THE DEVELOPMENT OF DAUPHIN ISLAND, ALABAMA

"GEM OF THE OCEAN"
APPRECIATION

Gratitude is expressed to those involved organizations that permitted a research of their minutes; to fellow workers who contributed remembrances, and to all those who entrusted me with many responsibilities and then helped me to carry them to a successful conclusion.

S. Blake McNeely
DEDICATION

Dedicated to a group of Mobile businessmen, professional men, bankers, realtors, the Mobile County Board of Revenue and Road Commissioners, the Governor, and other officers of the State of Alabama, all of whom banded together to build a bridge to beautiful Dauphin Island, Alabama and carry out its subsequent development, and to the enthusiastic investors who bought the lots on Dauphin Island to make the whole thing possible.

The October 2007 Reprint
of the Narration by
S. Blake McNeely

Provided by Dauphin Island Foundation

In Memory of
Dr. William J. Neely and his wife
Marian Tompkins Neely
With funds provided by them at their request.

Chris C. De Laney
Executor
In 1866 the Alabama Legislature passed a resolution authorizing
a study which should lead to the building of a bridge to Dauphin Island.
Little, if anything came of it. In the early 1900's the Mobile & Ohio
Railroad decided to extend its railroad to the island, recognizing the
romantic attraction of the island to tourists along their rail lines, but
principally it hoped to build a great coaling station there to serve
ocean-going coal-burning ships of that time. The railroad had moun-
tains of coal in their territory waiting to go. They extended their Bay
Shore branch from Bayou la Batre to Alabama Port and thence to Cedar
Point very close to the entrance to the present bridge. Engineers had
driven test piling for a timber bridge but they also discovered by trial
that the marsh under the track to Cedar Point would not support a
steam locomotive. Before efforts to overcome this problem could ma-
terialize, World War I put an end to the undertaking. Many Mobilians had
long eyed this attractive resort area four miles from the mainland, se-
parated by water too deep for a roadway and too shallow for a suffi-
ciently large ferry boat. Always alert to opportunities of its area, the Mo-
bile Chamber of Commerce in 1948 sponsored a drive to build a bridge
to the island and finance it with a one-cent gasoline tax. It was fairly
obvious there would be opponents but their strength was underesti-
mated and the proposed bridge was sunk at the polls. The island was
privately owned at that time, and a relatively small portion was to be
dedicated to public use. After these three false starts the Mobile
Chamber of Commerce undertook to build the bridge and develop Daup-
phin Island as a non-profit civic project. This is the story that follows.

By way of explanation it is my purpose to list the names of the
small group who nourished this last idea of a bridge to Dauphin Island.
Other names will be added as they assume parts in the story. Other-
wise the Chamber of Commerce effort will be referred to as "we" ex-
cept where someone undertakes a specific task.
THE
DEVELOPMENT
OF
DAUPHIN ISLAND, ALABAMA
"GEM OF THE OCEAN"

This is the way the idea got its start. It happened in the Royal and St. Francis Streets corner of the hundred year old granite classic edifice that was built for the U.S. Customs House before the Civil War. This was the office of Robert Dudley Hays, and Bob was the effective skipper of the Mobile Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber of Commerce occupied practically all of the ground floor of the old building. Grouped around his desk where Oliver H. Delchamps, Sr., who was then President of the Chamber of Commerce; S. Blake McNeely, a Vice President of the Chamber; A. A. Weiskopf and Other C. Lockett of the Chamber Staff. The conversation was gloomy. The Chamber had mounted a full-dress campaign for a gasoline tax to finance bonds to build a bridge to Dauphin Island. Opposing interests had outflanked us and dealt the idea a smarting defeat.

One of that small group said, "We ought to buy the island and sell off enough to pay for it and build our own bridge." That lit the fuse and right there was formed the whirlpool of enthusiasm that drew into its vortex the top talent from many fields of Mobile business. Bob Hays was one man in a thousand that morning. He believed in immediate action. He said, "Let’s call Mr. Forney Johnson and see if he’ll sell us the island.” Mr. Johnson was head of the group which held title to the island and lived in Birmingham. We all thought that was a pretty good idea but then tried to decide how much should we offer him. Somebody in the group said, "Well, how about a million dollars?" Bob said, "O.K., I’ll call him."
So he picked up the phone and called Mr. Johnson, had a pleasant talk with him and told him that we had a group in Mobile that was interested in buying Dauphin Island, since it looked as if there would be no other way to get a bridge to it. He asked what we had in mind and we told him we thought that we could raise enough to pay him a million dollars for the island. He considered that for a while and said he thought that might be a pretty good deal.

Well, that was the beginning, but I don't believe any of us realized what a project we had gotten ourselves into. But, as I say again, Bob Hays was the dynamo that was to keep everybody pushing as hard as they could, and as time went on he drew into the project more and a wider variety of talent which kept the thing on the move. It was to be a non-profit venture for the Chamber, the size and scope of which was unique for such organizations.

We had no idea how many lots could be carved out of the island, or how the streets would be put in or paved or hard surfaced, and we had no idea how much money could be expected to come from the sale of the lots. We only knew that if the plan would be successful it would have to net several million dollars to build required facilities. Of course the sensible thing to do then was to hire an engineer and planner to survey the island and give us a fairly accurate estimate of what we could expect. But here was the first obstacle. Such a deal would cost money.

