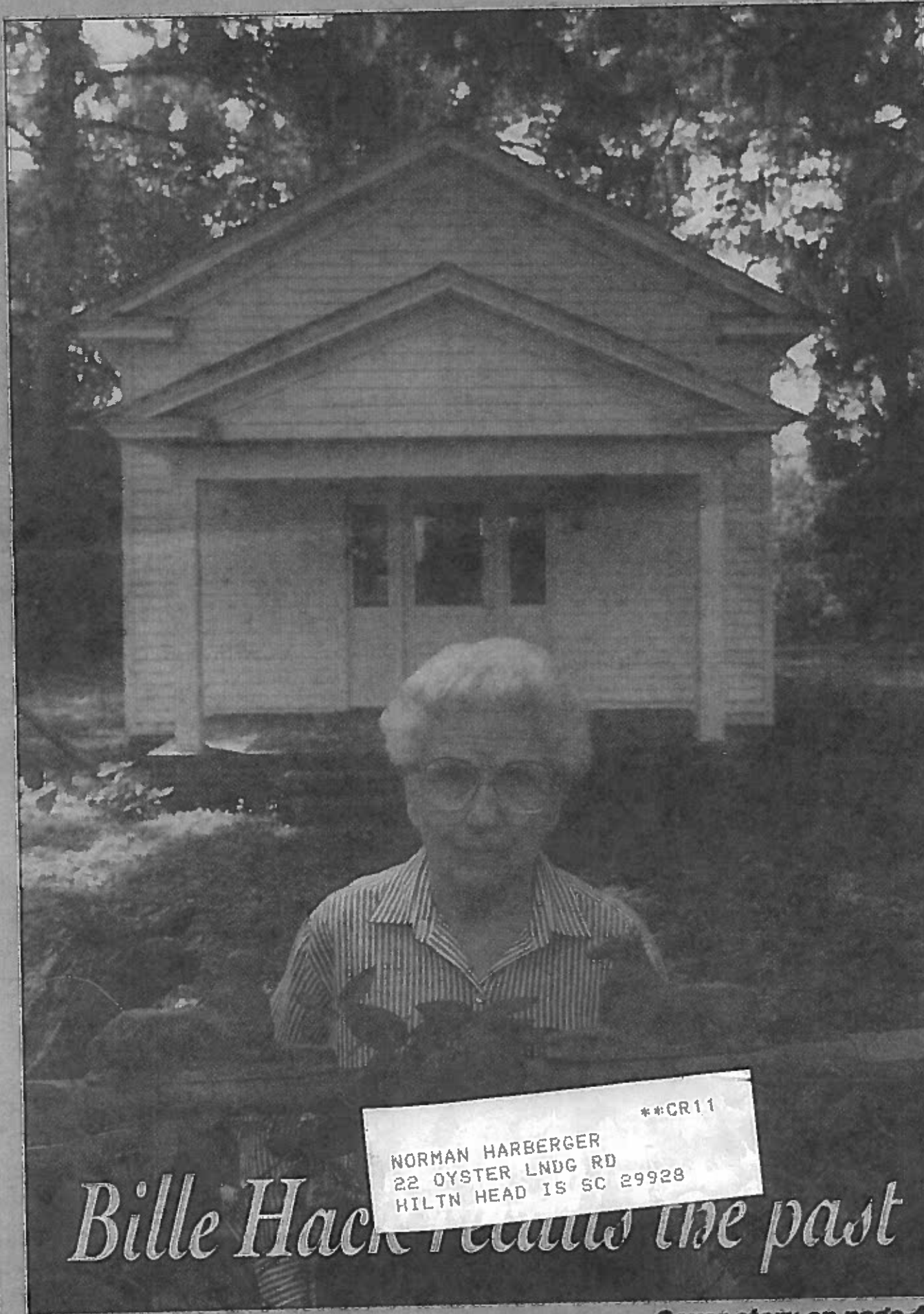


The GOOD LIFE

SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 1994



Bille Hack recalls the past

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Billie Hack recalls the early days

BY NANCY GEBHARDT

"When we came here in 1950 Hilton Head Island was such a peaceful place," said Billie Hack in a voice as soft as a sea island breeze. She remembers the care-free days when her family first explored the island, finding forests where the only sound was one's own footfall, and smooth beaches that stretched as far as the eye could see. "People on the island helped each other. Everything was open and you felt safe," she said.

