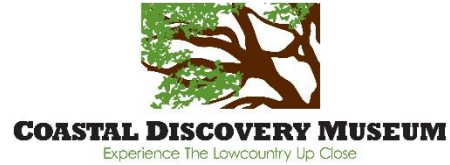


Hilton Head Island

Timeline



Native American Occupation 2000 B.C. – 1500 A.D.

2000 B.C. (over 4,000 years ago)

Native Americans on Hilton Head Island create a shell ring that is approximately 150 feet across and made up of hundreds of thousands made of clams, oyster, and mussels shell.

1335 A.D.

Native Americans living on Hilton Head Island create Green's Shell Enclosure, a 4 foot tall shell ridge that encloses two acres was built along the banks of Skull Creek.

European Explorers 1500-1700

1521

A Spanish expedition, led by Francisco Gordillo, explored this area, initiating European contact with local tribes.

1566

Spanish explorers settled Santa Elena, a permanent settlement, on Parris Island. They abandoned it in 1587 because British corsairs and Sir Francis Drake had been attacking their holdings in St. Augustine. Then, the Spanish concentrated their colonization efforts in St. Augustine.

1663

Captain William Hilton sailed from Barbados, on the *Adventure*, hired by sugar cane planters to explore lands granted by King Charles II to the eight Lords Proprietors. Hilton Head Island takes its name from a headland near the entrance to Port Royal Sound.

1670

Charles Towne was established by the English on the bank of the Ashley River. The settlement moved to its current location on the peninsula between the Ashley and Cooper Rivers by the 1680's.

1684

The Yamassee Indians began moving into the Port Royal area. They were invited by the Scots who had established Stuart Town. In 1686 the Spanish destroyed Stuart Town. Yamassee Indians occupied Hilton Head Island at the invitation of Henry Erskine, Lord Cardross.

1698

John Bayley, of Ireland, was given most of Hilton Head Island as a barony. Twenty-four years later, his son appointed Alexander Trench as his agent in charge of selling the land. For a short time, Hilton Head was called Trench's Island on some 18th century maps.

Plantation Era 1700-1860

1707

A military post was established on the Beaufort River to stop Spanish attacks on Charleston.

1711

Beaufort, South Carolina was founded.

1715

Yamassee Indians, in response to abuse by white traders and fearing possible enslavement, attacked several settlements in the Carolinas. They killed many traders and their families. These raids continued for fifteen years. The Indians were pushed to Florida.

1715

Colonel Alexander Mackay settled on what became known as Pinckney Island. The family sold it to Charles Pinckney in 1734. The entire island became a Wildlife Refuge in 1975.

1717

As a reward for his leadership in the Yemassee War, Colonel John ("Tuscarora Jack") Barnwell was granted 1000 acres of land (Myrtle Bank Plantation) on the northwest corner of the island by the Lords Proprietors. He became the island's first white settler. Myrtle Bank is now part of Hilton Head Plantation.

1728

In January, an entire crew of South Carolina scouts was killed by Indians on the southern tip of Daufuskie Island, giving the area the name Bloody Point. In March, Colonel John Palmer retaliated by attacking St. Augustine, ending most of the Yemassee attacks.

1733

Savannah was founded by James Oglethorpe. It was intended to provide a barrier between Spanish Florida and British Carolina.

1740's

Eliza Lucas introduced a successful strain of indigo that could be grown on the sea islands. She sold the seeds to her father's plantation owning friends. By the 1750's most sea island plantations grew indigo. Indigo's cultivation and processing demanded a large amount of enslaved labor. The end product, bricks of dye, was sold to the English for dyeing fabrics.

1748

The Royal Indigo Bounty was passed by England, making indigo profitable for South Carolinian planters

1760

Beaufort County's ship building industry was one of the largest in the 13 colonies. The deep-water creeks around Hilton Head and the prevalence of hardwoods (like live oak) made the island a popular place for shipbuilding. Robert Watts built the largest ship built in colonial South Carolina on Hilton Head Island; it weighed 420 tons. The U. S. S. Constitution, "Old Ironsides," was rebuilt in 1997 using live oaks felled during construction of Hilton Head Island's Cross Island Parkway.

1767

St. Luke's Parish, which included Hilton Head Island, became a new colonial parish (a religious and political boundary) due to population growth in the area.

