

Southern Exposure

# Coastal Affair



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# COASTAL AFFAIR.

I used to think I was privileged, growing up near the water, sailing or riding the ferry to an island with miles of resilient green-brown marshes, exploring thick maritime forests — with their protective canopies sloping to meet the sand, keeping the salt spray out — and hiking down miles of unspoiled beaches. Access became easier when someone — a developer — ran a narrow asphalt road miles down the island, cutting through the forests and dunes all the way to the inlet.

Change came slowly at first, and sharing a special place with other visitors and a few cottage owners didn't seem so bad; there was plenty of beauty, plenty of beaches and surf and dunes and sea oats. We came informally, on a whim, and parked or anchored casually. We came for the day and looked longingly at those who could stay the night, inside, protected from mosquitoes and the bite of wind-blown sand and thunderstorms. If we'd had the wherewithal, we might have bought our own place beside the sea or nestled amidst the fragrant junipers, salt cedars, wax myrtle and bayberry bushes.

A new town grew up on our island, an island that was ours because it had been a public recreation spot — public, not because it was owned by the government but because generations of local mainlanders had enjoyed it. When the town incorporated and fell under the development leadership of its new mayor and commissioners — all realtors and tourism businesspeople — we watched its growth from island backside to ocean, down the beach all the way to the beautiful, fragile inlet where the surfing, fishing, beach combing and play were the best around. We watched subdivisions fill first with trailers side-by-side, then with cottages and then condominiums. We watched the tall dunes disappear, and then the forests.

One day, when we came to walk the ever-changing beach and watch the inlet currents ripping past — churning, waves meeting crest to crest and smashing upward — we found No Parking signs. Intimidated, we turned around and drove back up the beach to a private parking lot, paid two dollars and walked on a beach without dunes, fringed instead by trailers and motels and miniature golf courses.

But we were spoiled. We wanted our inlet back, we wanted to play in the warm tidal pools and watch the fishing boats zig-zag slowly through the shifting channel, diesel engines throbbing behind the booming waves. We went back, parked illegally, endured outraged looks from private property owners there. Parking tickets were ignored. The town threatened towing. We went in the winter, when all the cottages and condos were empty, and still we were harassed by the police. Yet the state built a bridge to the new town, replacing the ferry and making access quicker, easier, even though there was no public beach.

Our state joined the federal coastal zone management program. The new island town received grants to do planning. Its own land-use plan concluded that the inlet was too migratory a place to be developed, that the only use compatible with its nature was public recreation. The town was offered more government money to purchase the inlet lands and hold them as public, and a temporary dirt parking lot was recommended — one that could wash away without causing financial loss to the town.

That grant was refused. The mayor and several of the commissioners, instead, turned the inlet land into several large developments with names like Whispering Sands and Laughing Gull, providing second homes for some of the state's most powerful officials, among others. The island road they had built a decade back was now maintained by the state; the migrating inlet ate part of it — asphalt on the beach, in the surf — but it was repaired. The No Parking signs were duplicated every 10 feet along the road, in front of the new cottages. We parked there anyway.

We had heard by then that the wet sand beach is public property by common law. We passed around petitions, collecting thousands of local names, demanding access to the inlet beach and other stretches along the island. We resented having to pay to park and even then being clustered — the great public masses — in the most undesirable beach areas, where children and fishing lines and surfboards

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and four-wheel-drive vehicles didn't mix safely, where dogs had to be walked on leashes. Some teen-agers from the mainland, arrested for tearing down parking barricades near the best surfing areas, were told to cut their hair and pray for judgment. We were like irritating gnats in the face of the developmental forces, waved carelessly away.

Our ire grew more fierce, more bitter, when we saw our tax dollars spent on sand bags and jetties to mitigate the acute erosion that threatened oceanfront residences. But over time we became resigned when we saw that the new motels and restaurants succeeded in drawing a new class of visitors, different from the people who had for years driven from a few hours inland to spend their weekends camping and fishing, fishing, fishing. Swimming, strolling, surfing. Now people came to the new golf courses, miniature and full-scale; they had drinks and cooled off in motel swimming pools before venturing down to the beach. A different sort of recreation, an expensive kind, and one that could take place anywhere. Why did they come to our island for that?

It hurt most in the winter, when we'd have to sneak and park in forbidden places though there was not one other person in sight, only an occasional patrolling police car. And it hurt to see the development spread, once the prime island real estate was sold, to the low-lying marsh lands, drained and filled. Into mainland farmland and fishing communities. Into the water — the sewage and garbage and run-off from bulldozed soil.

The local economy changed, became seasonal. High-school kids worked for low wages in the tourism service jobs alongside older women and men. Restaurant and motel managers answered to bosses from other places. The larger developers took their profits up and down the coast, investing in other new towns and resorts.

As our island town matured, it became more innovative in its pursuit of government money to maintain its precarious domination over the natural environment. Meanwhile, those of us privileged enough to have the time and physical strength — those who didn't have to carry heavy fishing gear, surfboards or young children — rode a people-ferry to a state park island an hour away, hiked along unspoiled marshes and across vast, glacier-like dune systems that covered forests and daily recorded the tracks of all visitors — including raccoons, deer, rabbits and snakes; we walked and ran and tumbled, beatifically perspiring, until we reached the Atlantic Ocean once again and enjoyed miles of beach that seemed so private, even when increasing numbers of others, like ourselves, sought it out.

I traveled. I heard retired people in recreational vehicles — seasoned wanderers seeking the best of natural America — say they wouldn't go back to places like my island. Used to be nice there, they said. Used to be able to go there without being hassled. Used to have good beaches, good fishing. Now they had found another place, but it too was changing. They would keep looking. It's like being on an Easter egg hunt, they said. Only a limited number of eggs left, got to find them while we can.

But the people back home, their egg was already found.

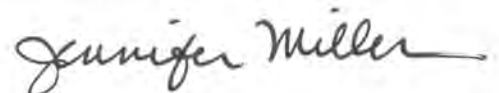
Most of them wouldn't have the choice of wandering off in search of others. They are losing their community as well, and the kind of progress that has come to them hasn't meant improved anything — not better jobs, not a healthy environment. Instead their property taxes are rising; some lose their land through trickery. Some are being offered very tempting prices for their homes. Those who know that starting over again somewhere else is no alternative are caught in an ever-tightening steel trap. Sell out? Try to hold on? Will staying be worthwhile if the area keeps changing for the worse?

It's a repetitious story, and one with many variations. Instead of coastal resorts, insert heavy industry which comes seeking abundant water supplies, cheap labor and transportation opportunities. Insert extractive industry seeking the South Coast's abundant, non-renewable wealth of minerals and fossil fuels. And then realize how much there is left still unspoiled: the South has more undeveloped islands than the rest of the nation, more productive wetlands by far than can be found in other regions of the Lower 48 states, more fish and wildlife, more self-sufficient communities, more recreational opportunities . . . and more potential for destructive resort and industrial development that will turn our coastal assets into a different kind of greenery, spent elsewhere.

In this book we introduce you to a varied cast of Southern coastal characters (if you visit the coast, you're in here too) and invite you to listen to their concerns. Longtime residents, visitors, recent immigrants — all are vying for a place amidst a distinct geography, one with special needs of its own.

The following stories suggest a simple truth, one founded in nature's lesson of ecologic balance so acutely apparent in the Tidewater South. The ideal public constituency for this affair of people, land and water must realize its fragility, must temper exploitation with conservative estimates of how much the system can endure. Most important, we must insist that our coastal, state and federal elected leaders get their economic development and environmental planning heads together. We must also strive to reverse the continuing tragedy of our segregated lives — the "us and them" syndrome that reduces potential public power to fractions and labels some communities anomalies, destined for extinction.

Our literature and experience tell us that a grandparent and grandchild may learn from and enjoy each other more than those caught between the ages. So too our South Coast past and future might benefit from closer contact. We can look back, learn our lessons and attempt to live *with* the coast's delicate, changing nature. Or we can abandon the imperative of wise stewardship and watch our coastal resources succumb to urgent, greedy appetites. And then the next generation of coastal people may just wonder what our nostalgic memories are all about.



*Compiled by Connie Toops*

# *In Ecstasy*

*The watercolors and diaries of Walter Inglis Anderson*

*I've been drawing Mallards. I caught two just as they would have flown – they knew I was there, but knew that they would be more exposed if they jumped. I made several drawings while I held them with the eye of the ancient mariner – then took it off for a little too long and up and away they went. Then I crawled first to no effect then in approaching about fifteen Mallard – bathing and tipping up – they suspected me and “froze” for a while, but I kept still and they went back to their playing and feeding.*

*This is a beautiful place and it is doing its stuff – the calm changed to a fog a wet white fog – suffused with light – the white beach giving a glow rising fifty feet in the air – the almost black tree trunks radiating light, and the tip of every grass blade with a tiny lantern hanging on it.*



*Before daylight just*  
before the moon rose  
I got up had coffee and  
walked west.

A silvery night with  
the sand saturated with  
phosphorous so that  
every foot step was illu-  
minated and the little  
waves were outlined in  
a lost and found line  
of silver.

I've had a gay walk –  
I have raced little peeps  
– drawn willets – and  
waves – and aroused  
the curiosity of a little  
alligator – by crawling  
– like an alligator –



*A flock of about a hundred Dogris [a kind of duck]*  
were close into shore and I hid behind a tree, and drew  
them from the top of a dune – stationary – some playing  
– chasing each other – then suddenly all swimming in the  
same direction – a pause and all off in a  
different new direction.



*There was a heavy rain squall . . .*  
and I worked “chez moi” – that is  
sus le bateau – or “under cover” –  
doing fairly well I thought, but horri-  
ble dirty color when I brought it out  
into the light. I think I need an arbi-  
trary scheme of color before I start.

. . . a tremendous cyclonic stu-  
pendous blue-black cataclysm of na-  
ture appeared in the NW. I got all the  
dramatic effects – electric green pine  
trees – dazzling White Herons –  
magnificent Fish Hawk – copper pink  
and black and white against the blue  
purple of rolling cloud – the green  
water with purple sheen like silk.  
It was a wonderful show.



*I have just done a panorama – neither gnats nor mosquitos could disguise the paintability of this place – in spite of the destruction and disorder caused by wind and water there is a child-like – neatness and simplicity about it – but there are plagues – suddenly out of the clear white sand appeared ants – which bit and stung me where ever they could get at me –*

*Three kinds of biting flies –  
Several kinds of mosquitos –*

*and I think at least two kinds of gnats – as well as something it may be sand fleas that gets you on the beach. There are also yellow jackets and possibly wasps.*

*I haven't had ticks yet but I think I've seen them on the rabbits' ears.*

*There are of course cotton mouth moccasins – and the shallow water at certain times of the year is alive with sting-arees –*

*Still all these are bearable – and may in some negative way add to the charm of the place – but gnats still bother more than any of the others.*



*Yesterday after lunch, I walked east along the inside beach to the gap and around on the outside to the bullrush pool. I did a circuit of it drawing dragon flies. I heard a little green heron complaining and saw white guano beneath a pine branch. Then I looked up into a dead pine beyond, and saw a young heron climb up using feet, wings, and the point of its bill. Then it reached a branch and stood – and stretched and stretched, silhouetted against an enormous white cloud. It seemed that with very little it would climb the cloud and take the kingdom of heaven by force – God knows it needs taking.*



*I drew it in ecstasy. It was a concentrated image that nothing could take from me. This does not mean that I am going to be content with that one image for the rest of my life. It will generate power in me for a while, then I need another. One image succeeds another with surprising regularity on Horn Island. Whether they could be shared is another matter – people need different things.*

*Walter Inglis Anderson, hermit and artist, was a man enthralled with nature. His 18-year love affair with Horn Island, Mississippi, produced thousands of drawings, paintings and journal entries chronicling its changing seasons and wildlife.*

*Every chance possible, from 1948 until his death in 1965, Anderson abandoned his Ocean Springs home and family and rowed his less-than-seaworthy skiff to the island some 12 miles out. Carrying only the essentials – canned goods, water colors, typing paper and notebooks, all packed in a trashcan – Anderson would cross the Mississippi Sound and set up housekeeping and studio under his overturned rowboat on the island.*

*During these stays, sometimes lasting as long as a month, Anderson confronted nature and art on their own terms – often on his hands and knees. A 1928 graduate of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and trained also in New York and Paris, he found another sort of instruction among the mosquitoes, ducks, coons, copperheads and gnats of Horn Island.*

*Anderson's diaries reveal that he considered himself no more or less important than the island wildlife. Nature always came first, and he used art only as a way to digest its wonders. In fact, he often referred to the process of painting as "eating," as it restored the mental health he had lost in his earlier mainland life.*



photo by Connie Toops



A MISSISSIPPI COLONY OF SANDWICH TERNS

photo by Connie Toops

*After his death, Anderson's family discovered his work scattered around the rooms of his Ocean Springs cottage: paintings on typing paper, journals tattered and blurred by salt water. Like nature's sweeping tides and sands, and the momentary formations of passing clouds, Anderson took little care to preserve his creations.*

*The family graciously released his work to traveling exhibits and documentary film-makers, and to Redding S. Sugg, Jr., who edited and introduced the artist in three books: *The Horn Island Logs of Walter Inglis Anderson* and *A Painter's Psalm: The Mural in Walter Anderson's Cottage* (both Memphis State University Press, 1973 and 1978, respectively), and *Walter Anderson's Illustrations of Epic and Voyage* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1980).*

*Connie Toops is a writer and nature photographer who lived on Horn Island with her park ranger husband until the fall of 1981. She now lives in Jasper, Arkansas.*



# BIG PLANS FOR WANCHESE



**CHEESE COUNTY**, North Carolina: People call the village of Wanchese a lot of names, most of them unprintable, but that one stands out. "Cheese" is obviously drawn from current pronunciation of the Indian name, Wanchese. But why "County"?

Located at the southern end of Roanoke Island, Wanchese shares the island with Manteo to the north — a bustling town that draws crowds to its "Lost Colony" outdoor dramatization of the first English settlement and thousands of tourists enroute to the Outer Banks resorts of Kitty Hawk, Kill Devil Hills and Nags Head. Manteo, the beach towns and the inland forests and large farms are all in Dare County along with Wanchese.

The fishing people of Wanchese explain, Cheese County is just a nickname given them for their independent ways. Goddamn hardheadedness. Pure stubbornness. Like refusing to zone property, incorporate village limits, welcome strangers or otherwise give in to the demands of twentieth-century living and the rest of the county's 90 percent population increase over a decade.

Independence. Like the right to own your own boat and drop your own nets. The right to take your own financial risks and write your own paycheck. The right to be provincial, to cling to the best, and worst, aspects of a culture little changed in 200 years.

Villager George Scarborough characterizes his home: "A very strong social fabric has been woven over the

centuries. Everyone is related, they all trace their ancestry back to one man — Willie Daniels. We all trace right on back and, as a result, it's a very exclusive group of people."

The last black man to live in Wanchese moved on rather than trying to dig in and raise a family there. The last black woman, although she bore and raised a white man's family, was never really accepted as part of the community. As in other geographically isolated fishing villages along the South Atlantic and Gulf coasts, resistance to new ways translates in part to racism. But that is not the whole story.

Scarborough: "Family connections were all that we had, so that's all that mattered. There was no wealth here till the '50s, so society stratified itself other ways. Land and lineage. Money's a novel thing."

Before the 1950s, the Wanchese economy was based on small boats harvesting shad and herring from the rivers and mullet from the sounds protected by the Outer Banks. After World War II, Wanchesers progressed to shrimping in the sounds in small trawlers with up to four crewmembers. As villager Leland Tillett recalls, "Not too many fishing boats ventured out past the inlets, only those used for transporting. The fish were always caught close to home."

But in the late 1940s and early '50s, the state of North Carolina determined that fisheries like that of Wanchese were primitive and outdated; along with a few local boosters, it fashioned an economic development

plan for the area: a dredged, maintained channel through nearby Oregon Inlet as a passageway to the Atlantic Ocean's marine resources. Congress authorized the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to cut a channel through the inlet, and the more prosperous local fishers began investing in larger, more seaworthy boats.

By the early 1970s, state officials told Wanchesers that immediate improvement of their small harbor was essential to the continuation of the area fishing industry. The plan: a 38-acre Seafood Industrial Park, costing \$7.3 million in public funds, with docks, bulkheads, roads and other essentials to lure fish processing establishments, cold storage facilities, boat equipment and maintenance firms to the village. This Seafood Park — "the only real answer to a viable fishing industry," officials claimed — promises to bring changes that even Wanchese hardheadedness cannot stop.

## CHILDREN IN WANCHESE RIDE FOR FUN AND TRANSPORTATION.



Photo by Lisa M. Krieger

Wanchesers never really thought they had a fishing problem. But the Seafood Park seemed a flattering offer at first. Overlooked in the hustle of surrounding tourism development in the 1960s and '70s, the 1,200-member community suddenly found itself the focus of national television news shows and slick public relations campaigns. After long being ignored by local government, Wanchese became a pet project of the North Carolina Commerce Department, the U.S. Department of Commerce and the state's congressional delegation. The project was even designated one of "national urgency," and there was talk of a \$6 million jump in the locals' total annual income and an overall \$7.5 million increase in annual regional income. Like other fishing communities, Wanchese did have problems marketing glut catches in good seasons, so having processing facilities in town sounded good, and there was mention of jobs, the kind that would keep kids from having to leave home.

Most importantly, officials promised to stabilize Oregon Inlet. The inlet channel weaves back and forth like an angry snake, first shifting one way, then shifting somewhere else by the time a trawler captain has a hull full of fish, a sleepless crew and a craving to be home. According to a 1977 Army Corps memorandum, 13 lives had already been lost in the inlet, and groundings occurred at a rate of up to 20 a month during the winter peak of offshore fishing.

For fishers caught in a storm off Oregon Inlet, the choice is clear: dodge along the shallow shoals of the Atlantic for another 75 miles until reaching either Morehead City to the south or Norfolk to the north. Or attempt to head straight through Oregon Inlet, in seas churning like bathwater down a drain. "Anytime you go out, you have a funny feeling in your stomach till you get back in," says Erb Gallop. "You're not sure you're ever going to get off that boat again."

Once the Seafood Park was built, Wanchesers were told, there would be enough political pressure to push authorization for stabilizing the inlet through Congress. Inlet stabilization would be essential to protect the government's multi-million-dollar investment in the Seafood Park; com-



TRAWLER IN WANCHESE HARBOR

photo by Lisa M. Krieger

panies would not come to the Park unless assured that ocean-going fleets could safely navigate the treacherous inlet.

But even with the promise of a safe inlet, local support of the Seafood Industrial Park shifted as quickly as the tides when Wanchesers watched the project get underway. Marshland was selected for the park, evaluated and quickly condemned.

"The [state] land appraiser came down and took us out to lunch at Daniels Restaurant. We no sooner sit down than he says, 'You boys have got something we want . . . and there ain't nothing you can do about it,'" claims property owner and crabber Willie Daniels. "As it turns out, he was telling the truth, I guess. He just wasn't beating around the bush.

"Well, my brother just got up and walked out. I stayed there. I said, 'This is America, not Germany. You just can't take our land.' But when I got back home, I walked out in the field and found stakes — they'd already been out surveying my land."

He continues bitterly, "When they were dredging, they went 30 to 40 feet into the rest of my land, that which wasn't condemned. Because they destroyed it, I said they should

#### WANCHESE BOY RESTS AFTER A DAY OF CRABBING.



photo by Lisa M. Krieger

put it back. Well, they didn't put it back."

Similar complaints abound. One Wancheser, awarded \$15,000 for land he thinks is worth 10 times that much, refused to pick up the money at the local courthouse. And George Scarborough recalls, "The state said they'd bulkhead land, improve it some, in exchange for donation of property. I guess they found that wasn't cost-effective because nobody's property ever got improved. Other property, they gave them just token amounts of money."

Hughes Tillett, whose mother lost eight-and-a-half acres of waterfront to the government, is resigned. "There wasn't much we could do about it, so we just gave it to them. Nothing you think, say or do will ever change the way the government operates."

As the Seafood Industrial Park construction progressed, Wanchesers began to realize that few of them would benefit from this public investment. The state was courting larger, outside businesses, consistent with their goal — not discussed locally — of drawing at least \$30 million in private sector funds just to get the park started. By late 1981, at least 16 outside firms had expressed interest in locating there; there were only two from Wanchese.

Says Willie Daniels: "Outsiders see the potential and have the money. We just don't have the ways and means to do it."

Even Malcolm Daniels, a trawler captain for three decades, king of the local fishing empire and one of the few Wanchesers in a financial position to use the Seafood Park, says his docks and fish-packing plant are already settled outside the park facility; he has no plans to move. Small fishing interests cannot afford to lease park space, and park planners have allotted no space for their small outboard motor boats.

"I can tell you why I don't like this project," confided one young fisher. "I had to start out from scratch, and my dock is falling to pieces. Meanwhile, they're getting everything built for them, everything for free. You can't compete against that."

The Seafood Industrial Park means social change as well, and Wanchesers fear the consequences. The promised 500 new seasonal jobs will bring in

strangers who, Willie Daniels claims, will "hurt the individual life of the community, no ifs, ands or buts."

Scarborough agrees: "It's poorly planned. They were in such a hurry they didn't bother thinking ahead. The roads won't support the traffic, the community can't house the people, and it'll put a burden on the public school system, and the police and fire protection.

"There's no zoning, there's nothing that would stop a bar from coming up. Local pressure might keep one of us from opening one up, but a non-local may not give a damn. Drinking has a real stigma here. 'Drink not to excess,' says the Bible. Well, they drink not, period. Grape juice at communion, and they smell it first to see if it's sour."

Adds Erb Gallop, "They'll want to make it just like it was back home. They'll say, 'I don't like this ditch, I didn't have ditches in Charlotte,' and fill it up. Or, 'I need sidewalks, I had sidewalks back home in Washington,' then build them. They can't just leave it the way it is."

"They say that what's good for business is good for the community," George Scarborough sums up. "But those are people who measure everything in monetary terms. As the Bible says, 'Lord forgive them, they know not what they do.'"

In retrospect, Wanchese opinion about the Seafood Park matters little. At the time the park plans were drawn up, no polls were taken, no petitions circulated. Criticisms at a 1976 public hearing were received politely, and then ignored. There is no local representative on the nine-member Seafood Park Authority that manages the project. Several Wanchese citizens served on an early project planning board, but "that was just a rubber stamp," one local says.

Feeling betrayed and victimized, Wanchese eventually tried to organize to protect itself. But the people's stubbornness and traditional values immobilized their energies. Civic Association meetings, normally quiet gatherings, broke out in squabbling and spats. Talk of incorporation and zoning — the only two means of controlling unchecked growth — raised howls of opposition. Incorporation means draining hard-earned money into the bottomless coffers of city government,



photo by Lisa M. Krieger

LAND IN WANCHESE IS PUT TO A VARIETY OF USES.

Wanchesers complained. Zoning was attacked as a conspiracy against a brother's trailer, a neighbor's front-yard oyster business or a daughter's pony tied up beside the house. "Every man has a God-given right to do with his property as he pleases," was the constant refrain.

In March, 1981, Governor Jim Hunt dedicated the completed Seafood Industrial Park, declaring it open for development. He called it a project of "national and international importance. The commercial seafood industry is a major component of the nation's total agricultural-industrial complex. . . . The government should assist fishermen like it has assisted farmers."

The governor was referring to the fact that the Seafood Industrial Park and Oregon Inlet stabilization project, requiring massive amounts of taxpayer support, must carry substantial national benefits. To justify such investments, the plan promises to make the state's commercial fishing industry more efficient, more competitive with other countries and more valuable in

balancing the nation's trade deficit — a rationale reminiscent of government subsidies which helped turn small farmers off their land and created agribusiness as we know it today.

Ironically, the Oregon Inlet stabilization project — the proverbial carrot in front of Wanchese's nose — may never happen because of its ballooning costs and the growing concern about the new hazards and ecologic damage it would cause. Instead, Wanchese will have a harbor it did not want, employing people who are not welcome and introducing changes that represent the end of an old way of life.

Perhaps, as state officials have often predicted in inter-office memos, villages like Wanchese will indeed become a thing of the past, and the local fishers will be brought into the modern economy. But they will be kicking all the way. □

*Lisa Krieger, a freelance writer in Washington, DC, was formerly a reporter for The Coastland Times, the newspaper of North Carolina's Outer Banks.*

# THE FOLLY OF STABILIZING OREGON INLET



**OREGON INLET** is the only sea-to-sound pass for almost 100 miles of Outer Banks, the only break from Cape Henry, Virginia, south to Cape Hatteras. Pounding surf and ripping tidal currents make this inlet the most dynamic on the entire East Coast. As part of the larger migrating barrier island system, Oregon Inlet is constantly changing, shoaling in its boat channel as it moves southward, and making navigation risky.

Testimony to the inlet's migratory nature is the high arching bridge that crosses it, a silent, expensive mistake reaching across more land now than water. Already, keeping the bridge in place has cost several times its original 1962 construction price. And keeping the dredged boat channel positioned beneath the bridge's highest span has proved a constant challenge.

How to make Oregon Inlet safe for travelers without hindering its essential natural movement is the subject of considerable debate, with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and most ocean-going commercial fishers on one side, and geologists, marine scientists and the U.S. Interior Department on the other. The Corps believes a system of mile-long jetties would stabilize the inlet and minimize the continuous dredging now required to keep the channel open. The other side, pointing to a body of knowledge about the behavior of inlets and islands, contends the jetties would do more harm than good, and might even increase navigational hazards through the inlet.

Behind the Corps' engineers are a

sizable bureaucracy, vested interests and almost \$15 million already appropriated by Congress toward the jetties' estimated cost of \$101 million. But geologists and marine scientists have nature on their side, and with an administration that hoards money now in place in Washington, their arguments against the jetties are winning powerful new friends.

The debate gets down to the basics of why inlets through barrier islands exist in the first place.

## INLETS -- NATURE'S BLOWOUT

The Outer Banks are long narrow accumulations of sand formed thousands of years ago far out on the edge of the continental shelf. As glaciers from the last Ice Age melted, rising sea level caused the islands to migrate shoreward. Over a period of 1,000 years, the Outer Banks moved inward some 40 miles. Sea level rise, sand supply, wave energy and the shape of the offshore sea floor (which affects the nature of the waves that strike the shore) are all responsible for the islands' individual configurations.

Inlets between islands usually form during major storms, hurricanes or persistent northeasters. As a storm approaches, water piles into the sounds behind the barrier islands; with the passage of the storm and the seaward shift of the wind, this high water surges toward the sea at a catastrophic rate. The flow follows the path of least resistance. Normally that path is through existing inlets which may widen and deepen in a matter

of hours to accommodate the huge discharge. Oregon Inlet, for example, widened from one-half mile to two miles in a 24-hour time span during the March, 1962, "Ash Wednesday" storm.

Sometimes, however, the water floods across a narrow low point on the island and forms a new inlet. A new inlet may silt back in fairly quickly, but if it provides a more efficient passageway than an older inlet, it will remain open while the old one fills with sand.

Oregon Inlet was first documented on maps in 1585, but closed from 1795 to 1846. In September, 1846, it reopened during a hurricane and was named for one of the first boats to pass through, the steamer *Oregon*.

Geologists have discovered evidence that at least 14 different inlets — short-term and long-term — have existed in historic times from Hatteras Inlet to the Virginia line. A new one could form at any time .

## TRAWLERS AT WORK ONE EARLY WINTER'S MORNING



Photo by J. Foster Scott

Once opened, some inlets stay in one place while others tend to migrate laterally. Oregon Inlet has migrated south over two miles since 1846. Longshore currents transfer sand along the coast, dropping their load on the upstream side of inlets and picking up more sand on the downstream side. Thus, the inlet channel moves south as well. Two early lighthouses built on the south side of Oregon Inlet fell victim to erosion, while the Bodie Island light on the north side now stands about a mile from the inlet channel it is supposed to mark for passing boats.

### WHAT'S WRONG WITH JETTIES?

Jetties block the natural flow of sand along beaches. The Oregon Inlet jetty design would block this southerly longshore drift and accelerate erosion to the south. Such erosion is of special concern because the 6,000-acre Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge occupies the island to the south. At times, the longshore movement of beach sand reverses direction. When that happens, the national park land north of the inlet, Bodie Island, will also experience accelerated erosion.

One point of contention between other scientists and the Corps' engineers is the sand bypassing system included in the jetties project design. The bypass system, supposedly, would periodically (every year or two) dredge sand from the upstream side of the jetties and pass it to the downward side, to prevent the inlet's natural migration. But much of the natural erosion and transport of sand on these islands occurs in a matter of hours during storms. Barrier island scientists doubt any dredge could keep up with nature's capacity to move sand during a storm. Furthermore, the sand bypass system hinges on a large engineering question mark. The bypass dredges are to work behind a newly designed floating breakwater that has yet to be tested anywhere, particularly in this most dynamic of inlets.

The jetty system, geologists and marine scientists contend, would constrict the inlet's width and destroy most of its ability to act as a safety valve during storms. Jetties will cork the outgoing rush of inland waters and a new blowout will occur, they say with certainty. The only question is

where.

Island history instructs that a new inlet could form anywhere in the area. It may blow out around the jetties themselves, undermining portions of the structure. Another likely spot, according to Dr. Stan Riggs of East Carolina University, is a narrow portion in the town of Nags Head. The Pea Island Refuge is another prime possibility.

To top it off, there is no assurance that the jetties will actually succeed in making the inlet safe for navigation. Barnegat Inlet in New Jersey is used by almost half of the state's 40,000 fishing and pleasure boats. But jetties constructed there in the 1940s, supposedly to create a safer channel and reduce the need for constant dredging, have not stopped the channel from shifting and shoaling, and numerous boats run aground on the jetties themselves. The Corps had to return to its previous role of extensive dredging in Barnegat Inlet.

Elsewhere, too, jetties have created new problems instead of solving old ones. Shortly after the Corps "stabilized" Masonboro Inlet near Wrightsville Beach, North Carolina, the inlet channel migrated toward the jetty and navigators literally found themselves up against the wall when trying to pass to and from the ocean.

Critics of the proposed Oregon Inlet jetties also point out that the Corps has failed to determine the nature of the substrata underlying the project and lacks sufficient oceanographic data to predict long-range effects accurately. Their attempts to confer with the Corps were persistently rebuffed.

In 1979 the National Park Service empaneled five internationally prominent shoreline geologists and engineers to evaluate the jetty proposal. The panel, headed by Dr. Douglas Inman of Scripps Institution of Oceanography, came down unanimously against jetty construction. The Corps criticized the panelists' conclusion, saying they had not seen all the available data. So the Park Service reconvened the panel in 1980; its members traveled to the Corps' Wilmington, North Carolina, office but were denied access to details of the jetty plans. Instead, they were treated to an insulting dog-and-pony show meant for the local Rotary Club, not the top

**OREGON INLET HAS WANDERED AND SHIFTED DOZENS OF TIMES OVER THE YEARS — AS MAPS FROM 1915 ON DEMONSTRATE.**





FISHERS HAUL IN A LOAD OF RED SNAPPER, BLUEFISH AND FLOUNDER.

scientists in the field. Subsequently, the North Carolina Academy of Sciences passed a resolution expressing deep concern over the Corps' reaction to the panel. And outraged marine scientists bypassed the Corps entirely, relaying their objections directly to the Interior Department.

### REINING IN THE CORPS

The Park Service's conclusion, shared by other jetty opponents, is that an improved dredging program would make Oregon Inlet safer for navigation and at the same time would

cost less and do less environmental damage than the jetties. For now, the Park Service has stalled jetty construction by denying permits to carry out the project on the park lands which border the inlet. Attempts in Congress and by the Corps to overturn the Park Service's action by "authorizing" the Department of Interior to surrender the land in question or issue the necessary permits ran into the 1982 federal-level budget-cutting fever, as well as Interior Secretary James Watt's instructions that dredging alternatives be resurrected and reconsidered by all parties.

Since the Corps has publicly concluded that the situation boils down to jettying the inlet or accepting continued danger to the fishing fleets that use it, local opinion has turned against the Park Service, Interior Department, Fish and Wildlife Service and geologists and marine scientists in general, all of whom are now classified as members of the species "environmentalist" who care more about birds and beaches than human life. Recently the Corps district office in Wilmington went so far as to "solve" the inlet problem by declaring — in the face of all conflicting scientific evidence — that island migration does not occur; thus the jetties will do no basic geologic or ecologic damage to the Outer Banks system.

The truth is that jettying one high wave-energy component of the islands' sand-and-water-sharing system would result in great economic and environmental loss to the American taxpayer and the vacationer on these beautiful parklands. Plus, the jetties raise false hopes of safety. They would reverse the National Park Service's decade-old commitment not to combat nature on national seashores. Since the Park Service will not allow the jetties to be built unless ordered to do so by Congress, at issue here too is a possible precedent for removing land from its protected status within national park systems. And, most significantly, the stabilization of Oregon Inlet would obligate future generations to pay for the string of eco-disasters sure to follow. □

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# THE FOLKS NEXT DOOR



**NORTH CAROLINA'S SEA-**food Industrial Park at Wanchese and the Army Corps of Engineers' proposed Oregon Inlet jetties have been best friends for years. The two economic development projects grew up together and are still bosom buddies.

In fact, their futures are so closely intertwined that the millions of public dollars poured into the park may be wasted if the Corps is unable to make the turbulent inlet "stable." More than a year after the Seafood Park officially opened, it has only one tenant — a trawler repair firm; other companies, though interested, are waiting to see what happens to Oregon Inlet.

Meanwhile, the Army Corps is projecting vast economic benefits from the Seafood Park to justify spending millions more of the public's money on the jetties project. Other, more mundane — and cheaper — methods of keeping the inlet channel open will not satisfy the needs of the booming ship traffic the new park will bring, says the Corps.

Over the past few decades, a confluence of local, state and federal interests have helped tie this unfortunate knot between the Seafood Industrial Park and jetties projects. A few local businesspeople in the 1940s wanted to improve Wanchese's harbor and knew that, in order to expand the traditional inland waters fisheries, they would need a safe ocean outlet. They knew, too, that the Army Corps was already laying plans to stabilize Oregon Inlet in a "permanent" way. Over the years, the local boosters and the Corps generated interest in an expanded harbor and stable inlet

among the area's more prosperous fishing firms.

Subsequently, an increasing number of trawler owners — from both Wanchese and the larger South Atlantic fishing community — have invested in bigger boats and begun harvesting abundant winter supplies of flounder, grey sea trout and croaker from the nearshore area within sight of Oregon Inlet, bringing the catch into local packing houses. The change in source of supply for much of Wanchese's fishing economy has meant growing local interest in hastening the day when trawlers could navigate peacefully from sea to sound and back. In the early 1970s, the Corps received a U.S. congressional authorization for the jetties project with the provision that Wanchese Harbor be enlarged as well.

State-level interest was piqued on several fronts. For one thing, North Carolina's highway department built a bridge over Oregon Inlet in 1962 — ironically, against the advice of the Corps, which said the inlet was too

volatile and migratory to support such a structure. In the last two decades, the bridge has required embarrassingly expensive attention to keep it in place. Also, the idea of improving the fisheries at Wanchese was consistent with a growing national movement toward making the South Atlantic fishing industry "more efficient and competitive." The state invested in that idea, along with the federal government, and from that point, both the jetties and the Seafood Industrial Park project snowballed.

## FROM FISH TO FISH PATTY

The Seafood Industrial Park concept was largely nourished by the federal Economic Development Administration (EDA), now essentially defunct, which offered coastal states planning and development grants to expand their seafood industries. EDA's Coastal Plains Regional Commission (CPRC) — a multi-state planning body — formed a Seafood Ad Hoc Committee in the early 1970s which

AN AERIAL VIEW OF THE SEAFOOD INDUSTRIAL PARK



photo by J. Foster Scott

studied the South Atlantic states' industry. It concluded the seafood industry could never reach its full growth potential as presently organized: a hodge-podge of small-scale, independent businesses, from the fishers to the dealers to the processors, ice suppliers, boat repair companies and trucking firms. Although many of these family-size businesses were making satisfactory earnings, CPRC and its member states foresaw a different scale of fishing, with ports where 100-foot-long and larger ocean-going trawlers would dock and sell their catch to large processors who would turn the catch into frozen fillets, canned soup and animal feed. They envisioned large distributing firms which would hold seafood in storage facilities and sell it in bulk to supermarket chains.

One official involved in developing North Carolina's seafood park describes today's U.S. fishing industry as "helter skelter . . . a bunch of rednecks . . . who throw fish around." The vast majority of North Carolina's fishing boats are 18 feet long or less. By contrast, he notes, the Scandinavians use large, sanitary factory ships with uniformed crews. The difference affects the marketability of the catch. The McDonalds fast food chain, for instance, which processes its fish fillets at its own plant in New Bedford, Massachusetts, buys only from foreign ships with tight "quality control."

Seafood Industrial Park proponents also maintain that larger-scale processing and cold-storage facilities would help stabilize fish prices, which tend to fluctuate widely with the seasonal supply. Having services concentrated in one port would be attractive to trawler owners: as boats become more sophisticated, they need specialized repair services for radar, sonar and other electronic equipment. Bulk ice would be available, as would fuel supplies and other necessities. Also, the advocates pointed out, with the enactment of environmental protection regulations in the mid-'70s that restricted the customary dumping of wastes from both fishing boats and processing plants, centralized waste treatment facilities would be another plus.

With this vision of Seafood Industrial Parks throughout the Southeast, CPRC made planning grants to each of its five member states. Virginia did a feasibility study for a Newport

News Park, South Carolina looked into a few sites and settled on Port Royal in Beaufort County. Florida considered several Gulf Coast communities and Georgia began planning in Brunswick but was thwarted by opposition from local fishers. North Carolina used its \$600,000 to begin planning for the Wanchese site.

Each state but Georgia drew up plans for a Seafood Park, and all of the plans depended heavily on EDA grants for construction. Of the four states, only North Carolina acted quickly enough to plan its park, vote state appropriations to help finance it (\$2.5 million) and secure adequate EDA money (\$4.5 million) to complete construction before the Reagan Administration's budget cutbacks.

The Newport News project got as far as phase one: enlargement of the harbor and bulkheading, at a cost of \$2.5 million. Further work on the Virginia park depends on whether the public will foot the rest of the bill through a bond issue. Other states' parks are still on the drawing board, with varying possibilities of completion.

#### JUSTIFYING JETTIES

With all eyes focused on Wanchese to see how this Seafood Industrial Park idea works, the pressure to go ahead and stabilize Oregon Inlet increased accordingly. Through the 1970s, design memorandums for the Oregon Inlet jetties were drawn up one after the other at the Army Corps' district office in Wilmington, North Carolina. The longer the Corps had to wait for a full appropriation to begin jetty construction, the higher the costs of the project became. In 1970, when Congress first agreed to the project, \$10 million seemed a sufficient appropriation. By 1980, after other federal agencies successfully delayed jetty construction, the cost had ballooned to \$86 million.

By 1981, the Corps was estimating that \$101 million would cover initial costs, and that the 50-year life of the jetties would carry a price tag of more than half a billion dollars. At that point, with the Reagan administration cutting back on domestic expenses on all fronts, Interior Department Secretary James Watt asked the Corps to take another look at the less expensive method of maintaining a 14-foot-deep channel through Oregon Inlet — dredging.

The Corps' 40-year-old determination to jetty this most dynamic of inlets arises from a traditional agency attitude, summarized by one Corps engineer in 1979 who wrote, "Problems arising from the sea's stubborn insistence on rearranging the world's shorelines have plagued man since the dawn of time." To the Corps, perhaps, a program of continuous dredging of the inlet's channel would seem almost a capitulation to natural forces, a throwing-up of our hands and shrinking away from the challenge of defeating this troublesome foe. As the cost of the jetties grew fearsome and threatened the project's future, therefore, the Corps developed an elaborate scenario to justify its ill-fated stabilization proposal.

Economic formulas weighing benefits and costs of any particular project are suspect when created by an agency with a vested interest in the project. The projected economic benefits from the Wanchese Seafood Industrial Park figured prominently in the Corps' benefit/cost ratio for the Oregon Inlet project; even so the ratio was a slim, tentative 1.14 to 1, already perilously close to being too low to justify the project. To make matters worse for the Corps, serious questions have been raised by other federal resource and fisheries agencies and concerned individuals about the basis of the benefits side of the formula.

The Corps has based almost three-fourths of the jetties' promised economic benefits on a "nontraditional species" fishing scenario — founded on the premise that if Oregon Inlet is jettied, large fishing fleets will bring hundreds of millions of pounds of deep-water marine life, such as squid, sea herring, hake and butterfish, into Wanchese. These species appear seasonally over 150 miles off the North Carolina and Virginia coasts, and as of yet are harvested mostly by foreign factory ships. Corporate interests would supposedly move into the Wanchese Seafood Park to process these nontraditional species and begin tapping markets for squid in Japan, Spain, Italy and Greece; for herring in Belgium; for hake in Western Europe, and so forth. Even foreign interests, mainly Japanese, have considered moving into Wanchese — but only if the inlet is stabilized.

Wanchese's current domestic fishing industry — though thriving even without a jettied inlet — is too small to



satisfy corporate appetites, the Corps maintains, and does not contribute to the nation's export trade.

Lesser items on the Corps' benefits side of the formula include "bridge protection," "area redevelopment," "land enhancement" and "reduced channel maintenance," but by far the "trash fish" scenario (as nontraditional species are commonly called in the United States) dominates, and government documents reveal that Wanchese is seen as a premier site for this new industry. North Carolina has been racing against other Seafood Industrial Parks planned elsewhere, particularly the one in Newport News, Virginia, which already has a stable outlet to the Atlantic Ocean and is closer than Wanchese to prime fishing grounds but does not have its facility open for corporate location.

As it is, federal fisheries agencies are questioning whether the Corps' estimate of economic benefits exaggerates the potential catch of ocean life within a reasonable distance of Wanchese. Even if the inlet is stabilized, they say, fishing fleets may not wish to put in at Wanchese since the most abundant fishing goes on further north. Foreign fleets have caught 50 times more volume off New England and the mid-Atlantic states than they harvest in the area off Oregon Inlet.

And, as J.E. Greenfield, the chief of the Fisheries Development Division of the National Marine Fisheries Service, wrote about the Corps' figures to an Interior Department policy analyst: "There are a number of competing ports ranging throughout the entire Atlantic Coast. . . . The Wanchese location is at the extreme southern edge of both the squid and herring grounds. Consequently, the competitive advantage of this port would be relatively brief throughout the fishing season and I feel that it might be overly optimistic [of the Corps] to assume [Wanchese] would capture 33 percent of the U.S. share of landing for these resources."

Even a top-level North Carolina fisheries official warned the Corps in 1976 that its catch figures were only estimates, and dubious ones at that. Yet the Corps has consistently discounted critiques of its ocean marine life harvest figures because, without a strong nontraditional fisheries scenario, the agency's fragile benefit/cost ratio breaks down com-

pletely, and Congress could not even consider appropriating funds toward the jetties project.

### BACK TO BASICS

Once the mathematical foundation for the highly touted economic benefits of the jetties and park is jerked away, the twin projects emerge as little more than a 40-year-old bureaucratic and engineering fantasy. The real needs of the area can be met with considerably less technology or public expenditure. "What Wanchese needs is a channel through Oregon Inlet of sufficient width and sufficient depth — and with sufficient buoys," wrote environmental planner Ken Hunter in 1981.

Hunter, who spent a year investigating the economics of the jetties project and lobbying against it, found that the Corps has managed to keep the inlet's 14-foot-deep channel open only 25 percent of the time. Dredging this channel is difficult, especially in the stormy winter months when the inlet is most dangerous and fishing is at its peak, and the Corps complains it lacks sufficient dredge boats. But Hunter discovered that Army engineers have devoted less than a million dollars a year to dredging while their jetty design calls for sand bypassing — which is actually dredging by another name — that would cost several times more each year than is now spent on the inlet channel.

Why is the Corps reluctant to secure adequate appropriations toward maintaining the channel in traditional ways? Hunter explains, "Dredging is impermanent. Dredging leaves nothing for future generations to admire. It isn't exciting, but in both the long run and the short run, dredging might be a lot cheaper than extending a massive, \$100 million, rigid, permanent landmark out a mile into the ocean."

If the channel were better marked and consistently dredged, as Hunter suggests, the existing fisheries at Wanchese would be relieved of a major burden — lost lives and boats in Oregon Inlet. Even without a jettied inlet or a functioning Seafood Industrial Park, trawlers from up and down the South Atlantic Coast have in the past two years joined local fishers in the nearshore Oregon Inlet harvest bonanza, bringing record catches into Wanchese docks and packing houses,

and enriching the village's trawling and processing firms.

With domestic fisheries booming of late, Wanchese Harbor *could* use more processing and handling capacity. But a Seafood Industrial Park catering to highly capitalized fleets operating far offshore would not serve this need. On the other hand, locals have sneered at past half-hearted government attempts to set up smaller fisheries cooperatives. When asked why an earlier government-supervised buying and marketing project failed miserably, one Wancheser quipped, "They were just mountain people. They couldn't tell a fish from a crab."

Given the local fishery's expanded needs and the presence of the new Seafood Park at Wanchese, it is conceivable that government action could put the two together for the public's benefit. But such efforts would require a reversal of present policy; they would entail devoting as much energy and money toward helping local companies establish processing and marketing facilities at the park's vacant sites as has been spent luring outside corporations.

Perhaps, as the cost of the jetties project continues to rise and more pressure from within the federal government forces the Corps to revert to more vigorous and less expensive dredging, the idea of turning the Seafood Industrial Park into a local resource will also draw more official attention. If not, the sign at the entrance of the park — "Jobs For Your Community" — may turn out to be just an embarrassing memorial to a worn-out dream and an ill-advised use of state and federal funds. □

*Jennifer Miller grew up on the North Carolina coast and wrote about the state's fishing industry in the Spring, 1977, issue of Southern Exposure. Sarah Rubin does research and consulting on rural economic development and currently works for MDC, Inc., a nonprofit organization in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, which monitored the development of the Wanchese Seafood Industrial Park from 1979 to 1981.*

*An excellent resource for further information on the bad economics of the Oregon Inlet jetties project is Ken Hunter's unpublished report: The Oregon Inlet Project: An Economic Inquiry Into the Nontraditional Fishery Scenario, January, 1982. Send \$5 to Hunter at: Blue Ridge Acres, Box 36, Harper's Ferry, WV 25425.*



# GULF STREAM NORTH

*By Earl Conrad*

**M**enhaden, they call it the natural feed of all other fish, natural fodder. Menhaden grinds up the plankton; the other fish grind up the menhaden . . . the shark, whale, bluefish, tarpon, and even smaller fish like pompano, mullet and flounder, they all smash into those moving fish cities, feed and forage.

When all these fish have eat their fill of the pogy, one of the menhaden's biggest enemies is still up there on top. They sense us in the big ship, run from us as fast as they will from a whale.

In New England the whaling men saw menhaden sailboats and steamboats go offshore a few miles, come back with 25 or 50 tons of fish, grind it up, squeeze out the oil, and the crews spend the night at home. By 1910 whaling men said, "Menhaden is the big fish now." The great whale was sounding.

A few years back menhaden got scarce along the New England coast. Mostly, menhaden, the biggest fishery in America, it's moved South.

In the earliest days the main thing they used menhaden for was fertilizer and bait for other fish. Around 1800 or so, in Rhode Island, they began pressing the oil out.

A while back, they discovered that the scrap from the fish made good eating for fowl and animals. Now the chickens get it all over the country, and when you eat an egg there may be menhaden in it. It's fed to most of the animals on the farm, mixed in the other feeds, reaches everybody's plate through the back door.

But the oils, that's where the most uses are. Solubles, vitamins, antibiotics, they get all that out of the stickwater, the leftovers of the oil. Use the oils in tanning leather, making rope, and in paints as a drier. They put it in soap, inks, insect sprays, linoleum. A lubricant for most anything that needs smooth going. Make steel and aluminum castings with it, caulking mixtures. For waterproofing all kinds of clothes you wear; for plastics; for metal treating. Mix it into putty, put it in brake blocks for autos. Plenty of it goes into lipstick. Kiss her and you kissing a little fish oil too. Freeze it, heat it, change it.

Everybody been just about swimming in menhaden oil and they never known it.





When first published in 1954, Earl Conrad's *Gulf Stream North* was hailed nationally, notably by both black and white publications, as "a corking good tale," with "a superb dramatic power and a rhythm that makes his work distinctive." The novel, excerpted here, compresses five days on a decrepit menhaden boat off the southeast Atlantic coast into a lively story about a little-known industry of white captains and black crews, the "sharecroppers of the sea," their workways, superstitions, fear of the sea's real dangers and their dependence on the lowly "pogy."

In some ways, menhadening has changed little in the past three decades. "Spotter" planes have replaced the lookout aloft in the hawk's nest, the days of hand-pulled nets have passed, and antiquated vessels like this story's *Moona Waa Togue* have yielded to more modern boats. Also, with increased demand, and costlier fleets and processing plants, many of the family-owned operations have merged with larger corporations. Yet the industry is still relatively unknown except in Southern coastal towns where the menhaden plants "smell like money." Compilers of fisheries statistics know about the pogy industry too: in 1981 more than one-third of the total U.S. fish catch was menhaden, from Atlantic and Gulf coast waters.

*Gulf Stream North* is told from the perspective of the *Moona Waa Togue*'s first mate, who early in the book describes his role: "A mate can go about blind with the job he has to do with his eyes. Sometimes, between the left eye for the captain and the right eye for the crew, you wink your way through a bad day so much that by night your eyes are all a-pepper." From the hawk's nest, his 100-foot long ship looks like a "fat, smoked cigar, stretched underneath."

"One thing about a menhadener, they never had one called *The Sweet Pea*," he says. "Not as I know of. Fish don't make a pogy ship sweet."

## THE SET

About 11 o'clock, eight miles off St. Simon's Sound, the captain leaned forward in the lookout till I thought he'd go over. You couldn't see the beach from here. Nothing but the sea about, and the stacks of a big ship farther out. Below the ship it was about 55 feet of water, hard gray sand on the bottom.

Captain, he was staring steady enough to hypnotize the fish, till he pointed and whooped, "*Fish hit! Fish hit!*" Sometimes his voice got a little music in it when he sang out a strike.

Carib pulled the rope that rang the gong over the forepeak.

Down on deck they was yelling and pointing off the starboard bow. "Fish! Fish! Strike!" Yell anything, everything. "There they play!" What we ain't seen in days, a brassy stretch of water, fish thumping at the surface. The color getting redder and redder as we got nearer.

Captain gave orders. "Hey, below! To wheel-starboard!" Fitch put the wheel over.

Carib stood up, put the palm of his left hand over his eyes, got the sign of the red spot good in his mind, tried to figure which way the school of fish might be heading. . . . [Carib is] called the dry-boat man because he don't get wet, like the bunt pullers do. He guides the purse boats around the school of fish, shows them where to lay their net.

While the dry-boat man skinned down the rope ladder, three bunt pullers lifted the rowboat off the deck and slid it overside.

The two seine setters and the two ring setters, they were already around the purse boats at the stern. Those are the small boats that have the big net in them. You spread out the net from those boats. The webbing itself, half of it in one boat and half in the other. The center of the net, we call it the bunt, it straggles loose between both small boats as they ride in the davits. If you could see that net stretched straight, out of water, she'd be in a rectangle shape nearly a quarter of a mile long and about a hundred feet across. Those purse boats, they ain't too small. Each about 30 feet long. The ring and seine setters popped

these boats in the water from out of the davits. The captain and nine men got into his captain boat, and seven men and me jumped into the mate boat.

Kirwan and Booker, the purse-boat engineers, they started the Lathrop engines, and we headed toward Carib. Both boats side and side, held together kind of Siamese-twin fashion by that net, with its bunt dragging in the water.

You have to get around up ahead of a menhaden school.

Carib, he was 200 yards away. We had to wait on his signals before we could get over the fish. He was spinning his oar above his head. That meant don't come in too close, the fish moving around. He wasn't sure which way they going, which was the head part.

You got to be a bee to get the sweet out of a blossom and a trained menhadener to get these fish out of the ocean. Carib, he kept shooting us signals to halt or come in closer. Signaled with his oar upside down, blade up to the sun. That meant the fish sounding, going under. Anything can cause them to go down, a motor sound, trouble with the big fish under water that may be eating on them, even a wrong move by the dry-boat man.

About now you begin to feel the heat. You can't move much or easy in those purse boats. It's hot summer to begin with. The sun is going to hit you directly, and the rays that hit the water, they'll jump at you. The bunt pullers, they're all muscled men, cordy wrists and bulging forearms, knotty shoulders. So that there's sweat crying through their skins already even before the work begins.

Carib stood up, gave us the come-ahead sign with his hands and wrists. "Here they pla-a-a-y!" In a few seconds our purse boats got up by him till he motioned us to separate. "Let your net go!"

The captain, he steered his boat left. Me, holding the tiller of the mate boat, I went right.

When our boats separate the net slips overside, out of the purse boats. A ring setter in each boat, he helps the net out with a long iron shaft that guides the rings into the water. But the



action of the boats moving away from each other, that does most of the spreading of the net.

Eight thousand pounds of netting and gear — rings, lead, cork, lines — all that starts playing out. That's the time to watch your net. Plenty that can happen because the net gets big and hard to handle. If you not careful with that net it can split your hands open. You make a wrong move, you can smash your legs against these steel purse boats. You can get killed too, because men have got killed.

When we made half the circle the dry-boat man, he spotted a movement of the head of the fish tangenting off outside the radius of the net. He yelled to me to back up on my mate boat. We backwatered about 15 yards till Carib called out for us to make a tack, told us when to bring her around. Then we started again, curving toward the captain boat.

"You got it made," Carib told us.

**N**ow we went fast as our Lathrops would take us. Got to close that circle. Us two boats have to meet and come aside each other. While we finish wheeling the net around the fish Carib has to stay where he is, at the bunt side of the net. He helps hold up the cork line on that side, so the fish won't try to get over it.

Till our captain and mate boats met, the quarter-mile circle around the fish done.

The next job, it's Blu's. He's a ring setter, a little fellow, froggish, lots of spring in him. Got an eye fine as a needle. He's got to carry our end of the purse line over into the captain's boat — that's a hard fast jump — and hook his line to a scratch block in the captain boat. The scratch block, it's attached to a purse weight. But mostly we call it the tom weight. That's a hunk of lead about two feet high, weighs 580 pounds. It's got to be lowered by a hand winch, with the block and purse lines attached, so that down under, at the bottom, the force and weight of the tom helps close up that ring line.

A split-second trick. Got to be done fast because the fish can get under the ring line and get away before it's

closed up. The tom weight settled underneath, the way it should.