Several of us knew Richard J. Scott of Montrose, Alabama, on the Eastern Shore of Mobile Bay, and knew that he was a Planning Engineer of wide renown. We called Dick and asked him to come over to the Chamber where we could talk to him about the idea. He came, and after listening to the few details we had gotten together up to this time, became very enthusiastic and wanted to be a part of the development. Dick was probably the first man who said that he would be willing to go to Dauphin Island and make the survey and take his pay when and if the project was activated and sales of the lots were actually made. He was also a real estate broker and he wanted to be active in the project.

We all realized that it would take money to pay the expenses of a crew living on the island and of course it would not be fair to ask one man to stand all of this. So this led to the next
phase of our idea. We simply had to get operating capital. At this point we contacted Julius E. Marx, who is one of the leading realtors in Mobile, and discussed the matter with him. He, too, became very enthusiastic and called in several more of his realtor associates. After several small group meetings of the realtors they decided to put the idea up to all of the realtors in Mobile who were members of the Mobile Chamber of Commerce and get their feelings. From this point on, the circle of dedicated workers began to grow in number and enthusiasm. The real estate men came to us and asked how much money we thought would be necessary to promote the plan, cover the engineering, early planning and advertising. After some consultations we came to the conclusion that one hundred thousand dollars would be the minimum needed. They thought they could raise it. So we decided to give it a try. An organized meeting of the realtors was called by Julius and the response was very gratifying. A large group came to the Chamber conference room and after the idea was explained to them fully they elected officers and directors and employed Mr. Albert J. Tully as their attorney, and decided to incorporate and sell participating certificates to the members included in the realtors' plan.

Always trying to keep the cart from getting before the horse, Bob Hays and his group of hard workers were constantly trying to build up the foundations. We knew that we would have to have the full cooperation of the Mobile County Board of Revenue and Road Commissioners to accomplish much in this area, and several meetings were set up with the Board, of which Mr. A. Beverly Jefferies was Chairman, the other four commissioners being Messrs. Charles F. Hackmeyer, Clifford H. Jackson, Leroy N. Stevens and George A. Toulmin. They assured us of every possible cooperation, and with this assurance we felt it was then time to go to the State to see what they would do.

Honorable Gordon Persons was then Governor of Alabama; Mr. Thomas A. Johnston, III was State Senator, and Messrs. Jack C. Gallalee, Sydney S. Pfeeger, and Robert B. Wilkins were in the Legislature from Mobile County. All of this time Oliver H. Delchamps, Sr., our enthusiastic President of the Chamber, was working every chance he got to strengthen the position of the idea,
and even looking back in history now, we all feel that with a President with less energy and foresight than Ollie, the project would never have been born.

At our request, Sydney Pfleger succeeded in getting an appointment for us in Montgomery with Governor Persons and Highway Director Guerry Pruitt, and the Chamber got together quite a group of prominent citizens, as well as the County Commissioners, and we made the sojourn to the Capitol in a large bus. The Governor was very cordial and we had a most delightful visit with him. Mr. Pruitt said he would go along with us if the Governor wished. I believe at that time very few people thought the project ever could be a success, even perhaps Governor Persons. It had been tried so many times over so many years, always meeting with failure, that everybody thought, "Well, here we go again." I never have been quite sure whether the Governor took us seriously at this time or whether he felt he was just being a good fellow to a bunch of good fellows and trying to stand in with all of us. Anyway, he said that he liked the idea and he would go with us if we would do our part. Highway Engineer Pruitt had previously told him that the estimated cost of the bridge to the island would be about three million dollars. At this point the Governor told us the State would build the bridge if Mobile County would contribute two million dollars toward its cost. With a great show of confidence we all assured him that Mobile County would do this.

Then we began to wonder if we really had a promise from the Governor, so Sydney Pfleger went to a typewriter and wrote a statement saying what the Governor had said he would do. We took this to the Governor and asked him to read it and he said, "Yes, that's what I said," and signed his name to the bottom of it. We felt very happy about it and all shook hands and returned to Mobile. But it wasn't too long after that we began to reconsider and read that paper again, and it turned out to be no more than a news announcement and had no actual legal commitment in it. This caused us considerable concern. At this point Mr. William H. McDermott came into the picture. He was a very prominent attorney in Mobile and a law partner of Sydney Pfleger. We wanted, if we possibly could, to get a legal commitment from Governor Persons. Sydney felt that he had gotten the first statement and that
possibly our chance would be better if his partner went to Montgomery and explained to the Governor that we needed more than his first announcement to proceed with our legal requirements—that we should have a letter or document of some kind.

Bill McDermott agreed to undertake the big job and went to Montgomery with the blessings of all of us and all hoping that the Governor would take us seriously and give us such a letter. By this time we had also sought the assistance of the legal firm of Inge, Twitty, Armbrecht and Jackson, and after several conferences we had pretty well decided what we wanted the Governor to say. Bill McDermott was armed with this information and we kept our fingers crossed for the full day that he was gone to Montgomery. But by the next morning he came into the office with his broad smile showing and we knew that his mission was accomplished. He had in his briefcase a perfectly legal commitment from Governor Persons that he would have the State build the bridge if Mobile County would contribute two million dollars toward the cost. We then felt that our first legal obstacle was out of the way. I want to say again right here that everyone up to this point had agreed to come in on that same slogan—that they would be paid “When and If.”