1775

The American Revolution began and England ceased paying a bounty on South Carolina indigo.

1776

The English captured Savannah, Georgia.

1779

Privateers sailing with the British navy burned many houses on Skull Creek and around the island on their way to Beaufort and Charleston. Hilton Head residents tended to be Patriots, while Daufuskie residents were Tories.

1781

Daufuskie Islanders burned several Hilton Head homes, including the Talbird home. A few days later, Philip Martinangele, of Daufuskie Island, led a raiding party to Hilton Head Island where they killed Charles Davant. The attack was avenged by Captain John Leacraft and the "Bloody Legion" which went to Daufuskie and killed Martinangele.

1783

The English abandoned Charleston in August.

1788

The Zion Chapel of Ease, a small wooden Episcopal church (40 feet by 20 feet) for plantation owners, was constructed. All that remains is the cemetery which is home to the Baynard Mausoleum near Mathews Drive.

1790

William Elliott II, of Myrtle Bank Plantation, grew the first successful crop of long staple, or Sea Island, cotton in South Carolina on Hilton Head Island. Its value was several times that of short-staple inland cotton. The cotton had to be ginned by hand, requiring larger numbers of enslaved workers.

1804

A hurricane passed through this area, killing 500 in South Carolina.

1813

During the War of 1812, British forces landed on Hilton Head Island, burning many of the houses along Skull Creek.

1820's

Some planters began building summer homes where Bluffton is located today. The town was not incorporated until 1852.

1836-1861

Reverend Joseph J. Lawton tried to grow rice on Calibogue Plantation in what is now Sea Pines Plantation. The endeavor failed due to lack of freshwater to flood the fields.

1854

The Church of the Cross was constructed in Bluffton.

Visit the Church of the Cross, Heyward House, and Bluffton's historic district with the Bluffton Historical Preservation Society.

1860

There were more than 20 working plantations on the island before the Civil War. Because of the island's isolation and the prevalence of diseases like yellow fever and malaria, most plantation owners did not live on Hilton Head. Instead, they had homes in Charleston, Beaufort, or Savannah. The island was populated with enslaved people and overseers.

The Civil War and the Union Occupation 1860 – 1865

1860

In December, South Carolina was the first state to secede from the Union.

1861

On April 12th, the Civil War's first shots were fired on Fort Sumter in Charleston harbor.

1861

Beginning in July, Fort Walker was built on Hilton Head Island at the entrance to Port Royal Sound in order to protect the port from Union attacks.

1861

November 7, Union forces attacked Fort Walker (later renamed Fort Welles in honor of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy) and Fort Beauregard (across the Port Royal Sound on St. Phillip's Island) in the Battle of Port Royal. A naval flotilla consisting of 17 warships, 33 transports, and 25 colliers. Nearly 13,000 Union troops flooded onto the island in the days after the battle. The troops built a pier for warships, constructed all of the installation's warehouses, sawmills, residences, and its hospital shortly after arriving.

1862-1872

Hilton Head Island was also referred to as Port Royal, in reference to the military installation by that name. Port Royal was the home to the Department of the South.

1862

Hilton Head's population swelled to over 40,000, including Union troops, civilian storekeepers, missionaries, prisoners of war, and formerly enslaved people seeking refuge from their owners.

1862

General Ormsby Mitchel set up the town of Mitchelville to house the island's contraband community; this was the first Freedman's village. Until 1863, the term for residents of Mitchelville was "contrabands of war;" and were considered abandoned property of the plantation owners. Mitchelville residents elected their own officials, passed their own laws and established the first compulsory education law in the state. The Mitchelville community was built along modern day Beach City Road.

1862

Northern missionaries participated in the "Port Royal Experiment" which created contraband schools. Penn School, on St. Helena Island, was one of the original schools.

1862

Fort Mitchel was built as a battery to protect Skull Creek from Confederate attacks. Fort Sherman, which circled the military installation was completed.

1863

On January 1st President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation.

1863

Many Bluffton homes were bombarded by Union ships patrolling the May River.

1863

The United States government bought many abandoned plantations at tax sales. Not all of the confiscated property was sold or divided among the freedmen. Some plantation owners were eventually able to reclaim their land, or it was sold to land speculators.