The ring and seine setters, they hauled in slack purse line till they couldn't pull no more and it was tight and hard. That meant the rings at the bottom had been pursed. Then the heavy work for the whole crew began. The seine and ring setters and the bunt pullers, they started to yanking up the whole line of rings. Had to pull up all those one-pound rings, in long tugs at the netting, till no more rings stayed in the water and all were in the bottom of the captain boat. Then half the rings and the meshing attached to it got switched over to my mate boat. That way we shared the weight of the gear between the boats and got them ready for the next set.

Nothing under the fish now but netting. No way they can get out. That's when the bunt pullers go to work, pull hand over hand, shoulder to shoulder. Lean over the gunwales with each pull and draw that netting back into the boat, throw it on the bottom. Then haul in another armful of netting. About 16 or 17 men be pulling at the same time. Purse-boat engineers, they help pull bunt too. Everybody pull bunt but the captain and the dry-boat man.

Everybody make the same forward and backward movements of their hands, arms and shoulders at the same time. And they don't hardly ever do it without singing in the fish. The songs we sing, they could be the same chanteys that been sung in this work for the last hundred years or more because it's about the same words used by the crews all up and down the coast.

You put your eight fingers and your two thumbs in the meshes, you sing:

*I want to see Lulu,  
Oh, oh, honey.*

All quiet again two-three seconds while the whole crew in both boats haul two or three feet more webbing out of the water.

*Oh, I want to see Lulu,  
See you when the sun go down.*

Like a choir on the sea when the

men sing the Lulu song. Drums, violins and pianos in their voices. Then the silent bar of their muscles when they pull.

Most of the net, it still sprawled big and baggy in the water, with the fish moving around in it, trying to get out. The more we pulled in the mesh, the more we formed them into the bunt, into the center. That's where the netting is tight and strong, the square linen bars small and close together.

You have salt water in your sweat now, taste it rolling into your mouth. Because you flip up a lot of water when you haul that linen. But the most of what you feel, it's there in your arms and shoulders, and in what you chant:

*Oh, oh, Lulu,  
I'll see you when the sun go down.*

Those fish fight for water and space like a man would fight for air and space. They need water to move in because air is in it; but pulling on the net, that forces the menhaden close to each other.

We're throwing 16-17 men's weight against hundreds of thousands of pounds of fish. Against thousands of pounds of linen webbing. And against the weight of the water itself.

Soon your fingers going to get like tight sticks. The mesh, it closes off circulation in your hands, and you steal an instant between pulls to beat your palms on your thighs to get the blood back, the crink out. Your fingers may cramp, stay stuck out in the twisted way of a crab's leg. You can get cramped in the arms and shoulders too. A hundred ways bunt pulling can draw on your body.

*I got a girl in Georgia,  
Help me to raise them.  
(Pull)*

*Oh, oh, Lulu,  
I'll see you when the sun go down.  
(Pull)*

We got most of the wing webbing into the boats, began rolling the fish into the center of the net, and that's when the menhaden started moving toward the sun.



Why the fish move toward the sun they don't nobody know, but every pogy crew knows they'll do it. Whatever time of day it is, wherever the sun is, those fish may all of a sudden move toward it. That throws the sun into the eyes of the bunt pullers.

Maybe the menhaden know it, maybe they don't, but they make it harder for us when they go to the sun.

That happens, it seems like more is against you than the fish and the net and the water. Like the whole sea, along with the sun, helping *them*, not us. It could have been a quarter-million fish in that net and *they* became the bunt pullers.

This shift of the fish around to the sun, it made the webbing about the captain boat get stiff and powerful. The net on our side, it got slack. The brunt of the work, it shifted to the men in the other boat. My bunt pullers, they jumped into the captain boat, formed one long line of men to hold the fish. They braced themselves against the steel ribbing of the captain boat and pulled the big bag toward them a yard at a time.

Captain Crowther, he sat on the bow, sweated like he been doing all the work, waved his hands and put spirit in us. "Raise'm! Raise'm!" But never once put his fingers in the mesh.

In menhadening, each man is a fisherman, a musician, a small-talk philosopher — and he got to be a team-worker if he going to catch fish. They got a special chantey that comes out of their farm work when the fish don't come in easy:

*I got a mule on the mountain,  
Call him Jerry.*

We pulled hard.

*Oh, I got a mule, mule on the mountain,  
Call him Jerry.*

Once more, God almighty strong,  
get them fish in the bunt.

*Go, bring him down, O Lord,  
Bring him down.*

Captain yelled, "Hold the fish, men!"

The fish in this big ball of linen

photo by Theodore M. Miller





mesh, they still moved inch by inch toward the sun. If we pulled them a yard our way, they pulled us, boat and all, a yard to them.

The set, it was in a serious way now. We could see the menhaden moiling at the top of the water. They whupped up a foam all over the inside of the circle, same kind of a foam as the tide will whup when it beats into shore. That foam made the men feel good, even with all that sun and sweat — a snowy, foamy sight, multiplying, like money. Which it was.

The net, it's filled with fighting fish. They're addled in there, pushing against each other, suffocating and dying against each other. They die quick, die when they don't have enough water to swim in, die when they're shoved against each other. The hard meshes kill thousands. Still, there's so many that the most of them are still alive. You keep hardening them, closing in on them. Forcing the water out of the linen bars, packing them in tighter.

The big bag of fish moved away from the sun. The mate-boat men, they switched back into my boat, and we drew the bunt from the two boats again.

Not so much singing now. The men don't have too much strength left for that; still they'll haul together.

Sometimes you can feel the big ball of fish raising and lowering, like they may be moving in one direction or another, trying to work as one fish. Which they do.

"Harden'm! Harden'm!" Captain Crowther yelled. "Fitch, get alongside."

The big boat slid up by our small boats. Fitch, he worked and maneuvered up close to us.

Till we got the purse boats up against the mother ship, next to the fish hole.

Me and Carib, we jumped on board, tied the cork line to the beackets. The small boats closed against the big ship like a triangle, with the fish in the middle of the bunt, trapped between our small boats and the side of the *Moona Waa Togue*.

But you can't take the fish aboard yet. The net is full of water. You got to get the water out of the net, just have fish in the net, get it hard enough

so you could about walk on top of the fish.

There's a critical minute in menhaden fishing, in every haul of it you make. It's when the fish are in that bunt hard enough to brail, just at that instant, they'll show their spirit. Show you the spirit in everything to stay alive or die trying. They'll tremble the net and the water all over, make no splash, but just tremble it all around. The bunt and the fish be a big ball bobbing up and down in that triangle. If you hold the net you can usually stop it then and there. But sometimes maybe the fish are stronger, or the men more tired, something else happens.

Like now.

Sounded as if the fish was a charge of dynamite.

They thundered.

A real explosion that nearly swamped both the small boats and shook the big boat.

The blast, it split that net like it was tissue paper. Blew out the bunt part, blew it to shreds, ripped the whole netting out of the purse boats and split it up so that the sea was a mess of tangled web, corks and lines. The mesh flew out of the boats in folds that you couldn't see unfold, in a balloon of split network.

The *Moona Waa Togue*, she rocked like a swell hit her.

A big shower of water, thousands of gallons, it went up 35 feet high, came down into the purse boats, threw most of the men overside.

The fishermen, some hung onto the purse boats. Most made for the big ship, grabbed at lines, beackets, the guardrail. A few untangled themselves from split-up webbing.

The menhaden swarmed over the broken net, went in rushes off from the big ship, under it, all around it.

When the thunder comes it will kill off a great many fish, tons of them. But most, those that live, they sound. They know safety lies down under.

In a few minutes, by the time the fishermen got back into the purse boats and started bailing out the water, you couldn't see many live pogy around. Just the white bellies of the dead ones up to the sun. All their rainbowish colors, the yellow and

the green and the red, it flies from their backs when they die, like it's their soul gone, and the most of what you get to see, it's nothing but their white bellies.

And that was our big set of the day.

### KILLING TIME

*Several days later, equipped with a new net, the crew of the Moona Waa Togue deck-loaded the ship, half a million menhaden aboard.*

**T**he harvest lay in the hold and on the deck, threshed, bound by the walls of the fish hole and the pen of the deck.

We hoisted the purse boats back in the davits — and started to port.

After breakfast, the captain took off alone for the lookout. Sometimes he wanted aloft by himself. That would be when we had a full load and it wouldn't do no good to spot the red line anyway. He'd say to Carib and me, "Handle the deck. My turn in the nest." That meant for us to stay below, let him be to himself 60 feet above deck, away from the crew. Look at him then, he seemed really alone. Just a man on a mast going south, and now and then taking a nip from his hip flask.

He shouldn't ought to have been drinking way up there, he could fall and land on the bridge — and have no more bridges to cross. But the bad week been bothering him, and the crew, he never wanted to be with them any more than he had to. "I think they mighty fine boys," he'd say to white folks. "The only one I can't take, it's the one born down here, he goes north and then come back south. He ain't the same. Comes back here like he owns it all. That's the fellow, we got him to kill."

The captain liked a bird's-eye view of everything. "This colored man is right where he wants to be," he'd tell you. "All he wants is to be treated right. I got to look out for him. If one of my men gets in jail, I just goes over to the chief of police and say, 'This here is my man, let me take him home.' I pay his fine, sign a slip of paper, get him out. Then I take the fine out on payday. That's all they is to it. This fellow is right where he



wants to be. Everything in this world got its place. Just that fellow that go north and come back, he bears killing."

Our captain thought that was the whole story. Lots of people think that's the whole story.

**D**own-coast slow, like a glutton loaded with food. Just two or three miles off the beach. With a load like ours, a ship like this, you not going to be too far from the hill if the engines and the rudder can keep you in close. We could see the blond line of the beach, see breakers spit at the hill like a man that hits over and over from revenge. A shark fin might seam the water close by. A breeze will sweep past and the sea will answer with a little roll, like the two go together, a song and its chorus.

Most of the crew stayed by the bow because the fish odor tended to slip off the stern, leave the air up at the front end a little cleaner. They leaned over the rail, tried to see the future of themselves in the deep glass of the ocean.

Woman talk just about came down to this: them that didn't have women, they did the most talking about it. Those that had women regular, the married men and some of the single, they didn't say so much, but thought a lot. The others talked about the mystery of women.

One said, "It say in the Bible, 'The Lord put man on the earth to be the master of all he see,' and that mean He put man here to master *women* too!" Some damn foolishment like that, though many men believe such as that, till someone else said, "Any time you damn fool enough to think you the master of women, you still got to grow up. Don't forget, 'The hand that rock the cradle rule the world.'" Back and forth like that, and get nowhere finally.

Politics, that's when it gets hot.

The men *always* talking politics. For a colored fisherman, politics is the race question, anything to do with a man's rights. You going to find every idea among them, conservative, radical, Bigger Thomas, nationalist, Uncle Tom, race man, "I'm an American too," left, right, dead center, sound views, senseless views, businessman's,

union man's, everybody's, anybody's. Just as much difference of opinion on a menhaden ship as you will find in the whole country; religious, not religious, democratic and not so democratic. *For the stone which the builders rejected is become the chief cornerstone.*

Mohr claimed he knew how to handle white folks. "You got to get them *coming* and *going*," he said.

Lawyer: "What you mean?"

Mohr: "Like this: If the white man come to you and he say, 'I got to hand it to the colored man, he has made more progress in a hundred years than any other people in the world,' you got to hit him over the head this way: 'That's a damn lie, mister, we still second-class citizens, ain't got this and ain't got that. So many lynchings and such.' Hit him hard. That way you'll get more."

Lawyer: "All right, now you got him *coming*, how you get him *going*?"

Mohr: "Like this: if the white man come to you and say, 'Colored people got it mighty hard, they are second-class citizens, they ain't got this and they ain't got that, and they getting lynched,' you got to fight that because it's a streak among people they don't want to be connected with what's

poor and what's been put down, so you say this: 'That's a *damn* lie, mister. We own such-and-such property, we in such-and-such unions, we equal in defense production, and the Supreme Court done so-and-so.' That way you got them going."

Lawyer: "Any chance we get *ourselves* mixed up by this *coming-and-going* tactic?"

Mohr: "Not a chance. Because the whole world's *coming* and *going* in the very same way." □

*In addition to Gulf Stream North, Earl Conrad has authored a biography of Harriet Tubman, a critical look at Jim Crow America, an autobiography with Haywood Patterson of a Scottsboro Boy, and numerous novels, stories and memoirs. Conrad, who now lives in Coronado, California, says that Gulf Stream North is his own favorite among his many works.*

*The novel was originally published by Doubleday in 1954. In 1980, Second Chance Press reissued the book as one of its series of great contemporary books that went prematurely out of print. For a copy of Gulf Stream North (\$16.95 cloth, \$8.95 paper) and the Press's catalog, write: Second Chance Press, RD 2, Noyac Road, Sag Harbor, NY 11963.*

photo by Theodore M. Miller



# WET & WONDERFUL

BY JULIE HOFMANN

There was a time when all swamps were dismal and every parking lot meant progress. Attitudes have changed, though, and people have begun to realize the real value of swamps, bogs, marshes and tidal flats — our nation's wetlands.

An estimated 40 percent of the continental United States' wetlands have already been surrendered to row crops, housing and marina developments, waste dumps, parking lots, power plants and other human enterprises. Those remaining that are not specifically protected continue to be ditched, drained and filled. Such losses are of special concern to Southern states with nearly 90 percent of the Lower 48's coastal wetlands, according to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates.

Louisiana's deltaic marshes, Florida's mangrove swamps and North Carolina's peat bogs are all periodically saturated with water and therefore come under the broad "wetlands" classification, along with salt marshes and meadows, pocosins, tidal flats, open freshwater expanses and fens. Biologically speaking, wetlands are among the most productive of natural systems — they teem with fish, wildlife, hardy vegetation and tiny organisms that flourish off the abundant plant life, muds and shallow, sun-warmed waters.

Today we know that wetlands perform biological functions essential to coastal ecologies as well as to the larger life-sustaining environment. In fact, wetlands are economic assets, and here are a few of the services they provide — for free.

*Filters:* The abundant plant life and decomposers in wetlands systems tend to absorb incoming water impurities. When water leaves the wetlands it is always cleaner than when it arrived. Within limits, this natural filtration system can take up various pollutants — such as waste water from sewage treatment plants and runoff from agricultural fields and

residential developments — and use them as nutrients. Scientists have concluded that an acre of estuarine marsh does about \$14,000 worth of work each year in purifying treated sewage.

*Flood buffers:* By sponging up excess water, wetlands act as natural breakwaters during storms and rainy seasons. Even in fierce hurricanes, coastal developments protected by extensive marshes suffer comparatively little flooding damage.

*Fresh water suppliers:* When dry weather comes, wetlands slowly release their reservoir of water, and this purifying, sponging, slow-release system recharges underground aquifers. Draining wetlands for large-scale agricultural and housing developments in Florida has contributed to groundwater shortages there. Such shortages affect more than wells; they are vital to plant life, and scientists believe they are closely linked to climatic conditions as well.

*Food source:* Wetlands are the base of a vast food chain, creating

organic material that feeds the plants and fish and other animals which feed on each other, some of which we eat. Georgia salt marshes produce 10 tons of organic material per acre per year, ecologist Eugene Odum found. Much of this nourishment washes out into nearby waters; over half the organic matter in a typical Gulf Coast estuary (where salt water freely mixes with fresh water flowing out of the marshes) is the result of wetlands productivity.

Although the economic and ecologic importance of wetlands is undeniable, few people find it profitable to own one in an undisturbed condition. Yet it is clear that the larger public cannot afford to lose these natural systems.

For further reading: *Our Nation's Wetlands*, a federal interagency task force report coordinated by the now-defunct Council on Environmental Quality, 1978. For sale for \$5.00 from: Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402. Stock No. 041-011-00045-9.



photo courtesy Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept.

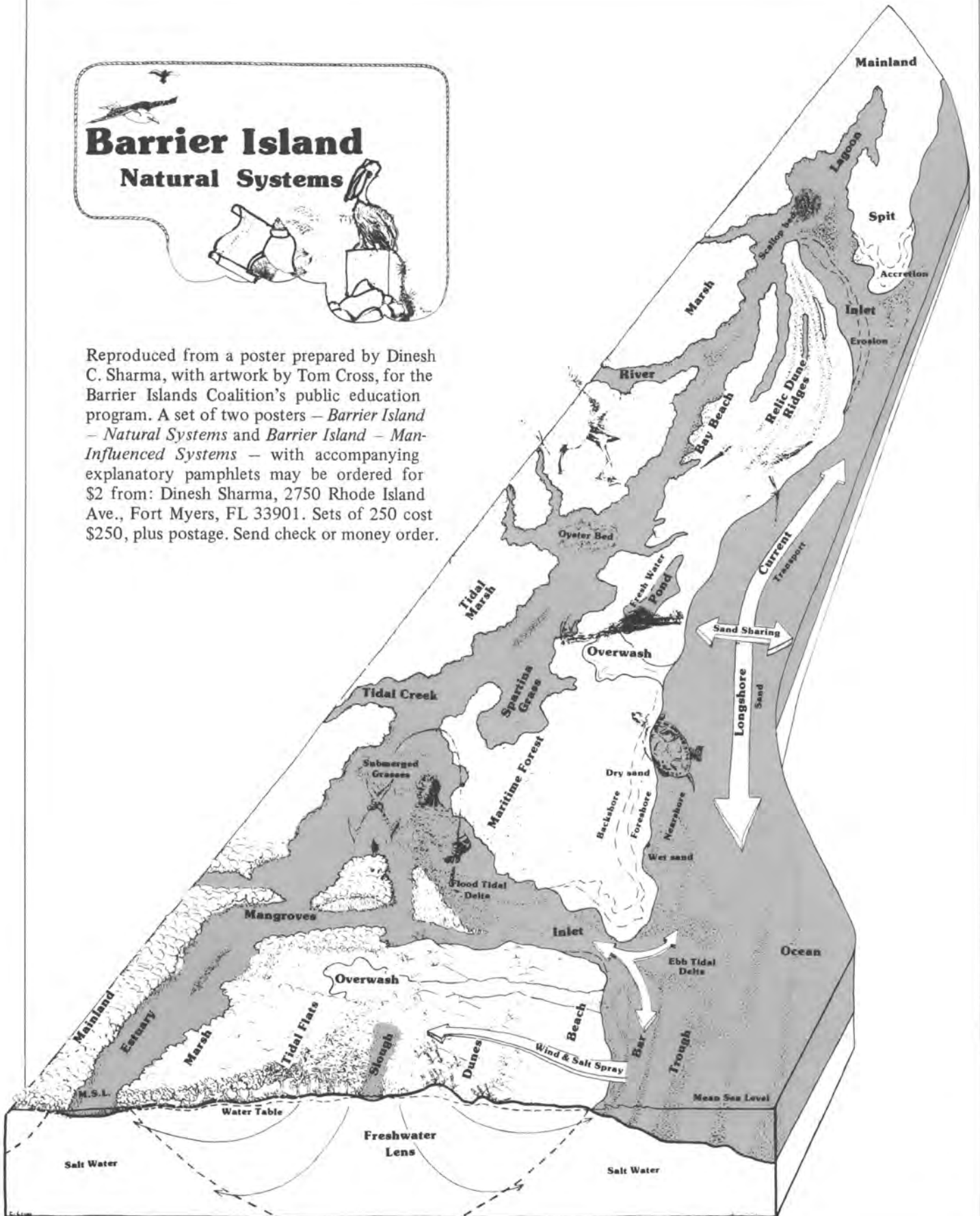


# Barrier Island

## Natural Systems



Reproduced from a poster prepared by Dinesh C. Sharma, with artwork by Tom Cross, for the Barrier Islands Coalition's public education program. A set of two posters – *Barrier Island – Natural Systems* and *Barrier Island – Man-Influenced Systems* – with accompanying explanatory pamphlets may be ordered for \$2 from: Dinesh Sharma, 2750 Rhode Island Ave., Fort Myers, FL 33901. Sets of 250 cost \$250, plus postage. Send check or money order.



# WHAT'S HAPPENED TO FLORIDA'S BEACHES?

*By Juanita Greene*

Perhaps no other state depends more on its beaches as an economic lifeline than Florida, the land of surf and sun.

The state is blessed with the longest coastline in the lower 48 states. Along the 1,300 miles of coast are 750 miles of beaches, a resource which has made many a developer's fortune and attracted untold millions of visitors and new residents. Its abundance of beaches should put Florida in good shape, considering that beaches are second only to climate as a tourist attraction.

But there's trouble along the Florida coast. The state has not properly protected its beaches. In developed areas such as Miami Beach, St. Petersburg Beach and Panama City Beach, the natural beaches are eroding away, their disappearance hastened by buildings planted in the sand.

The beaches are victims of their own popularity. For many years, as hotels, motels and condominium buildings went up along the beach, each new structure was placed closer to the water than the one before. Waves rolling in found concrete bulkheads instead of sand dunes in their path. Gradually, wave action ate away sand from the buildings' foundations.

When dunes are cleared away and buildings go up on the sand, the whole process of natural beach renourishment is disturbed. Just offshore, sand moves in a thin gritty stream that parallels the shore, in what is known as a littoral drift. Sand borne by this

current is continually thrown ashore by waves. At the same time, wave action carries sand from the beach back to the shoreline current, to be tossed ashore again by waves further down the beach.

This shifting supply of sand is diminished by development on the beaches. When storms or rough seas wash huge quantities of sand offshore, the dunes are no longer there to provide a new supply for beach rebuilding.\*

After decades of increasing oceanfront development, the cost of lost beaches became keenly apparent in the 1970s when people in the tourist industry and in beachfront communities began appealing to their elected leaders for expensive new artificial beaches. All 340 miles of Florida's developed beaches are eroding critically. In 1982 the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is scheduled to complete the world's largest beach renourishment project at Miami Beach, at a cost of about \$80 million. Of this the federal government is paying 55 percent and state and local governments 45 percent. Yet the beach is expected to wash away in the next hurricane. Army Corps engineer Pablo Aguilera calls the new beach a "sacrificial device."

\* Florida is more hurricane-prone than any other state. Since 1900 at least 45 hurricanes have assaulted the state's coastline. In 1926 a storm sent waves rolling completely over the barrier island that is Miami Beach.

"Better the beach wash away than the buildings wash away," he says.

To renourish all critically eroded beaches in Florida would cost from \$250 million to a billion dollars, according to Army Corps estimates. Most experts say renourishment merely buys time — at a cost of more than \$1 million a mile.

"People are starting to question whether these projects are worth the cost," says Jacob Varn, former director of the Florida Department of Environmental Regulation. "You can fight Mother Nature, but it is a very expensive battle. And who is paying for it? The taxpayers."

Agreeing with Varn to a great extent are 95 coastal geologists who published a position paper in 1981 on engineering efforts to save beaches. They said replacing sand or building seawalls, groins and jetties is prohibitively expensive and proves futile in the end. Instead, the scientists recommended moving threatened buildings back from the shoreline and creating setback lines and conservation easements to keep structures out of areas subject to erosion.\*

Meanwhile, as buildings rise like an endless picket fence along the waterfront, both residents and tourists are finding it increasingly difficult to get

\* "Saving the American Beach: A Position Paper by Concerned Coastal Geologists," March 27, 1981. Conveners: Dr. Orrin H. Pilkey, Jr., Duke University, and Dr. James D. Howard, Skidaway Institute of Oceanography, et al.

to the beaches. In all the Southern coastal states except Virginia, the wet-sand beach is considered part of the public domain. Lack of public accessways and public parking areas make it impossible for the public to get to their part of the beach in developed areas where the dry sand beach is privately owned.

"The public owns the beach between high and low tide, but the catch-22 is they can't get to it," says Baya Harrison, Jr., a former state attorney general on environmental affairs.

When taxpayers' money is spent to build new artificial beaches, the Army Corps is supposed to require access points every half mile. Even this rule is sometimes ignored. Along one stretch of Miami Beach where new condominium highrises run for more than a mile, there is no access to the new artificial beach. In some of the upper-income communities north of Miami Beach, few outsiders stroll the wet sand because there are no parking places within easy reach.

Where the public owns the dry sand area there is no access problem, of course. But as early as 1971, the Army Corps' National Shoreline Study found only 166 miles of public recreation areas along Florida's shores. By 1981, only 120 miles of Florida's beaches were publicly owned. An additional 55 miles are in federal military installations.

Obviously the public as well as the beaches have been losing in Florida.

The public's right to the beach between low-tide and high-tide marks has been long established in Florida. One landmark court ruling\* came in 1953 in a case brought by then Miami Beach Mayor Melvin Richard and others against a hotel that had encroached on the wet sand area. Miami Circuit Judge Charles A. Carroll ruled that Miami Beach's construction setback line was illegal because it allowed private buildings to intrude on the public domain.

The ruling was subsequently ignored and by 1968 the Parker Dorado, a new condominium building north of Miami Beach in neighboring Broward County, was able to reach 30 feet out into the surf with a bulkhead and

parking garage. By 1970, the protruding bulkhead triggered such dramatic erosion to the south of it that mansions in the town of Golden Beach began to fall into the sea.

That was too much even for Florida's pro-development legislature to take. In 1971 it passed a law requiring the cabinet to establish construction setback lines along all of Florida's beaches. Nothing was to be built seaward of the line. But by 1978 the setback rule had been riddled by more than 600 variances. The governors and the state department heads who form the cabinet, with the power to grant setback line exceptions, routinely gave up more of the beaches to development, granting variances for projects ranging from a recreational complex including an indoor swimming pool on one beach to a miniature golf course on another.

In 1978 the embattled setback line was changed to allow for more flexibility in deciding how far back from the waves construction would be allowed. The change was based on the fact that the 50-foot setback requirement meant vastly different things on geologically differing beaches.

On the books the change seemed an improvement to some: the state Department of Natural Resources would administer the law instead of

the governor and his cabinet. And DNR was given authority to grant permits for construction seaward of the line only if the project was deemed "safe" and followed certain building standards criteria. In reality, though, the change meant building on the beaches became "permissible," because DNR had been reluctant to deny permits. Denying a permit means facing the possibility of being hauled into court and accused of "taking" private property rights from righteous, law-abiding developers.

"This is absurd," says Dinesh Sharma, southeastern states representative for the protectionist Barrier Islands Coalition, about the permit system. "The basic legislation was to preserve and protect public beaches and to minimize losses from erosion. To allow buildings in front of the line violates both these intentions."

Until recently, the state never made any attempt to fine anyone for illegally building on the beach. It has never pressed criminal charges or imprisoned a violator of its beach-protection laws. The state has rarely forced violators to remove structures from the beach. No official tally is kept, but the best count by the attorney general's office is 10 times in the past 10 years.

The state has also refused to learn



photo courtesy of Miami Beach Visitor and Convention Authority

THE PRIVATE SANDS OF MIAMI BEACH, BEFORE AND AFTER THE ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS "RENOURISHED" THEM AT A PUBLIC COST OF \$80 MILLION.

\* State of Florida ex rel Harry Plissner vs. Harry Simberg. Circuit Court No. 122167-D.

from its mistakes. In 1975 when Hurricane Eloise hit the Panama City Beach area in the northwest Florida panhandle, a 10-foot wall of water smashed against and damaged or destroyed more than 100 buildings, all of them seaward of the construction setback line. Most of those on the landward side of the line were not damaged. The state could have required that all new and replacement construction go behind the line. But, in almost every case, the cabinet allowed rebuilding on the original site.

As one long-time battler for beach protection, Panama City's U.S. Representative Earl Hutto, comments, "It makes no sense to me for people to level the sand dunes which are the natural barrier against erosion, and to build these skyscrapers right next to the water, and then call on the taxpayers to pump them up some beach."

It is politically easier to fight erosion by creating new artificial beaches than to force buildings to back up. Reluctant officials of the Florida Department of Natural Resources raise legal questions when asked why they continue to allow buildings to go up on the beach. DNR director Elton Gissendanner claims the state would have to buy the beaches if it prohibited construction on them. Not everyone agrees with Gissendanner's position.

Barry Richard, who practiced environmental law in the state attorney general's office before going into private practice in Tallahassee, says the law as now written "establishes a legal presumption you cannot build seaward of the line. I don't know of any law sustaining what Gissendanner is saying."

Back in the early 1970s, when Robert Graham was one of the conservationists' champions in the state senate, Florida rode a brief wave of environmental protection fervor to the passage of some ambitious programs, including the Environmental Land and Water Management Act and the State Comprehensive Planning Act. But by 1978, when Graham became governor, critics say he turned his attention to powerful new allies in industry and agribusiness. In February, 1981, when *Sports Illustrated* published its widely quoted article, "There's Trouble in Paradise," which paraded the state's environmental ills before the nation, Governor Graham was caught off-

guard, some say even embarrassed. With his re-election campaign underway, he was also, perhaps, worried. Still an environmentalist at heart, Graham plunged back into that arena. By the fall of 1981, he was just putting the finishing touches on a program for buying up marshlands adjacent to rivers to protect water quality when he turned his attention to the state's troubled beaches.

"Floridians deserve to enjoy their beaches and we must move now before the coastline is obstructed by an impenetrable wall of construction," said the governor in a much-publicized announcement of his new "Save Our Coast" program in September, 1981.

Briefly, Graham's proposal has two thrusts: a \$200 million bond issue for purchase of as much of Florida's remaining undeveloped beaches as the money would cover (in a state where beachfront property runs about \$100,000 an acre or higher), and improved legislative and administrative oversight of development practices on the coast. Outside observers and some within the state legislature are hopeful, but fear political processes already at work could undermine the best aspects of the program.

Though only court approval of the bond issue is required, the state legislature was scurrying in the spring of 1982 to pass a bill which would require legislative approval of bond issues to buy conservation and recreation lands. Underlying hostility and competition between the legislature and the governor explains this move in part; the legislators have also criticized Graham's administration of the state's land acquisition office which, though reasonably wealthy from oil, gas and phosphate severance taxes, has not invested its trust in new public lands and is miserably understaffed.

If indeed the legislature obtains authority over the beach bond issue, predictions about its passage are difficult to make. Many of the senators and representatives would not mind having the state purchase beaches for the public in their districts. But taking valuable land out of private hands is anathema to many of the legislators and their constituents.

In the other half of his Save Our Coast proposal, the governor has urged key state agencies to direct state and federal funds for such things as roads, bridges and sewage plants only to coastal areas that can accommodate

growth. But deciding which areas cannot accommodate growth is a difficult and politically unpopular call to make.

Of the various reform bills introduced as part of the governor's package in the 1982 session, only a few even made it out of subcommittee. The legislature's attention was instead dominated by reapportionment — with 20 of the state's 40 senators serving on that one committee. The only Save Our Coast bill to make headway was one cutting red tape on the use of Army Corps of Engineers' dredged material (from harbors and inlets) to renourish eroding beaches.

Even better than anything Graham proposed was a bill drawn up by Tampa-area Representative George Sheldon, which Graham quickly embraced. It specifies numerous undeveloped islands and undeveloped parts of islands as state resources, to be protected with a stiff set of development criteria that have developers calling up their legislators and putting on the heat. Now languishing in a house subcommittee, the bill has slim chance of passage.

Generally, the legislative portion of the governor's Save Our Coast program holds little promise until a strong coastal construction setback line is enforced by both localities and the state. A lesson in the economic facts of life might help counter the pro-development sentiment in the legislature. Florida's beaches play a large part in luring the 35 million tourists who spend about \$17 billion a year in the state. Presently there are signs that tourism may be on the decline in Florida, having slipped one percent in 1981. And Miami Beach's oceanfront restoration was only one in what may be a series of expensive efforts to draw vacationers back again. For their own self-interest, Floridians and their lawmakers could do few better things than demand protection of their beaches. □

*For 26 years, Juanita Greene has reported on South Florida affairs for The Miami Herald. Three years ago she became the newspaper's official environment writer.*

# Stories from Edisto Island

as told by Sam Gadsden and Bubberson Brown  
to Nick Lindsay

## Sam Gadsden

I was born in 1882. One of my earliest memories is the earthquake of 1886. I was four years old when it came through and tore up Charleston and that whole section all around here.

It didn't shake down any houses on Edisto [Island] though. It just damaged some of the big ones a little. It came in the evening of the twentieth day of August and the people had all been out picking cotton all day. My father and my two brothers came home and it was *hot*. After a while my mother came home; she had been over there at Mr. Towney Mikell's plantation, California, picking his cotton. She got supper for us all and after we were done eating, she opened both of the doors of the house — it was a small house — and she put down quilts on the floor. We lay down there to try to get a nap and oh, it was *hot*!

Directly there came a rumbling, RRRRRRRR! People jumped out of their houses and started to holler, "Merceeee! Judgemennnnnt!" And they started to run back and forth to one another's houses.

I did it too. I was four years old; I went to the door and looked out; I enjoyed that kind of doings. The earth was going this way, that way, twisty, twisty, like something was underneath. Water was springing up out of the earth all about. I liked that kind of weather.



SAM AND RACHEL GADSDEN  
outside the Baptist Church, April, 1978

photos courtesy Nick Lindsay



The thing went on, it didn't stop, so the people ran up and started a meeting at the meeting house, and they all went crazy with whooping and hollering. That earth didn't settle down at all for two days. People would just get to work in the fields when the ground would start to twist and hump and they would run inside again. They were about to run off, but they didn't know where to run to.

I didn't have much sense. I didn't know and understand what I was looking at, so I took it for a rare pleasure.

The next insurrection we had here in this country was the storm of '93. I was a boy nearly 12 years old then. It was on a Sunday and the day was foggy. There was fog everywhere. I was hanging around the house while my father was getting ready to go to church. Allen AME Church it was, that same church on the corner where we go now.

My father gave my older brother the task to keep the crows out of the cornfield. They had been shucking and eating the corn as fast as they could go. I wasn't needed, so my father sent me to the next neighbor's; he had a boy my same age I went to school with. I went there and my parents went to church. A fog and a stillness were on the whole creation.

The neighbor's boy said, "Let's go over to Mikell's," that was a couple of miles west. And the trees were so *still!* We played there a while then we went to play with my cousin two miles east of us. Then they each went about their business and I was alone there at my cousin's house. Then the fog began to get heavier and heavier, and it began to fog-rain. I was in the house looking out when it started to windstorm, Ohhhh! Ooooooooh! Ooooooooh! And it started to rain steadily.

There I was, all by myself. I looked out and I thought how I was far away from home and nobody knew where I was because nobody had sent me there. I jumped out of that house and ran flat out across the hill in the place

they call Scott's. I got to the pond that is in the middle of that hill and all the pine trees that were around that pond were bending down to the ground. Their heads would touch ground, then they would jump back, touch down, jump back.

I was bound for the woods now. When I got to the woods, all the trees in the woods had their heads low, down to the ground. But the wind was behind me. I got through that place, I *fled* through that place. I wanted out. When I got out on the other side, the storm was there, the full storm, wind after wind. I went on until I got to the house of Old Man Peter Wright. He said, "Boy, you go on home."

But I said, "Let me stay here," so he opened the door and let me come into the house. They were standing or sitting about the parlor, but I wouldn't go in there. I stayed on the stairs they had there going upstairs, sat right there on one step.

I sat down and watched, and the storm was *real* then. I looked down, and there those steps I was sitting on were starting to come apart one from the other. When I saw that, I leaped out of that house into the storm. The wind was behind me and drove me home so quick I didn't even know when I went right past it. I had to cut back, and that one thing was like to have cost me all.

The old man had a corn house on the far side of the yard and the house was on the near side. I got into that corn house and I looked out and that was a *rain!* I looked across to see the house but the rain was so thick I couldn't see across the yard. I looked back down, and in that short time that I was looking across the yard, the water had risen waist deep around me. Water had come on that last flow of wind. I made ready to strike out for the house. A flow of wind came, then went on by, and the storm ceased for one roll. I leaped out there, and the

water was already almost up to my neck, salt water. I got to the house however I could, crawled up against it, "Knock, knock, knock."

My old man opened the door. "Where you come from?" and he shut it again as quick as he could, but the water was running through. I couldn't see anything; I was almost drowned. I went into the back of the house and pulled off my wet clothes, but then I couldn't get anybody to give me any room on the stairs. They were all on there. I went on up anyhow, climbed up on the underneath side of the stairs, like you climb the back side of a ladder when it's up against the house, hanging upside down like a squirrel. The back of the stairs wasn't closed in with boards. I got up to the top and lay right across the step there and fell fast asleep. I was out and done!

When I woke up the next morning and looked out, everything was under water. The storm had abated. All the chickens and turkeys were drowned, all the goods — drowned, dead things everywhere. I thought I must be dreaming. I rubbed my eyes to try and wake up and I looked out again.

Across the face of the island — the Great Atlantic Ocean! Water was across the whole creation. You couldn't see anything but ocean all about, then two miles over there, Mr. Mikell's place still standing, one or two smaller houses, but most of them were down under the water. The tide from the northeast met the tide from the southwest and the whole place was covered.

That water started to run off then. That was a sight to see too. I thought I would die of astonishment. I never saw water run away so fast. The whole place turned into a swift-running river of tide water.

Late that day the news came out. "Do you know, all the people on Joe Island drowned?" Joe Island, that's the northeast end of Edisto, the place they call Swallow's Bluff now. "They are all drowned, every soul. All the houses are gone."

Peter Wright, his boy, his wife and

# Edisto Island

Edisto is an eight-by-12-mile delta at the mouth of the Edisto River; nine-tenths of us who live on the island are black, eight-tenths of us are poverty and seven-tenths are confessing Christians. The poverty and Christianity are pretty democratically distributed among the various divisions of society — man/woman, age/youth, white/black, property owner/manual worker. A demographic profile of the island population would show a large proportion of children and very old people and seemingly too few of active years to have brought forth all these children. Travel across the island; you'll see house after house where people in their 60s or even 70s are changing diapers, getting children off on the school bus, hanging out a large wash. Shades of Abraham and Sarah! What is the magic of this place that extends the age of pleasure and the delight of child-making so far into the twilight of life?

Here's the simple secret of it. Most of the people of child-bearing age have gone north to get some of that Yankee money up there where the money is hot, but they have sent the children home for the grandparents to raise so both parents can work in the North and the children can still get a good raising in the South. There are

many advantages to this arrangement. The most important is the continuity of tradition which is ensured by a one-generation overlap. In addition to this, the children experience a tolerant relaxation and

valuable placability in the hand that wields the rod of discipline. The grandparents and great aunts and uncles can view the children's quirks and gifts in a large perspective and love them more generously, being less to blame, less on trial for the genetic contribution they personally have made than the parents are. Besides these two, there is a cogent financial advantage.

The older people gain their livelihood from three sources: gardening and small odd-jobbing, plus money from their children, plus a dole from the state welfare agencies. The state welfare agency pays more money the more children there are in the house. Each child is a financial asset in every case except when he happens to be living with his parents and they are working for a living. The official government stacks the cards against what it calls a normal household. This community has found a way to strengthen its family tradition and survival by means of the very agencies of government which have been most to blame in the shattering of the black family. They have arranged their affairs in such a way that those bonds of affection which are the most lively agencies of human discourse and activity are augmented by the additional impulse of nourishment and vital support.

— Nick Lindsay



map and illustrations from Scribner's Magazine, 1894

James Wright and his daughter — all drowned. A lot of people lived there, and the whole island was drowned off, every soul. In the years before the storm we used to go and pick oysters in the creek beside that settlement of people, and all were drowned. When the news reached us, I had to assimilate that.

Many people on little Edisto were drowned, and all of them on Whooping Island. Many communities were completely wiped out. It was the worst disaster that ever came to Edisto Island.

More people died after the storm than died in it. There was nothing to

eat, the whole island stank with dead cattle. We had no time to bury them. The government sent some relief here: Missy [Clara] Barton who was giving people some clothes and a few groceries. You could get maybe a peck of yellow corn meal every week, and two pound of bacon, but it wasn't enough to stem the hardship. The storm came in August and all the crops for that year were wiped out and the land was too salty and wasn't fit to plant the next spring, 1894. I don't see how the people that had no wages to help them out managed to live through that year.

The next two years sickness broke

out and killed almost all the old people. They were already starved, so they got sick easily. I had that sickness then too, and like to have gone. When God is ready for you, you go. He send me back. They called that sickness 'malarial gripe.' It was something like influenza.

Almost all the able-bodied men went away from here to try to get wages anywhere they could. Many men took work digging phosphate rock for fertilizer in the rock mine at Red Top.

After the storm passed, and then the pestilence passed, we started in on some good times. Everybody that had

come through made sure that they would make themselves a crop to live on. They had corn, peas, rice, hogs and fowls and tater plenty. They all started up again, they went into good times that year and have never fallen back into anything like the misery of 1893, 1894, 1895.

### ***Bubberson Brown***

I left from here in December of 1916. That year they had a kind of depression, they call it the Panic of '17. All the young men leave the island. Here in this neighborhood, all my friends are going. I going too. I was 18 years old. I tell the old man, "I will go down to work in Savannah. I know every corner of that place. Georgia is a good hiding place for me."

Old man say, "Go, maybe, but don't you run off."

It was night, dark outside, I say, "I ain't a run off, but I tell you I going and I will go."

Mama start in to cry. Papa, he start to cry. I gone through all that cry and I crying too. It was 12 o'clock at night when the boat leave and we gone, I and all them other boys, left out for Savannah.

I never had any trouble keeping myself in a job. I had money even though in them days is what you call a recession and ain't nobody got no money. Been a whole bunch of us down there in Savannah and only me one been working regular. That whole army of Edisto men in Savannah and out of work, and they want to get home. Along about March I was in a notion to come home too. I had money. I could pay my fare. Sure. But what about them boys? I figure out a way. Carry a few, anyway.

I had been working down at the boat yard, work on *The Cleveland* — a big ship been up on the ways to fix, caulk, paint. She is the one that run regular from Savannah up to Beaufort. They must take a different boat, take *The Brigantine*, and make that run

until *The Cleveland* is ready again. This one trip she would run all the way up to Charleston. That was for just that one trip and they need a crew in a hurry. Didn't have no deck hands. I tell them four Edisto boys, "I go as cook on that boat, and I get you on as deck hands," and in the meantime I tell the captain of *The Brigantine* that I could get him a crew that very evening. He agree to it just that way, them boys as deck hands and me as cook. I to prepare food and wash up the dish for both the crew and the

captain and mate. "I will pay you all after we tie up in Charleston," he said. But we ain't study about that pay. We have it fix up among ourselves ahead of time that we wouldn't even see Charleston that trip.

Gone to get aboard, three o'clock in the morning. Gone along the dock there — oh Lord, here he come, police! "Open that bag." I open, he search my suitcase, look for a gun. Ain't find none. Search and search but ain't find him. Search for whiskey too, but I ain't had none right then.



**BUBBERSON BROWN**





We get aboard and leave five o'clock that morning.

I didn't like that work very well. He had me to feed the deck hand first, feed them right there in the galley. Then there was a little elevator, a dumb waiter, that ran from right over the stove to the cabin overhead. I must pull up the food, plate, knife, fork and things on that elevator, then run up to the cabin, set their table and serve their meal. The captain say, "Any scraps, you throw them overboard." But I didn't do it. All that good food? The boys in the crew, they all had family back on Edisto who have plenty of use for that food. Because, you see, our plan which we agreed on ahead of time was to leave the boat just as soon as she tie up at Steamboat Wharf.

We stop at Beaufort, then we leave on from there, come on and tie up at Steamboat Landing here by 12 o'clock noon. He ain't have no freight to unload nor load and tide still rising, so captain say we can eat there and then go on to Charleston after lunch. Go on? *He* did, but not with any Edisto man. I cook for deck hands, then put the things on the elevator, pull on rope and send them up, feed captain and them. While captain eat, them boys, one by one gone up the road. Walk slow, get out of sight, run home. Each man had his suitcase packed — all *over* the deck in that galley — suitcase, suitcase, bundle, box. I don't think them boys could tote that suitcase up that road that fast. When I gone to serve the meal in the cabin, all those boys took off on the blind side of the cabin. They long gone. And just as soon as I finish wash them dish, I take off myself. Take my suitcase and gone up the road. I knew the time was close, but I didn't want to leave no dirty dishes.

I jump off the boat and get to the turn in the causeway there on Wharf Road and Whoooooo! Whoooooo! The captain can blow till his arm get sore, none of us showed up yet. There was a fella going there with a mule and a cart. I jump in and he carry me home. I gone and left my wages that

day. Them boys ain't got none either. We figure we had a fair bargain, since he didn't have to pay a penny for his crew that trip.

### Legend...

**T**he Flying Affiky Mans: this is an old and often-repeated story. The old people would tell it by the fire and we children would take it as a joke, as a tale for amusement. You hear it about men from Wadmaw, from Saint Helena — all about. The two men who had the reputation for flying on Edisto were Ceasar Knights and his brother, whose name I have forgotten.

Here is the story:

Ceasar Knights and his family that came to this country from Africa had several brothers and the master sent them into the field to work with their hoes. I am told they were good men to work with a hoe in the field. Ceasar went in the field with his brother but he didn't finish his task. Maussa sent to bring Ceasar and his brother to whip them. The overseer sent the driver to get them, but when the driver came close by, Ceasar threw his hoe up into the air, climbed up and sat cross-legged on the hoe, up high where the driver couldn't reach him. Neither him nor his brother got a whipping that day.

The next day Maussa sent them out in the field to work again, for they were good hoe hands and the crop was making. By quitting time, Ceasar hadn't done his task the second day. When the driver went to take hold of him to bring him and give an account of himself, Ceasar climbed up on his hoe and sat across-legged, grinning down on the driver from up in the air. Maussa got no account from Ceasar that second day either.

The third day Maussa went himself to see where Ceasar was working. He saw where Ceasar had a big fire and him and his brother and their wives

and children were all dancing and making a celebration around the fire, kick up their heels and all. While Maussa watched, the fire began to make a smoke, make a big smoke. Smoke, smoke, smoke, and when the smoke was gone, come to find out, Ceasar and his whole family had gone up in that smoke. Fly out across the ocean, gone home to Africa. No more see, no more hear: two brothers, their wives and children — the whole tribe.

— Sam Gadsden

### and Lore

**I**n those inlets you could catch fish by the load at certain times. And if you went out on the beach there you could fish for sea bass in the ocean.

For sea bass you use a long line, swing it round your head two or three times, then let go, and it will sail out way beyond the breakers and you can catch those bass out there. Maybe two or three in a day — that's a car load. Big old bass! Red channel bass maybe five feet long.

I have caught him many times out there on Edingsville Beach. By now that's about the only place left where you can catch him, because a bass is a scary fish and the people have scared him away from the beaches further down. You can't catch him where the real estate people have developed the place, you must come further down this way where the people aren't mixing up the water.

I'll catch me one about three feet long, fry that fish up, peel him, put him in a cool place and you have a month of fish there. After I get one meal off him on the table with rice or grits or something like that, I don't want him on the table anymore, but every time I come in I get a piece and eat it dry, just so. Get a little bread maybe. Presently I will eat that whole fish. That's the way I like to eat fish.

— Sam Gadsden

## BUBBERSON BROWN AND NICK LINDSAY IN BUBBERSON'S LIVING ROOM

They're talking about the *Cap'n John*, a beautiful shrimp boat — "it float just like a duck." At one time or another, both men worked on her, planking or caulking or in the pilot house.



### *The Storytellers*

**T**hese stories are excerpted from two oral histories of Edisto Island, South Carolina, transcribed by Nick Lindsay. *The Life and Times of Bubberson Brown* (1977) and *Sam Gadsden Tells the Story* (1975) were published by Pinchpenny Press, Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana, and may be ordered from the press for \$4 each (40 percent bookstore discount for 12 or more), or directly from Nick Lindsay, Edisto Boat Works, Edisto Island, South Carolina.

William "Bubberson" Brown was born in Freedman's Village on Edisto and lived there most of his life, with his wife. His grandmother came from Africa on a slave ship, was sold at Charleston's slave market and lived at Edisto's Seaside Plantation. Bubberson died in 1978, at age 81, and is buried beside the island's Bethel Church, which he built.

In 1977, as his life story drew to a close, Bubberson told Nick Lindsay, "I could work in New York. . . . I have

been up there and worked as a carpenter three times since 1925, but by now it's too rough. You need a body-guard just to walk the streets." When his cousin tried to persuade him to live in the city with her, he told her, "No. I have just me and my wife, let us spend these, our own reposal days, at home and forget about New York. That city don't suit me! Every time I go up there I got to send for some grandchildren to come get me. When I leave from there the last time I tell them, 'Fare thee well, I ain't come back no more, for work nor play.'

"This is better, home here. Me and my wife been together all these years now, 60 years. Long water run out me eye how thankful the Lord been to me! I sleep so good here, the world turn over. . . . Sleep so good, wake up at two o'clock this afternoon, I figure I done sleep around the clock, couldn't make it out no way, got to call my wife in here, 'Hey, old woman! Come here, get me some good sense into my head!' She must tell me what day it is. Sleep so good the world turn upside down."

Sam Gadsden was born on Edisto

Island in 1882 and died there in 1981. He is buried in a plantation graveyard where all his people lie.

"In 1973, I went to see him before Christmas," Nick Lindsay says. "No, he was busy. I must come back some other time. He had built himself a ladder and was up on the roof repairing his chimney. He was 91 years old then."

Lindsay was teaching a summer poetry writing course at Goshen College, Indiana, when Sam Gadsden died. He recalls, "Perhaps I didn't take his dying as seriously as I should, for I had already bid him farewell on his dying bed in July of 1976. He could only talk in a whisper and was twiddling the covers between his fingers the way a person will on his death bed. But what? We went to elect Carter at the polls in the fall and there were Sam and Rachel! He got up from that dying bed to make Carter President — couldn't die yet."

Nick Lindsay, son of the famed poet Vachel Lindsay, is a carpenter, boat builder and a poet himself. He has lived on Edisto Island since 1955 with his wife DuBose. They have 10 children, three still at home, and five grandchildren.

# Sea Island Plantations Revisited

*By Mark Pinsky*

HILTON HEAD ISLAND, SC — Sandalwood Terrace, the newest residential community in this sun-drenched luxury resort island, is located just across the tennis courts from The Oaks condominiums and up the road from the famous Hilton Head Plantation. An 80-unit development built in an attractive Spanish motif and carefully landscaped, Sandalwood Terrace is unique, even for an area renowned for innovation in architecture and lifestyle: it is Hilton Head Island's first public housing project.

"There was no strong outcry against it," says Ed Boyd, executive director of the Beaufort County hous-

ing authority. "That's what has surprised me, that so few people have voiced their concern."

The project's reception was not entirely warm, however. The Oaks declined to share its access road with Sandalwood Terrace, requiring construction of an otherwise superfluous winding drive that enters U.S. 278 almost directly across from the entrance to Hilton Head Plantation. And while construction of Sandalwood Terrace was going on, the letters "KKK" were painted on a wall of the nearby Spanish Oaks villas.

This unincorporated island — 12 miles long, five miles wide and shaped like a jogging shoe — is dominated by a chain of company towns, each called a "plantation." Sea Pines Plantation was the first, and now there are eight privileged preserves, occupying from 60 to 65 percent of the land, with names like Port Royal, Palmetto Dunes, Spanish Wells and Moss Creek. Telephone and power lines are buried underground, so as not



*photo by Sarah M. Brown*

SANDALWOOD TERRACE, HILTON  
HEAD'S PUBLIC HOUSING PROJECT

to interfere with the canopy of live oaks, hung with Spanish moss, that cover many of the roads, lanes and paved bike and jogging paths.

In addition to the plantations, there are numerous clubs, inns, villas and condominium establishments that cater to short-term visitors. Some developments come complete with private security forces and highway access gates. The plantations are especially opulent, beautiful and at the same time a bit surreal, their artificiality creating an ambiance somewhere between Fantasy Island and a Disneyland for wealthy Wasps.

Even as Sandalwood Terrace was being completed at a cost of \$3,162,772 in money from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, plans were announced for a \$1 million renovation of the Harbor Town Golf Links Clubhouse and, several miles to the north, the Kuwaiti-owned development company on Kiawah Island was selling ocean-front villas for \$200,000 each.

According to the Beaufort County Chamber of Commerce, about 700,000 tourists visit Hilton Head Island each year, spending from \$125 to \$200 per day, for a total of \$170 million per year, based on an average stay of seven to 10 days. When not eating and drinking at one of the 100 restaurants, residents of the plantations and visitors to the hotels located between them spend most of their time playing golf (there are a dozen courses on the island) or tennis, fishing or just lying in the sun. Sometimes they shop at chic boutiques for

designer sportswear, while company jets idle at the private airport.

Most visitors to this island would never imagine — and perhaps not want to know — that just two decades ago nearly all the residents and the majority of landowners on Hilton Head Island were black. Today, only 1,800 of the 12,500 permanent residents are black, and they own less than one-fourth of the island's land. The population turns even whiter in the peak periods — December, early spring and mid-summer — as the number of visitors swells to 40,000.

According to Emory Campbell, director of Penn Community Services, a private nonprofit education and community development organization that has been monitoring black land loss in the Sea Islands area, about 1,000 acres of black-owned land have gone over to white development in the last 15 years, "with the real crunch yet to come."

Public housing projects like Sandalwood Terrace, Campbell says, "provide a very negative alternative. They offer cheap, convenient and attractive housing, especially for young blacks, which makes it easier for them to sell their land, rather than develop it." The lure of quick money, he says, "enslaves a young person so they forget their community, their land, the essentials of life. They forget that a job is only a means to an end." (See interview with Campbell on page 37.)

The comparison between the old and new plantations on Hilton Head is also apt, Campbell says, because Sandalwood Terrace "provides quar-

ters for domestic servants" close by the condominiums and plantations.

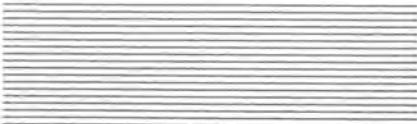
Charles Fraser, Jr., developer of the Sea Pines and Hilton Head Plantations and the person given most credit (or blame) for opening the island to development, says, "I think the people who planned Sandalwood Terrace should be applauded. Everyone on Hilton Head is in favor of housing for people of all incomes who work here."

Nearly all the residents of the racially mixed project work on the island, but the predominance of low-paying jobs means that even the average monthly payment of \$113 for rent and utilities takes a sizable slice of their budgets.

"I'm not high on that housing project," says Perry White, chair of the Hilton Head NAACP and a fifth-generation resident of the island. "It has the potential of creating an unprecedented 'household class' of black people on this island. It's a step backwards toward greater dependency.

"Frankly," White continues, "I'm distressed over how rapidly the lifestyle of a people has been changed in just the short span of my lifetime. From an economic standpoint, the development has been good for some black residents. But for others, it has had a relatively negative impact. And there are so many gates now." □

*Mark Pinsky is a freelance writer based in Durham, North Carolina.*



A NEW BRIDGE TO HILTON HEAD GOES UP BESIDE THE OLD ONE.



photo by Jennifer Miller

# No Place in the Sun for the Hired Help

*By June M. Thomas*

Thirty-five years ago, the residents of Hilton Head Island worked on farms or fished from boats; they grew beans, peas and cotton, and in the winter women generally made quilts and clothes, while the men left to find seasonal work on the mainland. Concentrated largely on the northern end of the island, black families formed a modest self-sufficient community of 1,000 people. A higher portion of them owned their land than did families on several neighboring islands, but like blacks throughout the Sea Islands, they had little cash income.

