boosters continued to encourage men to take their families to the beach. The two philosophies, promoting a family beach and accommodating a large influx of visitors, proved incongruous as the city grew. City leaders could keep Myrtle Beach small, hoping to create and preserve a small town family-friendly atmosphere, or they could encourage massive development, bringing in all comers. The latter would generate enormous wealth but strain its family beach image. Over the next thirty years, promoters of Myrtle Beach struggled with these two competing agendas.

45 Lilliefors, America’s Boardwalks, 148; and Moredock, Banana Republic, 11.
Chapter 2

The Myth of the Family Beach

*Boy, you should see this place after Labor Day it sure folds up* - Larry Boulier, 1956¹

On May 3, 1953, Myrtle Beach boosters achieved one of their greatest early successes: a travel editor for the *New York Times* wrote a brief piece that lauded the area as a perfect vacation getaway. The article perfectly articulated how promoters would come to describe the city. As the *New York Times* travel editor wrote, “This quiet dreamy resort on the South Carolina coast, 652 miles out of New York, seems too good to be true. It affords quiet, twenty miles of sandy beach creamed by sleep-producing surf night and day.” The quaint town, the paper notes, “includes every type of modern structure except the skyscraper…Only one hotel…has an elevator.” Despite having four movie theaters, “most visitors turn in by 10 o’clock,” because “There are no public bars and there is no nocturnal whoop-de-do.” The newspaper believed the sleepy town exemplified the best place for a family to visit and for visitors to start a family. Locals concurred with the assessment. “The Grand Strand,” resident Claude Dunnagan opined, “is known as the ‘family residential beach…where strangers become friends.’”²

By 1954, Myrtle Beach appeared to be the middle-class, white, family beach that became the crux of the city’s promotional backbone for the rest of the century. Boosters worked tirelessly to craft and cultivate this image, hoping to accelerate Myrtle Beach’s success as a

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tourist resort without destroying what brought visitors to the area in the first place, the beach. Yet while leaders made genuine attempts to foster the development of the city as a white family beach, they failed to realize that wholesome activities were not what brought people to the area.

Increasingly, visitors came to the beach to engage in illegal or illicit activities. Men came to the beach to play golf and gawk at women. Police officers and government officials conveniently chose not to enforce the state’s liquor laws and looked the other way when racial boundaries were breached in dance clubs and honky tonks. Cracking down on these activities would drive away visitors, something the town with little other industry could ill afford. Myrtle Beach was, in reality, a town created to cater to the middle-class white tourist’s every whim, legal and illegal.

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From 1930s to the 1960s, the main route into Myrtle Beach was down the Ocean Highway. This route, starting in New York and ending in Miami, was actually a combination of six highways and two ferry rides, one across the Chesapeake Bay, blended into one coastal route south. The road was neither the quickest, nor the best route, but businessmen along the coast hoped visitors would choose to travel the road to Miami. The “sea level route” gave residents of each coastal enclave a small economic boost as tourists stopped along the way to sightsee, sleep, or simply gas-up before they continued their way south. For some drivers, Myrtle Beach was the final destination on the Ocean Highway. Holidays like the Fourth of July usually brought as
many as fifty thousand revelers to the beach. Tourism helped insulate the area from economic downturns.³

City boosters along the route from Wilmington, Delaware, to Miami, Florida, understood the potential financial gains should travelers choose the Ocean Highway over its competitor,

³ Myrtle Beach News, “Chamber of Commerce, Or Not?” January 2, 1938; Gragg, The Illustrated History, 77; Talbert, So Much to be Thankful For, 214; “Myrtle Beach South Carolina,” Agricultural Bulletin II, no. 10, (1939):10; and Peninsula Pete Guides You Along the Ocean Highway By Way of Del-Mar-Va Peninsula: Fast-Safe-All Weather Route From Northern Pines to Southern Palms (Wilmington, Del: Ocean Hiway Association, 1942). The Highways were from north to south as follows: (1, 25, 130, 13, 17, 32, 21, 1).
Highway 301. By 1950, Florida could boast over a one million cars per year, or roughly five million people, crossing the state line in search of recreation. Every tourist travelling the Ocean Highway south would potentially bring more money to each city along the route. During the 1950s even more people packed up their belongings and headed to Florida for good. In that decade, the Sunshine State’s population growth was a staggering 78 percent, topping even its historic boom in the 1920s. Coastal city boosters desperately wanted those travelers and hoped to turn many of them into residents.\(^4\)

In 1935 leaders from coastal towns along the route met in Myrtle Beach and created the Ocean Hiway Association.\(^5\) This group of tourism promoters had yearly meetings to discuss how best to promote the route, usually at the group’s headquarters in Wilmington, Delaware. The association knew it had competition for which road would be the primary route southward. Highway 301, which went through Washington D.C. and Richmond, Virginia, was already the most traveled road. Highway 17 was thought of as a “second-class highway.” Without tourists traveling the down the Ocean Highway, each coastal enclave would struggle economically. But the towns needed more than just cars stopping to fill their gas tanks. These cities needed each traveler to become a tourist, to stop in town and buy a meal or a trinket, take a picture to show


\(^5\) Creating a Highway Association as a means to promote travel was common from in the first half of the twentieth century. Both the Dixie Highway and the Lincoln Highway, as well as smaller routes, had associations working to encourage travelers to use their route. Howard Lawrence Preston, *Dirt Roads to Dixie: Accessibility and Modernization in the South, 1885-1935* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991). The Association spelled Highway as “Hiway.”
friends, send a postcard, and hopefully spend the night. Multiplied by a thousand, tourists could provide residents a healthy income.\textsuperscript{6}

The primary claim made by the Ocean Hiway Association was that it was a better road than Highway 301, the north-south route roughly seventy miles to the west. Organization leaders alleged their route to be faster and safer. Much of the association’s claim came from its assertion that the Ocean Highway was an all-weather route. Proximity to the Atlantic made the trip better. During the winter, their brochures insisted, crippling snow storms that plagued interior routes became rain storms along the Ocean Highway. This rain kept rose bushes along the trek blooming and the route beautiful year-round. In the summer, ocean breezes made the drive cool and more pleasant. If the breeze was not blowing strong, travelers could take a break in the surf. From South Carolina down to Florida, they argued, the ocean is warm enough to swim year-round. The ploy did not work. The American Automobile Association (AAA) already acknowledged that 301 was the best route to take south.\textsuperscript{7}

In order to drum up visitors, the route needed a niche. For the Ocean Hiway Association, their niche was the white family vacation. Crafted primarily by Myrtle Beach promoters, the advertising scheme was designed to encourage travelers to take the scenic route, composed of small towns, rather than Highway 301. To persuade tourists to travel the route, the association printed large, detailed, travel brochures designed to be read aloud by passengers. Roughly seventy-five pages, the brochure consisted of a map and highlights of every major city and many


\textsuperscript{7} Peninsula Pete, 1-2. Despite the Ocean Hiway Association’s best efforts, their route never surpassed Highway 301 as the premier southbound route.
small towns along the highway. It also gave a brief description of each state and its culture, complete with illustrations featuring a campy tour guide dubbed Peninsula Pete.

The Peninsula Pete brochure was designed with the whole family in mind. For women, the Ocean Highway offered scenic beauty and proximity to the beach. The brochure did more than just list attractions; it also gave recipes for local delicacies such as peanut soup and corn whey pudding. In addition, the Ocean Hiway Association placed illustrations in the travel brochure to spark children’s interest in the scenery and local culture. Many of these pictures showed Pete partaking in the local customs. The association’s slogan, “From Northern Pines to Southern Palms,” encouraged travelers to notice the ever changing scenery around their automobiles. Many of their descriptions of cities include a mention of the area’s unique waterfowl or plant life, compelling families to stop, get out of their cars, and take pictures. For instance, the brochure urges travelers to stop in Jacksonville, North Carolina, and search for the carnivorous Venus Flytrap plant, or in Fort Pierce, Florida, to see the prickly pear cacti growing atop the sand dunes. Nature’s beauty, Pete wanted the traveler to notice, surrounded their vehicle. The description served two purposes. First, promoters hoped that the pictures would be shown to friends, thus boosting future traffic. Second and most importantly, time spent out of the car equaled less time traveling. Each business along the route stood to benefit from an extra meal served, convenience store purchase, or overnight stay.\footnote{Ibid., 46, 72.}

For men, the assumed drivers, the route itself symbolized freedom and the “call of the open road.” The brochure touted the road south using words with rugged and adventurous connotations such as “explore” and “a pilgrimage.” Their technique was nothing new. Travel trade magazines began using these terms to attract white male visitors in the 1930s. Pete offered
more than just lingo to appeal to men. From the automobile he could survey and visualize the nation’s history. The road went through Delaware where the “Swedes and the Dutch played tug-of-war.” It traveled along the Florida coast, where Ponce de Leon once scoured the sands. It also went through Virginia where the “scars of 3 wars cover the state.” Men, the association hoped, would enjoy the trek through the nation’s past.9

Peninsula Pete, however, was not meant for black families.10 Their exclusion began on the brochures front cover where Pete, a sharply dressed white tour guide, sits in the backseat of an automobile behind a white couple as they travel down the highway. With inter-racial travel taboo and segregation the law, the illustration demanded blacks’ exclusion from the joys of the route. Inside the cover, other images excluded the black family. Of the fifty-eight illustrations, only five pictured African-Americans all in the role of servant. None of the images showed blacks engaged in any leisurely activity.

The first of these images appeared just as the traveler was to cross from Maryland into Virginia. Featured in the illustration are roughly twenty-five black farmers harvesting the latest crop. There are no whites in the image. Other than the complete lack of discussion of the picture, (the Ocean Hiway Association instead used the space to talk about John Smith and Native Americans), what is striking about the illustration is the black woman drawn to appear closest to the reader. The only figure with discernable facial features, the farmer is looking back at the reader grinning widely. She clearly enjoys her menial job picking crops. Depicting blacks


10 There were guides specifically designed for black family vacations such as Victor H. Green, The Negro Motorist Green Book (New York: Victor H. Green & Co., 1949).
as poor but content farmers diminished their poverty and struggle to nothing more than roadside scenery. White families could therefore pass by the farms of the Deep South in the 1940s without feeling guilty about the plight of African-Americans. They were content in their place. Blacks’ back-breaking work and poverty, like the ocean itself, were part of the landscape and thus part of the Ocean Highway experience.\textsuperscript{11}

![Figure 3: Illustration of Black Sharecroppers in the Ocean Hiway Brochure, 1942](image)

Omitting blacks, except as scenery, from the Ocean Hiway Association’s travel brochure did more than just let blacks know they were attractions themselves. It also reaffirmed that a white family vacation was separate from a black family vacation. Blacks were servants and white tourists expected service. While highlighting the roadside scenery, the brochure briefly mentions Atlantic Beach, one of the few beaches blacks in the South could frequent. The absence of any extended coverage of the city was not shocking; this was not any reader’s intended destination.

While the Ocean Hiway Association did its part to craft an image of the coast as a destination for whites families, its efforts alone could not turn Myrtle Beach into a family destination. It simply created a façade of a cheery, trip southbound along roads where the

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Peninsula Pete,} 21. For more on how workers can be used as a tourist attraction see Eric Alan Cheezum, “Discovering Chessie: Waterfront, Regional Identity, and the Chesapeake Bay Sea Monster, 1960-2000” (PhD diss., University of South Carolina, 2007), 25-68.
temperatures were as warm as the people were friendly. The brochure only provided a promotional template for the city. Actually turning Myrtle Beach into a family beach and a national vacation destination, rather than a place for northern tourists to stop on their way south, was much more difficult.

In 1939, only four years after the founding of the Ocean Hiway Association, Myrtle Beach neither looked like the playground for the rich envisioned by John T. Woodside, nor the family beach portrayed by the Ocean Hiway Association. Single white, working-class men from farms in the surrounding counties, not families, flocked to the area both for work and leisure during the late 1930s. They would remain the area’s primary visitors. Poor and unemployed, these rough men came to Myrtle Beach hoping to relieve some stress and catch a break.

Local entrepreneurs operated businesses that catered to the dark desires of the area’s working-class male clientele. Highway 17 and the road to Conway were littered with seedy clip joints and motels that rented their cabins by the hour. Local historian Bo Bryan acknowledges, “The resort ran virtually wide open. There was organized gambling at the dog and trotter track. Bootleggers ran nightclubs outside the city limits serving their untaxed liquor. Slot machines and gaming tables were not unknown. The downtown amusement district was a booming carnival.” Journalist Will Moredock agrees adding, “You could get drunk, get laid, and get tattooed, all in one stop, at a couple of notorious roadhouses along the South end of the Strand.”

The local sheriff, a tough man by the name of Edward Sessions, ended horse racing and closed many of the unsavory clip joints in 1940. Myrtle Beach’s mayor, Ben M. Graham, disapproved of Graham’s crackdown. The shady and often illegal trades attracted hordes of

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white, working-class men, boosting the economy even during the Great Depression. Tougher law enforcement won Sessions few friends in city hall and elsewhere. He lost the next election as Horry County sheriff. Myrtle Beach needed the sordid businesses and its reputation for lawlessness to continue to attract paying visitors during the depression. The city desired white, working-class men to visit the town, stay for a night, and tell of their experiences, however distasteful.

Sessions’ actions were a mixed blessing. Local businessmen and city government disapproved of the crackdown because of the negative economic side effects. However, his efforts eliminated many of the objectionable businesses that could have undermined any attempt to promote the city as a family beach. When World War II ended, new city boosters and government now had a virtual clean slate on which to create an image of a family beach that did not stray too far from reality.  

Boosters received help from an unlikely source, the United States Air Force. With World War II raging in both Europe and Asia, the United States government began to prepare for the distinct possibility of entrance into the conflict. As a part of the “sunshine belt,” the land around Myrtle Beach was relatively unsettled, fit for both training and national defense. Equipped with a newly completed municipal airport, the site was perfect for the Air Force. Myrtle Beach eagerly agreed to let the military set up a base. In the spring of 1940, the Civil Aeronautics Administration spent $112,000 to improve the small field and equip it to house and land large aircraft. The first Air Force presence was tiny; only three military planes called Myrtle Beach...

home in December 1940. By the spring of 1941, the once small municipal field buzzed with activity as over five thousand airmen arrived for duty, sharing the airport with civilians.\(^\text{14}\)

The military did more than just station troops in the city. A month before the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor the United States government confiscated over one hundred thousand acres of land from three hundred different land owners. The Air Force intended to use the land as a bombing range to prepare for the possibility of war. Military strategists promised to give the land back after they were done using it. The bombing of Pearl Harbor delayed those plans. On December 7, 1941, the 112th Observation Squadron deployed to Myrtle Beach to protect the coastline. Almost immediately they began practicing on the newly acquired land. Several times planes came close to killing civilians when they missed their mark. One man remembered a .55 caliber bullet missing him by a quarter of an inch when he was sleeping in his bed. Most observers believed the military was going to be in the city long after the war.\(^\text{15}\)

The Air Force’s arrival changed Myrtle Beach dramatically. First, it offset the economic crisis caused by the sheriff’s crackdown on area vice. The area served as the last stop for those embarking to Europe, and many servicemen spent their money at the local Myrtle Beach hangouts, bringing local businesses much needed income. Most importantly, many men stationed in Myrtle Beach moved back to the city with their new wives after the war, giving it a


\(^{15}\) Talbert, \textit{So Much to be Thankful For}, 217-218; “Bases Resources and Economic Impact” Horry County Vertical Files; and “Myrtle Beach Aerial Gunnery and Bombing Range,” 11-13.
sizable, stable, young population for the first time. Now the city’s resident population matched its desired image of a place for middle-class white families.

Here the city was hardly unique. Many soldiers, upon leaving the military, chose to settle close to the southern bases where they had been stationed. And like other cities across the South, the sudden influx of military personnel created an urgent need for housing, sewer and water extensions, and other amenities. The flood of new residents forced Myrtle Beach developers to start building an infrastructure capable of handling its growing population. But Myrtle Beach locals did not treat these new residents like a burden to their overworked infrastructure nor as a godsend to building a sizeable tax base. They were treated as family, greeted by the female welcoming committee and asked to join the Chamber of Commerce and other groups. These new residents quickly joined in the city’s crusade to become a preeminent family destination. The arrivals were schooled on the area’s core purpose: to create a wholesome beach resort but above all, bring in tourists. New residents articulated part of the city’s mission by their very presence as a family. Just by moving to Myrtle Beach, they helped take the city one step closer to its goal. These families reinvigorated the area’s promotion, helping the city to present itself to outsiders as a truly safe and wholesome place to bring your family.\textsuperscript{16}

Of the new residents to arrive after World War II one stands out: Mark Garner. More than any other person, Garner was responsible for shaping Myrtle Beach into the city it is today.

Garner held a number of important jobs during his first twenty-five years in the city. He served as head of the chamber of commerce, and founder, editor, and publisher of the city’s largest and most successful newspaper, *The Myrtle Beach Sun News*. He served two terms on the city council (January 1954-December 1957) and two terms as mayor (January 1966-December 1973). Not happy to remain a politician and promoter, Garner dabbled in his own tourist attraction, the short-lived amusement park he dubbed Pirateland. His prominence earned him statewide attention. Garner was friends and business associates with South Carolina Governor Robert E. McNair and had regular discussions with Governor Donald Russell about tourism development.\(^{17}\)

Myrtle Beach could not have asked for a more qualified man to lead their promotional push. Growing up in Asheville, North Carolina, Garner saw first hand the economic force of the tourist dollar. Since the Civil War, western North Carolina had established itself as a place for visitors to relax and enjoy the rugged Appalachian mountain scenery. Asheville was the region’s business center and stood at the heart of its tourism promotional efforts. Determined boosters worked tirelessly to make the city and region nationally recognized as a tourist destination. In 1924, the city of Asheville brought a minor league baseball team to the area both as an attraction and as a roving promotional tool. Initially dubbed the Skylanders, the franchise quickly changed its name to the Tourists, “to better reflect the identity, values, and spirit of Asheville.” The club convinced several major league teams to play in their new ball park, McCormick Field, including the New York Yankees in both 1926 and 1931. The move was brilliant. Sportswriters arrived in Asheville to cover the game and the careers of stars Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig. The city

received free publicity that highlighted a phrase emblazoned along the left field grandstand: “Asheville – The Playground of America.” The subtle effectiveness of the message would not be lost on the young Garner.18

Garner was intrigued by the impact that tourism could have on a local economy. In the 1940s, after finishing his journalism degree at the University of North Carolina, he served as a combat correspondent with the Air Force in the Pacific theater. Upon return, Garner quickly took on two jobs as a sports editor for the Asheville Citizen, no doubt attending many of the baseball games, and as the assistant manager of Asheville’s chamber of commerce, where he handled public relations. Enjoying his work promoting tourism, but wanting a fresh start, Garner moved to Myrtle Beach where he served as the executive secretary of the chamber of commerce.19

Here he noticed the influx of families moving into the area. To Garner, a recent arrival himself, the appearance of so many families made him believe the city was a middle-class family playground. He also noticed the biggest event in the attempt to make the beach match promoters desired image. Since the 1930s, various traveling carnivals had visited the beach to entertain the local population and give the area a brief boost in tourism. But with the increase in population, particularly of families, the Myrtle Beach Farms Company wanted a permanent attraction. In 1948, company executive E.E. Burroughs convinced the Husted Brothers, a small traveling

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carnival in the region for the Conway tobacco festival, to relocate next to the Myrtle Beach pavilion. Two years later, Myrtle Beach Farms bought out the Husted Brothers and made the amusement park a permanent fixture. To make the attraction even more family friendly, there was no admission fee. Visitors paid per ride, meaning families could take their children to the beach or park based on the fickle child’s changing interest. For the next five decades the pavilion amusement park grew in size, adding, among other attractions, a carousel and a roller coaster. Understandably, Garner saw these new family-friendly ventures as Myrtle Beach’s present and future.²⁰

Although Garner was always involved with the chamber, his first love was journalism. In 1950, Garner, and his college friend W. Horace Carter formed the Atlantic Publishing Company. They printed both the Tabor City (NC) Tribune and the Myrtle Beach Sun. Garner served as the editor of the latter and the assistant editor of the former with Carter serving the opposite roles. The paper started its weekly printing in 1950 as the Myrtle Beach Sun, before Garner purchased and merged with their competitor, the Myrtle Beach News, in 1961.²¹ The choice of the Sun as its moniker, was intentional. It reflected the paper’s tourist promotion intentions, focusing on Myrtle Beach’s strength, its weather. It also subtly downplayed the paper’s standing as a source of news. The choice was deliberate. Garner’s years of promotional experience shaped the composition and content of what would become the Myrtle Beach Sun News. Under his leadership and guidance, the newspaper and chamber worked in unison in promoting Myrtle

²⁰ Lilliefors, America’s Boardwalks, 144; and Stokes, Myrtle Beach: A History, 85-96.

²¹ Jackson, 31. The newspaper changed its name after the merger to the Myrtle Beach Sun News.
Beach until the early 1970s. To a large extent, the *Myrtle Beach Sun News* existed as the local mouthpiece of the chamber of commerce.\(^\text{22}\)

Garner designed the *Sun News* for locals and tourists alike, especially the spring and summer issues. Along with local stories, the newspaper bombarded year-round residents with articles about the importance of tourist promotion, such as “We must not Grow Tired of Promotion” and “Tourism Could Be Our Big Industry If We Put Enough Effort in Program.” These articles encouraged constant economic development and promised significant financial rewards for the town if it wholeheartedly and unabashedly invested in the tourist trade. Every resident, the newspaper believed, needed to participate if the town was going to succeed. Locals eagerly got on board. Resident Anton Poster remembered in the 1950s, “Everybody was waiting for the time to come when Myrtle Beach would become a resort…I had it drilled in my head that this was going to be a resort.”\(^\text{23}\)

Garner and his staff also wrote articles specifically for tourists and part-time residents. These people were the life-blood of the city’s economy. One story was titled “Sun Always Shines On Grand Strand; Autumn is Excellent Vacation Period.” This article, and scores like it, informed readers about the inexpensive hotels and wide stretches of empty beaches. Water temperatures in autumn, they promised, were at the level of New York beaches in July. An additional visit by tourists or an extra month spent by summer residents could only boost the city’s economy. Garner intended the stories to do more than just encourage visitors to take a

\(^{22}\) Garner, interview by Catherine Lewis and Randall Wells, November 20, 1992, transcript, Horry County History Project; “Mark C. Garner, Developer of Pirateland,” n.d., Horry County Vertical Files, South Caroliniana Library. For the purposes of consistency the newspaper will be referred to as the *Myrtle Beach Sun News*. Jackson, 32. Garner would purchase the *Horry Herald* and *Conway Field*, giving him control of the three most widely distributed papers in the county.

longer vacation. He wanted summer residents to become year-round residents, to grow the sleepy little town into a resort city. The *Myrtle Beach Sun News* was more than just a source of news, it was a promotional tool.24

The *Sun News*’s frequent advertisements for Myrtle Beach and stories about the area’s tourism development program encouraged residents to engage in constant promotion. Expanding Myrtle Beach’s reach as a national resort was the singular goal. The newspaper created an environment in which any discussion of the possible negative consequences of promotion and tourism were discouraged. The beach was a gift horse whose visitors benefited everyone financially. Critical analysis of tourism as an industry and the methods and attractions used to bring in the tourists was muted, if it even existed at all.

Garner realized that his newspaper’s reach was limited to the immediate region. Only locals and those already visiting could purchase the *Sun News*. In order to bring in new tourists, Garner needed to bring information about Myrtle Beach to their doorsteps. He devised an easy solution: mail the *Sun News* to prospective visitors. For the second annual Sun Fun Festival, the most important tourist event on the beach and one that he helped start, the *Sun News* ran a special edition to cover the festivities two weeks before the fete began. Complete with water temperatures, events listings, town history, and beauty queens, the publication was over twice the size of the normal weekly printing. Its purpose was to encourage visitors to “Come on down, the water’s fine!” In later years, the *Sun News* sent a fall and spring edition composed of similar material to those considering Myrtle Beach as a vacation destination. Garner had ten thousand

copies of the edition printed, sending them around the world. For at least two decades the newspaper distributed the enlarged Sun Fun Festival Edition far and wide. Most copies went to residents of the U.S. and Canada.25

Like the Ocean Hiway Association and ARCADY developers in years prior, the newspaper used two tactics to lure visitors to Myrtle Beach. Its stories tried to convince potential vacationers that the area was wholesome and had the most temperate and peaceful weather on the eastern seaboard. Local boosters urged summer visitors to choose Myrtle Beach over Florida because of the former’s immunity to hurricanes. The city’s location, nestled in a crescent-shaped cove, prompted a belief that tropical systems could not reach or affect the area. Storms moving in to strike the city’s coastline, boosters argued, always either stayed out to sea or made landfall along a northern county. Myrtle Beach received only rain from these storms. The city selectively failed to mention the hurricanes that hit its coastline in 1893.

Myrtle Beach’s competitor, Florida, had a long history of strong, deadly, and infamous hurricanes. The storm that struck Miami in September of 1926 killed over 350 people and destroyed over $169,000,000 in property, crippling the city’s booming economy. Almost two years to the day later another storm hit south Florida causing Lake Okeechobee to overflow, killing as many as 3,500. In 1935, yet another tropical system, known as the Labor Day Hurricane, hit the Florida Keys. The most powerful storm recorded until 1988, it struck a work camp of World War I veterans, killing 252. These storms gave Florida a hint of danger. Threat of peril is not what a sun-starved northern visitor sought in a relaxing vacation. South Carolina,

25 Myrtle Beach Sun, “It’s Sun Fun Time,” May 15, 1953.
not hit by a major storm in the twentieth century, could point to Florida’s turbulent weather past as a reason for future tourists to stay away.\textsuperscript{26}

Boosters did more than just ridicule Florida as climatologically dangerous. Even in peaceful summer days, boosters concluded, South Carolina had better weather than the sunshine state. Myrtle Beach’s climate, the newspaper and chamber claimed, was not as repressively hot in the summer as Florida’s. The more comfortable South Carolina summers, however, did not translate to cold winters or cooler ocean waters. Both the winter season and the water’s temperature, they argued, were comparable to Florida’s. Residents believed and vigorously defended the paper’s proclamations about the area’s weather, even when it was obvious that the claims were false. One ice storm in 1962 created a month-long editorial barrage when one resident doubted whether indeed Myrtle Beach had better weather than Florida. Locals responded angrily to the editorial.\textsuperscript{27}

Promises of a more temperate, peaceful weather pattern than Florida’s never really brought tourists to the beach in the numbers that boosters hoped. For one, Americans held Florida in their minds as a mythical place, a paradise. That South Carolina, the state that travelers simply drove through, claimed to have better weather seemed preposterous. More importantly, technology made weather appear controllable. Air-conditioning came to southern residences in large numbers in 1951 with the release of the inexpensive window unit. While


only 18 percent of Floridian households had air-conditioning in 1960, the number jumped to over 60 percent by 1970, the largest increase by any Southern state. Cars and hotels followed suit. With temperature controls increasingly at people’s fingertips, claiming to have better weather than the Sunshine State was as meaningless as it was ineffective. Garner and city boosters needed something else to attract visitors. Unlike their counterparts in Florida, Myrtle Beach promoters would have to figure it out without financial backing from the state.28

South Carolina’s leaders were just beginning to understand tourism’s economic significance in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Leading the way was conservative journalist and would-be senatorial hopeful, William D. Workman Jr. In September 1950, Workman typed an eight-page memorandum detailing the success of Florida and the failure of South Carolina to attract visitors. Sunshine State boosters, he understood, claimed that tourists would spend $700 million in the Florida in 1950, a full $200 million more than the state’s manufacturing income and $300 million more than agriculture. “South Carolinians who marvel at the vast sum spent by tourists in Florida,” Workman argued, “fail to realize that most of that $700,000,000, probably as much as $500,000,000 passes THROUGH South Carolina en route to Florida.” Workman called on the state chamber of commerce to form a tourism promotion committee.29

The chamber of commerce did just that, forming a committee that met the following month. Acting quickly, they published 250,000 brochures and a manual illustrating the importance of the tourist industry to the state. The manual, appearing in January 1951, verified South Carolina’s negligence in attracting tourists. According to statistics from 1948, the state


29 Memo, W. D. Workman, September 1950, W. D. Workman Papers, Box 23, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina; and John S. Linton to W. D. Workman, October 30, 1950, W. D. Workman Papers, Box 23, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.
received only $50 million of the approximately $9 billion spent nationwide by tourists. Interior states such as Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Montana each took in twenty percent more in tourist dollars than did the Palmetto State. Only tiny Rhode Island and frigid North Dakota received less money from tourism.\(^\text{30}\)

The reason for South Carolina’s poor showing was two-fold. First, the state spent virtually nothing on tourist and recreational advertising. Its $3,000 annual expenditure made it second to last in the Southeast in amount appropriated to advertising. Only Alabama spent less. Mississippi proved that even a small increase could reap great rewards. That state spent a mere $25,000 annually on tourist-related advertising. Their small investment brought in an estimated $200 million in additional income to the state.\(^\text{31}\)

Secondly, with the exception of residents of Myrtle Beach and Charleston, South Carolinians were largely ignorant of the importance of tourism to the state’s economy. The state’s tourism manual tried to correct that. It included both a speech and a campy scripted interview meant for the radio. The ten-minute spots encouraged South Carolinians to be pleasant to travelers and informed listeners that tourism benefited more people than merely hotel and gas station operators. It benefited everyone.\(^\text{32}\)

By 1953, the State Development Board, more concerned about acquiring smokestack industries than tourists, finally became active but still gave the tourism initiative a paltry budget


\(^{31}\) Dollars in Flight, A4-A20.

\(^{32}\) Ibid.
for publicizing South Carolina in newspapers and magazines and for postage to reply to visitor inquiries. The state’s small effort reaped big financial rewards but also showcased an embarrassing problem. In 1955, inquiries concerning visiting South Carolina tripled from their 1953 level. The increase was so dramatic that it sapped the state’s entire designated travel budget. With more than three months left in the fiscal year, South Carolina had no money available to respond to visitor inquiries. Even with the remarkable success of this early effort, the state waited ten years before fully investing in the tourism industry. If Myrtle Beach were to become a major tourist destination in the 1950s, it would have to do it alone.33

Without help at the state level, Myrtle Beach leaders needed a marketing strategy of their own. They quickly settled on dubbing the city a family beach town. The decision was hardly controversial. There was no debate in the Garner-run newspaper about whether the town should promote itself as a quaint family beach. In fact, the chamber most likely never adopted that as its official philosophy. John T. Woodside created the concept of the white family beach with Arcady. The Ocean Hiway Association, with the help of Myrtle Beach boosters, had been promoting the ideal for years. In addition, emigration of young retired military families to Myrtle Beach after the war only furthered the belief that the city was family-friendly. Mark Garner and the chamber quickly capitalized on the new population composition of the city. He took the family beach marketing strategy of Arcady and the Ocean Hiway Association as blueprint for future promotion. Their advertisements, though, did not really reflect reality. While families no doubt populated Myrtle Beach, the city was area was hardly composed of all whites.

