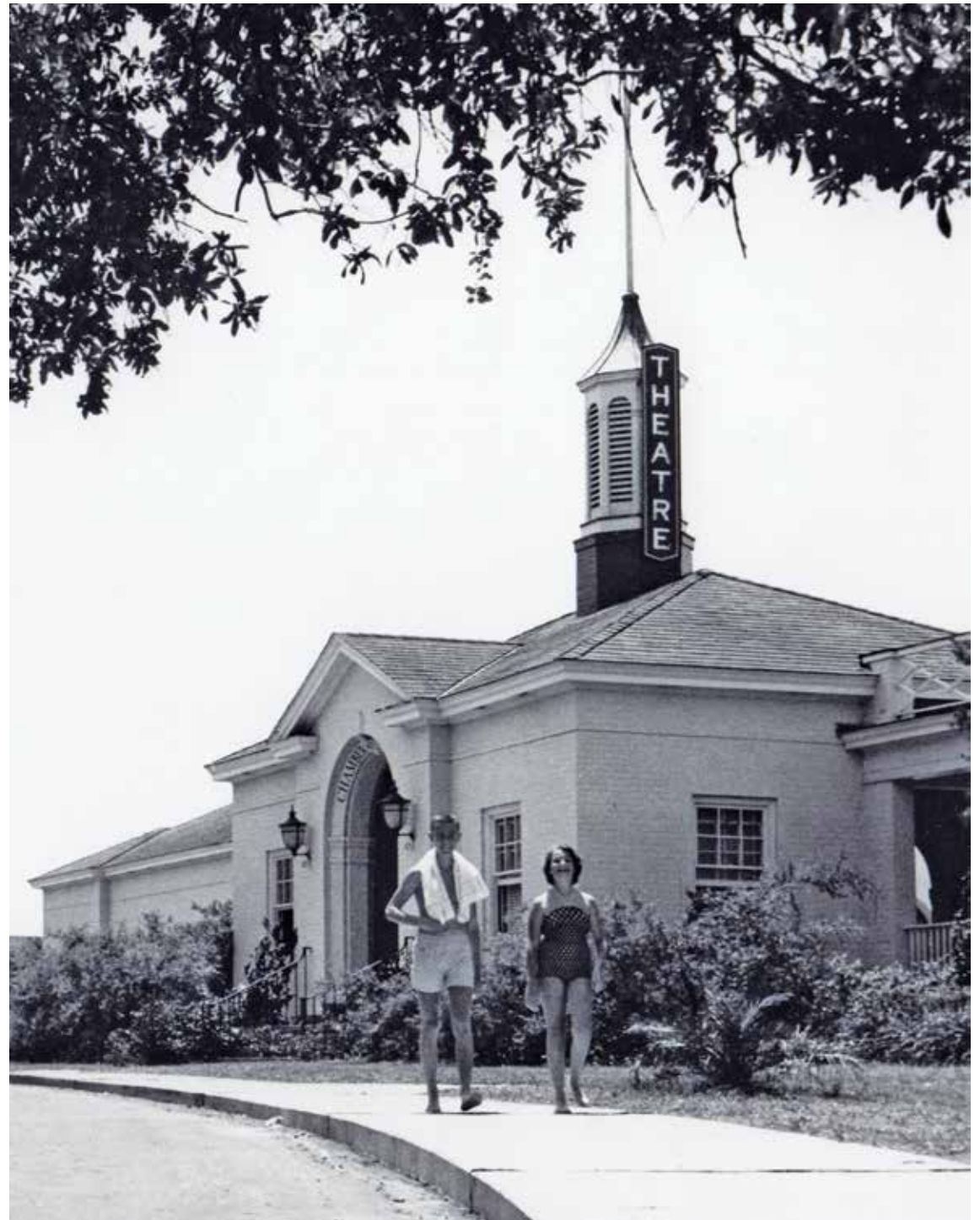


## A Casino for All Ages

Summertime has always brought residents and visitors to the Pier Village area on St. Simons Island. Since 1928, a community center known as the Casino has provided a venue for social activities, such as dancing and bowling. In the early 20th century, casinos were sometimes built for general recreation rather than gambling.

The island's first casino, a wooden pavilion built out over the water, burned to the ground in 1935. Within two years, it was replaced by the brick building we see today, using \$30,000 in insurance proceeds and additional funding from President Franklin Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration (WPA) program.

In Stephen Doster's book *Voices from St. Simons*, island native Sonja Olsen Kinard recalls the summertime attractions of the Casino, "We didn't have air conditioning. In the summer, we'd go down to the old Casino by the pier to play, visit, and stay cool. On one side was the bowling alley with a soda fountain and a jukebox. ... On the other side was the movie theater. In the middle was a sunken area ... that area had a good floor for dancing. People danced and danced until the Casino closed for the evening. During the war [World War II], the soldiers thoroughly enjoyed dancing with the young



girls. The jitterbug was the popular dance then."

From its earliest days, the Casino housed a public library, sponsored by Cassina Garden Club, which by the end of the war provided

over 3,000 books for summertime reading. The library expanded into the vacated bowling alley space in 1950. The movie theater became the home of the Island Players in 1963, when they moved from a playhouse at the St. Simons Airport.

This month's image from the Coastal Georgia Historical Society archives shows the entrance to the Casino and dates from around 1960. Originally, the building was painted white and stood as a horizontal companion to the St. Simons Lighthouse.