

# 1910 - 1950

## "The Summer Playground for All New England"

Hampton Beach grew exponentially in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. 20,000 people danced weekly at the Hampton Beach Casino and walked the new boardwalk that ran along the beach. Automobiles became available to everyone and driving personal cars and taking buses replaced the electric trolley as the preferred forms of transportation. Even after two destructive fires, Hampton Beach continued to grow and host a variety of spectacular events. In order to maintain the beach, the town transferred its ownership rights to the State of New Hampshire in 1933 and Hampton Beach State Park was established.

### Hampton's Reputation

Particularly in the 1930s and 1940s, Hampton was known for its vast sandy beach and high attendance rates of swimmers and sunbathers.<sup>1</sup> Hampton's positive reputation was also due to the wildly popular Casino and Bandstand. Sheet music for a ballad written for the beach boasted that it was "air-conditioned by cool ocean breezes."

By the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Hampton Beach had become the "summer playground of all New England" and its reputation as a clean and pleasant beach had spread across America. The sheet music text continued to advertise that a vacation at "Happy Hampton" could be had on any reasonable budget.<sup>2</sup>



People enjoying the beach near the Casino and Bandstand  
(Picture courtesy of Lane Memorial Library)

## Development Continues

In the first half of the twentieth century, Hampton Beach was considered "the recreational capital of New Hampshire," according to a 1933 *Hampton*



The Boardwalk, built in 1911.  
(Picture courtesy of Lane Memorial Library)

*Union* article.<sup>3</sup> The Hampton Beach Improvement Company, the locally formed organization that controlled much of the Beach's development, added to and improved what had already been built.<sup>4</sup> In 1911, a boardwalk was built along the beach. It ran on the eastern side of Ocean Boulevard, across the street from the Casino and on the ocean side of the bandstand. The

original boardwalk was around 500 feet long and was 12 feet wide.<sup>5</sup>

The Casino continued to expand as well. Even though it had been transferred from owner to owner, it adapted to the changing tastes in its entertainment offerings and even in its architecture. In 1927, a large ballroom was added to the southern end of the Casino adjacent to the Opera House. It was richly decorated and became popular almost overnight, becoming one of the main entertainment venues for several decades with an impressive weekly attendance record.<sup>6</sup>

The new Ballroom attracted around 20,000 people to dance for a small fee every week. People paid 10¢ per partner dance and could go four times for a quarter. Dancing became so popular that, according to Randall, "mothers would come to watch their daughters dance with likely prospects for marriage."<sup>7</sup> The bandstand was another Hampton Beach venue that remained popular for decades. In the 1930s, awnings were added to shade the musicians from the sun<sup>8</sup> and speakers were added to the roof in 1936.<sup>9</sup> In later years, the eastern side of the bandstand was enclosed in an attempt to improve the sound quality for the boardwalk and street audiences.<sup>10</sup>

## Hampton Hosts All Types of Events

During the first fifty years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Hampton Beach was the host of many unique and spectacular events. Some of these were individual

happenings, such a yacht races and moonlight cruises, dog shows,<sup>11</sup> singing church pastors,<sup>12</sup> and even carnivals and a Big Top Circus.<sup>13</sup> Other events were recurring ones that were favorites of Hampton Beach visitors, such as the famous Singing "Cop"<sup>14</sup> and the fireworks at night.<sup>15</sup>

"Bill" Elliot, Hampton's famous Singing "Cop," first started performing regularly around 1927 and was heard frequently with several Beach bands until the mid-1950s.<sup>16</sup> By the time he was performing regularly, he had become a full-time Hampton policeman.<sup>17</sup> Elliot would often come right from directing traffic in front of the Casino to perform on the bandstand. He became known as the Singing "Cop" because he frequently sang wearing his uniform.<sup>18</sup>



"Bill" Elliot, Hampton's Famous Singing "Cop"

(Picture courtesy of Lane Memorial Library)



Wednesday Night Fireworks

(Picture courtesy of the Hampton Historical Society)