Boosters had one problem in advertising the city as a white family beach: the area had a significant black population residing west of Highway 17 on the outskirts of the city. African-Americans were the engine of the town’s growth and an essential, but often overlooked, piece of the town’s economy. Many had lived in the wooded areas beyond the bustling beachfront for years, working in the city as needed. The black community built many of the town’s piers, hotels, and infrastructure. In addition, African-Americans served as waiters, cooks, and maids in the local hotels and motor courts. These service roles constituted much of the interaction tourists had with blacks along the beach front. Myrtle Beach, after all, was whites-only beach, as were most South Carolina beaches. Locally, blacks had only a few stretches of coastline from which to choose: nearby Atlantic Beach, South Carolina, or tiny Sea Breeze, North Carolina. Myrtle Beach’s shoreline was strictly off-limits. Long-time resident Jack Thompson recalls, “if black people crossed Kings Highway (Highway 17) in the ‘30s, ‘40s, and ‘50s, they had to be going to or from a job.” Yet, it would be a mistake to say that blacks and whites did not congregate together in the late 1940s and early 1950s. In fact, their intermingling prompted the biggest racial conflict in the city’s history.\(^{34}\)

In the early 1950s, Myrtle Beach was just beginning to draw tourists in large numbers, mainly during holidays, and most of them from the Carolinas and Georgia. Many of these tourists shared notions about white racial superiority and what constituted the “southern way of life.” Myrtle Beach, like other southern towns, adhered to Jim Crow segregation. City leaders, though, always needed to be wary about how ardently it defended Jim Crow. Welcoming desegregation openly would cause a revolt among white southerners, the bulk of the city’s visitors, while simultaneously killing Myrtle Beach’s economy and its white family beach image.

\(^{34}\) Wells, *Swamp, Strand, & Steamboat*, 94-95.
A hard-line stance, however, could prove equally destructive. If Myrtle Beach leaders took too conservative a stance on segregation, northerners, might choose to vacation in other locations rather than risk getting caught up in racial turmoil. This could preserve the city’s desired image as a white family beach, or at least a white beach, but would forever stunt the area’s growth.

Myrtle Beach officials and boosters walked a tightrope because of the nature of their economy. Visitors came to Myrtle Beach to relax and pursue activities unavailable at home. This was especially true of young adults. Visiting Myrtle Beach was liberating to southern young adults who came to the beach to get away from the stringent southern racial and sexual rules and mores. Myrtle Beach was, as Alecia P. Long discovered about New Orleans, a southern “safety valve” where people could come to relieve the stresses of complying with all the social folkways.35

The 1989 movie *Shag*, while albeit a fictional account of Myrtle Beach, provides good insight into the area’s reputation as a place to get away from the rigid rules dictating behavior. Set in the spring of 1963, *Shag* tells the story of four naïve female high school seniors from rural South Carolina who escape to Myrtle Beach for a final fling before adult responsibilities tear apart their close-knit relationships. From the first scene to the last, Myrtle Beach is a forbidden city. In the movie, three girls tell their parents they are headed to Fort Sumter to study history. The fourth girl jumps out of her bedroom window to escape her conservative preacher father. They know revealing their destination would doom their plans. In fact, much of the movie’s

humor revolves around them trying to keep their excursion a secret. For their part, the parents have reason to fear their children heading to the coastal city.\textsuperscript{36}

Thanks to the sexually provocative dance with an equally suggestive name, the shag, youth flocked to the beach. During the 1940s and 1950s, the dance thrived in the pavilions dotting the coastline but found its home along the Grand Strand after being banned in several other coastal locales. Similar to a slow jitterbug, the dance involves constant contact between men and women and syncopated body gyrations. Live acts usually supplied the music, which came to be called “beach music.” Their songs sported sexually suggestive song titles such as “Rocket 69” or “Sixty Minute Man.” The rebelliousness of the dance infuriated parents as much as it attracted their children.\textsuperscript{37}

Everything about the dance was sexual, including its purpose. Male white dancers spent months practicing their craft, gearing up for the summer when they would show off their moves to tourists. Residents commonly referred to these men as “beach bums” or “coastal gypsies,” a reference to their anti-establishment image and unemployment. Yet, if skilled, they became instant celebrities in the eyes of female visitors, garnering names such as “Rubber Legs” and “the Roach.” And more than a few young women wondered if the shagger’s talents at the provocative dance translated into other skills. Deejay John Hook explained, “The guys knew when they went out on the dance floor that a hundred women were watching them right at that


moment and that each would give anything to be their partner. Man, that’s some heady, heady power. You absolutely know for sure that you’re gonna score tonight.”

Parents, though, feared for more than just their young, white, and presumably innocent daughters losing their virginity to a beach bum. They worried their children might socialize with blacks, defying Jim Crow segregation. The beach, while fun, was not sufficient entertainment for many young adults, especially at night. Aside from the pavilion, there was little nightlife close to the shore. The permissive atmosphere of the beach culture prompted many tourists to be daring. No one knew them in Myrtle Beach and they felt free to experiment, to do what was forbidden to them back home. Few things were more forbidden in the South in the early 1940s and 1950s than socializing with blacks and dancing to rock and roll.

Whispering Pines gave them this opportunity. Whispering Pines was a local speakeasy, located just west of the pavilion on “The Hill” which, along with Atlantic Beach, was one of the few places that blacks could live near the coast. The club was owned by Charlie Fitzgerald, a slick and sophisticated black businessman who defied South Carolina’s racial norms. Wealthy, he wore nice striped suits and drove a convertible. Fitzgerald, who probably bribed local policemen from the stash of money he kept in a cigarette carton, often would sit in the white section of the local movie theatre or at white eating establishments. It was his club, however, that engendered the most controversy.

38 Beacham, “Charlie’s Place,” 54; and Bryan, Shag, 62.

39 Moredock, Banana Republic, 59. “The Hill,” sometimes referred to as Harlem, was actually a mile from the beach. Currently referred to as the Booker T. Washington neighborhood, “The Hill” was frequently used to refer to all black areas including Canal Street and Racepath.

40 Beacham, “Charlie’s Place,” 50-57; and See also Frank Beacham, Whitewash: A Southern Journey Through Music, Mayhem, and Murder (New York: Booklooker.com, 2002). For a brief
In the racially segregated South in the early 1950s, music by black artists proved difficult to obtain. Most stations refused to play so-called “jungle music.” Youth yearned to hear this new sound that was so different from the big band music their parents listened to. At first, it was the whites-only pavilion where youth would go to dance. But in the 1940s and 1950s, Myrtle Beach was still a strict church-going community. Town leaders sent police to the pavilion regularly to arrest dancers for indecency for shaking their hips. The city, after all, was trying to become a family beach. Young white dancers found another place to go, where the owner was accepting and the music was livelier: Whispering Pines. Fitzgerald profited from the police crackdown in the Pavilion.

Whispering Pines was the place to play in Myrtle Beach for black musicians. The list of performers was impressive: Billie Holiday, Little Richard, Ray Charles, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, and others. Their energetic music and performances brought in throngs of customers, both black and white. Whispering Pines counted many of the local shaggers as regulars. In fact, the nightclub was where whites learned and perfected the dance. Much of the music shaggers moved to was actually the same tunes played in black clubs like Whispering Pines. “Beach music” as shagger Chicken Hicks knew, “was race music.”


41 For an interesting look at the new music developing in the South in the 1950s see Pete Daniel, Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

42 Wells, Swamp, Strand, & Steamboat, 120.

43 Beacham, “Charlie’s Place,” 52-54; and Joyner, “A Region in Harmony,” 3.
Whispering Pines was a safe place for white dancers to go. Although the regular crowd there was rough (many blacks kept a knife or pistol visible) everybody knew the punishment meted if any white was injured in a scuffle. Shag Hall-of-Famer Leon “Rubber Legs” Williams remembers, “The colored girls danced with white boys, and the colored boys danced with white girls. We hugged each other’s neck. If you had been at the beach in that period of time, you’d have thought segregation didn’t exist.” Most youth could not experience this back home or anywhere else.44

The mingling of races on the dance floor alarmed many locals. South Carolina was already beginning to feel the erosion of segregation. Just a few years earlier, courts opened up South Carolina’s white Democratic primary and President Harry Truman desegregated the military. In retaliation, South Carolina Governor Strom Thurmond headed up the States’ Rights Democratic Party for the 1948 presidential election. Dubbed the Dixiecrats, they stood at the political center in the battle over segregation.45 Interracial dancing at Whispering Pines and Fitzgerald’s refusal to adhere to Jim Crow segregation served as the local reminder of the breakdown of white supremacy that was happening on a national level. It also threatened the city’s desired reputation as a white family beach. The unofficial defenders of white supremacy, the Ku Klux Klan, stepped in to try to end Fitzgerald’s activities.

Long-time Horry County residents had felt the presence of the Klan in their community before. In the 1920s, the second incarnation of the Klan gained members and political power all

44 Beacham, “Charlie’s Place,” 52-54.

across the United States. Its message differed from that of the first Klan of the 1870s; the group they did not just terrorize blacks, but also Catholics, immigrants, Jews, and persons engaged in what they deemed immoral behavior. Horry County’s incarnation of the Klan was no different. From 1922 to 1925 the Klan threatened or assaulted white bootleggers, Jews, and wife-beaters. The organization was responsible for attacks on at least five people and threatened violence on twenty others before disappearing.46

The Klan that emerged in Horry County in 1950 was much more concerned about the breakdown of Jim Crow. Its leader was self-appointed Grand Dragon Thomas L. Hamilton, a six-foot-two, two hundred fifty-pound grocery store owner from Leesville, South Carolina, where he served both as a mason and a deacon at the local Baptist church. It is unclear what drove him to lead a reinvigorated Klan, but he seems to have sought both power and money. He made a nice profit selling Klan attire and collecting membership dues.47

Hamilton chose Myrtle Beach and the small town of Tabor City, North Carolina, both over one hundred miles from his home, as his prime recruiting and rallying point for the Klan. While his reason for going to Tabor City is unknown, his decision to rally in Myrtle Beach was twofold. First was Charlie Fitzgerald. His refusal to adhere to segregation and his operation of a successful interracial dance hall proved to be an easy recruiting tool. Early in the summer Klan members approached Fitzgerald, demanding he ban whites from Whispering Pines. True to form, Fitzgerald told the Klansman to “go to hell.”48

46 Hux, “The Ku Klux Klan,” 211.


Secondly, Hamilton chose Myrtle Beach because the county was known for police corruption. Rumors flew that Fitzgerald bribed police to prevent officials from shutting down his establishment. Shagger Harry Driver recalled police arresting beachgoers for dancing or swearing, only to release them when they received a pay-off. Bootlegging was rampant throughout the county, and Horry County Sheriff C. E. Sasser profited from the illegal business. Poor when he first won the race for sheriff in 1942, Sasser left office in 1952 a rich man. In addition, Sasser refused to end the interracial activities at Whispering Pines. His decision not to take a hard-line stance for Jim Crow only reinforced the Klan’s belief that the police were corrupt.

White supremacist beliefs, police corruption, and a faltering system of Jim Crow made Myrtle Beach the perfect place for the Klan to bring its own brand of law enforcement. On Saturday, August 26, 1950, the Klan paraded through the streets of the city, including the section of “The Hill,” home to Whispering Pines. Hamilton led the twenty-six-car caravan with a fiery cross of red light bulbs glowing along his car’s left front fender. Upset, Fitzgerald reportedly called the police, informing them “the Klan better not come back.” They did. Tipped off by the police, Hamilton and his gang turned around and headed back to Whispering Pines, eager for a confrontation.

11, 1948. Some historians claim that Fitzgerald and his wife Sarah’s decision to register to vote gave impetus to the Klan furor. But in 1948, a full two years before Hamilton’s raid, Fitzgerald and his wife took their names off the voter roles in a highly publicized act.

49 The County had one police force.

When they arrived, Grand Dragon Hamilton later observed, “all hell broke loose.” Klan members jumped out of their cars and unleashed a flurry of between two hundred and five hundred bullets into the speakeasy. Many blacks in the establishment fled through the back door. Those that remained hunkered down inside and returned gunfire. The skirmish lasted only a few minutes before Klan members broke down the door and kidnapped Charlie Fitzgerald, driving him to a remote stretch of woods where they whipped him and cut off a portion of his ears.

Surprisingly, with that many shots fired, there was only one casualty in the disturbance. Late in the battle, as the Klan was preparing to enter Whispering Pines, a bullet from a .38 caliber pistol pierced the heart of Klansman James Daniel Johnson, killing him instantly. Klansmen grabbed the wounded man and took him to the local hospital, hoping for a miracle. Medics removed his Klan robes only to find his work uniform underneath. Johnson was a veteran Conway police officer and had just been elected a local magistrate.51

Much to the Klan’s chagrin, the local papers printed broadsides against the organization and the violence it brought. W. Horace Carter published scathing editorials against the Klan in his weekly newspaper, the Tabor City Tribune. The Klan retaliated, issuing death threats and even stealing and abusing his dog. Carter was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his reporting of this affair. The Myrtle Beach Sun also published many of his articles and included names and photos of those arrested for Klan activity.52

51 Carter, Virus of Fear, 37-38; and Myrtle Beach Sun, “Klan Leader is Under Arrest: Mayor J. N. Ramsey Terms Incident as ‘Outrageous’” September 1, 1950.

52 Carter, Virus of Fear; and Myrtle Beach Sun, “The Hoods Were Off When This Picture was Made,” February, 22, 1952.
Although the editors of the local papers undoubtedly abhorred Klan activities, the potential economic fallout scared businessmen even more. The mayor responded with outrage to the incident. He identified what provoked Klan violence, “namely white people patronizing colored business establishments or visiting colored sections for amusement purposes.” The mayor, however, acknowledged that this is “absolutely legal” and decried any further violence. Businesses reported the loss of black waitresses, maids, and other employees who fled the town fearing more attacks. The absence of these service providers threatened to cripple the burgeoning tourist industry. Myrtle Beach residents got their first taste of an important lesson that Little Rock and St. Augustine would learn later: racial turmoil could destroy the economy.\(^5^3\)

Sheriff Sasser promised to apprehend the suspects and claimed that Klan members even threatened violence against him. During that week, he arrested Hamilton for his role in the affair. Thirteen more arrests followed, but the county chose not to prosecute. The Klan continued to hold rallies in the area and assaulted several residents of nearby Columbus County, North Carolina. During the next election cycle Horry County elected John Henry sheriff. Rumored to be the Klan’s candidate, Henry won by a two-to-one margin.\(^5^4\)

The election marked a stunning turnaround for Henry. In 1948, he challenged and lost to Sasser by over sixteen hundred votes. With race a secondary concern during that election, many whites sided with the incumbent. In Racepath, the predominately black area of the county, the two candidates were separated by a mere sixteen votes. In 1950 Sasser only won six precincts,

\(^{53}\) *Myrtle Beach Sun*, “Klan Leader is Under Arrest: Mayor J. N. Ramsey Terms Incident as ‘Outrageous’” September 1, 1950.

one of which was Racepath. Residents there voted overwhelmingly against Henry 343-6, hinting that the rumors about Henry were true. The new sheriff did little to stop the Klan. It would take the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the state of North Carolina to bring an end to the Klan’s reign of terror. For Myrtle Beach, the election of Henry was a mixed blessing. It was a complete capitulation to the Klan, but it promised racial peace in the city and a continued tourist trade.

Despite the violent shootout and the injury to Charlie Fitzgerald, Whispering Pines remained open. It continued hosting renowned black performers and white visitors and local youth still crept into the speakeasy to listen and dance to music forbidden back home until the club closed in 1955. With the chaos caused by the KKK now gone, city boosters could continue their efforts to make Myrtle Beach the preeminent white family beach.55

City leaders, however, failed to realize the futility of the efforts. Even in the 1950s, when the pavilion amusement park was fresh and new and the town bustled with a resident population of young families, wholesome activities did not bring people to the beach in mass. Myrtle Beach flourished because it catered to people eager to get away from conservative principles concerning drinking, Jim Crow segregation, and illicit sex. While many families no doubt came to the beach and told their friends of their experiences, so did tourists who ventured into Whispering Pines or engaged in a hot and steamy night with one of the Grand Strand’s shaggers. Despite boosters’ best efforts, Myrtle Beach could not escape its reputation.

Fortunately for the city, all was not lost. Myrtle Beach was still relatively unknown as a vacation destination and boosters still had time to make its desired image a reality. Their time,

55 Horry Herald, “Unofficial Returns,” August 12, 1948; Carter, Virus of Fear, 127-227; and Myrtle Beach Sun and Ocean Beach News, “New Federal Indictments Brought Against Sheriff John T. Henry,” October 16, 1957. In 1957, Sheriff John Henry and his deputies were indicted on five counts of conspiracy to violate the civil rights of prisoners. Three black prisoners and one white prisoner were beaten until they agreed to admit their guilt to unlawfully selling liquor.
though, was running out. In 1954 a powerful October hurricane would hit Myrtle Beach, destroying many of its structures and threatening its very existence. The storm revealed the fragile nature of the city’s economy. Boosters, fearful that tourists would not return, engaged in massive promotion that would bring millions to the beach, but forever kill the dream of the family town.
Chapter 3
Hazel’s Wrath and the Resurrection of Myrtle Beach

*By that unfortunate natural disaster, Myrtle Beach gained tremendous amount of fame –*

Interview with Mark Garner, 1992

The city of Myrtle Beach was dealt a devastating blow in the fall of 1954. On October 5, hurricane hunters spotted Hurricane Hazel off the Lesser Antilles. The powerful storm grew in strength over the next week before slamming into Haiti, triggering mudslides that killed an estimated one thousand people. Weakened, the storm skirted the east coast of Florida, striking the Bahamas. The island chain registered winds of only forty miles-per-hour. Observers assumed the storm was dissipating and would do little further damage. They were wrong. After touching the islands it quickly regained strength in the record warm jet stream waters, making a beeline for the North Carolina/South Carolina border.

Myrtle Beach residents had little warning of the total devastation they were to face when Hazel blew ashore on the morning of Friday, October 15, 1954. In the days before Doppler radar, hurricane detection and prediction was spotty at best. The *Myrtle Beach Sun* said nothing of the approaching storm, choosing instead to focus its energy on the senatorial campaign, and party affiliation, of write-in candidate Strom Thurmond. No doubt the newspaper knew little about the storm’s course or increased strength. Tourists knew even less of Hazel’s route. Even

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1 Garner, interview by Catherine Lewis and Randall Wells, November 20, 1992, transcript, Horry County History Project.

if they heard of Hazel’s destruction in Haiti or the Bahamas, they undoubtedly thought it would not affect them. Years of claiming that Myrtle Beach was immune to such storms worked, and gave residents and visitors alike a false sense of security.³

Deputies along the Grand Strand learned of the approaching hurricane late on October 14 and immediately raced up and down the beach blaring their sirens. Well into the wee hours of Friday morning, the horns notified residents of the oncoming storm. Many who understood the noise’s meaning heeded the warning, fleeing inland to a local school for shelter, only occasionally venturing outside to hear the weather reports from the radio station in Charleston. Other residents along the shore packed up their cars full of valuables and headed out of town, leaving their African-American maids to defend the houses from the storm. Just before Hazel struck, local guesthouse owner Henrietta Abeles drove up and down the coast collecting the frightened servants and bringing them to her home, saving untold lives.⁴

Nonresidents, however, were not as lucky. Mr. and Mrs. David Epting, an elderly couple visiting from Columbia, heard the sirens but were unaware of their meaning, assuming they signaled a nearby fire. They went to sleep only to be awakened in the middle of the night. “We rushed to the front windows on the second story where we where sleeping, and we could see water pounding against the glass,” remarked David Epting. “We had no idea what was happening outside. We didn’t have any idea of how bad things were in other places.” The house


⁴ Samantha Owens, “Sight of Wrecked Beach Resident Numb With Shock; Living Now in Strange Place,” Myrtle Beach Sun, October 20, 1954; and Sigmund Abeles, interview by Sarah Bryan, January 15, 2007, Folder 1, transcript, Myrtle Beach Oral History Collection, Chapin Memorial Library, Myrtle Beach, S.C.
swayed during the storm but held. It was the only house in its vicinity that survived. South Carolina reported only one casualty.  

The city’s structures were not as fortunate. Hazel’s estimated 120-mile-per-hour winds and thirty-foot waves destroyed much of the beach front property. The storm surge, occurring at high tide, ripped several houses off their foundations, depositing them in a nearby swamp. Of the 380 houses on the beach, 200 were demolished and an additional 130 were damaged beyond repair. Hazel destroyed the city’s guesthouses, which local women had run successfully since before the Depression. In addition, the hurricane smashed all seven of the area’s piers, crippling the city’s winter economy, which depended on fishing. Hazel also destroyed the structure that tied the city together, the boardwalk. It would never be rebuilt. Debris and sand clogged the roads making travel nearly impossible. Over nine inches of rain fell in twenty hours, leaving many areas of the city flooded. With the city looking like a war zone, it appeared that Myrtle Beach would never become the major resort area of which Franklin Burroughs and John T. Woodside had dreamed.  

The lone bright spot came with the news that the pavilion had survived. Locals, expecting the tidal surge, opened all the doors of the pavilion allowing the water to move freely across the concrete floor of the structure. It was a smart move that residents took heart in, seeing it as a sign that they could rebuild. For the next fifty years the pavilion would serve as the beach’s centerpiece and a sign of the city’s progress.

5 Myrtle Beach Sun, “Couple on First Row Watch Blow From House,” October 20, 1954; and Fuller, “Myrtle Beach: Music and Motels,” 156.  

While Myrtle Beach boosters would never again claim that its protected location made it immune to hurricanes, it was their location that saved them from a worse fate. Just to the north, the beaches of Brunswick County, North Carolina, took a direct hit. On Long Beach, Hazel completely destroyed 352 of the 357 buildings. The other five were severely damaged. Long Beach was lucky. Further south, Ocean Isle Beach lost all but two homes and suffered the greatest loss of life. Hazel claimed the lives of eighty-one in the United States and nearly one hundred in Canada, mostly due to flooding.\footnote{Seamon, “The Storm of October 16, 1954,” 1-7; and Art Newton, ed., \textit{Hurricane Hazel Lashes Coastal Carolina: The Great Storm in Pictures} (Wilmington: Great Pacific Rim Trading Co., 1996), 1.}

The impact of Hurricane Hazel extended far beyond the extensive property damage suffered along the beach. It completely transformed Myrtle Beach, helping turn the city from a sleepy family beach town to one obsessed with promoting growth at all costs. Negative publicity about the town’s apparent destruction prompted city boosters to launch an all out promotional blitz that would affirm the city’s existence while giving Myrtle Beach exposure to a larger audience outside the Carolinas. The advertisements were critical. With an economy based solely on tourism, city boosters had to affirm quickly that it was still open for business and contradict the misinformation from the outside press that claimed both the town and the Ocean Highway had been destroyed. But the new exposure and increase in both tourists and residents started to transform the carefully crafted image of Myrtle Beach as a white family beach town. New tourists increasingly saw the city not as a place to take your children, but as a man’s vacation paradise complete with golf and young, single, bikini-clad women.

Instead of succumbing to the disaster around them, Myrtle Beach residents persevered, turning the city in a modern-day phoenix rising from the ashes. Ironically, Myrtle Beach looked
to Florida, the state whose natural disasters the city had at one time used for its promotional material. Based on what they saw in Miami and its struggles with Mother Nature, Myrtle Beach developers established a stricter building code to ensure that all new structures were able to withstand future storms. With the help of the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Myrtle Beach developers built a twenty-four-mile sand dune for additional protection. This replaced the dunes washed away by Hurricane Hazel and those flattened by homeowners who wanted to get closer to the water. Town leaders even considered constructing a seawall, but that idea was quickly shelved as potentially detracting from the beach’s natural beauty.\footnote{Myrtle Beach Sun, “McMillan Recommends Building a Sea Wall,” August 24, 1955.}

Myrtle Beach boosters turned the hurricane’s destruction into an opportunity for nationwide attention. The newspaper galvanized the city, encouraging residents to let former visitors know that everything would be ready for summer tourists, an initiative undertaken by the chamber of commerce. The chamber encouraged every hotel, motel, and guesthouse along the beach to send a postcard to their former patrons letting them know that the city was safe. Sending a two-cent postcard to each former visitor, the newspaper ensured residents, would do more than advertising. Boosters hoped the ploy would blunt the economic blow from Hazel. This was the humble beginning of the unregulated growth that would come to plague the city.\footnote{Myrtle Beach Sun, “Even Hazel Blows Good,” October 20, 1954; and Myrtle Beach Sun, “Postcard Publicity,” November 10, 1954.}

Postcard publicity alone was not the cure. Hazel exposed the fragile nature of Myrtle Beach’s economy. “Many states,” the newspaper reported, “felt the town had been virtually obliterated from the map.” Mark Garner, who played a key role in the development of Myrtle Beach, learned quickly about the negative publicity the city was receiving. In an interview nearly forty years later, Garner recalled a conversation with the receptionist at a New Hampshire
motel shortly after the hurricane hit the coast. While checking in, Garner and the woman talked about Hazel’s wrath. The receptionist admitted her ignorance. “Well, I don’t know anything about South Carolina,” she acknowledged, “but I know that the hurricane hit Myrtle Beach.”

Garner was stunned. To this woman, Myrtle Beach was destroyed and not worth visiting. Even rebuilt, fears that the city was hurricane prone could both thwart investment and send potential tourists fleeing to other locales. The receptionist’s remarks, though, contained a ray of hope; she knew nothing about South Carolina. Other than news of its destruction, Myrtle Beach was an unknown quantity. With large-scale promotions, the city not only could announce to the world that it had been rebuilt, but it could also reinvent itself. A new promotional scheme could shape the way tourists viewed the hitherto family beach town. Hurricane Hazel gave the city a chance to attract visitors curious about the town’s rebuilding efforts. It was a golden opportunity. Stories claiming the city “had been virtually obliterated” needed to be counterbalanced with promotional material detailing the city’s determination to be ready for summer visitors.

Hurricane Hazel’s wrath threatened all of the Ocean Hiway Association’s promotional efforts. After the storm struck, rumors spread that Hazel had destroyed sections of the Ocean Highway north of Myrtle Beach. Almost a year later, reports surfaced in newspapers, radios, and television stations across the Carolinas that Hurricane Connie destroyed much of the beachfront. One bulletin announced that the roads were covered with water and starving refugees occupied

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churches and school buildings. The sensational reports were false. Connie skirted the beach, inflicting only minor damage. Nonetheless, the rumors threatened to make tourists think twice about traveling the coastal route south. Hurricanes made calling the Ocean Highway both “safe(r)” than Highway 301 and an “all weather” route a thorny proposition. Even with this difficult task, promoters of the Ocean Highway route faced a bigger issue than just simple promotion.\(^\text{12}\)

Since the 1930s, the federal government had contemplated constructing a series of superhighways with little success. President Dwight Eisenhower, impressed by the German autobahn during his stint as commander in World War II, saw a superhighway system as necessary for national defense. An interstate highway system would allow the military to move armaments from location to location, strengthening the country’s security. Innocent civilians could also move out of harm’s way more quickly. The plan also would make travel easier, allowing tourism to flourish.\(^\text{13}\)

By 1954, Eisenhower and his staff moved closer to making an interstate system a reality. It was not an easy task. Congress and the president faced pressure from numerous trucking and automobile lobbyists concerning funding of the road. In addition, many legislators, including several from the South, were concerned about a potential federal take-over of road projects. Federal intrusion promised both to limit state power to lend out contracts and could lead to


\(^{13}\) Mark H. Rose, Interstate: Express Highway Politics, 1939-1989 (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 10-78. National defense was not Eisenhower’s only reason to act. He also understood the growing problems cities were having with outdated roads. Maybe most importantly, he wanted to stimulate the economy, which had started to flounder.
further meddling in state affairs. Beyond this was the question of where exactly to put these superhighways. Agencies representing various communities sent delegations to Washington to lobby for the placement of the route through their towns. The Ocean Hiway Association also sent a man to Washington. Despite the Association’s best efforts, Highway 17 was largely left out of the national planning. Instead, what would become Interstate 95 engulfed and improved the Ocean Highway’s biggest competitor, Highway 301.¹⁴

Myrtle Beach leaders were not pleased with the interstate’s projected route. They questioned the assertion that the interstate would serve the best interests of national defense. If the nation’s protection were truly at stake, then Highway 17, not 301, would be the more appropriate choice. Highway 17 connected military bases in Norfolk, Virginia, with bases in Cherry Point, North Carolina, Myrtle Beach, and Charleston, South Carolina. Building an interstate along this route would allow for the quick and easy transportation of military supplies to defend the nation’s coastline. Their argument went nowhere.

Worse for Myrtle Beach residents, the road threatened to kill the city’s economy. Unlike Highway 301 and the Ocean Highway, Interstate 95 promised to be a superhighway allowing drivers to travel to their destination without the hassle of traffic lights and stop signs. In the battle between the Ocean Highway and I-95 there would be no competition. Tourists would take the quicker route to their destination. Interstate 95 threatened to destroy travel down the Ocean Highway, just as Interstate 40 would destroy much of “the mother road,” Route 66. The announcement that Highway 17 would be passed over, coupled with the impact of Hurricane

Hazel and false media reports of additional hurricane damage, spelled doom for a city dependent on summer tourists and those stopping south on their way to Florida.

The new interstate system forced Myrtle Beach boosters to be completely dependent on their own resources to promote the city. Local businessmen could no longer depend on stop-over traffic. The Ocean Hiway Association, which for twenty years had diligently tried to attract riders along their route, soon became obsolete. The tie which bound together southern coastal communities from New Jersey to Florida was unraveling. Each city, by itself, had to discover a new way to attract visitors to its locale. Not every city was affected the same. The proposed interstate was set to run parallel to the Ocean Highway along much of the Georgia and Florida coastlines allowing them to prosper and making them unwilling to fight the projected route. Coastal cities in the Carolinas, however, faced an urgent need to find a niche that would attract visitors when traffic along Highway 17 dried up.

Briefly city leaders believed that the Chesapeake Bay Bridge – Tunnel project underway in Virginia would funnel four times as many tourists down the Ocean Highway, keeping the route alive. Businessmen from the area flocked to its opening with the promise that the bridge-tunnel would blunt the impact of Interstate 95. The structure’s opening did increase traffic briefly as travelers marveled at the new technology. The bridge-tunnel showed a 63 percent increase from its ferry forerunner and requests for maps of the Ocean Highway increased by 48 percent in 1964. Traffic soon died down as more of Interstate 95 was completed. Creating a year-round source of income went from a luxury to a necessity.15

Faced with the daunting obstacles of refuting news of their town’s destruction and the potential catastrophic economic fallout from the new interstate, Myrtle Beach leaders were at a crossroads. Early talk concerned bringing industries other than tourism, something the town historically had shunned. “Myrtle Beach,” one editorialist pleaded, “cannot be placed in the category of towns suffering from inertia…There may be a need to strengthen the town’s year-around economy by securing new industry.”  

City leaders could have chosen smokestack industries, such as steel or paper plants, or textile mills. Since the Civil War, the South had tried to obtain these industries to supplement its agricultural economy. Even those who desired smokestack industries were wary of their appearance. Yet, the local newspaper encouraged the town to “keep on making every reasonable effort to get the smokestack kind of industry to settle with us. But let’s don’t lose sight of our recreational industry, - and keep plugging that as diligently as Florida and California.” The chamber of commerce, at least on paper, took up the call to diversify the economy, promising to form an Industrial Committee Program that would attract “light industries” to the area. Light industries, as opposed to smokestack industries, would not negatively affect the beach’s scenic or environmental beauty. Although Myrtle Beach did not shun industry altogether, bringing in a curtain factory, two lumber companies, and Aerovox (AVX) which makes electronic components, the city chose to make tourism its year-around economy. City boosters knew that allowing smokestack industries would upset many residents who moved to the area for its scenic beauty.  

