

# Beaches Tidings

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Culture • History • Community



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## The Mother of Beaches History:

Celebrating the Life of Jean Haden McCormick

by Spring 2019 intern, Savannah Brychta

Without Jean H. McCormick's decades of hard work and determination, much of the history of the Beaches' area was in danger of being lost forever. Destined to fill a void many did not yet realize, Jean began her life as a proud and deeply involved member of the Beaches community.

Jean Haden was born on May 1, 1921, in Atlanta, Georgia. Her father, a credit manager by trade, was advised by his doctor to seek out the coastal Florida air as treatment for his perennial health issues. At only six-years-old, Jean moved with her family to Jacksonville Beach, Florida. After settling in, her father purchased an old Catholic orphanage on the beachfront and converted it into the Oceanic Hotel.

Growing up within the walls of the Oceanic, Jean had the formative experience of watching her parents work hard to build and maintain a community institution. Her father managed hotel operations until his death, when Jean was sixteen. After that, her mother took over, eventually passing the hotel over to Jean herself. It was there that she interacted with the many characters that passed through the Oceanic's doors, and it was there that she met J.T. McCormick.

In her early teens, the hotel was threatened by a violent tropical storm. Jean's father called upon



Jean McCormick on the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post*

B.B. McCormick & Sons to construct an emergency bulkhead to shield his establishment from the expected storm surge.

J.T. was one of those sons. The hotel survived and a romance was born. A few years later, J.T. and Jean began dating. Just before his death, Jean's father told her that as long as she finished high school first, he would happily give his blessing for the two to marry. In 1939, Jean graduated from Duncan U. Fletcher high school and became Mrs. J.T. McCormick. The couple moved to the undeveloped Penman Road and started their family.

While J.T. followed in his father's footsteps, expanding the community's infrastructure, Jean became a significant member of the Beaches' social structure. Her involvement in the community's affairs grew to the point that she was able to identify societal needs and worked to fill them. Her passion and tenacity resulted in the establishment of a Dental Clinic for underprivileged children, the foundation of the Azalea Garden Circle, and the creation of a study group for local women to meet and discuss current events and other intellectual topics.

Jean also served as a president of the Junior Women's Club of Jacksonville Beach.



The Hadens in front of the Oceanic Hotel (ca. 1929)



Phyllis Webb (left) and Jean McCormick (right) on the beach, photo by Virgil Deane (1948)

She served six years on the Jacksonville Episcopal High School Council and was vice president for two. She was president of the Women of Christ Church in Ponte Vedra Beach and president of the Friends of the Library at Jacksonville University. She served two three-year terms on the Jacksonville Historic Landmarks commission. She may not have realized it at the time, but working as a community leader in these organizations, Jean was building the skills and connections she later used to found a historical society. But it was that study group that planted the seed.

In 1976, in light of the nation's bicentennial, Jean and the rest of the country began reflecting more on their collective pasts. Jean used it as an opportunity to research and talk about the history of the Beaches area with her study group. The local library offered only a single book on Beaches history. She was instructed to go downtown to find more. Frustrated and motivated, Jean began to wonder why the Beaches were not the keepers of their own history. The Intracoastal Waterway (affectionately known as "the Ditch") has long been a border between the Beaches area and Greater Jacksonville.

As a result of this geographical divide, the communities on either side have evolved with some degree of separation, one that has birthed a distinct local identity at the Beaches. Jean began to wonder how one might go about preserving the story of that identity's evolution.

By 1978, she was in contact with her old friend J.B. Dobkins who worked for the Florida Historical Society in Tampa. Under his advice, and with the support of her close friend Virgil Deane, Jean began taking the temperature of local interest in the idea of forming a Beaches Historical Society. The response was overwhelming. McCormick later recalled that the project's momentum took on almost divine proportions. "The Lord meant this to be," Jean told the Sun-Times in 1981 when talking about how "doors had been opened" to her in the early stages of her efforts. By 1979, the Beaches Area Historical Society had embarked on their mission to "Plan a Future for Our Past." In 1981, they opened the Beaches Museum.

It takes a certain kind of person to pull together such a great achievement through sheer force of will. But looking over her life, it is easy to see how well-suited Jean McCormick was to the task.

Jean loved Beaches history because she had *lived* Beaches history. She managed the Oceanic Hotel where she later discovered German spies likely stayed there, disguised as vacationing artists who were only walking the coastline in search of information. The FBI later visited, investigating their suspicion that those long ocean-side walks were taken with the purpose of mapping the coast for a landing and attempted infiltration by Nazi saboteurs in Ponte Vedra during World War II.