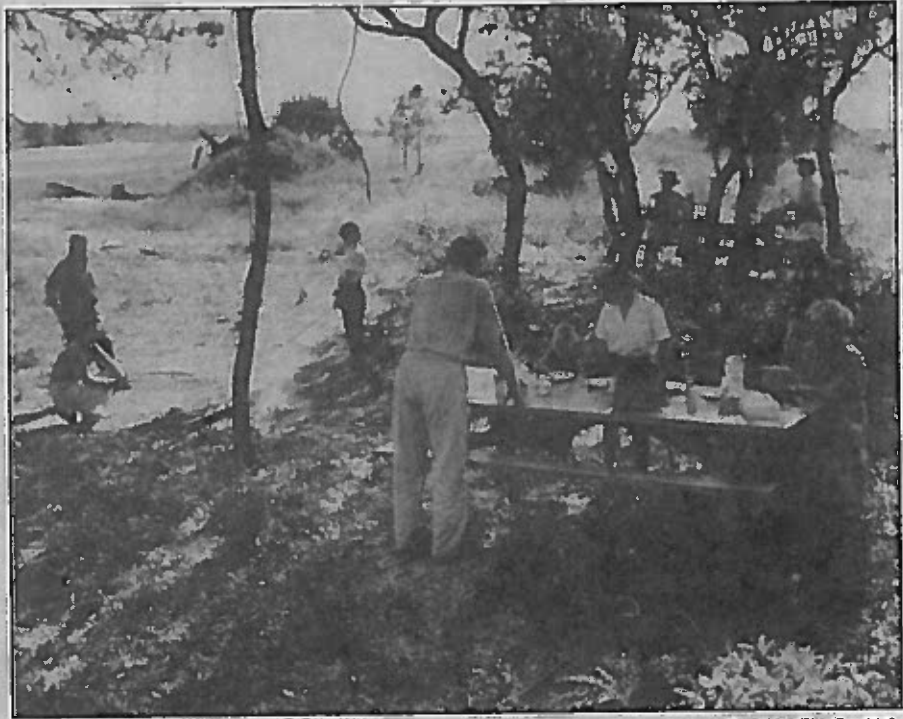
"My husband, Fred, had a .22 rifle. He used it to shoot snakes mostly, and he painted the rifle stock white. We used to leave our car on Jenkins Island when we went across the river, because we had another car at Buckingham, on the other side. We would leave that rifle in the car, in plain sight, and no one ever bothered it."

It is easy to imagine how gracefully this compact, white-haired lady handled everything during the pioneering days on Hilton Head. She is neatly dressed in blue denim slacks and a red checkered shirt. As she speaks in her distinctive drawl, she looks straight at you with her remarkably direct blue eyes.

"My grandfather built the bridges for the Seaboard Railroad during Florida's boom years," she recalled. In 1914 Billie was born in her grandfather's house on the Manatee River, not far from present-day Bradenton. She was given a family name, Will, and her mother called her Billie to avoid the nickname Willie.

When she was still a child, Billie's father, Charles C. Stebbins, moved his family to Rinora, Ga., near Savannah. Stebbins was a banker and businessman, dealing in real estate investment. "We moved a lot," Billie recalled. "Some years, I would begin school in Brevard, N.C., where the family spent summers; then we moved on to Savannah until the hurricane season was over, and I would finish the school year in Florida. We lived in Fort Lauderdale when it was just a small place. I remember Seminole Indians passing by our door on their way to town."

Because of the Depression, Billie had to postpone college for a year after she graduated from high school. In 1933, she entered the University of Georgia in the first class that accepted women.



Billie Hack (in white shirt at table) hosts a picnic in 1954 at the end of Pope Avenue, where the Holiday Inn now stands.

She earned a teaching certificate and taught elementary school for several years before returning to Georgia State College for Women to complete her bachelor of arts degree. "I had plans to study in France for a year, but World War II came along and scotched that," she said ruefully.

During the early war years Billie taught school in Hinesville, Ga., near bustling Fort Stewart. "I taught Charles Fraser in the seventh grade," she said. "I stayed with his Aunt Olive Fraser." She explained that, as part of the war effort, the townspeople opened their homes to accommodate the extra work force. "I took my meals at Mother Hack's," Billie added. Naturally, she began seeing a lot of Fred Hack.

"Through our family connections," Billie said, "it seemed as if

I had known Fred forever. Our grandmothers were friends, so he was always part of my life." During wartime Fred was working for the U.S. Soil Conservation Service, on loan to the Army Air Corps. "He also helped me with math problems when I got drafted to teach high school mathematics, which I hated!" said Billie.

In 1941, Fred and Billie were engaged, and in 1942 they were married. Fred was immediately assigned to mapping projects in Virginia, Minnesota and Colorado before the young couple settled back in Hinesville. Then, as the war ended, Fred went into the sawmill and timber business.