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Determined to make tourism revenue a primary source of income, Myrtle Beach boosters launched a nation-wide promotional blitz. Chamber president L.K. Ward understood the effects the negative publicity wrought by Hazel would have on Myrtle Beach. In March 1955, only five months after the hurricane struck, Ward established the Chamber News Bureau whose purpose was to dispense propaganda and promotional material about the city. It distributed “timely news stories and photographs” to various media across the nation. The entire chamber gathered information and wrote stories that portrayed Myrtle Beach as the place to spend a vacation. Fifteen months after the bureau’s creation it had distributed over 350 articles and over one thousand photographs to news outlets across the nation. Myrtle Beach’s steady and aggressive promotion would not end for twenty years.¹⁸

Clearing up falsehoods concerning the hurricane’s destruction of Myrtle Beach was the bureau’s first priority. Just a week after the bureau was formed, it sent out a story to be published in several newspapers. The article read more like a hard news story than the advertisement that it was. “MYRTLE BEACH, S.C. – ‘Hurricane Hazel? We’re bigger and better than ever!’ That’s the outlook of the people of Myrtle Beach, S.C., as they swing through an unprecedented post-Hazel $2,000,000 building program designed to assure 1955 visitors more accommodations than ever before.” The article goes on to discuss the increased development and readiness of the city.¹⁹


Certainly the hurricane brought changes to the city. Hardest hit were the depression-era guesthouses. Owners could not meet the new, more stringent building codes, and many had neither insurance nor sufficient cash on hand to rebuild. Those who did have insurance faced adjusters who offered property owners low settlements. Knowing that it would take months to dispute the claim, many took what little money they were offered. Others with insurance coverage faced a different problem. Their policies did not include flood damage. Because the storm surge -- the increased wave height caused by the wind -- caused most of the destruction to homes along the front row, many owners received no compensation. South Carolina’s response to the hurricane was equally slow and burdensome. Homeowners were told that they had to wait thirty to sixty days for assistance and would only receive money if they had the requisite collateral. In addition, guesthouses that operated only during the summer were not eligible for aid. Facing these obstacles, many owners chose not to rebuild.\textsuperscript{20}

In place of the guesthouse came motels. Those who weathered the storm financially eagerly bought the property from the former guesthouse proprietors. The new owners, mostly locals, built motels that ranged from a scant ten rooms to over one hundred. They were Populuxe design. Almost all of the motels were made of concrete blocks for their supposed durability and arranged in an L or U shape. Multi-story structures had a concrete screen wall lining the outer hallways on the upper stories both for style and to prevent guests from tumbling to the parking lot below. Each motel had a small check-in counter close to the parking area. The tiny lobbies were not conducive to chit-chat. They were cheap and efficient. By the early 1960s, these motels were the main source of lodging for beach-goers and they stretched for fifty blocks

along the coastline. Myrtle Beach no longer needed to cater only to the wealthy. The city now had the ability to lodge thousands of guests at any given time.\textsuperscript{21}

In the summer the large crowds came in increasingly greater numbers. Thanks to the quick publicity campaign, many knew Myrtle Beach was once again open for business, while others discovered the area for the first time. Tourists flooded the city between Memorial Day and Labor Day. During the 1950s and 1960s, parents from as far away as Ohio would bring their children to frolic on the beach and to play in the amusement park. The 4\textsuperscript{th} of July holiday was especially busy. For the first time, “no vacancy” signs greeted visitors who did not book reservations in advance. Every year the town received numerous reports that many tourists were forced to sleep in their cars. The beach buzzed with activity.

Despite the big crowds and loss of the homey atmosphere of the guesthouses and the boardwalk, which was destroyed by Hazel, the beach’s family quality lingered. Myrtle Beach was a small town that turned into a big town in the summer. After Labor Day, the businesses catering to tourists closed, not to open again until April or May. During the winter, the community would come together again to prepare for the coming summer and for group activities such as town clean-up drives. Mark Garner recalls, “I think it was, at least for those who have been here for a period of time, a more friendly community, much closer.” No doubt the community was close. Myrtle Beach’s population was small, only 5,824 full-time residents.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{21} Fuller, “Myrtle Beach: Music and Motels,” 158-162.

\textsuperscript{22} Garner, interview by Catherine Lewis and Randall Wells, November 20, 1992, transcript, Horry County History Project; and Myrtle Beach Sun, “City’s Population Now 5,824, Census Reveals,” July 27, 1955.
What brought the town together, a small population collectively geared towards a summer economy, did not wholly satisfy the residents. Each year businesses enjoyed only four months of prosperity. The rest of the year they struggled to turn a profit, hoping that the next year’s tourist population would arrive in more robust numbers. Town leaders knew that another hurricane could ruin local businesses. The fragility of the town’s economic infrastructure frustrated residents. Myrtle Beach businessmen desperately wanted a year-round economy. If city promoters could only convince tourists that the area was more than just a summer vacation destination, everybody would prosper.

The task appeared difficult. Myrtle Beach boosters touted the beach as its primary attraction. In the winter and spring, however, the chilly Atlantic Ocean was less than inviting. Autumn seemed like a logical choice to create a season. The waters were still warm but the days were more comfortable than in the steamy summer months. Plus, the beach was less crowded, allowing for a far more quiet and relaxing vacation.

Yet, encouraging visitors to frequent the beach in autumn presented obstacles. First, Myrtle Beach businesses tended to close after Labor Day, leaving tourists with little to do. Secondly, residents often proudly touted how the area looked like a ghost town in the fall. One columnist angrily argued “that if Myrtle Beach residents want a hold-over trade through September and October they should desist emphasizing that everything folds up here on Labor Day.” Thirdly, town leaders faced the inescapable fact that fall was hurricane season. Finally, the biggest problem they faced was that the school year began in September, forcing families to return home.23

Despite the litany of problems, Myrtle Beach boosters were undeterred from trying to build its off-season business. Surprisingly, bringing tourists down for the chilly waters of early spring was their first success. City leaders realized that they had an untapped population readily coming through their area every March on their way to Florida: Canadians. These northern tourists, traveling south every year for the warm weather, were a perfect fit as Myrtle Beach tourists. First, when they traveled they usually stayed for one to two weeks, far surpassing the average visit from regional tourists. Plus Canadian tourists embodied the “family tourist trade – in other words, straight, white couples with kids,” that Myrtle Beach promoters had always encouraged to visit. Encouraging their arrival could only help the city return to its pre-Hazel reputation. Myrtle Beach’s promotional machine quickly began targeting Toronto, urging Canadians to vacation in South Carolina rather than Florida.\(^\text{24}\)

In 1959, the chamber of commerce began purchasing advertisements in Canadian newspapers and distributing promotional material to travel organizations north of the border hoping to gain a foothold in that lucrative market. Many of the advertisements argued that Myrtle Beach resembled Florida, but it was closer. Canadian travelers, whom promoters assumed drove, could save two full days’ travel time by staying on the South Carolina coast rather than continuing south. Less time in the car translated to more time relaxing on the beach. In addition, boosters promised that the South Carolina’s ocean temperatures were much cooler than Florida’s. Spring in Myrtle Beach, Canadians would concur, felt like summer in Canada.

The promotion worked. Myrtle Beach found a receptive audience. Inquiries from Canadians about lodging in the city increased 127 percent over the previous year. The Myrtle

*Beach Sun News* was riddled with articles about Canadians’ love for the area. Visitors from north of the border flocked to South Carolina.

The promotion’s success pushed the city to solidify the relationship with Canada. In 1961 the chamber of commerce created the first annual Canadian-American Days Festival (Can-Am Days). The annual event would be held every March to coincide with the Ontario school system’s spring break. Can-Am Days featured numerous events, from a professional boxing match featuring Canadian boxer George Chuvalo, to an amateur golf tournament and a tour of the military base. City boosters, businessmen, and government officials hung the Canadian flag on their flag polls and eagerly accepted Canadian money on an equal basis with the American dollar.\(^{25}\)

The throng of Canadians gave the economy a boost and showed what targeted, large-scale promotion could achieve. By 1962, income generated from tourists soared to $45 million. For the first time, tourism produced more income in Horry County than agriculture. In March of 1963, more Canadians than South Carolinians wrote to the chamber of commerce asking about the area. The week-long Can-Am Days promotion showed the economic benefits of extending the tourist season. Encouraging Canadians to abandon their Florida vacation grounds for Myrtle Beach would not be enough to satisfy the demand for a year-round economy. City leaders craved more.\(^{26}\)

What they quickly discovered is that, despite the success of the Can-Am Days, creating a year-round season meant catering and advertising not to families, but to single men. This was


not the intended target. Although they would keep the family beach image in advertising for a generation, having to build businesses that serviced singles year-round made it impossible for the city to maintain a family friendly atmosphere during the summer.

Myrtle Beach promoters needed both a gimmick and targeted promotion to attract tourists to their shores. The Can-Am Days Festival lasted only a week and its reach was limited. Businesses remained starved until the start of the summer two months later. Myrtle Beach businesses needed a larger influx of people that would extend the tourist season both in the spring and the fall. Thanks to John Woodside and the ARCADY development group, the city already had its vehicle to extend the season: golf.

Arcadian developers completed the city’s first golf course in 1927, but outside of locals and the very rich, few had ever heard of the locale. Jimmy D’Angelo, a golf pro from Philadelphia, was one of the first people to see the potential of the beach as a golfer’s paradise. When he decided to move permanently to the town in 1948, his peers were skeptical. “Golf writers who were my friends in Philadelphia,” remarked D’Angelo, “thought I had lost my mind when I moved to Myrtle Beach, a god-forsaken place that few people outside of the Carolinas had ever heard of.”

D’Angelo saw something in the Dunes Golf and Beach Club, a new development that George W. (Buster) Bryan was attempting to build. The proposed new community was located across the highway from the Pine Lakes International Golf Course, formally known as the Ocean Forest Club. Just as John Woodside had desired years earlier, the Dunes would feature a championship golf course surrounded by luxury homes. The site was beautiful, but the plans were nonetheless ambitious. Bryan wanted to build the course right along the beach, an area

covered in marshland and swamps. He enlisted some help to make his dream a reality. Famed
golf course designer Robert Trent Jones saw the area’s potential and agreed to design the course.
Jones decided to turn the marsh into a freshwater lake that still helps irrigate the playing surface.
Upon completion, the course was immediately considered one of the best in the nation. In the
1960s, *Time Magazine* marveled at its thirteenth hole dubbed “Waterloo” for its difficulty.28

What D’Angelo saw in the new development was money. Bryan and his fellow board of
directors gave D’Angelo the task of selling stock in the venture. For every share of stock
D’Angelo sold, he would earn a 5 percent commission. By the end of the first month he had
earned roughly $1,500. “I thought I had found the mother lode” D’Angelo remembers. The
second month was not so easy. D’Angelo struggled to sell more shares and, by 1953, the course
attracted few visitors. It looked as though the club would fail. However, within a period of
months, two events would tie golf with Myrtle Beach.29

In November 1953, one of D’Angelo’s sports writer friends, Larry Robinson of the *New
York Telegram*, had an idea. He persuaded the Dunes Club developers to hold a dinner honoring
designer Robert Trent Jones. The meal was to be held the Monday of the Master’s week, the
famed tournament in Augusta, Georgia, and all sports writers were invited. Robinson knew the
event would give Myrtle Beach free publicity. Journalists would stop for the dinner, play golf,
and write a story about the city on their way south for the tournament. On April 4, 1954, the
Dunes held its first in what would become an annual dinner for golf writers. Although only eight
attended the affair, by 1990 the “clambake” attracted roughly 120 journalists. Months later,

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29 Ibid., 66.
Time-Life sent sixty-seven executives to play golf and plan a magazine. It would be dubbed *Sports Illustrated*. The two events put Myrtle Beach golf on the map.\(^{30}\)

Just as the city boosters had tried to convince Canadians that Myrtle Beach, not Florida, should be their vacation headquarters, so too did area boosters hope to convince golfers to migrate from their historic southern stomping ground, Pinehurst, North Carolina. Just a three-hour drive northwest of Myrtle Beach, Pinehurst was a golfing Mecca, attracting thousands to its courses each year. Home to the best golf courses in the South, Pinehurst hosted several major tournaments including the 1936 PGA Championship and the 1951 Ryder Cup. With the exception of Augusta, Georgia, which has hosted The Masters tournament since 1934, no other southern city could boast of landing a major tournament. And Augusta National’s exclusionary policies made Pinehurst the place for golf lovers seeking to try their skills on the same courses that legends Sam Snead, Byron Nelson, Gene Sarazen, and Ben Hogan played. So popular was the resort location that, unlike in Myrtle Beach, golfers year-round needed to reserve tee times in advance to guarantee a place on the links.\(^{31}\)

Myrtle Beach leaders desperately wanted to tap into Pinehurst’s popularity. City promoters tried two tactics to siphon off golfers. Since the North Carolina resort had unquestionably superior courses, boosters promised that Myrtle Beach courses were nearly equal to Pinehurst’s and, like their promotion targeting Canadians and Ocean Highway travelers, weather played a key role in their advertising. Boosters claimed that during the winter, freezing temperatures and snow made Pinehurst unbearable and its courses unplayable. Myrtle Beach,


with its proximity to the ocean, made golfing possible year-round. Most importantly, Myrtle Beach promoters attempted to bring golf to the masses. To play on most courses in the city, tourists did not need to be club members. In fact, several courses did not even require reservations. Playing golf in Myrtle Beach was less expensive than at other locations. Golf, a sport once reserved for the wealthy, was now affordable to the middle-class in Myrtle Beach.  

These promotional schemes failed to draw additional tourists, but local boosters were undeterred. Beginning in August of 1959, the chamber of commerce researched the prospect of offering travel packages. Hotels, working with airlines, could create a set monetary rate, making it easier for customers to book their vacations. The chamber also discussed enlisting golf courses in these package deals. Their goal was to create a total golf vacation package. With one phone call, men across the country could book a vacation complete with airfare, hotel accommodations and tee times. Two years later, the chamber offered the first Myrtle Beach golf package. The plan met with instant success. In 1962, for the first time, golfers needed tee times in the summer to guarantee a spot on the links. In 1967, the promotion was given its own name, the Myrtle Beach Golf Holiday. With a full-time director and four staff members, the organization was sending out over eight hundred thousand pieces of promotional literature by 1992 and fielding over fifteen thousand calls annually. More than seventy hotels participated in the promotion.  


By 1964, golfers alone brought in approximately $200,000 in revenue to Myrtle Beach from food, lodging, and green fees. Correctly seeing golf as an answer to their quest for a year-round economy, the chamber of commerce began making the white, male-dominated sport the centerpiece of their advertisements. Starting in the winter of 1964, Myrtle Beach flooded newspapers with advertisements touting itself as a golfing paradise, including spots in the three leading golf magazines, *Golf*, *Golf Digest*, and *Golf World*. Readers responding to the promotional blitz received golf information folders praising the city’s three “championship” courses with a list of local accommodations. 34

Talk of bringing in smokestack industries ceased. One editorial marked the change in the city’s thinking, noting, “Industry is generally associated either smokestacks or windowless, air-conditioned buildings surrounded with parking lots.” But in Myrtle Beach, “Industry is also something else…it is rolling greens, fresh water lakes and towering cypress trees.” Golf was the city’s new industry. Myrtle Beach believed the sport would bring the town all the revenue and jobs it needed. 35

As an industry, golf served as an antithesis to the family beach. City leaders had to choose between maintaining their wholesome family beach image or supporting a sport. Golf could bring in untold revenue, but also would bring in a predominantly white, middle-class, male clientele that used the sport as a means to get away from their families. The links were also far from family-friendly. Golf requires silence and concentration and takes several hours to

34 *Myrtle Beach Sun News*, “Golf is Big Business on the Strand,” March 19, 1964; and *Myrtle Beach Sun News*, “Chamber’s Advertising Program Gets Results,” April 2, 1964.

complete a round, an atmosphere not conducive to the presence of small children. Husbands would participate in the sport by themselves.

Myrtle Beach had inspiration in trying to create a paradise for men under the guise of the "family vacation." From 1945 to 1965 numerous travel trade magazines defined vacations as much needed time off from work. "Work," as they identified it, was paid labor. Vacations, therefore, were for the breadwinner, presumably the husband. "The whole family might go along," Heaney notes, "but it was Dad’s vacation." Wives’ roles did not change away from home. Their duties of cleaning, cooking, and keeping the children from pestering their tired and work-wearied fathers, traveled with them. A vacation was only for men. Always searching for the best way to market the city, Myrtle Beach boosters adopted the definition of a family vacation put forth by the travel trade magazines. Promoters would tout a family-friendly façade, while creating activities designed specifically for men. Golf would be the centerpiece.³⁶

It would be remiss to say that Myrtle Beach’s success as a tourist resort came about precisely because the chamber promoted golf. If this were the case, then Myrtle Beach would look little different than the resorts of Pinehurst, North Carolina, or Hilton Head, South Carolina, instead of a city littered with strip clubs and tattoo parlors. The constant and aggressive promotion after Hurricane Hazel, with golf as one of its centerpieces, forever changed the area. Coupling golf with national promotion made local businesses dependent on single white golfers, primarily men, for their clientele. Grand Stand promoters understood who was visiting. From 1954 onwards, city boosters would cater to the white male tourist’s needs, wants, and desires.

³⁶ Heaney, “The Call of the Open Road,” 67-126.
Chapter 4
Amateurs are Messing up the Business: Using Women to Sell the Beach

She was realistic enough to know that showing and selling tits and ass was a basic commodity in the Redneck Riviera – Dolly Devereaux in Richard N. Cote, Redneck Riviera

Tom Yawkey probably relaxed on the train down to spring training in March of 1936. As owner of the Boston Red Sox, he just acquired future hall-of-fame first baseman Jimmy Foxx from the Philadelphia Athletics for $150,000 and two minor leaguers. With another future hall-of-famer, Lefty Grove, already on the payroll, it seemed likely that the Red Sox would win the pennant, or at least finish ahead of the hated, but aging, Yankees.

Yawkey always left early for his trip to Sarasota, but not because he was excited about the upcoming season. He wanted to stop at his home on South Island, just three miles south of Georgetown, South Carolina. Yawkey, however, did not just want to relax. He wanted to oversee a business he helped fund, the Sunset Lodge, “the most prominent whorehouse east of the Mississippi.”

Hazel Weiss, former school teacher from Indiana, was the brothel’s madam. She set up shop in a two-story house with twenty-five efficiency apartments on ten acres of land. Weiss


2 Sadly for Red Sox fans, the Yankees won the World Series in 1936. They were led by an aging Lou Gehrig and a twenty-one year old outfielder in his first major league season, Joe DiMaggio.

recruited her women from out of town and trained them in proper manners. She imposed strict rules. Employees were to wear long evening gowns and were not permitted to drink or use obscene language. To those who did not know their profession, the ladies appeared as southern belles. But behind closed doors they would do anything for a price.\(^4\)

“Miss Hazel” had many visitors, including numerous servicemen, bankers, and lawyers. It is even rumored that Fidel Castro once visited the Sunset Lodge. Her best client, though, was Tom Yawkey. The Red Sox owner frequently rented the young ladies, sometimes as many as six at a time, to entertain his friends or players. Sex brought clients to the Sunset Lodge, as it would to Myrtle Beach thirty-seven miles to the north. While golf brought men to the beach, it was not the only activity that kept them coming back year after year. The promise of easy access to women, or access to easy women, promulgated by Myrtle Beach events, boosters, and promotional material gave the beach a year-round economy.\(^5\)

Trying to get visitors to Myrtle Beach was much easier after World War II than it had been before. Other than better roads and the development of television as a means to attract national attention, American employers also began giving workers paid vacations as a substitute for higher wages. Now middle-class Americans, the target audience for city boosters’ promotion, had the time and money to travel.

Just as important in the post-World War United States was consumption. Gone was the Great Depression when Americans scrimped and saved and clung to a job and whatever meager wages it provided. Gone too were the days when Americans viewed living frugally as essential.

\(^4\) This strict code of conduct and attire for southern prostitutes is far from unique. See Alicia Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans, 1865-1920* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005).

\(^5\) Berry, “A Once Famous Georgetown Landmark, Sunset Lodge,” 35.
After the war many felt that large scale consumption was the key to fending off another depression. In virtually every sector, from household appliances, to homes to automobiles, sales boomed.\(^6\)

Women still did most of the household shopping in the 1950s, yet it was not solely their purchases that drove the economy. While women shopped for the family, their husbands had a say in what they bought. On bigger purchases, such as a car or an appliance, men played an even larger role in the decision. In deciding where to spend a vacation, husbands and wives decided jointly, making sure their chosen destination had activities that appealed both genders.\(^7\)

Men were increasingly shopping, sometimes with their wives and sometimes by themselves. The stigma of shopping as “women’s work” slowly faded and what emerged was what Bill Osgerby describes as “masculine consumerism.” Instrumental in this was \textit{Playboy} magazine, founded in 1953 by Hugh Hefner. Hefner championed the swinging bachelor as a modern day renaissance man, who dresses exquisitely, cooks, travels, and reads fine works. The magazine has over the years interviewed celebrities from Martin Luther King to Jimmy Carter. For Hefner, the bachelor was the epitome of freedom and class, able to purchase whatever he wanted without being held in check by a woman.\(^8\)

Women, of course, were \textit{Playboy}’s biggest attraction and the reason why its circulation surpassed that of Esquire by 1959. \textit{Playboy} got its readership not from its articles but from its nude pictures of young women. The pictorials were the most important part of the magazine and


\(^7\) Ibid., 148.

its reason for existence. These pictures objectified women, posed as seductive sirens or the girl next door, allowing men to consume their naked images. As Osgerby writes, *Playboy* “constructed women as the objects of a voyeuristic look” with women “being configured as items for the *Playboy* adventurer’s consumption.” Myrtle Beach leaders, while they would never admit it, followed *Playboy*’s lead, using alluring young women as spectacle. What sold magazines also sold resorts.9

*Playboy* achieved its widest circulation among undergraduate college men. By the late 1950s, it was printing “Back to Campus” features which gave fashion tips. By 1966, *Playboy* claimed to have a circulation that included over half of all college-age men. Those same men who enjoyed *Playboy* came to Myrtle Beach for their spring and summer breaks, hoping that the tips they learned in the magazine could pay dividends with the scantily-clad, single women who arrived at the beach hoping to catch some rays and meet men.10

It did not take long for the Grand Strand to become a place for college and high school students just discovering their sexuality to spend their spring and summer breaks. Even before the first *Playboy*, a trickle of youth traveled to the Carolina coast for the summer to enjoy the beach, drink alcohol, and dance the shag. By the early 1960s, students comprised 38 percent of those visiting the beach, the most of any occupation. Seventy percent of college men and two-thirds of college women admitted that “watching…the opposite sex” was one of the main reasons to visit the beach.11


Spring and summer breaks attracted the most youth to the area. *Time Magazine* first reported on the annual rite of spring in 1959. Fort Lauderdale was the location of choice early on. Students with little money drove for twenty-five hours straight from their Midwestern colleges to reach the beach. Cheap beer and potential companions brought over twenty thousand students south. One establishment promised all the beer one could drink for only $1.50. A Notre Dame senior defended spring breakers’ alcohol use, protesting, “It’s not that we drink so much…It’s just that we drink all the time.”

While men came to Fort Lauderdale for the spirits, college women came, as one spring breaker insisted, because it was “where the boys are.” In 1960, the movie “Where The Boys Are,” starring George Hamilton and Connie Francis, stormed the box office. Theatre goers witnessed the story of four beautiful college women and their experiences finding love in spring break in Fort Lauderdale. Spring break and the beach became synonymous. Those who could not afford to travel to Florida came to Myrtle Beach.

Every year in the spring and summer tens of thousands of high school and college students descended on the city, selling out hotels, and leaving many to sleep in cars. Their arrival brought city businesses hundreds of thousands of dollars, but the youths’ increasingly permissive activities and ideals profoundly changed the town. This was the *Playboy* generation,

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who espoused the principles of the “swinging bachelor” and desired to see the sexualized female they saw in the magazine in their exotic southern vacation destination. Myrtle Beach leaders’ desire to cater to young men slowly eroded the family beach façade, as the money brought in by their visits helped sustain the local economy. Promoters began to use increasingly sexualized events and advertisements in order to draw the youth back.

During the Easter weekend, college students packed the Grand Strand area. The liquor laws in South Carolina were stringent; alcohol could only be purchased in quantities over a half-pint and could only be consumed in one’s home. Yet despite the archaic laws, students had few problems obtaining the forbidden libations. Government officials “closed their eyes” to the laws being broken in tourist hotspots such as Charleston and the Grand Strand. As early as the 1950s, officials up to and including the governor knew of Myrtle Beach businesses’ refusal to comply with state liquor laws but did little. On one visit to the city, Governor Strom Thurmond observed waiters at the Ocean Forest Hotel illegally serving liquor. Shocked at the blatant violation of state law, Thurmond asked Myrtle Beach’s mayor, Jasper N. Ramsey, to crack down on the offenders, telling Ramsey, “Myrtle Beach will never amount to a thing as long as you let them serve liquor.” Despite the exchange, neither the state or city officials stopped the hotel’s practice.¹⁴

Ocean Drive Beach, soon to become part of the town of North Myrtle Beach, was the location of much of the college students’ revelry. Jails became drunk tanks as officers arrested students for flagrantly violating the law against public intoxication, including one student

¹⁴ Governor McNair, interview by Cole Blease Graham, August 23, 1982, tape 9, transcript, Governor McNair Oral History Collection, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, S.C; and Athalia Stalvey Ramsey and Jasper Ramsey Jr., interview by Sarah Bryan, January 21, 2005, Folder 20, transcript, Myrtle Beach Oral History Collection, Chapin Memorial Library, Myrtle Beach, S.C.
arrested for stumbling down the sidewalk carrying a half gallon of bourbon. Despite the crackdown on youth drinking, local officials did little to enforce the state’s ban on consumption. Myrtle Beach Chamber of Commerce head Ashby Ward referred to the law as “archaic” and “an embarrassment.” Stringent enforcement of the law would only serve to stunt the area’s growth as an attraction.15

Illustrative of Myrtle Beach’s sexual culture in the 1960s is the movie Shag. Although fictional, the movie does an adequate job of portraying the real Myrtle Beach not shown in its “family-friendly” pronouncements. The film touches on all aspects of the city, the shag, the Sun Fun Festival, and most importantly, sex. In Shag, four sexually naïve female high school seniors (Carson, Melaina, Caroline, and Luanne) head from their rural South Carolina homes to Myrtle Beach. The trip has two purposes. First it gives newly engaged Carson an opportunity for one last vacation with her friends before she is to wed. Most importantly, it is a chance, as Carson says late in the movie, “to go to the beach and meet boys and to go to wild parties and dance.”16

As mentioned in chapter two, the movie begins with the four young women deceiving their parents, telling them they are headed to subdued Fort Sumter to look at colonial homes, rather than risk informing their family that their real destination is Myrtle Beach. The seniors arrive in the city at the very beginning of its annual Sun Fun Festival in June of 1963. Here they encounter three men who will change their lives, Jimmy Valentine, Buzz Ravenel, and Chip Guillyard.

15 Bill Black, “College Students Jam Grand Strand,” Myrtle Beach Sun News, April 18, 1968; and Talbert, So Much to be Thankful For, 241.

16 Shag, DVD.
Jimmy Valentine is the fictional celebrity heart throb that Myrtle Beach boosters have brought to town for the Sun Fun Festival. In the movie, the naïve, yet sexually suggestive, Melaina sees Valentine as her ticket to Hollywood and a way to escape her repressive parents. She concocts a simple plan to meet him: win the Sun Fun Festival pageant. Along with the crown comes a date with the heart throb and a chance to be swept off her feet. Her plan to use the festival’s pageant as a stepping stone was not without precedent. Just three years before the fictional character lost her bid to be Sun Fun Queen, Darlene Lucht won the real title. She did more with her fame than just promote Myrtle Beach. Lucht went to Hollywood, landing roles as a bikini girl in Frankie Avalon and Annette Funicello’s movies *Muscle Beach Party*, *Beach Blanket Bingo*, and *Bikini Beach* among other credits.¹⁷

Melaina’s attempt to win the Sun Fun Festival pageant fails miserably, but her desire to achieve stardom does not abate. She manages to deceive Valentine into believing that her friends are throwing a party which had yet to be planned. Through some quick publicity, the quartet rounds up scores of drunken men and women, and bring the group to the grand antebellum home where the girls are staying. Here the party-goers go wild, smashing furniture, toilet-papering the grounds, and drinking and cavorting in every crevice of the house.

As Melaina tries desperately to achieve stardom, a second girl, Caroline, just wants to find love. Caroline suffers from low self confidence and a weight problem. Throughout the movie, her friends commonly refer to her as “Pudge.” Caroline finds love through the city’s dance, the shag. She meets a young soon-to-be soldier with equally low self esteem and the two agree to be partners in the shag contest. In the end, the couple defeats the favorites and claims

the title. The film captures, albeit too innocently, how the beach brought men and women together.

The main plot of the story, though, concerns a third girl, Carson McBride. Carson is the stereotypical southern belle steeped in manners and propriety. She is engaged to a young wealthy man named Harley, who will inherit his family’s tobacco business. Myrtle Beach is an odd vacation destination for her. In fact, it is not her first choice. She, unlike the other girls, truly believes the quartet is headed to Fort Sumter for the weekend. Essentially kidnapped, Caroline meets and begins to fall in love with beach bum, ivy-league college student, and swinging bachelor, Buzz Ravenel. Their relationship culminates in her losing her virginity and losing her fiancée to the fourth girl on the trip, Luanne.

Shag typified Myrtle Beach youth culture in the 1950s and 1960s. Young adults, both men and women, went to Myrtle Beach to dance, party, drink, and to meet the opposite sex. But while the producers of Shag wanted to make Myrtle Beach the place to find true love, in reality it was a city where most found one-night stands. No doubt real life relationships developed through dance, like Caroline’s, or through seduction, like Carson’s involvement with Buzz. Many of these affairs, though, were drunken trysts.\(^\text{18}\)

Only rarely will a candid observer acknowledge that Myrtle Beach promoters used beautiful women to promote the beach. Most local historians cling to the notion that the area is family-friendly. The area’s chamber of commerce still claims on its website that the town is the “perfect family beach vacation.” That brings snickers from locals. What the chamber of commerce fails to acknowledge, for obvious reasons, is the seediness behind the family beach veneer is what transformed the beach into a major resort destination. The use of attractive

\(^{18}\) Shag, DVD.
women in promotional tools brought male visitors to the beach in droves and kept them coming back.\textsuperscript{19}

The extent to which area promoters used women as a tool is difficult to quantify. Sometimes the messages were hidden in seemingly innocuous articles published in the \textit{Myrtle Beach Sun News}. What is apparent is that Myrtle Beach boosters used the lure of curvaceous women to entice men to the beach. As the local newspaper put it succinctly in 1958, “No story on Myrtle Beach would be complete without a photograph of beautiful young ladies enjoying the surf.” But city promoters’ methods were not wholly their creation. Early boosters of the city’s activities looked both to Atlantic City, New Jersey, to the north and Florida to the south for ideas on how to attract visitors. They found that what drew people, primarily men, to the beach was sexual innuendo.\textsuperscript{20}

Using women as an advertising tool was hardly a novel approach. By the early 1900s, Atlantic City had already begun selling the area as a place to meet women. A black and white postcard from 1905 featured a photograph of four women lounging on the beach wearing turn-of-the-century bathing suits. A small caption at the bottom left-hand corner of the card announces “four of a kind.” The raciness of the photograph and message was not lost on those who saw the card. One gentleman who bought and mailed the card inquired of his friend next, “Which will


“you have?” Myrtle Beach promoters, always trying to determine what attracted northern tourists, copied Atlantic City’s use of sexual innuendo to attract tourists.\textsuperscript{21}

\begin{figure}
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Atlantic_City_Postcard_1905}
\caption{Atlantic City Postcard, 1905}
\end{figure}

The newspaper lured tourists to the town through promotion of the beach and attractive young women enjoying the surf. The beach attracted almost twice as many women as it did men. Going to the beach itself was considered a feminine desire, the mountains were the male domain. Travel magazines frequently depicted men and women facing the problem over where to spend their time. Women wanted to relax along the ocean; men would rather fish for trout in a mountain stream.\textsuperscript{22}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{21} “Four of a kind,” 1905, postcard sent from Atlantic City, New Jersey to W. Cunningham of Johnstown, Pennsylvania, author’s personal collection.
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\textsuperscript{22} Heaney, “The Call of the Open Road,” 83.
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One tactic boosters used was to create a spatial separation between men and women. Wives and children frolicked along the surf and husbands and single men found activities further inland. Key to this was golf, a sport dominated by white men. By the 1960s, golf’s national popularity grew weekly as rivals Jack Nicklaus and Arnold Palmer dueled at courses across the country, all captured on television. Arnold Palmer, the popular son of a greens keeper, was charismatic and a fan favorite. He was in his prime and drew a gallery in the thousands dubbed “Arnie’s Army.” The younger Nicklaus served as Palmer’s foil. More stoic than his counterpart, Nicklaus quickly proved an equal on the links, winning the Masters in 1963, 1965, and 1966. As the sport grew in popularity so did Myrtle Beach’s courses; men wanted to experience the thrilling game they watched on television.\(^{23}\)

For those not equipped with a costly country club membership, Myrtle Beach became the logical choice for men eager to play an inexpensive round of golf. Developers understood that attracting even a few men to play the sport would provide a financial windfall for the city. In 1958, roughly six million people nationally played golf, spending over $750 million. This was an average of $125 per person. In the same year, those engaged in boating and fishing spent less than $70 per person, including the cost of travel and the purchase of boats. Developers saw the rural coastal landscape of Horry County as the perfect place to build courses for the growing

sport. Between 1949 and 1960, five courses were built in Horry County and scores more were on the way.24

Creating two separate Myrtle Beach experiences, the beach for women and the links for men, was not seen as a solution to city boosters’ early struggle to capture the tourism market. After all, leaders were attempting to promote the city as a family beach. They needed to counter men’s desire to head to the mountains with activities and scenery that would equally catch their eye. Instead of trying to destroy the belief that the beach was for women, they capitalized on it, hoping the lure of young ladies would entice men. Following the lead of *Playboy* and adopting the “masculine consumerism” embraced by its readers, Myrtle Beach leaders adorned most of their promotional material with photographs of scantily-clad, and presumably single, young women.