Jean later oversaw the preservation of the wild invasion story with a historical marker in Ponte Vedra Beach. Jean was also part of the foundation of many local institutions. Jean was in the second graduating class at Fletcher High School.



J. T. & Mrs. McCormick Attending "Saturday in the Park" during Centennial Celebration (1984)

She was the first bride to walk down the aisle at Beach United Methodist Church. These experiences instilled in her the sense of community that inspired the formation of the Historical Society. She has described her passion as "sentimental," but it is precisely that ability to find meaning in things of the past that has saved Beaches history from being lost to the currents of time.

It would seem that she always had her keen sense for preservation and resourcefulness. When Jean and her husband moved from Jacksonville Beach to build a home in Ponte Vedra Beach, she salvaged timbers from her family's Oceanic Hotel to use for construction. When the Beaches Museum opened in 1981, everything was donated. When the locomotive was acquired, the transport and construction was all fundraised.

She had long possessed the qualities of a leader. As a hobby, Mrs. McCormick was fond of constructing miniatures of homes and buildings. She would build them to scale and curate them with a meticulous attention to detail and loyalty to authenticity.

Those same attributes were apparent in her leadership over the foundation and administration of the Beaches Area Historical Society.

In 2006, when the expanded Beaches Museum was completed, Jacksonville Beach Mayor Fland O. Sharp recognized Jean McCormick's contributions by proclaiming March 7, 2006 to be Jean Haden McCormick Day. Following her passing, the Beaches community hosted a number of events remembering the life and accomplishments of Jean McCormick for Women's History Month. The Mother of Beaches History—without her, our past would have been washed away by the waves.

In lieu of flowers, the McCormick family has requested that gifts may be made to the Jean McCormick Founders' Fund at the Beaches Museum. This fund will help to ensure the lasting legacy of Jean McCormick. To donate online, please the Beaches Museum website at [www.beachmuseum.org/donate](http://www.beachmuseum.org/donate)

## Jean H. McCormick FOUNDERS' FUND

**Thank you to those who generously contributed to the Jean H. McCormick Founders' Fund in memory of Jean H. McCormick:**

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HISTORY EXHIBIT

### **Sand, Soul, & Rock n' Roll: Music at the Beaches**

The Spring 2019 exhibit, *Sand, Soul, & Rock 'N Roll: Music at the Beaches*, opened at the Beaches Museum on March 8, 2019 with great stories, enthusiastic visitors, and, of course, fantastic music!

The exhibit celebrates the lively and diverse music scene of the Beaches community that grew throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and continues to thrive in the present day. Visitors are invited to take a look back at a few of the Beaches' most beloved music venues like the Jacksonville Beach Flag Pavilion (also known as the Jacksonville Beach Coliseum) and Einstein a Go-Go. Visitors discover the origins of some of the area's favorite musical traditions like the annual Springing the Blues festival. Historic photos, artifacts and memorabilia including commemorative t-shirts and posters depict a fascinating time of changes in lifestyle and entertainment over only a few generations.

The exhibit will be at the Beaches Museum until July 14, 2019.

### **SAVE THE DATE!**

**Tunes By The Dunes: Beaches Storytellers**  
**Saturday, June 1, 2019, 1:00 p.m.**

A panel of local music legends will share their stories and memories of the Beaches music scene through the years. The Museum also welcomes guests to share their own stories, photographs, and artifacts!



SPECIAL EVENT

### **Springing the Blooms presented by Rockaway, Inc.**

It was a wonderful morning in the park at the Museum's first annual Springing the Blooms festival held on Saturday, April 6. Children and adults, alike, enjoyed learning about all things bees, gardens, and Florida's natural landscapes. Participating organizations included: Honey Bee a Keeper, Duval County Master Gardeners, Jax Music Together, Bee Friends Farms, Atlantic Beach Urban Farms, Duval Audubon Society, Hanna Park, Jax Bees, Jacksonville Rose Society, The Playgarden, Montessori Tides, and Blossomy. Live children's music, delicious baked goods, face painting, and hands-on activities were the perfect complement. Thank you to event committee members Meghan Orman, Dory Wittmer, Nancy Ballas, Kathy Armbruster, Verne Shortell, and Brittany Cohill. Thank you to the sponsors for their generous support.



brilliant oceanfront entertainment



Kids used fabric markers to color their own tee-shirts



## Fletcher All-Class Block Party

Saturday, April 27, 2019 6:00 to 10:00 p.m.