1864

In response to decreasing numbers of troops on the island, Fort Howell was constructed by the 32nd U.S. Colored Infantry. It was built on the southwestern side of Mitchelville and is still located along Beach City Road.

1864

Clara Barton spent nine months as a nurse on Hilton Head Island. Later, she would be the founder of the American Red Cross and also assist the Lowcountry with its recovery from the Hurricane of 1893.

1865

On February 1st, President Lincoln signed the 13th Amendment to end slavery.

1865

On April 9th, General Robert E. Lee surrendered to General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox. Within two months the Civil War was over.

1865

The First African Baptist Church was founded in August. Reverend Abraham Murchison, of Savannah was the first pastor. Several island churches formed out of this church including, St. James, Goodwill, Central Oak Grove, and Mt. Calvary.

1865

In December, the 13th Amendment was ratified, and all slaves were legally freed.

Reconstruction and Isolation 1870's - 1940's

During this period, Hilton Head Island's residents were mostly Gullah people. Their culture, language, food, and many traditions can be traced back to their African roots. Learn more about Gullah people and their story.

1868

Large-scale military occupation of the island had ended. The island's population dropped to only a few thousand. Island residents continued a life of isolation from the mainland. They depended upon subsistence farming, fishing, and oystering to make a living.

1870s

Some of Hilton Head Island's plantations were reclaimed by their ante-bellum owners after paying back taxes charged to their property. Other properties were held by the United States government, sold to speculators, or sold to freedmen who remained on the island after the Civil War.

1872

The island was once again referred to as Hilton Head Island instead of Port Royal.

1881

A hurricane killed 700 in South Carolina and Georgia.

1890

William P. Clyde, of New York, bought 9000 acres of land on Hilton Head Island from former plantation owners and land speculators. Like many other northern buyers, Clyde used the land for a private hunting preserve.

1891

Savannah State College was founded. Many of Hilton Head Island's residents attended this college. An Island Native, Cyrus Wiley, graduated from Savannah State in 1899 and returned to the college in 1921 as its second president. He was the first graduate of the College to hold that position. He served as president until 1926.

1893

An enormous hurricane hit Beaufort County, killing at least 2000 people in the county and flooding parts of the island with its 12 foot surge. Many of Hilton Head Island's structures were destroyed in this storm.

1900 - 1930's

Private hunting groups, like the North Carolina Hunting Club, and the, also purchased large sections of Hilton Head Island during this period.

1901

A fifteen-inch Steam Cannon was installed and tested on the beach at Coggins Point (modern day Port Royal Plantation). It was one of nine designed to protect the United States coast.

1917

Troops were stationed at the former Union Fort Walker during World War I as lookouts for possible submarine attacks.

1920's- 1940's

Gullah native-islanders sailed bateaux from Hilton Head to the mainland, carrying people, crops, and livestock to the market on River Street in Savannah. Charlie Simmons, Sr. operated the first mechanized ferry in 1930 from Simmons Fish Camp located near Marshland Road. The Lola, a 30 foot boat with a 15-horsepower engine, ran three times a week. The last ferry, the Alligator, was larger, quicker, and ran more frequently.

1920's

Many families augmented their incomes by oystering. The Hudsons and Toomers operated oyster factories on Hilton Head from the 1890's until the 1950's. By this time the boll weevil had destroyed almost all of the Sea Island Cotton in the region.

1930

Landon K. Thorne and Alfred L. Loomis bought W. P. Clyde's and Roy Rainey's properties totaling nearly 20,000 acres for approximately \$6 an acre. They had already purchased the former Union Fort Walker from the United States Government in 1927. Alfred Mose Hudson served as the Woodsrider, or manager, of the property.

1940

The island's population was approximately 1100, most of whom were descendants from Freedmen who had made their homes on Hilton Head. A great storm hit the island leaving many people stranded and damaging many of the island's structures. Charlie Simmons' 55 foot long Edgar Hurst ferry was pushed across Broad Creek and onto dry land during this hurricane.

1941

Marines were stationed at Camp McDougal near the Leamington Lighthouse in present-day Palmetto Dunes. The lighthouse had been built in the 1870's and was known as the Hilton Head Lighthouse until the Palmetto Dunes development, Leamington, began. Marines paved the first road on the island which ran from the ferry landing at Jenkins Island (now Outdoor Resorts) to the lighthouse.