Myrtle Beach boosters use of women as a promotional tool began innocently. The *Sun News* would frequently publish photographs of beauty pageant winners or local contestants vying for such crowns as Strawberry Queen or Miss Tobacco Festival. Published on the first page, the pictures of the early 1950s, before the first issue of *Playboy*, were small head shots of eighteen-year-olds in their pearls. Both the acknowledgement of pageant winners and the accompanying photos are typical of small town newspapers.25

The *Sun News*, however, went further than just printing pictures of pageant winners. It published photographs based solely on capturing a beautiful girl on camera. In its August 11, 1950, edition, the *Sun News* caught Marilyn Bessent on camera coming down from a life guard

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stand wearing her bathing suit. The caption reads, “All the beauties seen on Horry County’s
famous Grand Strand are not imported products. Some of them are home grown…Marilyn was
snapped as she climbed the lifeguard tower in front of the Ocean Forest Hotel…noted for its
gorgeous gals.” The caption continues by informing the reader that Bessent attends Wampee
High School and works at Doc Johnson’s Crescent Beach Drug Store. She is young, local, and
presumably single.  

Other pictures showed women in a similar light. One titled, “Home Grown Talent”
shows three young women in bathing suits holding hands as they emerged from the ocean. The
description asserts “In shape for the Sun Fun Festival, these Myrtle Beach lovelies play on the
beach and soak up sunshine for a healthy looking tan.” Other photographs of women in the
1950s and 1960s specifically refer to them as a crop.

Myrtle Beach promoters understood their audience. Talking about women as “crops”
helped locals accept the transition from a farming-based economy to a tourist economy in ways
that they could understand. Almost since the arrival of the railroad through Conway in 1886 the
area maintained a strong agricultural base. Like most of South Carolina, cotton was king. But
Horry County’s reliance on cotton as its cash crop was short-lived. The boll weevil thrived
along the coastline. Feeding on cotton buds, the insect destroyed as much as 70 percent of the
cotton crop in some South Carolina counties. Residents quickly turned to a new crop. By the
1930s, Horry produced more tobacco than any county in the state and the fourth most in the
nation.

26 Myrtle Beach Sun, “Tan Age Beauty on the Beach,” August 11, 1950.
Farmers also knew they had to diversify. While tobacco was their main product, residents also raised livestock and grew soybeans, corn, hay, cotton, peanuts, and oats. Referring to women as “home-grown” and as a “crop” showed them as an economic asset. Having beautiful women grace the cover of the newspaper and the beaches of the Grand Stand brought in much needed income for the region. It diversified their economy. For the purposes of tourism, young, single women were a product or at least a moving attraction used to draw visitors. They were walking and talking economic diversification.

Referring to women as “crops” did more than just help farmers understand the beach’s new tourist-based economy: it commodified women. Crops are grown, bought, studied and, if unspoiled and pretty, sold and consumed. They are objects that are both fragile and easily replaceable. For Myrtle Beach boosters, women fit the role of the crop perfectly. Every summer a new collection of women visited the beach. The pretty ones, assuming they were unspoiled (a.k.a. chaste), would be taken home to be married. Next year a new collection of women would take their place.

Young women were the city’s main commodity for attracting men, and boosters promoted them year round to randy males. The November 30, 1960, edition of the Sun News serves as a good example. Spanning the bottom of the page was a pictorial of Miss Myrtle Beach on the beach in a bikini. Among other poses, photographs showed her sleeping, standing on her tip-toes, and jumping. The reason this is in the paper is clear by its large print title; “No Sleet, Or Snow, Or Cold Winds Blow Along South Carolina’s Strand.” Taken in November, the pictorial clearly was a means to attract tourists to the beach in the winter, normally a time devoid

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of visitors. The bikini-clad Miss Myrtle Beach, like all attractive women, was merely a tool to sell the area.29

The best example of Myrtle Beach’s use of southern women was the promotion of the town’s annual Sun Fun Festival. Started in 1952, by the city government, local businesses and clubs, and the chamber of commerce, led by president Mark Garner, the festival was a way to attract visitors to the beach in early June, a down period between the busy Memorial Day and July 4th holidays. Still held today, organizers usually find B-List celebrities like Mario Lopez and American Idol runner-up Justin Guarini to entertain guests.

One editorial extolling the virtues of the Sun Fun Festival encouraged tourists to see Myrtle Beach as a “young city with young ideas.” The fete reflected the spirit of Myrtle Beach, “A virile, driving progressiveness, balanced and tempered by a gracious hospitality for its visitors.” The gendered terminology is important. “Young” and “virile” are words associated with a sexually prepared young man, not a family beach. Local boosters wanted their target audience, middle-class men, to think of Myrtle Beach as a progressive place where multitudes of beautiful, sexually available women waited to serve them. Myrtle Beach boosters were bent on self-promotion and obsessed with attractive women.30

National coverage of the Sun Fun Festival ensured both its success and that the event would become an annual affair. A Life Magazine photographer and reporter came into town to cover the celebration in 1952, the first national magazine to do so. After taking more than 450 pictures, the magazine chose only a select few to go in its two-page pictorial. Chamber president


Mark Garner gloated over the national coverage; *Life Magazine*'s readership topped twenty million. Chamber officials understood the value of the pictorial, bragging, it’s a “fine piece of publicity worth thousands of dollars to Myrtle Beach.” Garner was right. The Sun Fun Festival would turn out to be one of the biggest economic boons to the city.\(^{31}\)

Sun Fun festivities include a parade down Kings Highway (Highway 17) complete with marching bands, floats, and local dignitaries. This was not the typical small town parade featuring the local homecoming queen. But as the *Myrtle Beach Sun News* remarked, it was the “beauties (that) always catch the eye of eager bystanders.” Every year the Sun Fun Festival organizers littered the parade with attractive young women. The 1965 fete is instructive. Featured were Miss America, Carolina’s Carousel Queen, Miss National Rural Electrification, the WECT Pirate Girl, Miss Sun Fun, and beautiful girls chosen by governors of eleven states as far away as Alaska. The plethora of smiling, waving queens lining the parade guaranteed a large male audience composed both of locals and tourists.\(^{32}\)

While the parade was part of the festivities, it was not the highlight. Like many southern fairs, the Sun Fun Festival needed to crown its own beauty queen. From 1952-1959, the festival was the site of the Miss South Carolina pageant. The contest was the biggest draw for the beach; people flocked to see the evening gown and bathing suit contests. The winner would get a chance to compete in the Miss America pageant. In 1957, Miss South Carolina took home the crown for the state. Myrtle Beach promoters took great delight that Miss America got her break in their city.

\(^{31}\) *Myrtle Beach News*, “City Featured in Life Magazine,” June 20, 1952.

Festival organizers could not hold on to the state pageant forever; the Miss South Carolina pageant officials moved the event out of the city in 1959. Myrtle Beach promoters needed another pageant to bring beauty to the beach. Sun Fun organizers started a pageant of their own, a national contest whose winner would be dubbed “Miss Sun Fun USA.” The pageant featured representatives from states all over the county. Many of these contestants represented Lions Clubs, Merchant Associations, or other small town beauty contests. Qualified contestants were single women, age eighteen to twenty-five, chosen by their home state. Ideally fifty women, one from each state, would participate. Town boosters hoped the new pageant would keep local and national coverage on the city. In 1961, Life Magazine, the Associated Press, United Press International, and seventy-five other news organizations sent reporters to cover the event. The first Sun Fun USA pageant was held at the pavilion in 1960.33

A 1960 Sun Fun Festival brochure further focused on the events’ main attraction, women. In the promotional piece, the chamber acknowledged that “Beautiful girls and celebrities highlight festivities.” The short synopsis of the festival mentioned only one event by name, the Sun Fun USA pageant. It was the biggest draw and the most important event. For those who did not read the pamphlet, the pictures littering the cover were easy to interpret. Of the twelve pictures, five pictured beauty queens, two pictured other scantily clad women, and two pictured golf and fishing. It was a pamphlet designed to attract men.34

33 Myrtle Beach Sun News, “Many Features on Tap for the Festival,” June 7, 1962; Bobby G. Thompson, “Annual Festive Event Set For Sun Fun Days,” Myrtle Beach Sun and Ocean Beach News, November 18, 1959; and Myrtle Beach Daily News, “In Picking the Queen Beauty Doesn’t Count,” June 6, 1956. There were other Sun Fun Queens before 1960. When the festival started in the 1950s, the Queen was chosen at random. The first winner was a bride from Philadelphia celebrating her honeymoon at the beach.
Miss Dianne Taff, Miss Myrtle Beach 1960, hosted the first Sun Fun pageant in the pavilion in early June 1960. The winner, Miss Darlene Lucht of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, received four trips, jewelry, and a 1960 Chevrolet Corvair. Her trip to Washington consisted of a tour of the White House and Mount Vernon, the home of George Washington. Also included were a dinner with U.S Senator Strom Thurmond and a half-hour interview with WRC-TV where she provided free advertising for Myrtle Beach. At least three other interviews followed in Wilmington, North Carolina, Charleston and Florence. The beautiful Miss Lucht was a walking, talking advertisement for the city.\(^{35}\)

Publicity from the pageant proved profitable. Chamber of commerce manager Fred Brinkman acknowledged that the contest gave the city over $100,000 in free exposure. Much of this came from the work of winners like 1963 Miss Sun Fun USA winner Ginger Poitevint, who dedicated their year as queen to promoting Myrtle Beach. Upon winning the crown, chamber promoters rushed Poitevint up to New York to appear on the nationally televised game show “To Tell the Truth.” After the shooting, she raced up to the top of the empire state building where she helped build a castle made of sand from Myrtle Beach. Other appearances included interviews with the *Huntsville Times* and syndicated columnist Earl Wilson, the cover of

\(^{34}\) Brochure, “Myrtle Beach and South Carolina’s Grand Strand Present the 9\(^{th}\) Annual Sun Fun Festival,” n.d., Horry County Vertical Files. The other pictures show clowns, an airplane, and a picture of the chamber of commerce building.

\(^{35}\) Bobby G. Thompson, “Annual Festive Event Set For Sun Fun Days,” *Myrtle Beach Sun and Ocean Beach News*, November 18, 1959; Bobby G. Thompson, “Pageant is Attraction for Beautiful Girls,” *Myrtle Beach Sun and Ocean Beach News*, May 4, 1960; and *Myrtle Beach Sun and Ocean Beach News*, “Miss Sun Fun USA Completes Tour of New York City and Washington,” September 21, 1960.
Alabama’s *Industrial Relations Magazine*, and a ride in the pace car at the Southern 500 in Darlington.\(^{36}\)

Myrtle Beach never shied away from using beauty queens as promotional tools. One tourist pamphlet sponsored by the chamber of commerce is striking. Encouraging visitors to come to the twelfth annual festival, it features a superimposed image of Poitevint, basking on the beach. Her upper body graces the cover and her legs line the back. As the only discernable face on the brochure, the lasting image the chamber of commerce wanted readers to remember was that Myrtle Beach was the place to see attractive women. Another chamber pamphlet entitled “Myrtle Beach: Riviera of the South” has a similar cover, silhouetting a females’ upper body and accentuating the women’s long shapely legs along the front and the back.\(^{37}\)

In fact, using beauty queens as a promotional tool was one of the primary focuses of the chamber’s activities. So important was the use of attractive women as a means of bringing in tourists, that for a several years beginning in 1964 the Sun Fun pageant was actually cancelled. A tighter budget meant they could no longer use the beauty queens like they had in the past. Allison Farlow, vice president of the chamber, put it succinctly, “We have put so much time, effort, and money into selecting the Miss Sun Fun that after it is over we don’t have anything left


\(^{37}\) Bill Gasque to a member of the South Carolina General Assembly, Governor Donald Russell’s Papers, Box 8, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, South Carolina; and Brochure, “Myrtle Beach Riviera of the South,” 1964, Horry County Vertical Files, South Caroliniana Library.
to promote her.” Crowning a queen was less important than using the winner to promote
tourism. Beauty had its purpose, to bring wealth into the city.  

Even without the pageant, the Sun Fun Festival had more than just beauty queens to
capture the attention of randy males. One of the photographs Life Magazine chose to show was
that of Myrtle Beach residents enjoying “Sun Fun Day.” On this day, usually a Thursday, all
visitors to the beach were required to don bathing suits. Others, however, willfully chose to
appear in work clothes, hoping to be approached by “the police.”

Sixty to seventy-five beautiful women enforced the dress code. These “Sun Fun cops”
dressed in matching white blouses and blue and white shorts while on duty. Their fake badges
and toy guns gave the outfits an almost Halloween feel. These “cops” were instructed to go into
places of work and even to peer into parked cars to see if men and women were wearing beach
attire. Those found to be dressed inappropriately would be approached by the provocatively
dressed official and brought to a “kangaroo court” where a judge in a bathing suit and robe
would preside. The guilty would be placed in the Sun Fun jail or pay a fine, to be used to build a
local hospital. Notable among those arrested was the mayor of Myrtle Beach and a reigning
Miss America.

What made the day fun was not so much the dress code, but the reversed gender roles of
the Sun Fun cops. It highlighted both men’s duty to protect women and women’s subordinate
position. The newspaper giggled at the situation of Bob Riddle. A patrolman for the Horry
County police department, Riddle found himself suddenly outranked by his wife Doris on Sun

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39 Myrtle Beach Sun News, “Sun Fun Cops Ready for Tomorrow,” June 6, 1956; and Myrtle
Beach Daily News, “Sun Fun Notice: Bathing Suits or Else!” June 6, 1956. Some referred to
“Sun Fun Day” as “Bathing Suit Day.”
Fun Day. He was forced to wear shorts. Geneva Strickland, a leggy cashier at the local A&P, was the Sun Fun cop’s Sergeant. The Daily News jokingly described her as “tough” and laughed at the thought of her “punch(ing) any big, burly guy who is reluctant to be hauled into Kangaroo Court.” Enforcing justice was a man’s prerogative.  

Neither the parade nor Sun Fun Day was wholly Myrtle Beach leaders’ creation. In fact, much of it was copied from an event held at a coastal resort in New Jersey. During the 1920s Atlantic City held a “Fall Frolic,” an event similar to the Sun Fun Festival, to drum up tourism. Like the Sun Fun Festival, a parade of beauty queens was vital to the event. The procession was led by Father Neptune, in this case Hudson Maxim, inventor of smokeless gunpowder, on a seashell float. Following behind him were floats containing his mermaids, bathing-suit-clad contestants, smiling for the judges, in the second annual Miss America pageant.

The day following, another parade commenced, dubbed the Bather’s Review. The spectacle was composed of both men and women in swim suits whose beauty would be judged. City leaders promised the spectacle would bring “(t)housands of the most beautiful girls of the land” to the area. Both the city council and mayor of Atlantic City wore bathing suits for the parade. Nearly one hundred thousand attended the event.

Myrtle Beach, always looking to other resort locations for tourist promotion, copied the activities. In the 1956 Sun Fun Festival, Myrtle Beach leaders trotted out their own Father


Neptune, Grady Cole, a Charlotte radio personality known as Mr. Dixie. Cole, dressed in a costume “a fish would not be caught dead wearing,” served as judge for Sun Fun Day, sentencing those not wearing bathing suits to a fine and jail time to be served in “Davy Jones’s locker.” As in Atlantic City, Father Neptune had his “mermaids” near. Beautiful ladies snuggled close to his throne during proceedings. Myrtle Beach boosters knew what attracted crowds.42

Promoters hoped that the reversed roles would make the beach seem like a playful place to relax. In fact, the Sun Fun Festival fostered a carnival atmosphere full of fun, games, and events. Most of the big events, like Sun Fun Day and beauty pageants, utilized scantily-clad, striking women to attract tourists. Even some of their games used the beauty of these women.

A game held a June 9, 1956, serves as a good example. On a hot Saturday morning visitors to the Sun Fun Festival gathered at the pavilion terrace to watch a battle of wits between Major General E.J. Timberlake, commanding officer of the Ninth Air Force, and Erberto Landi, producer of the first Italian television show. Radio and film crews from a national television network recorded the proceedings. Master of ceremonies Barry Sturmer introduced the event to festival goers. The game was first played almost five hundred years ago between two men vying for right to marry the daughter of the governor of the Italian state of Marostica. Before the skirmish, local Gerard Tempest translated a proclamation written by Ernesto Xausa, mayor of the Marostica, which gave Myrtle Beach his blessing to reenact this “noble” event. The proclamation and history belied the purpose of the occasion.

42 Myrtle Beach Sun and Ocean Beach News, “Parade, Beauty Contest Feature Five-Day Event,” June 5, 1957; and Myrtle Beach Sun, “Grady Cole Program Advertises Beaches,” August 17, 1951. Cole was an easy choice for Myrtle Beach supporters. He had plugged Myrtle Beach as a vacation destination on his radio show since 1951.
What Myrtle Beach staged on the morning of June 9, 1956, was a game of human checkers with twenty-four South Carolina beauty pageant contestants as the pieces. Dressed in bathing suits with either red or black shorts the women were only required to smile and absorb the lustful stares of curious onlookers. A grainy picture taken at the event shows a crowd of roughly two hundred spectators, mostly men, a sizeable figure considering the early start time and the proclivities of vacationers to sleep late. Promoters reenacted the game of human checkers for the same reason they tried to get as many beauty queens at the festival and the same reason they published contestants’ measurements: to attract men to the beach. They staged this game of checkers for over twenty years.43

Other games equally used women as pawns. Young men participated in a game called cold feet. It was a battle of wills to see which gentleman could stand the longest on a block of ice. To distract them from the growing pain on their frozen limbs, each gentleman held a beautiful bathing suit clad young woman. A later game, called beauties and brawn, would feature a man sitting on a block of ice with a female sitting on his lap. Adorned to the men like jewelry, the women’s sole responsibility was to smile during the sexually provocative event.44

Myrtle Beach boosters had a solution to attracting men if these subtle messages did not get their attention: more beauty pageants. In addition to the Sun Fun USA pageant, the festival boasted of two other pageants, the Miss Bikini Wahine and the Miss Legs contests. The former

43 Myrtle Beach Daily News, “Sun Fun: Flavor All Its Own,” June 6, 1956; and Myrtle Beach Sun News, “Festival Features Accent on Women,” June 10, 1977. When the Miss South Carolina pageant left in 1959, Sun Fun organizers chose other attractive women to participate in the Checkers game. By the mid 1970s contestants in the Miss Bikini Wahine pageant appeared in the event.

pageant consisted solely of contestants parading around in bikinis and a brief question and answer period. Judged primary on their beauty, the pageant gives the audience a chance to gawk at the young single women.

The Miss Legs contest was more instructive of how Myrtle Beach exploited women to attract male audiences. The contest was designed, like its creative title would suggest, to judge which young lady had the best legs. Competitors dressed in one piece bathing suits and high heels to accentuate their shapely attributes. Women also wore paper bags over their heads with eye holes cut out. This was supposed to help the judges stay focused on the women’s legs. No effort, however, was made to hide contestants’ plunging necklines and upper bodies; nor was there any effort to learn about the contestant’s personality. This contest was strictly about the female body.

The winner, as pictured in a June, 10 1977 photo, was “crowned” by Hawaiian Tropic representatives. Unlike a typical beauty pageant, this pageant’s “crown” was a garter. The front page photo of the June 10, 1977, Myrtle Beach Sun News featured two smiling Hawaiian Tropic officials easing the winning garter well over the knee of the new Sun Fun Miss Legs Queen. The racy event and photo made Myrtle Beach a more attractive place for men to visit.45

To be fair, a few Myrtle Beach businessmen did try to develop an attraction devoid of female exploitation. Like Charleston to the south, they sold history, albeit a fictionalized version.46 The “historic adventureland,” dubbed Fort Caroline, featured a recreated seventeenth


century town complete with a blacksmith shop, church, and costumed villagers. Tourists witnessed snake dances, witch trials, and Indian and Spanish attacks on the village. Like organizers of the Sun Fun Festival, park founders invited their fair share of celebrities, from Michael Landon to Burt Ward, Robin in the television series Batman, to the park. However, after only a few years, the park became a refuge for the homeless and drew increasingly smaller crowds, before finally closing its doors forever. Myrtle Beach visitors did not want a history lesson, not even a fake one; they wanted the beach, golf, and attractive women.47

Taken separately, the Sun Fun Festival events and promotional materials seem innocuous. Boosters’ goals were to attract visitors to the beach, to give tourists an experience they would never forget, and hopefully bring them back for years to come. Together though, these events highlight the fundamentally provocative nature of Myrtle Beach and signified that the city was a willing proponent of sexual permissiveness.

Myrtle Beach citizens even admitted that the Sun Fun Festival was the place to see and meet young women. In an article titled “Festival Features Accent on Women,” the author acknowledges that “girl watchers are in evidence” at the Bikini Wahine and Sun Fun Legs Contest. There were, however, “other examples of female pulchritude…on display.” Editorials joking acknowledged, “we are too old for many things but looking at pretty girls is not one of them,” and “you are never to old to look.” By the 1970s, there was no hiding that Myrtle Beach was the place for girl watching.48

47 Karen Dover, “The Old West” Myrtle Beach Magazine, Myrtle Beach Amusement Parks folder, Horry County Memorial Library, Conway, S.C.; and Article, “Robin, The ‘Boy Wonder’ to Appear in Myrtle Beach” Myrtle Beach Amusement Parks folder.

48 Myrtle Beach Sun News, “Festival Features Accent on Women,” June 10, 1977; Myrtle Beach Sun and Ocean Beach News, “Pretty Girls Make Spring Great,” February 8, 1961; and Eldridge
The Sun Fun Festival and other Myrtle Beach promotions were not meant to portray the city as family-friendly, as organizers would like tourists to believe. City leaders wanted potential visitors to see them as a tamer Las Vegas, a not as sinful sin city. Whereas Playboy’s archetype swinging bachelors went to the desert to gamble, drink, and partake in the steamy nightlife Las Vegas offered, Myrtle Beach leaders wanted visitors to know that their city offered those not able to travel across the country the same activities, albeit without legalized prostitution and gambling. The same beautiful women eyed in Playboy and watched in Sin City could be observed in Myrtle Beach. Residents not only tolerated this public ogling, they welcomed it.

Catering to the sexualized youth culture had its consequences for women and the area. For example, there was little glamour for many of the young women participants at these beauty pageants. During the 1970s Miss Waves pageant held as part of the Sun Fun Festival festivities in North Myrtle Beach, the audience, composed mainly of high school boys and college men, was overly rowdy and fueled by alcohol from a nearby beer parlor. Armed with rocks and beer cans, the unruly mob threatened to discharge their weapons if their winner was not chosen. Throughout the competition, the fourteen women heard hoots, hollers, and cat calls. After the winner was announced, fortunately the one the crowd wanted, all the women involved vowed never to return to the beach. One contestant, glad the pageant was over, complained, “I feel like we were a bunch of cattle on the auction block.” Myrtle Beach’s insistence on using the promise of attractive single young women as their primary attraction created this atmosphere.49

As the city became known for its sexual permissiveness, its preferred reputation as a family beach became comical. Myrtle Beach, state leaders knew, had more than just fun and

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sun. It had a little sin as well. In 1965 Ralph Gasque, state senator from nearby Marion, South Carolina, claimed on two occasions that high school and college students were having “orgies” on the sands of Myrtle Beach. He further complained about the brothels that were in operation along the Grand Strand. Gasque was undoubtedly correct. In 1966 James Fussell, a graduate student at the University of South Carolina, passed out a questionnaire in an attempt to determine why the beach had been experiencing such explosive growth. During his travels he met a “very pretty young woman” who claimed that she was a prostitute and demanded that her profession be included as a reason for visiting the beach. The student declined her request.\(^5\)

Any attempt to shield the darker side of Myrtle Beach to the city vanished in 1973 when The State-Record Company of Columbia, publishers of the largest paper in the state, bought the *Myrtle Beach Sun News* and changed its format. The State-Record Company had neither the need nor desire to tout the area as a tourist destination. So instead of the overtly tourist friendly paper of Mark Garner, the *Myrtle Beach Sun News* turned to more to hard news that occasionally cast the city in a negative light.

At no time was this new, critical look at Myrtle Beach more evident than on April 10, 1974. The feature story of the paper was a long story on “Stella,” a Myrtle Beach businesswoman. The opening lines were meant to shock readers. “She’s attractive, middle aged, and at three o’clock in the afternoon she’s wearing a long red negligee. She’s a mother, a grandmother and a prostitute.” The expose’ showed how far Myrtle Beach had strayed from its family beach image.

\(^5\) Fussell, “Geography of Recreation in Coastal South Carolina,” 65; and *Myrtle Beach Sun News*, “’One of Cleanest Places I Know of,’ Stevens Says,” April 8, 1965.
Stella acknowledged that she had hundreds of regular customers, all from out of town. In fact, she had so many customers she was looking for a partner. “I wish to God there was someone working with me in the golfing season,” Stella added, “If she was smart enough, I’d love to have her.” By “smart” Stella meant both expensive, and without a male attachment, pimp or boyfriend, that would siphon off earnings. “I’ve passed up more $50 tricks; you know darned well the guy’s got $100. I can see if you had a bunch of golfers and they would ALL go for $50 each…but I can’t see one guy,” Stella explains. “Amateurs are messing up the business.”

Stella acknowledged it was not just single men that utilized her services. “Some of my customers have even introduced me to their wives. They say they met me at a convention,” Stella acknowledges, “Then they’ll sneak away later and come see me. Most men are out to have a good time, whether they’re alone or with their family.” If Myrtle Beach was a “family beach” its male visitors did not always subscribe to all the tenets of family men.

The sex trade, according to Stella, was compatible with Myrtle Beach and should be protected. She saw herself as no different than a nightclub or golf course. “Golfers – anyone who puts his money out – you are pleasing them, making them happy, entertaining them. They SHOULD pay for entertainment…Every Tom, Dick and Harry who comes to town wants a good time. Why should I give them free love?” explained Stella. Myrtle Beach promoters had been selling sex for twenty years, and until this article, no one had mentioned that there were buyers.51

By 1972, there were over one hundred known prostitutes working the beach during the winter. Some were wives living at the Air Force base who went into business when their husbands went overseas. Many more, however, came to town in the spring and fall when men

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flocked to the city, to quote FBI agent Don Meyers, “to play golf, to drink and to find the girls.”

Like migrant farm workers arriving for the harvest, call girls “follow(ed) the seasons” coming to Myrtle Beach from out of state to give the golfers some night-time entertainment. Some came from as far away as Tampa, Florida. A local police officer conceded, “Its like tomato season…they follow the seasons from resort to resort. They travel first class…You can spot them around. They look like they just stepped out of a Cosmopolitan Magazine; they look like models.” While this police officer could spot them he, like other lawmen, did not arrest them.

Myrtle Beach authorities turned a blind eye to the oldest profession; male entertainment was the big business of the beach. While few doubted the low estimate of one hundred prostitutes doing business on the beach, in 1972 there were only five arrests for prostitution and commercialized vice. The local police and FBI knew about Stella and her operations, but to this point had done little. Although she had been in operation for years in her beachfront house, she had only been arrested once. She merely received a slap on the wrist. The four diamond rings she regularly flaunted showed that business was both plentiful and steady.

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54 Jennifer Amor, “She’s Mother, Grandmother, and Prostitute,” *Myrtle Beach Sun News*, April 10, 1974; Jennifer Amor, “100 Prostitutes in MB – What’s Being Done,” *Myrtle Beach Sun News*, April 11, 1974; and *Myrtle Beach Sun News*, “It’s Time to Act Against Prostitution,” April 11, 1974. While there were only a few arrests, South Carolina’s prostitution penalties had little teeth. A first offense called for a maximum fine of $100 and 30 days in jail. Penalties for
After the story was published, respondents quickly condemned prostitution and demanded for its eradication from the beach. Editorials pushed for a larger police force complete with plain clothes officers serving as a vice squad. They also argued for more stringent penalties to put those engaged in the act out of business.

Law enforcement officials quickly tried to temper the feelings of shocked Myrtle Beach residents. Their response, though, yielded more information about the dilution of the family beach image. A Myrtle Beach police spokesman defended the department’s inaction, “We don’t have a big problem with prostitution at the present time…One reason we haven’t had too much organized prostitution is because of all the college girls who come here for the summer.” College girls, according to the police, would have sex with anybody for free.

Horry County solicitor J.M. “Bud” Long concurred. While acknowledging that he knew there were prostitutes, he admitted surprise at the number. “We’ve generally felt that…aah…companionship…is available – both male and female – for anyone on the beach who wanted it, without having to see a prostitute…There’s just so much free stuff,” Long quietly admitted. Unlike the police spokesman, Long realized quickly the gravity of what he was saying about female visitors, hastily adding, “I hope you’re not going to say that in the paper.” By 1974 local officials had stopped denying that the beach was a place for sex and sin. The only defense they could muster was that the vast quantity of sex was legal and plentiful. The veneer of the family beach had been shattered.55

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Chapter 5

Selling South Carolina

*With centers like this, I believe that people will notice us more and these will create an image and an impression I don’t think visitors to the state will forget* - S.J. Workman, Chairman, South Carolina State Highway Department, 1969

M.W. Martin was confused. A free-lance journalist from Ohio, Martin wrote a travel column encouraging his readers to visit the “little known” attractions throughout the country. While other states co-operated with the columnist, sending him literature covering their unknown assets, South Carolina wavered in 1969. Kathleen Sloan, travel writer for the state’s newly created Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism (PRT) wanted to know in what periodicals the journalist’s articles would appear. Surprised by the question, Martin sternly responded, “What’s the big secret out in S.C.? Nothing there?” The harsh response prompted Governor McNair’s press secretary Wayne Seal to reply, acknowledging, “We have a great deal of information that is ‘little known’ to the general public” and instructed the PRT to quickly send Martin travel information. South Carolina officials had become conscious of the state’s image.