In the most literal sense, the enslaved forebears of today's Sea Islanders built the rice-indigo-cotton plantation system and buttressed the national economic, political and cultural clout of the area's white minority. In 1861, shortly after the first shot was fired on Fort Sumter, Union troops occupied Beaufort, South Carolina, and took control of the strategically important port towns and islands. Liberated Sea Island blacks began cultivating the land for themselves, and under various programs sponsored by federal and private agencies, they subdivided the plantations and purchased or assumed ownership of the land.

On January 16, 1865, General

William T. Sherman officially awarded possession of "the islands from Charleston, south, the abandoned rice fields along the rivers for 30 miles back from the sea, and the country bordering the St. John's River, Florida," to the former slaves of the area. Soon thereafter, however, President Andrew Johnson voided Sherman's order and returned thousands of acres to the former plantation owners.

Only about 1,000 black families could establish valid titles to land at the time, and despite white hostility, they passed the land down to the next generation. In subsequent years, other blacks managed to buy land, especially from whites who left after finding it difficult to revive an agrarian economy. Many blacks moved off the islands, too, but the continued decline of cotton prices and a series of devastating hurricanes in the 1890s and early 1900s convinced virtually all the whites to abandon the Sea Islands.

Subsistence farming and fishing became the norm, and land prices remained depressed from the early 1900s to the mid-1950s. The Gullah dialect and culture that evolved over three centuries, along with the absence of bridges to the mainland, fostered the independence and relative isolation of Sea Island black communities,

like the one on Hilton Head Island.

In 1950, Charles Fraser, Sr., and two partners bought large sections of the southern end of Hilton Head Island, mostly from private owners on the mainland. They timbered some of the land, and for a while provided a few jobs for blacks. Some Hilton Head Islanders contend the partners used the trust established with local workers to buy black-owned parcels at unbelievably low prices.

Regardless of the truth of that charge, relations dramatically changed after Charles Fraser, Jr., convinced his father to let him undertake development of a lavish 5,200-acre resort, Sea Pines Plantation. Land sale records at the Beaufort County Courthouse indicate that the erection of the first bridge to the island in 1956 and the opening in the next several years of three resort "plantations" — Sea Pines, Hilton Head and Honey Horn — generated a rash of land speculation, as other developers rushed in to profit on spin-off projects. Fraser's award-winning projects included dead covenants rigidly controlling growth on the southern tip of the island, but other developers built more mediocre housing tracts and led a run on land parcels.

Blacks, who still owned much of the land, were often not compensated properly because they did not know the property's true market worth, or because it was taken from them through trickery, or because problems with unclear title to the land allowed speculators to buy it at a fraction of its value. As on other Sea Islands and parts of the rural South, land owned by blacks is often inherited by many heirs; if a land title is not properly transferred from parents or grandparents, largely because of failure to leave a will, then it legally belongs to all heirs of the original owner, perhaps as many as 30 or 40 cousins, even though only one or two of the heirs live on the property. To buy a parcel of heirs' property, a developer may force a "partition sale" by tracking down one of the heirs (typically in a Northern city), buying his or her share, and then asking a judge to order the whole parcel sold on the grounds that one owner (the developer) claims the property was not equitably divided among heirs, due to variations in quality and location.

To help blacks clear up titles to their land and secure their ownership

rights, Charles Fraser, Jr.'s Sea Pines Plantation Company promised to start an heirs' property program several years ago. The program was originally funded at \$80,000, but even that much may not have been enough for the mammoth legal and detective work required to track down the heirs. Sea Pines was the only company to offer help, and local blacks gave it credit for at least making a minimal effort. But after the money was supposedly granted by the company, and before it was spent in any substantial amount, landowners were told the account was depleted. The local head of the NAACP called the program "a scheme to get black property in the disguise of help," saying the company only wanted blacks to gain clear title so that whites could buy the property. Blacks now own less than one-fourth of the land on the island.

Land loss is not the only reason blacks distrust the new plantations. Dirt roads in their communities have been truncated or absorbed by developers, yet some public access roads are now blocked by guardhouses. Centralized water and sewage systems serve only the areas with resort developments, but the huge consumption of water for the plantations' golf greens and other needs is jeopardizing everyone's private wells (see article on page 40). After carefully examining other new services on the island — schools, library, firehouse, roads, airfield, stores and local hospitals — it is apparent that each benefits blacks only as a by-product of the intended benefit they bring to whites. When that by-product does not naturally flow to blacks, they lose out.

The promised job opportunities from resort development have also not materialized. In fact, nearly half the 10,000 jobs that exist are held by residents of other islands or the mainland. As of 1976, all the domestics connected with the Hilton Head Company came from Ridgeland, a small town about 20 miles away. At the large Holiday Inn on Hilton Head, 60 percent of all employees and 80 percent of the housekeepers commuted to the island each day from Beaufort, Savannah, Hardeeville, Bluffton, Parris Island and Ridgeland.

The positions held by blacks are almost all in the uniform services, such as maids, maintenance workers, kitchen personnel and waitresses.

Many of the jobs are temporary or part-time; all of them pay little more than minimum wage. There are no unions on the island. Interviews with hotel managers reveal general satisfaction with black workers but dismay over the resentment many display toward white visitors. They complain about rude waitresses; a former Sea Pines manager who became vice president for a new resort development on nearby Kiawah Island spoke of his attempts to prevent what he called "the Hilton Head phenomenon," where a courteous staff gradually turns into a surly one.

One reason for the resentment, say workers, is that blacks are restricted to menial, dead-end jobs, with only a very few "showpieces" — usually men — in high positions. When a visitor enters one of the many hotel lobbies, he or she will likely find that the front desk personnel are all white. A visit to the hotel restaurant reveals a host of black waitresses and busboys. The kitchen food preparers and dishwashers are also black, with the exception of head chefs and wine stewards. By noon the army of black household personnel (maids) is in the midst of its daily rounds.

While promotions and other long-term opportunities are slim, the high number of available jobs continues to woo black youngsters away from school or homework because it is so easy to earn money waiting tables or caddying on the golf course — work is available until midnight or one a.m.

Eventually many young people drop out of school, ensuring their entrapment in a low-wage, low-skill job market.

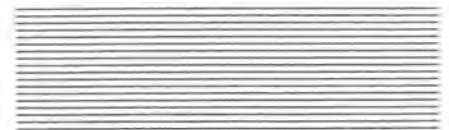
After reviewing the employment patterns on Hilton Head, Paul Good observed in *American Serfs*: "It could be argued — and is — that white development brought economic betterment to black chambermaids and to a generation of career caddies. However, a chambermaid-caddy economy never made anyone except motel owners solvent."

And the chances of a local black becoming a motel owner are remote, though not impossible. A few years ago, Beaufort County proposed the zoning of several predominantly black-owned areas of the island as agricultural or industrial, in an apparent attempt to limit their commercial development. Islanders successfully blocked the move, but more recent efforts to establish a land-use plan and island government (white residents now outnumber blacks by five to one) pose serious hurdles for a black entrepreneur interested in maximizing the potential of black-owned land.

Several black-owned businesses — grocery stores, service stations, bottle shops, a bus line, a landscaping and tree-care firm, and a few other service operations — are struggling to stay afloat. In general, none has reaped much profit from the new resort and residential developments, for the simple reason that they are not patronized by white visitors. The businesses are



photo by Sarah M. Brown



CHARLES FRASER, JR., DEVELOPER OF SEA PINES PLANTATION

not located on the wealthy southern oasis of white islanders, and white visitors and residents regularly speed past black-owned stores to shop at tourist-attracting facilities. There are notable exceptions. A black-owned, modern Gulf station and a small grocery store are bustling with activity. A shrimping cooperative has been a success, in large part because the motel industry and other islanders provide a ready market. The cooperative, organized by Thomas Barnwell, provides a number of jobs for local blacks, but on an uneven basis.

Research shows that the limited business opportunity for blacks in resort areas is not unique to Hilton Head Island. The situation is perhaps worse at nearby Kiawah Island, where contractors are building a magnificent complex of six resort villages for the Arab investors from Kuwait who own the entire island. While small contracts have been made with local businesses, such as a tree nursery and firms dealing with trash pickup, wells and locks, on the whole blacks do not own the types of businesses that a resort developer needs or wants. Even in the area of arts and crafts, a top Kiawah executive contends, the need for "high quality" goods to satisfy upper-income tastes limits the use of local producers. In the end, Kiawah and other resorts aim to be self-contained societies, providing within their own borders sufficient restaurants, craft stores and gas stations for their visitors. This closed economy and enclave mentality ultimately work to restrict all contact with local blacks to those whose service uniforms render them invisible or mere extensions of the resort's placid environment. □

*June Manning Thomas grew up in Orangeburg, South Carolina, and conducted extensive field research in the mid-1970s for her dissertation on Sea Island blacks, tourism and land development. She now teaches in the department of urban studies at Cleveland State University.*

*For further reading and resources on the history of the Sea Islands and the loss of black-owned lands to resort development, see Peter H. Wood's Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion (A.A. Knopf, 1974) and contact the Emergency Land Fund, 836 Beecher St. NW, Atlanta, GA 30310.*

# "We Are an Endangered Species."

*An interview with  
Emory Campbell*

*By Vernie Singleton*

The historical isolation of the Sea Islands, until 25 years ago when we were connected to the mainland by causeways and bridges, brought about a unique lifestyle. You learned how to use what was there without any kind of artificial or manufactured mechanism to sustain life. You had to hew out your mast for your sailboat from a tree; and you protected those long straight trees. You had to use that river, go in the river and do your fishing. You had to use the ground, so you were careful not to destroy the ground. You made sure that you planted peas one year and did something else with the ground one year so that you could have what they call "strength" in the soil.

During the winter months, you had to hunt and for some reason you would never hunt during the summer. It wasn't the law said not to hunt. For most Hilton Head people, it was because they knew the animals were pregnant — that was distasteful, to shoot and eat a pregnant animal. But at the same time, they unconsciously protected the whole species of animal.

Resort development has destroyed the habitat of the deer. I have seen them swimming across to Daufuskie Island, getting out of the way. They have found rattlesnakes three miles

offshore, swimming away from this island. We will eventually destroy all of our watershed, places that would hold rainfall. Water that the river is going to take is not going to be filtered because you're not going to have the ground for it to saturate through, so you're gonna find a whole lot more pollution in your streams. The very things people came here for — like fresh oysters, shrimp and fish — are being destroyed because they're destroying most of their spawning places.

The other impact on the environment is on the habitat of our people — the space on this island gonna be so precious and so crowded. People are stressful just driving from home to work. People are working more, too long hours, getting less pay but at the same time trying to increase a kind of standard of living to keep up with what's around them. The island has a kind of affluence atmosphere, so we got two people and their children working to try to catch up. I see that this stress on the family has already driven a lot of children to work rather than to be a child. They are becoming an adult member.

Our parents have always worked hard to eke out a living on this island, but we never had the stress we have in today's island economy. It used to be that the family went into the





here but we have to establish them ourselves, for ourselves, our community and children to come. I don't see any reason why black people in this country or anywhere shouldn't be in a position themselves to establish worksites for their own people. We need houses built. We need water lines in our communities. We need sewers. There is no reason why the person graduating this year shouldn't be preparing for somebody that's going to graduate, five, 10 years later to be employed. I don't think we can lie around much longer saying, "The Man won't give me a job."

We have to open up our own businesses — and this is the place for it. We get millions of tourists here every year. If we can get motivated to go to school and learn the kind of management skills and business skills that we could put into a business — this is the place. We got our land and everything to do it. And it can be done. It takes, first, the family coalition; then if you need to reach outside the family and form coalitions, you do that.

The world works around what groups of people can produce and how groups of people are recognized. People are recognized in the world similar to the way countries are recognized. If you're a threat militarily, you're recognized, and if you've

got something to offer you're recognized. Being a group of people that does the pot-washing ain't gonna get it. That's where the teen-age boy is every night now. He's washing pots and therefore he's not getting a good education. After high school, he's not going to be in a position to do anything.

So many blacks here are not motivated to go beyond the tenth, eleventh grade because they see the immediacy of the dollar, the automobile or whatever the "good life" offers these days. The few that have gone to college, they're motivated to leave rather than stay. They can't tolerate the situation: we just don't have the kinds of jobs here that would dignify staying; they become overwhelmed by the subservient roles that most blacks are put in here.

We have to look to alternative education for our children to keep them from dropping out. And we have to educate our grownups about how the world works, and let them know that education of the young is important once again. Let them know that it's important for them not to send their children to work, but to keep sending them to school to get that math. Let them know that it's important for *them* to know what they're going to do with land 10 years from now, so that if a Land Use Plan

or Zoning Ordinance or Planning Commission comes up with something, they can make it known that we want to plan jobs, transportation, education and how those things are going to impact on the island's future.

If there's one important aspect of what we've got to do — and do well — that is concentrating on our kids. The education process here on Hilton Head just showed its negativism the other day towards the black community. We thought that it's important for a black assistant principal to be at Hilton Head Elementary School. Some people say, "Why is that important? What's the difference between a black and a white? What is it, just to have a black face there."

No, that's not it. It's to have a black face there that is in tune with the culture of the black child of this island. That child's heritage, home environment, is different from a child who came here from Chicago, New York or Ohio. And that's where a lot of our white kids are coming from; so you put them in a classroom and say you're integrated and you got a classroom situation at Hilton Head Elementary School that's oriented to those kids who are moving in. We think the school has to ensure that there is somebody there who is looking at the process, seeing who is falling out of it and saying, as a link to the black community, what can we do after school or what can we do in this home so that this kid can get an education. Otherwise, they're going to get much less than people like myself got 30 years ago in a segregated situation. □

*Emory Campbell of Hilton Head, South Carolina, is director of Penn Community Services, Inc., a 120-year-old multi-purpose private organization located in Frogmore on the neighboring St. Helena Island. Penn Center, as it is commonly called, operates a conference center, tutorial program, land-ownership assistance project and other educational and community development programs affecting the Sea Islands. Vernie Singleton, who conducted this interview with Campbell, also grew up on Hilton Head and is currently a student at Hampshire College in Massachusetts.*



got a right

...and 'careers' as cashiers and burger flippers-  
Can't speak for the others, yet,  
but

I got a right  
to hate  
white hands  
collecting rent  
as oak trees vanish,  
four-lane highways  
tearing away  
at corn fields planted with our sweat.  
They dug up  
the resting ground  
of slaves  
who tilled the cotton and indigo;  
then put up a condominium  
(the new 'big house')  
where we grapple  
with their soiled floors  
and  
dirty underwear.

— Vernie Singleton

# THE CRISIS BELOW

BY BETSY NEAL, O. KAY JACKSON AND SHANNON LOWRY

*"We're receptive to any industry. . . . One attraction we have to heavy process industries which use large volumes of water is the Savannah River system, and then, of course, we have the aquifer."*

*— Sanford Ulmer, executive director Savannah Port Authority*

Below the gray cobblestone streets of Savannah, the arching bridges of Brunswick and the verdant golf courses of Hilton Head Island lies one of the world's richest water supplies — the Principal Artesian Aquifer. Just as coal brought mines and miners to West Virginia, so this bountiful supply of fresh, clean, cool water has lured the pulp mills and chemical manufacturing plants that dot the map between Beaufort, South Carolina, and St. Marys near the Florida line.

"What you have down there is liquid gold," says Woodrow Sapp, a Brunswick well driller.

Containing trillions upon trillions of gallons of water, the aquifer lies beneath south Georgia, all of Florida and parts of South Carolina and Alabama. It varies in depth from 10 feet at places in Low Country South Carolina, to 150 feet at Savannah, to 600 feet and more in the areas of Darien and Brunswick, Georgia.

Most of the water beneath the Georgia coast comes not from local rainfall, as is commonly believed, but from rain in the sand hills region near Macon. Ground water is held and carried across layers of limestone, which act as a massive petrified sponge. Moving sometimes less than a foot a year, the water that finally reaches the aquifer basin below Savannah and Brunswick may be centuries old.

Now this valuable water resource is endangered and most experts believe if action is not taken soon it may be lost to the coast forever.

• Heavy pumping by the city of Savannah, Union Camp, American Cyanamid and other industries has created a 50-mile-wide cone of depres-

sion beneath the city. A cone of depression is an area inside an aquifer in which water levels are lowered due to pumping; the phenomenon resembles a giant whirlpool, drawing salt water slowly toward Savannah's underground water supply from the South Carolina coast, much as water is drawn toward an open bathtub drain. Geologists say Savannah could pump up to 45 million gallons of water a day from the Principal Artesian Aquifer without triggering saltwater encroachment, but that is less than one-third the 146 million gallons now consumed by industrial and residential use.

• Brunswick's Big Three — Brunswick Pulp and Paper, Hercules and Linden Chemicals (formerly Allied Chemical Company) — use 90 percent of the 111 million gallons of groundwater pumped in that city each day, an amount that exceeds the total water consumed daily in metropolitan Atlanta! Saltwater intrusion has forced Brunswick officials to shut five wells which served some of the city's 20,000 people. Other wells were drilled, but city officials fear for the future of Brunswick's water supply as the zone of salt water spreads like a giant ink stain beneath the downtown area.

Contaminated water has forced both Brunswick Pulp and Hercules to close some of their wells because salinity corrodes machinery used in their operations. But the state's industrial recruitment program is still channeling heavy water users to the coast, including such chemical firms as the SCM Company of Jacksonville, Florida, which recently purchased a site on Colonels Island near Brunswick.

"It's a question of prostitution," says Coastal Audubon Society member Herman Krauss. "They're willing to accept any damned thing, any kind of industry. The SCM Company will represent a \$35 million investment and will employ only 35 people. The only people to benefit from that plant are the bankers."

SCM has already received permits

to take up to 1.14 million gallons of ground water a day for the manufacturing of turpentine products. A Japanese pulp firm, also locating on Colonels Island, and a pesticide plant proposed by DuPont for north of Brunswick could soon consume another 11 million gallons daily.

• Residents of South Carolina's Low Country islands first noticed salt water in their wells in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and the problem has grown worse with new developments in the area. Hilton Head Island uses more than 37 percent of all ground water pumped in the Low Country, with up to 10 million gallons a day going to irrigate its manicured golf courses.

• When two large military installations near Beaufort suffered the worst saltwater intrusion in the Low Country area, a federal grant spurred the formation of the Beaufort-Jasper Water Authority and the construction in 1962 of an 18-mile canal which now carries water from the Savannah River to the city of 51,000.

But now even that water source may be threatened. A plan by Milliken and Company to construct a \$10.5 million textile plant on the Savannah River has drawn a howl of protest from residents downstream in South Carolina, who fear the company's waste effluent will pollute their fresh water supply.

Many South Carolina residents feel any measures taken in their state will have little effect without cooperation from Georgia. "We're buying a little bit more time by busting our butts and doing all these conservation measures," says Camille Ransom of the South Carolina Water Resources Commission. "Yet Savannah can still push the red button and pump a little more, so it doesn't mean much." Efforts by four South Carolina counties to participate in a water supply study initiated by the city of Savannah and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers looked good until 1981 budget cuts

lopped the \$200,000 needed to complete the study adequately.

Not much help can be expected from Georgia political leaders either. The state's Ground Water Use Act, passed in 1972, only establishes case-by-case permitting guidelines to restrict specific threats to the aquifer. "Georgia's elected officials do not support the concept of management of ground water, only management of misuse," says Leonard Ledbetter, director of the state's Environmental Protection Division. "We have no legal authority to preserve ground water for the future."

The solution to the coastal water crisis lies in comprehensive land-use planning, so states can channel aquifer-dependent industries to areas where ground water is assured and discourage location of major water-using indus-

tries in endangered areas. While most public officials are still in no mood to curb development, the absence of a master water-use plan could become a negative factor for recruiting new companies. One industrial site-selection firm representative says his company has already discouraged "at least two industries" from including the Georgia coast in expansion plans during recent years. "The Georgia coast is one of the most attractive areas in the nation for industrial development, but it's at a dangerous crossroad right now. Some decisions are going to have to be made about the water situation and until they are, I don't feel like subjecting our clients to the risk of being left out in the cold," the representative said.

"We have an excellent ground-water program now," says Georgia Governor

Busbee, reflecting a popular notion that the aquifer's supply is unlimited. "Stronger regulations are unnecessary at this time and could have an adverse effect on industrial development."

In the final analysis the task of saving the aquifer probably will fall to coastal residents.

"A solution to the water problem is essential to the future of the whole region," says Edward Bee, a planner for Georgia's Coastal Area Planning and Development Commission. "But frankly, I don't see much happening until the public gets worried. I hope by then it won't be too late." □

*Excerpted from "Groundwater: The Crisis Below," an award-winning series published in The Savannah Morning News in October, 1980, updated October, 1981.*



THE LARGEST KRAFT PAPER MILL IN THE WORLD, UNION CAMP'S PLANT ON THE SAVANNAH RIVER

photo by Richard Sommers/The Georgia Gazette

*Harris Neck, Georgia* by Jon Jacobs

# CONSERVATION

VS.

# COMMUNITY

About halfway between Savannah and Brunswick on the Georgia coast, two groups whose goals need not conflict are locked in battle over control of a tiny tract of waterfront land called Harris Neck. In one camp are the former residents of Harris Neck and their descendants, who feel they were cheated out of their land 40 years ago and now want it back. In the other camp are the United States government and a major Georgia conservation organization, who believe the land — now the Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuge — should remain a haven for rare and endangered wildlife.

The dispute is now before a federal court and Congress, but its roots go back more than 100 years to General William Tecumseh Sherman's liberation of the Georgia and South Carolina Sea Islands and the subsequent granting of the lush, isolated coastal lands to the freed Afro-Americans (see article and profile, pages 35 and 99). While the century following the Civil War saw much of this area revert to white ownership through purchase, harassment and outright fraud, this was not the case at Harris Neck. During the decades after the war the former slaves and their descendants built a thriving community which was virtually self-sufficient: the residents fished the area's rich shrimp and oyster resources, grew vegetables on land not permeated by salt water and operated a cannery to preserve their products for their own use and for trade with the outside world.

The approximately 100 families of Harris Neck thrived in this manner until the beginning of World War II. Many of the details of what happened to destroy their traditional style of life and set into motion the events which today pit their land claims against a refuge for wildlife are, unfortunately, lost in a morass of missing and confused documents, poor

memories and sometimes self-serving actions and statements.

As nearly as can be reconstructed, however, the federal government became interested in the land around Harris Neck in 1940 or '41, when Army officers are said to have conferred with some area officials and residents, but not the black residents of Harris Neck, about the possibility of obtaining land for military uses. The officers, according to former residents, were told that those living at Harris Neck were just squatters, having no title to the land, and that the Army could have it for a song.

On December 7, 1941, a detachment of Air National Guardsmen showed up at Harris Neck, took possession of a primitive airstrip that had been built there sometime during the late 1930s and began to bulldoze the homes and other buildings of the residents preparatory to enlarging and improving the airstrip.

The residents, understandably shocked, approached the leader of the troops, a Colonel Campbell, who, according to the memories of those who were there, said that the government had passed a law condemning the land so it could be used for military purposes, but that it would be returned when the Army no longer needed it. Although the technicalities of the condemnations were not completed until 1948, the tiny community was forced to vacate immediately, with some residents — including some whites who lived in the area but who were not a part of the Harris Neck community — receiving as little as \$2.44 per acre. (The top prices received at the time for contiguous land by certain white landowners is one of the "facts" presently under dispute; it may have been as much as \$200 per acre.) The black residents reluctantly moved from their 2,500-acre community to an area of about 20 acres some distance inland — land

with no access to the sea.

When the small Army base closed in December, 1944, the former residents of Harris Neck expected the government to allow them to return to their land. In fact, this move almost happened. The War Assets Administration, set up at the end of the war to regulate redistribution of land taken over for the war effort, ruled that the land was viable for agricultural purposes and that the former residents would be given an option to buy back the land at the price they had been paid for it.

In February of 1948, however, at the request of McIntosh County, in which the land is located, Harris Neck was reclassified from agricultural to airport use. That simple act virtually eliminated the rights of former residents; only if the federal, state and local governments all chose not to use the land as an airport would it be available to its former residents.

McIntosh County officials next informed the government that they wanted the Harris Neck land for the county's general use, but when the Civil Aviation Administration informed them that they could only use the land for an airport, the county agreed.

Blocked from returning to Harris Neck, many of the former residents struggled to continue to make a living as commercial fishers, renting dock space from several local dock owners at prices and terms that made survival difficult. Moreover, they could grow only a limited amount of crops on their 20 acres. With little hope of ever returning to their homes, many of the families began to drift away from the coast.

Meanwhile, several local landowners who, according to former residents, had been trying for years to get their hands on the Harris Neck land, signed leases with the county allowing them to graze cattle and swine there and pursue other purposes. Negotiations were begun with the Methodist Church, which wanted to use part of the land for a camp.

In the early 1950s, a few conscientious local officials sent letters of complaint to federal officials about alleged misuse of the Harris Neck property. A long string of federal inspections, memos and reports followed, establishing that the existing uses of the land were destroying or rendering worthless the runways, and

that much of the federal property, including dozens of buildings, had been removed illegally.

Finally, in late 1961, the government cancelled its agreement with the county, and the land reverted to the Federal Aviation Administration, which, on May 25, 1962, turned it over to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for use as a wildlife refuge.

As a wildlife refuge, Harris Neck has been a great success. Its 2,687 acres of salt marshes, open fields and stately woods shelter geese, herons, egrets, ibis, songbirds (the peak population of migratory birds in 1978 was over 150,000), along with alligators, deer and fox squirrels. It is now considered a unique national resource.

But the former residents of Harris Neck and their descendants have never accepted the situation; they have always maintained that their land was stolen from them by white elected officials, landowners and bureaucrats. In 1971, with guidance from several Vietnam veterans who felt the injustice to themselves and their parents especially keenly, they formed People Organized for Equal Rights (POER). In 1972, they began writing letters to Washington and to local officials demanding their land back.

By 1976 they had interested U.S. Representative Bo Ginn in their case to the extent that he introduced a bill in Congress proposing that Harris Neck be sold back to its former owners for the price they had originally been paid for it. That bill died in committee, but in 1978 it was reintroduced, this time with the cosponsorship of Wash-

ington, DC, Representative Walter Fauntroy.

While that bill – which eventually died – was pending, the former residents got some news that moved them to more direct action. They heard from the Army Corps of Engineers that their original dock at Harris Neck, now leased to a crabbing concern which allowed the Harris Neck fishers to use it, was about to be torn down to make room for a dock that the U.S. Department of the Interior wanted to build. Although these plans were later postponed, the former residents felt such actions could recur at any time, so they decided not to wait for the Congress but rather to take literal possession of their lands.

On April 27, 1979, a group of POER members moved back onto Harris Neck and erected a small tent city. Five days later, when they began trying to rebuild the old church on the property, the U.S. government brought suit in federal court in Savannah demanding their ejection from the land. They were evicted and arrested, and Judge Avant Edenfield took the case, as well as a countersuit filed by the former residents, under advisement. On May 4, 1979, he also ordered the wildlife refuge closed to the public, apparently to prevent any more of the former residents from entering the land.

In their countersuit, the former residents claimed, citing many documents and many legal precedents, that their land had been stolen from them and that they ought to be allowed to have it back. But on June 23, 1980, Judge Edenfield ruled that

regardless of the value of the former residents' legal arguments, the statute of limitations on the reversion of such lands had run out; he also ordered the land reopened to the public.

Conservation groups, particularly the well-endowed Georgia Conservancy, have also lined up against the Harris Neck residents. Hans Neuhäuser, a Conservancy official from Savannah, has testified against each bill in Congress, arguing that Harris Neck is simply too valuable a wildlife refuge to lose. The organization also fears that the precedent of returning land to former residents would jeopardize other important wildlife refuges.

The rights of the members of POER and the need to retain a viable ecology are not irreconcilable, however. The Conservancy, in fact, has raised the possibility that an accommodation might be reached whereby the residents and their descendants would have special access rights at Harris Neck without destroying its usefulness as a wildlife refuge. But based on previous experience, the former residents are distrustful of all compromise proposals; they contend they have no leverage in discussions about the future use of Harris Neck until their legal right to the land is established.

And so the battle continues. A new bill, this one designed to set aside the statute of limitations in the Harris Neck case, now languishes in Congress, its fate uncertain at best. POER's attorney, Clarence Martin of Savannah, has also appealed Judge Edenfield's ruling to the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta, claiming the case ought to be argued on its merits rather than be ruled inadmissible because of the statute of limitations.

No decision has been made in the court case, but the determination of the Harris Neck survivors and heirs to reclaim their land is unshaken. "If the courts or the Congress go against us," says Reverend Edgar Timmons of POER, "we will move back onto our land, fight for it and die on it." □

*Jon Jacobs has been active as a political organizer and journalist in the South since 1964. He has been city editor of The Great Speckled Bird, Southern Bureau chief of In These Times and is now assistant editor of Brown's Guide to Georgia magazine.*

photo by Richard Sommers/The Georgia Gazette



HARRIS NECK "TRESPASSERS" REV. EDGAR TIMMONS, REV. TED CLARK, CHRIS MCINTOSH AND HERCULES ANDERSON, MAY 3, 1979

# CASTLES IN THE SAND

## BUILDING ON BARRIER ISLANDS

By H. Crane Miller

At first the brochures came from quite nearby, from Delaware and Maryland. Then they arrived from further down the South Atlantic and even the Gulf Coast. Our nation's coastal islands are developing swiftly, and the markets extend well beyond my home in Washington, DC.

These islands are a succession of narrow, low-lying barriers, spits, tombolos and cusped forelands running generally parallel to the mainland coast. They reach from Maine to Mexico, but 97 percent of their undeveloped acreage is in the South. In the last few years, they have become the subject of a lively debate between developmental and protectionist interests. In the midst of this debate, though, the very substantial costs of developing these islands — costs borne by both buyers and the general public — are seldom discussed.

Meanwhile, the brochures arrive more frequently. The offerings look attractive: the high dunes and wind-blown sands of North Carolina's Outer Banks, the semi-tropical quality of the Sea Islands, the sun setting over Georgia's marshes of Glynn, sea oats bending before the wind and beach grass etching fragile designs in the white sands along Florida's shores, and many other glossy color visions that recall memorable summer days.

Couple these alluring images with the increased leisure time and surplus income of upper-income Americans, and you arrive at the formula the Kiawah Beach Company, among others, put its finger on in 1974 when rationalizing the resort development of one South Carolina island: "This fundamental urge to vacation, or preferably live near the ocean, has led to the dramatic increase in new, ocean-related communities along the South Atlantic Coast. Swimming, fishing, sailing, sunbathing, beachcombing and

other water-based activities are the most important recreation activities for most Americans according to the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation."

The brochures I receive tell me, or the current occupant at my address, that I am a definite winner — one of the fortunate ones able to acquire oceanfront property and "slip away from the mainstream bustle into the tranquility of Nature." Permit me at least to wonder, if not doubt, how tranquil life would be on the islands. For the last 20 years, significant stretches of the Southern shore have enjoyed an unusual respite from major storms, creating a false sense of security among the millions of newcomers to coastal communities. "The 60,000 people who live in the Florida Keys feel they don't have a bad storm problem," wrote the authors of *The Beaches Are Moving* in 1979. "What [they] don't know may one day kill thousands of them."<sup>1</sup> Historically, Florida has averaged one hurricane every 1.6 years; but for Hurricane Eloise, however, it has escaped real devastation since the 1950s. The National Hurricane Center in Miami tells us that, because of the recent mass migration to coastal areas, 80 percent of those living in the "hurricane belt" have never experienced a major storm.

photo by Lisa M. Krieger



But what about the next 20 or 30 years, the life span of a typical mortgage? In that time, the mathematical probabilities give my house on a Southern barrier island an 18 to 26 percent chance of being struck by a devastating 100-year storm, and a 33 to 45 percent chance of a less violent, but still destructive, 50-year storm.

Building near the ocean is a gamble with time and nature. And despite the picture some would paint of innocent lambs being led to slaughter, many people who own property on the shores are well aware of the hazards. "I know what happened before, but this is where I want to be" was the oft-repeated sentiment of homeowners on a Rhode Island beach swept clean of all structures by hurricanes in 1938 and again in 1954.<sup>2</sup> For them, building near the ocean is a gambol with time and nature.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Frederic, Alabama coastal residents steadfastly refused to back away from the water's edge. Frederic struck the coast at Dauphin Island about midnight on September 13, 1979. From there east for some 30 miles, the storm cut an awesome swath of destruction and caused about \$2 billion in damages along the coast and inland. Fort Morgan, at the mouth of Mobile Bay, felt the greatest winds, about 120 miles per hour with gusts much higher. Wind-driven water at least six feet deep swept across much of the peninsula near the fort, leveling dunes and totally destroying 94 percent of the seaward-most homes for eight miles. Further east toward the town of Gulf Shores, the wind forces diminished but still destroyed more than two-thirds of the oceanfront homes.

Like all major storms, Frederic produced its tales of human tragedy — the man who refused to leave his home near Fort Morgan and was swept away; the couple who invested their life savings in a store on the water in Gulf Shores, only to have it demolished two weeks later by the hurricane (they had no insurance).

Two days after the storm, at a subdivision near Fort Morgan, we met a man who had a few dishes and bottles of soda in the back of his car. "That's all that's left of a \$20,000 investment," he told us.

"Do you have flood insurance?"

"No. But I guess I can take some

photo by H. Crane Miller



of the loss off my taxes for the next few years."

"Will you rebuild?"

"Expect so," he replied.

As we surveyed the beach, we heard the story again and again. People were stunned by the magnitude of their losses, yet found some sense of community in their shared misery. With federal and state aid, they were determined to rebuild.

One year later, we returned to the area and found over 300 new houses built on the same sites as before. Condominiums were sprouting up as well. The road and water systems had been restored to their former condition, or were perhaps improved, and a building boom was underway. But some of the new construction is cause for real concern, because the building standards and practices often not only repeat the pre-storm conditions but also add new height not offset by greater depth and bracing in the piling foundations; thus they may be more likely to topple in a hurricane than the pre-storm houses.

#### FEDERAL POLICY ENCOURAGES DEVELOPMENT

The intense demand to build and rebuild on barrier islands strongly colors the background against which government policy decisions about their future development or protection

are made. Despite education regarding the hazards, despite direct experience with major storms, development continues virtually unabated.

If storms are causing death and destruction, how has the federal government responded? A brief examination of federal strategies for flood loss management is instructive. The nineteenth-century approach was *laissez faire*: property owners who built on flood plains bore their own flood losses. About 1910, the government began authorizing various flood control projects, notably on the lower Mississippi River. Since the Flood Control Act of 1936, the federal government assumed national responsibility for flood control projects and has invested upwards of \$11 billion on structural projects to reduce riverine and coastal flooding and related damages. Despite that investment, flood losses continue to rise: the U.S. Water Resources Council estimates that average annual urban flood losses now exceed \$1.5 billion.

A third strategy is evolving, marked in part by Congress's attempt to shift some of the costs back to those who create the risks, the occupants of the flood plains and coastal hazard areas. It is also marked by a shift away from sole reliance on structural flood control works to methods such as flood insurance coupled with mini-

photo by H. Crane Miller



1. Wallace Kaufman and Orrin Pilkey, *The Beaches Are Moving* (Doubleday, 1979), p. 133.

2. People who live in coastal and riverine flood-prone areas were surveyed in the mid-1970s to determine their attitudes toward flood losses and rebuilding after floods; see: H. Crane Miller, *Coastal Flood Hazards and the National Flood Insurance Program* (Office of Federal Insurance Administration, Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1977).

mum building standards, and warning and evacuation programs. The National Flood Insurance Act of 1968 is Congress's principal tool for this third strategy.

The national flood insurance program has grown so much that it is now the second largest commitment against the U.S. Treasury, topped only by Social Security. Of \$98 billion in total flood insurance coverage, some \$10 to \$15 billion is for properties on the coastal barriers. The program has its

critics, and their attack focuses mainly on its coastal coverage. They question whether the federal program does not, in fact, offer incentive and subsidy for building in hazardous areas. This is now the subject of great debate. (See box.)

In 1981, Congress prohibited federal flood insurance coverage for any new construction or substantial improvements to structures on undeveloped portions of coastal barriers after October 1, 1983. Negotiations are now

underway to determine where this "undeveloped" acreage lies. Needless to say, developers are lobbying hard to keep their islands off this list.

Flood insurance is not the only way the federal government participates in coastal development. Since World War II, federal programs have shifted to the public a sizable share of the costs for island bridges, roads, causeways, water supply systems, wastewater treatment plants and erosion control, as well as disaster relief and

## A Policy Debate

As the debate over federal barrier island policy heats up, questions about federal flood insurance occupy center-stage. Government figures from January, 1978, through March, 1981, show that the operating deficit on policies in coastal high hazard areas averaged \$231 per policy, while the average policy premium in those areas was only \$145. Some protectionists contend that the program has actually promoted development by making financing easy to obtain. Some developers argue that lenders will be reticent to finance private developments without this federal insurance. These are but a few of the current issues.

In an attempt to make the program pay for itself, the Federal Insurance Administration has increased rates for construction in hazardous areas. But even with the higher rates, development will unquestionably continue because beach real estate is so popular and valuable. Initial returns indicate that policy coverage has increased at the same time that premiums have increased by nearly 60 percent.

The 1981 congressional action denying federal flood insurance for new building on undeveloped island acreage will take effect October 1, 1983; during the interim grace period, the Interior Department is designating which areas will be classified as "all or substantially undeveloped." Immediately upon issuing a set of draft maps in January, 1982, the department was plunged into controversy. The Barrier Islands Coalition, a broad alliance of environmental groups, charges that the Interior proposals undercut con-

gressional intent by designating many still-pristine acres as "developed." On the other side, the National Association of Realtors is organizing developers in all affected areas to demand that more island acreage be taken off the "undeveloped" list. The department is set to listen to all the comments before finalizing the maps sometime in the spring or summer of 1982.\*

Congress is also considering legislation that would further reduce federal involvement in coastal barrier development and generally inhibit it in places not yet disturbed. The package is known as "Chafee/Evans" after Republicans John Chafee, a Rhode Island senator, and Thomas Evans, the Delaware representative, who introduced companion bills in 1981, following earlier efforts addressing the same issues. Chafee/Evans would designate the undeveloped barriers of the Atlantic and Gulf coasts as the nation's Coastal Barrier Resources System, where federal participation in development would be barred. On the prohibited list would be federal financing of new buildings, roads, bridges, causeways, airports, boat docks or ramps, and so forth. Projects to prevent or stabilize shoreline erosion, except in certain emergencies, would also be off limits.

The bill is certainly not perfect. Its sponsors compromised on several key issues before even introducing it. It lacks federal authority to prohibit development entirely or to deny licenses for bridges or permits for dredging-and-filling island wetlands; it allows federal financing of certain restoration projects after disasters; and it does not consider the option of outright public acquisition of the islands.

But it does have a broad base of support. Twenty-five senators and more than a hundred House members have signed on as co-sponsors — though none of the senators and only seven of the representatives are from the coastal states of the South. Supporters at the final Senate hearings in early February, 1982, ranged from the Texas General Land Office to the American Planning Association. Among the states, only Louisiana officially objected; it was joined by homebuilders' and realtors' associations, as well as numerous local official civic boosters.

Even Interior Secretary James Watt has spoken out in the bill's favor. His testimony explains the bill's appeal to conservatives: "This legislation presents an opportunity for substantial savings in federal expenditures. . . . You have recognized that the federal government should not dictate what private property owners may or may not do with their property, but also that taxpayers should not shoulder the recurring costs and high risks of private development on coastal barriers. Because we believe it likely that private industry will assess the financial risks far more carefully in the absence of federal assistance, and exhibit greater sensitivity to the costs, development is likely to take place on only the least hazardous and most stable barriers." □

\* Copies of the draft maps for individual islands or island complexes cost \$3.25 each. Write the U.S. Geological Survey, 536 National Center, Reston, VA 22092, and specify the area of your interest. Copies of the draft definitions and information summaries for each coastal barrier are free. Write the National Park Service, Pension Building, Room 201, 440 G St NW, Washington, DC 20243.



flood insurance. If current federal policies and expenditures continue unchanged, the cost to taxpayers of developing the remaining undeveloped islands could be *more than five times what it would take to purchase them outright.*

The rate of development is high: an average of more than 6,000 acres a year over the last 30 years. At that pace, the developable portions of the barriers will be consumed by 1995. According to an April, 1981, Interior Department inventory, about 460,000 acres remain neither developed nor protected. Texas and Louisiana account for two-thirds of all this acreage; North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida each have more than all of the Northeastern states combined. And much of this land is ripe for more beachfront construction.

To understand the way development occurred, several colleagues and I studied nine communities on Southern coastal barriers in 1980 and found many common characteristics.<sup>3</sup> Typically, development began under the leadership of a local official or private developer. A bridge or causeway was the first necessity. Then the island needed a fresh water supply; though most islands lay atop shallow fresh water aquifers, these tended to become polluted as population densities increased. Wastewater could at first be handled by individual septic systems, but with further development, pollution necessitated a wastewater treatment facility as well.

In each community we studied, the initial development was financed by private capital, state or local revenue bonds or some other non-federal source. But federal funding did come later, in successive rounds of expansion, upgrading, replacement and reconstruction of public infrastructures. When we tallied the actual federal expenditures and obligations for public infrastructures in the nine communities, they amounted to an average subsidy of \$25,570 per developed acre. When restated in 1980 replacement costs, they averaged \$53,250 per developed acre.

In short, current federal programs encourage development of the coastal barriers at the public's expense. We could continue on that course unchanged — and the forces to do so are substantial — but it would cost a great deal. My colleagues and I estimate that continuing on this course would cost



the federal government from \$5.5 billion to \$11 billion over the next 20 years if the remaining coastal barriers were developed.

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#### WHAT SHOULD FEDERAL POLICY BE?

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It seems clear that the federal assistance cycle for coastal barriers must be broken. Available means include federal regulation, removal of subsidies and public acquisition of some of the barriers. Whichever strategy is employed, timing is critical: either we prevent development before it occurs, or we "correct" the damage *after* development. The further development progresses before protective actions occur, the less effective they

can be and the more they will cost the public. (See article on Florida's beaches, page 24.)

Because of the crucial role that bridges and causeways play in development, we could consider denial of bridge permits or the imposition of stringent (and costly) regulations on bridge building, with no option of federal rebuilding. Outright denial of bridge permits may be politically unattainable, but the second tool would add multi-million-dollar costs to island developments needing bridges.

Other kinds of federal and state

3. *Barrier Island Development Near Four National Seashores*, a report prepared for and funded by the Council on Environmental Quality, Federal Insurance Administration, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and Office of Coastal Zone Management (Washington, 1981). A summary was published as "The Barrier Islands: A Gamble With Time and Nature," in *Environment* (November, 1981). The communities studied were: Nags Head and Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina; Camden and Glynn Counties, St. Mary's, St. Simon's and Sea Islands, Georgia; Pensacola Beach, Florida; Dauphin Island, Alabama; and South Padre Island and Cameron County, Texas.



photo by H. Crane Miller



regulations are also possible, though they generally will not prevent development over the long term. Some examples include stringent property elevation requirements, construction setback lines, and development moratoria where health, safety or other standards cannot be met. Standards like these help reduce losses, but they cannot prevent disaster. Continued development, even with stringent minimum standards, increases the chance for catastrophic losses in the large, rare storm that eventually comes along.

Continued development also presupposes major investments in roads, water systems and other community infrastructures, and serious damage to these can be expected from storms considerably less intense than the rare ones; federal flood insurance building standards don't apply to these. Once all the infrastructure is in place, providing disaster relief after a storm is politically irresistible. Thus the cycle of building, disaster and rebuilding continues. Even the Coastal Barrier Resources System bills pending in Congress, which would curtail federal subsidies in ordinary circumstances (see box), leave the government open to funding emergency assistance and certain restorative work after disasters.

#### PUBLIC ACQUISITION OF THE ISLANDS?

Public acquisition of the still-undeveloped barrier islands is the surest yet most controversial way we have to protect them. Though frequently denounced as being too expensive, costs of acquisition com-

pare favorably with other alternatives. We estimate that buying all the remaining barrier acreage would cost about one-fifth of the federal share of development under current programs.<sup>4</sup> Public acquisition is also the surest way to protect natural values and remove particularly dynamic areas from the recurring cycle of disaster relief, flood insurance and other federal expenditures.

Given the current political and economic climate, federal acquisition of *all* undeveloped island acreage is out of the question. But it might not be necessary to acquire islands that have no bridges. In fact, with stringent bridge construction standards and denial of federal subsidies, private interests would be hard-pressed to finance development on 50 or more of the remaining pristine islands. Under a public acquisition program, priorities would be set, and places that are most endangered could be bought up first.

We estimate that purchase of *all* of the land in the proposed Coastal Barrier Resources System would cost between \$1 and \$2 billion, roughly \$5,000 to \$10,000 an acre. Some 40 to 45 percent of this might be

avoided if the federal government used the bridge regulation method in the areas mentioned above. If so, we as a nation could preserve the highest-priority undeveloped islands at a cost of \$600 million to \$1.1 billion and prevent, at the same time, spending perhaps five times those amounts if current subsidies continued unchanged. Even if pending legislation is approved, I estimate that the cost of federal subsidies could still be two or three times that of public acquisition.

On this subject, the issue is not legislative authority; ample authority for public acquisition is already on the books. The issue is one of political will, funding and differing concepts of what constitutes appropriate stewardship of the undeveloped barrier islands. The issue is critical: the coastal barriers of the South *are* developing, and the costly cycle gets harder to break with each passing year. □

4. The estimates were prepared for testimony on coastal barriers legislation pending before Congress: John R. Sheaffer and Louis Rozalkis, testimony before the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, on H.R. 5981, March 27, 1980; John R. Sheaffer, H. Crane Miller and Louis Rozalkis, statement before the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources on S. 2686, June 12, 1980; H. Crane Miller, statement before the Senate Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife Conservation and the Environment, Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries, on H.R. 3252, June 23, 1981.

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*For further reading on shoreline ecology and developmental follies, The Beaches Are Moving by Orrin H. Pilkey, Jr., and Wallace Kaufman is a creatively informative account of "a vision of how we can live with and love our beaches without destroying them or ourselves." Published by Anchor Press/Doubleday in 1979, the book is no longer available in stores but may be ordered for \$5 pre-paid from Dr. Orrin H. Pilkey, Jr., Dept. of Geology, Duke University, Durham, NC 27708.*





Most coastal visitors and residents know the sense of outrage and loss when a long-time favorite bathing, surfing or surf-casting beach is cut off by “No Parking” and “Guests Only” signs. But few feel as strongly about the possible loss of a larger commonly held resource, one that lies beyond the breakers and beneath the oceans and Gulf — the continental shelf.

Extending in a smooth apron far out to sea, composed of the same sheets of sediment that were swept by wind, rain and rivers from the mountains to the coastal plain, is the submerged extension of our continent. The continental shelf stretches some 50 to 100 or more miles out, sloping gently to a depth of about 600 feet before dropping steeply several thousand feet to the dark ocean floor. Thus far the continental shelf is largely unclaimed and undeveloped; less than 10 percent of our nation’s shelf is now leased, compared to an average 34

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# Three Miles Out ...and beyond

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percent worldwide. But if comprehensive planning does not begin soon, vested interests — especially the oil companies — will get what amounts to high-class squatters’ rights for resources that we all own.

Public ownership of the shelf is firmly engraved in law. Our title is based on 2,000 years of Roman and English law, the foundation of our Western judicial system. Early Roman law proclaimed the sea and seashore *res communes*, common to all. When King John of England signed the Magna Carta in 1215, he conceded



VIMS/Sea Grant

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by Wallace Kaufman

any right to sell or give away the tidelands — the open seas being considered international — and the accumulated weight of many courts' decisions thereafter reaffirmed what became known as the *public trust doctrine*, adopted by our nation's lawmakers in 1789. The essence of that doctrine was summed up by Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius in his seventeenth-century work, *Mare Liberum*:

*that which cannot be occupied, or which has never been occupied, cannot be the property of any one, because all property has arisen from occupation. . . . all that which has been so constituted by nature, that although serving some one person, it still suffices for the common use of all other persons.*

Today some 220 million of us heirs hold in common the title to the U.S. continental shelf. We are so many, in fact, that a trustee manages our inheritance. That trustee is the government. Unfortunately, our trustee is spending away the irreplaceable

to a moratorium on ocean dumping that was reaffirmed by the 1972 Ocean Dumping Act.

In January, 1982, however, the Navy proposed dumping worn-out, radioactive nuclear submarines 200 miles off the North Carolina coast. With suspicious coincidence, the plan was announced at the same time that the Environmental Protection Agency decided to consider removing the dumping ban. The Navy admits that the ships and their reactors will not stay safely sealed; they will eventually corrode and release their radioactivity into the ocean.

A similar on-and-off approach to protecting the shelf applies to federal regulation of the dumping of industrial and residential waste. When the federal government ordered American Cyanamid to stop pouring sulfuric acid into the Savannah River, for example, the company and government developed plans to unload 59,000 tons a month further out, near the Gulf Stream. The dumping moratorium and 1972 act, designed to phase out all "harmful dumping" by 1981, did cut such dumping drastically. Industrial waste dumping in the Gulf of Mexico fell

by burning 3.6 million gallons of PCB-laden oil in the first half of 1982, with EPA watching over the experiment. Though the environmental impact of such incineration over the shelf is yet unknown, it is clearly another case of a pollution dilution solution: doing it "out there" instead of adding to air pollution problems and incurring public wrath on land.

Theoretically, the dumping of municipal garbage and sewage sludge was to end by 1981, because of concern about damage to marine life and because some Northern beaches were blighted by "black mayonnaise" washing in during tourist season. Yet major metropolises like New York City have yet to find alternative ways to dispose of their tons of sludge, and the pressures for new dumping grow daily. In fact, the 1982 federal government's search for new revenues initiated an unsuccessful effort to put a "user's fee" on ocean sewage dumping. Though the fee concept was defeated, its being proposed at all raises questions about how permanent the dumping ban might be.

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#### GUARDING OUR INHERITANCE?

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The continental shelf is rich in resources, including renewable ones like marine life, and schemes for harvesting its wealth abound. These plans include sand and mineral extraction, offshore superports, floating thermal-conversion and nuclear power generation systems. But none will have as large an impact in the next two decades as the projected rapid expansion of deep sea oil and gas exploration.

Natural oil seeps on the Pacific Ocean floor attracted fortune-seekers as early as 1894, when crews reached for it from crude onshore rigs and long wharves. The first modern offshore platform began operating in 1947, pumping some 600 barrels a day off the coast of Louisiana. Since then some 20,000 offshore wells have been drilled, currently producing about 20 percent of our crude oil and 22 percent of our natural gas.

The American Petroleum Institute, the industry's lobbying group, claims these wells have produced only four major oil spills and no permanent damage. But even normal drilling operations involve much more than a spinning bit poking a hole in the

A CLEAN-UP CREW AT WORK ON MUSTANG ISLAND, TEXAS, AFTER THE OIL FROM IXTOC I HIT THE BEACH IN THE SUMMER OF 1979



photo courtesy Texas General Land Office

capital of our inheritance, an endowment that should sustain our heirs for centuries to come.

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#### OUT OF SIGHT

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The fact that no people live out on the shelf makes it a tempting place to put things no one wants on shore. The military has for years used coastal waters not only as mock battlegrounds but as a dumping place for old weapons. In 1970, the public and Congress realized that the government had been disposing of radioactive material on the continental shelf in a number of undisclosed sites. This realization led

from 1,408,000 tons in 1973 to 173 tons in 1978. Since then, though, corporate interests have received federal support for alternative methods of solving their disposal problems on the beleaguered continental shelf: during Christmas week of 1981, the converted 334-foot tanker *Vulcanus* cruised out of Mobile loaded with oil saturated with toxic PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls). Three hundred and fifty miles out in the Gulf it steamed for 10 days in a 150-mile oval course while its double furnaces burned the toxic oil at the rate of 3,000 gallons an hour. This was a test cruise. Chemical Waste Management, the ship's operator, plans to follow up

ground. A typical rig dumps an average of 4,000 barrels of mud and cuttings for each well, and a single platform may be the origin of as many as 40 wells. The rigs also discharge "produced waters" — waters geologically trapped with the oil — in volumes typically 200 times that of the oil and gas produced. Finally, most of the 1,500 different industrial chemical compounds used in various stages of drilling are disposed of at sea. The ocean, of course, dilutes all of these wastes but nevertheless has to bear sustained low-level pollution with unknown cumulative effects.

Independent scientists dispute oil company claims that their drilling activities have had no real effect on the shelf's environment. Scientists say they have been hard-pressed to assess the damage because, on the Gulf Coast, even the supposedly "clean" control sites, with no oil rigs nearby, are blanketed with a low level of petroleum hydrocarbons.

The risk of oil spills is always present from both wells and associated pipelines and tankers. From 1972 to 1977 the Coast Guard recorded 62,239 oil spills, releasing 110 million gallons into U.S. coastal waters, with most of the volume occurring from many small spills (such as tankers anonymously flushing their bilges after unloading at a harbor) and from the occasional devastating major ones. In just two years (1975 to 1977) the Coast Guard reported almost 12 million gallons spilled in the Atlantic and 15 million gallons in the Gulf.\*

With energy companies exploring for new sources of oil and gas in the Atlantic, another point must be factored into the risk equation: a study by the Council on Environmental Quality surprised its own authors when they found that Southern coastal waters are subject to more severe storms than either the North Sea or the Gulf of Alaska. There is a one-in-25 chance of sustained winds of 100 knots and seas with 50-foot waves in any year along the Southern coast. The odds for the North Sea are one in 90 and for the Gulf of Alaska one in 50.

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#### THE STATES WANT A SHARE

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Given the enormous risks of oil and gas development and the enormous wealth associated with it, it is no

wonder that the states and the federal government are locked in complex legal and political battles over who pays for the problems and who gets the revenues.

This tug of war began in the late 1800s when Californians started collecting offshore oil and the federal government sued to protect its role as guardian of the public trust, winning decisively in the Supreme Court. The Mineral Leasing Act of 1920 utilized the decision to grant the federal government the right to lease offshore oil and gas territory.

At the end of World War II, when it looked as if offshore drilling might become a big industry, Texas and Louisiana proposed a 27-mile territorial sea under state jurisdiction. President Truman responded in 1945 by declaring that *all* shelf resources belong to the federal government. Drilling started during the ensuing debate and another court case followed. In 1950 the Supreme Court ruled that the national interest outweighed states' rights.

The states countered by pressing for new legislation. By 1953 they had pushed the Submerged Lands Act

underwater activity, and oil companies stationed whole villages of workers on towers in the midst of the most powerful seas on earth.