Of course, Bob Hays had kept his Board of Directors fully informed of everything that we had done, and the Board was backing President Deltchamps at every step. At about this time Governor Persons seemed to take us more seriously and thought he had better get into it a little more fully. Apparently with this thought in mind he sent Mr. Earl McGowin, who was State Conservation Director in Governor Persons’ Cabinet, and one of his very close associates in his administration, to the Chamber of Commerce to talk to some of us. We held several very serious conferences with him, with various people coming in from time to time, and we believed that we had convinced him that the project was good, was feasible and could be done. Apparently our meetings were successful because Mr. McGowin did go back to Montgomery and advise the Governor that he thought the project had merit and was practical, and with lots of hard work and good luck it could be accomplished.

Now it seemed time to go back to the realtors and find out if they really could raise one hundred thousand dol-
lars. They had a good organization formed by now and had been incorporated.

I do not want to proceed further without bringing into this story another member of the cast of characters who played a most important part from the very beginning. This man was Mr. John Toomey. All of us counted on him to be the man to do any job that seemed to be most difficult. We considered him as sort of a "bulldozer" that would just go right in and get a job done when everyone else was holding back or hesitating for one reason or another. Whenever any realtor began to have some misgivings about whether he should really be active, we would ask Mr. Toomey to call on him and we could be reasonably sure that when he finished his enthusiastic conversation this man would be on our side wholeheartedly.

In reviewing some of the early minutes of the Chamber of Commerce I find it interesting that he had been carrying the ball for a good many years before the final idea was originated. For instance, the minutes of the meeting of the Board of Directors of the Chamber on May 30, 1946, held this report: "Mr. Toomey reported that, as Chairman of the Dauphin Island Bridge Committee, he has the assurance of the State Highway Department that they will take up where they left off before the War in the campaign to secure the construction of Dauphin Island Bridge."

Then again on October 16, 1946 the minutes of another meeting of the Board reflect this comment: "A report was made by the President of a meeting of the Dauphin Island Bridge Committee with State Highway Director Rogers in support of efforts being made to secure construction of a bridge to Dauphin Island. It was agreed that a letter should be written to Governor Chauncey Sparks asking that the State Bridge Committee call a meeting for further consideration of this project." At that time Mr. E. Roy Albright was President of the Chamber of Commerce, and was also Chairman of the Alabama State Bridge Commission. It is noted that in a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Chamber on December 13, 1946, was this report: "Colonel Albright made a brief report regarding studies being made by Ford, Bacon & Davis of New York regarding the economic prospects for the proposed Dauphin Island Bridge. Mr. Blocker L. Wheeler, representing this firm of engi-
neers, was in Mobile recently, and visited Dauphin Island and held conferences with the Mobile Chamber of Commerce."

At this time a group of us went to Dauphin Island with the State Bridge Commission to inspect various phases of the work and to get the feeling of the Island people. They were very cordial to us and had a fish fry for all of their visitors. Island native, Pete Patronas, his wife, Ola, and a group of residents of the fishing village on the island prepared seafood gumbo, fried mullet and all the trimmings. We went over that day in a small oyster boat which was crowded to the "gunnels."

As chairman of the Dauphin Island Bridge Committee, Mr. Toomey certainly learned a lesson that persistence is a virtue even if it takes years of persistence, for on April 22, 1947, at a meeting of the Board of Directors of the Chamber of Commerce, there is this report: "The President and Chairman Toomey of the Dauphin Island Bridge Committee reported to the Board on efforts which are being made to get a conference of State Highway Director McFarland and Mr. Forney Johnston, representing the owners of property on Dauphin Island, for a discussion of ways and means of promoting the Dauphin Island Bridge. They expressed optimism over the progress which is being made in connection with this project."

An excerpt from the minutes of an Executive Committee meeting of the Chamber of Commerce on October 25, 1948 is as follows: "Following a discussion of the proposal made by the Chairman of the Dauphin Island Bridge Committee as to ways and means to finance the construction of the proposed Dauphin Island Bridge, the President was requested to communicate with the Bridge Committee Chairman, send him a copy of the resolution adopted by the Board of Directors on this subject, ask him to concentrate on working out an agreement with the major property holders on Dauphin Island and make his report to the Directors of the Chamber of Commerce as soon as possible." Of course this was Chairman John E. Toomey of the Dauphin Island Bridge Committee.

At a meeting the Chamber's Executive Committee April 12, 1949, with President J. Roy Smith presiding, the following members were present: Messrs Leonard Metzger, Herman Todd, E. Roy Albright, O. H. Delchamps, Sr.,
J. B. Converse and Robert D. Hays, Mr. Duncan C. Smith, Chairman of the New Industries Committee, was present by invitation. Their action was as follows: The Committee unanimously approved the recommendations being presented by the Dauphin Island Bridge Committee to the Board of Directors requesting an advisory election and supporting campaign for a one-cent gasoline tax to finance the construction of the Dauphin Island Bridge. In approving the recommendations the members of this committee expressed themselves by being very much in accord with the plans of the Dauphin Island Bridge Committee for organizing a countywide committee to support the campaign for this undertaking.