By the early 1960s, a succession of South Carolina governors began to understand and respond to the financial impact of tourism, starting with Governor Donald Russell but taken up

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1 Minutes of the South Carolina Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Commission, Aiken, South Carolina, July 25, 1969, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia.

2 M.W. Martin to Kathleen Sloan, July 16, 1969, Governor Robert McNair Papers, Box 70, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina; Kathleen Sloan to M.W. Martin, July 3, 1969, Governor Robert McNair Papers, Box 70, South Carolina Political Collections; and Wayne Seal to M.W. Martin, Columbus, Ohio, October 20, 1969, Governor Robert McNair Papers, Box 70, South Carolina Political Collections.
more stridently by Governors Robert McNair and John West. They saw the successes of states such as Florida and Kentucky, and were increasingly determined to repeat these programs back home. As they looked for ways to encourage tourists to spend their money in South Carolina, the governors turned to the city in their own state that showed the most promise, Myrtle Beach.

South Carolina leaders felt Myrtle Beach was the key to the state’s ability to successfully attract tourists. City boosters had already found a way to consistently bring tourists to the city by the thousands. Their strategy, creating a single man’s vacation paradise, worked. Beginning in 1963, South Carolina leaders looked to Myrtle Beach as they developed an image of the state that would hopefully make it as popular as its biggest attraction.

A stable and successful tourism industry came slow to South Carolina. Throughout the 1950s, reporter and future Republican senatorial hopeful William Workman worked tirelessly to push the state to engage in tourism promotion with varied success. Ranking near the bottom of states in revenue obtained from out-of-state tourists in 1948, by 1959, the situation had improved. The latest survey showed South Carolina received $110 million from out-of-state travelers, up 140 percent from 1948. It did this despite the state’s modest appropriation of $60,000. Much of this increase came from the additional motels along heavily traveled Highway 301. More, though, needed to be done in order to attract a more stable tourist base. In a pamphlet intended for state officials entitled *Legislative Action Needed*, the state’s chamber of commerce pleaded for increased funding for tourism advertising, citing both the taxes generated by the industry and the increased competition for that money from other states. Legislators quickly doubled the money set aside for travel promotion expenditures.³

The increase was not enough. A study completed in 1963 showed how far the state needed to go. Among the southeastern states, South Carolina had the lowest travel promotional budget, $125,000, and received the least from travelers, $128,000,000. By comparison, Kentucky spent well over half a million dollars for travel promotion, and out-of-state travelers spent $205 million in the Bluegrass State. Further, whereas Kentucky employed thirty-five people to run its travel department, South Carolina employed only two. The report offered a glimmer of hope for the state’s travel industry. South Carolina was a natural stopping point between New York and Florida. Its convenient location brought in tourist revenue through gas taxes and lodging despite the state’s paltry travel promotion budget. The state was making money in spite of its efforts. With aggressive leadership and a little more investment, South Carolina could compete with other states for its share of tourist dollars.4

Early in his term, Governor Russell made the first real attempt to become that leader by forming a committee meant to study the possibility of bringing tourists to the Palmetto State. With few tourist attractions, South Carolina was short on experts in the field. Russell turned to the one place in the state that had an experienced and effective chamber of commerce that specialized in tourism promotion: Myrtle Beach. On July 30, 1963, he named Fred Brinkman, then head of Myrtle Beach’s chamber of commerce, to be one of two appointees to serve on the Committee to Investigate the Promotion of the Tourist Industry and Trade Within the State. Brinkman had already been consulting with the committee since 1961. His experience, Russell hoped, would bring recommendations that would help transform the state. While Brinkman left exactly one year later to continue promoting Myrtle Beach’s interests as executive director of the

4 Legislative Committee to Investigate the Promotion of the Tourist Industry and Trade Within the State, Travel Business in South Carolina: Report and Recommendations, October 1963, 2-4.
Ocean Hiway Association, Russell knew that in order to have a successful tourism effort, Myrtle Beach needed to be included.⁵

Although Russell made an early first step towards building a viable tourism industry, his actions paled in comparison to future Governor Robert McNair. McNair was born in Berkley County, South Carolina, in an area known locally as Hell Hole Swamp. He grew up in relative comfort and after high school enrolled at Clemson University. After only one semester McNair transferred to the University of South Carolina, a school he felt better suited his goal of becoming a lawyer. World War II interrupted his college education. McNair served in the Pacific Theatre for twenty-two months before returning to school, where he received his law degree in 1948. He ran for his first political office that year, suffering a stinging defeat in a close race for a seat in the state house of representatives. With his political career in Berkley County in doubt, McNair moved to Allendale where prospects appeared more promising. In 1950, he was elected to the South Carolina House of Representatives.⁶

In Allendale, McNair learned first-hand of South Carolina’s tourism potential. Located on Highway 301, Allendale was the last city travelers passed through in South Carolina before leaving the state. Its location on the most traveled route to Florida was an economic boon for the city. Every morning and night, Allendale’s diners and hotels accommodated a flood of northerners excited about their trip south. Governor McNair recalled, “One of the things that

⁵ Administrative Assistant to Governor Russell to Secretary of State O. Frank Thornton, July 30, 1963, Governor Robert McNair Papers, Box 70, South Carolina Political Collections; Fred Brinkman to Governor Donald Russell, July 30, 1964, Governor Robert McNair Papers, Box 70, South Carolina Political Collections; and Myrtle Beach Sun and Ocean Beach News, “Chamber Review Plans For Boosting South Carolina Tourist Trade in ’61,” August 31, 1960.

concerned me, having lived in Allendale and on 301, was that everybody stopped over and spent the night in South Carolina...on their way to Florida. They just spent the night only or had a meal with us. We felt we had all these resources here.”

As a lowly state representative, McNair could do little to move the state to make tourism promotion a high priority. His political star, however, was rising. With the backing of the business community and John Floyd, president of the state’s chamber of commerce, McNair launched his bid for lieutenant governor in 1962. He won in resounding fashion, beating fellow state congressman Marshall Parker by over fifty thousand votes. Donald Russell captured the governorship.

McNair used his brief tenure as lieutenant governor as a bully pulpit to promote the development of South Carolina tourism. “It takes more than Spanish moss to lure and keep the travel business that is growing so rapidly,” McNair told the South Carolina Broadcasters Association at their yearly meeting at the Ocean Forest Hotel in Myrtle Beach. He continued, “We aren’t getting the maximum from...God-given attractions.” McNair knew that millions of dollars of potential revenue were lost annually to Florida, the nation’s preferred vacation playground, and that he would find a receptive audience to this problem in Myrtle Beach.

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7 Robert E. McNair, interview by Cole Blease Graham, January 11, 1982, Tape 11, transcript, Governor Robert McNair Oral History Collection, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, South Carolina.

8 Grose, *South Carolina at the Brink*, 89-98; While McNair’s work in developing tourism is the focus of this work, the governor advocated for numerous businesses to locate to South Carolina. The most controversial of these was Badische Anilin Soda Fabrik (BASF). For more on this see Margaret A. Shannon and Stephen W. Taylor, “Astride the Plantation Gates: Tourism, Racial Politics, and the Development of Hilton Head Island,” in *Southern Journeys: Tourism, History, & Culture in the Modern South*, ed. Richard D. Starnes (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003).
The lieutenant governor offered a three-point program to bring the money back into the state. First, South Carolina would establish welcome stations designed to attract travelers. Secondly, the state needed to plan and coordinate an advertising program as well as develop historical sites and recreation areas. Finally, visitors should be encouraged to stay in South Carolina and not see the state as a place to “stop, eat, sleep, and gas-up.” Additionally, he cautioned that the development of interstate highways made these recommendations all the more necessary.10

As second in command in the state, his power to enact the recommendations was limited. In 1963, the state of South Carolina still found itself at the bottom of the list of funds expended for travel promotion by states in the Southeast. South Carolina annually spent $125,000; by comparison, the city of Myrtle Beach alone spent over $80,000. At McNair’s urging, the 1964 South Carolina state legislature allocated an additional $100,000 to promote travel in the state. Included in this budget were a travel writer, radio and television specialists, and a travel study committee that would journey throughout the Southeast to investigate other state’s promotion strategies. As lieutenant governor, this was the most McNair could accomplish.11

McNair’s term as lieutenant governor was brief. In January 1965, United States Senator Olin Johnston’s health began to fail. On Easter morning, Johnston died, leaving his seat in Washington vacant. Governor Russell yearned for the position. Summoning McNair to


10 Ibid.

Columbia, the two made a deal. Russell would step down from his post, elevating McNair to the governorship. In return, McNair would immediately appoint Governor Russell to the U.S. Senate to serve until the next general election. On April 22, 1965, just four days after Johnston’s death, Robert McNair became governor of South Carolina.¹²

At first, McNair acted slowly in developing the state’s tourism industry. Apprehensive about making far-reaching decisions too quickly, McNair followed the route laid out by his predecessor. Like Donald Russell, McNair formed a tourism committee. But unlike Russell, McNair’s committee would not study the impact of tourism but the possibility of creating a separate recreation commission. Both men, however, knew the importance Myrtle Beach would play in the process.

The new governor appointed Mark Garner to his new three-member tourism committee. The former Myrtle Beach Chamber of Commerce president and Sun News publisher was a good choice. Not only was Garner an avid promoter of Myrtle Beach’s tourism industry, he also was a rising political figure in the city. He served as city councilman from 1954-1959 and had recently been elected mayor of Myrtle Beach, a position he would hold until 1973. McNair and Garner’s contact did not end with the appointment. They became good friends and the two frequently discussed pressing issues. With Garner’s appointment to the committee, McNair guaranteed support from Myrtle Beach’s leadership.¹³

“Myrtle Beach,” McNair would conclude in a later interview, “had the only real tourism program going. Charleston, the Chamber of Commerce, thought they had one, but more tourists

¹² Grose, South Carolina at the Brink, 105-107.
¹³ Acting Legal Secretary to Governor Robert McNair to Secretary of State O. Frank Thornton, July 23, 1965, Governor Robert McNair Papers, Box 70, South Carolina Political Collections; and Stokes, Myrtle Beach: A History, 154-156.
visited Brookgreen Gardens than visited Charleston.” It was not just the number of tourists visiting Myrtle Beach, but the economic effect they had that shocked the governor. “We looked at the impact of tourism,” explained McNair, “and that’s what we discovered, to the surprise of most of us, that Myrtle Beach, not Greenville, you know industrial Greenville, had the highest per capita income in the state. We said, ‘My Gosh, here’s a six month business, an area and a community, with the highest per capita income.’” The state government wanted to repeat Myrtle Beach’s success.14

Myrtle Beach tourism promoters, however, did more than just sit on various committees; they played pivotal roles in the state’s promotional efforts. The city’s success in attracting tourists with little state funds intrigued McNair. “They (Myrtle Beach) were sort of leading the way,” McNair acknowledged, “The state contributed nothing, never did anything, never even supported them other than we’d give them a few thousand dollars once in a while for some special promotion.” The governor and travel leaders embraced Myrtle Beach boosters cost-saving tactics and promotion techniques.15

On May 23, 1966, McNair traveled to Myrtle Beach. He announced that he and his wife would lead a delegation of South Carolinians to Toronto for the Canadian Annual Exposition. Most of the delegation, though, came from Myrtle Beach. City leaders had done this before. In 1965, the Myrtle Beach Chamber of Commerce sent a delegation to Toronto for the exhibition,  


prompting twice as many Canadians to visit the Grand Strand during their annual Canadian-American Days. Now they would have the backing of the state government.16

The idea to bring a state delegation to Toronto was not wholly McNair’s. In February of 1965, travel directors from nine states formed the Southern Travel Directors Council (STDC). This was a collaborative approach for a joint travel promotion and to encourage budget increases. The Canadian National Exposition was the first effort by the group. Utilizing the theme “Travel South,” the bloc of states visiting Canada negotiated for their own hall dedicated to their mission.17

South Carolina’s role in the “Travel South” promotional effort did not mean Myrtle Beach possessed less influence in the state’s marketing scheme. In fact, the city was central to the state’s promotion. A map printed in the mid 1960s under the “Travel South” banner clearly shows the city’s importance. Imposed on a map showing the mid-Atlantic region of the United States is a winding route taking visitors from Toronto to South Carolina via Highway 17. While the route continues all the way to Beaufort, the small font the mapmakers used for that city implies that this was not the preferred destination. Myrtle Beach’s font size is equal to that of


Toronto, three times the size of any other place along the route. Myrtle Beach was to be Canada’s spring playground.18

McNair understood Canadians’ potential spending power and his presence promised increased attention for South Carolina. Not everybody, however, supported the trip. Back in South Carolina a local radio station harped on the state’s purchase of a jet for the governor’s office and what they believed was an enormous expense for such an excursion. CBS affiliate WCSC defended McNair and the “worthwhile” effort of the trip. The governor acted on what Myrtle Beach had realized years earlier. McNair later recalled, “Canadians all went to Florida. We determined that, if we could begin to turn them around in South Carolina, they could add about three days to their vacation time. So we targeted that.” With each Canadian spending an average of thirty-five dollars a day on vacation, each extra day of vacation generated significant income for the state.19

While the governor’s presence lent stature to the trip, he was not the main draw. The state wanted to stand out as an attraction; six additional southern states competed with them for attention. As Southern Living noted, “South Carolina’s efforts had a new wrinkle – a booth that was manned by a steady stream of Southern belles.” The article continues, “To help promote travel to South Carolina, Southern Airways and National Airlines ‘loaned’ a young woman each. They were aided by the Governor’s daughter, Robin, and the state’s Peach, Watermelon, and Sun Fun queens, who all drawled out South Carolina’s tourist assets.” The booth attracted many men

18 Map, “‘Golden Discovery’ The Compact Vacationland South Carolina,” n.d., Governor Robert McNair Papers, Box 76, South Carolina Political Collections.

19 “Editorial” n.d., Governor Robert McNair Papers, Box 76, South Carolina Political Collections; Robert E. McNair, interview by Cole Blease Graham, January 11, 1982, Tape 14, transcript, Governor Robert McNair Oral History Collection; and “South Carolinians Woo Canadians,” 12, 34C.
eager to hear what South Carolina was selling. These young beauty queens told the men about South Carolinian year-round golf and fabulous fishing, male-dominated leisure activities. Myrtle Beach’s influence was strongly felt. Just as the city had done, South Carolina sold the state through utilizing attractive, single women.  

McNair’s decision to bring a bevy of beauties to the exposition was both shown to be effective by Myrtle Beach and encouraged by a recent travel proposal written by a member of the governor’s staff. On February 26, 1966, some “Ideas for Consideration” came across McNair’s desk. Although just barely three pages long, the document had lasting significance. One of the five “Ideas” McNair applied in his trip to Toronto was to, “Allow more use of ‘showmanship’ in promotion, such as: Use of beauty queens and other well-known personalities to promote travel.” Southern belles were a cost effective way to attract men to visit South Carolin.

20 “South Carolinians Woo Canadians,” 34C.

21 Memorandum, “Ideas for Consideration,” February 26, 1966, Governor Robert McNair Papers, Box 70, South Carolina Political Collections.
Using women, particularly, white, single women, was more than just a cheap way to attract attention; it was intended to couch South Carolina in terms of the Old South. Capitalizing on an already preconceived notion held by some northerners, the spokeswomen’s southern drawl and home-spun hospitality harkened back to the mythical days of Scarlett O’Hara. These were not strong, forceful women who sold the state by talking about the value of the tourist dollar. They were delicate, well mannered and presumably chaste beauty queens who discussed the scenic beauty of the beaches and gardens as well as the male-dominated leisure activities of golf and fishing. They were, as *Southern Living* phrases it, “Southern belles.” They were mannered like the Old South women of historic Charleston, yet had Myrtle Beach sex appeal.

Their presence as Old South figures, however, belied the New South aspect of their mission. The Southern belle was only one role these beauty queens played. Queens like Miss Sun Fun were not taken to Canada solely based on their beauty, although that was a prerequisite. They were there to sell South Carolina and to bring money into the state coffers, a plan that the pageant winners fully understood. This was a New South mission disguised in an Old South myth. The dichotomy would come to symbolize the state’s promotional efforts.

While numerous Canadians visited South Carolina’s booth, neither the beauty queens mere presence nor a solitary exposition was enough to bring millions to the state. The state went even further to establish ties with Canada. In 1967, it established a South Carolina travel division in Toronto, becoming the first state to have offices there. Shaun MacGrath, who had spent three summers working for the state, headed up the division, serving as “Agent General.” For an annual salary of only $15,000, MacGrath became South Carolina’s ambassador to Canada, using official South Carolina stationery and answering the office phone with “State of
South Carolina.” Despite the new office, MacGrath urged that trips like the one McNair took in 1966 would still be needed, albeit with fewer people.\footnote{Minutes of the South Carolina Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Commission, Aiken, South Carolina, July 19, 1967, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia; and Shaun MacGrath to Dwight Holder, September 6, 1967, Governor Robert McNair Papers, Box 76, South Carolina Political Collections.}

Tourist promotion could not be done by McNair alone. The state needed a separate agency to deal with travel and recreation advertising. In 1966, the state’s Industrial Development Board had the job of bringing tourists into the state. This was a poor fit. The same document that urged the use of beauty queens, “Ideas for Consideration,” describes the situation best. It argues, “The customers and programs of Industrial Development and Tourist Promotion are basically different. Where industrial agents search out the elite, travel promoters have to direct their pitch to a mass audience.” The document continues, “Where the industrial relations personnel are required to ‘keep the lid on’ until the industrialist is ready to announce his plans, the travel promoter must constantly seek new ways to promote travel, [such as] publicity, travel shows, contests and other means at his disposal.” It concludes by arguing that the state needed to create a separate travel agency for tourism to reach its potential. McNair studied this document closely. In an interview sixteen years after it came across his desk, the governor repeated its words almost verbatim.\footnote{Memorandum, “Ideas for Consideration” February 26, 1966, Governor Robert McNair Papers, Box 70, South Carolina Political Collections.}

While the document confirmed McNair’s idea of creating a new commission, he was wary of acting immediately for two reasons. One, he had not been elected governor. Having not yet earned his party’s nomination, he did not want to make a significant change in governmental structure. It could both hurt him politically and be undone by his opponent if defeated.
Secondly, McNair was still unsure of the composition of the proposed new agency and its potential for success. His trip to Kentucky for the 1966 Southern Governor’s Conference pushed McNair to a decision.

The conference was held just outside of Paducah in the town of Gilbertsville, Kentucky. From afar, the city seemed an odd choice to house the eleven governors. Not to be confused with Lexington or Louisville, Gilbertsville was a small city in the southwest region of the state. Even today, it is home to just over three thousand residents. Governors chose the city not for its size, but for its location. It sits on the Tennessee River and is home to the Kentucky Dam Village State Park. Just a short drive away is the Land Between the Lakes, a large state park between Kentucky Lake and Lake Barkley, formed when the Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers were dammed. Gilbertsville was chosen to highlight the South’s tourist potential and as a useful backdrop to the conference’s theme of “natural resources, tourism and recreation.”

The conference began on Saturday, September 18, 1966, with guests arriving several days prior to check into their cottage and partake in the free recreational activities, tours of the dams, and cruises on the lakes. Special guests were flown to Lexington for the football game between the University of Kentucky and the University of North Carolina. The state’s state park system was to be the highlight of the event. The conference planned for guests to spend both Sunday and Monday nights on a cruise of the lakes and enjoying the scenic beauty. While the meat of the conference began on Monday, it was Wednesday before the governors officially broached the subject of tourism promotion.25

24 Remarks by Governor. J. Millard Tawes, September 19, 1966, Governor Robert McNair Papers, Box 49, South Carolina Political Collections.
At 10:15 a.m., Wednesday, September 21, the “Tourism, Parks and Recreation” panel began with the presentation of the “Report of the Southern Governor’s Conference Committee on Tourism Development.” The report solidified McNair’s desire to create a new agency by encouraging each governor to separate tourism development from industrial development. Promoting industry, the report argued, was incompatible with promoting tourism.26

Kentucky Commissioner of Parks Robert D. Bell followed the report with a history of the state parks in Kentucky. From 1948, when the state first started funding the park system, until 1964, out-of-state tourists contributed $22 million in state taxes, 9 percent of the state revenue. Marshal County, where the Governor’s Conference was being held, provided the best example of the value of tourism. Before state funding, the average county resident was a marginally successful farmer with a poor per capita income. In 1951, there were only 913 citizens employed in the county. By 1964, that number more than quadrupled and the county boasted one of the highest per capita incomes in the state. It was truly a remarkable turn-around.27

The trip sold McNair on the importance of a new agency and what its composition should be. Over the next few months McNair, elected South Carolina’s governor in November 1966, crafted his new department. In his state of the state address to the legislature, McNair announced that he had far-reaching plans concerning tourism. “I believe,” the governor announced, “the time has come for aggressive action to exploit our unlimited opportunities for recreational

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25 Booklet, “Southern Governor’s Conference” September 1966, Governor Robert McNair Papers, Box 49, South Carolina Political Collections.

26 Booklet, “Report of the Southern Governor’s Conference Committee on Tourism Development” September 21, 1966, Governor Robert McNair Papers, Box 49, South Carolina Political Collections.

27 Remarks by Robert D. Bell, Commissioner of Parks Commonwealth of Kentucky, September 21, 1966, Governor Robert McNair Papers, Box 49, South Carolina Political Collections.
development and tourist promotion.” Days later in his inaugural address, he articulated further saying, “Increased promotion of our outdoor recreation facilities will require a consolidation of services and effort.” McNair had already warned three agencies to expect a major overhaul.28

First, he decided to remove the Travel Division from the State Development Board. Their missions were incompatible. To promote travel, boosters need to publicize their message and attractions regularly. The Development Board needed to be more secretive. It could not announce the arrival of a new factory until all parties had agreed and documents were signed. Under this arrangement the Travel Division remained largely silent and inept. The Development Board treated the Travel Division like a “step-child.”

Next, he took the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation out of the Wildlife Department. Finally, he wrestled the state parks away from the Forestry Commission. This relationship, he felt, was a poor mix. The Forestry Commission simply did not have the time or resources to promote the parks’ use. These three departments would compose a new agency which McNair would dub the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism (PRT). On March 30, 1967, the department was officially created.29

Starting a program from scratch, McNair hired the head of his Inaugural Committee, Dwight Holder, as chairman of the PRT. Years later, Holder admitted his trepidation in taking the new role. As a businessman, he knew very little about travel and tourism and expressed those concerns with the governor. McNair was pleased with Holder’s response arguing, “That’s

28 Southern Living Travel Director Gary E. McCalla to Governor Robert E. McNair, Columbia, January 19, 1967, Governor Robert McNair Papers, Box 49, South Carolina Political Collections.

29 Dwight Holder, interview by Cole Blease Graham, August 26, 1980, Tape 3, transcript, Governor Robert McNair Oral History Collection, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, South Carolina; and Grose, South Carolina at the Brink, 157.
the reason I want you to serve as chairman. If you know that you don’t know anything about it, then you will surround yourself with people and staff to get the job done.” Holder took the job.30

His first task, with input from Governor McNair, was to immediately assemble a team of six commissioners, one from each congressional district.31 All of them were businessmen or close friends of the governor. Myrtle Beach’s district was represented by Horry County developer Edward Burroughs. Burroughs was not McNair’s first choice for the position. The governor originally wanted Myrtle Beach editor and mayor, Mark Garner, to serve on the committee. McNair felt Garner’s political power in Myrtle Beach and tourism promotion background made him an ideal fit for the position. Garner, however, declined to take the position citing other obligations, and recommended developer Edward Burroughs, himself an important figure in the city. Burroughs’ had just been elected president of Myrtle Beach Farms. His presence helped validate the department’s early work.32

The department, however, still needed an executive director. McNair and Chairman Holder knew of the perfect person for the position: former Myrtle Beach Chamber of Commerce president and current director of the Ocean Hiway Association Fred Brinkman. Brinkman was

30 Dwight Holder, interview by Cole Blease Graham, August 26, 1980, Tape 3, transcript, Governor Robert McNair Oral History Collection

31 Legal Assistant to South Carolina Secretary of State O. Frank Thornton, May 3, 1967, Governor Robert McNair Papers, Box 12, South Carolina Political Collections. In addition to these members the directors of four departments also served. The departments are as follows: South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Forestry, State Development Board, and the Division of Game and Wildlife.

32 Grose, South Carolina at the Brink, 157. Burroughs served only three years on the committee before being replaced by Billy Atkins who owned property in Myrtle Beach; O. Wayne Corley to South Carolina Secretary of State O. Frank Thornton, Columbia, July 17, 1970, Governor Robert McNair Papers, Box 12, South Carolina Political Collections; and Garner, interview by Catherine Lewis and Randall Wells, November 20, 1992, transcript, Horry County History Project.
flattered by the invitation but turned it down. Since his move to Virginia to head up the Ocean Hiway Association, he no longer felt he had the contacts with the state legislature to obtain the support the new department needed. After further conversation, Brinkman agreed to join and serve as the assistant executive director, but with one caveat. As Dwight Holder remembered, “We agreed, between us, that we would seek someone else to serve as the executive director, but we would really have to have his approval…You usually get the top man, then he selects his assistant. In this particular case, we did not do that.” The two selected former McNair press secretary Robert Hickman as executive director.33

Clearly, those interested in Myrtle Beach and those most responsible for its tourism success would be running the committee. Even Hickman understood that his role was to duplicate Myrtle Beach’s success around the state. In a 1979 interview, Hickman remarked on the city’s importance in shaping the state’s tourism policy, “The state as a whole and the tourism program as a whole took its cue from the natural instincts of the entrepreneurs of Myrtle Beach to promote their business.” By 1970, Fred Brinkman was so invested in the development of Myrtle Beach that he left his office at the PRT to once again become head of Myrtle Beach’s Chamber of Commerce. Four years later, when Hickman resigned, Brinkman became the director of the PRT. The tactics Myrtle Beach used to attract visitors were to be superimposed on the state.34

33 Dwight Holder, interview by Cole Blease Graham, August 26, 1980, Tape 2, transcript, Governor Robert McNair Oral History Collection.

The PRT was McNair’s pet department. It “was the prima donna, the favorite-child agency.” The governor listened closely to the department’s recommendations and pushed the legislature to fully fund its initiatives. Starting a state-wide tourism program came with a great cost.\(^35\)

McNair and the new department faced numerous problems making South Carolina a place to visit. One of the first priorities was updating South Carolina’s twenty-six state parks. Much of the park infrastructure, like that in Myrtle Beach State Park, was built during the Great Depression by the Civilian Conservation Corps. Since the parks’ completion South Carolina spent little on their upkeep. In 1968, the PRT lobbied and received $6.75 million from the state for renovations. The federal government matched that figure. By 1973, the state had the funds to acquire and maintain ten more state parks and historic sites.\(^36\)

Another problem facing the state was its arcane constitutional restriction on alcohol sales. Here too, the influence of tourism affected the state. Until the late 1950s, South Carolina placed a special stamp on all alcohol and cigarette packs. Police frequently stopped vehicles entering the state, searching for unstamped items. If found, the driver received a hefty fine. Myrtle Beach legislators balked at the regulation and its crackdown, finally getting the law changed in 1956.\(^37\)

Other than this small amendment, the state’s liquor laws had changed little from the days immediately following prohibition. Establishments were free to sell beer and wine, except on

\(^{35}\) Charles E. Lee, interview by Cole Blease Graham, November 21, 1979, Tape 1, transcript, Governor Robert McNair Oral History Collection.

\(^{36}\) Robert Hickman, interview by Cole Blease Graham, March 8, 1979, Tape 3, transcript, Governor Robert McNair Oral History Collection.

Sundays. Liquor could only be bought in quantities over one-half pint and could not be consumed where they were purchased. Myrtle Beach actively flaunted the state’s restriction on the sale and the consumption of liquor. Police officers balked at enforcing the stringent regulations in these locations for fear it would hurt the tourism industry.

The police’s selective enforcement of the law brought about its demise. A Columbia motel owner filed suit against the state after his establishment was raided for serving liquor. Challenging the constitutionality of the prohibition, the motel owner won a decisive victory. In a unanimous decision, the state supreme court ruled that South Carolina officials either needed to enforce the current law or change the Constitution. The governor had to make a decision. He knew that free-flowing alcohol was important for tourism but also understood that changing the Constitution would be difficult if not impossible. He needed a compromise that would satisfy his conservative political base without driving tourists to other locations.38

McNair rode the middle ground between enforcing the law and acknowledging that its provisions were out of date. His first stance was to say he would enforce the law, something that pleased his tee-totaling constituents, particularly the Baptists, an enormous voting block who helped put him into office. Yet he also worked on a compromise that would allow visitors to the state to consume liquor in restaurants, hotels, and bars. McNair mimicked West Virginia’s “brown bagging” law. This statute allowed patrons to bring their own liquor into eating establishments. Restaurant operators then would take the liquor and store it in a locker. From this stash, bartenders could create any mixed drinks the customer wanted. Unused liquor would

38 Grose, *South Carolina at the Brink*, 156; and Robert E. McNair, interview by Cole Blease Graham, January 11, 1982, Tape 9, transcript, Governor Robert McNair Oral History Collection.
be returned at the end of the night. The law was adopted on June 20, 1967, only three months after the creation of the PRT. 39

McNair’s compromise provision angered many fundamentalists. South Carolina’s Baptists even briefly considered rescinding an earlier invitation to McNair to speak at their November convention. The governor calmed his political base with an impassioned plea to the convention where he stressed his own Baptist credentials and told the gathering, “Let us face the reality of the twentieth century.” Although the law was not ideal for tourism, it was the first step in allowing tourists to consume liquor. Myrtle Beach’s interests were protected. 40

South Carolina moved to become a pre-eminent tourist destination with striking speed. In the two years since the Southern Governor’s Conference in Kentucky, McNair had created the PRT, funded a major renovation and expansion of the state park system, and modified the state’s alcohol policy. The governor even took the alcohol division out of the State Tax Commission Enforcement Division and created an ABC Commission to better control sales and distribution of distilled spirits. McNair had motivation to move quickly on his programs. South Carolina was about to lose its status as a traditional resting place for tired travelers.

McNair faced a threat to the state’s tourist industry that was neither his doing nor avoidable: the completion of Interstate 95. It is difficult to underestimate the importance to I-95 on McNair and South Carolina’s tourism industry. Entering the state around the small town of


40 Remarks by Robert E. McNair, Governor of South Carolina, November 15, 1967, Governor Robert McNair Papers, Box 90, South Carolina Political Collections.
Dillon, South Carolina, the interstate makes a two-hundred mile bee-line through swamps and pine forest to the Georgia border. Unlike Florida, Virginia, and northern states, I-95 in South Carolina neither intersects a major city, nor runs along the coast to benefit places such as Myrtle Beach and Charleston. Its completion helped tourists speed through South Carolina on their way to Florida. No longer would visitors facing a long trek south be forced to meander through small towns along Highway 17 or 301 to purchase gas, meals, trinkets, or secure a place to stay.