The party of the year is right around the corner! Celebrate this year's theme "Homecoming at the Beaches" at the 2019 Fletcher All-Class Block Party! This event is open to Senators and Senator supporters and benefits the Beaches Museum.

Listen to live music by the **Paul Lundgren Band**, dance, grab some food from food trucks **Ka-boom Kabobs** and **Latin Soul Grille** and most of all, have FUN to celebrate our island's only high school!

**General Admission:** \$25 in advance, \$30 week of the event, \$35 at the gate.

**VIP:** \$45 in advance, \$50 week of the event, \$55 at the gate, includes 4 drink tickets and VIP bar access.

**Sponsor your Class Year:** \$150, includes 2 VIP tickets to the event, listing on our thank you board and a name badge

**Reserved Table:** \$300, includes General Admission 8 tickets to the event and a designated reserved table for your group.

Please visit the Museum, website [www.beachmuseum.org](http://www.beachmuseum.org) or call 904-241-5657 to purchase tickets.

Thank You to Our Sponsors:



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ART EXHIBIT

## Water. Life. Art.

The Beaches Museum will be hosting an Opening Night for the art exhibit *Water. Life. Art.* by artist Annelies Dykgraaf on Friday, July 19, 2019 at 6:00 p.m.

Dykgraaf's acrylic paintings and relief prints are inspired by the connections of the people, symbols, textile patterns, and mythological motifs of her birth land of Nigeria, West Africa and her homeland of Jacksonville, Florida.

Although on different continents, both Nigeria and Florida share coastlines of the Atlantic Ocean. In Nigeria, the Niger River allows fertile life to thrive just as the St. Johns River nurtures life in Florida. Along both bodies of water, people derive their culture.

Annelies Dykgraaf holds a Bachelors in Fine Arts from Calvin College and studied in France through the Cleveland Institute of Art. She is a leader of the visual arts and philanthropy community as a founding member of Jacksonville Consortium of African American Artists (now recognized as the Jacksonville Cultural Development Corporation) and The Art Center Cooperative, Inc.

The *Water. Life. Art.* Exhibit Opening Night is free to Museum members with a suggested \$5 donation from non-members. The exhibit will be on display July 19 to November 11, 2019.

## Volunteer Corner

The Beaches Museum Volunteer Field Trip Program is in full swing in 2019. In the first quarter, volunteers enjoyed a tour of the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta – Jacksonville Branch located off Water Street in downtown Jacksonville. Volunteers were treated to a presentation detailing the history of national banking in the United States followed by a behind-the-scenes tour of the Reserve's money processing operation. Rounding out the afternoon was a stop at River & Post for lunch. The Volunteer Field Trip Program is just one of the many perks of being a Beaches Museum Volunteer. If you would like more information regarding the volunteer program, please contact Museum Associate Director Brittany Co-hill at [info@beachesmuseum.org](mailto:info@beachesmuseum.org).



## News from Archives and Collections

The historical collection of the Beaches Museum is constantly growing with new artifacts, information, and photographs to preserve our area's unique and exciting history!

The museum would like to thank Mr. George H. McLatchey and PVPV/Rawlings Elementary School for the donation of photographs, programs, and other documents pertaining to the school's history to celebrate its sixtieth year anniversary. We would also like to thank Jacksonville City Councilman Bill Gulliford for his donation of a t-shirt commemorating an early 1990s effort to designate the Beaches communities as Ocean County.

Thank you to those who continue to contribute to our collection of the rich history of the Beaches communities.

## Recovering Manhattan Beach: Florida's First African American Beach Resort in the Segregated South

Uncovering the history of Manhattan Beach - Florida's first African American beach resort in the segregated South - has been a labor of love for Beaches Museum Associate Director, Brittany Cohill. Manhattan Beach, located at present-day Hanna Park, was founded by Henry Flagler around 1900 as a place for black employees of his Florida East Coast companies to spend their leisure time, including those building his Continental Hotel. In keeping with national, regional, and local Jim Crow laws the Beaches area was segregated. Until the late 1930s, Manhattan Beach was the only beach in the Jacksonville-area open to African Americans. However, with no visual evidence of the site remaining today and little archival material, uncovering this history relies heavily on the contributions of members of the community with direct ties to its past.