Lured by the ever-expanding catalog of resources, the states attempted again to exert wider claims to the continental shelf. Texas tried to extend its territorial sea by measuring from the tips of new artificial jetties. Louisiana fought at least 10 different battles before the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1965 it lost a key decision when the court declared that the state's jurisdiction moves as the shoreline moves. This was particularly important near the Mississippi Delta, which can grow or shrink several hundred feet a year.

As of December, 1981, some 63 oil and gas leases averaging about 5,000 acres each lay across the state/federal boundary, illustrating that the movement of the eroding shoreline could be a big erosion of the state treasury.

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#### WHO GETS THE LEASING WINDFALL?

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The federal hold on the continental



photo by Dinesh Sharma

THE WHITE SAND BEACH OF PADRE ISLAND, TEXAS, UNDER A LAYER OF IXTOC OIL, SEPTEMBER, 1979

through Congress. The best they could do, however, was to reverse the court's ruling and give the states jurisdiction over the water within three miles of their coasts. Texas got three leagues (10.35 miles) based on its boundaries when annexed in 1845. Florida also got three leagues because Congress had approved its 1868 constitution claiming that much territory.

Only after 1953 did the real extent of offshore resources become known, and the technology to exploit them developed rapidly. With the space-age technology, engineers perfected deep-sea breathing and diving gear and invented huge seafloor habitats. They designed motor vehicles for the new

shelf has been cinched just when higher prices and accelerated leasing are about to bring in the real riches. Industry and government geologists estimate that 60 percent of the nation's undiscovered oil and gas is buried in the continental shelf. As of 1979, only 2.5 percent of the fuel-rich

\* The major spill of late was the 1979 Ixtoc blowout in Mexico's Bay of Campeche, which spewed 140 million gallons of "chocolate mousse" into the Gulf and fouled Texas beaches. Incidentally, though news coverage generally cast blame on the Mexican government for that one, it was an American rig — leased to the Pemex Company by SEDCO, Inc — that blew out. SEDCO is the family business of Bill Clements, the governor of Texas.

shelf had been leased. President Carter upped the ante by planning to more than double the leased offshore lands by 1985. Then President Reagan and his Interior Secretary, James Watt, accelerated the acceleration by proposing an increase from Carter's 26 million acres of leases to almost a billion acres, auctioning off the land in tracts up to 50 million acres each. Public environmental planners immediately began expressing concern that they would not have sufficient time or resources to cushion the local impact of booming developments if oil and gas interests hit the jackpot so quickly in so many places. Even the corporations worried that they would not have the wherewithal to explore such a vast area in the rush of competition to get there first.

In the first flush of power, Reagan and Watt also ignored the gathering storm in coastal states, where, once again, impetus to gain control of shelf resources was growing. The states had seen the estimates of oil and gas reserves. They had seen energy corporations bidding as high as \$36,000 per acre for leases. They knew that in August, 1981, 200 oil company

representatives meeting in New Orleans bid some \$561 million for drilling rights on some 50 tracts in federal waters off the coast of North Carolina. The states could only conclude that, despite talk of a "New Federalism" and partnership between state and federal government, Washington was about to take all the offshore royalties and leave the states with all the onshore problems — refineries, boom-town growth, public services expansion, pollution. So they fought back.

California had already successfully challenged a Watt-initiated federal lease in court. The U.S. Coastal Zone Management Act allows a state with an approved plan to determine if federal actions, including the leasing of oil and gas, are consistent with the state's own planning and development goals.\* In an unprecedented move, California used this clause in the spring of 1981 to claim the proposed lease was invalid because it contradicted the state's own federally approved coastal management plan. In response, Watt demanded that the Department of Commerce direct its Office of Coastal Zone Management

to rewrite leasing rules to exclude state participation. In his letter to Commerce Secretary Malcolm Baldrige, Watt called the coastal management act "an excellent example of unnecessary and burdensome regulations." Meanwhile, California sued and won postponement of the leases, and Watt withdrew plans for that particular sale, thus delaying a decisive showdown.

North Carolina Governor Jim Hunt also protested that his state had not had sufficient time to determine if the leases slated for the August auction — especially tracts a mere 13 miles off pristine and popular Cape Lookout — would conflict with his state's goals. His protest was riding the crest of public fury stirred by an early summer oil spill from an anonymous tanker that had closed long stretches of Outer Banks beaches to swimmers and dented the area's tourism revenues. Alerted, the oil companies avoided a possible court challenge to the entire sale by not bidding on the Cape Lookout tracts.

Despite small victories, the coastal states still feel individually threatened, like 97-pound weaklings on a beach with Secretary Watt and the energy corporations kicking sand in their faces and running off with the offshore beauty and booty. Out in Watt's spacious West, states receive 25 percent of the revenues from national timber leases, 50 percent from federal lands grazing receipts and, in accordance with the Mineral Leasing Act of

\* The 1972 Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) gave coastal states the opportunity to receive federal grants and increased authority to plan for new growth. In return, it required participating states to establish organizational structures to coordinate local/state coastal growth management. *Federal consistency* meant that states gained power of review over federal actions in coastal areas; state programs, in turn, had to meet minimum federal standards.

A 1976 amendment to CZMA created the Coastal Energy Impact Program (CEIP), which then received most of the full program's appropriation — \$1.2 billion of \$1.6 billion. Designed to mitigate local growth pressures caused by energy industries, CEIP also required states to plan for energy developments "in the national interest."

President Reagan recommended that CZMA be "zeroed out" in 1981, but Congress appropriated \$40 million for fiscal year '82, staving off CZMA's demise.

North Carolina's coastal program is often cited nationally as a model. For a brief explanation of its problems and promise, see NC coastal profile, page 93.

photo by John H. Shealy II



VIRGINIA OIL-SPILL VICTIM

1920, 50 percent (90 percent in Alaska) of all mineral leasing revenues on federal lands within the state. The budget office estimated that revenues from the private mining of public lands would pay states \$700 million in 1982 and over a billion dollars by 1985. But the continental shelf is treated differently.

When Congress did set aside some offshore lease money, it required that coastal states share the revenues with inland ones. From its inception in 1965, the Land and Water Conservation Fund received \$2.8 billion from offshore leasing, and doled the money out to all states that put up matching funds for purchase of new park and recreation lands. As of January, 1980, the Southern states, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands had received altogether only \$500 million over the last 15 years. Yet in the spring of 1981, Secretary Watt declared a moratorium on purchasing lands for national parks, saying the states should come up with their own money if they want more parks.

Furthermore, even as the nation's budget office estimates the federal government will receive some \$18 billion from offshore leases in fiscal year 1982, President Reagan has threatened to kill the only shield the states have for protecting themselves against chaotic onshore development related to continental shelf exploitation. In his February, 1981, budget, Reagan proposed zero funding for the federal Coastal Zone Management program, including special energy-impact aid to states that must house and school and police temporary oil and gas boom towns. In March, 1981, of the 25 coastal and Great Lakes states with federally approved (and 80 percent federal matching grant funded) coastal management programs, only five predicted they would be able to continue their programs without federal aid. Others indicated they would continue to enforce basic coastal protection laws but at a greatly reduced level and without a systematic program.

By July, 1981, Congress had appropriated \$40 million to coastal management for fiscal year 1982, but authorized only \$7 million for the energy-impact program. (A "payoff" amendment to the Coastal Management Act, the Coastal Energy Impact Program required states to plan for energy development and provided

aid for social, economic and environmental consequences. It was originally authorized in 1976 for an average \$120 million per year.) Observers predict that without broad public support to back up state lobbying, the administration will likely succeed in "zeroing out" coastal management by the end of President Reagan's term.

Already, Secretary Watt has received the new regulation he wanted from the Commerce Department, knocking the states out of "pre-leasing" planning which considers size and location of drilling rigs and environmental precautions. Pre-leasing activities, the new regulations say, do not directly affect state coastal zones. Once again, California challenged the regulations in federal district court and won. Watt has appealed. A decision is expected in the summer of 1982.

According to Senator Ernest Hollings, Democrat of South Carolina, and nine colleagues, the new pre-leasing regulation "would seriously impair the states' rights and violate the very spirit of 'New Federalism' espoused by the new administration."

In short, President Reagan and

Secretary Watt have betrayed their own supposed states' rights philosophy by trying to lock up offshore revenues for corporate interests and the federal government, while pursuing every avenue possible to shut out state participation in planning for the consequences.

The only significant alliance opposing this federal strategy is the Coastal States Organization, formed during the Carter years by governors of coastal states who banded together in part because of these leasing battles. The organization intervened on the side of California in its suits against Watt, and their victory has thus far kept some life in the provisions of the Coastal Zone Management Act that require federal consistency with state goals. Unless the act is gutted by budget cuts in the next few years, it remains the best hope for state power over continental shelf exploitation.

Most recently, the Coastal States Organization, along with citizen groups and state lobbyists, has launched a strong effort to garner some offshore lease revenues to continue funding state-level coastal zone planning. The center of their



CLEAN-UP CREW ON A VIRGINIA BEACH

photo by Mike Williams

work has been HR 4597, a bill introduced by North Carolina Democratic Representative Walter Jones. It would establish an Ocean and Coastal Resources Management Fund that would receive five percent of all rents, royalties and other money from leases on the continental shelf — but not more than \$300 million per year. The money would be distributed as block grants to the coastal states in proportion to their shoreline mileage, oil and gas activity, coal handling facilities and population. At least 30 percent of the money would be earmarked for coastal zone planning and for handling the consequences of offshore leasing. As of February, 1982, staffers of the House Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee were predicting mark-up by the full committee in April. The bill was facing strong opposition by the administration and oil companies, though.

While some observers call this approach “the bad impact payoff,” and a meager payoff at that, HR 4597 marks the beginning of a new effort by coastal states to claim some of the shelf’s wealth. Most states would like more than planning money from these

federal revenues. Once again, many are thinking of nothing less than attempting to extend their present three-mile jurisdiction to 12 miles through new legislation. Such an extension would enrich the states, but would not do much to mediate between conflicting interests or assure the orderly and wise use of resources on the shelf. In this regard, states have proven no more virtuous in the past than the federal government.

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#### WHAT CAN BE DONE?

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If we do not want the oil and gas rush to overrun all other public interests on the coast, only one solution offers a constructive path through potential conflicts. We are far behind the best time for extending serious land-use planning from the shoreline to the continental shelf. Already, most coastal states, with the encouragement and cooperation of the federal government under past administrations, have sanctioned planning for an area where public and private interests clash bitterly — the shoreline. By comparison, extending planning seaward

should be relatively painless for all but corporate interests and the Reagan/Watt administration. From the high water line seaward is nothing but public domain, yet we still govern its fate with a hodge-podge of laws and political deals.

Our leaders tell us not to worry, that we are overplanning and overregulating and being too detailed in our consideration of every minnow and microbe. Yet the experts who analyze what is happening to our coastal resources are not encouraged. Their graphs and charts and tables tell a story as clear as any banker’s profit and loss statement. It is increasingly clear that — despite the billions of tax dollars spent studying, planning and regulating, despite great annual convocations of scientists, engineers and politicians, despite several dozen federal agencies, departments and committees overseeing one or another aspect of ocean management — our heritage is being sold off too cheaply and quickly.

While the coastal states and the federal government slug it out over who gets the offshore leases, the ringside seats are too often empty. Unless our trustee knows there is a strong and educated public looking on, the real public-access questions — of who shares in the new wealth and who inherits all the problems — will never be considered.

Protection of continental shelf resources, control over development, and access to the wealth that will flow is vital to the South’s coastland as it tries to accommodate increasing growth pressures. But most Southerners do not come to the shore to worry about such questions. They look seaward to watch the boats and the waves. Few realize that riding on those waves only three miles out is a new blockade of corporate profit-seekers and government subservience. And, unlike the Civil War’s Union blockades, the purpose of this one is not to promote union but to divide the public from its own vital resources. □

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Illustration by Linda Maddalena





# PYRATES!

BY ELIZABETH FENN

In the early eighteenth century, European ships bound for the West Indies and North American colonies often encountered plundering pirates, including such famous ones as Calico Jack (Jack Rackam), Blackbeard (Edward Teach) and the “gentleman pirate” (Stede Bonnet). Among these outlaws two were exceptional. Their “remarkable ACTIONS AND ADVENTURES” were described at length in Daniel Defoe’s *General History of the Pyrates*. Both were known for their courage and tenacity in battle. And both were women.

Although born in Ireland, Anne Bonny was raised in colonial Carolina. Her temper flared often, and local rumor claimed she had once killed an English maid-servant with a case knife. When a young man attempted to rape her, she beat him so soundly that according to Defoe, “He lay ill of it for a considerable time.” She moved to the Bahamas after marrying James Bonny, an unemployed sailor. There, in the spring of 1719, she fell in love with Calico Jack Rackam and left her husband for a life of piracy on the high seas.

While sailing with Rackam, Anne Bonny masqueraded as a man, dressing in men’s clothes and fighting alongside the rest of the crew. But it was not long before she found her affections drawn from Rackam to another pirate aboard the vessel. When Bonny at last revealed her sex to the handsome young sailor, she learned to her surprise that her shipmate was actually Mary Read, another woman in disguise. The two became best of friends and sailed together until their capture near the island of Jamaica.

The women’s last stand, in November, 1720, was perhaps their most valiant. According to Defoe, “None kept the Deck except *Mary Read* and *Anne Bonny* and one more; upon which, she, *Mary Read*, called to those under Deck, to come up and fight like Men, and finding they did not stir, fired her Arms down the Hold amongst



MARY READ AND ANNE BONNY

them, killing one, and wounding others.”

Unlike Anne Bonny, Mary Read had spent most of her life in male garb. She was the illegitimate daughter of an Englishwoman, who had dressed her as a boy to gain financial assistance from relatives. Read spent several years in the British military, serving at various times as a sailor, foot soldier and member of the cavalry. She eventually found herself aboard a Dutch vessel bound for the West Indies, which was captured by Jack Rackam and his pirate crew.

Mary Read joined Rackam’s party and took naturally to life as a pirate. She brazenly defended the trade and its risks, claiming,

*That if it was put to the Choice of the Pyrates, they would not have the Punishment less than Death, the Fear of which kept some dastardly Rogues honest; that many of those who are now cheating the Widows and Orphans, and oppressing their poor Neighbours, who have no*

*Money to obtain Justice, would then rob at Sea, and the Ocean would be crowded with Rogues, like the Land, and no Merchant would venture out; so that the Trade, in a little Time, would not be worth following.*

Several weeks after their capture by Jonathan Barret of the British Navy, Anne Bonny, Mary Read and 12 male companions were convicted of piracy. Although all were condemned to hang, the women’s sentences were suspended when the court learned that both were pregnant. Mary Read developed a violent fever and died in prison soon after the trial. Anne Bonny was never executed. When Calico Jack Rackam was admitted to her cell just before his hanging, she had little sympathy to offer. “If he had fought like a man,” she said, “he need not have been hang’d like a Dog.” □

*The illustration, by B. Cole, is taken from the first edition of Daniel Defoe’s A General History of the Pyrates, published in London in 1724.*

# “SOUTH OF THE SOUTH”

photography by Nicholas R. Spitzer



Wilfred (left) and brother Wilson Latour play accordion and *frottoir* at a black Creole club in Opelousas, St. Landry Parish. The club, Slim's Y-Ki-Ki, is widely known for its Saturday night *zodico* (or *zydeco*) dances. *Zodico* is a Creole music unique to Louisiana, based on Afro-Caribbean rhythms, Cajun tunes and Afro-American blues. The word itself is a Creolization of the French word for snap beans, *les haricots*.

**T**he Louisiana Gulf Coast may have the greatest diversity and persistence of folk traditions of any area of the United States. In addition to the well-known cultural uniqueness of New Orleans, the many rural populations of south or “French” Louisiana until recently remained economically and socially isolated in a landscape laced with bayous, swamps, coastal marsh prairies

and fertile levee lands. It is in this increasingly industrialized rural region that cultural groups such as Cajuns, Creoles, *Islenos*, Yugoslavs and Houma Indians are struggling to maintain their distinctiveness today. This sub-region, which also extends in part to the Mississippi coast, owes as much or more culturally to the Afro-Latin Caribbean as to the Anglo-dominated Upland and Deep South. As local anthropologist C. Paige Gutierrez has said, this central area of the Gulf Coast is “south of the South.”

There are several ways in which south Louisiana can be understood as an extension of the Caribbean culture area, beginning with the parallel tropical environment and colonial development of the areas. Louisiana was controlled by France and Spain, two of the great Caribbean colonial powers, during the eighteenth century. Especially in terms of French colonialism, it was a small pearl on a sugar empire necklace that was dominated by St. Domingue (Haiti). Although Louisiana never produced sugar for European tables in quantities comparable to Haiti or Martinique, it did share the planter/slave social order with the French West Indies. The plantation sphere brought together the aesthetics and lifestyle of a small European cultured elite and the West African folk traditions of the masses, giving rise to the *gens libres de couleur* (free people of color) in both the French West Indies and Louisiana. It is generally presumed that Catholicism and a sometimes more liberal view of the human qualities of the slave/planter offspring allowed this class to arise and persist.

Another way that south Louisiana is culturally related to the Caribbean is via the actual movement of many of the area's diverse peoples from the West Indies to the mainland and back. At the American takeover in 1803, some French planters left Louisiana for Martinique and elsewhere. Prior to that in 1777, many Spanish Canary Islanders or *Islenos*, some of whom had previously settled in Cuba, had come to Louisiana during the Spanish colonial period in an attempt to Hispanicize Louisiana's culturally French society. To the present the *Islenos*, as fishers and trappers in St. Bernard Parish below New Orleans, maintain folk food traditions as in the dish *caldo* and sing Spanish ballads called

*decimas*. Further, Louisiana has been, and continues to be, a recipient of Spanish circum-Caribbean populations from Cuba, Nicaragua and Honduras, among other countries.

The most significant historical Caribbean influx to Louisiana was that of the French refugees from St. Domingue during and after the Haitian revolution. The arrival of 10,000 planters, *gens libres de couleur* and slaves after 1804 doubled the New Orleans population, assured the city a distinct West Indian flavor and gave new life to French Creole culture at a time of initial American control. It is this flood of people that gave rise to some of south Louisiana's unique folklife traditions. These traditions include Afro- and medieval-French-influenced folk Catholicism (voodoo, *traiteurs*, home altars and yard shrines), foodways (gumbo, jambalaya and red beans and rice), music (spasm jazz, street chants and *zodico*), Afro-Caribbean-derived dances (*calinda*, *bamboula* and now "second lining"), architecture (New Orleans shotgun houses and rural Creole cottages), and the continuing emphasis on festivals and street parades (Mardi Gras and jazz funerals).

In addition to similar plantation cultures and the actual back and forth migration, there was and is a parallel cultural diversity between island and Louisiana societies in general. The cultural base of both the Caribbean and south Louisiana is mainly of African and Mediterranean origins. During the colonial period, both areas also received French and Spanish peasant fishing and farming groups. Later, Syrian, Jewish and Lebanese traders and Italians came as post-slavery laborers. Further, both areas were settled with intermingling and strife between the colonial population and Native American groups such as the Ciboney, Arawak and Carib in the Caribbean and the Houma, Choctaw, Attakapas, Chitimacha and Bayou Goula in Louisiana.

Certainly the single best-known and dominant cultural group in rural south Louisiana has been the Acadians. They, with a few exceptions, did not come from the Caribbean. The Acadians or Cajuns arrived in Louisiana over a 30-year period after 1765 as exiles from what is now Nova Scotia. Prior to settling in Louisiana, they had been dispersed throughout the American colonies, returned to France (from



Three generations of black Creole women in St. Martinville, St. Martin Parish, pause en route to the cemetery with All Saints Day decorations. French speakers predominate in the parish – nearly 80 percent. Many of them, white and black alike, use the Afro-Caribbean Creole language referred to locally as *couri-vini* or *gombo*. The area is known as the place where the legendary Evangeline came to settle; the ethnic mix combines the old Acadian culture, descendants of French planters and Creole-speaking slaves, *gens libres de couleur* and English-speaking American planters and their slaves.



Signs along Bayou Lafourche – "The World's Longest Mainstreet" – tell shrimp, oyster and oil field service boat traffic where to get a haircut and a room for the night. Lafourche, with its densely settled natural levee banks, runs from Donaldsonville on the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico. The levees, or *batture*, provide fertile soil for sugar plantations on the upper bayou, often run by the descendants of Creole European and Yankee planters. The narrower lower banks are used primarily for gardens and are settled mostly by a Cajun and Spanish-derived population devoted to fishing and oil industry service jobs. Tremendous development along Lafourche, due to the new offshore oil port, has led to drastic population influxes and, in some places, has greatly disrupted communities and environments.



Morris Ardoin plays piano accordion and sings to his new-born son outside the family's *zodico* club in the tiny settlement of Duralde, near Mamou, St. Landry Parish. To his left (wearing a hat) is his father, the legendary Creole accordion player, Alphonse "Bois Sec" Ardoin.



Crawfisher Hally Barras of Catahoula, St. Martin Parish, checks his traps. Crawfish were originally caught for local consumption in bayous, roadside canals and the Atchafalaya Basin. They are eaten boiled or in various dishes – *etoufee*, *bisque*, *gumbo* – and have become a cultural symbol of the Cajuns. Nowadays, there is a broad regional and a growing national market, and these shellfish are increasingly "farmed" in flooded rice, cane and soybean fields all over south Louisiana.

whence they had come in the early seventeenth century), been imprisoned in England or migrated to the French Caribbean colonies. When the Acadians arrived in New Orleans, the colony had been ceded to Spain. The former farmers and fisherfolk from the cold north became *petits habitants* on levee crest farms along the rivers and bayous of sweltering Louisiana, as well as trappers and fishers in the back swamps and lower coastal marshes.

The 22 parishes of southwest Louisiana are usually referred to as "Acadiana," or "Cajun country." However, not all the people who reside there are Cajuns; not all Cajuns speak French; and not all people of French descent are Cajuns. In addition to the descendants of European Creoles, Creoles of Color, French slaves and settlers directly from the Old World, many Houma and Chitimacha Indians speak French, but none of these groups are usually considered Cajuns. It is the peasant-derived Cajun culture, rather than the former Creole colonial elites, that has survived most identifiably to the present. The Cajuns have, over time, managed to assimilate and acculturate the Anglos, Germans, Italians and Spanish with whom they came into contact, not to mention the French planter aristocracy and black populations.

The Cajuns themselves largely resisted acculturation to mainstream American ways until the last 50 years. In this period, schools began to promote the English language and literacy at the expense of oral French; the arrival of hard surface roads over soft, wet land allowed cars to replace boats and carriages; World War II forced many Cajun men to leave their rural life for the first time; and the powerful forces of English language media and the Anglo-dominated oil industry expanded the influence of American culture. However, in the face of changing linguistic and social customs, Cajun music continued to be heard. With its roots in the seventeenth-century French dance hall, filtered through the impact of jazz, blues and hillbilly music, Cajun music along with food and festivals often serves to symbolize the romantic cultural revival that French Louisiana is now undergoing.

## The Blessing of the Shrimp Fleet

(Bayou LaBattre, Louisiana)

*In my third-floor office, windowless, climate-controlled,  
there is no annual Blessing of Computers.  
Archbishop Technology has blessed us  
with self-correcting typewriters beyond  
the reach of sinister Fate, with dictaphones  
that break down less than stars, and copiers  
that deal in water-colors, ink, and oils.*

*The boats know better. They've been overruled  
by experts: Fate's in charge on the open water.  
They throw themselves on Fate, bound hand and foot.  
Therefore, if scented candles will drive away  
the oil-spill from the oyster-beds, if prayers  
will bless the single-veined transparent shrimp  
with fertile marriages, if holy water  
has power on storms – let there be candles, prayers,  
and water in abundance! Let the boats  
be painted, decked with flags and stocked with beer,  
and give one riotous day to celebrate  
our helplessness before we must despair  
from the same cause.*

– Gail White



French-speaking Cajun boatmaker Leroy Cheramie (left) works with his two sons to repair the bow of a shrimp boat in Empire, Plaquemines Parish.

Alongside and mingling with the Cajuns, the Creole culture of south Louisiana is significant. The term “Creole” has great semantic elasticity and often varies in meaning, depending upon who is talking to whom, about what, or whether it is used as a noun or an adjective. Derived from the Portuguese *criuolo* (meaning “native to a region”), “Creole” originally described the descendants of the European colonial population in the West Indies, Latin America, Louisiana and later the “Creoles of Color.” With Anglo-American intrusion into Louisiana, many slaves, as well as free people who did not consider themselves black, looked more to their European heritage than an African heritage to separate themselves from *les americains*, both black and white. Thus, Creole, a term once associated with the “pure” descendants of the European colonists, came also to be linked

to people of diverse ancestry and culture: black, Indian, French, Spanish.

In rural Louisiana many of the Creoles of Color (some of whom held their own slaves) and French slaves mingled with the arriving Cajuns. As a result, some black and lighter people known as *mulatres* are more Cajun than Old World French or Afro-American in their cultural orientation. However, among the rural Afro-French of Louisiana, some retain strong ties to Caribbean culture in speaking “Creole” – a language that can be briefly described as French words within a New World Africanized system of grammar and sound (parallel to the English-based *Gullah* of the Georgia Sea Islands) as well as in “Afro-Caribbean” dress, foodways and musical style. *Zodico* music, for example, reflects a middle ground between Afro-Caribbean rhythm patterns with tonal and repertoire influence from Afro-American music and the melodic sources of Cajun music.

The diverse foundation of south Louisiana noted previously was enhanced by the arrival of Yugoslavs, among other central and eastern European groups, before and after the start of the twentieth century. Asian input from China and the Philippines has also added to the cultural mix with the newest group being the Vietnamese, many of whom speak French and have pursued fishing as a trade. All these groups, past and present, have given rise to what has been described by New Orleans folklorist George Reinecke as a “Creole society”: that is, a society which has emerged as a multi-cultural whole without totally losing the uniqueness of its separate parts. As such, south Louisiana is the only area in the coastal South and the United States where a predominant Afro-Latin-Anglo-Asian cultural diversity is the source of a unified regional identity. □

*This article was excerpted and modified from program notes to the 1980 National Folk Festival guidebook. The author, Nicholas Spitzer, is a folklorist working with the state of Louisiana. His own special interests are in regional ethnic diversity in south Louisiana and black Creole music and festivals. A more in-depth survey of cultural traditions from south Louisiana can be found in his 1977 article in Southern Exposure, “Cajuns and Creoles: The French Gulf Coast,” Vol. V, No. 2-3.*

# CARIBBEAN CONNECTION

The South Coast's Caribbean connection flows backward more than 200 years, as Nicholas Spitzer details in the previous article on Louisiana's ethnic heritage. And it moves forward to the present moment, to the arrival on Southern shores of oil refined in Puerto Rico, bauxite mined in Jamaica, cocoa grown in the Dominican Republic and baseballs stitched in Haiti.

People from the islands keep arriving, too. Some bring official visas, education passes or work permits. Others, escaping chronic poverty and political repression, come with little more than the clothes on their backs.

On October 26, 1981, a 30-foot-long boat, *La Nativete*, concluded its 800-mile trip from Haiti with 63 passengers, each taking the dangerous voyage "*pour cheche lavi mouin* — to search for my life." Just off Hillsboro Beach, Florida, a powerful wave overturned *La Nativete*. Only 30 passengers reached shore safely. The other 33, screaming and struggling in the surf, drowned. Their bodies washed ashore while a different class of immigrants to south Florida — the wealthy retiree and seasonal visitor — watched from their beachfront balconies.

The 30 survivors received no accolades for their courageous journey or for their heroic efforts to rescue their shipmates. Instead they were rounded up and imprisoned "indefinitely" at the Krome Avenue Detention Center, an abandoned missile base located in the Everglades just west of Miami. The Haitians were seized by agents of the U.S. govern-

ment not because of any crime they committed, but because of who they were. Only 28 days earlier, President Ronald Reagan had declared that "the entry of undocumented aliens arriving at the borders of the United States from the high seas is detrimental to the interests of the United States."

The U.S. and Haitian governments had reached "an agreement," the White House explained, whereby the U.S. Coast Guard could "interdict" and stop any suspected Haitian craft anywhere on the ocean, board it and order its return if the passengers were not properly "documented" as "refugees" — people fleeing political or religious persecution. (It was not explained what documents were sufficient to establish such status.) Any immigrants slipping through the Reagan interdiction policy would be captured on shore, if possible, and "detained indefinitely" until they could be processed for deportation or could somehow demonstrate themselves to be legitimate "refugees."

Perhaps the passengers of *La Nativete* should have named their boat the *Mayflower*.

In the last decade, over 600,000 Haitians have left their homeland, a country the World Bank says is the poorest in the Western Hemisphere. The unemployment rate hovers at 50 percent, and on its last inspection, Amnesty International found that "the rights of free assembly, association, expression, thought and information were severely repressed."

Jean-Claude Duvalier, Haiti's "president for life," rules with the unilateral

control his father exercised before him. A 1979 U.S. State Department report concluded that Duvalier "wields almost all actual power . . . and significant amounts of domestic revenues usable for development continue to be diverted to personal enrichment." Although his government salary is \$25,000 per year, his personal fortune is estimated at between \$200 and \$500 million; meanwhile, 90 percent of the people live on less than \$100 annually.

An article in the February, 1981, *National Geographic* says, "It is not unusual for women in the Haitian countryside to lose half of all live births to infant disease. A child of two is called, in Creole, *youn ti chape* — 'a little escapee' from death."

Most Haitian immigrants seek refuge on the neighboring islands, which like Haiti are comprised entirely of transplants, primarily the descendants of European colonists and African slaves. Since 1972, about 50,000 Haitians have come to the United States, usually to the shores of south Florida. They might have been viewed as the latest in the unceasing wave of newcomers who have made this region — and nation — what it is today. But the hostility epitomized by Reagan's interdiction plan reveals an official attitude and policy toward the black boatpeople of the Caribbean that contradicts everything symbolized by the imperative to welcome the "huddled masses yearning to breathe free."

The United States cannot simply separate itself from Haiti's history, nor pretend it has played no role in

*"You shall not molest or oppress the aliens, for you were once aliens yourselves."*

— Exodus 22:21

shaping the conditions in which Haitians now find themselves. The French, who gave the U.S. the Statue of Liberty, brought slavery to Haiti and developed the country as its richest colony in the 1700s. Following a 13-year struggle, the world's first black republic was born there on January 1, 1804. But colonial economic ties with France, and increasingly with the U.S., perpetuated the island's political instability and fostered the emergence of a complicated caste-class system.

In 1915, the U.S. Marines smashed a popular rebellion, literally crucifying its leader, Charlemagne Peralte, and killing hundreds of black peasants demanding land reform. The Marines occupied the island for the next 19 years while U.S. officials and private business leaders helped erect a more "suitable" political-economic infrastructure, including fixing the country's currency to the U.S. dollar and removing its gold to New York.

By 1957, internal tensions had again reached such a boiling point that the U.S. allowed reformist advocate Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier to take control of the government from the French-speaking mulatto elite. In short order, however, Duvalier created his own network of merchants, government bureaucrats and feudal "judges" in rural areas. He attracted millions of dollars in international aid and investment, especially from the U.S., by projecting a new aura of stability. In reality, passivity was enforced through sheer repression, often administered by Duvalier's private army, the notorious *Tonton Macoute*. Thousands of mulatto intellectuals and merchants fled the island in the 1960s, while the spiritually strong rural peasants did their best to hold on, hoping the next government would bring improvement.

When Papa Doc died in 1971, the U.S. stationed battleships offshore to ensure the peaceful transfer of power to his 19-year-old son, Jean-Claude. "Baby Doc" promised land reform and new freedoms of political and private expression. But his failure to harness the *Tonton Macoute* or to initiate agricultural reforms soon convinced large numbers of the island's rural peasant majority that the prospect of another 40 or more years of Duvalier rule offered no hope for a future on the island.

Serious erosion and loss of topsoil have followed decades of cutting

trees for fuel and the mahogany trade; the rural ecosystem, says the Washington-based Conservation Foundation, is "ravaged nearly to exhaustion." The prestigious Inter-American Foundation reports other factors hastening the displacement of the rural population:

Facing the very real possibility of appropriation of their land by a *gros neg* ("big shot"), farmers are discouraged from investing in their land, and encouraged to overwork it. There are substantiated reports of land-grabs, of judges bribed to issue competing land titles, of extortion by locally powerful, quasi-government authorities. The situation of insecure tenant arrangement is the most severe and debilitating constraint to peasant development in Haiti.

In December, 1972, 20 months after Baby Doc took power, the first boatload of peasant families landed on the Florida coast. (They, too, were thrown in jail.) The mass exodus to other countries and to Haiti's cities has escalated as 80,000 job-seeking youths come of age each year. Labor-intensive industries have flocked to the island because, as the *Miami Herald* reports, "with the lowest wage scale in the Caribbean, Haiti has become one of the most lucrative locations for industries that require a great deal of hand work." Over 150 U.S. corporations now manufacture products on the island, taking advantage of liberal tax laws and duty fees for returning goods to the U.S.

Desperate poverty has led to sporadic revolts in the countryside, to new attempts at self-organization and support for opposition political parties — and to new levels of corruption among government officials. A few years ago, the island's Minister of Interior concocted a scheme to sell five tons a month of Haitian blood to such U.S. companies as Dow Chemical, Cutter Laboratories and Armour Pharmaceutical. For a monthly salary of \$12 apiece, 6,000 donors regularly gave their blood, considered among the richest in the world in natural antibodies because of Haiti's high disease rates. The Minister later resigned, but others in the government have sponsored equally devious plots. In 1980, the World Council of Churches discovered that Duvalier himself receives a kick-back of \$70 per Haitian canecutter sent across the border to the Domin-

ican Republic's sugar plantations.

In late 1981, Canada suspended an \$8 million follow-up grant for an aid program it had begun in 1974, because money targeted for improving health, education and agricultural services for rural Haitians inexplicably disappeared. In 1980, West Germany canceled a \$32 million grant for similar reasons: corruption and lack of accountability. France has also shut off aid, and the International Monetary Fund recently banned Haiti from borrowing more money until it accounts for \$20 million which "disappeared" during two months in early 1981.

Despite such mounting international censure of Haiti's government, the United States continues to send \$25 million in direct grants each year and to contribute the bulk of another \$50 million that Haiti receives annually through U.S.-sponsored aid consortiums. As the principal bulwark of a regime the world community almost uniformly condemns, the U.S. government finds itself urged to apply pressure against Haiti, just as it has been urged to move against other repressive "allies" such as South Africa and El Salvador. The *Miami News* summed up the message in a January,



DEMONSTRATION OF 500 HAITIAN EXILES AND SUPPORTERS OUTSIDE MIAMI'S KROME DETENTION CENTER, SEPTEMBER 7, 1981

photo by Jennifer Miller

*"No contracting state shall expel or return a refugee in any manner to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened."*  
— Article 33, UN Protocol on Status of Refugees, passed by the US in 1968

1982, editorial:

If ever there was a time when the United States was in a position to demand accountability, to dictate political, economic and human rights reforms to Jean-Claude Duvalier, that time is now. To simply encourage private, industrial investment, President Reagan's international panacea, is to make all but inevitable the kind of revolution Reagan would least like to see. . . . Haiti doesn't need more foreign investors taking advantage of a desperate, docile labor force to assemble purses or stitch baseballs. . . . Haiti needs to stop the medieval practice of allowing the government's hired thugs to expropriate the land at will.

Until the United States changes its policy toward the Haitian government, Americans in general and South Coast residents in particular can expect to see more Haitians landing on U.S. shores, working in the migrant stream along the East Coast, gravitating to Little Haiti ghettos from Miami to New York, "yearning to breathe free," yet — when they are caught without proper documentation — filling up U.S. prisons and detention camps.

Over 2,000 Haitians are now being held by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) in more than a dozen facilities in five states and Puerto Rico. INS procedures have changed in the 10 years since its officials imprisoned the first boatload of 65 men, women and children who reached Pompano Beach, Florida, on December 12, 1972. Attorneys for the National Emergency Civil Liberties Committee and the Haitian Refugee Center have, for example, won court decisions ordering INS to stop conducting mass deportation hearings; the Haitians' requests for permission to live in the U.S. must now be considered one at a time, with each Haitian represented by an attorney.

But the central principle undergirding INS practice under four presidents over the last decade has remained the same: since Haiti and the United States are friends, INS

assumes Haitian citizens entering U.S. borders are merely seeking economic advantage, not fleeing political persecution; as a class, Haitians cannot be considered "refugees" or "political immigrants," but must be viewed as "economic migrants" akin to Mexicans who illegally cross the Rio Grande in search of work and who, once caught, are sent back to their homes.

The refusal of INS officials to recognize the existence of widespread political repression in Haiti, which they assume pervades communist nations like Vietnam, is considered a double standard at best and blatantly racist by dozens of human-rights organizations. Despite overwhelming evidence of Haiti's police-state atmosphere assembled by such organizations as Amnesty International and the World Council of Churches, INS has granted political refugee status to fewer than 150 of the thousands of Haitian boatpeople whose applications it has processed. This selective blindness became all too apparent during President Carter's "open arms and open hearts" program to grant immediate political asylum in the U.S. to thousands of Cubans fleeing "Castro's grip."

"It is disturbing that the government's assumption seems to be that political persecution is automatic under a communist regime, but must be proven if the dictator is Jean-Claude Duvalier," said Representative Walter Fauntroy, chair of the Congressional Black Caucus. It is also disturbing, Fauntroy noted, that this denial of political asylum applies to "the only group of black people who have ever sought refuge in this country."

In July, 1980, a class action lawsuit on behalf of 4,000 Haitians brought a similar sharp rebuke of the government's "unlawful discrimination" from Judge James King of the Miami Federal District Court:

Those Haitians who came to the United States seeking freedom and justice did not find it. Instead, they were confronted with an Immigration and Naturalization Service determined to deport them. . . . The uniform rejection of their claims

demonstrated a profound ignorance, if not an intentional disregard, of the conditions in Haiti. It is beyond dispute that some Haitians will be subjected to the brutal treatment and bloody prisons . . . upon their deportation.

An embarrassed Carter administration quickly revised INS policy, introducing a set of new classifications and rights for thousands of Haitians who entered the country during the period of the 1980 Mariel boatlift of over 120,000 Cubans. But by the end of 1980, the door to U.S. asylum and/or work permits was again closed for Haitians. And Jimmy Carter, the champion of "a foreign policy based on human rights," had passed up his chance to award refugee status to Haitians as a group because, he told critics, he refused to be "stampeded into making an emotional decision."

To his credit, Carter's State Department did force a relaxing of some repressive practices in Haiti in what *NACLA Reports* calls "the season of free expression" from 1977 to November, 1980. Under the subtle threat of aid cutoff, Duvalier permitted more freedom of association and of the press, especially the Creole-language radio stations which in the largely illiterate nation became "the backbone of the democratic movement by simply reporting on issues relevant to people's lives," says *NACLA Reports*. But as early as one day after Ronald Reagan's election, members of the *Tonton Macoute* were celebrating in the streets of Port-au-Prince, firing pistols in the air and chanting, "Cowboys are in power, now we rule over human rights." On November 28, 1980, Duvalier initiated an unprecedented series of arrests, beginning with the imprisonment of 20 staff members of Radio Haiti and including more than 200 other journalists and leaders of labor, student, rural development, human-rights and opposition political organizations. Twenty-six of that number were later expelled by Duvalier; many of the rest are unaccounted for.

Inside the United States, President



Reagan replaced INS officials who balked at new steps "designed to discourage people from coming at all," according to David Crosland, former INS legal counsel under Carter. The steps included an August, 1981, decision to detain all new arrivals in prison without bail until their status is officially determined, a process that now takes over six months; an INS-requested court ruling (overturning an earlier decision obtained by the Haitian Refugee Center) which allowed 200 Haitians depressed by prison conditions and by the bleak prospects of obtaining asylum, to return home "voluntarily," where they would presumably spread the word of U.S. detention practices; the September 29 interdiction executive order; and intensive publicity in Haiti of the deaths of the 33 *La Nativete* passengers.

In December, 1981, a State Department immigration expert boasted that the get-tough approach "has been more successful than anybody had anticipated." He said only 1,960 Haitians had entered the U.S. illegally between August 1 and November 30, 1981, compared to 6,906 in the same four-month period in 1980.

A host of other voices roundly condemn the new measures. They include Haitian women jailed in Alderson, West Virginia, who began a hunger strike on April 2, 1982, the most recent of a long series of mass protests inside and outside the prisons; U.S. District Court Judge Robert Carter in New York, who ruled on March 5, 1982, that eight Haitians jailed in Brooklyn since July, 1981, were illegally "denied

parole because they were black and/or they were Haitians;" Archbishop Edward McCarthy, who said the U.S. Catholic Conference would sponsor all 2,100 Haitians now incarcerated if the government would release them while it considered their requests for asylum; and a Haitian exile at a rally who said simply, "Our reasons for leaving our homeland are as valid as those of the Cubans, Vietnamese and Eastern Europeans."

On the other hand, some Florida officials seem pleased with the Reagan actions because they say the state is overburdened by the medical and social-service costs associated with the Haitian and Cuban immigrants. "The whole system of resettlement in Florida has been a failure," said Deputy Attorney General Ken Tucker. He said the entrance of more Haitians posed "a serious potential for the introduction of tuberculosis into south Florida," and he suggested that those inside Miami's Krome Avenue Detention Center be "carefully processed and carefully resettled — resettled outside the state of Florida."

Ironically, Dade County and the state of Florida may have to pick up a large share of the cost of aid programs for immigrants as a result of other bold initiatives by Ronald Reagan — the federal budget cuts. In February, 1982, Vice President George Bush, who heads a cabinet-level task force on south Florida's Crime, Drug Smuggling and Illegal Immigration, announced an extension of federal subsidies for programs serving indigent immigrants, but only until April 1. He also said, "The Secretary of Navy has authorized the use

of U.S. Navy warships — I repeat, U.S. warships — to help the Coast Guard interdict ships smuggling drugs or carrying illegal aliens into Florida."

Despite the bravado and heavy-handed measures, some Haitian exiles and immigration experts believe the boats will keep coming. "A few ships on the Windward Passage aren't going to stop the Haitians once the trade winds shift in April," said one refugee camp administrator. The choices Haitians face are extremely limited, he pointed out — either emigration or revolution.

"We will survive Duvalier as we survived his father," says Miami's Haitian Refugee Center director Father Gerard Jean-Juste. "And we will survive the Reagan administration." Ultimately, he predicts, the Duvalier regime will be overthrown. In the meantime, coastal Southerners should expect to receive more passengers — arriving dead or alive — in boats like *La Nativete*. □

*Bob Hall is an editor of Southern Exposure. Jim Clark is a reporter with the New York-based National Black Network. Background material for this article was provided by the Haitian Refugee Center of Miami, The Miami Herald, Friends of the Haitian Refugees, NACLA, Richard Dieter of the Alderson Hospitality House in West Virginia, Roz Dixon of the Women's Task Force for the Haitian Political Prisoners, Linus A. Hoskins of Washington International College, Max Manigat of the Caribbean Studies Department at the City College of New York and the Minority Rights Group of New York.*

photos by Jennifer Miller



U.S. BORDER PATROL AGENTS, CALLED IN FROM TEXAS, HOLD BACK DEMONSTRATORS AT THE KROME CAMP;

MEANWHILE, 1,000 HAITIANS INSIDE COULD HEAR THE PROTESTERS CHANT, IN CREOLE, "LET MY PEOPLE GO!"

# GOING OVERBOARD

By Lucy Gwin

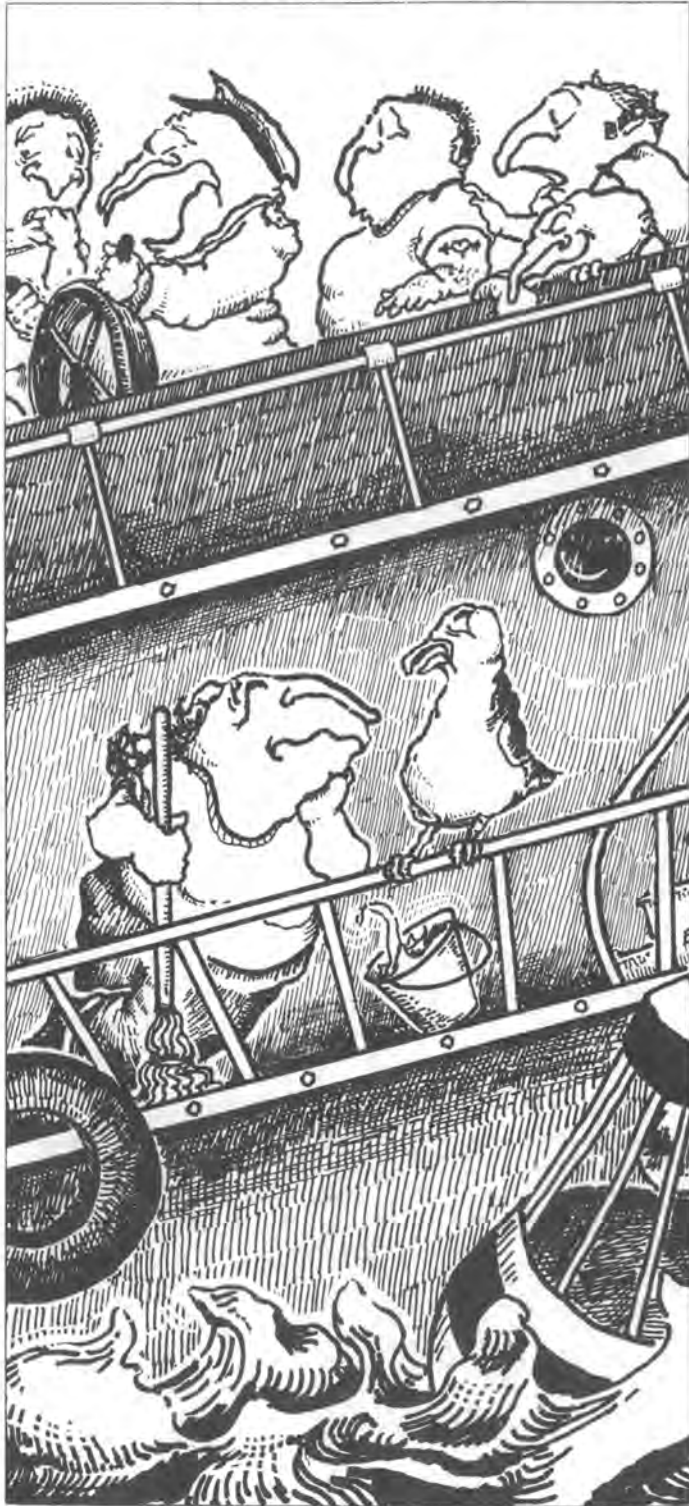


Illustration by Beth Epstein

I sit down to make an accounting of my year in the offshore oilfields merchant marine with a certain woman in mind, a woman I never met who signs herself Betty c. On my last night as a sailor I found a message from her on the overhead of my bunk.

Women are rare in the Gulf Coast oilfields. In 1979 males outnumbered females hundreds, maybe thousands, to one; a message from one oilfield woman to another was surprising in itself. So I had reason to take this communication seriously, even though it disturbed me.

Bordered by a rude drawing of oversized male genitals and written in the uncertain hand of a near-illiterate, it said: "I like to fuck anytime. Big Dicks for the Cook. Betty c."

After a moment's thought, I set my rebuttal alongside it: "A woman's place is in the wheelhouse." But my dialogue with Betty c. was not so easily concluded.

Flat on my back on that boat, Betty, lust was maybe the least of my preoccupations. Up until the time I went to work on the boats, I'd thought of myself as a man's woman. Women, I believed, led boring and limited lives. Men were free; I thrived on their company. I'd fallen in love no fewer than 22 times in my life. But after a year in the merchant marine I would've traded my entire reproductive apparatus for a chance to do my job in peace.

I was the first woman, or maybe only one of the first — Guinness doesn't keep records in this category — to work as a deckhand on the oilfield supply vessels. The work was hard; the men were harder. They tested me, courted me, competed with me, nearly killed me once or twice. Through it all they insisted they knew what women like me were about. "No woman comes out here in the man's world 'less she just wants to get fucked." I denied that, Betty, in the name of female sailors everywhere. But then I found your mark.

Betty, I only wish I knew you, that we could talk. Failing that, I wish you could read. Because today I sit down to write you a book.

**T**his is it, the jumping-off point, edge of the known world. Many who come here to make their fortunes, or, like me, only to jump off the world for a while, are not seen again. You may never have heard of Morgan City, Louisiana, but it is a major capital of American blue-collar nomadic culture and hub of the Gulf Coast offshore oilfields. A sign on its outskirts identifies it as "Morgan City — Home of the Shrimp and Petroleum Festival." "One Hundred Years of Progress," reads another.

I would erect a different sign: "Morgan City — Epicenter

of Too Many Booms. One Hundred Years of Boomism.”

In 1874 Morgan City built a moss factory and enjoyed a modest boom in sphagnum harvested from the surrounding Atchafalaya Basin swamp. The arrival of the railroads brought full-scale booms in timber and shipbuilding, a boomlet in beeswax and honey, booms in pelican oil, otter and beaver pelts, egret plumes, alligator hides. Then came the booms in crab meat, oysters, pogfish, jumbo shrimp. Never mind that the Pelican State no longer has a pelican to its name — nor an otter, nor a beaver — or that its alligator and egret populations were saved from extinction only by unwelcome federal intervention, or that the oyster and shrimp catches get thinner every year; a boom is a boom, irresistibly here today while the getting's good, gone tomorrow when the boomstuff runs out. Morgan City stands in the ruins of her sequential booms and seems not to mind the temporariness of it all. The booms just keep coming.

In 1949 came the most powerful economic explosion to date: the boom in black gold, crude oil. If the oil lay beneath Morgan City's main street, the city fathers would surely have called in the bulldozers and wiped their town off the map. But the oil is pooled downstream and offshore, beneath the blue gumbo mud and coral shelves of the Gulf of Mexico. Morgan City, with its well-developed port and its central location, is the oilfields' major freight and manpower depot.

Around the clock the oilfield supply ships arrive at the docks, load up with supplies for the rigs, and run back down the Atchafalaya to the Gulf. Because offshore oil rigs are manmade islands, the supply vessels — and to some extent, a fleet of helicopters — must ferry the rigs' groceries, their fuel and water, their machinery and men. The men who crew the rigs and the supply ships work in shifts of one or more weeks at a time without a shore break. On the midweek days when the rig and boat crews change over to allow the offshore workers their home leave, Morgan City's single main highway breaks out in clumps of bad-toothed hitchhikers carrying makeshift seabags. (All along the oilfield coast a plastic garbage bag is referred to as a Morgan City suitcase.) Those lonesome, horny, homeless, hard-muscled men are known to the locals as oilfield trash, *rigrats*.

All rigrats are male. All but a few of them are under 30 years old, Caucasian, nomadic. They lead a bruising life on the underside of American protection and plenty, bumming their way from the Gulf Coast oilfields to the Baltimore Canyon to the Alaska pipeline and back, always back. Some of them get as far away as the oilfields of Africa, Venezuela, the North and China seas. But Morgan City is their training ground, their jumping-off point, the one town they can count on for a ready job if all else fails. Such men are always in demand in the oilfields; the oil companies can never seem to hire on enough of them. Morgan City couldn't prosper without them. But nobody really wants them at all. They are rogue males in the grip of testosterone wanderlust and you can smell it on them.

An old friend of mine, Slammin' Sam Baxter, had steered me to Morgan City and a cooking job on the oilfield supply boats. He'd guaranteed I'd get the job I wanted on

my first day in town. He'd even furnished me with a map that would lead me to Watercraft, a major oilfield boat company he thought would be hiring this time of year.

I tore up my first try at the application, the one where I admitted to being former vice president of a Michigan Avenue advertising agency, former owner of a gourmet restaurant. I was no Yankee spy, no union organizer or investigative reporter. But my background might raise suspicion. On a fresh application form I demoted myself to former cook and waitress.

I needn't have troubled. Five hours in the steamy hiring shed must have done the trick. Watercraft's hiring secretary put me on without a second look. "You kin cook? Thass what we want. Start Tuesday, week from today. Be at the gate at oh-four-hunnert hours. Bring an alarm clock, no liquor, no mind-altering drugs. All you gotta do is what the cap'n tells you. Cook job pays 45 dollars a day."

I boiled over with questions. What was the name of my boat? How many in the crew? Where would we be going?

Mainly, what's it like out there?

She answered only the last, wrinkling her little white nose. "I don't have the least idea. I wouldn't go on one of them dirty boats if you paid me."



don't think I heard the word *Cajun* more than a dozen times in my year on the Cajun coast. The coast-correct, if vulgar, term for the Acadian French immigrants to Louisiana is *coonass*. Accent first syllable if you aren't one, accent second syllable proudly, and soften the *a*, if you are. The *Pride's* regular skipper, Captain Auguste Godchaux, The Goose, was a full-blooded *coonass* who'd spent 31 of his 49 years as a sailor.

Guste's face was crook nosed and double chinned, lit by wise Gallic eyes that had seen, at one time or another, all the foolishness the world had to offer. The pattern of laugh lines on his face would seem to indicate that he approved of it. He was looking at me now. "Dey tell me I got a crazy-crazy Yankee cook, me. I din' b'lieve dat shit. Now look! Turn y'seff aroun'." He spun me. "Lookin' somepin like a college gel to me. You college gel?"

Guste invited me, and even expected me, to join him in the wheelhouse whenever the *Pride* left her moorings. Without my having asked for it, or even thought of it, he pushed me headlong into a full-time apprenticeship. Since diagrams written on paper were beyond him, he demonstrated the sometimes complex principles of navigation with a pack of cigarettes and a lighter. With only canoe experience behind me, I was hard put to keep up with his instructions. But Guste was that rarest of teachers. Not once did he explain a piece of equipment to me if I could take it into my own hands and discover for myself, through often tedious trial and error, how the thing worked. I'd never changed a flat tire in my life, or taken a math course willingly. But Guste had me calculating wind speed and

*From Going Overboard by Lucy Gwin  
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current direction, boxing the compass and plotting our course after one lesson.

Guste was especially tickled to be teaching me what no woman, by common oilfield consent, was ever allowed to learn. He promised that after a couple of weeks of lessons I'd be bringing the *Pride* down the bayou and into the locks by myself.

I told Guste I'd been thinking about quitting cooking to work on deck for real. Deckhands had more interesting work to do, more loose time to learn things than the cook did. Here I'd landed myself the least exciting job on the boat, an indoor job. No sooner would I start a piloting lesson than it was time to make supper. My beloved volunteer night watches ended not in soft sleep but in tense preparations for breakfast. Guste himself had told me that decking was probably too heavy a job for a woman. Still, I wanted to try.

As he lassoed the tall deck bitts time after time, I stood just beside him, mimicking his discus thrower's posture, the wide arc of his right arm, his (it seemed to me) exaggerated followthrough. He never missed.