Without immediate action, McNair felt that the tax money generated by tourism would dry up. 41

The first issue for South Carolina legislators was the course of I-95. Myrtle Beach had long been promoting Highway 17 as the best route south despite AAA’s suggestion that travelers to take Highway 301. Interstate 95 made that claim comical. On December 19, 1964, North Carolina announced the terminus of its section the Interstate. The road would take an inland route. Four months before McNair assumed office, South Carolina leaders did little to direct the interstate’s course toward Myrtle Beach. 42

One tourist attraction, however, did have the influence to change the course of I-95: South of the Border. Allen Schafer created the attraction in 1948 along Highway 301, nestled just south of the North Carolina state line in Dillon County, South Carolina. In its first few years, South of the Border achieved success primarily because it was the closest place for residents of Robeson County, North Carolina, to purchase alcohol. The attraction, which now boasts several rides, stores, and diners, began a twenty-four-hour operation in the 1950s to accommodate tourists along the heavily traveled route. Its neon glow is visible for miles. The

41 Florence is the biggest city Interstate 95 passes through in South Carolina.

42 Laura Koser, “Planned by Pedro: South of the Border 1950-2001” (master’s thesis, University of South Carolina, 2004), 66. To this day, Myrtle Beach still attempts to get a branch of the interstate to run through the city, with little success.
attraction is best known for the “Pedro” billboards that litter I-95. Pedro is a cartoonish Mexican stereotype complete with a sombrero and ridiculous accent. One such billboard features Pedro and a giant hotdog at its top, claiming, “You never sausage a place! (You are always a weiner at Pedro’s).” The comically racist advertisements are designed to make “South of the Border” a play on words and a campy place to visit.43

The location of Interstate 95 would either benefit or destroy Shafer’s enterprise. Shafer had political and financial muscle and was willing to use it.44 He had served previously on the state’s highway commission and was no stranger to cutthroat politics. Rumors abound that Shafer used “bribery, blackmail, or even murder” to get politicians in North and South Carolina to change the route of I-95 and to construct an interchange for his business. South Carolina historian Walter Edgar believes Shafer possessed a great deal of influence, noting that I-95 “Makes a little jag there to go through South of the Border.” Nearly fifteen years after the interstate’s completion, Governor McNair would acknowledge that the two states worked together to help the attraction. Dillon County, he rightfully said, depended on South of the Border for employment. In 1966, the kitschy attraction garnered more visitors per year than the Charleston Museum and the Smithsonian’s Arts and Industry Museum combined.45

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43 Koser, “Planned by Pedro,” 49, 69.

44 Koser, “Planned by Pedro” 66, 80. Shafer tried to flex his political muscle on a national level. In 1964 Shafer wrote to Olin Johnston offering to print one hundred thousand copies of Republican Barry Goldwater’s N.A.A.C.P. membership card in order to discredit the Arizona Senator in the South.

45 Robert E. McNair, interview by Cole Blease Graham, August 23, 1982, Tape 14, transcript; and Table, “Attendance at Selected Attractions” 1967, Governor Robert McNair Papers, Box 79, South Carolina Political Collections.
Governor McNair was concerned about the economic fallout the interstate would have on South Carolina. Cities bypassed by the new network of roads faced economic ruin. Interstate developers tried to build their roads close to the old national highways. Interstate 80, for example runs parallel with the Lincoln Highway throughout most of its course, sometimes even merging with the route. Old Route 66 takes winds through the country from Chicago, Illinois, to Barstow, California on much of the same path as Interstates 55, 44, and 40.46

Despite the efforts of developers, some cities were completely bypassed by the Interstate. For example, Truxton, Arizona, a town first built in 1951 around a gas station and hotel servicing Route 66 travelers, now sits forty miles away from Interstate 40. Developers chose a more direct route from Flagstaff to Kingman, Arizona, instead of the old road which directs travelers closer to the Grand Canyon. Until recent preservation efforts, Truxton’s service station and hotel stood faded and needing repair. Other businesses in town closed forever.47

While few cities suffered the fate of Truxton, most faced the same problems as their Arizona business counterparts. Though developers tried to preserve the course of the old highways, in most instances they could not or would not merge the interstates with their forbearers. And whereas Route 66 was the main thoroughfare through many small towns from Los Angeles to Chicago, the interstate ran miles from many cities’ downtown areas. Businesses that sprang up along the route had to scramble to maintain their main revenue source, money from tourists passing by. The most obvious way for businessmen to keep their enterprises afloat was to advertise along the interstate. State and federal government restrictions on interstate


signage made advertising all but impossible. With little other choice many businesses along the old national routes closed.\textsuperscript{48}

With the course of I-95 largely settled by the time McNair ascended to the governorship, he grappled with how to cope with the changes the new route would bring. In the 1950s and early 1960s, entrepreneurs along Highways 301 and 17 built a number of hotels and restaurants in hopes of cashing in on those headed to Florida. McNair understood that the interstate would force these businesses to close as I-95 funneled tourists elsewhere. Most affected by the new route would be the governor’s home district of Allendale. He hoped to slow down motorists using the interstate and persuade them to stay in the state a little longer.

One way to slow motorists was by force. McNair understood that Highway 301 largely ran parallel to I-95 from the North Carolina border south to the Santee Lakes region in the middle of the state. From there, though, 301 swerves decidedly more inland on its path towards Tampa Bay on the west coast of Florida. Never again would it run alongside I-95 on its way south. McNair was concerned about the effect the interstate would have on the southern section of Highway 301. As he remembered, “We left stretches (of I-95) undeveloped. People in the area from South of the Border down to Santee Lakes progressed pretty rapidly, and we wanted to get that one (part of the interstate) open. Then from there on down was where we had tremendous investment, Orangeburg, Bamberg, Allendale, all through there, that was (stop-over tourism) their livelihood.” McNair continued, “I mean, really, it had become bigger than agriculture in those areas, and mostly locals who had their investments, you know, millions of dollars. So we began to leave gaps in it, and we did leave a gap in I-95 below Orangeburg on

down through that area.” South Carolina’s portion of Interstate 95 was not completed until after McNair left office.49

Leaving gaps in interstate construction greatly helped those businesses on the southern section of Highway 301 recoup some of their investments. Long-term, though, it was not a solution; the interstate would ultimately be completed. South Carolina had to find another way to encourage travelers to stop and see the state’s attractions. McNair knew the solution. He would have a series of welcome centers built where Interstates 20, 26, 85, and 95 entered the state, a tactic he advocated during his tenure as lieutenant governor. Another welcome center would be built in Horry County for the benefit of Highway 17 travelers.50

The governor might have known about Georgetown, South Carolina’s, brief attempt at a welcome center. Located thirty miles south of Myrtle Beach, Georgetown touted its historical district as a tourist attraction. In 1956, the city’s garden club and other groups stopped every out-of-state car passing through the area as a part of their “Welcome Tourists” program. While serving doughnuts and coffee, the groups mixed in conversation that encouraged those stopped to visit Georgetown’s attractions.

Myrtle Beach, too, tried its hand at a welcome center. Housed in the chamber of commerce building, the welcome center opened for three hours every weekday between Labor Day and Christmas in 1959. Less than four hundred people visited the center. In 1960, the city government instructed the police to get involved in city promotion. On two afternoons a week,

49 Interstate 95’s eventual completion hurt cities like Allendale and Orangeburg. Many of the hotels and restaurants closed as tourists went elsewhere. Robert E. McNair, interview by Cole Blease Graham, August 23, 1982, Tape 14, transcript, Governor Robert McNair Oral History Collection.

the police department was to stop cars with out-of-state licenses traveling on Highway 17. Those stopped were issued a “summons” inviting them to have a cup of coffee at the welcome center. \(^{51}\)

Even before McNair created the PRT, he decided that Highways 17 and 301 and each interstate’s entering point should have a welcome center. He had seen the benefits of welcome centers first-hand. Just a few miles from his home in Allendale, the State of Georgia built a center on Highway 301. Southbound guests stopped daily to use the rest rooms, obtain local travel brochures, and talk to the attendants who might encourage them to purchase a fruit cake on their trek south from “the fruitcake capital of the world,” Claxton, Georgia. In July 1963 alone, the welcome center received over seventeen thousand visitors, half of whom were so thrilled with the experience that they signed the guest book. The 1966 Southern Governor’s Conference touted Georgia’s achievement and encouraged more states to follow suit. \(^{52}\)

McNair commissioned South Carolina’s first welcome center to be built in Horry County. At a price tag of over $250,000 this center was by far the most expensive one built in the state. Unlike future centers, Horry County’s welcome center was not located off an interstate and therefore was not eligible for federal funds. Having commissioned the construction, McNair and the new PRT faced a dilemma. They needed to determine what the structure would look like and who would staff the building. Their decisions give some indication of what image the state was trying to project.


\(^{52}\) Legislative Committee, Travel Business in South Carolina: Report and Recommendations, 17-18; and Booklet, “Report of the Southern Governor’s Conference Committee on Tourism Development” September 21, 1966, Governor Robert McNair Papers, Box 49, South Carolina Political Collections.
A welcome center is usually the first state structure encountered by a traveler. Its construction tells the tourist about the place they are visiting. A dark all-glass building is modern, but could give tourists the impression that the state is cold and unwelcoming. One nestled far away from the interstate surrounded by picnic tables gives the traveler a feel for the scenic beauty of the state. Similarly the inside of the complex also is important. It should reflect the best the state has to offer. Most importantly, visiting the welcome center should be memorable. Traveler’s first impression has a lasting effect on how visitors will view the state and could prove pivotal in their future vacation plans. South Carolina’s welcome centers, like the 1966 mission to Canada, would reflect the influence of Myrtle Beach and Charleston.

McNair and the PRT knew the value of a welcome center and studiously decided on its design both inside and out. Its exterior had a slate roof and promenade and a modern glass façade facing the highway. The rest of the building was composed of white brick. Five columns in the front of the center gave the structure a sense of stature while also giving the building a look of an old plantation house. It was a New South design with an Old South flare, a perfect blend of business progressivism and antebellum myth.\textsuperscript{53}

The inside had a similar dichotomy. Designers made the welcome center look “far more like a large, inviting living room than an information and rest center for tourists.” Along two of the glass walls were four white plastic sofas with green and blue stripes, arranged in the shape of an “L” to facilitate stimulating conversation. Between them was a lamp designed to look just like a palmetto tree, part of the state’s official seal. For those who preferred not to sit on the couches, four occasional chairs gave travelers another place to sit. The glass walls were covered

by white sheer drapes with a blue and green imprint of the state’s seal in the center. Designers used native cypress for the ceiling. Scattered around the facility were colored photos depicting azalea gardens, golfers, and content fishermen. Soothing background music offered travelers a place to unwind and relax. Travelers were to “feel like guests.”

The interior design had another feature: hostesses. As The State would say in its women’s section, travelers will “be more like guests who get the kind of warm, cordial welcome that a Southern homemaker offers when she says, ‘Won’t you come in the living room?’” The welcome center hostess served the weary traveler complementary Pepsis and Fritos. The women were polite and eager to please. They were “southern belles.”

South Carolina tapped into a historical approach to attract tourists. In the post-Reconstruction era, tourism promoters couched rhetoric on the wonders of visiting the South in gendered terminology. Southerners had a pace of life slower than that of their northern counterparts. They were anti-modern. The South became a place of retreat, an escape from the hectic pace of city life. The leisure industry was thus built on domestic comfort, what wealthy plantation owners allegedly had before the Civil War. As historian Nina Silber remarks, “the whole notion of southern leisure suggested a more feminine style of life.” For welcome center designers, reconstructing an antebellum southern homemaker in a plantation house harkened back to an anti-modern sentiment and a response to the changing gender roles of the late 1960s.

54 Barbara McAden, “Now Travelers In S.C. Will Feel Like Guests,” The State; and Myrtle Beach Sun News, “Tourist Welcome Center Expresses the New South as Well as the Old.”

55 Barbara McAden, “Now Travelers In S.C. Will Feel Like Guests,” The State; and Myrtle Beach Sun News, “Tourist Welcome Center Expresses the New South as Well as the Old.”
Like the post-Reconstruction tourist promoters, South Carolina in 1968 was portraying itself as a place of refuge from the rapidly changing culture. The state was stuck in time.  

Welcome Center hostesses, however, were not traditional southern belles. South Carolina, emulating Myrtle Beach, made them sexual objects as much as greeters. Youth and beauty were required for the position. According to a job advertisement placed in the *Myrtle Beach Sun News*, “Desirable qualifications for the manager and hostesses include: experience in dealing with the public, attractiveness, poise, about 18-30 years of age, good command of English, and some college.” Once hired, the state required each employee to wear a rather provocative uniform. So important were these outfits that welcome center designers centered the color scheme around the ensemble. The earliest outfit was a blue and white skimmer dress ending above the knee with matching large rimmed hats. Blue and red coats and white boots completed the outfit. The ensemble was not that of the southern belle. It was an attractive modern outfit clothing an antebellum figure. For South Carolina officials, beautiful women were part of an attractive scenery, something to gaze upon like the ocean or a sunset.

Part of the hostess’s duties was to ask travelers if they wanted to book a hotel room. The sexually charged proposition was sure to increase the state’s tax base. “With centers like this,” ruminated S.J. Workman, chairman of the South Carolina State Highway Department, “I believe

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that people will notice us more and these will create an image and an impression I don’t think visitors to the state will forget.”

The center opened on Monday, February 19, 1968. Lieutenant Governor John West presided over the opening ceremonies along with special guest Joan Crawford. Governor McNair passed along the duties to meet with the trustees at South Carolina State University. The cold, blustery conditions prompted West to give a quick speech, forgoing the governor’s prepared remarks. In spite of the inhospitable weather, over three hundred people attended the opening. It was a sign of the tremendous success to come.

During fiscal year 1969-1970, over 170,000 people visited the now three operating welcome centers. Ninety-three percent of those who stopped were from out of state, giving South Carolina the outside attention it desired and leaving the traveler with the impression the state intended to send. Just to make sure their mission was successful, researchers conducted a study. The University of South Carolina distributed travel survey cards at each of the welcome centers asking visitors where they were from, their destination, income, and expenditures in the state. While there was little space in the margin of the card and no section for subjective comments by the traveler, this did not stop them from remarking on the state or in many cases the welcome center staff.

58 The outfit only existed for two years. The PRT decided in July of 1969 to create a different ensemble that would mix a variety of styles and colors. It was made by Springs Mills, a company whose founder was a commissioner in the PRT. Minutes of the South Carolina Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Commission, Aiken, South Carolina, July 25, 1969, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia.

59 Myrtle Beach Sun News, “West, Joan Crawford Open Center,” February 22, 1968. Crawford made an appearance because she served on the board of Pepsi, who had contracted with the state to provide free drinks.
In many cases it was the hostess’s beauty that drew an unsolicited comment. A traveler from Virginia remarked, “We have been in every visitor center from Va. to Texas and S.C.’s are the best with the nicest and prettiest hostesses.” A North Carolina visitor observed, “Very lovely hostesses!! A credit to South Carolina!!!” Another group from Georgia commented, “Extremely helpful girls at center! Well informed – gorgeous (sic).” Like Myrtle Beach, the state of South Carolina wanted travelers to know it was home to the country’s most attractive young women.\footnote{Memorandum, “Travel survey card cheers and jeers,” Governor John C. West Papers, Box 8, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.}

Selling the state as the Mecca of single young attractive women worked. Tourists flocked to the state and tourism soon overtook agriculture as South Carolina’s top money-maker. Blessed with beautiful beaches, expansive lakes, history, and the one attraction Florida does not have, mountains, it appeared that nothing could hold South Carolina back from garnering a place as a national tourist destination. Yet the state still had one huge problem to tackle, racial segregation. Violent confrontations, or even a hint of racial turmoil, could deter many tourists from visiting, costing the state hundreds of thousands of dollars. Governor McNair knew that in order for the state to have a successful tourism program, it also needed racial peace.
Chapter 6

Hiding the Racial Problem

*Although 40% of South Carolina’s population is Negro, we have very little trouble* –

Governor Robert E. McNair, Canadian National Exposition, 1966

As the first day of the twenty-first century dawned, South Carolina was in the midst of a political firestorm. The presidential race was heating up as Arizona Senator John McCain and Texas Governor George W. Bush squared off in what would become the key state in the Republican primary, South Carolina. What was causing a stir was not a national issue, like the slowing economy or the improprieties of outgoing President Bill Clinton. What interested voters were the candidates’ views on the Confederate flag flying defiantly on the dome of the state capitol building. A misstep on this question could derail either’s hopes for the presidency.

National attention on South Carolina was brought to bear by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In September 1999, the NAACP passed a resolution boycotting South Carolina if state leaders refused to remove the Confederate flag from the capitol grounds. Attempts to defuse the situation failed. The boycott went into effect on January 1, 2000, and African-American groups quickly cancelled conventions and conferences. The negative publicity threatened to cripple the state’s multi-billion-dollar tourist economy.

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1 “South Carolinians Woo Canadians,” 12, 34C.

2 Both candidates said the flag was a state’s rights issue before the primary. McCain later recanted his statement.

Myrtle Beach was one of the first to respond to the threatened boycott. Fearful of an economic disaster, the chamber of commerce voted unanimously on October 19, to support the removal of the Confederate flag from the capitol. Chamber president Ashby Ward spoke for the town when asserting that “the bottom line is the publicity is simply embarrassing. It’s painting South Carolina as something we are not.” Ward understood a lesson learned by his predecessors: a boycott could cripple the economy if those siding with the NAACP vacationed elsewhere. Too harsh of a stance, though, would bring a backlash from flag supporters. On July 1, 2000, state leaders capitulated and removed the flag from its perch on top of the capitol building and moved it to another location on the grounds. While the move did not satisfy African-American groups, the show of compromise largely diffused the crisis.\(^4\)

White South Carolina leaders’ reactions to the flag problem typified race relations in the state since the Civil Rights Act. Government officials remained wary of change, knowing the sensitive topic had both political and economic repercussions. Aware of the implications, white leaders acted carefully, offering only minor concessions to preserve as much of the status quo as possible, without seeming intransigent. The state’s tourism industry only highlighted these reactions. Tourist money was South Carolina’s major revenue stream by the late 1960s, but also would be the quickest to dry up if there was any major racial confrontation, as tourists would choose to vacation elsewhere. Tourist leaders felt they had to ride a middle ground, placating visitor’s expectations of racial progress and civility without upsetting a white voting populace anxious about change.

Change, though, was what had appealed most to South Carolina blacks since the formation of Jim Crow segregation. South Carolina blacks played a pivotal role in shaping the early modern civil rights movement. Black residents’ attempts to end Jim Crow began almost as soon as the system was put into place. Their efforts have long been overlooked. While blacks in other southern states achieved few civil rights legal victories before *Brown v. Board of Education*, South Carolina blacks began to chip away at Jim Crow by the mid 1940s. Judge J. Waties Waring, a native of Charleston, ruled in two separate cases, one in 1944 and another in 1945, that public school teachers should be paid the same regardless of race. While Waring upset many of his peers with these rulings, it was nothing like the ire he would face after he ruled on *Elmore v. Rice*.

After the *Smith v. Allwright* decision in 1944 struck down the all white democratic primary, South Carolina legislators panicked. Hoping to preserve the state’s white political monopoly on a legal technicality, the state legislature repealed all laws and statutes concerning their primary system. State Democratic Party leadership quickly turned their organization into a “club” that only whites could join. South Carolina legal minds felt that if the state did not officially sanction the primaries then the *Allwright* decision would not apply. They were wrong. Blacks, led by George Elmore and represented by NAACP attorneys, challenged the ruling and found a favorable judge in Waring. Waring ruled in Elmore’s favor, striking down South Carolina’s version of the white primary and opening up the democratic process to blacks.

The slow demise of Jim Crow was quickened in poor, rural Clarendon County. Here Harry Briggs, father of five, signed a petition challenging *Plessy v. Ferguson*. The case, *Briggs v. Elliot*, wound its way through the court system before being heard by the Supreme Court,
twice. Ultimately the case would be decided under the umbrella of Brown v. Board of Education.

Challenges to Jim Crow did not go unnoticed by white South Carolinians. Judge Waring, whose rulings infuriated his southern peers, was threatened, harassed, and ostracized. Harry Briggs lost his job and was unable to support his family. Both ended up leaving South Carolina for a more hospitable life in New York.\(^5\)

These cases represent only a small sample of racial hostilities in the state. In 1947, a mob of at least thirty men kidnapped twenty-four-year-old black laborer Willie Earle from his jail cell in Pickens County. He was being held for allegedly stabbing cab driver Thomas Brown. The mob, mainly composed of fellow taxi drivers, beat, stabbed, shot, and ultimately killed Earle. Despite thirty-one arrests and twenty-six confessions, none were convicted of the crime.\(^6\)

Well into the 1960s, white South Carolinians proved they were not adverse to using violence to preserve Jim Crow. In Rock Hill, Freedom Riders received the first taste of what awaited them in Birmingham and Anniston, Alabama, thanks to the punches and kicks of South Carolina citizens. In Orangeburg, police unleashed dogs and water hoses on young black protesters three years before a similar scene in Birmingham would spark a national uproar.


Despite the racial instability, by the 1960s state leaders could see that Jim Crow was vanishing and began to prepare their state for integration.\textsuperscript{7}

The racial records of South Carolina governors Donald Russell, Earnest F. Hollings, and Robert McNair compare favorably to those of their Deep South counterparts. Mississippi governor Ross Barnett (1960-1964) actively opposed the desegregation of the University of Mississippi. Georgian Lester Maddox (1967-1971) came from virtual obscurity to the state house thanks to his ardent and violent defense of segregation. Governor George Wallace (1963-1967, 1971-1979, 1983-1987) rose to national fame with his “stand in the schoolhouse door” at the University of Alabama. These Deep South leaders would not let Jim Crow laws recede without a fight.\textsuperscript{8}

In contrast, the governors of South Carolina in the 1960s were more open to desegregation, or at least less fervent in their public proclamations for Jim Crow. Instead of refusing to obey court decisions, South Carolina’s governors chose to run under the banner of preserving law and order. Hollings (1959-1963), who ran on a segregationist platform, planned for the peaceful desegregation of Clemson College in 1963. That same year, newly elected

\textsuperscript{7} Raymond Arsenault, “Five Days in May: Freedom Riding in the Carolinas” in \textit{Toward the Meeting of the Waters}, 201-221.

Governor Russell (1963-1965) held an interracial inaugural barbecue. It was the first integrated state function in South Carolina since Reconstruction.9

This is not to say that these governors were racial egalitarians. In 1958, Governor Hollings won his election over Donald Russell in large part by arguing that he was the better defender of Jim Crow. Five years later, Governor Russell wrote an impassioned speech defending the legality of Jim Crow segregation. Relying heavily on legal precedent, he argued that the pending civil rights bill was unconstitutional. But his speech was temperate for a Deep South governor. He advocated gradual desegregation in order to prevent violence, certainly a different approach than that advocated by his Alabama counterpart.10

Publicized violence was what governors Hollings and Russell most feared. It threatened northern and foreign investment in “smokestack” industries. The governors understood that hard-line, aggressive resistance to desegregation would cripple economic development, as had happened in Little Rock, Arkansas. In 1957, Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus had refused to let nine blacks integrate Central High School in Little Rock. Violent racial conflicts accompanied a prolonged confrontation that involved the 82nd Airborne Division and the Arkansas National Guard. The fallout from the disturbance cost the state millions. From 1958 to 1961, Little Rock did not acquire any new industrial plants while cities like Birmingham, Alabama, flourished.

9 Edgar, 536-546. For more on South Carolina’s governors’ handling of the Civil Rights movement see Tony Badger, “From Defiance to Moderation: South Carolina Governors and Racial Change” in Toward the Meeting of the Waters, 3-21. For more on McNair and his efforts in school desegregation see Phillip G. Grose, South Carolina at the Brink. Clemson’s desegregation actually occurred under Governor Russell. A dissertation completed in 1996 does an excellent job in documenting the desegregation of Clemson and the campaign for law and order. Maxie Myron Cox Jr., “1963: The Year of Decision. Desegregation in South Carolina” (PhD diss., University of South Carolina, 1996).

10 Governor Russell Speech Draft, July 17, 1963, Governor Russell Papers, Box 1, Miscellaneous Subjects, Speech File, South Carolina Department of Archives & History, Columbia; Badger, 11.
The “lesson of Little Rock” was clear: racial violence was “economic suicide.” Both Russell and Hollings put the state’s economy ahead of “the southern way of life.”

Under the leadership of these governors, Myrtle Beach faced its first civil rights protest. On August 30, 1960, Reverend Isaiah DeQuincy Newman, executive secretary of the South Carolina NAACP, arrived at Myrtle Beach State Park along with two carloads of blacks and one white man, Gerald Friedberg, and his wife. All of them demanded admittance.

This was not the first time South Carolina faced the prospect of having to desegregate the state parks. As early as 1947, blacks in Columbia began to agitate for a state park near the capital. State Senator James H. Hammond urged the quick creation of a park, fearing that blacks would demand, and obtain, the use of white parks if the government did not act. During the crisis, Hammond wrote an impassioned letter to State Forester C.H. Flory requesting his help. The park, however, never materialized. Associate State Forrester C.H. Schaeffer explained to Hammond that finding a suitable park with a lake or river was impossible. He added that any proposed “Negro park should be located on a body of water which was not upstream of a body of water used by white people.” Blacks, he believed, would only pollute the water, making it unsuitable for whites.

Black attempts to get access to a state park did not end with the failure in Columbia. On several occasions between 1953 and 1960, groups threatened to pursue lawsuits demanding park desegregation, but chose not to file. South Carolina park officials, however, knew a


confrontation was imminent. In 1955 the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond ruled that segregated public parks and playgrounds were unconstitutional. Following the decision, a group of six blacks from Charleston sent identical letters to Dan Cooler, the superintendent of Edisto Beach State Park, requesting to use the area. They were denied admittance and immediately filed suit. On February 7, 1956, the state legislature quickly closed the park to both races in hopes of making the lawsuit null and void. Governor George Bell Timmerman concurred with the legislature, saying emphatically, "There will be no mixing of the races in our state parks." In 1957, South Carolina legislators reaffirmed their stance by writing in their operating budget a provision funding only segregated parks.¹⁴

By 1960, blacks were ready to try again to desegregate the state parks, this time in Myrtle Beach. Newman’s attempted “wade-in” was short-lived. Police officers had been tipped off to the group’s activities and were there to meet them, determined both to stop the demonstration and prevent a possible violent confrontation. When park officials saw the vehicles preparing to cross the northbound lane of Highway 17 into the park, they closed the gates. Prevented from entering, the two carloads parked on the shoulder of the highway and insisted on admittance. Pete Strom, chief of the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED), informed the group that the park was closed, arguing it had a capacity crowd. Later, State Parks Director C. West Jacocks contended that officials closed the park “in the interest of public safety.” The park reopened the next day with officials at the gate prepared to turn back any challenge to segregation.¹⁵

The refusal to desegregate the Myrtle Beach State Park prompted a class action lawsuit, *J. Arthur Brown et al v. South Carolina State Forestry Commission* filed July 8, 1961. As the lawsuit wound through the court system, state leaders attempted to appease blacks by dividing Huntington State Park, just south of Myrtle Beach, in half, creating one section for blacks and the other for whites. This move towards accommodation did nothing to prevent the legal process from coming to completion. On July 10, 1963, the district court in Greenville issued an order to desegregate all state parks. The day the order was to go into effect, September 8, 1963, the South Carolina legislature ordered all the parks closed indefinitely.\(^{16}\)

Shutting down the state parks proved to be an economic disaster that left would-be tourists confused. Mrs. Clifford Stunkel and her husband were two of those tourists. The white couple were avid campers, having stayed in scores of state parks across the country. During the summer of 1963 alone, the Indiana duo camped in eight southern states and encountered no problems. Leaders in Florida and Kentucky, worried about economic ramifications, had already begun to integrate. This year, the Stunkels wanted to camp in South Carolina and wrote a letter to the Commission of Forestry for information concerning the state parks. The “lovely” brochure the couple received only heightened their desire to book a campsite. Stamped on their material, however, was a notice informing the Stunkels that the parks were closed until further notice. Scores of others received similar information that delayed or prevented their visitation. South Carolina lost untold revenue from the legislative stunt.\(^{17}\)

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Only a week after Myrtle Beach State Park closed its gates, a group of roughly one hundred residents jammed city hall to express their views during a special public hearing organized by the South Carolina House of Representatives. The Arrants Committee, as it would come to be known, included J. Clator Arrants, Robert A. Hammett, Thomas Howell, Jr. and two legislators from the most popular tourist locations, A.J. LeaMond of Charleston and Lloyd B. Bell of Myrtle Beach. The representatives expected the crowd to demand the parks stay closed.

Just a week prior to coming to Myrtle Beach, the committee met with a similar group of citizens in Barnwell County, South Carolina. There, the locals demanded the parks stay closed indefinitely, refusing to make even the slightest compromise concerning integration. A decision to keep the parks sealed had irreparable ramifications that Barnwell County residents were willing to risk.\(^\text{18}\)

The Arrants Committee knew, though, that closing the parks would cost the state millions of dollars. Worse for the state, the vast majority of parks had a reversion clause. Many donors had willed the land to the state specifically to be operated as parks. If the state were to close the parks for a full year, the land would revert back to the previous owners. Once lost, it would be difficult to get the parks back, costing the state millions in revenue. Developers could swoop in and purchase the land, building housing developments where campgrounds once stood.

\(^{17}\) Mrs. Clifford Stunkel to the South Carolina State Commission of Forestry, Columbia, January 31, 1964, State Park Desegregation File, Box 1, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia; and Myrtle Beach Sun News, “James Stevens Inclined to Support Closed Parks,” January 30, 1964.

With this in mind, the Arrants Committee headed to Myrtle Beach, prepared for a repeat of their Barnwell County experience. Myrtle Beach State Park, donated to the state by Myrtle Beach Farms Company during the depression, did not have a reversion clause. It could delay reopening indefinitely. Faced with seemingly no repercussions from a segregationist stance, the Arrants Committee prepared for Myrtle Beach residents to fight the park’s opening.

Residents packed city hall for the meeting. Many citizens, with no room to stand, waited outside for news. Much to the representatives’ shock, the crowd - composed of white retirees, hotel and motel operators, and four blacks - criticized the closing of Myrtle Beach State Park and demanded its immediate reopening. The feeling was almost unanimous. Retired businessman Warren Cromley asserted, “I think the ocean is big enough for all of us.” Reverend Murphy Williams concurred, acknowledging, “I think the people of South Carolina can handle this.” When the committee asked for a show of hands denoting who would vote to keep the parks closed, “only one hand was raised – and it only partially.”\(^\text{19}\)

The potential economic disaster from the park closing prompted the large turnout. Since its inception, Myrtle Beach State Park had been the most visited park in the state, providing the city an enormous source of revenue. Officials estimated that it attracted over three-quarters of a million people annually with campers spending an average of $150 per week. The *Myrtle Beach Sun News* concluded that over a three-month span the park’s closing would cost the city more than $3 million.\(^\text{20}\)

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\(^\text{19}\) Frances Moore, “Integrate Park, Committee Told,” *Myrtle Beach Sun News*, September 19, 1963; and “Myrtle Beach, Georgetown Urge Integrated Parks,” Forestry Commission Desegregation File, Box 2, South Carolina Department of Archives and History.

The economic motivation to keep the park open was clearly on the mind of those in attendance. African-American attorney and Conway resident Prentice Stevens hinted at the financial ramifications of the situation, telling the committee that they should not close the parks just to hurt blacks because “you are hurting yourselves and South Carolina if you do.” Even the lone dissenter admitted concern over the park’s closing. During the meeting he accused those pushing for the state park to open as being “mercenaries,” for choosing to trade economic security over southern values. The reference was an apt one. Myrtle Beach residents, like their counterparts in Florida, clearly sided with their pocketbooks in the segregation battle.21

Not everyone could attend the packed committee meeting. A large contingent of Myrtle Beach residents waited outside city hall, eager to hear what transpired inside. While there was some disagreement about whether to open the swimming pool, almost everyone asked was in agreement about desegregating the park. Myrtle Beach’s desire to open the park swayed the representatives. Late in the hearing, Arrants asked the audience if they felt the situation could be better handled by a local committee rather than on a state level. The crowd wholeheartedly agreed on home rule. The next day the Arrants Committee recommended a local option plan that would allow the state park operators to decide whether to desegregate.22

Privately, those in attendance admitted their pleasure in the outcome of the hearing. Mrs. Henrietta Abeles attended the meeting and voiced her support for desegregation. Writing to her

21 Frances Moore, “Integrate Park, Committee Told,” Myrtle Beach Sun News, September 19, 1963; and “Myrtle Beach, Georgetown Urge Integrated Parks,” Forestry Commission Desegregation File, Box 2, South Carolina Department of Archives and History.