I have located the minutes of a meeting of the Board of Directors on April 19, 1949, and it is interesting to note the members attending that Board meeting which of course represent a cross section of Mobile's outstanding citizens. The meeting was presided over by President J. Roy Smith, with the following members present: Messrs. Glen Brock, John M. Griser, R. E. Hartman, John D. Terrell, Leonard Metzger, L. B. Moreland, W. C. Todd, Colin Brown, W. H. Jernigan, E. Roy Albright, Herman D. Todd, Charles McNeil. State Senator Joseph N. Langan, State Representative Joseph C. Sullivan, and Mr. J. Finley McRae, President of the Merchants National Bank, were present by invitation. The following is quoted from the minutes of that meeting: "A report and recommendations were presented from the Dauphin Island Bridge Committee as covered in the following excerpt from the minutes of the meeting of that committee which was held on Friday, April 8, 1949. The President and General Manager reminded the members of the Board that a thorough discussion of this subject should be held, as this involved a very serious undertaking." Here are the quotes from the Committee meeting: "The Chairman reported the results of a conference held with Mr. Forney Johnson, Attorney, and Mr. Peter Vredenburgh, representing the principal owners of the properties on Dauphin Island. The Chairman also reported that a conference had been held with the members of the Mobile County Legislative Delegation who had agreed to ask the County of Mobile to call an advisory election to determine whether or not the people of Mobile County would want an additional gasoline tax of one
cent per gallon, the proceeds of which would be used to finance the construction of the proposed Dauphin Island Bridge, with the understanding that this gasoline tax would be automatically removed as soon as the cost of building the bridge is paid. This with the further understanding that tolls would be charged for crossing the bridge."

The Committee thought that the properties which had been offered for public purposes on Dauphin Island would be adequate and a resolution was unanimously adopted recommending to the Board of Directors of the Mobile Chamber of Commerce that the Legislative Delegation be requested to ask the County of Mobile to hold an advisory election as above outlined with the understanding that legislation would be sponsored in accordance with the wishes of the people, as shown in the proposed election. It was also recommended that in the event the Board of Directors approved this recommendation the Dauphin Island Bridge Committee would be authorized to organize a Dauphin Island Bridge Committee of Mobile, which would be composed of members from all sections of the county." The minutes continue as follows: "In the discussion of this subject Mr. McRae expressed himself as being in favor of the project and proposed that something should be added in the plans for financing the bridge so as to provide funds for the building of parks and swimming facilities in the proposed recreation area. On motion of Mr. Glen Brock, seconded by Mr. Leonard Metzger, the recommendations of the Dauphin Island Bridge Committee were unanimously approved."

These few excerpts show the unbounded energy that Bob Hays and John Toomey were devoting to their favorite project—the Dauphin Island Bridge. I know that Mr. Toomey's interest continued right up to the last day of his life, because on that day he and I had been called as witnesses in a squatter case on Dauphin Island and we were waiting in the hall of the present Court House to be called in that case. It had been a long wait and when the lunch hour came and the Judge adjourned the meeting until after lunch, Mr. Toomey told me he had to go out on another project on which he was working. I think it had to do with Spring Hill College. To the great loss of the Dauphin Island project and all of Mobile, Mr. Toomey never returned from that trip. He was stricken while out on this lunch break.
and never did recover.

All of this energy was cut short by the election at which the voters of Mobile County turned down the gasoline tax as a method of paying for a bridge to Dauphin Island.

It was at this juncture that the idea was born of buying the Island and proceeding from there. So to return to the scene of this new activity: On August 26, 1953, the meeting of the Board of Directors of the Chamber was held, with President O. H. Delchamps presiding, and the following directors present: J. H. Baker, T. T. Martin, Julius E. Marx, J. P. Turner, E. Roy Albright, J. A. Allain, Frank C. Drane, L. B. Moreland, William H. Armbrecht, Jr., J. R. Mighell, Jr., H. A. Pharr, John E. Toomey and S. Blake McNeely. Present by invitation were Mr. A. B. Jeffries, Chairman of the Mobile County Board of Revenue and Road Commissioners, and Messrs. Sam H. Lackland, S. E. White-Spunner, George Downing, Ernest Cleverdon, and Fred Holder. It will be noted that some of the names on the Board of Directors had changed since another term of administration had come around, but it is also noted that they were all outstanding citizens and the retiring members of the Board never failed to lend every bit of assistance they could to the new Board.

On August 26, 1953, the Bridge Committee submitted to the Board of Directors a memorandum which outlined the complete plan for the purchase and development of Dauphin Island, and the memorandum was unanimously endorsed in all of its parts. It was also agreed at this meeting that expressions of appreciation should be sent to Governor Persons, State Highway Director Pruitt, and State Conservation Director McGowin. It was also agreed that expressions of commendation should be extended to the members of the County Board and the County Legislative Delegation.

The minutes of this meeting hold a copy of the original contract between the Dauphin Island Land Sales Corporation and the Mobile Chamber of Commerce setting forth all of the agreements as to commissions, methods of marking lots, engineering, compensation for an administrative staff and so forth. This contract was prepared by Mr. Albert Tully, who was the attorney for that corporation. The contract also carried a copy of the “Offer to Purchase Lot on Dauphin Island” so that the Chamber could see exactly
what the real estate people had in mind.