I took my own first 20 tries, and muffed them all. Hand-to-eye coordination had never been my strong suit. The small ragged crowd of men who gathered at our dockside gate were no help. They called out random and contradictory advice, nudging one another in the ribs and hooting as I missed the bitt and missed again and missed again.

Guste, hanging back, just scowled at them.

I would have liked to quit. Even when the line grazed its target, my loops invariably failed to open over the bitt and drop onto it obediently, as Guste's had.

The winter sun was hot, high contrast. I watched my clumsy shadow, felt my nerves stutter. And then I hit my mark, once.

That was heartening. I gritted my teeth in concentration, sent the light lasso flying, hauled it back, sent it flying again. Pretty soon I was hitting square on two out of three attempts.

After supper, we went back to the deck for more line practice. This time Guste hauled a three-inch-diameter line from our offside stern bitt and dropped it at my feet. I could only just lift its awkward 40-inch loop. "I don't see how I can throw *this*," I whined.

Guste shrugged. "Try and see how she do."

On my first attempt to hurl the thing, it dropped on the deck just paces from my feet. *Thud*.

"Yo'll do him," Guste said. Then he excused himself to go ashore for what he called "a bit lapp" (tr.: beer). Once he was out of sight I nearly put the line back up on the bitt. I could always say I'd tried. But then I saw two faces at the wheelhouse windows, our two deckhands watching me.

Can a woman do it? They didn't think so. I couldn't have borne their being right about that.

So I tried. And I rested. And I tried again. My muscles shrieked and my ears sang in agony. Once I managed to hook the bitt by its horn. But I just couldn't seem to get the damned line high enough off the deck.

And then a feeling of entrancement settled over me,

some kind of magic second wind that took me beyond my trying, trying, trying. The line that I'd cursed just minutes before was suddenly whistling over my head, circling the bitt, catching with a satisfying *snap!*

I tested this crazy magic; was it repeatable? Yes, and easier every time. My back straightened, found a balance point. My shoulders loosened. I could feel, actually feel, the power of my own leverage working for me. Here I was doing the lasso act that was the mark of a real deckhand, when back home I'd been a failure at Frisbee. Magic indeed.



Back at the Watercraft office, I made my way through the wall of noise that marks a crew change day: the rough, loving curses of old shipmates meeting, the uneasy shuffle of oilfield vagrants waiting for their new assignments, the ringing of a dozen telephones at once, the click of the heels of white-collared office girls. I stood near the desk of my marine supervisor for almost an hour before I got his attention. Others were waiting, too, to plead their special cases.

The marine supervisor was rat-nosed, a smoothie, perfect model for a loan company collection man. "I want to be a deckhand," I told him.

He pretended he didn't hear me.

"I want to give up cooking and work on the deck," I said, louder this time. The men's chatter dropped off. The phones rang on. "I didn't think any women could do it, but I've been trying the job and I do OK," I said.

Loan Company leaned back in his swivel chair and winked at the men behind me, as if I were a stubborn child. Then he went back to his paperwork, and the room to its noise. "We like to keep our cooks . . . *cooks*," was all he said.

"Even if I can prove to you today, out on a deck, that I can do the job? Maybe you don't believe I can do the job?"

"No, honey, it's not that at all. We just don't want to see you get hurt."

"Isn't getting hurt or not getting hurt my own responsibility?"

"I have a safety man down the hall would sure give you an argument about that."

"Then maybe I'd better go talk to the safety man."

"Suit yourself."

Safety Man, a marine super-supervisor with a private office, was no friendlier to my cause. He produced a pocket Bible and waved it under my nose for proof of the sanctity of home cooking and small children, the glory of God's plan for women. I must have rolled my eyes a shade theatrically.

"I saw you make that face at me, young lady," he pounced.

"Look," I told him, "my husband and I were divorced more than 15 years ago. My children are in college now. I've paid my debt to society. Now I want to work on your boats as a deckhand, and you tell me I've got to go back to square one and make babies again. The last I heard, I have some rights. Title Seven of the Civil Rights Act guarantees me this job if I am physically able to do it."

Safety Man leaned over his desk and into my face. "This here is a *private* enterprise, darlin', and it ain't Uncle Sam signing your paycheck. I'm the one with the final sayso about who's fit to be a deckhand and who's not. Your captain tells me you're a good cook. The men all like your cooking. So a cook you are and a cook you will stay. We like to keep our cooks —"

"I know. *Cooks.*"

On my way out of Safety Man's office, I spied the able-bodied seaman's handbook on his shelf. Guste had told me to borrow a copy. Instead, I stole it. These jokers might slow me down, but they wouldn't stop me.



*inally a deckhand, Lucy secures a "trial" position aboard the Condor under Captain Billy Flowers, a retired Coast Guard captain who persists in wearing his dress whites and has "about half a pound of chin on the end of his face." Viewing his "classic admiral-of-the-seas profile," she knew she was in for a hard week.*

*After long, hot days of chipping away at flaking paint, stroking on endless coats of white, scrubbing "every grundgy corner of the boat" instead of using her skills as a sailor, Lucy promises herself that someday she'll have her revenge on Captain Flowers.*

I got it, too, sooner than I'd hoped.

When I climbed out of the sanitary tank bilges to report that they were spotless, I found Captain Billy alone in the wheelhouse, bringing the *Condor* out of the Gulf to the Freshwater Bayou. But something twitched my navigation nerve; our position was not right.

"The compass is broken," he raged, pounding it with his fists. "Completely off. I don't know where the hell we are."

I recognized our position from a clump of onshore towers, having made the same navigational error myself back on the *Pride*. Captain Billy had overshot the sea buoy by 15 miles.

He must have seen some evidence on my face of the superiority I felt. "I don't suppose *you* know where we are," he said, suspiciously.

"Actually, sir, I believe we're about 15 miles east of the sea buoy and into Ship Shoals."

"And what makes you think *you* know anything about that?"

"Just guessing, sir."

Billy wouldn't take my word for it, of course. He ran the *Condor* up to a pogy boat that was tied off to a well cap and blew our air horns, startling the pogy boat's sleeping crew out onto their deck. He hailed them for a compass reading and position. They hailed him back. I stole a look at our own compass. Perfect agreement. Billy traced our position on the chart with a shaky finger. I'd been right. We were 15 miles east of the sea buoy.

Billy only snorted, and manhandled the *Condor* onto course. An hour later I spotted our buoy.

"We ought to be just about there." Billy squinted. Damn! The man couldn't even see the sea buoy! I could have pointed it out, but hell, he'd made his masterly bed:

let him lie in it.

Guste had taught me the tricks for coming across the shoals into Freshwater Bayou Locks. It's fairly chancy as these things go, what with swift local currents and a squatty black sea buoy that's hard to spot in daytime, when it isn't blinking. Guste had told me that sooner or later I'd run with a green captain and get a chance to save his ass by bringing the boat in myself, so he'd let me practice piloting that stretch again and again.

But Billy didn't ask me the time of day. He rang the *Condor's* general alarm, summoning our mate and engineer.

A general alarm is an exquisitely alarming sound, designed to scare the living bejesus out of everyone aboard. The two men popped up the stairs just moments later, wide-eyed with panic, wearing their silly jockey shorts. "Find me the sea buoy," Captain Billy commanded them. "And *you*" — he indicated me — "keep your damned mouth shut."

The *Condor* rocked for long minutes on the spot, her wheels kicking up Louisiana mud while the two crewmen fuddled around rubbing their eyes. I examined my fingernails. Damned if I'd tell them where it was.

Finally the captain turned to me. "I'm willing to stake my professional reputation that somebody sunk the sea buoy," he said.

I said, "Captain, that's the sea buoy right over there."

With a savage wrench of his arms, Captain Billy wheeled the *Condor* around to take the buoy on our starboard side. The wrong side. Even at high tide and in smooth weather, the boat must be lined up just so between a cluster of offshore platforms and a big white chemical tank onshore. Then the captain must squeak past the sea buoy on the port side full speed ahead or the currents will whip the boat around and strand it on the mud.

Today the seas were rough, and we were coming in at low tide's turning with the currents especially nasty.

Billy must have spotted my white knuckles clutching the starboard rail because he turned to me again. "What's *your* problem, Miss Liberal Bleeding Heart, Miss Think-Yew-Know-Everything?"

"Sir, I believe it's wiser to take the buoy on our port side."

Billy sent me to my quarters then, and I was no more than halfway down the outside stairs when I had the satisfaction of feeling the *Condor* run aground with a hard *scrump*. A sea gull landed just a few feet from our hull and took a walk around us, pacing as if he were worried. Pacing in three inches of water.

I heard the bow thruster kick in with an impotent wailing whine. Nope, we were stuck good. Beached. I went on down to the galley and compiled a lusty triple-decker sandwich, a super-Dagwood garnished with my own delighted smirk. □

*Lucy Gwin is a writer who now lives in Rochester, New York. These tales are drawn from her forthcoming book about her life and work on a supply boat in the offshore oil fields.*

# BANKER PONIES

JOHN D. COBLE, 1912, FORMER LIGHTHOUSE KEEPER, CAPE LOOKOUT

Well, now you've heard of the banker ponies? Well, there were not only ponies — there were cows and sheep, too . . . and they just ran loose on the banks; nobody looked after them.

Now, a funny thing about it. This island [Harkers Island, North Carolina] was about 22 miles long, and they would migrate from one end to the other. Well, they'd go up to the north end, and by the time they'd get back, there'd be a little bit more grass, see? That would give it time to grow, and they'd just work back and forth, like that.

The cows would go right along with them. And so would the sheep. Generally, they kind of stayed together. You might look out there one day and see them about five miles up the beach; then the next day they'd be about two miles. The next day they'd pass you. But they had no shelter out there, no protection. Sometimes they might get behind a few sand dunes, but they were pretty well conditioned to the weather.

But one of the most fascinating things: If you'll stop and think about it, a horse can dig. Now, those banker ponies, there was no one to look after them and trim their hoofs. You know, they would grow like a toenail or fingernail. And some of them would curl up, and they would actually split. And they would get sore feet and eventually, sometimes, they would get an infection and die. And occasionally they'd break off and they'd be all right. But anyway, when they'd get thirsty, those horses would start digging right out on the high part of the beach there someplace. And maybe there'd be one here and one here and three or four over there, scattered around, and just like a dog — clawing with their front paws, and pretty soon their belly would be on the ground and they'd be down in the hole.

And you'd see him get through, and another one would go down there and drink his fill. Well, all the time,

the horses would drink first; the cows and sheep have split hoofs, so they can't dig, and they'd just stand around and wait. When the horses got through, the cows would start drinking, and then when the cows got through, the sheep would drink. Then they'd migrate on down the beach. And the next day they'd start digging more holes. Well, the wind and the tide and everything would come in and cover them up.

Now, another fascinating thing about those animals: at times the mosquitoes were terrible out there. Usually we had wind, but you get down to the evening when the wind has calmed down, and in that marsh grass where it's a little mucky and muddy, there's millions of these little black mosquitoes, we call them. OK. They would get so bad that the poor animals just couldn't get away from them. There was no relief in sight. And you know what they did? They'd go out in the Cape Lookout bight, in the salt water, and they'd go just as far out as they could to keep their nose and eyes above water. And, as the tide would go out, they'd keep going out a little farther; and as the tide would come in, they'd gradually keep coming in just enough to keep their nose and eyes so they could breathe. And you could look out there

on an evening sometimes and see 500 or 600 heads just up above the water.

We had one boy at the Navy station, that, one of those cows was so pretty, and she had a calf, and she had a right nice-sized udder on her, and he decided, "Well, that cow's so pretty, I'm going to get some feed and start feeding that thing and milking her." Cause he had a kid or two. His name was Dabney, and I'll never forget him as long as I live. He was from Alabama. And he caught this old cow and she was a pretty thing, and he bought some hay and he bought some cow feed. Brought it over there and started feeding that cow like a regular cow.

And the food was so rich the cow died in about two weeks. Just couldn't stand it. □

*This story was excerpted from Rough Weather Makes Good Timber: Carolinians Recall by Patsy Moore Ginns and J.L. Osborne, Jr., artist. Copyright ©1977 The University of North Carolina Press. Cloth \$11.50, paper \$6.50. Available in bookstores or prepaid from the UNC Press, Box 2288, Chapel Hill, NC 27514. (NC residents add three percent tax; Orange County, NC, residents add four percent tax; publisher pays postage.) Reprinted by permission of the publisher.*



photo by John H. Sheally II

by Ben Green

# “IF WE’D STUCK TOGETHER”



Fishing people are the hardest ones in the world to organize, but in Florida they tried.

The common joke that “nobody is from Florida” raises an important question: “Where did the native Floridians go?”

The answer in most cases is: “Nowhere.” They are still here — in the building trades unions, in the black neighborhoods, behind the check-out counter at the “7-Eleven,” or on the outskirts of Florida’s sprawling metropolises, with an old john-boat parked on a trailer at the side of the house.

The closest thing Florida has to a “native” tradition, in fact, besides the culture of the Seminole Indians, can be found in scattered fishing villages like Cortez, on the Sarasota Bay in Manatee County. Cortez was settled in the 1880s by fishing people from Carteret County, North Carolina, who came seeking one thing of which Florida has a-plenty: mullet.

A community of kinfolks, Cortez’s population of 500 mostly traces its lineage back to about 10 Carteret County families — the Taylors, Joneses, Guthries, Bells, Fulfords, Garners, Lewises and others. The lines between families overlap so that it is difficult for an outsider to keep track of who is related to whom, and the nick-

names — Goose, Gator, Tink, Snooks, Wormy, Popeye, Toodle, Bunks — make it almost impossible.

By comparison, Bob Knowlton, who only arrived in 1922, is a newcomer to Cortez. Now the resident fireman for the Cortez Volunteer Fire Department, Bob lives with his wife Ruth in an apartment adjoining the station. A tall man who looks younger than his 85 years, Bob knows more about putting out fires than anyone in Cortez. He knows as much about catching fish as anyone in Manatee County. And he knows more about the history of unions among Florida fishermen (and they were all-male organizations) than almost anyone in the state:

“A fisherman can jump in the boat anytime, day or night, and go when he likes, come back when he likes, and he doesn’t have to go at all if he doesn’t want to. They’re the hardest people in the world to organize.”

Lord knows, Bob Knowlton has tried. He spent 20 years, from the mid-1930s until 1958, traveling up and down Florida’s west coast organizing mullet fishermen. There were some important victories during those years, some moments of unity and strength,

but never a lasting organization.

Mullet fishermen initiated the union efforts because mullet was and is the main commercial “crop” for scores of fishing families, but the price they received for their catches was almost wholly dependent on local dealers.

In Cortez, the battle lines between fishermen and fish dealers were often drawn right down the middle of families. Instead of Henry Ford, John D. Rockefeller or the president of the U.S. Steel Corporation, fishermen had to organize against their first cousins, their uncles and sometimes their fathers. Consequently, this labor history had a distinct quality of cooperation, as well as a viciousness that only family feuds can generate.

When Bob Knowlton moved to Cortez in 1922, he knew no one in the village and organizing a fishermen’s union was the furthest thing from his mind. But he had worked for four years as a fireman on Michigan’s Grand Trunk railroad. “When I first started working on the railroad, they could keep you out there shoveling coal for 16 hours,” he says. “But they got the union while I was there and then they had to relieve you after eight hours. Once we got the union working, it worked fine, and that’s what got me interested in a union here in Cortez.”

Knowlton had learned fishing by working with Elverton Green in Cortez and had his own boat in the 1930s, when workers in many industries across the country were organizing for the first time. It was a difficult time for mullet fishermen then too. Earl Guthrie of Cortez recalls, “In

'36, me and Bill Guthrie and Jim Campbell fished 13 weeks and made \$26.37 apiece. For 13 weeks! I'll tell you, when you drive a guy to the point that he can't make a living for his family, he'll fight. And we was to that point."

Cortez played a leading role in the first union and the ones that followed for two main reasons: Cortez was the second largest mullet fishery in the state, and those fishermen, being closely related, stick together, whether in a barroom fight or in the union. An interesting contrast is Fort Myers, the largest mullet fishery in the state. The ports in Fort Myers are strung out along a narrow peninsula. Their geographical separation led to more competition among fish dealers, fewer family ties among fishermen and a harder job of building unity.

The only targets for the fishermen's frustration with low prices were the fish dealers in their own communities. In Cortez, the first organized action against dealers took place in 1932.

"In the spring when silver mullet season started, they cut us to a cent a pound," says Earl Guthrie, remembering that crucial year. "Well, we'd been expecting to make a few dollars during silver mullet season, and we couldn't make it, that's all. So we all got together and formed a union and set a date for a strike if they didn't go back up on the price."

On the morning of the strike, the villagers gathered in the empty lot next to Buck Parent's grocery store, one block from the fish houses on the shore. "Practically everybody in Cortez gathered up there that morning," Earl Guthrie recalls. "There was a flagpole down there in front of the store. And we run the American flag up and we said to the dealers, 'When you put the price back up, we'll take the flag down and go back to work. Until you get right and give us the price we're asking, we'll sit right here from now on.'

"Well, everybody was sore at each other," he adds, "the fishermen and the dealers. And the dealers thought, 'They'll go back to work in a couple of days.' But we didn't go back. We sat right there! Finally they said, 'Well boys, we'll go it!' So we took the flag down and went back to work."

In retrospect, Cortez fishermen agree that nobody was making money during the Depression, not even the dealers. Woodrow Green, who ran a



RUTH AND BOB KNOWLTON AT HOME NEXT DOOR TO THE CORTEZ FIRE DEPARTMENT.

fish house in the '30s but later became active in union efforts, says quite a few dealers went bankrupt during those lean years. Even when they trucked their fish up into Georgia or even further, they could only get two-and-a-half cents a pound, after paying the fishermen one-and-a-half cents.

"We went back fishing after the strike," says Earl Guthrie. "But it wasn't too long after that until first one guy and then the other began to drop out [of the union], until we didn't have no strength at all. Well, the union just faded out like a cloud."

By the late '30s, dealers started making good money again, and fishermen in Cortez and elsewhere realized once again that they were at the mercy of the local businesses that bought their catch dockside. There were tremendous gaps between prices paid in different ports. Cortez dealers always paid more than dealers in Fort Myers, for example, largely because Cortez fishermen knew the dealers, knew how much they were selling the fish for and knew to demand a fair price.

But Cortez fishermen also realized that no matter how united they were locally, they would never increase the price very much in Cortez as long as the other ports on the coast remained unorganized. The first opportunity for a statewide union and a standard price for mullet presented itself in 1938 when the Seafarers International Union sent an organizer

into Cortez.

An SIU local was formed, with Bob Knowlton as its business agent. He remembers, "We'd call a meeting down at the schoolhouse and talk things over, and the dealers usually gave us what we wanted. We got the price up to three cents a pound." With SIU locals in east and west coast ports, the total state membership reached 6,000 fishermen at one point, says Knowlton.

Soon even the dealers in Cortez saw some value in the union. "I sat down and talked to the dealers," Knowlton says, "and they saw that the union would keep Fort Myers from buying and selling fish cheaper than Cortez, and then putting them on the market and cutting [our] throats."

But the dealers weren't above pulling some pretty devious tricks to try to break the strikes that did occur. "The dealers were two-sided about the union," says Grey Fulford, holding up two fingers and crossing them to emphasize the point. "They'd join the union and pay their dues and come to the meetings and talk about how they were for the fishermen, but then they'd go behind our backs and try to bust the union. One time we went on strike at the same time as St. Petersburg and Sarasota, and the dealers here got one of their good buddies to go out fishing, and then they hauled them fish up to Petersburg on trucks and showed them around to all the fishermen and said, 'See, them Cortez boys



has done broke the strike and gone back fishing.' Then they carried them same fish down to Sarasota and showed them around. Just trying to make the other fishermen suspicious of us."

In 1945, a post-war strike wave swept through almost every industry in the country, because war-time profits had far surpassed the wage increases allowed by the War Labor Board. With the return of thousands of veterans and the expiration of "no-strike pledges" taken by unions for the duration of the war, picket lines blossomed all over the country. Cortez was no different. In that year Florida produced a record 55 million pounds of mullet, and the fishermen wanted a bigger piece of the pie. When the dealers refused to grant it, a strike ensued.

"At first when some of them boys got home they got sore as the devil with we guys," explains Earl Guthrie. "We called a little meeting one night and some of them said, 'By God, we've been over yonder fighting a war and you fellas been home sitting on your ass on strike!' I said, 'Fellas, just wait. Let's get something straight. We were fighting for your interests so you'd have something when you came back. And you was making as much in the service as we was here.' From then on the dealers didn't get no help from the servicemen."

As is true with any strike, it was hard for the fishing families to survive

without a weekly paycheck, especially since many of them had no savings. But the government had instituted a "20/20" program for unemployed veterans, under which they could draw \$20 a week for 20 weeks. That helped some of the families, and the union members developed ways to help each other. "Ones that didn't have money would borrow from different ones that did," says Gene Fulford. "One time we had a big fishfry to help raise money for the union, and the dealers really got mad about that cause we went out and caught a boatload of fish."

Besides the financial strains, there were plenty of emotional strains on families in Cortez, too, as the village was again split right down the middle between the dealers and fishermen. "You'd think somebody was gonna kill each other," says Gene, "but they was just mad, just mad. 'Judge' Millis, one of the dealers, he was just like a daddy to me, and he got so mad that he wouldn't even speak to me. He'd just spit on the ground and walk away."

The strike lasted for several weeks; finally the dealers gave in and raised the price of fish. But the resentment between the dealers and the union had reached a point where the word went out that Bob Knowlton was going to be run out of town because of his union activities.

"Yeah, I remember something about that," says Bob, chuckling as he

tells the story. "I said, 'Well, all right, I'm not gonna run too easy.' So then they said they wouldn't buy my fish. Tink come to me one day and said, 'I can't buy any more of your fish.' So I went around and told two or three guys, 'I can't sell any more fish to Tink.' They said, 'Why? Just cause you're trying to keep the union going?' So every one of them that was fishing for him quit. They told him, 'When Bob can sell fish, we'll go back fishing for you.' After a few days of that, one of the other dealers, Jim Guthrie, said he'd buy my fish, so I told the guys, 'I'm gonna sell my fish over yonder,' and then they went back to fishing for Tink."

Despite victories like the 1945 strike in Cortez, the Seafarers Union was never able to achieve its main goal — a standard price for fish in all ports. Failing that, and lacking the solid backing of all the fishermen on the coast, the organization collapsed by the end of 1945, as the dealers cleverly played fishermen in one port off against those in other ports.

For seven years, from 1945 to 1952, there was no fishermen's union in Florida. Major organizing drives continued in other states — particularly in New England and along the Texas, Louisiana and Alabama coasts — but a big stumbling block to those drives arose when fish dealers began filing court suits. They claimed that the fishermen's collective efforts to raise the price of fish were in violation of the "price-fixing" provisions of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act. Those claims were upheld in several landmark court rulings, which effectively nullified the ability of unions to negotiate contracts and price schedules with fish dealers. This twisted use of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act proved to be a major factor in the next attempt to organize Florida fishermen.

**BY 1952** THE UNITED PACKINGHOUSE WORKERS OF AMERICA HAD ALREADY organized most of the major companies in the packinghouse industry, such as Swift, Cudahy and Armour, and had also negotiated contracts with many of the smaller, independent companies as well. The UPWA was interested in expanding its ranks to



EARL GUTHRIE SEWS A CAST NET IN HIS LIVING ROOM.

include other types of workers; and with a potential of 11,000 fishermen and shrimpers, Florida seemed a likely choice. After some initial contacts in 1952, the UPWA established a state-wide fishermen's local in 1953, headquartered in Osprey, near Sarasota, but when the international office appointed a former dealer as organizer, many fishermen grew suspicious and the infant local collapsed completely by the middle of 1954.

The UPWA then assigned one of its national organizers, Ed Beltrame, to the Florida campaign. "The international sent me into Florida to put the pieces back together," says Beltrame, now retired and living in Lowell, Michigan, "and the first thing I had to do was establish better lines of communication. I started making the rounds of all the ports and set up six different locals, at Cortez, Everglades City, Homasassa, Fort Myers, Pine Island and Cedar Key. Then I hired J.B. Roberts [of Osprey] to travel around and talk to the fishermen about the union. Everybody called him 'Prof' because he was a retired schoolteacher, and he knew all about the fishermen up and down the west coast. He was very instrumental in getting the union going again."

Beltrame began holding "general port meetings" every three months, at which fishermen from all over the state would assemble to discuss their problems. National UPWA leaders, like Secretary-Treasurer G.R. "Butch" Hathaway, came to those meetings to encourage the local organizing efforts. The UPWA's regional office in Atlanta began putting out a monthly newsletter for fishermen.

Beltrame and "Prof" Roberts traveled the state until mid-1955, when Bob Knowlton replaced the elderly Roberts as a paid organizer. From that point on, Beltrame covered the north end of the state and Knowlton took from Tampa south to the Keys. With Beltrame putting 65,000 miles on his car in one year and Bob putting 35,000 miles on his '47 Chevrolet in one summer, the UPWA's membership climbed to 1,400 by the end of 1955.

It wasn't easy to get the union recognized in some places after the failure of the Seafarers, as local resistance to it was very strong. "I went down south one time," Bob recalls, "and there was a guy who was kind of a bully for the whole town. They said he'd hit a guy over the head



1956 CONVENTION OF THE UNITED PACKINGHOUSE WORKERS OF AMERICA, CINCINNATI, OHIO

with a gun barrel and bent the barrel. I said, 'Well, let's go talk to him,' but the other fishermen said, 'You can't talk to him. He'll kill you if you go up.'

"I went up there and told him what we were trying to do, and he said, 'Let me tell you something, when you get that working like you say, I'll be in it. I'm gonna wait and see.' I don't know whether he ever joined, but he never did cause any trouble."

Woodrow Green and other Cortez fishermen also traveled around the coast for the union, sometimes with Bob and sometimes on their own. "One time down in Fort Myers there was a guy who was brother to the biggest dealer," says Green, "and the fishermen wouldn't even invite him to their meetings. But we went down and paid the gas for some of them to come up to our meetings in Cortez to see how the union worked, and eventually that brother to the dealer, he became the friendliest one of all. And when his wife began to catch on, boy, she was all right. See, the women was mainly the ones that was pushing the whole thing, cause they wanted a living."

Though pushing the union behind the scenes, women were not allowed to play any formal roles in the union drive. "That was a mistake," says Beltrame, "because we never really gave the women a chance to support what we were trying to do. The UPWA

had set up women's auxiliaries in other places, but we never got around to doing it in Florida, and that hurt us."

The union pursued its goal of a uniform price for fish in every port, and in late 1955 Beltrame invited all the dealers to come to a general port meeting to hear the union's demands. "The dealers listened to our proposals but turned thumbs down to them," says Beltrame. "I had even drawn up sample contracts, showing them what we wanted to negotiate, but the union's legal counsel had warned me that the Sherman Anti-Trust Act prevented us from negotiating on the price of fish. Once the dealers turned down our proposals, the only thing we could do was try to force the issue in each port."

Early in 1956, the UPWA called a series of strikes in ports on the west coast, including one in Cortez. Despite resistance from some fishermen, the strikes were successful in raising the price of all fish: mullet went from five to seven cents a pound to eight to 10 cents, depending on the port; trout went from 22 cents to 32 cents; bluefish went up from 10 cents to 14 cents; redfish went from 12 cents to 16 cents; and pompano went from 85 cents to \$1.50.

In Cortez, the strike ended after nine days when the dealers agreed to raise the price of mullet to 10 cents a pound. But there were negative

repercussions from the strike that would eventually drive the dealers further away from the fishermen and closer to the dealers down south.

Ralph Fulford of the Fulford Fish Company explains the dealers' point of view on the strike: "They started out to organize the whole coast and it would have been a good thing. The

fishermen needed it. But then Cortez went on strike first and we had trucks that stopped coming in here to buy fish and started going down to Pine Island, cause they were still fishing down there. Well it took us years to get those trucks to come back to Cortez, and some of them never did come back."

Cortez dealers eventually became more influenced by the attitudes of dealers in other ports, and they turned against the union. "When them dealers down south seen the union was growing and doing some good, they began to kick pretty heavy," says Woodrow Green. "They got onto Tink and Judge and Jim Guthrie and they

***"The only difference I can see between a commercial fisherman and a lot of those sport fishermen is that the sport fisherman takes a picture of his fish before he sells it."***

— Blue Fulford

Today, Florida fishers not only lack the security of a standard price, they lack the security of knowing that they will be able to continue drawing their livelihood from Florida waters.

Upper-income settlers and retirees who came to Florida during the 1950s and '60s gave birth to hundreds of new developments on the coast, and with each came a fleet of dredge boats, drag lines and bulldozers. The mangroves were cleared and seawalls built, the estuaries were dredged to make networks of finger-shaped canals, and fill dirt was dumped into the bays. As newcomers sought their prime water-view property, some of them formed politically active neighborhood associations, and some of those associations formed alliances with developers to fight a common and "unsightly" enemy: commercial fishers in old straw hats and raggedy boats.

In 1967, legislation was passed in Manatee County to outlaw commercial fishing in many of the bayous of Sarasota Bay, where the mullet feed during the spring and summer. In that same year, the ringleader of the local movement told Thomas "Blue" Fulford of Cortez, "Well, Mr. Fulford, it looks like you people are just on the way out." His prediction seemed accurate at the time. But he had not reckoned with the strong, even militant, survival instincts of people like Fulford in the fishing industry, in Cortez and around the state.

In that year, the Organization of Florida Fishermen was formed. It began in Everglades City, where a state-endorsed experiment promoting

the use of purse seines to catch king mackerel worried fishers that the larger-scale technique, requiring well-capitalized fleets of boats, would put them out of business. OFF led a campaign to outlaw purse seines for all food fish, and by 1969 had succeeded in making the technique illegal. In the course of building support for the Everglades City struggle, a woman named Jimmie Robinson traveled to other ports and organized local chapters of OFF, replacing various local fishing associations. Robinson became the first executive director of OFF.

As legislation similar to Manatee County's restriction on commercial fishing began appearing in other localities, OFF chapters grew accordingly. Blue Fulford became the chapter head in Cortez, then became state president of OFF, and from 1972 to 1978 lobbied for OFF as executive director. He was replaced by Jerry Sampson, who still holds that position today.

In 1973, OFF succeeded in getting a bill passed by the legislature which said that fisheries regulation is the responsibility of the state, thereby voiding all local laws passed by county or city commissions. However, such local regulations could still be enacted by the legislature as "special acts," and there are close to 200 such bills still on the books. Fulford and several other fishers filed suit in 1975, challenging those local bills as unconstitutional because they denied commercial fishers the right to make a living. But in 1981, the courts ruled against their claim; that ruling is under appeal.

In the 1970s, OFF also worked with environmental groups to get greater restrictions on dredge-and-fill operations and to halt the destruction of the mangrove estuaries. By early 1982, one of OFF's major objectives, the establishment of a statewide fisheries management plan, was moving toward completion.

Today OFF claims 1,400 members in 30 local chapters. Unlike earlier union efforts which pitted fishers against dealers, OFF is a coalition of both. In fact, in many localities where anti-netting campaigns threatened the fishing industry, the dealers sponsored the organizing effort. Woodrow Green of Cortez describes it: "They didn't give you any choice about belonging — they just went up a little on the [dockside] price of gas and took that out for OFF dues, which made some of the fishermen mad. But they were right. It was an emergency, and they needed to do it. I was shrimping back then and I kept paying my dues long after I retired, because I believe in it. OFF is the only thing the fisherman's got now and if they don't hold onto it, commercial fishing is gonna be wound up."

The most recent threat to commercial fishing comes from recreational fishers in organizations like the League of Florida Anglers. In fact, in 1982, a statewide proposal was bandied about that would ban all commercial fishing in Florida for a three-year period, with the fishers paid a yearly pension out of state funds; OFF's current director, Jerry Sampson, says coolly, "That doesn't have a chance in hell of passing."

"I think we've about got the dredge-and-fill licked," says Blue Fulford. "But if the sport fishermen had their way, there wouldn't be any net fishing within three miles of shore, and only then with a hand dip-net."

*Editors' note: Since some "fishermen" are now women, perhaps it is timely to revive the ancient term "fisher" for the occupation.*

## You can tell it first from their hands. You won't find hands like these in *Cosmopolitan* and *Ladies Home Journal*.

Cortez women are working women, and it shows in their hands.

Rough, twisted and cracked, their hands are etched with blue veins from years of dishwater, salt water, laundry detergent and scalloping.

When Doris "Toodle" Green saw the photograph I had taken of her, she exclaimed, "Oh my goodness, why'd you have to have my old hands up there?"

It would be all too easy to write about a fishing village and skip right

over the women. Easy because by definition a fishing village centers around fishing, generally a male industry. Old boats tethered to their posts, scenic vistas of netspreads in the afternoon sun, hardy fishers returning from a day's work — that's what the visitor sees, that's what the occasional newspaper feature story relates, and in fact, that's what most of the women in Cortez describe when they talk about the village.

Yet there is a rich and powerful

history of what women in Cortez have done to survive and to make a life for their families. One could miss that staring wistfully at the waterfront, but there is no easy way to miss it when you notice the women's hands. For one thing, the more time men have spent fishing, the more women have been left to keep the home, raise children, do fill-in work at the fish houses and run the community.

Toodle Green, the resident historian of Cortez, spent her early years helping her mother at home with the nine children, and then raised two of her own. "I'll tell you, there wasn't much romance in it. It was just real hard living," she recalls. "I remember many a night after my mother got supper fixed for all of us, she'd have to turn around and cook another whole meal to fix 'buckets' for the boys that were old enough to go fishing."

In general, the men of Cortez Island fished and the women worked at home, but there were many times when the women were out on the water as much as the men. That was especially true during scalloping season. There are many women in Cortez who scalloped every day during the summer, for 30 years in some cases, and by so doing brought home sizable contributions to the family's income.

Armed with an old No. 2 washtub and a wooden scallop box — a square box with a sheet of plate glass in the bottom so they could see scallops beneath the shallow water — the women would pole out to the "kitchen" in old skiffs or little rowboats. They'd wade around in waist-deep water, pushing their scallop box in front of them, looking through the glass bottom, and dragging the washtub behind them on a short rope. When they'd spot a scallop buried in the sand, they'd dip down, grab it and flip it into the washtub. Hours later they'd pole back to Cortez with a couple of washtubs full of scallops and then sit hunched over a tub for hours more, opening the scallops, cutting out the meat, cleaning it and packing it in quart jars. They would sell the scallops to fish dealers or to restaurants at the going price.

Lela Taylor tells a story about



DORIS "TOODLE" GREEN

photo by Ben Green

scalloping in the days when the price was sometimes so low it wasn't worth the effort. "How many millions of scallops I've opened in my life I couldn't tell you. I'll tell you one time we went down by Crane's Bayou and caught a world of scallops. We sat up there till four o'clock in the morning opening scallops. We got them all washed and the man had promised to pay us 14 cents a quart for them. That was what we was getting. So I took them over to him and the fellow said he'd only give us seven cents a quart! I told him, 'No, I'll take them to the county hospital before I'll do that.' So we come back and went over to Hawkers Market and he said he'd only pay seven cents a quart, too. I told him no. And you know what, we taken them to the county hospital and give that big dishpan full of scallops to them. I'll never know how many pounds it were, but we give them to the county hospital."

One woman, Maida Culbreath, has been as much a fisher as any man in Cortez. Until recently, when health problems slowed her down, Maida Culbreath went fishing every day with hook and line. She and her husband, Julian "Goose" Culbreath, raised their family on the combined income from the mullet that Goose caught in his gillnet and the trout that Maida caught each day with her poles. It was a familiar sight to see her anchored out near the Pass, wearing a big straw hat and sunglasses, pulling in as much as 100 pounds of trout every day of the week.

Toodle Green recalls, "Before the days of welfare, if you were left a widow with three or four children and you didn't have a family to help you through, well you were just left at the mercy of the world.

"Like Grey and Gene Fulford's mother, Mamie, whose husband Clyde died in the flu epidemic of 1918. She worked all the time. She'd take in boarders and she'd do washing for people. And she had a hard time of it raising those kids. But luckily they had Grandpa [Billy] Fulford, and he was a successful fisherman. He never had any money except what he made, but he looked after them and helped the family out. People were real good to each other here."

turned turtle. They had been 100 percent for the fishermen until that clique south got in with them, but then they was one of them. We'd go down to Fort Myers, they'd go down to Fort Myers. We'd have meetings together, they'd have meetings together. Yeah, they turned turtle upside down."

## THE UPWA

**HAD TWO OTHER OBSTACLES TO OVERCOME TO BUILD A LASTING** organization for fishermen: racism and internal disunity. Like other CIO unions, the UPWA had taken strong stands on the importance of organizing all workers, black and white, and at its 1947 convention one third of the delegates representing locals across the country were black. But the fishing villages of Florida were almost completely white in the 1950s, and many of them, including Cortez, still have no black residents. The UPWA's tenure in Cortez was the one time in the village's history when the prejudices relaxed a little bit, as the common economic interests of the fishermen and the UPWA's black members overrode the Jim Crow attitudes of the time. The divisions were still there, but not as sharply as before.

"The Seafarers didn't have any blacks," says Bob Knowlton, "but the Packinghouse Workers had plenty of them, and lots of officers that were black. In fact, they had a black organizer named Don Smith who was a troubleshooter for the union. He came here to Cortez one time and stopped in front of our house. He didn't get out and come in, so I went out and got him and we come in and had breakfast. My wife Ruth said, 'What are people around here gonna say?' I said, 'I don't care what they say. He's all right.'

"And one time I got a couple of guys to go with me to Tampa for a meeting, and Smith was up there at that. He got up and talked and told them some things, and when we was coming home one of them said, 'If you had about half a dozen like Don Smith it wouldn't take long to organize the whole state.' I never heard any complaints about blacks in the union, not here anyway."

Ed Beltrame never encountered any direct problems from Florida fishermen opposed to UPWA's racial poli-



GENE FULFORD



GREY FULFORD



EARL GUTHRIE

cies, but there were grumblings under the surface that he never heard. "When we went up to that meeting in Tampa," says Gene Fulford, "there was a great big fellah, black as tar. He was the head organizer from Chicago. And for some of them that stopped it right there. I heard some of them say if he was the head of it then to hell with it."

In any case, racism was not as harmful as the disunity within the ranks of the fishermen. Stubborn individualism hurt the union repeatedly in key struggles. "We could have all got more money for our fish," says Hal Culbreath of Cortez, "but you know this bunch of fishermen here, they'd go to that schoolhouse and swear they didn't have the \$3 to pay their monthly union dues, but then they'd come right down here to the Sailor's Haven beer joint and get drunk. They had enough money to get drunk! And when we went on strike some of them'd swear they wasn't going fishing, but they couldn't wait till they got out of the schoolhouse for they'd go."

The UPWA in Florida finally came to an abrupt and nearly bloody ending in the spring of 1957, when a long and turbulent strike broke out at Fort Myers Beach. "They cut the price on the fish," says Knowlton. "We couldn't see any reason for it, they

didn't need to do it, so we called them out on strike. And it went on for four to six weeks if I remember right, and every week me and Woodrow carried \$1,000 to \$1,500 down there from the national strike fund so the fishermen could live.

"But there was one guy there, a fisherman, and he was the one that started all the trouble and kept it up. He said if he could sell his fish he was going fishing. That one guy went on fishing, and then he got another one to go, and first thing you know, well, the whole works fell apart."

Tensions in the community built to a fever pitch. "It came to a point where some people thought there had to be a little bit of killing," says Woodrow Green, "and that's what really and truly killed the whole deal. Nobody wanted it, and that's why they just threw the union overboard. Nobody wanted nobody there killed, but there was no other way around it cause they had pleaded with that fellah and everything else."

The union men seriously discussed other options, besides killing the man, such as blowing up a fish house or some trucks. But unable to reach a consensus on violence, the fishermen's union came to an end fairly quickly. "Once that strike failed," says Knowlton, "we tried to keep the union going a little while and took a lower price

for the fish, but then other dealers cut their prices too and that ended that." In November, 1957, Knowlton wrote to Ed Beltrame and told him that the union was a complete flop, that the price of mullet was down to three or four cents and was expected to drop even further.

The UPWA made two attempts to put the pieces back together on the west coast. About a year after the Fort Myers Beach strike, Ruth Knowlton and Elizabeth Jones drove up and down the coast and collected over 100 signatures of fishermen who agreed to rejoin the union. "We sent the names to Hathaway [Secretary-Treasurer of the UPWA] and he tried to schedule a meeting to talk it over, but the people just wouldn't come," recalls Ruth Knowlton.

As a last gasp effort, the UPWA offered to establish cooperative fish houses that the fishermen would run themselves. These co-ops, locally known as "crow-hops," were rejected outright, largely because repeated failure had discouraged the fishermen.

## TO BOB

**KNOWLTON, SITTING IN THE FIREHOUSE AND REFLECTING ON THE** past, the future of fishing in Cortez doesn't look bright. "If things keep going like they are now, I don't believe there'll be any fishing five years from now," he says. "All those party boats, yachts and kicker boats are racing up and down the bay all the time, and they keep it so stirred up the fish can't even feed. And these condos just keep going up everywhere."

But Bob Knowlton has too many years of his life wrapped up in both fishing and the labor movement to turn loose of the past completely, and there are memories he's still attached to — like the time he met John L. Lewis in Fort Myers. "He was just the nicest guy you'd ever talk to. Well, look at all he did for the coal miners." He shakes his head slowly, shrugs and says, "We could have had all that too if we'd stuck together." □

*Ben Green, director of communications for the Florida AFL-CIO, spent most of his childhood summers in Cortez. He is related to many of the people interviewed in his story, which is part of a book-in-progress about this fishing community.*

photo by Ben Green



BOB KNOWLTON STANDS BEFORE THE CORTEZ FIRE ENGINE.

# BORDER WARS

BY BUD WATSON

From the time of the earliest European settlement in the Chesapeake Bay region, those who had the resources to acquire land did so, and those who did not looked to the water for their livelihood. The term "watermen" grew to denote the economically disadvantaged or dissident settlers who claimed some of the islands and high-ground hammocks in Bay marshes. They engaged in sporadic privateering, practiced subsistence farming and, above all, lived off the bounty of nature by fishing and hunting. For them, the Bay waters constituted a "commons," to be exploited by anyone.

Then the competition arrived in the early 1820s. Having already depleted oyster stocks in Northern coastal waters, Yankee schooners migrated south, and by 1880 were dredging up some 17 million bushels of oysters every year, about five times the present-day yield. Shortly after this peak, with oyster populations declining, the Bay states realized their marine resources were imperiled and enacted residency laws denying access to outsiders.

Once again the Bay became the domain of local watermen, still self-employed but now tied to a cash economy supplying local and Northern metropolitan markets built during the rampaging harvests of preceding decades. In this century the local importance of Bay watering trades has been eclipsed by new industries, tourism and recreational boating, but some important centers remain.

Smith Island, on the Virginia-Maryland border, is the best preserved remnant of this tradition. Smith shares with neighboring Tangier Island, Virginia, the distinction of having no road link with the mainland. Unlike Tangier, though, Smith has thus far resisted the summer influx of tourists which reduces Tangier's dependence on the watering trades. The result is a pace and mood on Smith that seems to belong to an earlier time, and a

detachment from organized government which breeds a cavalier attitude toward law and regulation.

"Illegal" is an everyday term in the Smith Island waterman's vocabulary. "Tomorrow we're going illegal scraping" (for crabs) is a fairly common statement which reflects the common-sense understanding of the need to bend inflexible regulations. Particularly irritating is the Virginia state border across the south end of their island which prohibits them from lawfully crabbing and oystering south of the line. The law is irritating only because since 1978 it has been enforced.

Friction between Maryland and Virginia over Bay resources is nothing new. Violent "oyster wars" in the 1880s resulted in a re-drawing of the state boundary, shifting it north to its present position and allowing Virginia watermen to share the valuable oyster beds of Tangier Sound with Marylanders. For the century following, Smith Islanders have ventured south of the line to dredge or scrape unlawfully when they felt it necessary for their livelihood. But with the arrival of Virginia Marine Resources Commission inspector Juney Crockett, a Tangier Island native, strict and regular enforcement of the Virginia residency law revived the border feud. Smith Island's Tangier Sound Watermen's Association explored methods of gaining legal access to Virginia waters and, failing to get any satisfaction or encouragement from Virginia's Marine Resources Commission, filed suit against the state to invalidate the residency law.

Because of strong constitutional interpretations against restraints on interstate commerce, the Smith Island watermen have a good chance of winning their suit. The case may well go all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. If the watermen prevail, there will be important ramifications both within the Bay and beyond. Not only would the Smith Islanders be able to fish Virginia waters, Virginians could

harvest Maryland's water resources, and anybody else could come into the Bay to compete with both. This has some Virginia watermen and marine resource regulators from both states worried that another round of over-exploitation may ensue.

Additionally, the residency law decision may overturn decades of selective exclusion in other states that prohibit nonresidents from freely fishing coastal waters, particularly for crabs, oysters and shrimp.\* Exclusion is the simplest form of fisheries management, and open access, at least in theory, carries the specter of the over-exploitation of the most productive fisheries along the Southern coast.

There is also the possibility of the decline of the independent fishing industry throughout the South by the entry of nonresident fleets of highly mechanized craft capable of following the season from state to state and wresting control of the markets from the locals. The Smith Island watermen are betting otherwise and going full-speed ahead with their lawsuit. But regardless of who ultimately fishes these waters, the states are likely to have their work cut out for them in devising new regulatory schemes to keep this increased mobility from resulting in ravaged fisheries stocks. □

*Bud Watson is active in a number of Virginia conservation organizations, and is also Virginia staff attorney for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation.*

\* Among the Southern states only Maryland and Virginia currently have outright prohibitions against nonresident commercial fishing. North Carolina, Georgia and Alabama require reciprocity with other states before allowing nonresidents to fish their waters, thus reciprocally excluding Virginians and Marylanders. South Carolina and Mississippi, like Maryland and Virginia, lease oyster bottoms only to their residents. Texas will not lease its oyster bottoms to nonresident (i.e., out-of-state) corporations, and Louisiana allows no nonresidents either to shrimp or to oyster its state waters.

# Working on the Bay

By Carolyn Ellis

*“Our people are  
used to freedom.”*

You go to work in the morning; you come back home when you want — you don't have to punch a time clock. On the other hand, that requires a certain something about a person, because occasionally we see somebody who will need to work under a boss and who doesn't have the whatever it takes to carry on his own business.”

— *Smith Island waterman*

The Chesapeake Bay is this nation's largest and most productive estuary and a major fishing ground for crabs, oysters, clams and popular species of fish like trout, bluefish and bass.

For 12 years, I lived for varying periods of time among the citizens of two of the Bay's most isolated fishing communities: nine years with the Guinea people of Virginia and three years with the inhabitants of Smith Island, just across the Maryland state line, in the middle of the Bay. I saw first-hand, and often participated in, the ways in which people of these communities harvest the Bay — working at their own paces, with methods old and new, dealing with the changes which modern marketing pressures, new technology and increased government regulation are bringing to their lives.

The following vignettes are drawn from my experiences with these harvesters of the Bay. The photographs come from a variety of sources and localities along the shores of the Bay, including — but not exclusively — Guinea and Smith Island.





Almost all the Guinea and Smith Island men fish for crabs in the summer and oysters in the winter. The Guineans catch mostly hard-shelled crabs, while the Smith Islanders scrape for “softies” — crabs which have shed their shells and whose soft, whole bodies are considered more of a delicacy. The crabber’s art lies in recognizing the precise stages of a crab’s shell development, as each phase signifies a change in the way the crab must be handled and marketed.

One day last fall I went scraping for softies with a Smith Island crabber named David. I had spent the night with his family, and David’s mother called me at 4:00 that morning. “Are you sure you want to go out there?” she asked me. “It’s going to be a long day.” When I said yes, she sighed and said, “Well, you have more nerve than I do. I never have gone.”

The sun was just starting to come up as we headed out on David’s boat. The air was chilly and the sky was full of color. David didn’t talk much; he said he enjoyed the quiet of the morning. He steered standing up, pressing his leg against the tiller. It took about half an hour to reach the shallow, marshy area where David planned to scrape. “When crabs shed, they look for the cover of the marsh grass in shallow water for protection,” he explained. He noted that we were illegally over the state line, but pointed out about a dozen other Smith Island boats fishing the same area.

David threw the two crab scrapes into the water, then put the engine in low gear and dragged forward slowly for about 15 minutes. When he pulled the first scrape up over his head, it looked heavy. He emptied it into an enclosed, boarded-up section of the boat — and I soon saw why the enclosure was needed: out of bundles of eel grass scurried dozens of crabs, eager to escape. Deftly, David picked them out from the grass, jellyfish and other sea creatures.

As he worked, he explained, “Crabs grow by shedding their shells. You can tell when a crab will shed by the color of the skin on the swimming leg [the back fin].” He threw most of the crabs back in the water — “too small to mess with.” After breaking the claws of the remaining crabs (“so they won’t hurt each other”), he sorted them into

buckets according to when they would shed: hard crabs that wouldn’t shed for some time; green crabs which would shed in a few days to several weeks; red crabs which would shed within a day or two; “rank” crabs which were starting to shed; soft crabs which had just shed; and “buckrams” which had shed and were just forming a paper-thin shell. He explained that buckrams cannot be sold as soft crabs and that it is illegal to keep them. “Most everyone keeps some for eating, though,” he added. Most crabs which hadn’t peeled would be stored live in submerged crab floats back at his family’s crab shanty and checked every day until they reached the marketable soft stage.

We worked until about noon. David was disappointed with his catch. “Got 800 yesterday and about that many the day before,” he said. “Today we only have 150 soft and 50 hard. Probably cause of the wind; a nor’east or a sou’east is a bad wind.”

Around 12:30, David called a buddy on his CB radio: “Let’s go in early and drink beer.” We started slowly in; David scrubbed down the boat on the way. I noticed most of the other boats were coming in too.

We stopped to gas up the boat at the shanty, store the new crabs in the floats and “fish-up” — remove those soft crabs ready for market. We got home about 4:30, suppertime on Smith Island.

Guinea women generally work in local fish houses, cleaning and dressing fish, shucking oysters or clams, or packing crabs. Most of the fish houses are small, hiring from four to 15 workers, most of them part-time. Women workers say they like the day-to-day cash, and the fact that the boss doesn’t take out taxes. They can make \$25 to \$50 in a morning cleaning fish; shucking clams and oysters brings around \$6 an hour. But the work is often sporadic, and may not be available when the women need it the most.

Bob’s fish house is fairly typical. It contains two small, cement-floored rooms. Each has a heater, but the place was definitely chilly the morning of my visit.

Mary Jane was standing on a small, wooden stool, cleaning fish on a long





waist-high table. "This stool keeps my feet off the cold floor and out of the wet," she explained. "The pan of hot water warms my hands. These fish is trout. He pays me \$3 a box to fillet and \$2 to dress them [cut off heads and clean out guts]. Takes me about 10 minutes to dress a box."

"How long will it take you to clean all these fish?" I asked.

"Lands a'mercy, child. Near a lifetime, I reckon. Exceptin that my sisters is a'comin from the other fish house to hup me when they finish up there."

"Could I help clean?" I asked.

"Sure," said the boss, who was working along with everyone else. So was his wife.

"I thought the boss didn't have to work," I joked, making conversation.

"It don't work that way around here," he replied seriously.

The water was five inches deep in the filleting room of Cecil's fish house, the largest in the area. Five women stood at a long table cleaning fish, which had first been through a scaling machine. Swish, swish! Two cuts of a knife and a fish is filleted. Almost no meat is wasted.

Meanwhile the women were singing country music songs and bantering about who is "the fastest fish cleaner that has ever been," or who has the biggest fish to clean, or how much money they have made so far. "Made \$50 already," one woman said early in the morning. Later I found out that she made only \$48 for the whole day.

**O**n a cold late-winter morning, Donnie picked me up in his boat to go oystering. We stopped for gas at the Smith Island pump a little after 7:00. "Can go all day on 17 or 18 gallons of diesel," said Donnie. His boat is a 40-footer, with a cabin that has a stove and a bunk bed.

We headed east for about 45 minutes before Donnie put on his oil skins and lowered a chain hooked to a line and buoy into the water. He pulled the chain along the bottom until he felt a bump, which told him there were oysters below. He threw down the anchor, leaving the buoy in place to mark the start of his circular tonging rotation.

Donnie dredged with hydraulic

tongs — five-foot-wide opposable steel baskets with jaws which scoop up mud and oysters from the bottom. (This method has become controversial since it tears up the bottom, disturbing the beds and making it more difficult for new oysters to form.) He lowered the tongs with a foot pedal. Another pedal opened and closed the jaws on the bottom. Then he began raising the tongs — as slowly as possible — but still the heavy tongs came swinging over the boat so that he had to reach out and pull them in.

"Watch out," he yelled as he opened the jaws; oysters, mud and loose shells poured onto a culling board in the middle of the boat. Cold water and mud sprayed us thoroughly. "It is a boring job and a hard way to make a living," said Donnie as he separated out the whole oysters, which he then threw onto the floor of the boat, pushing the debris back overboard.

The whole process started over again. When the tongs brought up nothing but mud, Donnie moved to another spot in his circle. In two hours he had four bushels, or \$32 worth. "In a good season I sometimes get my limit, 25 bushels, by 9:30 a.m.," he commented. "That's all a licensed oysterman is allowed, but many get more than that. I got 37 bushels once." The legal size for oysters is three inches, but Donnie kept them all, saying, "Inspectors are hardly ever at the dock of the oyster house. You take the chance."

We worked that location until the middle of the afternoon. I helped some but soon retreated to the warm cabin for a nap. It was a cold, strenuous and dirty job. Donnie relieved his boredom by talking occasionally on his CB radio with other oysters, joking around and comparing his luck with theirs.

Around 3:00 we moved to a second location, but few oysters came up so Donnie decided to quit. We chugged over to the mainland to sell the oysters. Several boats were already in line in front of the oyster house so we went to a local bar for a drink with some of the men who had already unloaded their catches. After a while we went back, and Donnie shoveled his oysters into buckets and attached them to a winch which was pulled up by an oyster-house employee; the oysters then moved into the house on a conveyor belt.

I was heading out from Guinea towards the mainland one morning in Michael Paul's little skiff, when I noticed about nine men, women and children standing in the water together. Some of the women had on dresses and carried baskets tied to their waists. "What are they doing?" I asked Michael Paul.

"They're rakin clams," he said, calling me "foolish" (a term of endearment) for not knowing.

"Tell me how," I asked.

"Well, you get in the water as fur up as your waist. Tie a basket round you in the middle. Then you take a clam rake and dig for the clams. If you are really good, you can flip them up with the rake or your toes, but some has to bend over to get them. Can make a lot of money that way."

