



Newsletter

February, 2012

2702 Mechanics Ave.
Thunderbolt, Ga. 31404

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The Thunderbolt Time Capsule

Thunderbolt's Thriving Casino

By Linda and Rich Wittish

For much of the 19th century and during the early 20th century, Thunderbolt was a riverside resort.

"By 1898, Thunderbolt boasted many of the area's most exciting attractions" writes Luciana M. Spracher in her book, "A History of Thunderbolt, Georgia," which was published in 2003 by the Thunderbolt Museum Society.

One of the most significant of those attractions was the Casino, which offered a variety of entertainment for residents and visitors.

The following is an excerpt from Spracher's book that provides a detailed look at that amusement center on the bluff.

"The Casino at Thunderbolt was built in 1895 by the Savannah Electric Company to increase patronage on their streetcar lines to Thunderbolt. The tracks ran right up to the Casino, a large three-story frame building with expansive porches supported by white wood columns on all sides. The porches and balconies provided shade in the summer and views in all directions, of the river, marshes and amusement park. There were two large pavilions on the north and south ends of the Casino. Broad staircases led to the main entrance, facing the bluff.

"A pamphlet advertising the Casino could not have made it sound more enticing:"

"To him who is on pleasure bent, the Casino and Park at Thunderbolt offer everything to be wished for. The Casino building is large, well constructed and convenient, with spacious airy piazzas, a roomy and well ventilated auditorium, lighted by electricity, and cooled by electric fans, with a fine dancing floor, handsome stage and furnishings and the best orchestra in the county. Here is presented in the amusement season, vaudeville, comedy, minstrels, and comic opera. Dancing and moving pictures are furnished free for the pleasure of those who visit the resort."

"The Casino was one of the first establishments in the Savannah area to show movies. Ernest F. Schmitt, a long-time employee of the Savannah Electric Company, ran the projector.

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The Casino, Thunderbolt, Savannah, Ga.

**Thunderbolt Museum Society
Board of Directors**

Chairman	John H. McKenna Jr.
Vice Chairman	John Harris
Secretary	Sherry Dwyer Beasley
Treasurer	Janelle Gober
Accessions	Jeanie Zadach
Fundraising	Maury Gallaher
Programs/Hosting	Donna Moody
Volunteers	Billy Ann Sullivan
Volunteers	Luree Bonner
Town Council Liaison	Beth Goette
Ex-Officio Member	Patty Dwyer McKenna

A Note to Members

By John Harris

Vice Chairman, Board of Directors

When Mildred Teeple Hill called me one night back in 2005 -- I think it was, it might have been earlier -- and asked me if I could help out with a computer program the museum was using to track donations, I was at a loss for words. What museum, I asked. She said the Thunderbolt Museum, of course! Then I told her I had not heard of a museum in Thunderbolt.

She then told me how she and Patty McKenna had gotten permission to use the old City Hall at the corner of Mechanics Avenue and Victory Drive. She told me of her and Patty's dream to have a place where they could show the world Thunderbolt's rich history. She asked me to come by the museum and check it out. I made an appointment to see the museum the following week.

I kept thinking about this museum and could find no reason for it. I had left Thunderbolt in February 1961 to join the U.S. Air Force. Married in 1965, I got out of the Air Force in November 1965. We bought a house on the south side of Savannah and pretty much had nothing to do with Thunderbolt until Mildred's call.

Museum Hours:

Wednesday and Thursday: 9:00 am-4:00pm

Saturday: 1:00pm- 5:00pm

912-351-0836

Email: Thunder50@comcast.net

When I went to the museum, Mildred walked me through the building. I was amazed at the artifacts and tools used in the building and repair of shrimp boats. There were donations of clothing and pictures of people that I had vague memories of. I was impressed with the old pictures of the Thunderbolt riverfront that I remembered.

It was neat, but I still could not see a reason for a museum; that is until I read the book I purchased that day: Luciana M. Spracher's "A History of Thunderbolt." After I read the book, I understood the reason for a museum. Then I was hooked; I had to help out any way I could.

There were many things in the book that brought back memories of growing up in Thunderbolt -- fishing off the docks and swimming across the river at low tide to play on the mud flat. I have fond memories of growing up on Bonaventure Road and playing hide-and-seek in the cemetery.

I think the primary reason for the museum is to preserve the memory of the wonderful people who made this town what it is -- a community that worked together to build upon the resources that the sea gives us.

Mildred and Patty were right in trying to preserve the rich history of our little fishing village. I have gained a great deal of respect for these two ladies and also for the Board of Directors that continues to work together to preserve the history of Thunderbolt so that future generations will not forget the hard work that the shrimping families did to establish the industry.

Enjoy tasty treats from the sea

at the

Annual Mildred Teeple Hill

Shrimp Boil

Saturday, March 10

11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Tickets: \$10

Dinners can be picked up at Teeple's
or in the Thunderbolt Museum parking lot.

Thriving Casino

Continued from page 1

The description cited emphasizes that the Casino was built not only to increase business on the streetcar lines but to promote the popularity of electricity, with movies, lights, and fans all running on electricity.