The Dauphin Island Land Sales Corporation was the agency through which the Chamber of Commerce had agreed to sell the lots on Dauphin Island. It was incorporated November 9, 1953. Julius E. Marx was elected the first President; John A. Roberts, the first Vice-President; and John E. Rolston, the first Secretary-Treasurer. The other incorporators were George R. Irvine, W. F. Mandrell, and E. Allen Sullivan. Forty-five realtors held certificates in the corporation, and since it was they who supplied the first $100,000.00 to give the breath of life to the project, their names are listed below:

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Alabama Realty Co., Inc.
Allen Realty & Insurance Agency
Baumhauer & Co.
M. D. Bell
Berg & Diehl, Inc.
Boyles Insurance & Realty Co.
Gillette Burton
Carter & Co.
Courtney & Pharr
Cowan-Irvine Co., Inc.
Crawford-Whiting-Espalla, Inc.
Croom & Matzenger, Inc.
Daniel Real Estate & Insurance Co.
Sam Doney Real Estate Co.
C. D. Glaze
Jay H. Green Co.
Gulf Development Company, Inc.
Martin L. Horst
Johnston Real Estate & Insurance Co.
A. D. McIntyre, Jr.
W. F. Mandrell
Mann Realty Co.

Julius E. Marx
Henry Mattei
J. F. Maury & Co.
Moore-Foshee Realty & Insurance Co.
Thomas M. Moore
Norville Brothers
Pickett-Hamilton Realty & Insurance Co.
Poggi-Moragues
Roberts Bros.
Rolston Realty Corp.
Rush Realty
St. John Realty & Insurance Co.
Sage & Burgett
J. E. Sayers
Richard J. Scott
C. W. Seignious
Staples-Pake-Griffin
Sullivan Realty & Insurance Co.
Thames-Jackson-Harris Co.
Thomas-King Co.
A. C. Tonsmeire
Walter Weaver
Homer L. Williams
As soon as the corporation was set up it began negotiations with the Chamber of Commerce to take over the selling of all of the lots on Dauphin Island after they were properly surveyed and staked and maps of record and contour maps prepared. The contract was entered into between the Dauphin Island Land Sales Corporation and the Mobile Chamber of Commerce on February 5, 1954. It will be noted that most of the lots were sold in late 1953, before the contract with Land Sales was signed, but letters of intent and much confidence was shared by all concerned. Looking back after twenty years it is very interesting to note that many provisions that were foreseen and handled as if the whole project had been guided by a Higher Intelligence than those of us involved with the deal.

Briefly, the Chamber agreed to list with the agent a minimum of 1500 lots to be sold, with not less than 1,000 lots to be delivered on the day and date of the initial listing, and not less than 500 lots on or before six months from the said date of the initial listing. Now it must be borne in mind that at this time Richard J. Scott, our engineer, had not only completed a survey of the island but had made a rough estimate of lots and figured that the Chamber would have at least this many lots to offer for sale.

The Chamber was willing for the Land Sales Corporation to be their exclusive representative for all of the lots, inasmuch as every realtor could be represented in the sales under the agreement that later was made between the realtors of the area. The lots were to be sold on a pre-bridge, pre-development discount of twenty percent, and an additional ten percent was allowed if the lot was paid for in cash. Now of course any cash or reserve funds that were paid at that time were put in escrow until the whole deal could be consummated. In addition to the above discounts, the Chamber agreed to pay the Dauphin Island Sales Corporation a twenty percent commission on all of its sales, and in the corporation’s agreement between it and the subscribing members who had put up the initial $100,000 “gamble” money, they agreed to divide this twenty percent among their participants in a manner that was agreed upon by all concerned. It was agreed that no sales would be counted as final until the corporation had sold a minimum of $2,250,000.00 in lots. It was further agreed that any
licensed real estate broker in the State of Alabama, or any other state shall have the right to serve as a real estate broker in the sale of these lots, and he would participate in the commissions as provided in this contract.

There was a gentlemen's agreement with Governor Persons that Alabamians would be given a three day preference in the selection of their lots. The corporation agreed to survey all streets, public parks and individual lots and place a recognizable lot number on each separate lot. This was so that although there were no streets on Dauphin Island at the time, a prospective purchaser could go over in a boat and if he was ambitious and hardy enough, he could walk to the site of his proposed lot and find it and decide whether or not it was one he wanted. While this arrangement was made available to all prospects it is a remarkable thing that the vast majority of the lots were sold to people who never saw them.

In the offer to purchase the buyer was requested to indicate a first and second choice, since the sale was strictly on a first come, first served basis. They felt reasonably safe in this procedure because the Chamber had agreed after the streets were in and the lots were properly surveyed and marked that if anyone had a lot that was low or undesirable the Chamber would either fill it in, trade it for a good lot, or give the money back to the buyer. After ten years about thirty-two such transfers had been made and the Chamber has had no complaint from anyone as to the manner in which it was handled.

It was now time for Julius to call the first full meeting of his Dauphin Island Land Sales Corporation organization. The meeting was called for eight o'clock in the morning and we had some misgivings as to how many real estate men would attend. Our concern was groundless, for on arriving at the Chamber that morning we found the large assembly room crowded. The Dauphin Island project held out great promise and every realtor with a mind for business did not want a project of this size to get on the road without him being a part of it. The meeting was opened by Julius Marx with the following prayer which was so fitting, as it did indeed seem that a higher Mind than ours was guiding us since so many right things seemed to fall into the right places.