I watched the Guinea oystermen coming closer to the shore as they were finishing for the day. On each side of the boat, a man was holding two long poles that crossed like scissors. Each man pushed the top ends of the poles together, causing the lower baskets to close around the oysters. Hand-tonging is strenuous work. Sometimes there were as many as 30 oysters in the tongs, sometimes only mud, shell and rock. A young boy culled the oysters from the loose shell.

The men had stayed out about five hours; in the summer they will use the same boats for crabbing. They say they like the change in seasons: "Eases the boredom of doing the same thing."

George Lee came back with quite a pile of oysters. "Probably 30 bushels there," he said. "At \$6 a bushel, I'll make out okay today."

A man in a truck pulled up to pick up the oysters. "He owns the clam house down the way," George Lee said. "Always buys my oysters."

I noticed George Lee had put aside several smaller baskets of oysters. He saw me looking and said, "One is for you to take home." □

*Carolyn Ellis received her Ph.D. in 1981 from SUNY at Stony Brook. Her dissertation "Community, Crabs and Capitalism" concerned life, work and change in isolated fishing communities. She is now an assistant professor at the University of South Florida in Tampa.*



The Virginian-Pilot/The Ledger-Star, Norfolk, VA

VIMS/Sea Grant

Courtesy of the Mariners' Museum, Newport News, VA

# MARSH FEVER

BY CINDY ALLEN AND LARRY BOSTIAN

"Musketos are long sharp Flies, whose venom, I believe, according to their Bulk, is as Baleful as that of a Rattle Snake."

— Anonymous traveler in South Carolina, 1740s

Most residents and visitors to Southern coastlands would agree with our eighteenth-century traveler. Because the baleful mosquito also carries malaria, it has played a critical role in Southern history. Thousands of lives have been lost and millions of dollars spent on mosquito control in the South, although endemic malaria ended almost 30 years ago.

Actually, malaria was not even native to the Western Hemisphere. European colonists brought a mild form with them and, unwittingly, spread the "fever and agues" by impounding water for rice and indigo cultivation, and for millponds. By the late 1700s, all low-lying areas in the Southeast were highly malarious.

It was through the African slave trade that a particularly virulent form of malaria came to the South, yet Africans were less likely to suffer from the disease than whites. Unaware that the sickle-cell trait, common among West Africans, conveys a heightened resistance to the parasite that causes the disease, planters did notice the Africans' resistance and promptly added it to their list of reasons why blacks "deserved" to be slaves on coastal plantations.

Throughout the nineteenth century, marshes were drained in campaigns to end the disease. The city of Savannah, for instance, spent \$70,000 in 1817 to drain nearby wetlands. But not until 1897 did scientists prove the suspected link between marsh-breeding mosquitoes and the troublesome fever. The U.S. Public Health Service began serious mosquito control efforts in the South in 1912. The Army joined the battle during World War I with education, window-screening and drainage programs around military bases, and a campaign to kill mosquito larvae

by spreading oil on water. After the war, the Public Health Service worked with local, state and private agencies to expand its programs, adding aerial spraying of chemicals in 1921. During the Depression, relief agencies employed thousands on massive ditching projects, draining almost 550,000 acres of Southern wetlands.

Still, malaria continued to take its toll in the South. Government studies in the 1930s assessed the monetary cost of deaths and disabilities at \$500 million annually, and found malarial infections in up to 50 percent of some rural counties' school children.

After World War II, large-scale spraying of DDT replaced more labor-intensive control methods. Through the Public Health Service's Extended Malaria Control Program, five-percent DDT emulsions were sprayed inside rural homes and privies in virtually every Southern coastal county. These measures, combined with better health care and living conditions, ended endemic malaria in the South by the early 1950s.



Ironically, at about the time that malaria was eradicated in the South, scientists and laypeople began to recognize the harmful side-effects of mosquito control practices. In 1948 a Florida medical journal warned, "DDT is a poison to many more forms of life than just mosquitoes." Later, Rachel Carson (*Silent Spring*) and other environmentalists argued successfully for a ban on DDT use in the United States.

There were other problems, too. Some misguided drainage programs actually created more mosquito breeding sites than they eliminated. And critics of drainage efforts found that early grid-ditching methods severely

damaged marsh ecosystems. Private motives, not public health, kept some controversial "control" efforts alive, as one Georgia official noted in 1940: "Self-interested landowners will urge drainage of their property at public expense with little or no malaria justification." As late as 1981, a North Carolina state report pointed out that publicly funded drainage programs were widely carried out for purposes "other than mosquito control" — such as draining farm or residential land.

Mosquito control programs also outlived the anti-malarial campaign because, in the stilted words of a 1957 government report, mosquito bites lower "physical efficiency and comfort upon which mental equanimity depends to a large degree." To relieve coastal populations of the pest, many states rely on repetitive chemical treatments that kill adult mosquitoes; ground fogging and aerial spraying of insecticides, mostly malathion, are common practice. All told, mosquito control efforts cost the United States over \$70 million annually.

For years, mosquito control officials, scientists, coastal residents and environmentalists have debated the safest, cheapest and most effective way to control mosquitoes. Years of experience in Southern and mid-Atlantic coastal wetlands, along with pressures from the environmentally concerned, led to a newer technique, less harmful to the salt marsh, called Open Marsh Water Management. A network of small ditches opens the high marsh to tidal action; permanent ponds provide access for aquatic predators to mosquito larvae.

But because the initial costs of this newer method are high, most states still rely on the quick fix — ground and aerial spraying — to control adult mosquitoes. □

NOT UNTIL the last few years has a grassroots, multi-racial organization achieved real gains in this Louisiana parish where civil-rights activists dared not set foot in the 1960s.

*By Pat Bryant*

# A Long Time Coming

Plaquemines Parish is a fertile deltaic peninsula southeast of New Orleans, divided by the Mississippi River and stretching more than a hundred miles out into the muddy waters of the Gulf of Mexico. The humid, swampy parish gets its name from a traditional Native American bread — plaki or plakamine — made from the bittersweet fruit of local persimmon trees.

For its size, Plaquemines contains some of the richest mineral resources in the world. In just one year, 1980, leased lands in the parish provided \$7 million in royalties from oil companies, and the parish's public coffers would have received even more had a substantial amount not gone into one controlling family's pockets.

Since the 1920s, Plaquemines Parish has existed as the private fiefdom of the Perez family, which dominated local politics and made a private

fortune off the parish's natural wealth. As a result, despite its native riches, Plaquemines is home for some of the nation's most impoverished people, deprived of many of the basics and pleasures other Americans take for granted. Many of its nearly 30,000 people live in poverty, earning a small living off the river or in the service of the corporations and local bosses.

The foundation for the Perez family dynasty was laid back in 1919 when the notorious Leander Perez, Sr., now dead, was appointed district judge. Perez used his office to build a powerful political machine matched by few other rural parishes or counties in this country. Services, the fruit of government, were all tied to his patronage machine. Although Leander Perez boasted of achieving a republican government where nearly everybody voted (except blacks), Plaquemines elections were in fact blatantly

undemocratic. Handpicked Perez candidates won landslide victories, often garnering 90 percent of the votes cast. On many occasions the number of votes cast exceeded the number of registered voters; even Donald Duck was among the fictional parish citizens supporting Perez-backed candidates. So corrupt was the system that in 1950 the FBI convicted five Plaquemines election commissioners of fraud.

Before his death, Perez became a multi-millionaire by founding or serving as attorney for corporations leasing state/parish lands; he did this even while serving as district attorney, a definite conflict of interest.

Glen Jeansonne, author of a biography of Leander Perez, Sr., *Perez: Boss of the Delta*, summed up this process in a recent interview:



A SING-ALONG AT AN FCCA WORKSHOP

“Essentially what Perez would do would be to set up a corporation which would be in the business of leasing lands from the levee boards, primarily, and sometimes from the school boards. The best example of this is the [Perez’s] Delta Development Corporation which still operates down there. These corporations would not intend to search for oil themselves. They might lease land from the levee board for a very small price, a few dollars an acre, and then turn around and lease it to an oil company – like Exxon, Mobil or Texaco – for hundreds of dollars an acre, plus royalties on the production of the oil that is produced.

“These kinds of corporations were siphoning off much of the wealth which, had it been leased directly by the people of the school board to the oil company, would have gone directly to the schools.

“Perez would usually not be a stockholder. He would not have his name on the incorporations; he would use his friends and relatives, but he would be attorney for the corporations. If you looked at some of the records of corporations you would find that some of these land development companies spent a large proportion of their income on attorney fees, and Perez was the attorney.”

An unrelenting segregationist – who reportedly called blacks “animals right out of the jungle” – Leander Perez, Sr., dispersed some of his ill-gotten gains to the campaigns of racist politicians like Strom Thurmond, Ross Barnett, Lester Maddox, George

Wallace and Orval Faubus. While his financial dealings periodically came under attack by Louisiana governors and legislatures, he always managed to avoid criminal prosecution, mainly by tying up cases against him until friendlier politicians were elected.

Before Judge Perez died in 1969, he passed along rule of the parish empire to his two sons. Chalin was boosted into the Parish Commission Council, where he served as president until 1982, and Leander, Jr., was appointed district attorney.

Between them, Chalin and Leander, Jr., held sway over all political and economic aspects of Plaquemines life until open feuding divided them. The brothers no longer speak to each other, and have used their public offices as a battlefield: Chalin denies funds to the district attorney’s office, while Leander, Jr., hauls council members and local officials into court on charges of misconduct and unauthorized use of parish property.

Meanwhile, the council members have turned against both brothers. The council recently voted three to two (with Chalin voting for himself) to oust this Perez brother from the presiding position on the commission council.

Hastening the demise of the Perez empire is a rising tide of organized resistance from oppressed citizens of the parish.

## Getting on the Ball

The Fishermen and Concerned Citizens Association of Plaquemines Parish grew out of a 1979 event that threatened to put independent black oysterers out of business and into the service of larger, white-owned fishing companies. That year, Plaquemines State Representative Frank Patti ushered a bill through the legislature which outlawed the use of two-foot hand dredges used by many Plaquemines fishers in this oyster-rich parish. Neighboring St. Bernard Parish and Plaquemines together supply some 90 percent of the state’s annual oyster catch. The Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Department enforced the new law, denying oystering permits to those who lacked the more expensive – and ecologically harmful – hydraulic dredging equipment.

Three black oysterers – brothers Irving and Melvin Cross and Morris Harvey – took a ride to New Orleans in the summer of 1979 to talk with Ronald Chisom, a regionally respected community organizer active in the city, particularly in its strong black Treme community beside the prosperous French Quarter. Chisom’s wife Jeralie is a native of Plaquemines, so Chisom was acutely familiar with the parish. He accepted the invitation to help the fishers and soon solicited legal help from Ron Pursell and Bill Quigley, staff attorneys in the Community Development unit of the New Orleans Legal Assistance Corporation.

### Irving Cross:

We’d heard about the Treme Tenant Organization having their 10-year anniversary. We went to talk with Ron Chisom because we knew he was involved in the organization. We told him about the problems we had with the dredge law and he asked if we could get some fishermen together. We said yeah. He said, “I will be down there and try to get you guys organized.” We told the rest of the fellows and had a meeting at my brother’s house. There were 19 fishermen present. At the meeting, Ron asked if we wanted to get an organization going. He asked if we did, would we want community leaders in it. We said

yeah, the more people, the better it is. So we got community leaders in it, and after that it started growing.

**Ronald Chisom:**

We began to present some historical information about the parish, emphasizing to the fishermen that they are not powerless, but they had some serious work to do if they were going to get their livelihoods back. We gave them a basic plan for conducting meetings and acquainted them with the things they could expect to be involved with, such as talking and winning over people, projecting the positive as well as flexing the organization's muscles.

When they were ready the fishermen invited to their meeting State Representative Frank Patti, the legislator responsible for getting the dredge law enacted. Now keep in mind, these fishermen had never confronted an elected official before. Many had never been in a courthouse or had seen anything like what they were involved in. This was a hell of an experience that they were going through.

They told Patti they wanted the law changed and he said he would do it, claiming that he didn't mean any harm when the dredge law was enacted. We got the impression soon, though, that Patti was going to take his time. We dug in and really began to get more people. At one time, hundreds of people started coming to the meetings, mostly young blacks. Patti couldn't believe blacks were coming together in Plaquemines in some function other than a wake or wedding or that kind of thing. Then he made a firmer commitment to get this law changed.

*Already, the fledgling organization had broken a spell that had hovered over Plaquemines since the 1920s. Even before the dredge law was repealed, the Fishermen and Concerned Citizens Association (FCCA) began to sense its power and resolved to tackle other problems in the parish. A multitude of long-lived injustices came to the surface, and at the top of the list was the lack of running water in the black community of Ironton.*

*Like other hamlets in Plaquemines, Ironton is unincorporated and thus governed by the all-white parish council. The community's 241 people and their ancestors had for years tried*



photo by Tyrone Edwards

**OYSTERER IRVING CROSS**

*to get the council to supply them with water, and the issue had caught the attention of citizens parish-wide. Ironton is on the Mississippi's west bank, and most of the FCCA members lived on the east bank, so this issue provided a way to cross the river and attract new members. Gary Barthelemy, a fisher and president of the FCCA, spoke about how the organization's membership expanded.*

**Gary Barthelemy:**

When the FCCA was first formed there were a lot of people who didn't want to get involved because they really didn't know what the organization was about. A lot of people had been messed with in organizations before. So they were real careful about coming to it. After we started to deal with the water problem in Ironton, that is when everybody fell into the organization and were concerned about what we were doing. People joined the organization and helped support it.

**Mary Trufant, a grandmother and active civic worker in Ironton:**

I had two large containers [cisterns] and I had water running into the house from the containers by an electric pump. But it still wasn't like running water. Besides the rain, the parish had a truck that was supposed to come every week but sometimes it would skip us. When it came, the driver would back up and put a filthy hose that had dug the ground in our water containers. We didn't know what we were drinking out of this

tank, how often they would clean it or what. One time we had two cases of diphtheria back in here. Parish officials claimed it wasn't from the water but, really, I thought it was from bad water.

I started trying to get water here when my children were small. The old people before me tried to get it but they are all dead now. Older people, my mother-in-law and friends went down to get water from the Parish Commission Council and got the same hassle.

Our situation was really bad. You would have to call behind the folk who brought the water, begging them and telling them we were out of water. The white people who didn't have water got treated better than us. They would get refilled before they ran out. All of this was complicated by some people thinking negative and saying we would never get running water in Ironton. After the Fishermen and Concerned Citizens Association came to help us organize a chapter to get water, things started getting on the ball. A lot of doubters got out of their attitudes and they had to join in.

*The process of starting a parish-wide organization to fight for water was extremely confrontational. Chisom drove from New Orleans nightly, holding meetings in various hamlets. The parish council denied requests, saying that the area would eventually get water, but that Ironton was too far from already existing trunk lines and that the \$500,000 price tag was*

prohibitive. However, at the same time officials managed to find money to build a \$1 million marina and \$400,000 golf course for corporation executives. FCCA members refused to accept the insufficient funds answer any longer. They got ready for the big fight.

**Ron Chisom:**

There wasn't any political power here and that was the basic problem. After we started meeting, a couple of blacks who worked for the parish came to their relatives and said, "You had better quit what you are doing. Those n-----s are going to get you into trouble. Chisom ain't going to do nothing for you because he doesn't know what he is doing. You leave him alone and I will get water for you."

Now, I don't mind struggling, but I need to know I have support. I asked them to think twice about what they were doing and asked them to tell me if they were hesitant about it. I told them I was not here to play games because I know what Perez will do. So the brothers and sisters gave me a firm commitment that they were behind me 100 percent.

bad they are, if you can't get them out to a meeting or whatever, it means that you don't have the skills, but you shouldn't fault the community. The community is always smarter than you. They know more than you, they see more than you, and they can hear more than you. You have a lot to learn, you have to stick that into your head.

We had training programs periodically. We talked to a lot of them on the phone long distance from New Orleans. I had to soothe them sometimes, the men and women. I would have to spank them sometimes, take a ride with them and walk with them. They were exposed to what was going on in New Orleans. We would criticize them when they didn't do the right things in their meetings. We taught them how to chew out the man and how to get off him. This was very intense.

After the elected officials would leave our meetings, I would let [the FCCA members] know exactly what they did wrong and right. Everybody would be critiqued. That went on for months and months.

Each time it happened it blew my mind: folk who wouldn't speak

state capitol in Baton Rouge to get the dredge law amended and won a victory.

**Mary Trufant:**

We never had a march or anything like that until the Concerned Citizens came out. We just went down to Chalin Perez and got the same story every time. The white folks heard what we were going to do. Some thought we were crazy. It was getting next to them. They knew something was going to happen. They still tried to brainwash us like they do when we do something visible.

Before we marched, we went to the church, and the pastor, Reverend J.E. Brown, led us in prayer. Then we left from the church and boarded the bus and went down to the river and crossed on the ferry. When we got to the east bank, we knelt in prayer again and then marched to the courthouse.

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## Getting Fired Up

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**Ron Chisom:**

Think about the first time you demonstrated. Some of us do it all the time, so it is just a normal thing with us. I saw 75 people who for the first time in their lives — husbands, wives and children — were really excited. Then people started getting off work. In a little while there were 200 people marching around the courthouse chanting, "We're fired up! Ain't gonna take it no more!" You could see the emotions coming out of these people. After we had stayed the time that we had planned, I said, "Let's go now." They just looked at me and kept chanting, "We're fired up! Ain't gonna take it no more!" So I left them alone until they could get it off their chests.

The parish officials were frightened. All of the white women running the courthouse were hanging out of the windows, wanting to know what in the hell was going on. The officials were all flabbergasted. The New Orleans press came out, something they don't do normally because Plaquemines is about one-and-a-half hours away.

The next action was before the Parish Commission Council. The people knew exactly what to say. They knew when to listen. I could see and the

photo by Anne Braden



"WATER NOW" DEMONSTRATION OUTSIDE PLAQUEMINES PARISH COURTHOUSE

At that point I felt very encouraged to go ahead and do what we had to do. Months passed. We taught basic organizing, and we set up meetings, but we made sure that the officers were involved and coordinated every detail. We showed them how to produce a leaflet and distribute it. We taught them how to get reaction from the people and feel them out. We instructed members not to be negative about the community because that's your strength. I don't care how

up in the meetings were now raising their hands so that we had to almost sit them down. They were ready now to go the Parish Commission Council. I wanted them to shake their fingers in [Chalin] Perez's face. I wanted them to invite him to the meetings and jump on him.

They did all of that and finally planned a public demonstration, the first protest demonstration by blacks in the parish's history. Meanwhile the fishermen were traveling to the



officials of the parish could see that these people could take charge of their own lives and know what to do technically with their organization to achieve that.

After a brief recess, Chalin Perez came back to the meeting and announced water would be piped to Ironton and that almost \$100,000 had been donated by private interests in the parish. The packed courthouse went wild. What a victory!

photo by Tyrone Edwards



WEEKLY WATER DELIVERY, IRONTON

**Tyrone Edwards, executive director of the FCCA:**

The senior citizens were recognized at the Water Day Celebration. Several of the elders who had been struggling with the issue of water for years were honored. After marching from the church, there was a ribbon cutting. A ribbon stretched across the road and at one end was attached to a water hydrant. The oldest member of the community cut the ribbon. Then the water hydrant was opened.

The commission council wanted to have a celebration of their own after they found out that the FCCA had planned one. When invited to participate in ours, they said, "We can't participate in yours because we have the Orange Festival and we are committed to that." However, on the day before our Water Day, the commission council came out and set up a stand which was draped in red, white and blue. But people from the community ignored them and did not participate at all.

On Water Day all of the commis-

sioners showed up except one. It was really strange to see these commissioners hanging on the outside wanting to be a part, but not knowing how. Finally, Chalin Perez, president of the commission council, came up to mingle right after the ribbon was cut. It was really like a wedding that day. People got together and ate a lot of food, and the kids played on the railroad tracks. The old and young were dancing.

## Breaking New Ground on Disputed Land

*After the Ironton water victory, some of the members of the chapter thought the FCCA might heal another festering sore, a cancer which had sapped parish resources for more than five decades.*

*Spurred by an Army Corps of Engineers recommendation, the Louisiana legislature in 1924 gave land condemnation power to the Orleans Levee Board, to create spillways on the Mississippi River north and south of the low-lying metropolis. These spillways would relieve the city of periodic flooding, the Corps claimed, and even the Bohemia Spillway in Plaquemines — though down-river from New Orleans — would at least reduce flood levels by a few inches. Over the years, the 25-mile-*

*long strip along the river in Plaquemines Parish has been used as a spillway several times, the Corps and levee board maintain, but local people point out that much of the spillway itself is already protected from floods by levees, and that part is high ground upon which cattle graze and aged oak trees stand. Producing oil wells are located on the spillway as well.*

*The first oil lease in the Bohemia Spillway was let to Standard Oil by the Orleans Levee Board in 1928. Four years later, Leander Perez executed a scheme that resulted in the legislature's granting the parish police jury control over the liabilities and assets of the levee board. Between the police jury and the levee board, Perez had firm control over the immense oil, gas and sulfur resources beneath the 50,000 acres of spillway land in Plaquemines.*

*Several Plaquemines residents who lost farmland to the spillway unsuccessfully contested the forced land sale in court. Others have continued to hope for redress, and a 10-year-old court case is still pending. Phillip Simmons's family has been fighting to keep control of land which the Orleans Levee Board claims was taken by court action and paid for with a \$900 check which has never been cashed.*

**Phillip Simmons, white fisher and vice president of the Boothville FCCA chapter:**

They came in 1925 and said that they had to have a spillway to prevent flooding of New Orleans. About 1926



APPLAUSE FOR FCCA'S ANNUAL AWARDS CELEBRATION

photo by Tyrone Edwards



FCCA MEMBERS TAKE A BREAK FROM AN ORGANIZING WORKSHOP

or 1927 they turned around and they leased that land they took away from the people to the oil companies for mineral rights and leased surface rights to cattlemen. I didn't think that it was right to take our land away if they were going to lease it off and make a big profit off it.

One particular piece of land that my family is fighting for is the Peter Johnson Estate, which was never sold, never expropriated, and never was paid for. We are still paying taxes today. The Orleans Levee Board says they own it. But my uncle lived on the land until 1965 and we still have a cemetery over there. I have buried kinsfolk over there up until 1976. There is no oil on that particular piece of land that I know of but they took away other people's land that got oil on it. Shell Oil Company paid to run a pipeline across our property. The Pan American Oil Company leased that property from the levee board in the '60s and paid a mineral lease.

For many years, many people in the parish have individually hired lawyers to get their land back, and they have gone down and have not been able to accomplish very much. Now we have an organization in Plaquemines which is fighting for us and we are getting some things done.

*The Boothville chapter is unique among other FCCA chapters. The chapter's president is Elizabeth Taylor, a black woman, and until recently Kirk Sherman, a white man, served as vice president. Other offices are nearly evenly split between blacks and whites in the chapter.*

*Boothville's chapter began as a predominantly black group, but when the FCCA began attempting publicly to recover land and revenues from the Bohemia Spillway, whites flocked en masse to the meeting. Ron Chisom recalls with pride how one white woman came to him early in the organizing effort and said, "Will you help me get my land back?" and then, after becoming a member of the chapter, asked, "Will you help us get our land back?"*

*Elizabeth Taylor is a long-time fighter for civil rights, working mainly with the NAACP registering voters and supporting desegregation of schools in the parish.*

#### **Elizabeth Taylor:**

When Ron Chisom and lawyers Pursell and Quigley came to Boothville, some of the whites came out to the meeting and told the others that didn't come they should join. They told their friends, "It's legal-aid lawyers and people dealing with the

federal government, so they shouldn't be crooked." Everybody got involved. Before, they had gotten lawyers to help who would go away and stop and tell the people there was nothing that could be done about the land.

*Due to FCCA pressure, the Bohemia Spillway land issue is now before the Louisiana legislature. After 60 years of citizen complaints and court cases, the legislature finally convened a study commission to hold public hearings and gather testimony in Plaquemines Parish. Plaquemines citizens have traveled to hearings in Baton Rouge, at which the Orleans Levee Board officials and Army Corps engineers were grilled. A March, 1982, hearing in Boothville drew 500 people. Predictions are that the area's legislators will introduce a bill soon to return the land to its rightful owners.*

#### **Frederick Encalade, an unsuccessful school board candidate in Plaquemines in 1981 and an FCCA officer:**

You take the people who are involved in this land question, the people who own land down in the spillway. They are not only from Boothville, Buras or Pointe a la Hache. They are from all over. There are people from New Orleans, Jefferson Parish, New York and California,

that have strayed all over. What it is now, instead of getting recognition just in Plaquemines Parish or in the state of Louisiana, people are talking about the FCCA all over the United States. We have people all over. Whenever they come back here they ask us what is happening with the land.

*FCCA members are hoping that the legislative study commission will unravel webs of complicated financial dealings that the Perez family wove: the maze of leasing companies and the millions of dollars that have passed through the Delta Development Corporation and similar firms. While there is general optimism in the FCCA that the land or royalties will be recovered, members see it as a continuing political process, rather than a purely legal struggle. When members of the study commission recommended that individuals file suits in court, the FCCA immediately responded that the courts had not worked for them before, and that going into court would take the issue out of the hands of the people of Plaquemines, people who are now bent on building a strong organization for justice.*

**Dorothy Stone, FCCA officer and long-time activist in the parish:**

This land problem will be solved by politicking. The person running for office who wants your votes will get on our side to play against the other person. We will be able to gain from that. Whenever the can of worms is opened, there will be no stopping because they will come falling out. To get to Baton Rouge or Washington, some politicians will sell Perez or anybody down the river.

*Besides the repealed dredge law, the water-for-Ironton victory and the Bohemia Spillway land issue – which will next go before the full legislature – the FCCA has tackled discriminatory hiring practices in the parish government and inadequate allocation of parish resources to poor and black citizens. Bus service was recently approved for both banks of the river, and buses have been purchased. A new swimming pool has been built, the first one accessible to Plaquemines' black population. More blacks are on the parish payroll. And politicians are now asking for the FCCA's backing in electoral campaigns and are requesting their views on the issues. In a special*



**MELVIN CROSS AWAITING RESPONSE TO HIS QUESTION TO THE PLAQUEMINES PARISH COMMISSION COUNCIL**

*election in October, 1981, Chalin Perez's wife ran for a judgeship and was defeated by a significant margin.*

*More importantly, the people of this parish now feel a new and liberating confidence that they can control their own lives.*

*Kirk Sherman, a former vice president of the Boothville FCCA chapter, is an office manager for an electrical company. This is the first time Kirk Sherman has been a community leader of any sort, and he says, "I'm not particularly adapted to this type of thing, but it is just a matter of doing it."*

**Kirk Sherman:**

I am not a fisherman but I am a concerned citizen. I do think in all sincerity that we must turn this political situation around. It's going to be a struggle, it's going to be hard to do, and it's going to take a lot of work. Now is our best opportunity, and it can be done. □

*Pat Bryant is an editor of Southern Exposure and field organizer for the Southeast Project on Human Needs and Peace.*

# SOUTH COAST FOLLIES

*Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas*

## A LOOK AT THE SOUTHERN STATES' COASTAL REGIONS

WHEN WE BROACHED THE SUBJECT OF A COASTAL South book, our friends reacted with a classic, "Oh Boy! The beach!"

Then, when we trotted out a few horror stories, examples of serious threats to this scenic region, faces fell. "You mean there's more to the beach than a good time?"

Yes, there is more — and in the following pages we focus on the critical conflicts coastal people face in the South Atlantic and Gulf states. Although some follies are common to all coastal areas, and ecological systems do not really stop at state lines, we have profiled the brackish region of each state separately: its unique history, indigenous culture and natural features, and its own special problems which often reflect official policy toward coastal resources and residents.

Here, then, is the bad news, along with much detail for the curious and the concerned, and a few success stories that illustrate what coastal advocates can do when they work together.

## VIRGINIA

VIRGINIA'S COASTAL ZONE, KNOWN AS THE TIDEWATER, IS dominated by the nation's largest and most productive estuary, the Chesapeake Bay. Formed over the last 15,000 years as the rising sea flooded



the low coastal plain at the mouth of the Susquehanna River, the Bay unites Atlantic tides with the freshwater flow of five major river systems and numerous tributaries, draining over 64,000 square miles in six states.

The Bay also separates the largely agricultural Eastern Shore peninsula from the rest of Virginia and provides an inland avenue for commerce and recreation. The two major Bay ports, Norfolk and Baltimore, rank fifth and sixth nationally in total tonnage. Though other ports are scrambling to catch up, Norfolk's port is by far the nation's leading coal exporter, handling over 53 million tons in 1979. A pleasure fleet of some 150,000 craft competes for space with the 7,500 ocean-going commercial ships and 10,000 local commercial vessels which ply the Bay each year.

On the Bay's western shore in Virginia lie three large peninsulas, separated by the Potomac, Rappahannock, York and James rivers. From earliest

times, the length and width of these rivers isolated the peninsulas' fishing and farming communities. Now new residents, often still called "Come Heres" by old-timers, constitute an economic elite of retirees, second-home owners, metropolitan commuters and the new business owners who service their needs. Concentrated on the scenic water's edge, the Come Heres have displaced fishing families but left the interior of the Tidewater peninsulas much as they were before the leisure

and recreational boom: agricultural, forestal and often impoverished.

The Eastern Shore, even more isolated from mainstream Virginia life than the western shore peninsulas, has remained economically dependent on truck farming, poultry, corn, soybeans and seafood. Migrant workers harvest the truck produce, while local low-income people, particularly black women, work part-time in the seafood processing plants. The Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel, built in the mid-1960s, did not bring on the tourist boom its backers expected but has reduced the day-to-day isolation from mainland Virginia for those who brave the \$18 round-trip fare to work in the Norfolk area.

To the south and west of the Bay's outlet into the Atlantic sprawls the booming urban Tidewater area: the port cities of Norfolk, Newport News, Portsmouth and Hampton; the tourist centers of Williamsburg and Virginia Beach; and a host of other rapidly

photo by Lisa M. Krieger

growing cities and towns. Over a million people reside in urban Tidewater, making it one of the largest metropolitan areas in the coastal South. Expansive port-related industries — including the state's biggest industrial employer, Tenneco's Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Company, manufacturing plants, 20 military installations, associated private firms and a burgeoning tourist industry — are the driving forces of the area's economy.

The shallow Bay's mix of fresh and salt waters sustains valuable spawning and nursery grounds for a variety of marine life. Oysters and crabs are the most famous of the Bay's seafood delicacies. About 20 million pounds of oysters are harvested annually, more than any place else in the nation.

Some 3,500 Virginia seafood harvesters, augmented by an equal number of part-time commercial fishers, brought in oysters, crabs, finfish, clams and scallops worth \$65 million at dockside in 1978, and about 7,000 additional workers in the production and wholesale marketing segments of the industry increased the gross income value of the catch to about \$100 million.

**VIRGINIA'S TRADITIONAL LAISSEZ FAIRE ATTITUDE TOWARD**

growth management has contributed to some of the major problems facing its coast. Take for example the lax water pollution control measures in the Hopewell area (the self-proclaimed "Chemical Capital of the South") that were intended to help industrial production. Ultimately, this resulted in Allied Chemical's 1976 kepone disaster which closed the James River to commercial fishing for five years and, because the James River flows into the Bay, caused massive public fear and distrust of all Virginia seafood.

Or consider what happened when state government tripped over itself to expedite a 1974 plan by Cox Enterprises, the Atlanta-based communications conglomerate, to go into the oil refining business at Portsmouth. Like other state agencies, the Marine Resources Commission approved the refinery's required permit, even though its own investigation indicated that serious harm to the Bay seafood industry was a likely result of oil spills associated with refinery operations. The Army Corps of Engineers' environmental impact study

indicated that Portsmouth was probably the worst site for a refinery on the entire East Coast, largely because of its proximity to irreplaceable seed oyster beds. Other federal agencies, particularly the Fish and Wildlife Service, strongly opposed the refinery. Ultimately, though, the decision rested with the Secretary of the Army, top commander of the Corps, who, under pressure from then-Governor John Dalton, approved the final permit in 1979.

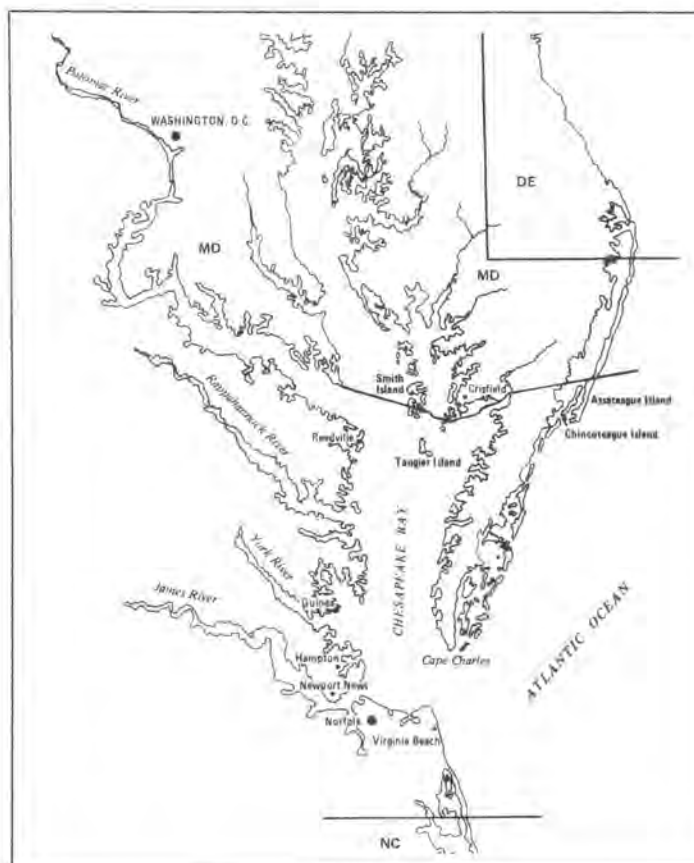
After watching this process incredulously, a number of groups filed lawsuits. The Virginia Oyster Packers Association lost a suit in state court against the Water Control Board and the refinery. Citizens Against the Refinery's Effects (CARE), a spirited Norfolk group, some of whose members lived downwind from the refinery site, filed four federal lawsuits over the air and water issues and engaged in a five-year process which, along with litigation by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and the National Wildlife Federation, continues to delay construction of the refinery.

As a result, the Norfolk and Western Railroad, which had initially sold the refinery site to Cox Enterprises, sued Cox to get it back, and the

state passed legislation allowing much of the site to be condemned for a state-owned coal port. Apparently, export coal has displaced oil as the latest coastal economic bonanza.

**VIRGINIA ADHERES STRICTLY TO A CONSTITUTIONAL RULE,** known in legal circles as Dillon's Rule, which limits local powers to those specifically granted by the state. Only the state has planning powers, and it has steadfastly refused either to use them or to delegate them to the localities through enabling legislation. Indeed, like Georgia and Texas, the state shied away from the national coastal zone management effort and in 1976 simply abolished its Division of State Planning.

Without growth planning, multi-million-dollar assessments of environmental deterioration — financed by taxpayers everywhere — are merely measurements, not mandates for action. The Environmental Protection Agency's \$25 million Chesapeake Bay Program study, for example, concluded that the Bay's productivity is severely threatened by siltation and nutrient over-enrichment from upland development and agricultural runoff, and by industrial and residential pollu-



tion. The EPA Bay Program called for innovative management practices to stem the decline of marine life. But the study will be largely wasted unless planning and growth regulation are applied to Bay problems. Thus far, Virginia's response to the program's suggestions has been scant.

This ostrich-like stance is held in place not only by a general legacy of distrust toward government regulation, but also by a peculiarly Virginian alliance of old families, business interests, state government and the courts, operating in a vacuum of local power and leadership serving the public interest.

The cumulative weight of many unregulated small-scale developments in coastal Virginia — such as housing, shopping centers and marinas — has fouled water, closed shellfish beds and troubled the recreation and tourist industries. Virginia Beach, for example, has grown so rapidly that even local boosters admit it has become a sprawling, non-functional community with little relation or attention to the values that caused people to come in the first place. Much of the formerly renowned oyster beds in nearby Lynnhaven River have been condemned. Even public access to the water, except at the highly developed beach proper, is generally poor.

The issue of beach access, particularly ocean beach access, deserves special mention. Virginians are barred from the Atlantic coast by both geography and land ownership patterns. The distance around the Bay to the Eastern Shore, the time and toll dollars required to get there, and the fact that the private, nonprofit Virginia Nature Conservancy owns 13 of the 16 islands fringing the Atlantic border of the Shore and limits access

to them because of their inherent fragility, leave few available openings for the general public.

On the northern end of the Eastern Shore, the tourist center of Chincoteague and the Assateague Island National Seashore do offer accommodations and ocean access for millions of beachlovers. Indeed, this site is in many respects a model development, with all private businesses located behind the main barrier line of Assateague Island, thus avoiding the usual problems of erosion, pollution and private property conflicts caused by construction on the oceanfront.

The lack of sufficient access to the ocean's water seems a small inconvenience compared to another problem: inadequate water supplies. Urban Tidewater's population has endured year-long restrictions on water use, largely due to growing industrial and residential consumption and sorely limited supplies. Many Norfolk-area residents believe the dwindling supply is the result of drought, not overuse, and others have accepted these and similar dilemmas as the price one pays for enjoying the second highest weekly earnings in the state, short of Richmond.

A good income builds complacency, no matter what your color, and today many blacks in the urban Tidewater fit what Dr. Milton Reid, publisher of the *Journal and Guide*, Norfolk's black weekly newspaper, calls "the mold of conservatism." Attracted by steady jobs in the shipyards and high-paying industrial trades, rural blacks from North Carolina and Virginia moved to the area in large numbers during and following World War II. Their white-sponsored security mollified defiance. Says Dr. Reid,

"The '60s never happened in Norfolk. There wasn't much of a mass movement here." The Norfolk School Board is currently trying to abandon school busing to achieve racial integration (because it costs too much, they say), and only a small core of people are fighting the plan. After court-ordered desegregation began in 1972, whites fled Norfolk, many of them lighting in the Virginia Beach or other waterfront areas. With the Norfolk school system already majority black, activists are predicting that if school busing for racial balance is curbed, the city's black youth will be resegregated in under-financed schools.

The price of job security becomes even more suspect as the tidal wave of industrialization ebbs. In early 1982, when the Norfolk Ford plant laid off its third shift, workers were sorely pressed to find other jobs. Even with the increasing defense budget and the numerous military facilities in the Tidewater area, unemployment is steadily climbing. Though area economists predict a turnaround by mid-'82, the lesson remains that there is no job security when multinational corporations and an elastic defense budget dictate the local marketplace.

**VIRGINIA'S GOVERNOR AS OF 1982, CHARLES S. ROBB, IS IN A** position at least to consider local alternatives for economic development. Robb owes his narrow margin of victory over his Reagan-Republican opponent to black voters, 97 percent of whom supported him. Facing a close race, Robb also courted numerous public-interest groups, including coastal conservationists, and even issued a position paper on environmental affairs, another rarity in Virginia politics.

Accordingly, Robb has indicated a willingness to increase local government planning and growth management authority, to appoint more balanced interests to state environmental boards and to pay attention to the employment needs of the economically disadvantaged.

Robb's supporters are now waiting to see if he delivers. So far, a basic question in coastal Virginia — the "jobs versus environment" debate — has in truth never been addressed. Instead, local people are faced with a choice between an oil refinery and



photo courtesy Norfolk Ledger-Star

more coal ports. Two coal terminals in the Norfolk area are being upgraded; and four new coal terminals are either planned or under construction. There is intense competition among ports from Baltimore to Galveston for this trade. The Norfolk channel is to be dredged an additional 10 feet to a 55-foot depth to accommodate huge coal ships, and state/federal dredging permits are being "fast-tracked," forcing environmental concerns again to take a back seat to industry.

Ironically, relatively few new jobs — 1,500 at the most — would directly result from the public capital ex-



photo by John H. Sheehy

ended in Virginia's coal port mania. Considering that the estimated price tag for the dredging project is \$1.8 billion and that four new coal terminals would cost some \$450 million, far more jobs could be created if comparable public and private investment went toward light manufacturing, small businesses and other industries compatible with the natural resources of the area. To date, the state Division of Industrial Development has given no indication that it compares the job-creating potential and long-term environmental side effects of stimulating non-renewable, capital-intensive industries to the benefits of assisting indigenous industries, including tourism and seafood businesses.

This governmental responsibility to evaluate alternative futures is important everywhere, but particularly crucial in fragile coastal zones like Tidewater Virginia.

*By Bud Watson, with thanks to Dr. Milton Reid.*

## NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE SUMMER OF 1981, NORTH CAROLINA GOVERNOR JAMES B. Hunt and officials from Peat Methanol Associates of Santa Fe, New Mexico, stood before a crowd of reporters to announce that the world's first peat-to-methanol plant was coming to one of the state's northeastern counties. The plant will employ about 200 people and utilize peat being mined from vast coastal wetlands by several "superfarm" corporations.

This and other well-publicized development projects along North Carolina's coast have changed the way people there live, work and interact with their natural environment. The 20 counties which border salt water still contain only 10 percent of the state's population, but four of them are gaining new residents at two to six times the rate of the state as a whole, largely because of a boom in several retirement and resort beach areas.

The resurgence of public and private interest in North Carolina's coastal area follows nearly 150 years of decline in the region's economic, if not political, importance to the state. Geography alone can take much credit for the area's slower development. Like a skinny arm off its Virginia shoulder, North Carolina's Outer Banks hang southward and seaward for over 100 miles — with only one break, at migrating, treacherous Oregon Inlet — before turning back toward the mainland at Cape Hatteras, 30 miles offshore. Another long stretch to Cape Lookout is broken in several places by shallow inlets that have opened and closed over the decades. From that point south to the border, the islands hug the mainland, shielding it from the ocean's force. While the Outer Banks are too narrow for much crop cultivation and therefore did not participate in the inland slave culture, they did support scattered villages of whalers and fishers.

Between the barrier islands and the mainland are about 4,500 square miles of shallow sounds, bays, tidal creeks and salt marshes. Pamlico Sound is the nation's largest body of water behind a barrier island. Altogether, the state's inland coastal waters comprise

an estuarine system second in size only to Louisiana's in the lower 48 states. Inland from these fertile, sea-life producing waters are seven major river systems bordered by brackish and freshwater wetlands, and fertile farm and forest lands.

Mainland high and dry enough for farming was divided up by European settlers in the mid-1600s, following a series of bloody confrontations with Indian tribes. An earlier, friendly welcome to the first English colonists is still replayed in Paul Green's "The Lost Colony" outdoor drama on Roanoke Island. Inaccessible terrain and legislative restrictions on the size of holdings kept North Carolina from following the pattern of huge plantations set by Virginia and South Carolina. But by 1776, enough exceptions to the 660-acre limit had been made in the fertile tobacco and cotton region to spawn a slave-owning aristocracy which dominated state government. This concentration of power brought the state to the brink of revolution in 1831, when the state constitution was changed to give more clout to the far more numerous small farmers who took pride in their economic and political independence.

By 1860 over a third of the state's people were slaves on coastal plantations. After the Civil War, plantations became tenant farms or were run on a sharecropping system that kept laborers in constant debt. Most of the state's leading industries — textiles, tobacco and furniture — bypassed the coast for the Piedmont, which had water power and transportation and which drew bankrupt farming families into a growing industrial workforce. It was not until 1875 that an active fertilizer and lumber industry took root along the Cape Fear River near Wilmington. The city itself was a mecca for free blacks, and a fusion of black Republicans and Populists held control of its government long past the end of Reconstruction. In 1898, the white Democrats made their ultimate move to regain the region, declaring martial law, abolishing the duly elected local government and murdering scores of citizens, most of them black, in what is now known as the Wilmington Massacre. Once in command, the architects of Jim Crow spread terror and segregation throughout the region.

**MANY COASTAL AREAS STILL REFLECT THEIR LONG HISTORY** of economic extremes and cultural isolation, but numerous changes have occurred in the last several decades. The construction of two major military installations in the 1940s, increased tourism and second-home development, the emergence of corporate agribusiness, and expanded industrial activity have increased the region's population and changed coastal life for many North Carolinians. By 1976, the coastal region had attracted an estimated 83,690 recreational properties alone. It is not unusual for recreation and retirement towns, like Nags Head in Dare County and Emerald Isle in Carteret County, to contain two or three times as many houses as permanent residents, and to be governed by condominium and beach cottage developers. Although beaches to the high-water tide line are public in North Carolina, many of them are now de facto private property because parking and pedestrian access is increasingly restricted by local governments and property owners. Fortunately, much of North Carolina's Outer Banks is national seashore and wildlife refuge, and thus protected from private development.

Approximately half the land in the 20-county region is devoted to commercial timber growing. This acreage includes small private woodlots managed by corporate foresters, state and national forests leased to the corporations, and the thousands of acres directly owned by Weyerhaeuser, International Paper, Union Camp, Champion Timberlands and Georgia-Pacific. State economists estimate that \$91 million in revenues was generated through the sale of forest products in 1979, revenues that provided jobs to approximately 5,800 people. However, since the North Carolina General Assembly changed the tax law in 1973, these companies have not been required to pay county property taxes on the value of their standing timber, thus dramatically reducing the tax base of many counties. For example, Gates County, where 22 percent of the population is poor, lost one-third of its tax base.

Political and economic benefits from the coast's old and new resources are also evenly divided. In some coastal counties, particularly in the northeastern section (not on the barrier islands), Afro-Americans are

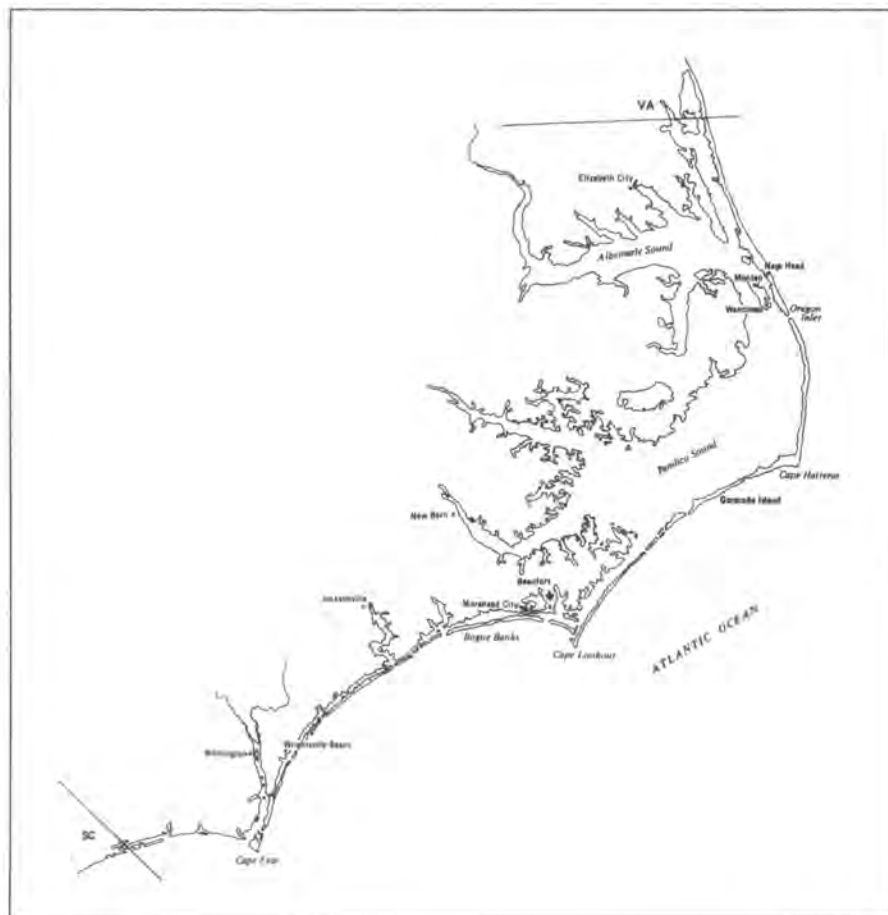
the majority (over 50 percent in Gates and Bertie counties and almost 50 percent in five other counties), yet their strength in numbers has not resulted in more than minor political representation. Income levels in high-percentage black population counties are lower than the already low coastal average, with over one-third of the citizens in Bertie, Hyde and Tyrrell counties living below federal poverty level standards. In 1979 the average Hyde County worker labored for \$85.66 a week, the lowest wages in the state.

Farming remains a principal money-maker in the region, but a decreasing number of coastal residents earn their primary income from farming; total cash receipts from farm marketings reached almost \$400 million in 1978, but only 3.6 percent of the region's workers list themselves as employed on farms.

State ports in Wilmington and Morehead City, although usually operating in the red and requiring large

state subsidies, still contribute to economic development. The banks of the Cape Fear River near Wilmington have the heaviest concentration of coastal industry, including chemical plants and a small oil refinery; and over 1,000 people are employed by Texasgulf in phosphate mining and associated manufacturing in Beaufort County, where efforts to extract the fourth largest phosphate deposit in the world are enhanced by economical barge transportation down the Intracoastal Waterway to ships at Morehead City.

The fast-growing market for U.S. steam coal in European countries is seen as a new income source for the two ports. In April, 1981, Alla-Ohio Valley Coals, Inc., began exporting coal from Morehead City, and nine even larger coal export terminals are proposed, two for Morehead City and seven for Wilmington. But citizens in towns along the coal trains' route to the sea are growing concerned about dust, vibration, noise and traffic





disruption — with Morehead City drivers complaining about hour-and-a-half delays at the railroad crossing near the port when the trains were unloading.

Just as opposition to expanded coal operations was intensifying, Alla-Ohio shut down operations — having over-extended itself into temporary bankruptcy — and began to reorganize. Even so, continued outside interest in the coal export potential of Morehead City has scientists and citizens worried that water quality will be degraded by runoff and groundwater leachate from coal piles and machinery, construction of coal terminals in low, sandy areas, and dredging to deepen the harbors for larger coal ships.

Similar concerns have led many to reassess the benefits of Texasgulf's mining. Withdrawals of over 100 million gallons of ground water a day, necessary to keep the phosphate pits from flooding, caused area wells to go dry and raised concerns that municipal wells in large portions of the coastal region might be threatened by shortages or saltwater intrusions. Moreover, even though the mining has provided jobs, it has also brought new residents to fill those jobs, new demands on public services and even proposals to displace the entire town of Aurora to allow extraction of phosphate beneath it. Growing skepticism about local benefits from corporate phosphate mining recently made it politically acceptable for the Beaufort County Board of Commissioners to reject Texasgulf's plan to mine the Pamlico River bottom until a study determined how mining would affect the river.

### VAST ESTUARIES AND COASTAL WATERS SUPPORT THE STATE'S

commercial and sports fishing industry. North Carolina fishers have shipped a wide variety of shellfish and fish to markets, first on steamboats and sailing vessels which crisscrossed the sounds to connect with the railroads, and today on refrigerated trucks, most of which head north to major population centers. Since the mid-1970s, the state and federal governments have spent \$7.3 million to make North Carolina's small-scale commercial fishing industry more efficient and competitive by constructing a seafood industrial park, dedicated in 1981 ceremonies led by Governor Hunt at Wanchese Harbor

(see related articles on pages 7-15.)

The state's Division of Marine Fisheries estimates that sport and commercial fishing now generates approximately \$1 billion in revenues; more directly, the catch brought \$57.5 million in 1981 to fishers at the docks. The highly decentralized commercial fishing industry employs some 20,000 fishers and workers, with a gross product of \$300 million. It also sustains numerous tiny towns and barrier island communities of mostly moderate- and low-income people. On the barrier islands, the once-isolated fishing villages where residents spoke a thick Elizabethan brogue are now a mix of old-timers and new beach cottage owners, tourism business-people and realtors.

Deteriorating water quality seriously threatens North Carolina's fisheries. Malfunctioning septic tanks — primarily associated with resort development and runoff from urban, suburban, agricultural and commercial forest lands — have contaminated 317,000 acres of oyster and clam beds, degraded estuaries essential to the survival of 90 percent of the seafood resources in the state, and spurred scientists to warn that a hepatitis outbreak is possible. Hardest hit thus far have been the fishers of Brunswick and New Hanover counties (near Wilmington), where pollution has closed a majority of shellfish acres (84 percent in Brunswick and 58 percent in New Hanover).

And now North Carolina's largest and most productive estuaries are in jeopardy. Four superfarms are uprooting and burning vegetation and draining excess water throughout a low-lying, 648-square-mile area in the Albemarle-Pamlico peninsula to grow crops, raise livestock and strip-mine peat deposits. Developers of these farms include the John Hancock and Prudential Insurance companies and Malcolm McLean, a resort developer, ex-trucking magnate and founder of the highly successful Sea-Land Containerized Shipping Lines. According to a U.S. Geological Survey study, rapid runoff of fresh water into Pamlico and Albemarle sounds is harmful to fishery resources; that is not news to those who depend on the resource. In 1976, one fisher, Troy Mayo, helped collect 3,000 names on petitions protesting large-scale drainage and carried the protest to the state capital; with characteristic distrust of

photo by Jennifer Miller



government experts, he told a reporter for the state's Sea Grant newsletter, "The bureaucrats and educated fools can't see what's going on without a study. But you can ask the stupidest person in Hyde County and he'll tell you. The damage has been done in the past 10 years by the big corporate farms."

Five years later, the state's Marine Fisheries Commission finally publicly expressed its own strong reservations about the effect of the superfarms' freshwater drainage into the estuaries. The commission's statement, though, was overshadowed that same day by Governor Hunt's announcement that the \$250 million peat-to-methanol plant would be located on Malcolm McLean's First Colony Farm, requiring the mining of at least 633,000 tons of peat a year.

### THE NEED TO GUIDE COASTAL DEVELOPMENT AND PROTECT

natural resources was formally recognized in North Carolina when salt-water protection legislation was passed in the 1960s. Then, in 1974, at the height of the environmental movement in the United States, the state's General Assembly passed a Coastal Area Management Act. The law has four main features. First, it creates a Coastal Resources Commission which holds public meetings every six weeks to make policy decisions and hear permit appeals. Eleven different interest groups, including commercial fishing, agriculture, forestry, real estate and banking, are represented, and each of the 15 members are nominated by county or municipal governments, subject to the governor's approval. The act also sets up a 47-member Advisory Council to represent all levels of state and local government.

Second, counties must and cities may prepare land-use plans and policies for future development. Implementation of the plans is not mandatory, but they must be considered whenever state and federal



photo by Gene Furr

permitting, funding and development decisions are made.

Third, certain places are classified as "areas of environmental concern." These include parts of barrier islands and estuarine waters and wetlands, but exclude freshwater wetlands, inland portions of barrier islands, plus coastal farmlands, commercial forests and many other ecologically connected land forms where certain types of development can damage the larger system.