The fireworks show on Wednesday nights during the summer season has been a part of the beach's activities for about a century. The idea of a regularly scheduled show came from local merchants and store owners. Several local shop owners came together to put on the firework shows in order to increase their business. Their intention was to "lure" people away from the Casino's featured attractions to watch the shows; afterward the people were encouraged to visit their stores. The shows were soon held three times a week but were later moved to Wednesday nights. This tradition continues today at 9:00 pm every Wednesday during the summer season.<sup>19</sup>

## The Automobile on Ocean Boulevard

Soon after the turn of the century, Henry Ford made his new automobile available to the public. This worldwide event had a major effect on Hampton Beach. Both personal automobiles and buses appeared on Ocean Boulevard soon after.<sup>20</sup> In the summer of 1905, around 300 automobiles passed

through Hampton Beach every day!<sup>21</sup> In 1915, beach roads were “congested with cars” as the personal automobile replaced public transit as the preferred form of transportation to the beach.<sup>22</sup>

By 1918, “the end of the trolley business was drawing near.”<sup>23</sup> The combination of high costs of operation most of the year, especially during



The beach road in 1915, full of automobiles and a trolley car.

(Picture courtesy of Lane Memorial Library)

the winter, and a decrease in passenger usage due to the automobile was taking a financial toll on the Exeter, Hampton, and Amesbury Railway.<sup>24</sup> It was the automobile that was primarily responsible for the decline in both the train and trolley services.<sup>25</sup> In late May 1926, the trolley made its last run to Hampton Beach and

was finally abandoned.<sup>26</sup> According to Tucker, author of the “Our Town” column in the *Hampton Union*, the trolley era from 1897-1926 was the “most outstanding epoch” in the history of Hampton, “insofar as development is concerned.”<sup>27</sup> It had a long and enduring history. The increasing amount of automobiles at the beach also brought about other changes such as the playing field behind the Casino being turned into a parking lot to accommodate the vehicles.<sup>28</sup>

## The State Acquires the Beach

Although the development at the beach was a great economic boost, it had taken quite a toll on the beach itself. By the 1930s, the natural dunes along the sandy beach were almost completely deteriorated. That was due to a combination of natural causes, such as storms and tidal erosion and developmental causes, such as the building of roads, parking areas and buildings along the oceanfront. These dunes normally protected the land and buffered the rough tides that would threaten the dense development.<sup>29</sup>

Since the dunes had been basically leveled, the town needed to maintain the beach to make sure the land and the beach itself remained protected. This maintenance was a substantial financial burden that overwhelmed the town

of Hampton. In 1933, the ownership of the beach was transferred to the State of New Hampshire so that it could take over beach maintenance.<sup>30</sup> This maintenance was needed to conserve it and protect it from being destroyed by the ocean. People believed that if the town of Hampton and the State of New Hampshire combined efforts in this way, "the future of the Beach [would] be even greater than the past."<sup>31</sup>

## State Action at the Beach

Hampton Beach State Park was established when the State acquired the beach in 1933. One of the first of many things the State did to maintain the beach was dredge the Hampton River channel, or remove sand from the bottom of the river, and pour it onto the southern tip of Hampton Beach. This created about fifty new acres of land and was called the Hampton Beach State Reservation.<sup>32</sup> Another duty the State had was to build a seawall where the development met the beach.<sup>33</sup> This was executed later at the end of the 1940s.

The dredging of the Hampton River provided an opportunity for an expansion in recreational boating.<sup>34</sup> This activity was already on the rise with the invention of the gasoline engine.

When the river became more accessible to boaters, it became a popular spot for summer tourists and Hampton residents alike.<sup>35</sup> It was so well-liked that a bill that allowed the appointment of a harbor master was passed in 1937. The person in that position had control over the boats and any moorings in the Hampton River.<sup>36</sup>

Recreational boating was yet another common activity that tourists could engage in while vacationing at Hampton Beach.



