



The Jekyll Island Club: Southern Haven for America's Millionaires

William Barton McCash, June Hall McCash

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From its inception in 1886, the Jekyll Island Club included in its elite membership the nation's wealthiest families, among them the Rockefellers, Pulitzers, Vanderbilts, and Morgans. Far from the hectic northern cities where the members tended their fortunes, this private island refuge off Georgia's coast offered the wealthy a tranquil change of pace.

Bringing together more than 240 fascinating photographs, Barton and June McCash trace the sixty-two-year history of this exclusive retreat whose members at one time were reputed to represent one-seventh of the nation's wealth. From the time of the club's opening, members came to Jekyll Island each winter to seek elegant leisure, arriving on yachts or in private train cars from New York, Boston, Chicago, and Philadelphia. Capturing the lives and amusements of the very wealthy, this evocative photographic history presents descriptions of elaborate costume balls and playful outdoor parties; the Rockefeller clan gathering at water's edge and J. P. Morgan lounging by the pool; Victor Astor's "patented beach boat" and the Goulds' private indoor tennis court; the Vanderbilts' yacht anchored offshore and the imposing "cottages" built by individual members.

During their stays, members amused themselves in a variety of pursuits. In the 1890s they organized bicycling clubs and held races on the beach. Hunting was also for a time a favorite activity and the island was regularly stocked with imported wildlife--pheasant, quail, turkey, and bucks. By 1919, however, the game committee had dwindled to one member, and prime hunting grounds had been cleared for golf courses and tennis courts. The hub of the island's social life, however, was the clubhouse, where members gathered in formal attire to converse, while drinking fine wine and dining on freshly caught game and local delicacies.

The seclusion that Jekyll Island offered was not impenetrable. On the day after Christmas in 1900, the country's fascination with technology could no longer be resisted, and the sound of a gasoline automobile disturbed the island's quiet glades for the first time. Despite the immense wealth of the club, it was not immune to the stock market crash of 1893 and the Panic of 1907. The club managed to survive World War I intact and enjoyed a "golden age" from 1919 to 1927, during which time it held its own against the increasingly popular Florida resorts. The stock market crash of 1929, however, initiated a death spiral. Membership declined steadily throughout the 1930s, and when the United States entered World War II, the club closed its doors forever.

Based on surviving club records, newspaper accounts, and letters and diaries of members and guests, *The Jekyll Island Club* chronicles an era when leisure was the preserve of the wealthy. For more than six decades the island, now a state park, served as a haven for millionaires. As one visitor described the Jekyll Island Club, it was "the only place of its kind in the world--and will never be again."

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