Finally, the act requires commission permits for development in "areas of environmental concern"; this procedure rarely prohibits development but rather attempts to head it in more environmentally sensitive directions.

Intense lobbying of coastal-area legislators by real estate and industrial development interests succeeded in watering down the act with several dozen revisions to the original version. After its passage, proponents of the Coastal Area Management Act were concerned by the bill's weakening, but saw it as a good beginning. Seven years of planning and regulations have generated a good deal of debate — and thus education — among coastal residents and their officials. But, according to Office of Coastal Management staffer Ralph Cantral, "Building a constituency for an environmental program in these days of tight pocket-books is extremely difficult." North Carolina's coastal management program is often cited nationally as a model for other states, but coastal management officials live in continued fear that if they get too tough on development the program will be cast away by the General Assembly.

Attempts to locate a huge, potentially explosive liquefied petroleum gas

storage facility and two oil refineries on the state's coast, plus the phosphate mining, the superfarm clearing-draining projects, coal export developments and rapid resort development of unprotected barrier islands have all served to ignite public interest in the future well-being of this region. The Conservation Council of North Carolina, Carolina Coastal Crossroads at Wilmington and Carteret Crossroads in Morehead City/Beaufort, N.C. Land Use Congress, Neuse River Foundation and the Pamlico-Tar River Foundation are among the citizen organizations seeking to make coastal development more environmentally sensitive. Aided by the forum provided by the Coastal Resources Commission, these voluntary groups, even though limited by lack of funds, have focused public attention on development projects that are highly controversial in nature. In rural areas, though, citizens are poorly matched against well-financed development interests.

Whether North Carolina's citizens like their coastal management program or not, it is a "good beginning" that allows public participation and local government control to a greater extent than is found in other Southern states. The goal of the act — "To insure the orderly and balanced use and preservation of our coastal resources" — and its provisions are vulnerable to misuse by powerful forces interested in short-term profits. Yet the program also holds great promise if supported and influenced by people with foresight who care about the future quality and economy of their coast. □

*By Todd Miller with Robert W. Oast; thanks to North Carolina's Office of Coastal Management staff.*

## SOUTH CAROLINA

**ALL OF COASTAL SOUTH CAROLINA CAN BE DIVIDED INTO** three parts. From the North Carolina border to Winyah Bay, the crescent-shaped "Grand Strand" has few barrier islands but enjoys broad beaches and thick dunes. Anchored by Myrtle Beach, the 50-mile stretch is the fastest growing section of the coast and is rimmed with motels, carnival-style attractions, 30 golf courses, 12,000 campsites, older communities of oceanfront cottages and a maze of new condominiums.

Tourism, South Carolina's second largest money-maker with \$2.2 billion in 1980 revenues, has long centered in the Grand Strand; and the area still draws half the seven million out-of-state visitors, including hordes of college students and over 50,000 Canadians each spring. The strain on the 45,000 local taxpayers to provide adequate public services for 300,000 vacationers on a typical summer day is considerable. Young families are being priced out, yet Myrtle Beach offers tax breaks to new property owners over age 65, another factor helping South Carolina attract the third highest proportion of retirees among the states.

The recent emphasis on luxury retirement condominiums has also changed the pluralistic character of Myrtle Beach, an area that got its major commercial boost after World War II and again in the booming 1960s. "In a class sense, the new development is limiting," says Dr. Charles Joyner, a Grand Strand native who now teaches history at USC's Coastal Carolina College. "When I was growing up here, there were many classes although we all spoke with the same accent. People speak with all sorts of accents now, but it is all one class." The interior of the Waccamaw region, meanwhile, remains working class and largely farming and forest land, with Horry County (population: 101,000; 75 percent white) leading the state in agricultural production, chiefly tobacco and soybeans.

**THE COAST'S SECOND SECTION BEGINS AT GEORGETOWN AND** Winyah Bay and continues for 20 miles through the Santee River delta, the largest river delta on the East Coast. It includes the 20,000-acre Tom Yawkey Wildlife Center, the 17,000-acre Baruch Foundation properties, the 24,000-acre

Santee Coastal Reserve, the 31,000-acre Cape Romaine National Wildlife Refuge and a chunk of the Francis Marion National Forest — altogether an unparalleled vista of protected beaches, forest lands and marshes that are home for hundreds of thousands of birds and such endangered species as the loggerhead turtle, bald eagle, short-nosed sturgeon, and Eastern brown pelican.

Before the Civil War, the freshwater areas here and in the Waccamaw region supported the state's wealthiest, most slave-intensive rice plantations, while the breezy, saltwater lowlands hosted summer retreats for planters up and down the coast. Much of the land passed to Charleston and Columbia merchants during Reconstruction and later to Northern financiers, timber companies and private hunting preserves. Even in areas deeded to the public, hunting clubs still hold special privileges to use state-maintained rice impoundments for duck blinds. Forty percent of the marshes of the Santee delta are impounded, and large sections of the interior are part of the three million acres of coastal zone timberland, mostly owned by the big paper companies.

The inlets, bays and coastal waters make the area a center for South Carolina's fishing industry, which grossed \$26.5 million in dockside landings in 1979. Some \$2 million came from clams and oysters, and over \$20 million came

from harvesting shrimp. The Army Corps' project to re-divert the Santee River back to its original course will wipe out the clam and oyster beds at the mouth of the old river, says Tommy Duke, a local boat captain and operator of Bulls Bay Seafood in McClellanville. During the New Deal, the Corps shifted the Santee's flow to the Cooper River as a means of flood control; but now the Corps wants to move it back to reduce siltation in Charleston harbor. Some shellfishers who rely on the beds at the Santee's mouth are bitter about the change, but the increased river flow could yield improved subtidal oyster beds in the long run. Whether the benefits ever outweigh the loss "is just anybody's guess," says Duke.

#### BELOW BULLS BAY, THE SOUTHERN SECTION OF THE COAST

features a string of stubby sea islands, separated from the mainland by marsh, tidal channels and inlets. Some, like Capers and Hunting, are partly or entirely publicly owned with restricted access; some, like Johns and St. Helena, are populated by descendants of slaves who initially received land from Gen. Sherman (see pages 35 and 100); some, like Sullivans and Folly, are older beach villages, predominantly of whites; and some, like Seabrook and Hilton Head, are modern enclaves for the very rich.

With Charleston at the center, this region nurtured an extremist culture of privilege and privation that in too many ways continues today. Its roots go back to Pedro de Quexos, a slave trader who sailed into what was probably Winyah Bay in 1521 and left with 150 Indian captives for the Spanish plantations in the West Indies. In 1664, Capt. William Hilton dropped anchor at an island he named in his honor and recorded his amazement at the area's oak-forested islands and abundant fish and fowl, ideal conditions for colonization. "The ayr is clear and sweet, the country very pleasant and delightful," he wrote. "And we would wish that all they that want a happy settlement of our English nation were well transported here."

In 1670, the English settled along the Ashley and Cooper rivers and began importing slaves, first from the West Indies and by 1700 directly from Africa. A "pest house" on Sullivans Island, just off Charleston harbor, became a quarantine center for thousands of Africans entering the New World. The new workers, bringing knowledge of rice cultivation with

them from West Africa, were forced to build an expanding system of ditches and embankments along a 50-mile strip of tidal swamps. Later many rice fields and additional lands were transformed into indigo and cotton plantations, yielding spectacular wealth.

Muggy weather and fear of malaria led planters to spend much of the year elsewhere, at Mt. Pleasant or McClellanville, in Newport, Rhode Island, in the mountains, or enjoying the fashionable life of Charleston. In 1824, Charleston boasted more carriages than any other city in the U.S.; upper-crust ladies, observed Mrs. Nathaneal Greene, "spent half their time making their toilets, one-fourth of the remaining time paying and receiving social visits, and another fourth in scolding and hitting the servants."

While blacks were less susceptible to malaria than their white masters due to sickle-cell trait, they too sought ways to change conditions or leave the region, often by boat. A settlement of free blacks grew outside St. Augustine, and the slaves who organized the dramatic Stono Revolt near Charleston in 1739 were marching to join them when they were overpowered. Similar plots, real and imagined, triggered violent reaction from planters who cherished the belief that slavery was natural, even preferred by their captive workforce.

In 1775, for example, the provisional government killed Thomas Jeremiah, one of the free blacks who routinely piloted boats in and out of the Charleston harbor; the freedom fighters said Jeremiah was conspiring with a British warship to smuggle arms to the slaves, so they burned him at the stake in downtown Charleston.

Denmark Vesey was a slave in the West Indies at the time, but he won his freedom with a lottery ticket and became a prominent free black carpenter in Charleston. In 1822, he was hanged with several co-conspirators for plotting to free the city's enslaved majority.

A few months later, the state legislature authorized the creation of what became the Military College of South Carolina (the Citadel) "to establish a Competent Force to Act as a Municipal Guard for the Protection of Charleston and Vicinity." In the defense of the planters' way of life, cadets from the Citadel assembled on a harbor island on January 9, 1861, and fired the first shots of the Civil War on a federal ship bringing supplies to troops at Fort Sumter. Today, the school is one of



only two all-male, publicly funded military colleges in the nation and symbolic of what writer Pat Conroy calls Charleston's "seige mentality" and "conviction that the twentieth century is a mistake."

#### THE LEGACY OF A PLANTATION ETHOS IS EVIDENT THROUGHOUT

the low country — in the casual use of the term "plantation" to describe the new resorts; in the preoccupation of prideful preservationists in Charleston and Beaufort; in the high incidence of white-only private academies; and, most remarkably, in the persistence of a tradition of paternalistic, authoritarian "masters" who determine the destiny of their chosen home turf.

The latter includes such modern-day master politicians as Mendel Rivers, a man who represented Charleston in Congress for 30 years and who left the district with 10 naval and other military installations, enough to make the Pentagon still the area's largest employer.

And the tradition includes Charles E. Fraser, Jr., a master of development strategies whose Sea Pines Plantation pioneered the resort island concept. In 1969, Fraser led a coalition of resort owners, black fishers from Hilton Head and environmentalists against the location of a German chemical company, BASF, on Port Royal Sound. The state government and the Beaufort-area black community and Chamber of Commerce heavily courted the \$200 million plant, but with the use of anti-pollution laws, court suits, intense lobbying and promises of alternative economic development, Fraser's coalition prevailed and BASF abandoned its plans.

Ironically, five years after Fraser helped environmentalists block the German chemical firm, he championed a plan by Arab investors from Kuwait to convert pristine, virtually uninhabited Kiawah Island into a sumptuous seaside resort. The Sierra Club, Audubon Society and Charleston's sizable Jewish community opposed the project, but Fraser and his associates, who had the contract to manage the development, lined up support from Charleston and neighboring Johns Island blacks like Bill Saunders, who said, "The environmentalists are just a bunch of upper-middle-class white people who care about birds and turtles, but they never mention the poor people of Johns Island." On the day of the public hearing for zoning changes on Kiawah, Fraser got the U.S. Assistant Secretary of Treasury to call the head of the

Charleston County Council to explain how increasing Arab investment in the state was in the national interest. The changes were adopted and development on the island commenced.

Four years later, on August 12, 1980, "Kiawah officials were as content as alligators in the shallow ponds on the islands' hard-to-reach areas," wrote Keith Schneider in the *Charleston News and Courier*. On that one day, they sold \$10.2 million in real estate, even though the prime interest rate hit 20 percent. That same season, a quarter acre of Fraser's Sea Pines Plantation ocean-front property sold for \$375,000. But although Bill Saunders had landed a top job with the Kiawah Development Co., many other blacks on the sea islands and the rest of the low country were losing their land and still waiting for the promised prosperity from resort development (see articles on pages 33-39).

Beaufort County, which is 33 percent black and includes Hilton Head Island, ranks 34th among the state's 46 counties in average weekly wages, consistently exceeds the state's unemployment rate, and employs half its non-agricultural workers in low-paying service and trade jobs; but because of the resort island rich, the county shows up having the second highest per capita personal income in the state. Jasper County, on the Georgia line, ranks 45th; its population — 14,500 — is 57 percent black, one fourth the size of Beaufort County, and mostly engaged in agriculture, fishing and timbering.

#### DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES ARE SPARKING DISPUTES ON OTHER

parts of the coast as well. The town of Georgetown, which serviced the early rice plantations, opted for industrial development in the 1920s and '30s and underwrote the construction of International Paper's giant pulp mill in its downtown. Some say the mill's sulfur odor and the metallic dust from Georgetown Steel's smokestacks have prevented the surrounding area from attracting tourist development. But the union wages at both plants have helped the sagging economy of a county that was majority black until 1970.

With chronic unemployment — now at 19 percent — and a declining port, city leaders welcomed a 1979 plan by Carolina Refining and Distributing Co. to locate a 30,000-barrel-a-day refinery on Winyah Bay. On the other hand, Zane Wilson of Georgetown Advocates for Rational Development points to

the adjacent wildlife refuge areas and valuable fishing industry, and says the inevitable oil spills and pollution "are not worth accepting in exchange for 60 or so jobs from a refinery." Investigative reporter Jan Stucker found a half-dozen major errors or problems with the company's numerous filings in the last two years, but state regulators have given the refinery a green light with only two or three permits to go.

"It's all political," says Betty Spence of the South Carolina Wildlife Federation, which is suing the South Carolina Coastal Council for granting the permits required under the state's coastal management law. According to Stucker and others, the "undisputed power" behind the project is James B. "Jimmy" Moore, vice chairman of the state Port Authority, which owns the land where the refinery would be located. Moore is a former legislator, a powerful Georgetown County Democrat and attorney for Carolina Refinery. He has convinced Sen. Strom Thurmond to help him keep the Army Corps of Engineers from preparing an environmental impact statement (EIS). Bo Bricklemeyer of the Center for Lowcountry Environments says environmentalists have formally requested an EIS on the refinery since January 1979. But the Corps has not budged; its South Carolina office has earned a reputation as "the worse in the Southeast." If it eventually grants the refinery a permit without doing an EIS, more lawsuits will surely result. Moore and his friends are incensed at the prospect of delays, especially since they see the project as the key to upping the economic benefits side of a cost-benefits equation which could justify federal improvements of the harbor.

The pro-development bias of the South Carolina Coastal Council, which oversees the coastal management plan, is equally infuriating to environmentalists, many fishers and coastal residents. "The little guy who can't afford the right law firm may not get a permit," says Bo Bricklemeyer. "But the well endowed with connections can still get what they want. In many cases, the Council doesn't follow its own rules."

One recent example involves a long-standing desire by Graham Reeves of the Georgetown-area Annandale Plantation to build a series of dikes around 660 acres of marsh near the mouth of the Santee for duck ponds. Despite his questionable legal claim to the land and data showing the impoundments would damage valuable estuaries and block 14

large streams in the area, the Coastal Council's review committee recently granted Reeves a permit. The Natural Resources Defense Council, the South Carolina League of Women Voters and state Attorney General (who is concerned about private infringement of public trust land below mean high water) are now challenging the permit.

Up at Murrell's Inlet, the Council is allowing the construction of a marina for commercial and sports fishing boats, despite residents' vigorous opposition to further development in their coastal village and fears that increased boat traffic will harm existing shellfishing in the area. Meanwhile, state and federal grants and permits for additional Charleston port facilities on the Wando River now threaten one of the most productive estuaries in the state.

Boosters of coastal development have been slow to acknowledge the consequences of their shortsightedness. Steady erosion and hurricanes have taken the first line of houses on Folly Island's beach. In late 1979, residents held workshops on proper coastal management; but a few weeks later, the city council granted building permits for a 540-unit condominium project on the island's southwestern tip. A loud outcry followed and the Audubon Society threatened a lawsuit. "Anyone who visited the site could see it was a dubious venture at best," said the Society's W.C. Blakeney, noting that the proposed access road to the property would be often under water at high tide. Anti-development publicity helped limit the company's pre-construction sales after four months to only 18 units. It finally dropped the project and its option on the land. In a pleasant victory for beach and nature lovers, the area was subsequently purchased by Charleston County for a public beach and park.

Those who need an extra nudge before the lessons sink in might stand at Charleston harbor and gaze upon a lighthouse surrounded by water that was once far inland on Morris Island. Years ago, eager engineers erected two five-mile-long jetties at the mouth of the harbor "to maintain a safe channel for vessels." The jetties' disruption of normal sand shifts along the coast hastened the erosion of Folly Island and eventually left the Morris Island lighthouse several thousand feet from its shore. And the harbor channel still fills in. □

By Bob Hall, Todd Miller and Robert W. Oast.

## GEORGIA

AS THE GULF STREAM PASSES BY THE GEORGIA COAST 65 MILES offshore, it creates a gentle backwash that flows south along the state's sea islands. The winter storms that blow out of the northeast combine with the longshore current to lift the sand from one beach and carry it southward to the next, each island feeding the next one in the chain, their shapes changing slightly with each season.



The shoreline of Georgia's 100-mile coast itself changes much more dramatically than the shape of the islands, but that shifting takes longer than a season. The continental shelf slopes very gently here, so a change of 10 feet in sea level can push the shoreline 10 miles in or out. Some 220 million years ago, the ocean washed against the present-day fall line at Augusta and Macon and Columbus, 150 miles inland. During the coldest epochs of Earth's history, when the ice caps absorbed much of the ocean's waters, the coast of Georgia stood 100 miles further out to sea.

This constant change from land to water to land occurs every day, too. Twice each day, eight-foot tides flood 425,000 acres of marshland behind the sea islands and twice each day the marsh re-emerges as land. As land, Georgia's salt marshes are three times as productive as the richest

Iowa corn field. As water, they provide a nursery for shrimp, crabs, fish and oysters. The plant and animal life in this subtropical wilderness includes a diversity and abundance found in few other places: bald eagles and peregrine falcons, loggerhead turtles and whales of various types, dozens of different kinds of crabs and hundreds of different kinds of butterflies and moths, marsh grasses and live oaks and lichen, to name a few.

A BAND OF SALT MARSH FIVE MILES WIDE SEPARATES Georgia's sea islands from the mainland, insulating them from many of the changes of the past 100 years. Archaeological records suggest that the first residents of Georgia's islands moved here shortly after the islands emerged from the sea, about 8,000 B.C. Some of the larger and more stable islands have yielded pot shards and shell middens 10,000 years old.

The Spanish happened on the islands in the early sixteenth century while searching for gold in the Caribbean basin. After preventing French Protestants under Jean Ribaut from obtaining a foothold on the southern coast, they set up Catholic missions on St. Catherine's, Sapelo and Cumberland islands. Franciscan friars offered the blessings of Christianity to the Gule Indians in exchange for forced labor and cultural submission. Indian workers in mission villages raised food and citrus crops to sustain the foreigners and to support, through a very heavy corn tax, the permanent Spanish settlement in Florida.

In 1597 a Christian Indian named Juanillo from the island of Gule (St. Catherine's) led the first recorded anti-European revolt in North American history. Distressed over the customs, controls and diseases brought by the Europeans, the Indians brutally killed the Spanish soldiers and most of

### COASTAL NEWSLETTER AVAILABLE

Shirley Taylor, chair of the Sierra Club's National Coastal Committee, publishes a newsletter - *CUSP (Citizen Update on Shoreline Policy)* - which reports national coastal policy issues and environmental threats. The *CUSP* motto, "by citizens and for citizens," stands both for its style and its finances: the quarterly is free to interested people but depends on donations.

For a subscription, write *CUSP*, PO Box 201, Blacksburg, VA 24060.

the missionaries in the region.

Fearing rebellion would spread southward, the Spanish governor retaliated quickly, destroying the offending villages and permitting his soldiers to enslave the able-bodied men and women. New friars soon returned to the area, but the unprofitable missions were finally abandoned during the early seventeenth century. The names of some of the rivers and islands — St. Mary's, St. Catherine's, St. Simon's — are all that remain of the Spanish presence.

The English settlement of Georgia began with James Oglethorpe's founding of Savannah in 1733. Oglethorpe proposed to create a self-sufficient colony of artisans, craftsmen and laborers. He banned lawyers, rum, slaves and Roman Catholics from his utopia and created a scheme of housing and gardens that gave each settler a small stake in the colony. He proposed to build this new order on a silk industry; but after 20 years, Georgia's silkworms and mulberry trees had produced no more than 1,000 pounds of cloth in any one year.

Oglethorpe and his trustees reverted to the South Carolina plantation model, legalizing race slavery to attract new investment to keep the colony alive. Britain's king, George II, offered grants of land — most of them small parcels of high land surrounded by hundreds of acres of marsh — to attract British aristocrats to the colony. The aristocrats brought slaves from South Carolina, the West Indies and then directly from Africa to dike the marshes and create rice fields.

For the rest of the eighteenth century, the rice plantations provided enough commerce for the colony to survive, but not to prosper. Georgia's planter society remained a poor imitation of its neighbor across the Savannah River in South Carolina. Then in 1793, Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin during a visit to a plantation on the Savannah River. His mechanical device for separating seed from fiber made cotton a more valuable crop, and its popularity spread across the coastal plain from the islands toward Alabama and the Southwest. Slave laborers dug canals and built railroads to haul cotton from the fields to the rivers and then to the port of Savannah, which mushroomed from a frontier town of 3,000 residents in 1790 to a rich trading center of 15,000 by 1850.

For the next 75 years, the plantation culture of the Tidewater region dominated Georgia's politics, economy and society. But the state's political power and its economic strength slowly shifted inland. By 1840 the land speculators and yeoman farmers of the Piedmont and mountain counties had driven the Cherokee and Creek Indians out of the state and shoved the Seminoles into Florida. New railroads connected the cotton fields with the new textile mills of the Piedmont, bypassing the swampy coast, and the more competitive world of small farms and giant mills bypassed the stratified life of the Tidewater plantations.

By the time William T. Sherman marched into Savannah during the last months of the Civil War, the cotton trade was in shambles. Rather than burn the city as he had Atlanta, Sherman sent a message to President Lincoln: "I beg to present you as a Christmas gift the City of Savannah." After he had toured the abandoned cotton fields of the coast, he decided to make another gift of land, this one to the newly emancipated workers who had lived on the coast for more than a century.

On January 16, 1865, with the approval of the Secretary of War, Sherman designated the entire sea island region from Charleston to the St. John's River as an exclusively black settlement. The former slaves were to receive "possessory" titles to these lands stretching back 30 miles from the coast, and black refugees from other areas would be allowed to take

up property there in 40-acre tracts. Special Field Order 15 guaranteed federal protection to the occupants "until such time as they can protect themselves, or until Congress shall regulate their title." The order stood for three years; then President Grant rescinded it as part of an agreement to bring Georgia back into the Union.

Many of the former owners of the plantations returned to their homes, and white investors from the North took up new tracts, but the agricultural base of the coastal economy had already died. Land which had sold for \$5,000 per acre when it grew long-staple cotton before the war was not worth much without captive labor to produce the crops. The price of island land dropped to \$50 per acre, and it stayed there for more than 80 years.

Freed slaves formed small communities on Ossabaw, St. Catherine's, Sapelo and St. Simon's islands, growing vegetables and harvesting oysters, shrimp and crabs. The landowners harvested the pine and oak from the primitive forests to feed the sawmills on the mainland and left the islands to take care of themselves.

While the rest of Georgia moved on into the twentieth century, the mainland of coastal Georgia wallowed in an economic depression. The collapse of cotton prices in the economic panic of 1893 and the arrival of the boll weevil took away the cotton trading that had made Savannah rich. Though cotton accounted for more than half the total value of Georgia agricultural products until 1920, its



photo by Richard Sommers/The Georgia Gazette

dominance of the coastal economy was over.

Logging operations generated just enough timber and naval stores to keep the ports of Savannah and Brunswick open. The rest of the coast became a winter resort as America's wealthiest industrialists acquired the islands — Carnegies on Cumberland, Fords and Wannamakers on Ossabaw, Rockefellers and Vanderbilts on Jekyll. Rice fields became duck ponds for hunters; field hands became guides and caretakers.

**BY THE TIME THE GREAT DEPRESSION GRABBED HOLD OF** the rest of the United States, coastal Georgia had already lived through 10 years of economic hardship. Then, in 1932, Charles H. Herty matched Eli Whitney's technological miracle by devising a way to manufacture paper from Southern pine trees. Union Bag and Paper Company moved from New York to Savannah to open a mill on the Savannah River in 1936. The new plant hired 400 workers the day it opened, and by the end of the decade it employed more than 10 percent of the county's work force as it grew to become the largest paper mill in the world.

The new paper industry sucked 20 million gallons of water per day out of the limestone aquifer that supplies water to the coast — as much as the rest of the city of Savannah consumes in a day — drying up wells 20 miles away. (See article on water resources, page 40.) Union Bag and the 10 other paper companies that followed it to the area during the next three decades quickly destroyed what was left of an agricultural economy along the coast. Trees require less tending than other crops, and the rural agricultural towns boarded up their storefronts.

As the cities of the Piedmont boomed after World War II, Savannah lost nearly 20 percent of its people, and the coast became a vast tree farm. Union Camp Corporation (as the company is now known) acquired more than 800,000 acres of south Georgia pine forest, most of it concentrated in the sparsely populated counties along the coast.

With their control of so much real estate, the paper companies — particularly Union Camp, Brunswick Pulp and Paper and Gilman Paper — have steered development toward well-to-do communities. Since 1970,

Union Camp's own subsidiary, the Branigar Organization, has created a community of 3,000 residents on Skidaway Island, eight miles southeast of Savannah, using 3,100 acres the company acquired in 1941 for \$50 per acre. When Chatham County built a bridge to the island in 1968, six families lived there. The county planning commission projects that the population of Skidaway will reach 20,000 within 20 years. A marshfront acre on the island now sells for \$125,000.

What the paper companies don't own on the Georgia coast, the federal and state governments do. The U.S. Army has 20,000 troops at its Hunter Army Airfield-Fort Stewart complex, and the reactivation of old Fort Stewart has boosted the population of Bryan County from 6,539 in 1970 to 10,175 in 1980. Similar growth will occur at King's Bay on the other end of the coast, where the U.S. Navy is building a base for the Atlantic fleet of Trident nuclear submarines. King's Bay covers 16,000 acres in Camden County. The Navy says that more than 7,000 active duty personnel and 18,000 family members and civilians will be stationed there by 1990 — nearly five times the current number of residents in the county. In fact, the sparseness of that population led the Navy to choose the site in 1975, given the need to isolate the nuclear reactors aboard the submarines and explosives on the loading docks from population centers.

The U.S. Interior Department owns more than one-fourth of Georgia's beaches, including the national wildlife refuges on Wassaw, Blackbeard and Wolf Islands, and 22,000 acres on Cumberland Island, a national seashore accessible only by boat. Other federal wildlife refuges and military installations from the Okefenokee Swamp to Tybee Island cover more than 400,000 acres.

The state of Georgia owns two of the largest islands, Sapelo and Ossabaw. Sapelo serves as a marine science research center for the state university system, and Ossabaw is home to an artists' and writers' colony operated by a private foundation under the auspices of the state Department of Natural Resources.

Since 1976 the state has also claimed ownership of Georgia's 425,000 acres of salt marsh because for 12 hours each day they are coastal



photos by Jennifer Miller

waters rather than coastal land. This claim arose in 1968 when Kerr-McGee Corporation, an Oklahoma minerals company, acquired title to a cluster of small islands and the surrounding marsh 15 miles east of Savannah. The company had located a deposit of phosphates 30 feet below the surface and wanted to strip-mine the marsh and islands. The state's control over the marsh has survived two court challenges, but Kerr-McGee still owns the islands. A rise in the price of fertilizer could bring new proposals for mining the deposits.

Although the state government in Atlanta has achieved some degree of control over coastal land use, the political affairs of the coastal region remain very independent. The ethnic rainbow which makes up Savannah's population — Irish, Greeks, Italians, Russian Jews and the more typical Southern black and white Protestants — has no parallel anywhere in the state.

Neither does the insularity of Savannah's politics. From the last wave of Irish immigration in the 1870s to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, the Irish Catholic vote dominated coastal politics. As long as the local Irish machine delivered its votes to the proper state politician, the machine could run its own affairs. But no one from the coast has been elected to statewide office for nearly 100 years.

By the mid-1930s Savannah had become known as the Free State of Chatham County, generally ignoring state liquor and gambling laws and receiving far less than its proportional share of state funds for roads, schools and hospitals. The isolated counties along the coast existed as smaller



Photo by Richard Sommers/The Georgia Gazette

versions of the same thing; in some poor communities the largest industry was often a speed trap catching tourists bound for Florida.

The independence of local politicians often translates into antagonism toward state and federal governments. Georgia refuses to participate in the national coastal zone management program, and local political leaders have refused to pressure the paper mills to correct their pervasive "rotten egg" stench.

State and federal taxpayers shelled out \$4 million in 1975 to pump enough sand onto Tybee Island's eroding beach to give vacationers something to play on. In exchange the town was to provide more parking spaces for day visitors. But after the Corps of Engineers did its part, Tybee reneged and then added insult to injury by allowing the part-time town attorney to construct a hot dog stand on the new sand dunes.

Tybee's antagonism toward government doesn't stop with state or federal officials. Even at the municipal level, the town prefers random placement of hundreds of new condominiums to any kind of zoning. Zoning means government interference in private development, according to the Tybee town council, and so the island has accepted 500 new apartments in 18 months without regard for how the town can provide water, sewer and garbage service for the new residents — much less schools, libraries and health clinics. The volunteer fire department is not equipped to fight fires in buildings higher than three stories, yet three of the biggest new condominium projects stand five stories or more.

Lack of planning and intergovernmental coordination could erode Tybee's future. The state has invested more than \$250 million in the past five years to develop the Port of Savannah as a bulk commodities export terminal and as an import center for containerized freight. Ship traffic has increased 30 percent to 150 vessels monthly since 1977 and state officials expect another 20 percent increase over the next five years. All that activity could help justify the cost of deepening the harbor from its present 36 feet to 45 feet. And the dredging could, in turn, interfere even more with the coastal currents which move sand from beach to beach, thus increasing Tybee Island's erosion problem. An identical conflict is developing at the Port of Brunswick and the public beach at Jekyll Island State Park, which is located just south of the Brunswick channel entrance.

**ALTHOUGH GEORGIA'S COAST IS SHORT COMPARED WITH ITS neighbors', its marshes and mudflats produce an abundance of shrimp, crabs, oysters, clams and fish. The state's fishing industry, like that of the Carolinas, is composed mostly of independent operators who have little control over prices paid by dealers or over ill-advised government strategems to "manage" the fisheries. Because it takes four years for an oyster to mature and state regulations only permit two-year oyster bed leases, Georgia oysterers have never worked to ensure a future crop, having no assurance they will be able to lease the same site in future years. Consequently, only one person applied for a commercial license to harvest oysters in Georgia in 1981 and, despite the fact that the state grows some of the most succulent ones in the country, local markets mostly receive oysters from Apalachicola Bay, Florida.**

The shrimping industry did well in 1979, bringing in six million pounds in a year when a light catch in the Gulf of Mexico drove prices very high, but by 1981 the state catch had fallen to some two million and the price had come down 25 percent. Two severe winters in a row had killed off most of the young shrimp in the marshes. The number of operators obtaining a license to shrimp fell 35 percent between 1979 and 1981.

In addition, the under-employed

shrimp fleet became a shuttle service for drug smugglers: a state crime task force reported in November, 1981, that smugglers imported \$6 billion worth of drugs through Georgia's coast in one year. Since 1980, an average of one public official in the southeastern part of the state — from deputy sheriffs to city managers — has been arrested or indicted on drug charges every 19 days.

**GEORGIA'S COAST HAS RIDDEN A SERIES OF ECONOMIC BOOMS and busts. Gold for the Spanish, silk for the English and rice and cotton for the planters all offered a promise of wealth, but each of these phases of development faded after a few generations, and the wilderness erased most of their traces. The changes brought on by the paper companies and the military are much more extensive and long-lasting, but they have helped to ensure that the Georgia coast will remain much more sparsely populated than those of her neighbors, which should in turn protect the area's natural wealth — its wilderness and the diversity of life that the wilderness supports. □**

*By Albert Scardino and Marjorie Scardino, with research assistance from Cathy Schulze and Peter Wood.*

## FLORIDA

**IN 1775, NATURALIST WILLIAM BARTRAM VISITED FLORIDA AND pitched a tent "under the shelter of a forest of Live Oaks, Palms and Sweet Bays. . . . Our repose however was incomplete, from the stings of mosquitoes, the roaring of crocodiles, and the continual noise and restlessness of the seafowl, thousands of them . . . in such incredible numbers, that the trees were entirely covered."**

This wilderness soon fell victim to colonizers' attempts to subdue it — especially after it became United States territory in 1822 — and Florida's long history of official boosterism began in earnest. Successive state assemblies interpreted public-land management to mean land bestowment, and by 1899 Florida had offered private corporations considerably more land than the state ever possessed. The principal beneficiaries of this largesse — the railroads — got land grants of as much as 20,000 acres



per mile of track.

The man most responsible for the course that east coast development took was Henry M. Flagler, a Connecticut native whose early fortunes were made as a partner in Standard Oil. He turned his land grants and tracks running from Jacksonville to Miami into the Florida East Coast Railway empire, which by 1908 included a string of luxury hotels that could accommodate 40,000 guests. At age 75, Flagler set out to conquer the very tip of Florida. Seven years, three hurricanes and 700 lives later, the Overseas Railroad pulled into Key West in 1912.

Once the wilderness was opened, tourists and immigrants poured in. And if Florida — really just a thin layer of land on a limestone shelf — wasn't exactly as promised, then Florida could be changed. At Miami Beach — in 1910 a narrow barrier island, sloping away from low sand dunes into a great thicket of mangrove-covered tidal flats — developer Carl Fisher employed black laborers, working knee-deep in mud and breathing clouds of mosquitoes and sandflies, to clear a thousand acres of mangroves and fill the swamp with six million cubic yards of mud dredged from the bay bottom.

By the early 1920s, two million tourists were visiting the golden coast each year. These were the state's boom years. Though the bubble burst temporarily in 1926, the '20s land grab gave Florida an expanded transportation system and a doubled population in only six years. The lure of warm climate and waterfront property continues, as does the pattern of overall expansion and boom-bust cycles — all of which promise to make Florida the nation's fourth most populous state by the year 2000. In the last decade alone, Florida grew four-and-a-half times faster than the country as a whole.

**NO PART OF THIS PENINSULAR STATE LIES MORE THAN 70 miles from the sea; even so, 80 percent of its population crowd into the coastal counties, leaving much of the interior to agribusiness, cattle, timbering, phosphate mining, tourist attractions and lakeside fantasy. The steady surge of development has spread along the string of accessible barrier islands hugging the Atlantic Coast mainland from Georgia to Miami; the flashy**



Palm Beach-to-Miami corridor, for example, is home to more than a third of the state's 10 million people. Down the peninsula's thin tail to Key West are a string of coral and limestone islands or "keys," home to 60,000 Floridians.

Across the southern mainland is a wide, slow slope of sawgrass and cypress, the Everglades and the Big Cypress Swamp. After a century of drainage projects, only half the Glades remain, and water levels are so depleted that the soil often burns down to bedrock in dry periods. Northern portions of the swamp have been turned into large vegetable farms employing tens of thousands of seasonal farmworkers, many of them Haitians, Jamaicans and Mexican-Americans. The flow of vital fresh water to the estuaries of the Everglades National Park has been diverted to quench the thirst of agriculture and South Florida metropolises.

In the Ten Thousand Islands area on Florida's southwestern coast, oyster bars and red mangrove trees gather passing silt into tiny new islands; some now under development are only decades old. Beginning south of Sanibel Island and continuing to St. Petersburg is another series of heavily developed barrier islands.

The pressure of newcomers (retirees

arrive in Florida at a rate of 8,000 to 15,000 per month, according to a federal study) is compounded by the flight from the state's troubled urban areas to the rural towns and fishing villages which until recently had constituted "the Other Florida." Northward to the Panhandle stretch salt marshes and tidal creeks that are now in the path of the spreading demand for waterfront property. At shallow Apalachee Bay, the coast bends sharply west to Apalachicola Bay and the crystal blue waters toward Pensacola. Here, the tiny town of Destin, at the mouth of the Choctawhatchee Bay on the Panhandle Coast, zoomed from 1,000 residents in 1970 to more than 6,000 in 1980, along with a seasonal population of 5,000. Like those of neighboring towns, Destin's beautiful beaches have been "discovered" to the extent that even the local chamber of commerce president publicly moans, "Development is out of control."

In south Florida, too, the "chamber of commerce" dream has turned sour. Along with water quality and supply problems, real estate speculation and a growing impoverished under-class, the area is besieged by rampant lawlessness. Miami, West Palm Beach and Fort Lauderdale each made the FBI's 1981 list of the nation's most

crime-ridden cities, with Miami ranking number one in murders. The local and national press dwells unceasingly on the region's crime problem, and a *Time* magazine cover story in November, 1981, all but told potential visitors that a vacation in south Florida might cost them their lives.

The region's proximity to Caribbean islands has made it the point of first sighting for vessels carrying human cargo — the "boatpeople." Cubans and Haitians are the most visible and controversial of Florida's recent immigrants. Almost a million Cubans have crossed the straits to settle in south Florida since Castro's 1959 revolution. Well over a billion dollars in federal aid went to those who came in the 1960s and '70s.

But when Castro opened the port of Mariel to anyone who wanted to leave in the spring of 1980, the crush of 125,000 exiting Cubans severely strained south Florida's ability to absorb newcomers. Castro also opened the doors of Cuba's prisons and mental asylums for the boat lift, exporting increased crime and social problems to the area.

Years before Mariel, Haitian exiles and civil-rights organizations in south Florida and elsewhere were noting that the black boatpeople were treated differently from light-skinned Cubans. Of the 50,000 Haitians who have sought political refuge in the U.S. since 1972, fewer than 150 have been officially granted that status. (See the article on Haitian immigration, page 60.)

Meanwhile, in Miami's black Liberty City community, the unemployment rate tripled in just over a decade and stood at 17.8 percent in 1978. By May, 1980, Liberty City erupted in the bloody riot that brought it much national attention but no improvement in economic conditions.

**DESPITE ALL THE NATIONAL ATTENTION FOCUSED ON SOUTH** Florida's troubles, tourism statewide still draws 35 million visitors spending \$17 billion annually, and aside from Disney World the beaches are the main attraction. Yet 340 of the state's 750 miles of ocean beaches are only slivers of what they used to be, because of destructive developments and erosion. An \$80 million beach renourishment project in Miami Beach is only one of many planned for the state that will continually require hundreds of mil-

lions of tax dollars. (See the article on Florida's beaches, page 24.)

Despite widespread perceptions to the contrary, heavy industry is also important to the coastal region's economy. Much credit for the industrial wave must go to 11 major military installations in the coastal zone, where the Pentagon has forged a lucrative partnership with Pratt and Whitney Aircraft, IBM, Piper Aircraft, Honeywell, Boeing and other, smaller firms. Florida ranks seventeenth in the U.S. in generating hazardous wastes, 90 percent of which comes from nine coastal counties.

Florida also attracts another type of economic development: drug smuggling may now be the state's leading industry. With ideal access to the source — Latin America and the Caribbean — coastal Florida has become the gateway for an estimated 70 percent of all marijuana and cocaine brought into the U.S. In south Florida particularly, drug money finances large sectors of the banking and real estate industries, as well as well-documented corruption among public officials and law enforcers. Some of Florida's 10,000 fishers, too, have discovered that transporting bales of marijuana — known locally as "square grouper" — is far more profitable than netting mullet.

Commercial landings of fish and shellfish at Florida ports during 1977 were valued at \$95.2 million dockside. Almost \$45 million of that went to the capital-intensive shrimp fleets, yet the less valuable foodfish catch — particularly mullet — supplies a living

to thousands more Floridians in small boats. In fact, in 1977 Florida led the South Atlantic and Gulf states in foodfish production, despite the "population boom, major destruction and alteration of its fishery habitat and numerous conflicts in the fishery that have been caused by social, political and biological concerns," documented in a 1981 study by the state fisheries advisory council.

#### HALF THE NATION'S STOCK OF CONDOMINIUMS IS IN FLORIDA.

Conversion from rental units to condos is causing acute housing shortages in south Florida, and mobile homes are fast becoming the norm for the middle class in some areas. Lower-income people can't even afford trailers. In Indian River County (Vero Beach), where one-fourth of the population lives in trailers, a citizens' group has been pressing local officials and the state to discourage "unconscionable" rent increases; one man said his lot rent rose by more than 75 percent in one year.

Unscrupulous coastal development has created another, much more dangerous problem. Thousands of Floridians, many of them retired people who settled as close to the water's edge as they could afford, are sitting ducks for floods and hurricanes. They live on artificial islets separated by finger-shaped canals or on barrier islands perched offshore — their only escape from disaster a 12-hour hurricane warning and a narrow bridge. Residents of the Keys are linked to the mainland by a two-lane road more than 100 miles long, glued together with dozens of bridges. On Tampa Bay alone, 65,000 people live on thin sand veneers dredged up from the bay bottom.

Since 1900, Florida has been hit by an average of one hurricane every year and a half, but the state has enjoyed a moratorium on major storms since the early 1960s. Because of the long respite, 90 percent of its coastal dwellings have not weathered a major hurricane, and the coastal areas are largely inhabited by people who have never experienced the high winds and storm surge that one brings.

Housing in "reclaimed" swamp areas carries special problems, too. When Tropical Storm Dennis arrived in 1981 amidst a two-year drought, it brought much-needed rain and flooded the east Everglades. Homeowners and



photo by Dinesh Sharma

farmers in that area were soon up in arms at the South Florida Water Management District for not draining the water off their lands. But, as a *Miami Herald* editorial writer pointed out, local, state and federal government agencies had 12 years earlier set "policy" that the area would remain wilderness and that development there would be discouraged. Development occurred anyway, vegetation was cleared, and the homes and farms periodically flood. Draining this area (west of Miami) would mean the loss of fresh water, already in short supply, which recharges Dade County's aquifer. If not recharged, the aquifer suffers saltwater intrusion. (See water resources article, page 40.) The editorial concluded that the Glades' new residents "should have known better."

**STATE ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY HAS BEEN MIXED. FROM 1972 TO '75,** Florida enacted much progressive legislation, with Governor Bob Graham, then a state senator, as the conservationists' champion. But in February, 1981, a *Sports Illustrated* story accused Graham of being a man with high political aspirations who had turned to industrialists and agribusiness for support. "The sad fact is that Florida is going down the tube," the magazine claimed. "Indeed, in no state is the environment being wrecked faster and on a larger scale."

Focusing on the development of environmentally sensitive areas, the article noted that Miami's drinking water is among the most chemically contaminated in the country. Tampa Bay pollution has caused a drastic decline in its oyster population, with one section closed for swimming as well; the state sports the nation's largest number of potentially dangerous hazardous waste sites (103 recorded) with no barriers to ground water; the state's canals, along which housing and commerce cluster, are grossly polluted with coliform bacteria, such that "in many locations, Floridians have, in essence, run a hose from their toilet to the kitchen faucet."

The Audubon Society, the Florida Conservation Foundation, the Florida Defenders of the Environment, Sierra Club groups and various local organizations are credited with stopping some of the degradation, on a never-ending case-by-case basis. *Miami Herald* columnist Al Burt once characterized

photo by Dinesh Sharma



Florida's environmentalists as being fearful of espousing their true philosophy — that if growth continues in the state, the environment is doomed — "because somebody might shoot them or mash them flat with a bulldozer."

Still, concerned citizens stopped a refinery project on Biscayne Bay, fought off development on the northern Keys, saved the Big Cypress Swamp as a national preserve, stopped the Cross-Florida Barge Canal Project in 1971 (though the canal is reportedly still on Congress's active list), and more. But they worry that they've lost Graham to politics. Though some activists say he is still accessible to them, Florida Wildlife Federation head John C. Jones said in the *Sports Illustrated* article, "I can't even get in to talk with him, and I run the biggest conservation organization in Florida."

Word is that Governor Graham was so embarrassed by the negative national attention the *Sports Illustrated* article generated that within weeks of its appearance he persuaded his cabinet to deny Getty Oil a permit to drill a test well in Pensacola's East Bay and began to talk about raising money to buy undeveloped natural areas and save the coast from "an impenetrable wall of construction."

There are local battles as well. Apalachicola Bay produces 90 percent of all Florida oysters. Oysterers there, who are also local elected officials, moved to protect their multi-million-dollar fishery from an Army Corps of Engineers' proposal to dam, straighten and dredge the huge river that feeds the Bay. Reams of studies conducted

by Florida State University marine biologist Robert J. Livingston and an army of researchers concluded that the Corps' economic justification for the project did not consider the damage to the Bay and the local livelihoods it supports. Backed by the experts, local citizens convinced the state to spend an additional \$8 million to acquire river frontage and establish the Apalachicola River and Bay Estuarine Sanctuary, thus reducing the threat that development poses to commercial fishing.

In the last decade, some coastal Florida communities have begun to slow down or restrict their own growth. When the Gulf Coast island of Sanibel proved unable to cope with the consequences of expansion plans thrust upon it by far-removed Lee County commissioners, its wealthy residents decided to "secede" from the county. Sanibel incorporated as a town, drawing up a charter that placed high priority on the natural attributes that had attracted its residents in the first place. The new town even set a strict cap on annual growth and successfully defended the cap in court.

A state supreme court decision in June, 1981, signaled a cooling-off of Florida's long and steamy love affair with developers. In *Bob Graham, et al. v. Estuary Properties, Inc.*, the court upheld Lee County's denial of zoning and development approval to a corporation planning a mammoth waterfront city near Fort Myers. The company's blueprints called for 26,500 homes with shopping centers, marinas, boat basins, golf course and tennis

courts — a typical new town in Florida that would have destroyed some 1,800 acres of black-mangrove-forested wetlands.

The county imposed 12 conditions on the developer, including lowering the density, reducing the amount of wetlands to be destroyed and protecting the water quality. Estuary Properties sued, and the highest state court finally decided that protecting an environmentally sensitive area and preventing pollution are legitimate concerns for public welfare and that these concerns are valid uses of a community's police power, not an arbitrary "taking" of private property rights. Late in the year, the final hurdle was jumped when the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear Estuary's appeal and let the Florida ruling stand.

The decision sends a strong message to communities that they can close the door on developers and kick the "growth at any cost" habit — even in Florida. □

*By Dan Stroh with Terry Pierson and Jennifer Miller; thanks to Charles McCoy, Richard G. Hamann and Shirley Taylor.*

## ALABAMA

### ALABAMA'S TINY COASTLAND HAS ALWAYS BEEN DOMINATED

by the ambitions of its only big city, the port of Mobile. The state's 48 miles of Gulf-front beaches are in high demand because of their proximity to this major metropolis, and the coastal estuarine lands and waters are called on to serve the conflicting needs of wildlife, fishing interests, residences, recreation and especially Mobile's

heavy industry.

Geographically, the area is complex, with its deltaic marshes abundantly fed by the confluence of two major river systems and more than a dozen tributaries converging at Mobile Bay; its barrier islands and long, narrow peninsula; and the coastal marshes of the Bay, Gulf and the Mississippi Sound.

The overriding importance of industry here aside, Alabama's coastal region is rich: the Mobile-Tensaw River Delta is a complex ecosystem which has been placed on the National Register of Natural Landmarks; only a portion along the Mobile River is heavily industrialized. Three barrier islands stretch 19 miles along the state's coastline, with only three percent of their acreage preserved from present and future development. And the coastal wetlands — 120,000 acres — support a wealth of plants and animals, including an estimated 90 threatened or endangered species of plants, fish, reptiles, birds and mammals.

The Mobile Bay itself, averaging 10 miles in width and running 33 miles to the Gulf, contains over 3,000 acres of oyster reefs. Along with other marine life dependent on estuarine waters and wetlands in coastal Alabama — mainly the highly valued shrimp populations — they support some 7,000 Alabamian commercial fishers. Like other natural assets in coastal Alabama, the wetlands and the oyster reefs suffer from growing industrial and residential pollutants which degrade water quality — already some 72,000 acres of shellfish beds have been closed to fishing because of contamination — and from more direct disturbances such as dredging and siting of developments in their midst. Even so, Bayou la Batre, a

small fishing community west of the Bay and fronting the Mississippi Sound, ranks tenth in the nation in annual landings of shrimp, oysters and fish.

**HISTORICALLY, AS WELL AS GEOGRAPHICALLY, ALABAMA'S** two coastal counties are a region apart from the rest of the state. In fact, in 1907, when the state was considering a liquor prohibition law, the city of Mobile threatened to secede entirely, and more recently, state representative Tommy Sandusky renewed the proposal that Mobile and Baldwin counties join their regional compatriots on the Florida Panhandle and the Mississippi coast in forming a new Gulf Coast state.

Such proposals are based on cultural and historic connections with neighboring coastal areas that make the coast distinct. While the rest of Alabama was settled by people from further east, mainly Georgia and the Carolinas, the coast was first colonized by the French in 1702. By 1719 slave ships were bringing West Africans to Mobile to clear land for a small number of rice and indigo plantations. Descendants of the original settlers from France, Quebec and the West Indies and, more significantly, of the many waves of immigrants who came directly to the port of Mobile from Europe in the nineteenth century, still have more in common with neighboring Gulf Coast communities than with inland populations.

Like other Southern ports, Mobile had large and active German, Irish and Jewish communities; Greeks and Lebanese also settled in both coastal counties. Catholic institutions flourished under French and Spanish flags, and Mobile still has one of the largest Catholic populations in the South.

The local Indians — the Choctaws — were driven west in the early 1800s to reservations in Mississippi and Louisiana. Many of those who stayed in coastal Alabama intermarried with whites and blacks and are known today as the "Cajuns" of northern Mobile and southern Washington counties. These "Cajuns" bear no relation to the Louisiana Acadians, and many identify with the recently organized Mo-Wa tribe, now officially recognized by the federal government.

Mobile's old families have long maintained an interlocking network of family and business interests that still



OYSTER TONGERS IN APALACHICOLA BAY

*photo by Dinesh Sharma*

holds sway. The wealthy live mostly in "West Mobile," a sociological location as much as a geographical one. Today, due to massive white flight from the downtown district in the 1960s and '70s, the mushrooming city extends from the Bay's western shore to a ring of suburbs sprawling north and west toward the Mississippi line.

To the east, as well, portions of Baldwin County have become suburban white communities; median family income (\$9,700 in 1975) increased in Baldwin in the last decade, while there was no appreciable increase in Mobile County. Less well-endowed white residents live on Mobile's south side and in nearby fishing towns and countryside. And black citizens, who comprise a third of Mobile County's population, are mostly concentrated in a swath of slums and a few suburban neighborhoods running north to the neighboring, majority-black city of Prichard. Through urban renewal, thriving black neighborhoods in downtown Mobile were razed in the 1960s, and new residential construction has been slow in coming.

The Mobile-Prichard black community's rich cultural heritage has of late been the focus of an attempt to get national historic park status for AfricaTown, a community which traces its roots to an 1859 illegal slave voyage that landed America's last recorded shipload of captive Africans. The community retained its distinct ethnic and tribal code of government, its traditional language and customs, until well into the twentieth century, but the cultural history kept alive for so long would have disappeared without concerted efforts by local black leaders.

Culturally rich but economically poor, blacks in coastal Alabama remain at the base of a political and economic system which increasingly benefits a small elite and a new population of skilled workers who move in with major corporations. Mobile's ruling powers, particularly, have inhibited progress in black communities. For example, though recent downtown revitalization plans contained promises of housing rehabilitation and the possible creation of a historic district in the Davis Avenue area (the city's largest black neighborhood), these plans were scrapped in January, 1982, when the city diverted

the funds to fight drainage problems caused by development in West Mobile.

The contrast between rapidly industrializing Mobile and neighboring Prichard is especially startling. Some observers say Prichard resembles an impoverished Central American city. In 1970, its population of over 40,000 was half black and half white. By 1980, though, after a black mayor and mostly black city council were elected, white residents fled to northern and western suburbs and Prichard became three-fourths black. As the tax base dwindles, the city's leadership has been hard-pressed to improve conditions for its citizenry: unemployment, crime, drug addiction and



poverty are rampant, with a quarter of Prichard's people using food stamps, compared to only one in seven in all of Mobile County.

Seasoned observers of the region say Alabama's coastal population is unusually polarized along race and class lines, and racial tensions have not diminished even in recent years. Continuing social strife is one major result of the conflicts — so common and so critical in coastal areas — between the ambitions of politicians and developers and the needs of the indigenous population and the complex but fragile environment that supports them. In Mobile, as in other "booming" Sunbelt cities, unchecked and unplanned growth is rationalized by the "trickle-down" theory. But far from bringing in more jobs for its own poor people, the Mobile area's recent boom has brought in outsiders to fill the mostly specialized jobs and the posh new residential communities. As a result, competition and animosity between the races periodically comes to a head, especially when swelled by the resurgence nationally of the Ku Klux Klan and other racist groups.

During the last couple of years, racial tensions have spawned a number of violent attacks against blacks, including the March, 1981, lynching of Michael Donald (see *Southern Exposure*, Fall, 1981) and several law-enforcement-related black deaths. Lack of national attention to these incidents, along with light coverage in Mobile's daily newspapers and a weak and belated response by the local white community, have heightened anger and frustration in the area's black communities.

The black citizens' efforts to gain a foothold in the city's political life had already suffered a major setback, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against them in the spring of 1980 in a landmark case, *City of Mobile v. Bolden*. The case dated from 1975, when a group headed by long-time Mobile civil-rights activist Wiley Bolden brought suit charging that the city's at-large elections diluted black voting strength. The plaintiffs had high hopes because past cases in other cities had allowed blacks to demonstrate that at-large voting violated their rights by use of accumulated circumstantial evidence of racial discrimination, evidence of which was readily available in Mobile.

But the Supreme Court ruled against Bolden, saying that circumstantial evidence of discriminatory effect was not enough; the plaintiffs must prove discriminatory intent. This decision, placing a nearly impossible burden of proof on the victims of discrimination rather than on its perpetrators, was a historic setback for voting-rights struggles everywhere.

**BEFORE WORLD WAR II, THE RURAL ECONOMY OF ALABAMA'S** coastal area centered on fishing, agriculture, shipbuilding and lumber. Lumber had replaced cotton as the port's main export commodity in the 1880s, and in 1928, International Paper Company set up the first large manufacturing plant in the area. In the late '30s, Alcoa, National Gypsum and several chemical companies were drawn as well by the port's excellent transportation facilities, low taxes, abundant water supplies and cheap labor. The industrial work force was generally unorganized except in the older skilled trades like shipbuilding, carpentry and bricklaying. And all the unions — except the bricklayers, masons and plasterers — were

segregated.

Industrial expansion on the state's coast never really took off until 1964 when the Brookley Air Field — a major employer in the area — closed and was leased to the state port as an industrial complex. To cope with this blow to the local economy, the Mobile Chamber of Commerce created a "Task Force 200" to obtain \$200 million worth of industrial development in five years. The group was so effective that it met its goal in a year and a half. To a large extent recruitment goals followed the lines of a 1960 Area Audit by the Southern Institute of Management that recommended, among other things, going after the chemical industry because of the area's abundance of water and cheap transportation.

