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## An Oral and Pictorial History of a Sliver of Sand

By CHRISTOPHER HANN

MARGARET THOMAS BUCHHOLZ had long entertained the notion of compiling a picture book of Long Beach Island. But the idea didn't gain traction until two years ago, when she came across a dozen poster-size black-and-white photographs of the island displayed at a local banquet hall. The rather desolate island she had known as a young girl in the 1930's and 40's was evoked by some of the images -- depictions of hardy people leading a rugged existence on an untamed sliver of sand set precariously between broad bays and pounding surf.

For Ms. Buchholz, the display crystallized in her mind the type of picture book she then set out to produce. She started poking around for more such photos, asking friends to sort through their dusty old shoeboxes. She scoured archives from Lynn Photo, a photography shop in Ship Bottom, and from The Beachcomber, the local newspaper she had owned for 32 years before selling it in 1987. (She now works there as an editor.)

When her collection surpassed 300 photographs, taken from 1880 to the 1970's, Ms. Buchholz decided to arrange them in a sort of family scrapbook. The result is "Island Album: Photographs and Memories of Long Beach Island," published this spring by Down the Shore Publishing in West Creek. It is both an oral and pictorial history of the 18-mile sandbar at the center of the Jersey Shore and an ode to a pioneering way of life long vanished.

"It was in my mind to show what it used to be like here," Ms. Buchholz said. "There's a real continuity here, and I'm trying to show some of that."

Ms. Buchholz, 73 and deeply tanned, lives in the house she grew up in, a bayfront ranch in Harvey Cedars that has been enlarged more than once since her father, Reynold Thomas, built it in the Depression. A longtime mayor of Harvey Cedars, Mr. Thomas founded the Barnegat Bay Dredging Company, which contributed mightily to the island's ferocious mid-century growth by depositing countless tons of sand, dredged from the bay, along the island's western edge, a common practice in those environmentally insensitive days. "A lot of people who come down now don't realize that all the homes on the bay side are built on manmade land," Ms. Buchholz said.

Her book is arranged according to the significant trends and events -- cultural, commercial, meteorological -- that have steered the island's evolution ever since the first luxury hotels were built in the 1880's. Photographs recall the laying of the first railroad tracks spanning Barnegat Bay later that decade, the completion of the original wooden causeway in 1923, and the building of the modern causeway that replaced it 30 years later.

One photograph shows a gathering of islanders watching the Hindenburg pass overhead on May 6, 1937, just minutes from its disastrous landing at the Naval Air Station in Lakehurst. Chapters recall "Early Cottages," "Guarding the Coast," "Barnegat Lighthouse," "Yacht Clubs" and "Rough Weather."

Ms. Buchholz was not convinced that pictures alone could tell the island's story. She remembered that in the 1980's, Eleanor Smith, a retired schoolteacher, had recorded her conversations with elderly islanders on the porch of the Long Beach Island Museum in Beach Haven. Throughout the book Ms. Buchholz sprinkles nuggets of these "rocking porch talks," like this memory from Effie Griggs: "When we first came it was all open and the children could run over the dunes, and wild roses and bayberry were rampant."

Read today, these recollections serve as a wistful lament for the passing of those days, which seem in these pages to have vanished in methodical, inexorable fashion, like a sand castle built too close to a rising tide.