22 Cox, The History of Negro State Parks in South Carolina: 1940-1963, 97. Residents in the upcountry and near Columbia also wanted the parks opened. Myrtle Beach Sun News, January 9, 1964; and “Residents of Myrtle Beach Back Integrated State Parks,” Forestry Commission Desegregation File, Box 2, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia.
son Sigmund, she opined, “it was voted unanimously to reopen them integrated rather than keeping them shut. However several counties voted otherwise. Myrtle Beach has a good number of Northerners.” Abeles struck on the reason residents chose to desegregate. Myrtle Beach’s avid appeals to New Yorkers and Canadians, like in Florida, changed the city’s demographics.\textsuperscript{23} To these transplanted northerners, Jim Crow segregation appeared unnecessary. Myrtle Beach’s support of tourism did more than just bring in a divergent population; it also gave leaders insight into how other locales, particularly Florida, dealt with racial conflict.\textsuperscript{24}

Myrtle Beach promoters kept a close eye on tourism promotion in both Atlantic City and Florida, often emulating the two. Florida, however, was their key competitor and drew most of their attention. City leaders grappled with the state’s successes and delighted when it failed. The \textit{Myrtle Beach Sun News} frequently discussed the Sunshine State’s weather, even noting the hypocrisy of the state’s promotion of year-round warmth, citing a freak snow storm in Pensacola. Such knowledge of minute details meant that town leaders also knew that between 1956 and 1964, blacks in the state demanded and achieved integrated beaches.

Historian Gary R. Mormino has investigated desegregation in South Florida. Interior communities, those little touched by tourism, held firm to Jim Crow segregation. Beach towns in southern Florida, however, took a different path. Understanding that racial conflict could seriously hinder their economic well-being, “virtually every South Florida beach community

\textsuperscript{23} Earl Black and Merle Black, \textit{Politics and Society in the South} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 17. In 1950, a full 30 percent of Florida’s residents were born outside of the South, a figure that would increase well into the 1980s.

\textsuperscript{24} Mrs. Henrietta B. Abeles, Myrtle Beach, S.C., to Sigmund Abeles, New York, September 1963, Sigmund Abeles papers. During the next session the state legislature voted to reopen the parks on an integrated basis, albeit with rules that helped prevent the races from mingling. Most state parks closed their public swimming pools or kept them open for whites only. Governor McNair quietly urged the legislature to completely desegregate the parks the next year.
between Volusia County (Clearwater) and Pinellas County (Daytona Beach) had resolved this issue by the early 1960s.” This is equivalent to 450 miles of coastline. The quick resolution helped South Florida continue to attract tourists in large numbers.25

An ardent defense of Jim Crow segregation, on the other hand, proved to be disastrous for St. Augustine, Florida. Tourism accounted for as much as 70-85 percent of the town’s income in 1964, and black leaders knew the industry was the city’s “Achilles heel.” Under the leadership of Martin Luther King Jr., blacks staged a series of wade-ins between June 21 and June 25 at the city’s segregated beaches. A racial battle ensued along the surf on the final day. Whites attacked black protestors, breaking their bones and nearly killing one man before the police finally restored order. Newspapers across the country plastered pictures of the racial disturbance on their front pages. The battle on the beach devastated St. Augustine’s tourist economy; the city lost over $5 million in projected revenue. The message from St. Augustine was clear: racial violence would kill a city economically.26

The local option plan proposed by the Arrants Committee never passed. Instead, South Carolina decided to open its parks on a limited integration basis. Among the new rules were bans on swimming, camping, and changing clothes in the state park limits, more intimate activities. The new laws stayed in effect for twenty-five months before Governor McNair and the state legislature fully integrated the parks. Residents’ concerns about the parks closing were


on target. It took the parks three years after reopening to realize the same number of visitors they enjoyed prior to the integration disruption.\textsuperscript{27}

The leadership in Myrtle Beach and the state of South Carolina understood the problem faced by St. Augustine. In July 1964, a week after the conflict in St. Augustine and just days after President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act, Myrtle Beach quietly desegregated its restaurants, beaches, and amusement parks. Curious spectators watched as blacks walked on local piers and waded in the gentle rolling surf for the first time. Police on the scene reported a few minor disturbances but no major incidents. Later that year token desegregation began at Myrtle Beach High School.\textsuperscript{28}

The integration of the state parks was the first of many civil rights battles Robert E. McNair would face during his term as governor of South Carolina. While his predecessors, Governors Russell and Hollings, worried about the effects of racial violence on smokestack industries, McNair and Lieutenant Governor John West worried about how the civil rights movement affected another industry: tourism.\textsuperscript{29} An uprising like that in St. Augustine in 1964


\textsuperscript{28} Myrtle Beach Sun News, “Negroes Use Beach Without Incident,” July 9, 1964; The Myrtle Beach Sun News, “Four Negro Students Accepted For Enrollment at Myrtle Beach,” December 31, 1964; and Myrtle Beach Sun News, “For First Time in History of Horry County Voters Give GOP Candidate Majority,” November 5, 1964. Myrtle Beach residents did express their discontent politically. In 1964, a Republican presidential candidate carried Horry County for the first time. Goldwater garnered 65 percent of the vote. No doubt race played a role in voting. In the predominately black area of the county, Goldwater only received 2 of the 633 votes.

\textsuperscript{29} It would be amiss to claim that McNair was the first governor to acknowledge the contribution of tourism to South Carolina’s economy. In 1960 Governor Hollings gave a speech discussing tourism’s impact. Speech, “Are We Missing the Boat?” November 2, 1960, Governor Earnest F. Hollings Papers, Box 20, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina, Columbia.
could have a ripple effect on the state’s economy that could last for years. Protests and violence threatened to curb the number of people staying in the state and quicken their departure. From his years living in Allendale along Highway 301, the heavily traveled route to Florida, McNair knew of the finicky nature of tourists as well as the economic boon brought by their travels.

McNair came into office in 1965 both keenly aware of the racial situation in the state and with a desire to increase the number of tourists visiting South Carolina. His creation of the PRT was one of his crowning achievements as governor. He understood that money obtained from visitors proved to be both more profitable and more volatile than income derived from more traditional industry. McNair realized that tourism even contributed more to the economy than agriculture. Per-capita incomes were higher in Horry County than industrialized Greenville County. But unlike in smokestack industries, small, seemingly innocuous occurrences, like several days of rain, or rumors of inhospitality, could send ripples through the tourism industry, threatening the livelihood of the businessmen and increasingly the economy of the entire state.

It was a challenging time to be a southern governor. Jim Crow segregation was slowly disappearing leaving McNair in a difficult political situation. An ardent defense of segregation might endear him to white South Carolinians as a champion of “southern values.” He could propel that goodwill into another political office after his term ended in 1971. 30 Such a stance, however, could prove disastrous both to his hopes for a national office (McNair was briefly considered a potential vice presidential candidate for Hubert Humphrey in 1968) and for South Carolina. An avid defense of Jim Crow had economic repercussions. Bombings, battles, and racially motivated murders made northerners think twice about spending their hard-earned

30 Randy Sanders, Mighty Peculiar Elections: The New South Campaigns of 1970 and the Changing Politics of Race (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 113-145. By 1971 the racial politics held less of an appeal to South Carolina voters than in previous years.
vacations in a battleground. Tourism, after all, depends on reputation. The Governor wanted middle ground, to desegregate slowly while eradicating the state’s more overt anti-black sentiments. He wanted, as Cleveland Sellers put it, to “maintain a semblance of no conflict” so South Carolina “could avoid the trouble of other southern states while maintaining their status quo.”

McNair was not the first governor to deal with the issue of race and tourism. He had a leadership model to follow in former Florida Governor Leroy Collins. Collins was born in Tallahassee, Florida, in 1909. After a religious upbringing, Collins went to Cumberland University where he studied law. In 1935, he won his first elected office, becoming a state representative from Leon County. Nineteen years later, Collins announced his intention to run for governor against acting-Governor Charlie Johns. Seeking support along the south Florida coast, Collins won by more than sixty thousand votes. He won reelection in 1956.

Collins understood both the foundation of Florida’s economy and its potential pitfalls. He insisted, “Florida stands on three sturdy legs. Tourism. Industry. Agriculture. The ultimate potential of all three has hardly been sighted, but all three must grow and strive together or none can survive.” As the first Florida governor elected since the Brown v. Board of Education decision, Collins was keenly aware of the racial situation in his state. Collins’s racial views were unlike those of other southern governors in the 1950s.

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31 Cleveland Sellers, “The Orangeburg Massacre” in Toward the Meeting of the Waters, 362.


33 Wagy, Governor Leroy Collins, 42-44.
Collins was a racial moderate who became more liberal as he began to confront injustice. Early in his term, Collins still believed in segregation. But he was not an extremist. Collins vetoed an interposition document that would have declared the Brown ruling null and void and give public schools the option to close if threatened with integration. The governor feared racial turmoil, arguing, “that if we go into a period of racial antagonism and friction our state will have much to lose by it.” As his term as governor was about to expire, Collins became more open to integration. Faced with sit-ins late in his second term, the governor responded with a speech implying that segregation was immoral. The stance made him unpopular with whites in his home state.\(^{34}\)

In 1963, less than a year into McNair’s two-year stint as lieutenant governor, Collins came to Columbia to speak to the Chamber of Commerce. From his podium, the now former Florida governor gave an address that both generated controversy and showed how far his racial views had progressed since he was first elected. In front of Senator Strom Thurmond, Collins passionately pled his case against extremism. Collins argued, “It is little wonder that other Americans fail to regard us on occasions as being in the mainstream of American life and citizenship. And I ask you tonight, how long are the majority of Southerners going to allow themselves to be caricatured before the nation by these claghorns?” The McNair administration took up this call.\(^{35}\)

South Carolina’s reputation had to be tailored if the state was going to flourish as a vacation destination. It was both quicker and easier to change a caricature of South Carolinians as a bunch of racist extremists than actually to fix the racial problems facing the state. With the

\(^{34}\) Ibid., 59-139.

\(^{35}\) Ibid., 178.
completion of Interstate 95 looming in 1969, the state’s reputation needed to be changed quickly. Tourists would soon be able to traverse the two-hundred-mile stretch between North Carolina and Georgia without stopping. Between 1965 and 1969, McNair and Lieutenant Governor West reviewed travel programs from other states and evaluated proposals given to them by their staff and the newly created PRT. From there, the state leaders implemented many new plans. They established a reservation service at welcome centers and created a survey for tourists to identify what brought them to the state.

Other ways to increase tourism involved a decidedly racial element. Taking up Leroy Collins’s call to reverse the state’s negative characterization, McNair headed to Toronto in 1966 for the Canadian National Exhibition. The purpose of the trip was to promote the state as a tourist destination, but he knew some image-building had to be done. He understood and perhaps feared Canadians’ negative perception of the South as a racial hotbed. While his posse of beauty queens ran the state’s convention booth, McNair sat down for an interview with a Canadian newspaper. Here he tried to correct the state’s image. “We are moving ahead at tremendous speed in all fields of industry, education, and employment,” McNair claimed, “And although 40% of South Carolina’s population is Negro, we have very little trouble.” A year later McNair sent a telegram to a female student from South Carolina State College, one of the state’s historically black colleges, wishing her well in her upcoming Miss Tan USA contest. The note was as much about the state’s strategy of using beautiful young women to promote the state as it was about racial reconciliation, but it shows that the governor did not let race prevent him from bringing tourists into the state. The governor’s best efforts would all be for naught, however, unless McNair cleaned up the negative images of his state perpetuated by his own residents.36

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McNair sorted through many proposals on developing the state’s tourism industry and cleaning up its image. One proposed tourism procurement program called on the state to strictly control highway advertisements, arguing, “We do not need K.K.K. or similar signs.” The proposal did not stop there. It called for the state to use celebrities to “sell South Carolina as a place of fun, intelligence, dignity, and progress. (Help dispel the idea that we are all members of the K.K.K., etc…).” McNair flew out to Universal Studios where he met with Raymond Burr. Burr agreed to narrate a promotional movie, “South Carolina – The Good Life,” which focused on the state as a place of intelligence, industry, and environmentally friendly leisure.37

Another proposal concerned tourists’ perceptions of the state. Living conditions for African-American residents required vast improvement. The proposal urged the governor to “Attempt to sell cities on major routes on the importance of clearing up unsightly approach areas to their cities (Slums, joints, dumps, etc.).” Key in this recommendation is the term “major routes.” Tourism promoters were not concerned about the hidden abject poverty in remote parts of the state. Tourists, though, might feel guilty spending money after seeing those with so little.38

Myrtle Beach, whose mayor, Mark Garner, was a friend of Governor McNair, was one of the first towns to implement this recommendation. By 1968, simply desegregating the beaches was not enough. Promoters realized that they had a big problem brewing in the section of the


38 “Proposed Program,” January 27, 1967, Lieutenant Governor John C. West Papers, Box 6, South Carolina Political Collections.
Grand Strand dubbed “Harlem.” Harlem was located on the outskirts of the city running from Carver Street, roughly a quarter mile west of Highway 17, to U.S. 501 to the South, and Canal Street to the North. Myrtle Beach largely ignored the plight of the six-hundred blacks in the two and a half square mile area now referred to as the Booker T. Washington neighborhood. City leaders had refused to annex the section of town, claiming the location had not been adequately mapped and that ownership disputes had not been resolved.  

Poverty consumed Harlem residents. The dilapidated shanties called homes had roughly two to four rooms. Early residents constructed their dwellings in the 1930s and 1940s, building them quickly using the cheapest materials they could find. By the 1960s these homes sagged from poor construction and the wear and tear from tropical storms. Many of the roofs had begun to collapse and the once cute front porches stood broken.

Harlem had no running water. As many as twelve families shared a water pump. Lack of plumbing also created health issues. Raw sewage ran in the ditches, creating a haven for rats, maggots, and flies. Without indoor plumbing, residents used outhouses or buckets that they emptied in a large pond behind their houses or in Withers Canal, which ran through the center of the city before flowing into the ocean.  

During a heavy rain, a common occurrence on the coast, the low-lying neighborhood would fill with water, pushing refuse into homes. Summer sunshine also created problems. Most homes lacked window screens and residents’ decision to ventilate their homes gave the rats


and insects another breeding place. “During the summer,” exclaimed life long resident Mary Canty, “as soon as you cross over the railroad tracks, the stench is terrible.” Wintertime hardly brought relief. Without heat, residents bundled up for warmth or in some cases used rotten wood from their crumbling houses to create a fire. Even on a cold day, the stagnant water smelled of decay. The area was ripe for the spread of disease.  

Children dwelled in the houses during the day, usually taken care of by older siblings as their parents worked in low paying domestic or janitorial services. If they had no siblings, children as young as three stayed home alone and fended for themselves. Many families were large. In one residence, nineteen children crowded into a four-room shack equipped with four beds. With little income, access to doctors was difficult. Children suffered from curable ailments caused by poor hygiene such as impetigo, a bacterial infection that causes weeping blisters. Many of the children contracted this from playing in the filthy water near their homes. Others suffered from hepatitis, spinal meningitis, or tuberculosis. Numerous children at Carver Elementary went without lunch, getting only a sip of water to settle their grumbling stomachs. Those that were lucky had the fifteen cents needed for milk. This was not the Myrtle Beach shown on the tourist brochures, but it promised to be the area most talked about by tourists if the city did not fix the problem quickly. 

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Led by Lulu Bellamy, Harlem residents had tried to improve their living conditions since 1952 with no success. Their monthly and sometimes weekly trips to town hall to plead for city services received little press coverage and no resolution. The city council told the residents that their issues were not the problem of the city of Myrtle Beach; they were wards of the county. County officials told them the best way to get water and sewer lines was to become part of Myrtle Beach, something that the city council was unwilling to do.

City leaders were, however, eager to bring white neighborhoods under their jurisdiction. In fact, as early as 1960 the Myrtle Beach Chamber of Commerce recommended that the city annex interested areas adjoining the city. Harlem was interested, but not welcome.\(^\text{43}\)

Government officials felt no need to act quickly. Harlem was not on the primary route into town and few locals had even ventured into the area. Since Whispering Pines closed its doors in 1955, tourists seldom visited the area. In addition, keeping Harlem’s residents poor and in desperate need of work served the economic interests of the town. Roughly two-thirds of Harlem residents worked as cooks and maids in the city’s restaurants and hotels. But by 1968, developments on the state and federal levels gave city leaders’ impetus to act.

Fewer tourists took the trek down Highway 17 into Myrtle Beach in the late 1960s. Worse yet, the traffic pattern was set to change for good. With the opening of a large section of Interstate 95 on January 21, 1969, U.S. 501 would be the main artery into the city for out-of-state car travelers. The new route threatened to expose the city’s true race relations. Now, instead of arriving seeing only hotels and houses along the Grand Strand, visitors’ first impression of Myrtle Beach would be the black slums that bordered 501 on the outskirts of the city. As early

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as 1953, northern tourists complained about the horrendous living conditions of blacks. One
Massachusetts couple remarked, “South Carolina is treating the colored people shabbily by
letting them live in these shacks. Better homes should be built for them.”

Although the comment was disregarded at the time as just a rant from a liberal Yankee,
Myrtle Beach promoters could not afford for their tourists to lodge similar complaints. South
Carolina already had an image problem thanks to police brutality. Under McNair’s watch, the
state faced what the governor feared the most: racial unrest along a major tourist route.

Not a tourist destination itself, Orangeburg, like McNair’s district of Allendale, sits on
Highway 301, still the most traveled route south in 1968. Crisis brewed there in February of that
year as students at South Carolina State University fumed over a still-segregated local bowling
alley operated by Harry Floyd. On February 6, several black students entered the establishment.
Floyd asked the students to leave. When they refused, the police moved in, making several
arrests for trespassing. News of the arrest got back to the college immediately and hundreds of
students rushed to the bowling alley to demand those arrested be released. Tensions escalated as
a fire truck arrived. Many in the crowd recalled an incident in Orangeburg in 1960 when
protesters were met by police dogs and high pressure spray. Angry students pressed the police
closer and closer to the bowling alley. Finally the tensions and proximity became too great and
the police responded, bludgeoning students with their clubs, sending several to the hospital and
the rest hurrying back to campus.

The police action was a harbinger for what was to come. Students, angry at what they
saw as unwarranted violence used to protect a business that was violating the Civil Rights Act,

44 Comments collected from a survey from South Carolina Jaycees, April 1953, W.D. Workman
Papers, Box 23, Tourist Promotion Committee folder, South Carolina Department of Archives
and History.
fumed on campus for the next two days. As tensions grew, McNair saw the potential for further racial violence. After the skirmish, the governor ordered the National Guard to stand ready in Orangeburg. On February 8, the situation became critical. Police barricaded part of the campus. They were met by a barrage of rocks and the sound of bullets flying overhead. In another part of campus, students built a bonfire. Some students used the bonfire as a means to take out their anger, hurling flaming objects at a nearby vacant house. Faced with the specter of an out-of-control fire, a fire truck arrived to douse the flames. It was escorted by the police. As the force moved on campus, the students at first backed off, but slowly inched forward until they were dangerously close to the nervous patrolmen. Suddenly one of the officers opened fire. He was soon joined by his peers. Three South Carolina State students died in the barrage and twenty-seven more were injured. Although the governor no doubt abhorred the shootings on campus, the potential effect racial violence would have on tourism was foremost in his mind. Shortly before state police opened fire, McNair rerouted Highway 301 away from the college because “tourists (were) going by.” Racial crisis was not the kind of image McNair wanted the state to project.45

The Orangeburg Massacre assured that northern travelers would think twice about coming to South Carolina. Garner and McNair knew that if tourists witnessed black living conditions outside of Myrtle Beach they would be more likely to spend their tourist dollars elsewhere. By word of mouth, Myrtle Beach’s carefully crafted reputation would be sullied, something a town with little other industry could afford. Tourists would choose another city or

45 Jack Bass & Jack Nelson, The Orangeburg Massacre; and Robert E. McNair, interview by Cole Blease Graham, July 12, 1983, Tape 28, transcript, Governor McNair Oral History Collection. There is no proof that any South Carolina State student fired a gun during the disturbance. Highway 301 does not actually border the campus, but McNair wanted to prevent the traffic from getting too close.
state in which to spend their vacations. Myrtle Beach needed to look racially progressive. Tourism promoters needed to act quickly.

On May 7, 1968, three months after the shoot-out at South Carolina State and just seven months before I-95 was to open, a group of black residents once again arrived at the weekly city council meeting asking for annexation into the city and the water and sewer improvements that would come with it. Lulu Bellamy pressed for annexation as soon as possible “while we got on our travelin shoes.” State law, which required an accurate map of the annexed area along with signatures from seventy-five percent of residents and landowners, made annexation nearly impossible for residents with such paltry resources. With this in mind, Harlem residents briefly changed course. On August 6, 1968, Harlemites again returned to the city council pleading only for running water instead of full annexation. Mayor Mark Garner expected their arrival. For the first time, the city seemed receptive. Although city law required out of town residents to pay the full price for water access, a total of over $27,000, Garner appeared willing to consider bending the rules. In the days preceding the hearing, Garner and close friend Governor McNair talked about the situation in Harlem and the possibility of annexation and granting water to the black neighborhood. With the Orangeburg Massacre just months before, both men knew that any racial clashes in Myrtle Beach could destroy both the city’s and state’s tourist economy. The country was already watching the state’s actions closely.46

As the opening of Interstate 95 loomed, tourists could drive through the state quickly, choosing not even to use the state as the historic stopping point between Florida and New York. On December 23, 1968, less than a month before the interstate was to open, the city announced it

46 Myrtle Beach Sun News, “Harlem Says it Wants In,” May 9, 1968.
would begin constructing water extensions into Harlem. For the benefit of tourism, Myrtle Beach was willing to help the needy black community.\textsuperscript{47}

City and state leaders’ actions typified South Carolina’s “pseudo-civility” on racial issues described by Cleveland Sellers. Governor McNair’s fears of publicized violence in Orangeburg prompted him to reroute South Carolina’s most traveled road southbound. It also prompted him to remove racist signs that littered the state’s major routes. In Myrtle Beach, leaders did not necessarily want to improve the conditions of African-Americans, they just wanted to prevent tourists from noticing the poverty of blacks and promote the impression of happy, singing servants and racial harmony depicted in the Ocean Hiway Association pamphlets. City leaders attempted to hide the poverty to keep it from affecting their image and thus their pocketbooks.

The economics of racial disputes and tourism vary little from that of the economics of racial disputes and business. Both city and state leaders learned that the lesson of Little Rock and the lesson of St. Augustine were one in the same. Racial conflict is bad for business. Promoting tourism though, involves more than just preventing violence; it involves creating a sort of Shangri-La, where everybody is content and racial harmony is the rule. Creating a tourist haven in South Carolina meant sweeping conflict away, keeping it out of the minds of visitors, but not actually tackling the problem head on. Tourism allows for progress meant to placate visitors, like taking the flag down from atop the capitol, but not for confronting and eradicating the racial inequality that put it there in the first place.

Chapter 7

Paved Paradise

*We have worried too much about getting big and making money, and we have overlooked the town as a nice place to live...We may as well live in New York* – Myrtle Beach Councilman Dr. Holmes Springs, 1978¹

On Saturday March 11, 1978, long-time residents of Myrtle Beach woke up to an alarming fact. Their city of only eighteen thousand was no longer the quaint little beach town that only twenty-five years earlier caused the *New York Times* to openly gush about its restful beauty. Myrtle Beach was trashy and overdeveloped, and visitors knew it. Steven Birnbaum, travel editor for the nationally televised *Today Show*, had harsh words for the city. “My first impression” he claimed in an interview, “was wall to wall McDonalds.” Alfred Borcover of the *Chicago Tribune* agreed, noting the dense concentration of hotels destroyed the beach’s beauty. “I don’t know,” Borcover admitted, “that people are looking for all this tackiness.” Myrtle Beach, the editors observed, “was highly commercialized and has somewhat of a honky-tonk atmosphere.” Residents took notice but could do little to change the situation. Overdevelopment wrecked the quaint little town. The family beach had disappeared.²


Myrtle Beach was a victim of its own success and of South Carolina’s accomplishment in attracting tourists to its shores. Selling their town as a place for cheap golf and cheaper women brought a middle to lower class tourist to the beach. These tourists purchased tacky goods and desired more establishments that catered to their primal instincts. By the 1980s, a bevy of strip clubs had opened along the Grand Strand, further catering to the single-male tourist clientele. As one local commercial aptly put it, the clubs existed, “Because you can’t golf at night.” In addition, the large influx of money spent to promote the state sent unprecedented numbers of people to Myrtle Beach, which already lacked adequate infrastructure. Residents faced a crossroads; either they continue their unregulated promotion of tourism, which would put further strain on the city’s image and infrastructure, or they could end promotion and cut off their primary source of revenue. In the 1973 mayoral election, Myrtle Beach voters made their choice.

Myrtle Beach residents’ rejection of unfettered expansion came slowly. As late as 1970, politicians felt confident that touting their tourist credentials would win them votes in the city. In October of that year, just days before the gubernatorial election, Lieutenant Governor John West placed a political advertisement in the Myrtle Beach Sun News that made clear which candidate spoke for the city’s tourism interests. The ad, which asked in big bold letters, “Who has spoken out for tourism?” was simple, yet striking. It consisted of two columns, one for West and one for his opponent, Albert Watson. West’s column featured two quotes from the lieutenant governor encouraging the building of an interstate branch that would funnel tourists in Myrtle Beach. Watson’s column was empty. West won in a landslide.³

In 1970, glowing reports appeared in newspapers concerning tourism locally and across the state. Most focused on the monetary impact. In 1969, the state brought in $35 million in tax revenue from out-of-state tourists, up 9 percent from the previous year and besting the national average increase by 3 percent. Locally, Myrtle Beach generated $130 million in tourist-related income. That figure was over twice the income Horry County generated by agriculture ($33 million), manufacturing ($9 million), and wood products ($9 million) combined. The message was clear; without tourism South Carolinians would suffer.⁴

By August 1970, spirits were high with hope of continued growth and prosperity, despite a brief worry a month earlier. Two top Myrtle Beach Chamber of Commerce officials had simultaneously announced that they planned to leave the organization in July. The chamber quickly eliminated any worry about the organization’s future success by bringing over the widely respected Fred Brinkman and naming him executive director. Brinkman had served in the position nearly a decade earlier. He took the job in Myrtle Beach rather than stay on as second in command at the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism.⁵

His time serving on the state board gave him a new perspective on how tourism development should be run locally. While head of the Myrtle Beach chamber in the early 1960s, Brinkman strove to build a successful tourism industry without the help of the state. Now, with state backing and high level connections, he sought to turn Myrtle Beach into a mega resort. With the local chamber and the state tourism board in lock-step, the city was in line for a huge expansion. In 1971, Myrtle Beach experienced the beginning of what would be the biggest

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construction boom in its young history. Building inspector Gary F. Wiggins issued $21 million worth of construction permits in 1971, $12 million more than 1969 and more than the previous two years combined. It would be the first year of unprecedented growth in the city that would last throughout the 1970s.\(^6\)

Topping the list of permits was one for an eighteen-story motel to be built by the joint venture group, Convention Motor Inns. The development would be the first high-rise motel built in Myrtle Beach since the Ocean Forest Hotel in the 1920s and would surpass its predecessor in amenities. The building included child-care facilities, kennel, beauty salon, clothing stores, and golf reservation services. Mayor Mark Garner released a statement touting the planned hotel and the economic benefit it would bring to the city. “We believe that Myrtle Beach is on the brink of its greatest period of growth and prosperity,” Garner announced, “This convention motor inn project is the pioneer of an ambitious and very welcome New Progressiveness.”\(^7\)

The high-rise hotel was built on Ocean Boulevard between 15\(^{th}\) and 16\(^{th}\) Avenue and included eight hundred feet of frontage along the ocean. Like most new developments, the land originally was a summer home. Sherwood and Allene Jones Mobley, two of the Convention Motor Inn owners, first bought the property in 1953 and used it as their beach house. Now they would make an immense profit.\(^8\)

South Carolina leadership was instrumental in attracting the new business. PRT executive director Bob Hickman acknowledged the department was involved in the development of this property since its inception. He had worked with Fred Brinkman and Mark Garner to


\(^8\) Ibid.
make the hotel a reality. Hickman raved about the benefits it would produce to both the city and
the state. The luxury hotels promised to bring in conventions, conferences, and trade shows.
Unemployment would drop as residents first helped construct the hotel and then would be
employed in its various shops and services. Carl Obenshain, Executive Manager for the venture,
praised Myrtle Beach’s government, chamber of commerce, and the PRT for their cooperation
and “enthusiastic assistance.” They were “forward-looking men” who understood that Myrtle
Beach was an “untapped market.” The new hotel, however, quickly had competition.9

The Convention Motor Inn investors’ plans were just the first in a string of new high-rise
properties along the heart of Myrtle Beach’s coastline. In 1972, Governor West, who succeeded
McNair in 1971, publicized that a Hilton hotel would break ground soon on the Grand Strand. A
year later on December 5, 1973, the city announced plans for the building of a twenty-four-story
condominium complex. Two weeks later, the city granted a permit to the builder of another high
rise condominium, this one seventeen stories. In all, the city approved a total of $40 million in
new construction in 1973, much of it going to high rise structures to be built along the beach
front.10

While the new high-rise developments brought in more residents and tourists, it further
wrecked the family beach. Most developers built these structures along the front row, once
home to beach cottages and small, family-run motels. As new hotels moved in, personal
connections broke down. What once was a community where families met each other on the

9 Ibid.
10 Myrtle Beach Sun News, “Reflections on Headlines,” May 20, 1972; Myrtle Beach Sun News,
“It’s Official: Hilton In Hotel at Arcadia,” May 16, 1972; John Monk, “Permit Let for 24-Story
Permit Let for $4 Million,” Myrtle Beach Sun News, December 22, 1973; and Myrtle Beach Sun
beach, had cookouts on the patios of their guesthouses for dinner, and danced together at night, had disappeared. Families were less apt to stay an entire summer along the coast, blending in and becoming part of the community. Now visitors stayed only a week at a time, usually in a timeshare or a resort. Tourists only left their hotels to play golf, get a quick snack, and partake in the city’s increasingly seedy nightlife.

In addition, the mammoth structures blocked access to the beach, making it difficult if not impossible to see the highly touted Grand Strand from the highway. The majestic beauty was gone; but its reputation as a beautiful place still remained. Tourists flocked to these new resorts, clamoring to stay on the top floors to get the best view. It gave them a sense of status that added to their vacation.

Not everybody, though, could afford to stay in the high-rise resorts. Many middle to lower class visitors stayed in the small inns just a few rows away from the beach front. No longer possessing an ocean view, these hotels’ were inexpensive but still allowed for access to the beach. Their pocketbook friendly prices, however, attracted a rougher clientele.

Those not staying in the new hotels struggled to find a place to park, usually settling for a place further up the coast that was untouched by the new development. It is in this part of Myrtle Beach, just north of the last skyscraping hotel, that modern-day tourists can still see how the city once looked. Here, there are houses still along the front row with spaces in between to provide for parking. The developers of Myrtle Beach incorporated these spaces so those on the second row of houses away from the beach could still have a beach view. They now serve the purpose of allowing locals and day-trippers to utilize the beach. This region stands in stark contrast to area’s coastal city landscape.
High-rise hotels and resorts were not the only construction projects underway in Horry County. By 1972, the area boasted twenty-one golf courses. Fourteen additional courses were built by the end of 1980. While their construction changed the county’s landscape, residents seldom complained about how the new, flawlessly maintained courses looked. The increasingly popular sport brought in thousands of tourists. In 1971 alone, the county hosted forty-six golf tournaments. The influx of participants only increased the need for more hotels. Myrtle Beach promoters did not want to tame this “golf fever.”