"Oh, Lord, as we gather together here, our first thought is of
thanks to Thee. At the inception of this undertaking we invoked your guidance and blessing. Surely You have graciously answered our prayers and we thank Thee. Continue to show us the way in the pursuit of our task, for we have only begun the work we are dedicated to finish. May You graciously smile upon this labor that has imbued us, so that all who help to build this community on Dauphin Island will have the foresight and the courage to continue there a work of Thy Hand. Amen”

Mr. Marx and Colonel John Rolston explained to their fellow members all of the intricate details of their plan. Briefly, it was that the corporation would issue participating certificates in units of five hundred dollars to any member who wanted to be a part of it. And for each five hundred dollar certificate he received a package listing a certain number of lots, chosen between the most desirable lots, Gulf Beach lots and those that might not be so desirable. The arrangement for handling a fair distribution of the lots among participating realtors was spelled out specifically in the agreement between the Land Sales Corporation and the Chamber, and the best way to make it clear is to reproduce part of the agreement here: “It is specifically understood and agreed that the Agent shall have the right to allocate and divide the lots and parcels of land listed with the Agent by the Chamber among such real estate brokers (hereinafter called the "Listing Brokers") and in such proportions as the Agent, in its discretion, may determine so that each of the said Listing Brokers selected by the Agent shall have the exclusive sales agency of such proportion of the lands listed with the Agent as the said Agent may determine. It shall be the duty of the Listing Broker to familiarize himself with the properties allocated to him for sale. The Agent shall pay out of the commissions received by it, as hereinafore provided, a commission of fifteen (15%) percent to any real estate broker (Listing Broker) having the exclusive listing of any lot or parcel of land that may be sold, said commission to be due and payable according to the terms and provisions of this agreement. PROVIDED, HOWEVER, that any licensed
real estate broker in the State of Alabama or any other state shall have the right to serve as real estate broker (hereinafter called the "Cooperating Broker") as to any lot or parcel of land listed with the Agent by the Chamber and not previously sold or contracted to be sold, and to procure and produce prospective purchasers for said lands, and to act jointly with the Listing Broker to whom any such lot or parcel of land shall have been allocated under the provisions hereof in consummating the sale of any such lot or parcel of land. In such event, the Cooperating Broker shall share equally with the Listing Broker in the commissions on the sale of said lands, and shall receive for his services in procuring any such sale a commission of seven and one-half (7 1/2) percent on any such sale, the payment of said commission to be subject to the terms and provisions of this agreement.

There were two hundred packages at five hundred dollars each. Some emotional events occurred in that momentous meeting. It is no secret that we had canvassed some of the realtors and had advance information that they would make substantial contributions. So, when the meeting was laid open to offers, here would be a thousand dollars, there two thousand, over here three thousand, and I recall there were one or two for ten thousand, and several for five thousand, and then the buying began to slow down somewhat. At that point one of the smallest operators in the room rose to his feet and said that he could hardly afford to contribute anything, but he was so enthusiastic about the project that he would contribute five hundred dollars, and to him this was as much as five thousand dollars would be to some others in the room. This rekindled the spirit, there was a round of hearty applause, and once more the buying began to go up. When it slowed one more time Julius Marx and Colonel Rolston rose to the floor and said, "Alright, we are about getting to the end of the meeting and all of the subscriptions that are not taken, Mr. Marx and I will divide them between us and raise the entire one hundred thousand dollars." This statement was greeted with another hearty round of applause and several more contributors rose and increased amounts that they would take. I recall one realtor, who was somewhat of a doubting Thomas, and who had agreed to contribute the smallest item—five
hundred dollars, felt he was doing it only to be a good citizen; then retired from the room and about thirty minutes later he came back and withdrew the offer and said he did not believe it would be a success and that he wanted to withdraw. By that time the enthusiasm had increased to such a point that his contribution was snapped up immediately and the meeting was closed as far as the one hundred thousand dollars was concerned.

With the engineering and planning money in hand Dick Scott proceeded to Dauphin Island, set up living quarters in an old army barracks, got together a crew to handle his instruments in the field with him, and he set about to work. Actually Julius Marx had advanced him a thousand dollars of his personal money and Dick was set to go immediately.

I should add at this point that the seeming speed with which we were doing everything was absolutely necessary, because, as you see, this was about August, 1953 and Governor Persons would go out of office on January 1, 1954. We had no way of knowing what the next Governor might do, but we did have a commitment from Governor Persons that he would do the job.

So it behooved us to get all of our groundwork done and a bridge contract let before December 31, 1953. It was not too long before Dick Scott had given us the preliminary estimate of about 1,500 lots that could be made. He was reasonably certain that this would be the minimum number of lots and when we then put prices on the various ones, after we had decided which parts of the island were most desirable, we came up with roughly three and one-half million dollars worth of saleable lots. We felt sure then that we could go ahead with our project and that it would increase in value rather than decrease.

