



The “Club” at the End of the Causeway

The April 1, 1939 Mail-Away edition of the *Brunswick Pilot* newspaper featured an article about a building that most of us have driven by, but very few have visited – the original Mediterranean-style visitors center located at the entrance to the F. J. Torras Causeway.

In the mid-1930s, the local Board of Trade sought to capture the attention of motorists on the Coastal Highway (U.S. 17) by erecting a “Visitors Club” at the entrance to St. Simons Island. The Club was one of the first of its kind, not only encouraging motorists to stop to visit the Golden Isles but also inspiring other communities across the South to emulate the example.

Local architect Francis Abreu was chosen to design an appropriate structure for the Club. Of Cuban descent,

Abreu was born in New York state and graduated with a degree in architecture from Cornell University. After Abreu developed a successful practice in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, Alfred W. Jones, Sr. encouraged him to move to Glynn County. He became architect for the Sea Island Company and designed additions to The Cloister, as well as new buildings for the resort. Well known for his work in the Mediterranean style, he designed a number of fashionable cottages on Sea Island, including Casa Genotta, the home of playwright Eugene O’Neill. Abreu also served as an architect for Glynn County and his projects included the present day St. Simons Island Casino.

In addition to being the headquarters of the Chamber of Commerce, the Visitors Club contained “valuable files of information concerning the community” and “exhibits of material produced both by modern industry and archeological

research in and around Brunswick.” The grounds surrounding the building provided an opportunity to showcase “beautiful specimens of plant life of this immediate area.” Preceding the Coastal Georgia Historical Society’s own Museum of Coastal History (the present-day St. Simons Lighthouse Museum) by over 30 years, the Visitors Club may have been Glynn County’s first history museum.

As the Causeway expanded to allow more traffic onto St. Simons, both tourist and residential, the visitors center was relocated and traffic lanes now surround the original structure.

This month’s image, from the April 1, 1939 *Brunswick Pilot* Mail-Away edition, shows the Visitors Club shortly after it opened. A copy of this newspaper is preserved in the Coastal Georgia Historical Society archives.

Our monthly images on this page are from the vast archives of the Coastal Georgia Historical Society. The Society’s mission includes the “administration, restoration and maintenance of historic facilities and resources ... preserved as a living part of the historical and cultural foundations of our coastal community.” Society facilities include the St. Simons Lighthouse and Museum, the A.W. Jones Heritage Center, and the Maritime Center (formerly the U.S. Coast Guard Station). To learn more about the Society, its diverse programs, and the benefits of Society membership, please call (912) 638.4666, or visit www.saintsimonslighthouse.org.