Dr. Yvonne Hicks shares family history and photos with the Beaches Museum

Cohill's research began as she was pursuing her master's degree in history at the University of North Florida. She transformed her student project into a public presentation which she debuted as part of the Museum's Boardwalk Talk series

in August 2017. Since then, Cohill has continued her research under the auspices of the Museum and her presentation has evolved in step.

Over the course of two and a half years, she has delivered her presentation nearly a dozen times. Each time, someone from the community comes forward with another piece of the puzzle.

Most recently, Cohill had the pleasure of sitting down with Kenneth LeSesne and Dr. Yvonne Hicks. Mr. LeSesne's grandfather, Mack Wilson, was a prominent business owner in Manhattan Beach. Dr. Hicks' great-grandmother was Mack Wilson's sister.

They chronicled their family's story including the journey out of plantation slavery in the Florida panhandle to becoming property and business owners in Jacksonville and Manhattan Beach.

Their oral histories - now recorded and housed in the Beaches Museum archive - are truly invaluable. Just as invaluable are the photographs Dr. Hicks provided of her family spending time at Manhattan Beach in the 1930s - all of which can be viewed in the Museum's newest pop-up exhibit.

The exhibit, "Recovering Manhattan Beach: Florida's First African American Beach Resort in the Segregated South," will be on display at the Rhoda L. Martin Cultural Heritage Center throughout the month of June. In conjunction with the exhibit installation, Cohill will deliver the newest iteration of her presentation on June 4, 2019 at 6:00 p.m.



Reproductions of "The Green Book" accompany the traveling exhibit

## Boardwalk Talks

### Michael Ray FitzGerald - "Jacksonville and the Roots of Southern Rock"

Thursday, April 25

Fitzgerald, music and media historian, recently authored "Swamp Music", an encyclopedic catalog of famous musicians from North Florida. His talk will delve in to Jacksonville's rich musical heritage and the roots of southern rock.



### Dorothy Fletcher—"Jacksonville on Wheels"

Thursday, May 16

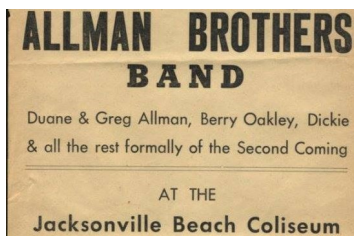
Fletcher will be presenting her book "Jacksonville on Wheels", a comprehensive look at how the automobile impacted the Jacksonville area. Along the way of technological innovations, Jacksonville participated in the latest trends and models that the auto industry had to offer including the first roads, first bridges, first dealerships, and speed records.



### Bob Beatty- "The Allman Brothers Band and American Music"

Wednesday, June 26

Fifty years ago in Jacksonville's Riverside neighborhood, a group of six southern musicians gathered to play together for the first time. The result combined multiple genres of southern music—blues, rhythm and blues/soul, gospel, rock 'n' roll, country and western, and jazz—into a singular, cohesive sound. In doing so, the Allman Brothers Band created a new form of American music.



**Boardwalk Talks begin at 6:00 p.m. in the Beaches Museum Chapel. The events are free to Beaches Museum members with a suggested \$5 donation for non-members.**

## Chapel Concert Series

### J.P. Soars and the Gypsy Blues Review

Monday, May 6



An amazing spring concert season wraps up with J.P. Soars and the Gypsy Blues Review. J.P. Soars' new album "Southbound I-95" draws on inspiration from living in South Florida saying that he wanted "the vibe of living here in Florida shine through a bit." According to Fred Delforge from Zicazine Magazine France "He is without a doubt one of the most original guitarists of his generation."

**Individual Advanced Tickets: \$25**

**Individual Day-of Tickets: \$30**

Chapel Concerts are held in the Beaches Museum Chapel. Shows start at 7:00 pm, check in begins and refreshments are served at 6:00 p.m. Seats are first come, first serve. For more information, visit our website or call 904-241-5657.



Mama Blue performed a sold out event including a powerful performance of 'We Shall Overcome' for the 2019 Springing the Blues Festival opening concert

# Beach LEGENDS

Save the Date! The 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Beach Legends gala will be on **Friday, September 20, 2019.**



## Beaches Legacy Circle

A planned gift to the Beaches Museum will further education, preservation and cultural programs in the future. Ways to leave a future gift to the Beaches Museum include:

**Bequests** – Bequeath a monetary sum, securities, or a percentage of your estate in your will or trust.

**Gifts of Retirement Funds** – Name the Beaches Museum as the beneficiary of your retirement plan assets.

**Create a charitable trust** – Funded with cash or appreciated property or stock. This option can provide annual income for yourself and/or other beneficiaries.