The Hampton Harbor Yacht Club was one of the many results of dredging Hampton River.  
*(Picture courtesy of Lane Memorial Library)*

## Great Fires of 1915 and 1921



In 1915 and 1921, there were extremely destructive fires in the same approximate area of Hampton Beach. The fire of 1915 occurred on September 23<sup>rd</sup>, just north of the Casino. The destruction was mostly



The aftermath of the 1915 fire  
(Picture courtesy of Lane Memorial Library)

around B Street, one of the many one-way streets that connect Ocean Boulevard to its parallel street, Ashworth Avenue.<sup>37</sup> According to Aykroyd and Moore, authors of *Post Card History Series: Hampton and Hampton Beach*, the only reason that the Casino did not catch fire was because the wind blew the flames away from it.<sup>38</sup> The fire completely destroyed around ten acres and

\$400,000 of "recreational property," leaving nothing but a "blackened and smoking wasteland."<sup>39</sup> The devastating flames were finally stopped by dynamiting the buildings that would have otherwise burned down and spread the fire.<sup>40</sup>

The Great Fire of 1921 occurred during the summer season in June. The fire began in a restaurant on B Street, the same section that burned down just five seasons before.<sup>41</sup> This time the fire destroyed about seven or eight acres. However, the value of the property destroyed was about the same because all of the buildings were made of higher quality materials than the previous ones and they had been recently restocked for the beginning of the 1921 season.<sup>42</sup>

In the aftermath of the second fire, the Chamber of Commerce did not want tourists or residents to be disheartened by the two great fires. In order to assure people that Hampton was still going strong, the Chamber of Commerce had a sign erected that read "Down, But Not Out!" which was the Salvation Army's old slogan. The sign continued in larger lettering, "Watch Us Grow!"<sup>43</sup> As it proclaimed, Hampton Beach did continue to grow.

## Hampton Beach's Involvement in World War II

Even though Hampton Beach had maintained a reputation as the place to escape the chaos of the world, it could not escape America's involvement in

the coming wars. The country's short involvement in WWI did not greatly affect Hampton Beach. As a result of the First World War, the town learned how to become more self-sufficient, thousands of dollars in war bonds were purchased by residents, and many young men were registered for the draft. However, the war was over by the time Hampton really started contributing to war effort.<sup>44</sup> Hampton's part in the Second World War was very different than the first.

In 1933, a *Hampton Union* editorial predicted that "the historic and beautiful town of Hampton cannot possibly escape the consequences of the great winds that are blowing unchecked over the surface of the earth."<sup>45</sup> This statement became a reality even before America entered the war. From 1940 to 1941, London endured an eight month stretch of almost nightly bombing from the Luftwaffe, or the German Air Force, a time known as The Blitz. In order to provide some relief to the war-weary people of England, Hampton residents formed a local group called "Bundles for Britain" in January 1941. This was a group of mostly women who made bandages, sewed and knitted clothing, and collected used items of clothing and essentials to aid the British.<sup>46</sup>

After America entered the war in December of 1941, Hampton joined the rest of the country in being America's home front. Hampton and Hampton Beach took part in the same activities and preparations that the rest of New England did. At the end of May 1942, the entirety of Rockingham County held a trial blackout which was completely successful; only a month

Selling War Bonds off of the Bandstand during World War II  
(Picture courtesy of Lane Memorial Library)



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**WAR RATION BOOK No. 3** Void if altered

Identification of person to whom issued: PRINT IN FULL

John M. Holman (First name) (Middle name) (Last name) Address and Sign  
Street number or rural route Mill Pt  
City or post office Hampton State N.H.

AGE	SEX	WEIGHT	HEIGHT	OCCUPATION
15	M	101 Lbs.	5 Ft. 6 In.	

SIGNATURE John M. Holman  
(Person to whom book issued. If such person is unable to sign because of incapacity, another may sign in his behalf.)

**WARNING**  
This book is the property of the United States Government. It is unlawful to sell it to any other person, or to use it or permit anyone else to use it, except to obtain rationed goods in accordance with regulations of the Office of Price Administration. Any person who finds a lost War Ration Book must return it to the War Price and Rationing Board which issued it. Persons who violate rationing regulations are subject to \$10,000 fine or imprisonment, or both.