I remember Mr. McRae asked Mr. Marx how long he thought it would take the real estate men to sell a substantial part of the island. Mr. Marx said, "two days or two years—who can tell?" Fortunately for us, and little dreamed by us, his first prophecy of two days was nearer correct. Much to everyone's surprise purchasers of the lots paid for slightly more than eighty percent of them in cash, although earlier estimates by realtors had been about thirty percent. This eased our financial problems considerably, and it is also interesting that in the final settlement of more than 2,500 lots only four were
ever foreclosed on for lack of payment. We believe this set some kind of record in real estate transactions. It also gave us great satisfaction to see the faith that Mobilians and other lot purchasers placed in the Chamber of Commerce to carry out all of its obligations.

At this point the real estate people felt we should get a firm option on the island, so several of us made trips to Birmingham and talked to Mr. Forney Johnson and one of his sons, Mr. Joseph Johnson. Finally with the help of our legal advisers we worked out an option to buy the island for one million dollars in bridge revenue bonds.

By this time the wheels of progress were whirling, and the Land Sales Corporation realized that they had to have a staff to take care of all the paper work that was coming into play. For instance, there were various types of deeds—deeds with survivorship, deeds to corporations, vendor lien deeds, and so on. Then there were offers to purchase to be prepared, restrictions to be written, records to be kept, mailings to go out, etc. They approached the Chamber of Commerce with the proposal that they use the Chamber’s staff in off hours, on Saturdays, Sundays and nights, and that “when and if” the project was successful they would make arrangements to pay those members of the staff who agreed to go along with the plan. The Chamber’s Executive Committee, on October 5th, accepted this proposal and much work was done in off hours by the various members of the staff of the Chamber. Mr. Hays, of course, was the leader of all of this group of people, and he was what we called at the time, a demanding and tireless worker. We accorded him “the last pencil” and when a pencil notion was on an idea in his handwriting it meant a final agreement had been reached. His energy and persistence carried the day many a time when things began to look a little discouraging. Here again, I feel sure that had some of them known the amount of night work and weekend work that was going to be required they may have been a little reluctant to take on the deal. Bob Hays was one of those who would do his Chamber of Commerce all day, go home and take a short nap, then wake up about eleven o’clock at night and do Dauphin Island work from then until daylight, and he would bring all of that work to the office the next day for the staff to work on that coming
evening.

Your narrator, who at that time owned and operated the Gulf States Engraving Company, agreed with the Land Sales Corporation that he would handle the publicity and advertising for the project and that he would not make any charge for his services unless the project was a success, and if it was they would compensate him properly for it. They did agree to pay for any newspaper space that was purchased or other actual out-of-pocket expense to which he might be put.

On November 14, 1953 a letter was prepared to go out over the signature of the Dauphin Island Land Sales Corporation to all real estate licensees in Alabama and this letter gave all of the details of how real estate operators could sell the lots on the basis that they were to be sold, when they could be sold, and the documents necessary to be prepared. The letter also warned out of the city and out of the state agents that they were not to do any advertising or any publicity until a certain date was given to them, and that they would be sent a sales kit which would give them all of the information they needed to make a sale, offers to purchase to be signed, and all of the answers that could possibly be conceived at the time they were given to them. This letterhead carried on its face the names of the real estate firms that had shown their faith in the project by advancing funds to cover the cost of surveying, engineering and developing the subdivision plan of Dauphin Island.

It is interesting to note that at all of the early meetings of the Land Sales Corporation every one of their officers and directors were present at each meeting. Also I notice that R. D. Hays, S. Blake McNeely, Other C. Lockett, and A. A. Weiskopf attended many of these meetings to get the feeling of the real estate people and to carry out the details that they wished to have attended to.

For instance, Other Lockett was in charge of arranging transportation to get prospective customers to Dauphin Island and to convey them about the island in the general neighborhood of the lots after they got there. There was one trail running down through the island from the Fort to the fishing village, and Lockett hauled the people just that far and from then on it was up to them to walk. It must be borne in mind that at that time there was not even something for them to ride in for
the two miles from the Fort to the village. It was up to Lockett to work out a plan to get a bus of some type to the island. Weiskopf joined him in working on these details and a great deal of help was given to the group by Colonel Harold Jones of the Alabama National Guard and some of his men. He arranged for them to get a large military transport to the island and in some way they also secured a large bus affair that had no motive power of its own but had to be pulled by a tractor. This latter vehicle proved to be a jolly investment as most of the people who rode on it felt that they were going on some kind of picnic hay ride. This was especially true since the island at the time was fresh and absolutely untouched by development of any kind. Most people got a great kick out of it. Here was nature at its pristine finest.

The matter of providing boats to get to the island was the most difficult. The water between the mainland and the island extends for about three and one-half miles but it is too shallow for a large boat that could handle a number of people. Since only shallow draft boats could make the trip, most of the crossings were made in oyster boats that could handle fifteen to twenty-five people. They would go to the end of a crabbing pier at Cedar Point and board the boats there to go to Fort Gaines, a distance of about six miles, where they would get off and get about the island as best they could. The trip took more than an hour each way and they did not have too long on the island.

One event that was very amusing but could have been serious was the first morning that it had been advertised to take a group to the island. So many people came out to the end of the old pier that the pier simply sank down into the water and some of the people were dumped into the bay. Of course the water was not deep enough to hurt anybody, but it was quite an experience to have the wharf give away unexpectedly. It all had to be rebuilt before we could take other people over. Sometimes the small boats were loaded so heavily that the waves would lap over the sides and we spent most of our time just hoping and praying that a squall wouldn't come up and swamp the whole lot where the water was too deep to stand up. A person had to expect to be pretty well wetted down with spray from the waves or shower from a squall for there was no shelter. You just plain got wet. No one seemed to
object and everybody had a great time during all of this experience.

