



A BOOK THAT CAPTURES OUR DAYS AT THE BEACH

By ERIN HARRINGTON

Brighton Beach may have its memoirs, but if the waves at Jones Beach could talk, they'd crash on the shore and resound with enough nostalgic tales to fill an ocean.

More memories than grains of sand have shaped Jones Beach State Park since it officially opened on Aug. 4, 1929. On that historic day, when Gov. Franklin Delano Roosevelt spoke on a dais at the now famous Bathhouse, a willful man largely responsible for making the oceanfront playground a reality sat just to his right. He was Robert Moses, and his vision to construct the Wantagh and Southern State Parkways is what enabled the roughly 10,000 people to hit the beach that August day and every day since.

Jones Beach, no longer an isolated sandbar accessible only by boat became, as *The New York Times* touted in the 1920s, "one of the finest and most useful recreation grounds near New York City." Progressive? You bet.

Eight decades later, Jones Beach is still making headlines. Recent buzz centers on the \$40-million Trump on the Ocean restaurant and catering facility being built on the boardwalk—another progressive proposition sure to attract future generations of visitors to the beach. That's precisely why John Hanc's book, *Jones Beach: An Illustrated History*, couldn't have come at a better time. The pages, like sand seen through an hourglass, forever preserve a place etched fondly in the collective memory of generations past.

Like Long Island itself, Jones Beach harbors some pretty neat history. The average person has no clue why it's even called Jones Beach and is surprised to learn it's named for Thomas Jones, born in and exiled from Ireland. Jones' life reads like a Harlequin novel but, thankfully, has been tracked closely by historians who've written the non-fiction version. Laid to rest in Massapequa, Jones lives on in anonymous infamy, bearing the name of one of the world's most famous public beaches.

"Thomas Jones was infamous for two centuries in New York and it took the beach to erase his memory," Hanc notes. "I learned a lot of things writing the book."

Readers will too. *Jones Beach: An Illustrated History* is packed with precious historical factoids. The chapters take the reader chronologically through the fascinating evolution of Jones Beach State Park, beginning with The Battle for the Beach, which provides an interesting glance into the man Robert Moses was and the complexion of local politics within which he maneuvered.

The second chapter tells the tale of Pirate Jones and the unlikely life that brought him stature and a whole lot of Long Island land. (After reading Chapter 2, a drive down Merrick Road will never be the same.) In the third chapter, An Island Unto Itself, Hanc gives a rise and fall tour of the High Hill

summer colony and provides an intimate portrayal of the generations of Baymen who traveled to the waters of Jones Beach to make a living before the new state park took those livings away.

Chapter 7 features The Guy Who Loved the Beach – Guy Lombardo. From 1954 to 1977, as the executive producer for the Jones Beach Theatre, he brought Broadway-par performances including *Arabian Nights*, *Showboat*, and *Finian's Rainbow* to the beach. Lombardo made a lasting impression that wasn't lost on Hanc as he penned this book.

"I used to associate him with Auld Lang Syne and thought he was a square from my grandparents' generation," Hanc admits. "Now I see him as a lovely man and extremely talented musician. He may have enjoyed Jones Beach more than anyone. He commuted with his boat, The

Tempo to Jones Beach and always waved to everyone. He brought his musician friends in from New York City to be a part of the shows and seemed to have a wonderful time at the beach, which it's all about."

The book's final chapter, *A Sporting Life, An Endless Summer*, pays tribute to the many athletic events that have played out on Jones Beach over the years. It's a fitting conclusion for the author, an avid runner who writes fitness columns regularly for *Newsday* and freelance articles for magazines including *Men's Health*, *Runner's World*, *Weight Watchers*, and *Men's Fitness*. Hanc knows intimately how soothing the sands of Jones Beach feel under his sneakered feet.

John Hanc strikes a beautiful balance of imparting historical research (he credits many sources in the book) into prose woven with personal recollections. In his introduction, Hanc speaks to the great love his father and grandfather – both from Czechoslovakia – had for Jones Beach. "The beach – and particularly this beach, with its vast expanses and that open-endedness – was on a scale they could never have imagined in old Prague's narrow, crooked streets." Talk about liberation.

The book's foreword, written eloquently by Ed Lowe, tells a universal story we all lived growing up so fortunately close to Jones Beach. How many of us can remember piling into the stifling heat of family cars packed with coolers of soda cans and melting-as-you-drive cheese sandwiches (or, in Lowe's case, jelly sandwiches that resembled purple sponges upon opening them on spread out blankets), the packed sand in our suits, the heat of the boardwalk piercing our bare feet before the cool water in the Bathhouse cooled them, the saltwater taffy we all, in our childhood innocence, just assumed was really made with salt water? These are all part of our collective Jones Beach memories that John Hanc captures so reverently in this important illustrated history book. Pick it up. Heck, bring it to the beach. It's required summer reading. (For more information on *Jones Beach: An Illustrated History*, published by Globe Pequot Press, and John Hanc's upcoming speaking engagements, visit www.jonesbeachmemories.com.)