1948

On June 30, President Harry Truman signed a resolution creating "National Freedom Day" to be celebrated on February 1st. The day was intended to commemorate the signing of the 13th Amendment which ended slavery. In 1997, a group of Hilton Head Islanders revived National Freedom Day with a Gullah celebration at Simmons Fish Camp.

Mainland Connection and Modern Era 1949 - 1990's

Hilton Head Island's population grew exponentially during this period. Changes happened quickly on an island that had been isolated for many years. Learn more about this period by reading "Gullah Days: Hilton Head Island Before the Bridge".

1949

A group of lumber associates from Hinesville, Georgia bought a total of 20,000 acres of pine forest on Hilton Head's southern end for an average of nearly \$60 an acre. They formed the Hilton Head Company to handle the timber operation. The associates were General Joseph B. Fraser, Fred Hack, Olin T. McIntosh, and C.C. Stebbins.

1950-1952

Logging took place on 19,000 acres of the island. There were three lumber mills built to harvest the timber. The island population was only 300 residents.

1950

The first electricity was brought to the island by Palmetto Electric Cooperative. The poles were brought by barge to the island.

1953

A state-operated car ferry began running from Buckingham Landing (near today's bridge, on the mainland) to Jenkins Island (at Outdoor Resorts). The first ferry, the *Gay Times*, held only four cars. The second one, *Pocahontas*, held nine. The cost to ride was 10 cents as a pedestrian and \$1.25 for a car.

1954

Hilton Head Elementary School opened for the island's black students near the present-day intersection of Wildhorse Road and Highway 278. Prior to this period, students studied in small one or two room neighborhood schools that were scattered around the island. (White students studied in a one room schoolhouse near Honey Horn.) Isaac Wilborn was the principal of the Elementary school from 1954 until it closed in 1974. The site is now owned by the Town of Hilton Head Island. The school was replaced by a new integrated school constructed on a new site in 1975.

1955

Beaufort County State Representative Wilton Graves opened the Sea Crest Motel on Forest Beach. At first, it consisted of two rooms. It expanded to eight by 1960. The first vacation cottages were developed on Folly Field Road, which had been acquired from the Hilton Head Company.

1956

James F. Byrnes Bridge, a two-lane swing-bridge, was constructed at a cost of \$1.5 million. This opened the island to automobile traffic from the mainland, at a \$2.50 round-trip toll. Forty-eight thousand cars traveled across the bridge in 1956. The toll was discontinued in December 1959.

1956

Gen. J. B. Fraser withdrew from the Hilton Head Company. His son, Charles E. Fraser, bought his interest and began developing it into Sea Pines Plantation.

1956

Norris and Lois Richardson opened the first supermarket on the island. It was located near Coligny Circle in the North Forest Beach area. Before then, island residents depended upon small, neighborhood general stores to provide for their needs, or they traveled to Savannah.

1958

First deed to a lot in Sea Pines Plantation was signed. Beach front lots initially sold for \$5,350. By 1962 they were selling for \$9,600.

1958

The first year of telephone service was offered by Hargray Telephone Company. Their first Hilton Head office did not open until 1960.

1958

Palmetto Bay Marina opened. The William Hilton Inn opened with 56 rooms. It was torn down to build the Marriott Grand Ocean Resort on South Forest Beach Drive in the 1990s.

1959

Hurricane Gracie hit the island causing slight damage.

1959

Organized Mosquito spraying began.

1960

The island's first golf course, the Ocean Course designed by George Cobb, was built in Sea Pines Plantation.

1962

Port Royal Plantation was developed by Hilton Head Company, led by Fred Hack.

1964

Hilton Head's first condominiums were completed in Sea Pines plantation.

1964

The Bank of Beaufort began offering banking services on the island for a few hours each week. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM and Tuesday, Thursday, 9 AM - 9:15 AM)

1965

The Sea Pines Medical Center was built. It was staffed by a retired doctor who lived in Sea Pines, but served the entire island community.

1965

Hilton Head Island had its first Rural Mail route established with Phil Propst as the carrier. There were 415 deliveries on the island.

1967

Sea Pines Plantation installed the island's first gates. Port Royal, Shipyard, and future developments followed the trend.