Fred was cutting timber on Creighton Island off the coast of Georgia when he was told that the south end of Hilton Head

(See HACK, page 10)

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The Good Life

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On the cover: Billie Hack, who moved with her husband, Fred, to Honey Horn Plantation in 1950, poses in front of the little chapel on the grounds.

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Hack, continued from page 2

Island was for sale. "It was 1949 at Christmas when Fred went over to the island to have a look," Billie recalled of the day that was to change her life. "I remember how thrilled he was when he returned home — about the wonderful beach and the timber and the wildness of everything. Of course he had to raise the money — about a million dollars.

"Fred got Gen. J.B. Fraser, who was also in the lumber business, and Olin McIntosh, and my father, C.C. Stebbins, to form the Hilton Head Company. They raised enough money to buy the south end of the island, up to about where Pope Avenue is now."

By March 1950 Fred was living on the island, and Billie and the children came in June. The Hack family, now four, rented the only unoccupied house they could find, on Honey Horn Plantation. The modest house, set under a canopy of majestic live oaks, was built by the former plantation owners, Thorne and Loomis, for the manager of the hunting preserve. It had a wood stove in the kitchen, and an old fashioned ice box.

The main house on Honey Horn Plantation, still called the Big House, rambles about with many wings and porches and chimneys. The oldest part has stood since before the Civil War. During the 1950s the Hack family continued to use the Big House as a lodge for private hunting parties. "The men came down from up North to hunt turkey, quail and duck and occasionally deer. Where they built the first golf course in Sea Pines, the Ocean Course," Billie said, "that's where all the good duck ponds were."

Honey Horn Plantation was designed to be self-sufficient. In the 1930s, Thorne and Loomis had dug a well and put in a generator plant — for electric lights only. They also built a charming little chapel, a laundry house, several barns, stables, a tack room and a dog kennel. In the early days, Billie taught Sunday school in the barn, while services were being held in the chapel.

When the Hack children, Avary and Frederick, were ready for school they went to the one-room schoolhouse on Route 278, across from the entrance to Honey Horn. "The teacher was Mrs. Merritt, who had been teaching on Daufuskie Island. She stayed with the Toomer family in their house, right about where the Crazy Crab is now. Then Fred built her a little cottage on Honey Horn.

"Later, when Pete and Aileen McGinty decided to come to the island, Aileen took over as the schoolteacher. Pete was one of the first architects here, and his design set the standard all over the island." Billie has special affection for this pioneering couple who lived in the teacherage on Honey Horn while building their house on North Forest Beach.

"In 1952 Byron was born," Billie continued with a smile at her younger son, who has joined our conversation. "I spent the last two weeks before he was born at a hotel in Savannah. When I went to the hospital I called Mose Hudson who lived in Buckingham — there were no phones on the island yet — and Mose went over to the island by boat. He woke Fred up and brought him back to Bluffton. Of course, by the time Fred got to Savannah, Byron was already born."

As Billie remembers it, in 1953, the S.C. Highway Department started regular ferry service to the island from Buckingham Landing. The ferryboat, called Pocohantas,

took about eight cars.

In late 1952 Olin McIntosh had built 20 beach houses at Folly Field. "They were built up on blocks. They had two bedrooms with a bath between, and across the front was the living room, kitchen and a screened porch.

"Fred always said that those 20 houses convinced the highway department that we needed a bridge, even though at that time the island's population was less than 1,000."

When Byron was 4 years old the bridge was finished. Dedicated on May 19, 1956, the James F. Byrnes Crossing was originally a toll bridge paid for by publicly issued bonds. Later it was purchased by the highway department.

The only paved road when the Hacks first came here was built by the U.S. Marines during World War II and went only as far as the Palmetto Dunes lighthouse. "We used to go all over the island. We knew where the Stoney-Baynard ruins were, and we found Fort Sherman, which is now in Port Royal Plantation.

"Fred surveyed and mapped the area for the first time. Also we found artifacts, though we didn't dig for them. We just took what was on the surface. We must have 500 old bottles from the beach. After spring plowing each year we would look for arrowheads and pottery."

Byron added some nostalgia. "We used to fish and hunt. And we'd ride the horses all over the north end of the island, mainly back through Jonesville, along Marshland Road. At night we used to ride to Elliott's Beach — now called Dolphin Head. Every Sunday afternoon we would 'walk the spread' — that meant covering Honey Horn's 150 acres. We were always looking for what my dad used to call the 'holy grail' — a stone marker left by the Huguenot settlers that is supposed to be around here somewhere."