"The grounds around the Casino were as exciting as the actual Casino facility. Built on parts of the Confederate battery, the site boasted two bandstands for concerts and dancing. One bandstand extended over the bluff onto a pier jutting over the Wilmington River. The second bandstand was a circular gazebo in the center of a large round duck pond west of the Casino. As at the Savannah Yacht Club, wood and cast iron benches lined the bluff overlooking the river.

"The Casino grounds included an amusement park that further promoted the interests of the electric company with electrical rides and games including a merry-go-ride and miniature roller coaster. Additional entertainments included a 30-acre zoo and a beer garden. In one post card image of the Casino, tightrope walkers are performing on a rope set up over the duck pond at almost twice the height of the Casino building.

"Once again the electric company's advertising pamphlet describes the resort and wonders that were once at Thunderbolt: 'The grounds are large, beautifully laid out and well kept. On Sunday afternoons and evenings there are concerts by orchestra or band. The shady piazzas of the Casino are always well crowded on Sunday afternoons with people who go out to enjoy the cooling breezes and charming scenery, and the view of the river, with numerous craft of all kinds passing up and down, is a very pretty sight. The complete and extensive amusement park of the Electric Park Amusement Co. is provided with everything usually found at a first-class resort, the list including: a Tobagan (sic) Slide, Mystic Maze, Carousal, Circle Swing, Miniature Railway, Shooting Gallery, Box Ball Alley, Etc. . .'

"The Casino enjoyed immense popularity during the late 19th century and early 20th century. As automobiles became wide spread, use of the streetcar lines decreased and Savannahians began to travel outside of the immediate area for vacations. By the 1920s the Casino had become run down and neglected.



Casino at Thunderbolt, near Savannah, Ga.

"In 1930, Michael M. May bought the Casino after it had already changed hands several times. May renovated the property, hoping to revitalize it as a resort destination for dining, dancing and golf under the new name of 'May Linx.' The renovation cost \$60,000 and included adding an 18-hole miniature golf course, and archery gallery, and other sports. The golf course was designed by Arthur F. Comer, of Savannah, and was constructed by D.H. Wall, a Savannah landscape architect. The course utilized some of the old earthwork mounds from the Confederate battery as hazards and 'a Confederate cannon' was placed on one of the novelty holes, with the object to get the golf ball into the mouth of the cannon.

"On Nov. 2, 1930, only two months after reopening, the Casino was destroyed by fire. The fire started in the basement and spread quickly in the heart pine building. The fire gutted the inside and an explosion in the basement caused flaming embers to fly through the night. All that was left when the fire was put out were the foundation pillars."

Celebrate Thunderbolt's rich history

By buying a copy of

Luciana M. Spracher's book,

"A History of Thunderbolt, Georgia"

During the month of March for the special price of \$ 10.00.



Thunderbolt Museum Society, Inc.

2702 Mechanics Ave.

Thunderbolt, Ga. 31404

Board Actions:

The Thunderbolt Museum Society's board of directors in January made plans for a spring fundraiser and discussed new ways to utilize two books produced by the Society. The fundraising event, the annual Mildred Teeple Hill shrimp boil, will be held March 10 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tickets will be \$10. Dinners may be picked up at Teeple's or in the museum parking lot.

During their monthly meeting on Jan. 17, board members approved a motion to sell the Society's 162-page, soft-cover book, "A History of Thunderbolt, Georgia" at a reduced price. The book -- written by local historian Luciana M. Spracher and published in 2003 -- will be sold during the month of March for \$10.

The board also decided to ask a group of members of the Society to assemble a package of inserts for the Society's cookbook, "A Taste of Thunderbolt, Georgia." The inserts would consist of recipes for dishes that were not included in the original book. In other business, the board discussed possible locations where museum materials could be stored and voted to increase the hours and pay of museum director Julia Neidlinger. Under a new arrangement, she will work a total of four more hours -- two on Wednesdays and two on Thursdays.

The January meeting came on the heels of a busy year for the board, the museum and its supporters.

During 2011:

* A plaque honoring the late Mildred Teeple Hill, one of the founders of the Museum Society, was created, then dedicated during a reception at the museum in mid-November.

* Two fundraisers -- a shrimp boil in late March and a spaghetti dinner in early October -- were held, with the spaghetti dinner serving about 240 people and netting almost \$1,650.

* Donna Moody of Hudson Plumbing was added to fill the vacant seat on the museum's board.

* Mike Teeple, Peyton Grimm and Captain James "Bud" Pierce of the Thunderbolt Police Dept. refurbished the flagpole in front of the museum. The Town Thunderbolt purchased the necessary hardware as well as the American Flag. A Thunderbolt flag will be added later.

* A new hot water heater was installed at the museum.

* A new membership and Christmas covered dish party was held in mid-December.

Support our Gift Shop

Items in our gift shop make unique and interesting gifts.

T-shirts: \$14 Members

"A History of Thunderbolt, Georgia" March price: \$10

"A Taste of Thunderbolt" cookbook: \$10 for Members

Thunderbolt Decals: \$4 for Members

Did you know the museum sells used books? An excellent selection of hardbacks are available for \$1 each; paperbacks are .50 each. We are always looking for donated books to add to the collec-