1967

The Palmetto Dunes area was acquired from the Hilton Head Agricultural Company by the newly formed Palmetto Dunes Corporation headed by William T. Gregory for \$1,000 an acre.

1967

The Hilton Head Airport opened. The first plane to land belonged to golfer Arnold Palmer.

1968

Hudson's restaurant was opened by J. B. Hudson, Jr.

1969

Harbour Town village was completed. The full time population of the island was 2,500.

1969

The first Heritage Golf Classic played at Sea Pines' Harbour Town Links. BASF announced plans for a \$100 million chemical plant three miles from Hilton Head Island on Victoria Bluff, now the area is a 1,200 acre wildlife refuge and home to the Waddell Mariculture Center.

1970

A group of islanders effectively stopped the development of the BASF chemical plant on the mainland. The island's shrimping co-op, made up of native islanders, played a central role in halting the chemical plant's development. The co-op had over 125 members who operated 30 boats from its dock on Skull Creek (now Skull Creek Seafood). David Jones, head of the cooperative, took his shrimp boat up to Washington to deliver petitions against BASF's plant to Secretary of the Interior, Walter Hickel.

1970

Island Packet newspaper was first published.

1970

Deep Well Project began.

1972

First movie theater opened on Hilton Head Island, in Coligny Plaza. Walt Disney's Song of the South was the first movie shown.

1972

Chicago Bridge and Iron (CBI) announced plans to build off-shore drilling platforms on Victoria Bluff.

1973

Moss Creek, the first off-island planned development, began. Rose Hill, Callawassie, Belfair, Colleton River, and others followed in the next 20 years.

1974

The swing-bridge was struck by a barge which forced island residents to travel off the island using ferries and later a pontoon bridge was constructed by the Army. The bridge was opened and closed at various times to allow boat traffic to pass through.

1975

Island's full time population: 6500. Over 250,000 visitors came to Hilton Head.

1975

Hilton Head Hospital was completed.

1975

Pinckney Island's owners, Edward Starr and James Barker, donated their 5,000 acre island to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service for conservation.

1979

Hurricane David missed the island, but high winds left beaches eroded and destroyed several Singleton Beach homes.

1982

Four-lane bridge built to replace the two-lane swing-bridge to the island. Island's full time population: 12,500. More than 500,000 visitors came to Hilton Head in 1982.

1983

Town of Hilton Head Island incorporated as a municipality. The town agreed to provide planning services to Hilton Head Island. The first mayor, Ben Racusin, and Town Council were elected to two year terms.

1985

Hilton Head's Comprehensive Plan was adopted by Town Council. The population was over 17,000 full time residents.

1985

The Environmental and Historical Museum of Hilton Head Island founded (now known as Coastal Discovery Museum).

1989

Using some state funding, town officials implemented a beach nourishment plan to restore heavily eroded beaches by pumping sand from offshore (repeated in 1997).

1992

The Beach Preservation Fee (part of Hilton Head Island's 2% Accommodations Tax) was passed by the Town Council to provide funding for future beach renourishment.

1993

Del Webb Corporation began its 5,100 acre development of Sun City Hilton Head, a retirement community nine miles west of the island.

1994

Coastal Discovery Museum, formerly the Museum of Hilton Head and the Hilton Head Chamber of Commerce Welcome Center moved into a shared building along Jarvis Creek at the north end of the island.

1995

The permanent year-round population exceeded 28,000 people. The island had over 1.5 million visitors.

1995

Construction on the Cross-Island Parkway began.

1997

Crossings Park, near the Palmetto Bay Road entrance to the Cross Island Parkway, opened.

1997

First Gullah Celebration sponsored by the Native Island Business and Community Association.

1998

Cross Island Parkway opened in January. The total cost was \$81 million for construction, land acquisition and planning. Tolls were collected on this roadway until 2021.

New Century 2000-today

2007

Coastal Discovery Museum opens new facility at Honey Horn.

2010

[Hilton Head Demographics from 2010 Census.](#)

2016

Hurricane Matthew brushes by Hilton Head Island causing significant damage to structures from falling trees and flooding.

2020

[Hilton Head Island Population](#) and number of visitors continues to grow.

Global Coronavirus pandemic closes schools and businesses for a period of time. County and Town ordinances are created to help protect the health of locals and visitors.