

# Launching a Local Tradition: The Sunshine Festival

The first Sunshine Festival on St. Simons Island was held in 1955, and was sponsored by the St. Simons Jaycees as a fundraising event. Unlike recent years, the Festival took place in June rather than over the 4th of July holiday. There was no fireworks display, but the organizers packed three days with activities full of music, dancing, contests, a raffle, military displays, and even a visit by Miss America!

Thursday and Friday of the first festival featured a Little League game, sailboat races, and water skiing in the Frederica River. Several events planned for Saturday were cancelled due to rain and high winds, including the demonstration of a helium-inflated balloon used by the Navy at Glymco for airship training. But the Festival went on, with the Hunter Air Force Base band filling in by supplying music for an impromptu jitterbug contest. Later in the day, a band from Camp (now Fort) Stewart presented a concert on the Casino lawn.

Perhaps most interesting to the modern audience was the enforcement of a "skinclad" order during daylight hours. According to the *Brunswick News*, this required that "only persons wearing shorts

or bathing attire will be allowed in the pier section of the island." Members of the Jaycees and local high school club, Pirates of the Spanish Main, were assigned to patrol the Pier Village and levy a fine on anyone not complying with the order. Proceeds from these "arrests," as well as other fundraising activities like carnival games, were to be used for civic improvements.

The culmination of the Festival was a street dance featuring a twelve-piece string band from Waycross, the Palmetto Band. At 10:30 p.m., Miss America 1955, Lee Meriwether from California, pulled the winning raffle ticket in a random drawing for a free boat, motor, and trailer.

This month's image shows Lee Meriwether with (left to right) St. Simons Jaycees Jack Jenkins, Lamar Davis, and Joe Bradford. Also shown is the Army band from Camp Stewart. These photographs are preserved in a Jaycees scrapbook generously donated to the Society by Bill Strother.