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OFA Form No. R-180

World War II Ration Book belonging to Hampton resident John M. Holman  
(Picture courtesy of Lane Memorial Library)

later a real blackout was held along much of the seacoast. Shop owners at the beach built barriers around their stores and automobile drivers used only parking lights, all to ensure the American ships passing by "would not be silhouetted against coastal lights and therefore become easier prey for enemy submarines."<sup>47</sup>

Pre-existing and newly formed Hampton organizations also pulled their weight in the war effort. "Bundles for America," previously known as "Bundles for Britain," was making needed items for the soldiers overseas and providing food for those visiting Hampton.<sup>48</sup> The Hampton Garden Club promoted and helped with families' personal Victory Gardens.<sup>49</sup> By May 1942, ration cards had been distributed and Hampton residents did their share by rationing food and supplies according to federal guidelines.<sup>50</sup> War bonds were even sold from the bandstand,<sup>51</sup> sometimes with the help of Hollywood celebrities such as Harry Stockwell, the voice of Prince Charming in Disney's first color animated movie, "Snow White and the Seven Dwarves."<sup>52</sup>

## The War Attracts New Englanders to the Beach

Even throughout the war, Hampton Beach became an increasingly popular destination. Due to gas rationing which prevented long-distance travel, the beach attracted New Englanders in particular, especially those who would normally vacation in far off places. Surprisingly, the beach was especially popular during the middle of the war and experienced "record crowds and booming business."<sup>53</sup> At one point in the 1943 season, hotels were so full that tourists actually slept on the sand.<sup>54</sup>

Like the rest of the country, the good news of the war's end was met with large celebrations at the beach. On the evening of August 14, the people of Hampton heard the news that the war was over and one of Hampton's largest celebrations in many years broke out onto the streets. According to the *Hampton Union*, "the bedlam lasted far into the night, stopping only



Victory Week and Festival of Fun, put on by the Chamber of Commerce, was intended to maintain homefront morale. According to this pamphlet, "Healthful Recreation Builds National Strength," and Hampton Beach could deliver the recreation.

(Picture courtesy of Lane Memorial Library)



because the joyous people became exhausted." According to Randall, the Casino and all shops closed down for the night, a popular band played a concert on the bandstand, and "people sang, danced, paraded with wash tubs used as drums, and threw confetti, releasing the emotions stored up after three and a half years of war."<sup>55</sup> Even on Labor Day in 1945, after the war's end, there were record crowds at the beach to join in with the ongoing celebrations.<sup>56</sup>



A meeting of the Hampton Klu Klux Klan in 1925  
(Picture courtesy of Lane Memorial Library)

Just as the beach was not exempt from World War II, it was also not free from nation-wide issues such as discrimination and Civil rights. Non-native newspapers and some

Hampton residents, in private, would admit that "certain people were, in the past, less than welcome at Hampton Beach."<sup>57</sup> Many minorities were singled out for years near the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. James Tucker, "Our Town" columnist for the *Hampton Union*, sometimes addressed issues of oppression and discrimination in his articles. In one of them he concluded, "We want nothing more of modern versions of the Goody Cole incident."<sup>58</sup> Eunice "Goody" Cole was a 17<sup>th</sup> century Hampton resident who was ostracized and jailed as a witch because she was hated by her neighbors and eventually by the whole town.<sup>59</sup> Although Hampton Beach is not impervious to issues such as racism and discrimination, Randall echoed the hope of all visitors when he concluded, "There was discrimination at Hampton Beach, but there is little likelihood that anyone will be turned away again from the resort because of race or religion."<sup>60</sup>



Eunice "Goody" Cole, the "witch" of Hampton  
(Picture courtesy of Lane Memorial Library)



Ready to join in with the festivities of the Hampton Beach Carnival, possibly in 1932

(Picture courtesy of Lane Memorial Library)

Just as the first half of the twentieth century was a time a growth for Hampton Beach, the second half and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century saw much improvement upon what had been established at the beach. The bandstand and surrounding buildings were replaced two times by updated and efficient complexes. The 99-year lease that gave the Hampton Beach Improvement Company rights to beach development expired and the developmental responsibility once again fell to the town of Hampton. Click NEXT to read about Hamptons major improvement projects in 1950-Present: "*Still Enjoying a Golden Era.*"