**Life Insurance** – Gift your fully paid life insurance policy, or make the Beaches Museum the beneficiary of an existing policy.

Remembering the Museum through a planned gift can also be earmarked to a specific fund or program. Whether you would like your gift to support the Museum's endowment, preservation efforts or education programs, you can be assured that your gift will go far to invest in the mission of the Beaches Museum.

## Did You Know?

One of the benefits of becoming a member at the Beaches Museum is reciprocal admission to selected museums at discounted rates! Through participation in North American Reciprocal Museum Association and Southeastern Museums Conference Reciprocal Membership programs, Beaches Museum members can visit sites throughout the country. Local NARM sites include The Cultural Center at Ponte Vedra Beach, the Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens, the Lightner Museum, and MOCA Jacksonville. One of the Local SERM sites is the Mandarin Museum & Historical Society. To join as a new Beaches Museum member or renew a membership starting at \$50, visit our membership website or call (904) 241-5657.

*Jean H. McCormick*  
**FOUNDERS' FUND**

Thank you to the families and individuals who have generously contributed to the Beaches Museum to sustain our future of preserving the beaches' history! These endowments are the core for our future growth:

**The Helen Murchison and Edward Wood Lane, Jr.  
Endowment  
in Memory of Helen and Charles H. Murchison**

**Maxwell & Edna Dickinson Operations Endowment**

**The Vic & Mary LeNoble Endowment for  
Preservation of the  
Oesterreicher-McCormick Homestead**

In addition, the Jean H. McCormick Founders' Fund honors those individuals who had the foresight to begin preserving the history of the beaches area decades ago and ensures that the Museum's mission "to preserve and share the distinct history and culture of the Beaches area" will be supported in perpetuity.

**Many thanks and appreciation to our most recent contributors.**

Mr. & Mrs. Robert Kastner  
Mr. & Mrs. Chris Hionedes  
Mr. & Mrs. Richard Keene  
904 Boss Babes

## San Pablo Society

Thank you to all of our members, donors, and supporters. We would like to recognize those who have gone above and beyond by joining our San Pablo Society. This list represents a very dedicated group of supporters who not only give financially, but are also very involved in the events and activities of the Museum. THANK YOU for your generous donations of time, talent, and treasure!

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Mr. Bob Davis  
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Mr. & Mrs. John C. Schmidt  
Mr. & Mrs. Jerry Miller

### Mapmaker

Baptist Medical Center Beaches  
Mr. & Mrs. Robert F. Taylor  
Ms. Jean H. McCormick  
Mr. & Mrs. Robert Taylor  
Mr. & Mrs. Robert Kastner  
Mr. & Mrs. Joe Hixon

### Adventurer

Ms. Lila Elliott

### Explorer

Mrs. Dana Voiselle  
Dr. John G. Bordelon & Mr. Gerry Williamson  
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## Museum Hours of Operation

10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday  
Noon to 4:00 p.m. Sunday

381 Beach Boulevard

Jacksonville Beach, Florida 32250

# EVENT CALENDAR

- |                 |   |                     |   |
|-----------------|---|---------------------|---|
| <b>April 25</b> | Boardwalk Talk: Jacksonville and the Roots of Southern Rock           | <b>June 26</b>      | Boardwalk Talk: The Allman Brothers Band and American Music |
| <b>April 27</b> | Fletcher All-Class Block Party  | <b>July 19</b>      | Exhibit Opening: Annelies Dykgraaf                          |
| <b>May 6</b>    | Chapel Concert: J.P. Soars and the Gypsy Blues Review                 | <b>August 24</b>    | Gallery Tour: Annelies Dykgraaf                             |
| <b>May 16</b>   | Boardwalk Talk: Jacksonville on Wheels                                | <b>September 7</b>  | Riding the Rails: Pablo Beach Train Day                     |
| <b>June 1</b>   | Tunes By the Dunes: Beaches Storytellers                              | <b>September 20</b> | Beach Legends Gala  |
| <b>June 4</b>   | Manhattan Beach presentation at Rhoda Martin Cultural Heritage Center |                     |   |

For more information, please visit [beachmuseum.org](http://beachmuseum.org) or call 904-241-5657.