No one in the Hack family is likely to forget the summer of 1965 when they moved into the Big House. The whole family went on a trip to Boston that summer, and Fred Hack had his first major heart attack there. He spent six weeks in a Boston hospital, and came home to find that servants, family and friends had moved the household.

"It was a hectic summer," Billie recalled in characteristic understatement. "Two of the children

(See HACK, page 11)

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Hack, continued from page 10

were going off to college, and we had plumbers and electricians and remodeling going on. It seemed to take forever to get organized again." Not one to shrink from hardship or crisis or responsibility, Billie continued to do the necessary — and still does.

Her commitment to First Presbyterian Church remains strong. She is on the Board of the Presbyterian Church Women. In 1965 she was a prime mover in organizing the Bargain Box, and she still works there every Friday.

Billie was the first president of the Women's Association, she is a

board member emeritus of the Museum of Hilton Head Island, and she helped start the Friends of the Library. "The first library here," she said, "was a double-wide trailer parked near the original Bargain Box at the corner of Folly Field Road and Mathews Drive. Imagine that!" she beamed.

Hilton Head's First Lady, as Billie is known on the island, has always thrived on challenge and adventure. In fact, she is planning to visit Turkey and Greece this summer. But as she reminisces, it is clear that her heart is at home on Honey Horn.

Tips, continued from page 5

saving money if you're traveling alone, and 10 money-saving tips for traveling in Europe.

(Examples: Travel in the "shoulder season" between summer's high prices and winter's lowest; stay in smaller cities, which are much cheaper than big ones; use debit cards to save commissions on changing currency and get the best rates, etc.)

While these tips will get you started, if you're planning a European vacation you'll want to send for "Bargain Hunter's Europe." This booklet guides you to the best deals in airfare, lodging, tour packages, rental cars and rail passes. It not only tells how to find an inexpensive hotel, but offers information on such lower-cost alternatives as staying on a working farm. In Denmark, for instance, a guest room with breakfast can be as low as \$26 a day.

A HalfPrice Europe Membership Card, which costs \$42, offers 50 percent discounts at more than 700 European hotels. And while rooms in London can cost over \$200 a night, it tells you about the bed-and-breakfasts outside of town that rent for as little as \$20 to \$30 a night. The book is crammed with cost-saving ideas of all kinds, and there's a list of the phone numbers and addresses for the tourist offices of every major European country.

Some of the other booklets require less explanation. "America's 100 Best Undiscovered Vacation Spots" (which includes Edisto Island but definitely not Hilton Head) is broken down into beaches, backpacking, lake vacations, historic sites, spas and "little towns with lots of character."

"America's Most Scenic

Drives" contains 35 trips ranging from Sunday spins through New England to mountain drives that snake from desert to pine forest and allow you to go from summer to fall in a single trip. The drives vary in length from 40 miles to 400, and come complete with lists of scenic and cultural roadside attractions, plus suggestions for where to stay.

"Great North American Rail Vacations" ranges from long trips (the Sunset Limited from Los Angeles to Miami) to the St. Charles Streetcar in New Orleans and a dinner train in Atlanta. If you thought rail travel was dead, this little booklet will put you back on the track.

"Florida for Free" is a complete guide to the free and almost-free attractions in the Sunshine State. It tells you where to get free coupon books, where state parks are located, and what attractions charge no admission. It describes the major attractions in all sections of the state and gives prices, phone numbers and directions. I don't see how anyone could consider visiting Florida without it.

Other booklets include one on traveling alone, on staying well while traveling and what to do if you don't, how to pick cruise ships and ports. The company also puts out booklets on retirement, personal finance, and Lord knows what all else. For a complete list of available titles, or to order any single title, write to: Vacation Publications, 1502 Augusta, Suite 415, Houston, Texas 77057.

(If you're in a hurry, their phone number is 713-974-6903; the fax number is 713-974-0445.)

Have a good trip!

Volunteers, continued from page 4

and Low Country Human Development since 1976, and Meals on Wheels since 1979. It has contributed to Penn Center since 1982 and the Children's Center since 1984; the local Boy Scouts and Hospice since 1985. A plaque hangs in the sales room, listing donation recipients for 1993.

The current donations chairman, Gloria "Roo" Fisher, processes applications, keeps files on all the recipients, visits them regularly, and sends out the checks authorized by the board each month. Says she with a happy

smile, "I just love my job!"

So do the other volunteers, both in sales and in the "back room." They enjoy the camaraderie as they work together. They enjoy finding little treasures to buy for themselves. And they helped the oldest volunteer, George Hill, celebrate his birthday on July 1. He was 93.

As the bags of donations continue to pile up, willing workers are always welcome. Anyone interested in becoming a volunteer may call the Bargain Box at 681-4305 for an appointment.

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