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- <sup>1</sup> Aykroyd, Elizabeth, and Betty Moore. *Postcard History Series: Hampton and Hampton Beach*. Portsmouth, NH: Arcadia Publishing, 2005, 35.
- <sup>2</sup> Leave, Charles H., & Elliot, "Bill." "Let's Go Down To Hampton Beach" Recorded 1938. The Hampton Beach Chamber of Commerce and Development Council 1938.  
[www.hampton.lib.nh.us/hampton/history/vignettes/LetsGoDownToHamptonBeach1938.pdf](http://www.hampton.lib.nh.us/hampton/history/vignettes/LetsGoDownToHamptonBeach1938.pdf), 6.
- <sup>3</sup> Randall, Peter E. *Hampton, A Century of Town and Beach*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher and the Town of Hampton, 1990, 661.
- <sup>4</sup> New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development. Division of Historical Resources. *Hampton Beach Area Form*. By R. Walsh, J. Keane, and Carol S. Weed, Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. Concord, N.H., 2009, 6.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid 8.
- <sup>6</sup> Aykroyd and Moore 42.
- <sup>7</sup> Randall 199.
- <sup>8</sup> Aykroyd and Moore 62.
- <sup>9</sup> Holman, John M. Lane Memorial Library, "The Hampton Beach Bandstand." Last modified 2002. Accessed August 13, 2013. <http://www.hampton.lib.nh.us/hampton/history/bandstand/beachbandstand.htm>.
- <sup>10</sup> Aykroyd and Moore 62.
- <sup>11</sup> Randall 211.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid 202.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid 205.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid 206.
- <sup>15</sup> Aykroyd and Moore 59.
- <sup>16</sup> Randall 206.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>19</sup> Aykroyd and Moore 59.
- <sup>20</sup> Randall 625.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup> *Hampton Beach Area Form* 8.
- <sup>23</sup> Randall 67.
- <sup>24</sup> Tucker, James. "Our Town: Trolley Lines Go Into "Red"." *Hampton Union*, October 25, 1951. <http://www.hampton.lib.nh.us/hampton/history/ourtown/trolleys7.htm> (accessed August 9, 2013).
- <sup>25</sup> Randall 625.
- <sup>26</sup> Tucker, James. "Our Town: Our Town Buys Trolley Line." *Hampton Union*, November 1, 1951. <http://www.hampton.lib.nh.us/hampton/history/ourtown/trolleys7.htm> (accessed August 9, 2013).
- <sup>27</sup> Tucker, James. "Our Town: Colorful Era of Electric Railways." *Hampton Union*, September 27, 1951. <http://www.hampton.lib.nh.us/hampton/history/ourtown/trolleys1.htm> (accessed August 9, 2013).
- <sup>28</sup> Aykroyd and Moore 44.
- <sup>29</sup> New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development. Division of Parks and Recreation. *Results of Phase IA Site Assessment, Hampton Beach State Park Redevelopment*. By Carol S. Weed, Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. Concord, N.H., November 2009, 15.
- <sup>30</sup> *Hampton Beach Area Form* 10.
- <sup>31</sup> Warren, Reverend Edgar. "An Old Town By The Sea." *1638-Hampton Tercentenary- 1938: Official Pictorial Magazine*, 1938, <http://www.hampton.lib.nh.us/hampton/history/1938/oldtown.htm>.
- <sup>32</sup> *Hampton Beach Area Form* 10.
- <sup>33</sup> Randall 227.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid 207.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid 211.
- <sup>37</sup> Tucker, James. "Our Town: Great Fires Of 1915 and 1921." *Hampton Union*. (1952). <http://www.hampton.lib.nh.us/hampton/history/ourtown/index.htm> (accessed August 8, 2013).
- <sup>38</sup> Aykroyd and Moore 51.
- <sup>39</sup> Tucker, "Our Town: Great Fires Of 1915 and 1921."

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- <sup>40</sup> Aykroyd and Moore 51.
- <sup>41</sup> Tucker, "Our Town: Great Fires Of 1915 and 1921."
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>44</sup> Randall 653-660.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid 661.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid 663.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid 666.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid 667.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid 668.
- <sup>51</sup> Holman.
- <sup>52</sup> Randall 669.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid 669.
- <sup>54</sup> Aykroyd and Moore 45.
- <sup>55</sup> Randall 670.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid 215.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid 218.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid 224.
- <sup>59</sup> Tucker, James. "Our Town: The Witch of Hampton." *Hampton Union*, August 30, 1951. <http://www.hampton.lib.nh.us/hampton/history/ourtown/witchofhampton.htm> (accessed October 8, 2013).
- <sup>60</sup> Randall 225.