There was one area in construction where Myrtle Beach lagged: single-family residences. There was not even an adequate supply of apartments. Those seeking to move to the area permanently had few places to live. The problem would soon be exacerbated by the air force, which stationed over 2,300 airmen in the city. Slowly, housing construction, led by the condominiums, got underway in earnest.

As early as June 1971, Myrtle Beach residents began to complain about their city’s growing urban plight. One editorial exclaimed, “we are pleading for a little foliage for Myrtle Beach” and begged for fewer parking lots. Another article complained about the pungent odor during the annual Sun Fun Festival. The smell, coming from the numerous hotel dumpsters, made the writer sick. Worse, the stench was so prevalent he had difficulty finding a clean place to watch the parade. “There ought to be more to walking down Ocean Blvd. than having to hold one’s nose every thirty feet,” bemoaned the editorial.


The complaints reached Myrtle Beach’s city council. Resident Birgit Darby arrived at the February 6, 1973, meeting with posters and pictures of local “eyesores.” The photos included garbage dumps, boarded up stores, and condemned buildings. Heading the list was Chuck’s Alignment Service, a former business located on the intersection of Highway 501 and Highway 17, the heart of downtown. Whether arriving via the Ocean Highway or the interstate, all tourists encountered the weathered and crumbling building. Chuck’s proved that the city’s “virile, driving progressiveness” was showing its age.14

Other Myrtle Beach residents expressed their fear that the beach was losing its family atmosphere. A former inhabitant of the town wrote to the Myrtle Beach Sun News and asked the paper to cancel her subscription. Even though she had moved west, she still considered herself part of the community and had the paper mailed to her. After months of reading about the growth of Myrtle Beach, she felt the city was moving in the wrong direction. The area attracted too many tourists and permanent residents. Myrtle Beach was growing too large for the former local; she could not continue her subscription. Her money would only encourage further growth, which would “ruin Myrtle Beach.”15

The Myrtle Beach Sun News, still owned by Mayor Mark Garner, disagreed. Calling the former subscriber confused, the newspaper argued that progress was essential and would only benefit the city. While acknowledging that some developments may hurt a city’s aesthetic beauty, the editors argued, “we don’t see much of that here.” Only smokestack industries, the


14 The Myrtle Beach Daily News, “Sun Fun The Spirit of Myrtle Beach,” June 6, 1956; and Minutes of the Myrtle Beach City Council, February 6, 1973, Myrtle Beach City Hall, Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

paper believed, with the potential to pollute the area’s air and ocean, would bring ruin to the city. Despite the newspaper’s perspective, the canceled subscriber was not alone in her concerns for the city.\footnote{Ibid.}

It was not just the loss of the Myrtle Beach’s family-friendly atmosphere that frightened residents. They feared that new construction would literally destroy their town. Developers, either careless or ignorant about protecting the shoreline, frequently bulldozed the same sand dunes city leaders had carefully reconstructed after the ravages of Hurricane Hazel twenty years earlier. In their place came parking lots or swimming pools. Myrtle Beach police rarely enforced the law protecting the sea oats that took root in the dunes. When law enforcement did intervene, they could do little, giving only a one hundred dollar fine. Developers quickly accepted the paltry fine in order to have an unblemished view of the beach worth thousands.\footnote{Myrtle Beach Sun News, “Reflections on Headlines,” November 4, 1971; and Myrtle Beach Sun News, “3 Students Plead: ‘Save Sand Dunes,’” April 1, 1972.}

Angry residents reacted with disgust at their city’s increasing urbanization. Of utmost concern was the deteriorating condition of the beach. Hotels were not the only thing destroying sand dunes. A series of storms created big waves along the normally quiet Grand Strand, causing flooding and beach erosion. For a city that once promised five-hundred feet of uninterrupted sand from water to dunes, erosion spelled doom. City leaders feared the loss of the beach could lead to the end of tourism and create huge problems with local infrastructure. Always looking to Florida, one editorial reminded Sun News readers, “We don’t want to wind up like Miami Beach, where the Atlantic is about to find its way into a number of hotels.”\footnote{Myrtle Beach Sun News, “Reflections on Headlines,” January 22, 1972.}
Just as bad, many residents feared, was the quality of the water destroying the beach. Withers Swash, a large stream that runs through Myrtle Beach into the Atlantic Ocean, contained sewage and industrial chemicals. The area was a health hazard. Children spent their summers wading in the swash while tourists swam, fished, and caught crabs where the swash met the ocean. Longtime resident Harry Benton, looking at the milky, pinkish-red water muttered, “This used to be a clear stream. I wouldn’t stick my big toe in it now.” Nearby residents threatened to file suit against the city, forcing it to both clean the stream and prevent further pollution.¹⁹

City officials faced a crossroads. Much of the pollution was coming from overflowing septic tanks and inadequate disposal of garbage in the area immediately west of the city: Harlem. Residents of Harlem faced a public health crisis that was spilling over into Myrtle Beach. Although much of the area had received water extensions from Myrtle Beach by 1969, at least 18 percent of residents remained without running water in 1975. In 1972, the city finally annexed Harlem, bringing trash service in 1973 and a promise to install a sewer system. Almost immediately, the city constructed a pressure line for sewage down Canal Street, the only paved road in the Harlem. The city went no further than that, never extending sewage lines into homes.²⁰

By 1975, 77 percent of Harlem households had substandard, nonexistent, or malfunctioning septic tanks. Seventy-one percent had trash on their lots and 68 percent had standing water and poor drainage. Mayor Robert Hirsh, who succeeded Mark Garner, blamed

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²⁰ Kenneth M. Hare, “Canal Street Push Underway,” Myrtle Beach Sun News, December 18, 1975; Myrtle Beach Sun News, “Council Okays Annexation,” April 6, 1972; and Minutes of the Myrtle Beach City Council, January 9, 1973, Myrtle Beach City Hall.
Harlem’s problems on the previous administration. Harlem stood between the city and its industrial park. According to Hirsch, “In order to make the industrial park contiguous to the city, they went over and wooed the people and got them to sign (for annexation).” One flustered Harlemite echoed his disappointment at the current state of the area, complaining, “What little was done got done under the county. Since we went with the city, seem like they’ve forgotten us.”

The community, knowing from where much of the pollution emanated, responded by starting Operation Friendly Hand. Armed only with volunteers and funded by contributions, the group covered open drainage ditches in 1970, hoping to prevent the spread of disease and eliminate the risk of children drowning in raw sewage. Though a nice gesture, the city took no further steps to improve the sanitation or living conditions of Harlem blacks.

Harlem was not the only cause of the city’s pollution. Several city businesses flushed oil and chemicals into the swash, making the water even murkier. Withers Swash was not the only contaminated body of water along the shore. Golf courses also came under fire as local fisherman who used to catch crabs and oysters in the inlets were banned from fishing because of contaminated water. Many believed that the fertilizers used on the courses were to blame for the pollution.


23 Myrtle Beach Memories, DVD, directed by Steve Folks, (Columbia, South Carolina: SCETV, 2003).
An unforeseen problem arose when developers replaced summer homes and small motor courts with high-rise hotels and condominiums. The city did not yet have an infrastructure to support the increased population. Myrtle Beach growth outpaced its sewage disposal system and its water supply dwindled. The area’s resources were sufficient for its winter residents, roughly forty thousand, but strained during the peak of summer when its population hovered well over two hundred thousand. Residents crammed city council meetings complaining about their homes’ lack of water pressure, placing the blame solely on the city’s building boom. Locals encouraged the council to either fix the water problem immediately or declare a moratorium on building. To fund the improvements, residents demanded the city tax the new high rise motels and condominiums.24

By 1973, it appeared to a majority of residents that the city’s problems, including water pollution, the rapid destruction of sand dunes, rowdy and unruly mobs of drunken college students, traffic congestion, loss of water pressure, and elimination of the area’s scenic beauty by high rises hotels, all came from one source: tourism. Even desegregation seemed to have its roots in the promotion of tourism as Governor McNair opened the state parks, which added hundreds of thousands of dollars a year to the state coffers, on an integrated basis. Residents now understood that visitors had begun to destroy the family beach. Many tried to turn back the clock, to recapture the Myrtle Beach that had first enticed them. Tourism became the enemy. While residents knew that eliminating tourism was impossible and impractical, they sought to slow down the pace of development and expansion, hopefully turning the flood of new tourists into just a trickle.

24 John Carriker, “County Legislators Seek West’s Help,” Myrtle Beach Sun News, December 28, 1972; and Minutes of the Myrtle Beach City Council, May 1, 1973, Myrtle Beach City Hall.
Myrtle Beach residents’ anger boiled over in 1973. Eighteen new buildings were under construction during the summer, normally a slow building period, to coordinate with the city’s tourist season. Construction debris littered the beach and the sounds of cranes, trucks, and jack hammers caused would-be tourists to search elsewhere for a quiet respite. Building supply vehicles stopped or slowed traffic in an already congested town. Concrete ash dotted cars surrounding construction sites. Peeved tourists and motel owners complained about the noise, litter, and traffic congestion, but received few solutions. One out-of-state visitor spoke for many on the beach avowing, “If something isn’t done, you won’t have to worry about 100,000 tourists for long, just the 10,000 that live here.” Life-long resident Dino Thompson also expressed concerns, asking the mayor and city council where they thought the city was headed, “toward a Miami, Florida; an Ocean City, Maryland; or a nice place to live.” Garner admitted he had no idea where the city was going.

With Myrtle Beach facing these mounting issues, Mayor Mark Garner announced that he would not seek a third term as mayor. Understanding that the city would face its most critical challenges in the years that follow, Garner felt he could no longer dedicate the time necessary for the job. He had spent the last twenty-five years serving the city in positions ranging from head of the chamber of commerce, to city councilman, to his current title as mayor. Through his public role and his leadership at Myrtle Beach Sun News, Garner helped turn Myrtle Beach from a sleepy little town to a national playground that already attracted hundreds of thousands and whose new developments promised to bring more. Garner felt it was time to retire.

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Garner’s decision to leave office did not come out of the blue. Just days before the mayor announced his retirement, the Myrtle Beach city council began to question how the local government should operate. In 1962, residents voted for a city manager form of government. But in 1973, the city was still ruled by the mayor and council, not a city manager. In a heated exchange, Councilmen Cook argued that Myrtle Beach’s problems stemmed precisely because Garner, “a non-professional” in city government, had a stranglehold on the city. Rightfully, Garner took the statement personally saying, “he was sorry if some people did not appreciate his efforts in the community.” Two weeks later Garner announced he would not seek another term.

Several residents disagreed with the mayor’s decision. Citing the need for strong leadership amidst the city’s unprecedented growth and without a clear heir, residents started a petition to encourage Garner to reconsider. Over 250 people signed the document. In addition to the petition, Garner received over one hundred phone calls, visits, and letters encouraging him to stay on as mayor. Garner was moved. In September of 1973, less than two months before the election, Garner changed his mind and became the first candidate. Despite much public fanfare for his sudden change of plans, he would face competition for the position.

Challenging him was Republican Robert J. Hirsch. Hirsch was a relative newcomer to Myrtle Beach. He arrived with his family from New York in 1969 to assume the role as manager of manufacturing engineering at AVX (Aerovox) Ceramics Corps. Hirsch was the first serious

27 The town had a city manager, but his power was limited.

28 Minutes of the Myrtle Beach City Council, July 3, 1973, Myrtle Beach City Hall.

Republican contender for mayor of Myrtle Beach, buoyed by the strong support South Carolina maintained for Richard Nixon. However, a Hirsch victory appeared unlikely. Garner’s wealth of experience and connections built over the last quarter of a century made him the favorite. His campaign looked unstoppable. In Garner’s first re-election bid, in 1969, he beat the runner-up by a margin of six to one.30

Garner’s campaign got off to a bad start. In fact, the first blow to his campaign occurred two weeks before he agreed to run for a third term. Diddy Matthews Palmer, a popular columnist in Charleston, West Virginia, wrote an informal letter to the personified city of Myrtle Beach. Her column appeared in the West Virginia Gazette on August 21, 1973. Nine days later the Myrtle Beach Sun News ran the letter as the lead story. For the column’s title, the Myrtle Beach News asked its readers the sole-searching question, “Is Myrtle Getting Old, Fat, Cheap, Gaudy…?”

Palmer began her letter, addressed to “Miss Myrtle Beach,” by reintroducing herself to the city. Like many West Virginians, she was a frequent visitor to the area having stayed there for the previous ten summers, usually in a little oceanfront efficiency apartment. Palmer marveled at the ability of the city to house and cater to nearly a quarter million summer visitors. Yet Palmer noticed that this “hostess-with-the-mostest” was suffering from some fatigue.

After the initial introduction, Palmer addresses the reason for the letter. Talking to Myrtle Beach as if the city was a woman, she writes:

The real purpose of this letter is to tell you a few things your local friends have been saying about you and think you should know. I hope you won’t mind if they’re rather personal.

Woman to woman, Myrt, what about your figure? Aren’t you getting a bit hefty? Every time we visit you, you’ve gained dozens of enormous new motels, high-rise condominiums and eating places. Frankly you are beginning to bulge a little in spots, and we all thought you were a lot prettier when you were slimmer. Can’t you curb that appetite for bigger and better buildings? Maybe zip yourself into some kind of reducing girdle?

The middle-age spread is hard to get rid of Myrtle, and no matter how you kid yourself, nobody loves a fat lady. Vacationers are a fickle bunch my friend. You have a lot of rivals along the coast, and some of them are weight-watching and trying to hang on to their youthful figures. Please don’t get any bigger, or you may find yourself with thousands of empty guest rooms during your annual house party.

And another thing. I hate to remind you of this, but I happen to know that you’ve had your 50th birthday and maybe a few more. A good-looking woman of your age shouldn’t be wearing some of the cheap, gaudy, over-decorated outfits you’ve been buying lately. Or using such garish make-up, or so much plastic junk jewelry. If I had a necklace like yours – that breathtakingly beautiful curving, sparkling coastline – I’d never put on another piece of jewelry.\textsuperscript{31}

The letter hit Myrtle Beach residents hard and from different angles. First, it affected Myrtle Beach in the area that the city promoted the most, its beauty. Myrtle Beach’s new businesses and developments made the town garish and cheap. The city’s new tackiness even obscured their reason for being, the beach. More biting though was how she talked to “Miss Myrtle Beach.” To Palmer, Myrtle Beach was an old, overweight woman. For a city that prided itself not only in its beauty, but in the beauty of the young women that visited, the characterization was alarming.

Most importantly, the letter also struck at the heart of the city’s already acknowledged problem with overdevelopment. Now, however, not only did visitors know about Myrtle Beach’s rapid growth and loss of small town atmosphere, they were broadcasting the ill effects of the city’s change. The negative publicity would be sure to hurt the city’s tourism industry. While many in the city wanted Myrtle Beach’s development to slow, few wanted to destroy the

tourist economy. Republican mayoral candidate Robert J. Hirsch seized on the city’s rapid
growth as the reason for his candidacy. The pace of the city’s development became the issue of
the campaign.

On October 8, 1973, less than a month before the election, Hirsch laid out his campaign
pledge during a speech at a meeting for the Myrtle Beach Jaycees. “Uncontrolled growth is not
progress,” Hirsch flatly announced. “It’s time to have progress stop masquerading as growth…I
say that we are going to grow, but we must have controlled growth.” He called his plan
“intelligent selfishness.” Hirsch further indicated that Myrtle Beach’s erosion problems could be
curbed through proper legislation restricting land use. The candidate cited his engineering and
administrative backgrounds as his job qualifications.32

Days later, a group of twenty prominent Myrtle Beach business and professional leaders
met for a two-hour dinner to discuss the town’s overdevelopment problem. The men formed the
Citizens for Progress with Protection. While spokesmen claimed that the organization was
nonpartisan and nonpolitical, its goals mirrored Hirsch’s plan of continued, but restricted,
expansion. The formation of the Citizens for Progress with Protection marked a significant blow
to Garner’s campaign as it showed that even business leaders, those that would most benefit by
increased tourism, felt the city had a problem with unrestrained development.33

Just days before the election, the Hirsch campaign printed a large, prominent
advertisement in the Myrtle Beach Sun News. The feature laid out his closing argument for his
case to be mayor. “Permanent Residents First…Tourism Second” appeared in large bold letters


33 John Monk, “‘Citizens for Progress with Protection’ Group to Promote Orderly Expansion,”
underneath Hirsch’s smiling face. He promised to “immediately act on the recommendations of the Planning and Zoning Board to restrict population density, particularly in the area of our beach” and to “use our sewer treatment facilities to correct problems which NOW exist, and provide service for permanent residents before adding new commercial users to the lines.” Most importantly though, the political advertisement promised voters that Hirsch would “Tone DOWN our promotional efforts on massive development: and emphasize FAMILY LIFE and ENJOYMENT.” The Republican clearly felt that Garner’s regime had wrecked Myrtle Beach’s family beach image.³⁴

Garner’s campaign staff failed to respond adequately to these charges. In fact, he agreed with Hirsch’s contention that the city’s growth and development needed to be better harnessed. Garner’s main premise for his candidacy, his experience, was also his biggest problem. While his campaign touted his role in promoting and leading Myrtle Beach, Hirsch spent his energy carping that it was that same leadership that got Myrtle Beach into its predicament. Garner hoped that his friendships and connections would be enough to pull him through his final run for office. His experience might have been enough to win, but only five days before the election a barrage of accusations accusing Garner of racism and corruption tarnished his reputation and image.³⁵

During a late October press conference, Hirsch accused Garner of a “serious conflict of interest” for his actions in April of that year. In the spring, Garner recommended to the city council that the law firm of former South Carolina Governor and friend Robert McNair, be the bonding firm for the city of Myrtle Beach. Following the mayor’s request, Myrtle Beach granted


McNair’s firm (McNair, Kondurous, Corley, Singletary, & Dibble) the $1.8 million bond issue. In the previous thirty years, the Charleston firm of Sinkler, Gibbs, and Simons, handled all of the city’s revenue bonds. They were not even contacted in April with the news. In return, according to Hirsch, Garner became an equal shareholder in former Governor McNair’s newly formed life insurance company. When a reporter questioned Garner about these allegations, the mayor defiantly responded that he “decided not to even dignify Hirsch’s allegations with an answer.” With only a week before the election, Garner’s lack of a real response appeared to validate Hirsch’s charges.36

The allegation of the mayor’s “serious conflict of interest” went deeper than just accusing him of political corruption. It touched the heart of Myrtle Beach’s overdevelopment issue. These charges implied that not only was Garner doing little to curb the city’s growing urban blight, he was actually financially benefiting from the strain on the town’s resources. In addition, Garner’s experience and high level connections now appeared as a detriment, not an asset, to his campaign.

If that was not damning enough to Garner, another charge leveled by a member of his own party crippled his chances of winning re-election. Realtor Bob Booe, a Democrat running for city council, also spoke during Hirsch’s press conference. Booe shocked the gathering by announcing his dissociation with Garner because the mayor was racist.

36 Myrtle Beach Sun News, “GOP Candidate Levels Charge at Garner,” November 1, 1973; and Minutes of the Myrtle Beach City Council, April 3, 1973, Myrtle Beach City Hall. There is little proof that any back deals went into the choosing of McNair’s firm to issue the bonds. McNair, Kondurous, Corley, and Singletary had already been authorized to handle the bond issue for the Pollution Control Authority of the State of South Carolina and had handled the bond issuance for Horry County. The firm was eminently qualified. The city council, composed of several members who disapproved of Garner’s handling of city affairs, approved of McNair’s choice unanimously, with little debate.

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In 1973, Myrtle Beach elections promised to be historic even without a governing party change. Leroy Weathers, pastor of Mt. Olive AME Church, became the first black candidate to run for the city council. According to Booe, not only did Garner not welcome Weathers as a candidate, he withheld support from the pastor. Booe claimed that the mayor never campaigned with Weathers and never associated the two in any campaign literature. In addition, Garner refused to invite the pastor to a reception with the governor that was to be held November 2.\(^{37}\)

This was not all. A troubled Booe claimed to have approached Garner about these issues before speaking at the press conference. According to the city council candidate, Garner was less than supportive of Weathers’s run for office and made clear that he would not be a part of his re-election bid. He further shocked Booe by flatly admitting, “Weathers is a black man and might hurt us. It could do more harm than good.” After leveling these charges, Booe then revealed he would not be voting for the Democratic lead on the ticket announcing, “I would rather lose an election than participate in racism which would ultimately destroy our community.” Garner denied ever making the statement. The accusations helped whittle away Garner’s already waning support.\(^{38}\)

The costs of overdevelopment and accusations of corruption and racism doomed Garner. Even though Governor West adamantly threw his support behind the incumbent and the Sun News ran a series of long editorials praising the mayor, it was not enough. On Election Day, Hirsch defeated Garner 1,505-1,339. It was one of the tightest races in local history and the first victory for a Republican mayoral candidate. Garner responded with fear for what the Hirsch administration meant for the city, telling supporters shortly after his defeat, “It’s all right – I can


\(^{38}\) Ibid.
take it. I just hope Myrtle Beach can.” During one of his last city council meetings as mayor, Garner admitted that the city’s rapid growth cost him the election.\textsuperscript{39}

Garner had a tearful final few days in office. Two weeks before he left office, his friends, supporters and even political opponents attended a reception in his honor. Ironically, the keynote speaker at the event was former Governor Robert McNair, whose relationship with the outgoing mayor spelled doom to Garner’s candidacy. It was McNair who created the state department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism that funneled people and money to the city, ultimately bringing about the massive development that voters now resisted. McNair lavished the outgoing mayor with praise, but appeared oblivious to the reason behind his loss. McNair proclaimed, “The kind of growth that Myrtle Beach has witnessed during this man’s administration could never have happened without the kind of leadership that is exemplified by Mark Garner.” Garner and his wife were then presented with gifts and received a standing ovation. The new mayor would have to deal with the city’s overdevelopment.\textsuperscript{40}

Hirsch promised sweeping changes in the moments following his victory. He guaranteed a complete reversal of Garner’s policies. For one, Hirsch noted, Garner’s defeat severed the office of mayor from the city’s publishing powerhouse. Accusing the \textit{Sun News} of “yellow journalism,” he proudly proclaimed, “The association between the mayor and the local newspaper was a serious conflict of interest. I think the conflict of interest has now been removed.” Hirsch promised to revisit the city’s taxing policy and increase those on big


\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Myrtle Beach Sun News}, “Hundreds Salute Garner,” December 17, 1973.
landholders such as city developer Myrtle Beach Farms. He announced the city would hire an engineer to look at the capabilities and possibilities of alleviating the stress on the city’s water and sewer systems. Hirsch even made a point to say the city would strive to bring the black community’s living areas “up on a par with the rest of the community.”

National economic trends made the success of Hirsh’s proposals appear promising. The United States was in the midst of an energy crisis. Gasoline shortages forced many would-be tourists to stay home, abandoning their vacations. Hirsch believed that, although the crisis might briefly hurt the city’s economy, it would slow the pace of development and give the city time to build an infrastructure capable of serving both tourists and residents. What the new mayor did not count on was the effect the state, now in the tourist business, would have on the city’s development.

Hirsch’s attempts to slow the area’s growth might have been easy if it was not for state leaders. The PRT and Governor John C. West, who helped then-Governor Robert McNair promote the state during his previous stint as lieutenant governor, did not want Myrtle Beach’s growth to slow. Money generated from tourism annually generated millions of dollars in state income through gas and sales taxes. By 1974, tourism was the state’s second largest industry and Myrtle Beach contributed 40 percent of the business. According to the PRT director, South Carolina led all southern states, even Florida, in relative importance of tourism to the state’s economy. With the country facing an economic downturn, the state needed this revenue more than it had in the past. West and the PRT would not sit idle and let Hirsch, a member of the opposition party, slow down the pace of Myrtle Beach’s growth and pull back on their promotion

efforts. Tourism promotion, once only in the hands of locals, was now under state control. And it was a priority.\textsuperscript{42}

State government leaders did their best to make sure that South Carolina would still get a fair share of visitors. In Columbia, West told a gathering of state tourism and leisure-related industries officials that he was optimistic about the state’s future, but warned that the state has “a lot at stake” in a tourism slowdown. South Carolina leaders had an aggressive two-prong plan. First, they tried to keep South Carolina residents from leaving the state and spending money elsewhere. Though important, keeping residents home was not the PRT’s primary focus. South Carolinians annually spent only $75 million frequenting state tourist centers. Convincing tourists from out-of state to stay in South Carolina proved far more lucrative. Those visitors spent over $470 million in the state. To keep these tourists coming in droves, South Carolina promoters used an advertising scheme dating back to the efforts of the ARCADY developers.\textsuperscript{43}

Fred Brinkman, former head of the Myrtle Beach Chamber of Commerce and now head of the PRT, resurrected the old promotion strategy meant to utilize the gas shortage as a way to bring tourists into the state. The state, as early Myrtle Beach developers had done, would tout its proximity to northern locales. Tourists, Brinkman cleverly argued, could travel to Myrtle Beach instead of Florida, thus saving visitors money on gas. The governor approved. “If this is the


energy crisis,” West acknowledged, “let’s make the most of it.” The state placed advertisements in *Reader’s Digest* and *National Geographic*.\(^{44}\)

The struggle between the state and the city produced expected results. Development slowed considerably; building permits went down almost 80 percent during Hirsch’s first month in office, compared to the preceding year. That did not transfer into fewer visitors. After a sluggish 1974, tourists returned to the strand in record numbers in 1975. In December 1974, Hotel operators were reporting that the month of March was booked solid. State tourism leaders argued that their efforts were what saved the state from suffering a decline in tourism. As proof, they noted a 100 percent increase in out-of-state inquiries about South Carolina.\(^{45}\)

The continued influx of tourists assured that Myrtle Beach would continue to develop. Although Hirsch began imposing limits and regulations on new hotels and condominiums, the city continued to expand away from the coast. Even the beloved Ocean Forest Hotel was torn down in 1974 to make way for a new housing complex. The more healthy growth meant that residents would be happier with their water pressure, but also assured that the family beach for which they had moved to Myrtle Beach would disappear in a maze of golf courses and businesses that catered to idle golfers at night.


Conclusion

To tear it down is like ripping the very heart out our coastal city

- Susan Seagroves, Myrtle Beach

In March of 2006, Burroughs & Chapin Company announced that the Myrtle Beach amusement park and pavilion would close and the attractions torn down or moved to another site in the city. The developers remained silent on what would replace the iconic symbol that had served Myrtle Beach since 1948. Despite a petition signed by over thirteen thousand people and a litany of editorials castigating the decision, the park closed for the final time on September 30, 2006. The park and pavilion survived Hurricane Hazel but could not survive Myrtle Beach’s image make-over. By eight o’clock, the last ride rattled to a halt, the carnival music ceased, and the lights went dark.

With the demise of the pavilion and accompanying amusement park, Myrtle Beach now has little of the family vestiges that city promoters loudly proclaim was and is the essence of the city. Boosters still fail to acknowledge that what has underpinned the city’s success as an attraction since the ARCADY experiment stems not from its catering to the desires of wives and children, but from the creation of a two-pronged male-centered tourist trade. Golf and the plethora of available women now stand as the backbone of the city’s lucrative economy.

Far from a family beach, the city is now nationally known as a proper destination for bachelor parties. Larry Olmstead, writer for New York Weddings Magazine advised his male


golfing enthusiasts in 2004 to spend their last days before marriage in Myrtle Beach. The city is “cheesy in the perfect bachelor party way…meals come in the form of beer and wings…adult entertainment is at every turn, and the 100 plus laid-back golf courses dispense on-course beers from beverage carts.” To start off the party correctly, Olmstead encourages attendees to travel Hooters Air from Newark to its hub in Myrtle Beach.³

Others agree with the assessment of New York Weddings Magazine. “What do you need for a great bachelor party?” Tim McDonald, National Golf Editor for Golf Publication Syndications asks. “The essence is cheap digs, alcohol, and nude dancers. Myrtle Beach has all that and more. For bonus it’s got the beach – to lie out and let the sun soak up the Jim Beam…You can do everything you normally do at bachelor parties, then stumble out the door for limitless golf options.” McDonald recommends three strip clubs, but he acknowledges, “Myrtle Beach is lousy with strip clubs; you can’t turn around without bumping into one.” Impressed, Myrtlebeachgolf.com added the article to its website.⁴

Highlighting McDonald’s strip club recommendations is “Masters,” the new symbol of Myrtle Beach. Of all the clubs in the city, it stands out for both its prominence and it gimmick. The 33,000 square foot gentlemen’s club is equipped with a pro shop, driving range, and valet parking. Deriving its name from the annual golf tournament in Augusta, Georgia, it is one-stop shopping for bachelor parties as men can drive some balls and get a lap-dance within minutes, all under one roof. The name, though, could just as well come from the male clientele that visit the

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clubs, who consume the moving images of naked female flesh in a manner reminiscent of their nineteenth-century predecessors. Inside, men are truly masters.

Myrtle Beach media heavily promote these establishments. Driving around town it is difficult to avoid seeing a strip club or listening to one of their tacky, sexually charged promotions. Myrtle Beach radio stations frequently air advertisements and contests like the one overheard on Sunday, May 17, 2006, the last day of biker week. The spot shows both how far the city has fallen from its desired family-friendly image and how intertwined golf and sex are in city culture. The advertisement featured two male morning disc jockeys promoting a contest to be held the following week. Poking fun at more conventional prize offerings, the winner in their contest would receive “dinner and a booby.” After a meal the lucky man (because only a man can win the contest) would get a private room at Masters.

The creation of a middle-class, white man’s paradise has been critical to the growth of Myrtle Beach. Businesses and homes extend almost unbroken along Highway 17 from South Carolina’s border with North Carolina down to Myrtle Beach State Park. Moving westward, Highway 501 to Conway is loaded with strip malls, outlet stores and, of course, gentlemen’s clubs. As in the 1970s, Myrtle Beach residents still complain about the sprawl and especially the traffic. Even during an accident-free day, it can take upwards of an hour and a half to get from Coastal Carolina University to the shore, a mere fifteen miles. Downtown is worse; the two-lane roads are hardly adequate to handle the summer influx.

Like many Florida cities, an apt comparison as both the Sunshine State and Myrtle Beach have experienced their greatest growth in the age of the automobile, the downtown area is rundown. Instead of “young” and “virile,” the Myrtle Beach hotel district appears as an aging man well past his prime. Old hotels have plywood over their windows and others are showing
signs of their age. Paint from their facades is faded and chipping away. The rooms need refurbishing too; blinds are old, dingy and dirty. The city needs an influx of new investment to regain its youthful vigor.

Myrtle Beach has a long way to go if it wants to re-kindle its family-beach image. Maybe the destruction of the pavilion, however heartbreaking, signifies the beginning of the city’s rebirth. Perhaps one positive sign is the closing of the Hard Rock Park, a nine-month attempt to capitalize on the success of the Hard Rock Café brand name with a heavy metal theme park. Replacing it is the Freestyle Music Park, a far more family-friendly venture.

One park, however, will not return the city to its past glory. Myrtle Beach leaders need to re-invest in downtown, clean up the more lurid sections, and rebrand the city’s image. But doing so will come at some cost and plenty of risk. There is no guarantee enough families will visit to offset the loss of the area’s male-dominated clientele. And Myrtle Beach leaders are not only ones to blame for the city’s present condition. The state has a heavy financial investment in the city through sales and hotel taxes and would be wary to risk a loss of revenue. Yet Myrtle Beach has always persevered. After Hurricane Hazel, the city arose, bigger and stronger. It can do so again.
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