Another factor has been the controversial Mobile Industrial Development Board. The autonomous 13-member board has the power to issue tax-free bonds and grant property tax exemptions. Although Alabama law allows cities to retain ratification powers over such boards, the Mobile City Commission chose not to do so when it created the board in the 1950s. Between 1969 and 1979 the board issued more than \$400 million in industrial development bonds. The county tax assessor is not even told how much property the board is removing from tax rolls, but has estimated that tax exemptions have cost some \$8 million in revenue sorely needed for schools and human services.

From 1973 to '79, chemical and allied industries accounted for nearly 80 percent of industrial investment in the coastal area. Already, 70 known solid waste disposal sites were operating without authorization in the two counties; major water quality problems have surfaced, particularly in the Mobile River and western portions of the Bay; Mobile ranks second behind Birmingham among cities in the Southeast in industrial/commercial particulate and sulfur oxide emissions into the air. The prevailing philosophy among Mobile's leaders seems to be that the work of today is to recruit any and all industry, and the future will take care of itself. (See Robert Ratner and Jeffrey Rothfeder, "How High A Price to Win New Industry," *Floridian, St. Petersburg Times*, December 16, 1979.)

Today, nearly 50 large industries



AERIAL VIEW OF THEODORE INDUSTRIAL PARK AND ITS WATERWAY

are crowded around the port, with promise of more to come, particularly chemical firms and energy corporations. South of Mobile on the western shore of the Bay is the 4,000-acre Theodore Industrial Park, created in the mid-'70s, which has already attracted almost a billion dollars in industrial investments. The park is part of a larger harbor-improvement scenario spawned by the imminent completion of the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway — widely called "the granddaddy of Corps boondoggles" — which will connect the port with major industrial centers along the Ohio and Tennessee rivers now served by the port of New Orleans. (See *Southern Exposure*, Spring, 1980.)

The Tenn-Tom, scheduled for completion in 1986 at a cost of nearly \$2 billion, has set off a gold-rush surge in Mobile's business community. Aside from the chemical companies already bidding on sites along the waterway's mouth, the chamber of commerce is banking on huge amounts of coal barge traffic from the Appalachian coalfields. These expectations are part of a national fever which even *Fortune* magazine calls "The Coal Export Gamble." Coal terminals are being planned or built at 29 harbors from New York to Texas, with forecasters predicting that coal shipments to our allies — to "get them off OPEC oil" — will exceed grain exports by the year 2000.

All this new growth will make sharp demands on the Bay and surrounding wetlands, since the new industries will want sites near navigable waters. State port officials are already seeking hundreds of millions of dollars to dredge the 40-foot-deep Mobile Bay ship channel to 55 feet. A Reagan administration effort to cut back federal expenditures by imposing user fees on beneficiaries of harbor dredging projects has Mobile port officials extremely worried.

Dredging projects have severely disturbed the oyster reefs and marine life of Mobile Bay. Disposal of dredged materials has environmentalists fearful: the material contains toxic substances which have settled to the Bay bottom. Officials are hoping to use the dredge spoils to fill in 1,800 acres in the Bay adjacent to the Brookley Industrial Complex; the new land would be used for industrial sites.

Also looming on Alabama's coastal horizon are recent oil and gas discoveries in Mobile Bay and offshore. Natural gas deposits were discovered in the Bay in 1979 by Mobil Oil Company, and in March, 1981, 13 large tracts in state waters were leased to eight oil companies. In addition, three major oil fields are in operation offshore, and one, the Citronelle Field, has produced 110 million barrels since 1955. Onshore refineries are imminent; Mobil Oil plans one in the Theodore Industrial Park, receiving

crude natural gas piped through a 15-mile network of submerged pipes.

**BECAUSE OF THE AREA'S GEOGRAPHY, INDUSTRIAL AND residential growth brings special problems.** Built on a low, sandy plain, Mobile has been subjected to flooding, as well as devastation by six of the 20 hurricanes which have pounded the Gulf Coast since 1900. Most recently, 1979's Hurricane Frederic wreaked \$1.7 billion worth of havoc. The land's natural drainage abilities are not adequate to the task presented by overdevelopment.

The booming Eastern Shore area in Baldwin County is a case in point. At present, septic tanks handle most of the waste-water disposal, but as subdivisions multiply and industry moves into the county, the soil becomes oversaturated and bacterial pollution results. Since Baldwin is growing much faster than the rest of the coastal region — with a 31 percent population increase in the last decade — the situation can only worsen. Yet there is still no county-wide authority to coordinate waste-water management.

Drainage and pollution problems are even more acute on slim and scenic Dauphin Island, where development took off after an access bridge was built in 1955. By 1976, overpopulation (mostly seasonal) and overdevelopment had forced the Mobile County Board of Health to issue a moratorium on septic tank installation and new construction.

Hurricane Frederic imposed another building "moratorium" when it whipped the island with 145-mile-an-hour winds and destroyed most of the buildings along with the bridge. A subsequent controversial decision to rebuild the bridge with \$38.5 million in federal tax dollars was a nice boost to Brown and Root (which has the construction contract) as well as island property holders and the 680 permanent residents. Critics of the new bridge point out that Dauphin Island is largely a playground for the rich, with only a half mile of beach accessible to the general public. (See the article on federal subsidies for island development, page 44.)

No community was harder hit by Frederic than the eastern peninsula beachfront town of Gulf Shores. Since the storm destroyed most of the free-standing structures there, the

town has had a chance to plan for a safer, more sightly future as it rebuilds. But, though some citizens have initiated discussions along those lines, they are losing out quickly. An unprecedented building boom is exploding in this once-quiet fishing and tourist community. Condominiums are springing up along the beach where single houses once stood, along with numerous new bars, fast-food restaurants and gift shops. In 1981 alone, about \$31 million worth of new construction went up, compared to only \$700,000 in 1977, and the town faces the prospect of becoming another overbuilt resort.

In one regard, Gulf Shores is better off than it was before the hurricane. Working in the area after the storm, the Federal Emergency Management Agency purchased and deeded to the town several beachfront lots that had been motel sites. As a result, the town now has some 12 miles of public beaches, far and away better than Dauphin Island's one-half mile.

**EFFORTS TO STEM THE FLOOD-TIDE OF RESORT AND INDUSTRIAL development in Alabama's coastal region are still mostly small-scale and fragmented.** Black citizens' groups in Mobile and Prichard continue to seek more political power and better human services in their cities, while small, fairly well-off, mostly white environmental groups seek protection of natural habitats. Members of the Mobile Bay Audubon Society are concerned about rapid industrialization along the Bay and raise determined voices at public hearings. And the Nature Conservancy recently saved from development a 1,290-acre tract

on the Fort Morgan peninsula, subsequently turning it over to the federal government as a wildlife refuge. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service calls the tract the best remaining undisturbed beach ecosystem between Pensacola, Florida, and New Orleans.

Struggling against enormous monied opposition, new industrial arrivals, oil and gas development and an exploding population is Alabama's Coastal Area Board, created in 1976 when the state joined the national coastal management program. A notable first effort at growth management, the program was crippled at the outset by its tentative legislative mandate. If the Coastal Area Board does what it is supposed to do — protect the coast's natural resources by conditioning or denying industrial development permits — it may be knocked out completely by industrial growth boosters. Already in the spring of 1982, the legislature was voting to strip the board of its powers and move it to the state capital, effectively severing the coastal public from its main growth management and environmental protection tool.

Yet, there is much left to save. Off the causeways and along the remaining undeveloped coastlands, local people still enjoy abundant opportunities to drop a hook, launch small boats and watch sunset clouds paint splendor across the watery and marshy expanses. In this coastal area particularly — caught in a boom-or-bust craze only a few decades old — immediate, forceful citizen demand for planning and regulation seems the only hope for a healthy future. □

*By Rebecca Paul, Frank Daugherty, Chris Mayfield and Terry Pierson.*



photo by David Lay

## MISSISSIPPI

**COASTAL MISSISSIPPI IS LESS LIKE THE REST OF ITS STATE** than perhaps any other coastal region in the South. Largely isolated from the agrarian economies which shaped the rest of Mississippi, the three counties along the Gulf are tied historically to Louisiana through the common roots of their settlers and through a connecting web of trade and travel routes.

Ships once entered the port of New Orleans by navigating across the Mississippi Sound; the east-west railroad line completed in 1869 and the Old Spanish Trail which preceded Highway 90 both provided wealthy New Orleans residents access to a handy retreat from the yellow fever plagues which troubled that city each muggy summer. This escape/vacation route gave rise to towns like Pass Christian, with its yacht club, its elaborate antebellum mansions and its relatively high black-to-white ratio — a reflection of the original servant-master households.

Today nearly 300,000 people live along the 70-mile-long coast; most of the population is packed into the nine coastal cities whose economies center largely on neon tourism, bustling port commerce and associated industrial parks, and government employment.

The legacy of the New Orleans connection is evident in many aspects of Mississippi's coastal counties. Take the Catholic faith, for example: just east of the Louisiana line, half of the 25,000 people living in low-lying, relatively undeveloped Hancock County are Catholics; they comprise 19 percent of the next coastal county, Harrison, and only eight percent of Jackson County, bordering Alabama. (With 155,000 and 120,000 people respectively, these last two counties rank second and third in population in the state, behind Hinds County, where the capital city, Jackson, is located.)

Or take the coast's reputation as the "sin capital of Mississippi," a reputation largely spawned by two strips of vice parlors in Biloxi that cater to tourists and military personnel from Keesler Air Force Base. Gambling and prostitution houses, with ties to New Orleans organized crime figures, are ignored

by most residents and tolerated by police and politicians as an ineradicable part of a "Gulf Coast mentality." Mississippi's shoreline also serves as an ideal entry point for dope smugglers, as evidenced by periodic findings of a different kind of "sea weed" which washes up in bales along the beaches and in secluded bays.

**ON THE OTHER HAND, THE ETHNIC DIVERSITY WHICH** Mississippi's coast shares with Louisiana has combined with a steady influx of tourists and military personnel to blunt the vigorous racism found in other parts of Mississippi. In the more rural areas of the three coastal counties, north of Interstate 10 where timber cutting and farming still prevail, racial segregation follows the pattern found in much of the rest of the state, and the dilapidated housing of North Gulfport, along with the poverty of unincorporated, largely black communities on the coast itself — in D'Iberville, Gautier and Escatawpa — all demonstrate that racial injustices still exist on the Gulf shore.

But "we are way ahead" of the rest of the state, says Dr. John Kelly, a black marine specialist working with the Sea Grant office of the Mississippi Cooperative Service. Dr. Kelly echoes

the feelings of many blacks along the urbanized parts of the coast. This relative prosperity may be due in part to the fact that blacks are only 18 percent of the coastal population, compared to 37 percent in the rest of the state; white coastal residents may have felt less threatened by the progress of such a comparatively small minority. Dr. Gilbert Mason — the Biloxi NAACP leader who spearheaded the integration of the area's beaches (the "wade-ins") in 1962 — notes that after the initial brutal confrontations blacks were accepted as part of the shoreline scene, more than they ever have been in the Delta.

Today a cadre of black leadership — ranging from Dr. Mason to the bishop of the Catholic diocese of Biloxi to the president of the International Longshoremen's Union to the coast's one black state senator — bargains with the white power structure so that blacks can, as Dr. Kelly says, "continue to enjoy a greater share of the economic pie than elsewhere in the state."

The economic expansion of the area has helped minimize racial tensions; in cases where competition for limited jobs or resources increases, racism still flourishes. Exclusion of blacks from the highest paying jobs



THE BISHOP OF BILOXI BLESSES THE SHRIMP FLEET.

photo by Sonny Pippin/Gulf Publishing Co.





on the waterfront docks relaxed only after federal affirmative action programs began to be enforced and other economic opportunities opened up for white skilled workers. More recently, tensions flared between local fishers and Vietnamese immigrants over the immigrants' fishing practices and the locals' bitterness that the Vietnamese (who began arriving in 1975 and now number around 1,200) were receiving federal aid. Tempers have cooled considerably with a record shrimp harvest in 1981 and increased understanding between the two groups.

Ironically, the seafood industry has long promoted the growth and ethnic diversity of the Gulf Coast by attracting immigrants. During the boom years of 1890 to 1920, Dalmatian Yugoslavs and Cajun French arrived in Biloxi to fill the job market. It is their descendants who now worry about newcomers, as well as about the large, refrigerated shrimp boats that can stay out for days in the open Gulf and use larger nets to outperform the family-owned boats.

These smaller boats are generally confined to the Mississippi Sound, an 82-mile-long span of calm, low-lying water stretching from Lake Borgne, Louisiana, to Mobile Bay. The Sound is protected from Gulf waters by a chain of undeveloped barrier islands — Cat, West Ship, East Ship, Horn and Petit Bois — which lie an average of 9.3 miles from the mainland. The Sound, now only about 10 feet deep and slated for major dredging, is part of the "Fertile Fisheries Crescent" arching from Pascagoula to Galveston, one of the

Earth's most productive fishing regions. Jumbo shrimp are richly abundant, and mullet caught in Mississippi waters are so popular that they have been fondly nicknamed "Biloxi bacon."

Meanwhile, the coast's oyster industry has severely declined from its heyday in the 1920s and '30s, when the nation's largest oyster reef and 30 seafood processing plants made Biloxi the shrimp and oyster capital of the world. The failure to replenish oyster beds, industrial pollution, increased river/storm runoff into the Sound, Hurricane Camille's direct hit on productive reefs in 1969, and the dumping of municipal sewage have all combined to render unproductive 80 percent of the oyster tonging reefs. Since 1977, the state has tried to revive the industry by leasing water bottoms within its three-mile territorial jurisdiction to private oyster farms.

As in other coastal states, the biggest fisheries problem is "loss of habitat" for fish breeding, including a 10 percent loss of the original coastal marsh. Unfortunately, the state's Coastal Wetlands Protection Law of 1973 is a "wet" program — it allows direct regulatory jurisdiction only up to the high tide line. The filling of a high marsh can be blocked only if the state invokes the "indirect impact to tidal wetlands" argument, which it rarely does for large-scale economic development projects. An exception occurred in August, 1981, when the Mississippi Commission on Wildlife Conservation denied a request for a wetlands variance that would have allowed an elevated superhighway exit

loop to be constructed over the Mississippi Sound and part of its beaches. Commercial fishers are also starting to fight to protect their fisheries from ecological disaster; at Pascagoula they successfully challenged the filling of several acres of marsh proposed as part of a \$1 billion expansion of Chevron's \$2 billion refinery.

In the 1970s, too, the National Wildlife Federation and its state affiliate won a court battle to protect the Earth's rarest crane — the Mississippi sandhill crane — from losing its Jackson County habitat to Interstate 10 construction.

**INTENSE INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT, WHICH FURTHER DISTINGUISHES Harrison and Jackson counties from the rest of Mississippi, has also caused an annual drop in the water tables and poses the imminent danger of saltwater intrusion into drinking supplies. The fastest-falling water table — four feet a year — is under the Bayou Casotte Industrial Park which abuts Pascagoula and is the home of the state's largest industrial employer, Litton Industries' Ingalls Shipyard. From its origin in 1939 with an order for four battleships to a peak employment of 25,000 in 1978, the shipyard and related trades today dominate Jackson and surrounding counties, drawing workers from more than 100 miles away and throwing the region into economic depression whenever military orders decline. A 16-mile, \$12.7 million pipeline is now being laid from the Pascagoula River to the Industrial Park to help reduce demands on the water table, but long-term planning for increased drinking water and sewage disposal has barely begun.**

Pascagoula, the largest port and the fastest growing of the nine major cities on the coast, also hosts a surprising number of major industries: a Quaker Oats plant that converts fish to canned cat food, the Chevron refinery, a host of businesses that cater to offshore oil wells in the Gulf, and assorted other multi-million-dollar chemical, fertilizer, brick and grain operations. About 65 percent of the jobs in Jackson County are in manufacturing.

In Biloxi, 40 percent of the population depends on military jobs, with tourism and seafood-related industries counting as the other key

pillars of the economy. Gulfport, with the world's largest terminal for imported bananas, aims to establish itself as a retail and financial center.

Hancock County, whose western marshes and smaller communities are far less developed, mushroomed in population during the 1970s after the huge National Space Technology Laboratory located new facilities in its backwoods. Population jumped again in 1975 when, after being blocked from locating in Georgia, the DuPont Company built a \$150 million titanium dioxide plant on the shores of pristine Bay St. Louis. Joe Stone, then chair of the permit board of the Mississippi Air & Water Pollution Control Commission, said that local politicians "sold their souls to the devil" by letting DuPont come to the area.

More than 600 citizens under the banner "Save the Bay" fought for five years to halt construction of the plant; they won only promises of improved monitoring and pollution control from the company. The plant now injects 300 gallons of toxic chemicals a minute into a 10,000-foot-deep well. County officials may be digging a deeper grave by helping underwrite a multi-million-dollar channel and railroad spur "industrial corridor" project, designed to lure more firms like DuPont to the area. Much of the channel deepening, though, depends on federal support through the Army Corps of Engineers, and the county has run up against the federal budget-cutting fever which is delaying such appropriations.

Official disregard for the long-term environmental damage from such projects has become all too familiar. And the federal government, far from acting as an ally, is often the culprit that local citizens' groups and elected officials have to chase down, rein in and overcome. For example, in 1972 — two years after the Pentagon stored 850,000 gallons of the toxic defoliant known as "Agent Orange" at the Naval Seabee Center in Gulfport — traces of dioxin surfaced in a drainage ditch 9,000 feet from the storage site. Only after persistent pressure from local citizens and elected leaders did the government finally load the dioxin herbicide into the ship *Vulcanus* and send it to the western Pacific for incineration.

Nuclear bomb testing under nearby Tamar County's salt domes in the mid-'60s failed to spark much local



AERIAL VIEW OF BILOXI AND DEER ISLAND

controversy, but the federal Energy Department's plan to bury radioactive wastes in the domes has triggered a mass revolt that peaked in November, 1981, at a meeting in the Mississippi Gulf Coast Coliseum in Biloxi. Over 5,000 coastal residents heard speakers ranging from Buckminster Fuller to the state's attorney general condemn the federal government's plan and demand the right of the state to veto siting of nuclear waste dumps. Mississippi's U.S. congressional delegation is now pushing a law to ensure that right. The Biloxi gathering was organized by Citizens Against Nuclear Disposal, a single-focus, well-connected group whose arguments have commanded the attention of local politicians all over the state but particularly in coastal Mississippi. After all, if radioactive wastes stored in the salt domes eventually leaked into the highly water-soluble salt medium, they could easily contaminate the coast's future water supply — for industry, tourism, fisheries and all other inhabitants.

**PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT AND CERTAINLY THE MOST** implacable of the influences shaping the coast is weather — especially rough weather. A hurricane in 1915, for example, swept away an early attempt to develop one of Mississippi's barrier islands into a haven of fun for prosperous vacationers. Called the "Coney Island of the South," the development on Deer Island included a ferris wheel, a resort hotel, an amusement park and other attractions. The next year,

another storm wiped out the remaining buildings on the tiny island that lies just a few hundred yards off Biloxi.

In 1923, the nearby Isle of Caprice hosted casinos, dance halls and a bath house, enhancing the coast's reputation for high-priced "sin." But by 1931, the "Monte Carlo of the South" was gone, and the entire island lay under four feet of water.

Another hurricane in 1947 undermined the longest concrete seawall in the world, which had itself been completed 20 years earlier to protect a new boom of hotel, restaurant and tourist-related construction along highway 90 between Biloxi and Gulfport. To protect the wall that shields the buildings from water and wind, a 26-mile beach was created, using sands dredged from the Gulf's bottom.

Somehow, the lessons of a hurricane's force are easily superseded by the grandiose plans of developers. In 1969, the most powerful storm to strike the U.S. mainland in recorded history, Hurricane Camille, pounded the Mississippi coast with over 200-mile-an-hour gusts and a 24-foot surge of sea water, leaving more than 130 dead and 3,800 homes destroyed. Among the dead were a confident realtor and his family who felt secure in their "hurricane-proof" home.

In 1980, only 11 years later, coastal residents discovered that another cocky realtor — Florida developer John Stocks — had bought Deer Island and planned to build 400 "hurricane-proof" condominiums on this thin ribbon of sand. Later, through official intervention, Stocks was forced to reduce the number and size of dwellings on the island. Stocks also managed to buy land on Petit Bois Island. Like Horn Island, Petit Bois is a federally designated wilderness area and the few remaining private land-owners are prohibited from developing their land.

When the brazen Stocks, already facing a lawsuit in Florida for bulldozing sand dunes, announced he would dice up his land on Petit Bois Island and sell it in five-acre lots, the public and the Park Service moved against him, filing eminent domain proceedings against the property. On Deer Island, however, Stocks's cranes are erecting buildings as fast as they can; Deer Island is on the Interior Department's list of undeveloped island acreage that will not be protect-

photo by Bill Elnore/Biloxi Sun-Herald



a 40-mile shortcut to the Gulf, destroyed some of the state's most productive oyster and trapping grounds in St. Bernard Parish. Scientists conclude the full savings of moving ships through the shortcut will never justify the long-term losses stemming from the inundation of thousands of acres of wetlands by salt water. The channel, originally 500 feet wide, is now 1,500 feet across in some areas as the bordering marshes steadily crumble into the water. Adding insult to injury, one of coastal Louisiana's increasing number of ship collisions, fires and chemical spills left 25,000 pounds of highly toxic pentachlorophenol (PCP) in the outlet during the summer of 1980.

Louisiana's wetlands are threatened with extinction. Canal dredging, salt-water intrusion, chemical pollution and stagnation, as well as the worldwide rise in sea level and the natural subsidence of unnourished deltas share the blame for this. By restricting the free movement of the Mississippi, says noted Louisiana scientist Dr. Sherwood M. Gagliano, "We have concentrated the flow of energy and material in a single conduit and failed to recognize that self-maintenance of the system is based on overflow and diversion." In other words, on its way to the Gulf, that Ol' River is meant to ramble, flood its banks, replenish its marshes and delta lands and push back incoming salt water.

Dr. R. Eugene Turner of LSU's Center for Wetland Resources reports that more than 60 percent of the state's coastal land loss is directly or indirectly caused by the 15,000 miles of canals already dredged for oil and gas exploration. Environmentalists have urged that corporations be required to fill in or plug canals no longer in use before dredging new ones, but their message has not become

policy.

Characteristically, it is not the complicated environmental considerations that most disturb Louisiana lawmakers, but the simple fact that the state is losing some 40 square miles of dry land along its shore every year, and the land loss translates immediately into dollars. As the state's outer boundary recedes, oil wells once within the legislature's three-mile taxing jurisdiction slip out of its grasp. Royalties from just two oil leases lost in the mid-'70s deprived the state of \$8 million in annual revenues. The consequences of an eroding shoreline are even more catastrophic when one considers that nearly one-fifth of the state's total tax revenues come from oil and gas extraction in eight coastal parishes (counties), that already seven acres of south Louisiana are under water for every acre of dry land, that almost half of the state's people live on this fragile terrain, that the nation's first and fourth busiest ports (New Orleans and Baton Rouge) are located here, and that over \$10 billion worth of oil refineries, steel and aluminum mills, chemical plants, barge landings and power plants line the 120-mile stretch between the two.

The state government is now pondering all manner of radical solutions to stem coastal land loss, ranging from spending millions to dump rocks on the barrier islands to erecting a flimsy mesh frame through which an electric current would pass, yielding a concrete-like substance to hold back the waters. One strategy widely respected by scientists, government officials and environmentalists is called freshwater diversion, which simply stated means selectively siphoning off water from the Mississippi into critical areas to combat saltwater encroachment, plus releasing river sediment to rebuild deteriorating wetland bottoms. But even the most extreme use of this technique could not produce over 10 square miles of new land a year.

MEANWHILE, THE STATE GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO BEND the definition of "the public interest" to suit interim solutions offered by the petrochemical industry and its handmaidens. To shore up the billions in investment along the New Orleans-Baton Rouge corridor, a consortium of oil companies launched the con-



photo by Nicholas R. Spitzer

struction of the Louisiana Offshore Oil Port (LOOP) in the early 1970s. Completed in May, 1981, LOOP is the nation's first port able to handle crude oil supertankers, some longer than three football fields.

Uncertainties about an OPEC-controlled oil supply have down-scaled similar projects in Texas and thwarted boosters' attempts to establish one in Virginia. But in Louisiana, when 11 of the 16 oil companies dropped out of LOOP, the state issued bonds to cover 90 percent of the project's \$732 million cost. Ironically, the rising cost of petroleum-based fuels has already convinced Louisiana utilities to switch to out-of-state coal for their generators and forced Kaiser Aluminum to cut back production at its huge smelting plant.

Past and present industrial investment in Louisiana's coastal zone has far outstripped that of the rest of the state; planners are projecting that the port of New Orleans will triple its business by the year 2000. And in February, 1981, the Army Corps secured the support of New Orleans and other area parishes to proceed with its \$410 million plan to dredge the Mississippi from New Orleans to Baton Rouge to a depth of 55 feet. All the parishes down river expressed concern that the deeper channel would draw salt water into their drinking water; nine times since 1929, a saltwater wedge has reached New Orleans's public water supply intake valves on the river, and in February, 1981, a saltwater wedge creeping upstream was within 35 miles of doing it again.

Many south Louisiana cities have grown and prospered as service centers for oil and gas exploration activities. But in numerous cases, public coffers



photo by Nicholas R. Spitzer

have not benefited from energy-related growth: a 1977 state study concluded that the outer continental shelf drilling activity in five of 22 coastal parishes did not yield enough revenue to pay for the local and state public expenditures necessitated by the activity. In another 11 parishes, sufficient revenues were returned to the state, but not to the local governments.

**THE INFLUX OF NEW MONEY, INDUSTRIES AND SERVICE-**oriented businesses has homogenized coastal Louisiana's diverse culture as it has eroded the natural environment. Indigenous enterprises and livelihoods based on healthy ecologies and renewable resources have lost out as well. Morgan City, for example, which was the first major offshore fisheries port in the state, has become a base for offshore oil exploration; it changed the name of its Shrimp Festival in 1968 to the Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival.

Louisiana's huge fisheries catch — 32 percent of the nation's total in 1978 — is directly dependent on the productive estuaries now being destroyed. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has already reported a 90 percent decline in the fishing industry's "catch per unit effort" over the last three decades. The total catch figures of all fish species do not show the dramatic change because more people are fishing, commercially and recreationally, and there are bigger, better-equipped boats to bring in more total tonnage of some varieties. But in the years 1945 to 1972, the annual shrimp catch per Louisiana boat fell from an average of 45,000 pounds to 6,000 pounds; and oysters — 90 percent supplied from productive beds in St. Bernard and Plaquemines parishes — have declined in the same period from 500 to 50 pounds per acre.

In the mid-1970s, fishing and seafood processing accounted for about 17,000 jobs, nowhere near the 70,000 employed in oil and gas extraction and related activities or the 50,000 working in port and navigation-related jobs. Even so, the gush of oil dollars has clearly not flowed down to the great mass of Louisiana residents, one-fourth of whom live in poverty. In fact, in Lafayette, regional home for 800 oil-related companies, one family in six is poor and two in

five black families live below the federally established poverty line. In New Orleans, where 45 percent of the population is black, 40 percent of the black families are poor.

The growing number of government jobs across the state — now topping 250,000 — and the rising number of tourist-dependent service jobs show no promise of providing a decent living to the indigenous population. Chronic unemployment, increased crime, virulent police brutality, race and class antagonisms, a thriving sub-economy of drugs, graft and petty thievery, and mass protests against government insensitivity — all substantiate the parallels some critics in New Orleans are now drawing between their political economy and those of Jamaica, Trinidad and other Caribbean colonies dependent upon tourists and energy.

The battle against inequity is widespread, if not always successful. One recent series of victories resulted when a multi-racial coalition, the Fishermen and Concerned Citizens of Plaquemines Parish, took on the heirs of arch-segregationist Leander Perez and won back the right to harvest oysters with their traditional tools, the right to public water service and the right to litigate ownership of the land residents claim oil interests stole nearly 60 years ago. (See article on page 83.) Scattered reports of Cajuns swimming in front of dredgeboats to block construction of yet another canal, of locals blowing up bridges or waving shotguns at government officials, signify the growing bottom-up opposition to state industrial

policy.

A group called "Save Ourselves" ("because no one else will save us") organized when the Industrial Tank Company announced plans to build the "world's largest waste disposal and treatment plant" close to their homes in Ascension Parish on the Mississippi River. Aware of the company's poor performance record elsewhere, the group was appalled when the Louisiana Environmental Control Commission approved plans to discharge half the treated water into the Mississippi, the source of drinking water for 1.5 million people, and incinerate the other half in an area which already has the highest lung cancer rate in the nation, according to the New Orleans chapter of the Sierra Club. The Sierra Club and others have already widely broadcast studies showing that 34 "volatile organic constituents" have been found in the blood of typical New Orleans adults and that the area's abnormally high cancer rate "is closely associated with" existing pollutants in the river.

Environmental groups are also waging a tough campaign to put teeth in the state's new coastal management program. Unfortunately, the program falls within the purview of the Secretary of Natural Resources, Frank Ashby, a former oil executive who personally intervened in the only two permits denied by his staff since the program began in September, 1980. Over 800 other permits had been routinely processed, but these two were originally denied because it seemed unlikely the dredging and drilling in previously undisturbed



photo by Jennifer Miller

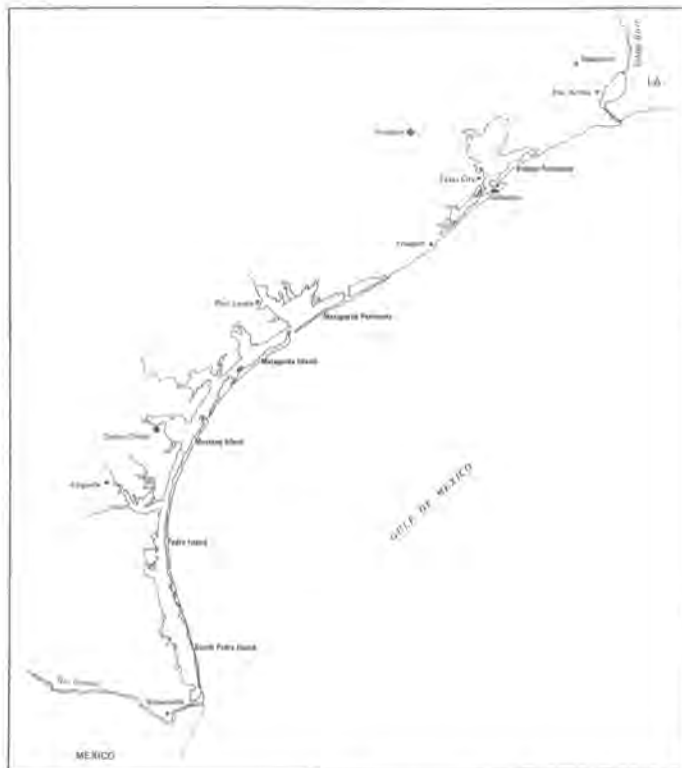
wetlands would yield enough oil to justify the environmental harm. Ashby overturned his staff's decisions, and before the Sierra Club's appeal could be heard, the oil companies had begun drilling. A couple of months later, both sites proved dry.

**IRATE TAXPAYERS, FISHERS AND ENVIRONMENTALISTS FACE SIMILAR obstacles** when they tackle the federal permitting process. For example, after the Ventech Company had trouble getting approval from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Army Corps to build an oil refinery at Krotz Springs in the fragile Atchafalaya Basin (floodway for New Orleans), a letter dated April 28, 1980, arrived at the New Orleans office of the Corps. Signed by Louisiana Senators Russell Long and J. Bennett Johnston and by seven members of Congress from the state, the letter urged the Corps and EPA to approve Ventech's permits in "the national interest." Such stories tell us that the opening words of Harnette Kane's book on Huey P. Long are as true today as they were when he wrote them 40 years ago: "From its start, Louisiana has been a land of great wealth, great men [and women] and great thieves."

*By Jennifer Miller and Dan Stroh, with thanks to Michael Halle, Coastal Environments, Inc., and Dr. R. Eugene Turner.*

## TEXAS

**THE COASTAL PLAINS AND WATERS OF TEXAS ARE A MASS** of contrasts — host to the densest urban/industrial complexes in this vast oil-and-gas-rich state, but site as well of huge expanses inhabited only by cattle and oil wells. Over the years, Texas has supplied more than a third of all oil and gas ever produced in this nation, with the coastal counties accounting for about one-fifth of the state's oil output and over two-thirds of the natural gas. Though Texas production has been declining since its peak in 1972, oil remains the region's lifeblood, as more and more is imported to sustain the world's largest petrochemical complex here. This string of refineries, storage tanks and chemical processing plants comprises 25 percent of the United States'



refining capacity and 40 percent of its petrochemical industry.

All of this means a booming economy, even in recessionary times, for some of the coastal region's people. It also means grave disparities between rich and poor, and serious threats to the health and environment of all.

**THE TEXAS COAST MAKES A SWEEPING SOUTHERLY CURVE** nearly 400 miles long, from the Sabine River border with Louisiana to the mouth of the Rio Grande. Fronting the Gulf of Mexico for most of this length are the sand beaches of barrier islands and long narrow peninsulas — one of the world's longest coastal barrier systems, cut by fewer than a dozen narrow inlets. It shelters a number of bays, most of them shallow lagoons running parallel to the barriers, but also a few large open ones like Galveston Bay, Matagorda Bay, Corpus Christi Bay, Baffin Bay. Coastal marshes and wetlands border the bays, and behind them rises a gently sloping plain crossed by 11 major rivers, three flowing directly into the Gulf and the others into sheltered bays and lagoons. The region has for countless millennia been home to abundant wildlife, including the nearly extinct whooping cranes that winter in the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge.

When the first Spanish explorers

landed on the Texas coast in 1519, the northeast coastal plain, eastward of Galveston Bay, was sparsely settled by a farming tribe of Caddo Indians. From the Bay south toward Mexico, the coastal Indians were Karankawas — hunters, gatherers, wanderers, tall lean people who shot fish with bows and arrows and also fished with nets. None of these people survived the contact with Europeans, succumbing to war and disease over the next few centuries.

The people now living on the Texas coast are the product of successive waves of immigration beginning in the sixteenth century and continuing as strongly as ever today. Though the Spanish "conquered" Texas, there were only a handful of mission towns on the coast until the early 1800s, when the Spanish and Mexican governments encouraged settlers to inhabit this vast territory. Anglo-Americans moved down from places like Tennessee and Kentucky, and immigrants sailed from Europe and Mexico to coastal ports at Galveston, Corpus Christi and Matagorda.

In the early 1800s, also, Texas was a haven for runaway slaves — whom the Spanish government declared free when they hit Texas soil — and other free Afro-Americans looking for opportunities not available in the American South. The grace period for those escaping bondage was short-lived,

however. By the 1820s and '30s, Anglos arriving from slave states brought their captive laborers with them, established a slave market at Galveston and built a plantation system in east Texas just like the one back home.

South of Galveston, the land and climate could not support plantation-style agriculture. Instead, some early Texas cattle ranchers worked slaves as cowboys, herding livestock; they preferred white bronco riders, though, rather than risk monetary loss should a slave be killed or injured. Most of the Southern cattle country was owned and tended by Mexicans, and the area is still predominantly inhabited by people of Mexican descent. But the ownership has largely changed from caballeros on haciendas to millionaires on spreads like the King Ranch.

#### GENERALLY, THE COASTAL POPULATION OF TEXAS IS

growing at rates well above that of the nation as a whole. Several urban complexes account for much of this growth, with increases of over 50 percent in the 1970s, and demographers project 20 to 30 percent more people will live in the areas around Houston, Corpus Christi and Brownsville by 1990.

Lacking zoning, and receiving the lion's share of "sunbelt" immigrants seeking higher than average wages, Houston especially has sprawled to fill the marshy land around it with housing developments, industrial districts and all the servicing, policing and planning problems such rapid growth brings.

By and large, the still-rural counties do not share this trend: two of them actually lost population in the '70s. Despite urban sprawl, nearly half the land on the coastal plain remains devoted to agriculture. Rice is king on the upper coast, where there is plenty of rain and river water to flood the fields. Further south where the climate is semi-arid, cattle ranches occupy the coastal grasslands and marshes, and grain and cotton crops predominate. At the southernmost tip is the "Magic Valley" of the Rio Grande, rich soil that produces, with the help of extensive irrigation and a 12-month growing season, a wealth of fruits and vegetables, much of it harvested by chicano and Mexican migrants.

Although the fisheries play a rela-

tively minor role in Texas's coastal economy, they have a major share of the problems arising from fierce competition for local resources. Commercial fishing in Texas is of two general types — smaller boats in the protected bays and lagoons, and the more capital-intensive fleets in the open Gulf. The industry is worth about \$136 million a year in dockside landings, providing about 10,500 full-time jobs. Sport fishing is also a major industry; direct expenditures are estimated at \$42 million annually, with about 4,500 jobs provided by servicing businesses.

Most valuable to these fisheries are shrimp, oysters and other shellfish — all species dependent on the bays and estuaries for growth and reproduction and hence seriously threatened by industrial development, channel dredging and oil drilling that pollute these waters and change saline balances, temperatures and critical habitats. At the same time, some Texas fishers complain that they are hurting themselves by overfishing, that they face unfair foreign competition and that their costs are outstripping their incomes.

The critical cost problem is fuel. As one shrimper explains it, for every dollar of revenue, 57 cents goes for fuel and 35 cents for labor, leaving only eight cents to cover all other expenses, including the highest interest rates in history on mortgaged boats and equipment. Fuel cost is also the critical factor in their complaints about foreign competition; Mexican shrimpers trawl on fuel that costs one-fourth to one-third what Texans pay, because the Mexican government owns its oil industry and sells diesel fuel at reasonable prices.

In recent years the total commercial fisheries catch in Texas has been fairly constant — around 100 million pounds — but the number of licenses has grown by leaps and bounds. The number of bay shrimping licenses, for example, more than doubled between 1975 and '81. The general state of acrimony in the industry — charges and countercharges not just between Texans and Mexicans, but between bay shrimpers and Gulf shrimpers, sport fishers and commercial fishers, and between Louisianans and Texans — fills the newspapers of coastal cities and preoccupies politicians in the state capital to a bizarre degree.

Texas bay shrimpers and crabbers

were recently projected into the national limelight when some of them engaged in a bit of nastiness with Vietnamese refugees. The Vietnamese had been resettled on the Texas coast by seafood processors looking for cheap, dependable labor. Many of the refugees, though, soon surprised their sponsors by turning to shrimping themselves and making successful entries into the market. As a distinct group of racially different newcomers with different work habits and fishing methods — some of which conflicted with long-established local practices — the immigrants just as quickly became the focus of the native-born shrimpers' frustration with their industry's hard times. Tensions periodically erupted into violence, peaking in early 1981 in a handful of towns where the Ku Klux Klan tried to organize white fishers to drive the Vietnamese out of business. After the Vietnamese got a court order halting Klan activity, the situation eased; 1981 turned out to be a good year for shrimping, and the state legislature clamped a moratorium on new bay shrimp-boat commercial licenses.

The 1981 battle over redfish (red drum) is one of many illustrations of conflicts and politics in Texas fisheries. Redfish are popular: sport fishers love to catch them, and the commercial fishing industry depended on them for a steady several-million-pound crop until the late '70s, when the catch fell off sharply.

The state legislature passed a conservation act in 1977 limiting the commercial catch, in response to widely disputed claims by the State Parks and Wildlife Department that redfish were over-exploited. Still the harvest numbers fell until, in 1981, the legislature banned commercial red-fishing entirely. During loud and angry legislative hearings before the ban was enacted, state experts testified with one set of figures "proving" the declining number of redfish, and commercial fishers brought in federal marine fisheries officials to claim the opposite. The sport fishers' lobby was particularly effective: for instance, one Houston senator complained of threatening phone calls and telegrams from powerful people like John Connally and James Baker, President Reagan's chief of staff. Even Governor Bill Clements got into the act, siding with the lobby but moaning that he would have to go to New Orleans to eat

redfish. When asked about the fortunes of other Texas folks who could not afford a trip to Louisiana any time they longed for this popular staple, the governor said, "Let them eat catfish."

Recreational fishing in coastal Texas is such a favorite pastime — among all income levels of the population — that over 14,000 citizens signed petitions recently to save one bountiful fish pass through the Bolivar Peninsula from extinction. The Committee to Save Rollover Pass claimed that this tiny inlet annually drew 250,000 visitors to harvest its seasonal runs of speckled trout, flounder, croaker and redfish. Ironically, the target of the citizens' ire is the state of Texas, which in the mid-1950s created Rollover Pass to increase salinity in the bay behind the peninsula and improve its fisheries habitat potential. The state succeeded in making a tidal pass that lured bountiful supplies of marine life, but soon found that the perpetual expense required to keep an artificial, bulkheaded inlet from succumbing to tidal currents and storms was too high a price to pay for recreation. When the state decided to cease maintenance efforts at Rollover Pass, they had not reckoned with the inlet's popularity. Those fighting to save the pass have charged that many expensive channels and inlets are maintained elsewhere, for shipping and in politically powerful coastal communities, so why not Rollover Pass?

#### TEXAS BEACHES ARE DESERVEDLY POPULAR WITH THE PUBLIC

as well. During peak tourist season, for example, the daytime population of Mustang Island swells by 500 percent, a small influx of visitors compared to the 4,000 percent seasonal increase in the tiny city of South Padre Island. The 1970s and '80s have seen exponential growth and development in a number of beachfront areas — especially on Mustang and South Padre — yet there are still long stretches of near-wilderness, most notably the 80 miles of Padre Island National Seashore, largely inaccessible to anyone without a boat or a four-wheel-drive vehicle.

Unlike most coastal states, Texas has a history of protecting the public's right to use its beaches. The hard-won 1959 Open Beaches Act was a response to broad public realization that accessible beaches were becoming private-property enclaves for the wealthy.



Photo courtesy Texas Highway Dept.

Generally, the act prohibits developers from building on the beaches. But growing coastal populations threaten its effectiveness. Realizing the value of the shore when access to it is inhibited, resort communities have been gradually undermining the Open Beaches Act by enacting local ordinances that prohibit vehicles from driving on the beaches while not supplying other adequate accessways or adjacent free parking. Steve Frishman of the citizens' Texas Environmental Coalition says the act needs "refining," but that free-access forces have been reluctant to push the issue with state legislators for fear they may water down the act's primary objective — free and unrestricted ingress and egress to the beaches of Texas.

Texas has done even less about protecting the beaches themselves from deleterious human interference. Over half of the state's beaches are eroding, with 13 percent losing more than 10 feet a year. Though erosion is partly the result of rising sea level and natural sand migration, it is also caused by a dramatic reduction in the supply of sediments that built the beaches; nearly all the rivers that carried these sediments to the Gulf and Texas bays have been damned upstream. As is true elsewhere, coastal erosion is only termed "critical" when it threatens beachfront developments, placing people and their expensive cottages and condos in jeopardy, and the response has been seawalls, jetties and bulkheads that further disturb the natural system and often create still more erosion.

Flooding is another problem along much of Texas's coast because the land is low-lying and loses its natural drainage ability as it is covered with concrete and asphalt, and when its wetlands are filled. Already chronic in the Houston area, flooding is expected to worsen in other developing areas in coming years.

Far worse than the drainage problem, though, is land subsidence, caused primarily by the heavy withdrawal of groundwater for industrial and municipal use. As the water is pumped out, the subsurface sediments compact and the land surface sinks. There are any number of places near the coast where measurable subsidence has occurred in the last 40 years; 3,000 square miles have subsided by a foot or more. In the Houston area, land near Galveston Bay has sunk as much as 10 feet, with severe losses of homes and productive land. In a neighborhood in Baytown on the north shore of the bay, for example, dozens of homes have been abandoned, and the people who remain must evacuate five or six times a year. Since the community is now located at mean sea level, any abnormally high tide is a real threat.

And hurricane-induced high water and storm surge are certain to come. Hurricanes have struck Texas at average intervals of two-and-a-half years since 1900, killing 7,000 people and causing \$3 billion in property damage. Most of the deaths came in just one storm — the one that destroyed Galveston on a weekend in September, 1900. The entire island was under water, and at least 6,000 people died.

Despite all known probabilities that another storm is only a matter of time, coastal communities are simply not prepared to evacuate their residents or to control building standards and booming growth in potentially hazardous areas. Former state senator Babe Schwartz, himself from Galveston, has described the dangers to the growing Gulf-front population as "a slowly unfolding tragedy," and blasts state government for not regulating burgeoning island growth and shoddy construction practices. Until Schwartz (who previously was known in Texas as "Senator Coast") was washed out of the legislature by the considerable Republican forces accompanying Ronald Reagan's ascension to the presidency, he attempted time and again to give coastal communities zoning power in unincorporated areas and



authority to adopt and enforce building codes. But “unscrupulous” lobbies defeated the bills, says Schwartz, who calls the real estate interests in particular “the sorriest-motivated group as a whole in Texas.”

A typical case of development that is hazardous to life and property can be found on South Padre Island, where a 1967 hurricane cut an inlet through the island. The channel eventually silted in, but geologists say it is almost certain to reopen in the next major storm. This time the surge of waves will undercut a new development located right on the channel site.

#### THE “TYPICAL” WORKER ON MOST OF THE TEXAS COAST

does not fish or farm for a living, but rather works on an oil rig, in a refinery or in one of the plants that turn crude oil or natural gas into plastic, synthetic rubber, paint thinner, pesticides or polyester. The companies are household names — Dow, DuPont, Celanese, Goodrich, Union Carbide, Velsicol, as well as all the major oil corporations. Their heaviest concentrations are in the “Golden Triangle” of Beaumont, Port Arthur and Orange (which some of the residents have taken to calling the “Septic Triangle”) and around greater Houston, but the industry is also important in Corpus Christi and Brownsville.

The refineries started going up in Houston even before oil was discovered in the area and expanded quickly

in the next decades as new oil and gas fields were discovered up and down the coast. The petrochemical plants were the gift of World War II, when German and Japanese chemical and rubber imports were cut off and the federal government turned to Texas to fill in. The result is a complex that one writer has christened the “Spaghetti Bowl” for the thousands of miles of pipelines running from one plant to the next and connecting to national pipeline networks.

It wasn’t many years before residents discovered one dramatic aspect of life in the Spaghetti Bowl: accidents happen and people get hurt. The worst single incident came in 1947 when two ships, one loaded with ammonium nitrate, collided and exploded at the dock in Texas City, on Galveston Bay, setting fire to the adjacent Monsanto plant. People 15 miles away could see and hear the explosion. More than 4,000 were injured, and 576 died.

Smaller-scale collisions, explosions and toxic spills occur regularly in the state’s industrial port waters. Experts worry most about the possibility of an explosion on the Houston Ship Channel, that umbilical cord which has transformed an inland city into the nation’s third-busiest port, and which accommodates ships and barges carrying more than 70 known toxic materials, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. The ship channel is narrow, curving and dangerous, and even the Coast Guard’s Vessel Traffic Service office in Houston tells tales

of ships encountering each other in fogs, on blind curves, and sometimes playing a “game” called “The Texas Chicken” — in which vessels approaching from opposite directions stay in the center of the channel as long as possible, then veer off sharply, bounce off the water compressed between their hulls and the banks and come back to midchannel, each pilot praying that the other ship is out of the way in time.

Chemical plants, refineries and other industries abut each other for 50 miles from Galveston Bay into the heart of Houston along the ship channel, and it is so polluted that some fear even the water might burn, spreading conflagration up and down its entire length.

Jobs in petrochemical plants pay well, but they carry a heavy cost: in a *Texas Observer* article, a Union Carbide worker ticked off this list of life-threatening hazards at his plant in Texas City: “Ethylene diamine will burn your skin. Phenol can kill, even if only eight percent of your skin is covered. Ethylene gas could kill you if you were in a confined space. Ammonia could explode. Sulphuric acids can burn and cause death.” His plant is typical. Government investigators have counted 10 recognized carcinogens at the same plant. The reason they were counting is that an unusual number of the workers there were dying of brain cancer, and the federal study concluded that those Union Carbide workers stood twice the risk of dying of brain cancer than did all other white male residents in their county.

Similarly, the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union, which represents most of the workers in this industry, found in a recent informal survey that the average lifespan of their members is 55, while company executives live about 20 years longer.

And now there is disturbing evidence that the industry’s victims are not limited to its employees. In Port Neches, between Beaumont and Port Arthur, lies the world’s largest synthetic rubber complex, and people there are discovering an unusual susceptibility to leukemia among not only the plant workers but also people who live or go to school nearby.

There is also the matter of how to dispose of the staggering amounts of toxic wastes from petrochemical manufacturing. The numerous “problem”



photo by Roger Powers/The Houston Post



GALVESTON ISLAND, EASTER WEEKEND, 1977

photo courtesy Texas Coastal and Marine Council

Texas waters and on Texas beaches. In the midst of this, in November, 1979, the oil tanker *Burmah Agate* collided with a freighter near the entrance to the Galveston Ship Channel. The *Burmah Agate* burned for 69 days and spilled over 16 million gallons of oil. Nine other incidents brought 1979's total spill to nearly 150 million gallons.

Oil spills, like every other threat to the Texas coast, will continue unabated until stringent regulations and penalties are imposed by the state. But responsibility for regulating coastal affairs is divided among a bewildering array of state boards, agencies and commissions, none with overriding authority. In a critique of the state's attempt at dune and shorefront protection, coastal hazard mitigation and growth management, the Sierra Club labeled those efforts "illusory."

Recognizing this, the state's small but determined cadre of environmental activists and planning advocates, along with a few sympathetic politicians, worked hard through the 1970s to get Texas to join the national coastal zone management effort. The Texas Land Office spearheaded the effort, submitting three different management plans to the federal coastal office and the state legislature for approval, without success. They did achieve what one participant described as "tremendous consciousness raising" among coastal citizens during the struggle, while the state spent millions in federal grants, and considerable funds of its own, on its half-hearted attempt.

Following the failed coastal management effort, Republican Governor Clements added insult to injury by moving coastal planning activities out of the generally protectionist Land Office and into his own Energy and Natural Resources Advisory Council, which one insider recently described as "passive in the extreme" when it comes to environmental affairs. In this region of intense industrial and urban development, with so much potential for damage to human life and the environment, passivity offers little hope for the future well-being of the Texas coast.

*By Linda Rocawich, with thanks to Dan Stroh, Steve Frishman, Babe Schwartz, Sally Davenport and Paul Sweeney.*

sites in coastal communities include dumps where poisons and carcinogens have been abandoned and slowly leach into groundwater and soil — like the one in Galveston County that the Environmental Protection Agency ranks as a bigger threat than Love Canal. (See *Southern Exposure*, Fall, 1981, on toxics in Texas and elsewhere.)

The industry has less measurable impacts, too. One man who lives on the Bay near Houston says the quality of life has deteriorated significantly in the past 10 or 12 years: "We have the aura of a whole horizon of lights. It's difficult to see the stars at night because of the general lights of the city sky. In fact, if it's cloudy the light reflects, and it's like sunset all the time. Houston's become the new Land of the Midnight Sun."

**AT THE ROOT OF THE PETRO-CHEMICAL INDUSTRY, OF** course, is the petroleum itself. Although land-based extraction has been declining for several years, the offshore industry is expanding, and the state of Texas stands to gain a great deal more than neighboring Louisiana from this bonanza. Texas territorial waters extend three leagues out (10.35 miles) instead of the three miles that Louisiana is allowed to claim (see Kaufman article, page 49). But it is the local governments along the coast that pay the price of municipal services to the people and companies drilling and servicing the wells.

The most ingenious response to this

drain on city coffers came when Port Arthur annexed one of the world's most prolific natural gas wells nine-and-a-half miles off its shores. Galveston and Corpus Christi had long included two or three miles of Gulf in their city limits, but when Port Arthur sent Superior Oil a property tax bill of \$775,000 in 1981, the oil companies started a battle royal. They have not fared well in the courts — a state district court and an appeals court both ordered Superior to pay its taxes to Port Arthur. But the battle has been extended into the political arena. After much commotion last year, legislators decided to put a moratorium on further offshore annexations so it could "study" the matter.

Texas is also taking pains to assure its refineries and petrochemical plants a steady supply of imported crude oil. There are plans in various stages of development for superports (both offshore and onshore) capable of handling supertankers from the Middle East. Questions about reliable foreign supplies, public costs and environmental effects have delayed construction to date, but what is certain about the superports is that their appearance on Texas's coast would mean increased risk of oil spills, a familiar hazard there already.

Sometimes everything seems to go wrong at once, as in 1979, when the Mexican oil well Ixtoc I blew out in June in the Bay of Campeche. It wasn't capped until March, 1980, having spilled at least 140 million gallons, much of which ended up in

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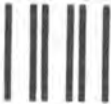
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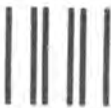
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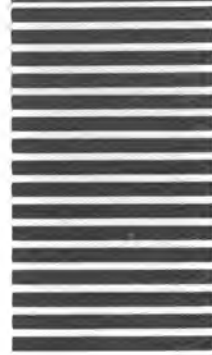
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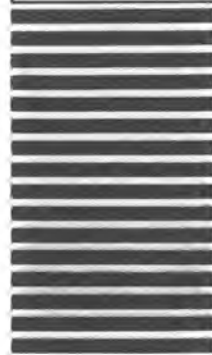
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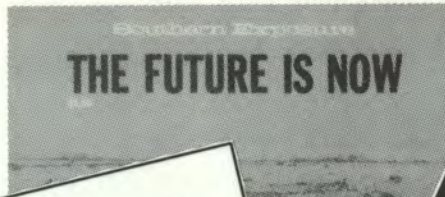
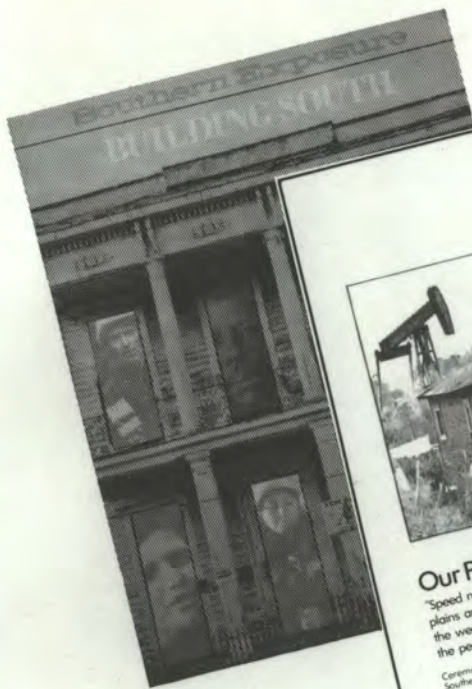
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