Several times in the early days some of us would take our wives over to the island and they would find the primitive conditions very exciting. They would walk over some of the island with us but would spend most of their time over on the beautiful Gulf beaches. When lunch time came we would pick them up and go to one of the two small stores on the island. The lunch was a Spartan affair to say the least. The only things you could get would be a can of sardines, a can of potted meat, a loaf of bread and a bottled soft drink which wasn't always cold, as the island did not always have ice. One little store sat about where LeMoyne Avenue enters the island and was a tiny frame building. We would sit on the front steps and eat sandwiches made of the food we had bought and this always attracted a small perimeter of pigs which would stand around waiting for scraps. It was fun to watch them scramble for bits of food we would throw to them and it was also very satisfying to note that when the luncheon was finished and we had thrown things out on the ground the pigs cleaned it up to where it was in nicer shape than it was before—food, paper and all.

Although we frequently got caught in short squalls crossing the water in the oyster boats and everyone would get soaked to the skin, the ladies seemed to enjoy it and all had a good time. Of course the rest of us had been used to it and didn't mind it too much.

At our point of departure at Cedar Point there was a combination fish house and small restaurant which was known as Collier's Place. We blessed them many times because on cold, wet, foggy mornings the ladies in the family would have a pot of hot coffee ready to serve to all of us who would go on the early boats. Mrs. Martha Collier, well along in her years, was the matriarch of the Collier group and she was a joy to talk to because she knew so many of the legends and tall tales of the past concerning Dauphin Island. We first learned from her and later verified the fact that no one had ever been drowned at Dauphin Island in a hurricane. One man had been drowned during a hurricane, but it was because he had tried to go out into the water to save his boat and wasn't able to get back. "Miss Martha", as she was affectionately known, had great misgivings about the bridge. She told us
several times that one day a great tide and a great storm would come and either wash the bridge away or wash the island away, that they both could not stay there at the same time. She felt that the bridge was occupying too much of the space in the Pass and she felt the water would pile up against it and someday wash it completely away. It has not happened yet, and we hope and pray that it never will, but nevertheless we were all very fond of Miss Martha and her daughters who helped us so many mornings with a good cup of hot coffee.

Later, a temporary landing was made at the Western mouth of Dauphin Island Bay at Chugae (a corruption of the illustrious Frenchman’s name, “Chateaugue”) Point and some of the smaller boats could land at a pier that Lockett had constructed there. This shortened the trip by at least half an hour. It made the back and forth passage a whole lot faster and several trips a day could be made to take prospects to the island. Land Sales decided that it was best to buy a boat that they could depend on and have a man to operate it. The boat sank before it ever made its first trip! That was one of the hazards of the day.

But Other Lockett was not dismayed and he finally made an arrangement with Captain "Raz" Crenshaw (in reality Captain E. S. Crenshaw of Bayou la Batre) to operate a boat very successfully. Together with his fast boat and several large oyster luggers, a very good fleet of boats was operating to take people whenever they would go, except of course they would have to get up groups and several of them go at one time. We had arranged to have a jeep with the hayride wagon meet people at this point and ride them as far as they could go toward the Fort. If they wished to go to the westerly end of the island they simply had to walk; there was no road. So that they would know what they were seeing when they got there, Dick Scott had a crew on the island with surveying instruments staking four corners of a lot just as fast as he could go, and McNeely had at the same time made signs with lot and block numbers on them so each lot could have its own identification tacked to a pine tree where it could be seen easily. It must be remembered, there were no streets and only one narrow trail—people were principally wandering through the woods to see lots, and they had to have
some method of identifying the area that they wanted to purchase. This was the way we did it. Frequently visitors would get lost and when they were late for the last boat we would send people out to round them up. It proved quite a lark to all of them.

An agreement was reached with the Title Insurance Company of Mobile to furnish Guarantee of Title and they worked with Mr. Scott in the type of monumenting that they preferred on the island. I guess it was not unusual that there would be some vandalism even way back then, and some people would pull up iron stakes and move them, perhaps in mischief. But anyway, it was a serious matter and the Chamber asked Sheriff Holcombe to appoint Pete Patronas, who had worked for the project a long time, as a Deputy Sheriff on Dauphin Island for the purpose of curbing this vandalism. Pete was a native islander, very well liked and he did a very good job for the many years that he stayed with the Chamber of Commerce.

Because of my long experience with boats I worked very closely with Other Lockett in arranging his boat transportation. Captain Crenshaw and natives of the island were most helpful in supplying boats at reasonable charter when we had crowds too large for the one small boat that we operated regularly.

Since the project was now assuming rather large financial proportions it seemed proper that the next group to call would be our bankers, and they gave unstinting help. Presidents J. Finley McRae of the Merchants National Bank, H. Austill Pharr of the First National Bank, and George S. Dennis-ton of the American National Bank, came in to do what they could to help. Mr. McRae was especially helpful and gave us considerable sound advice. He explained that trust agreements should be prepared and the banks should come into the picture to guarantee to prospective lot owners that they would get a satisfactory lot or they would get their money back. It was suggested that escrow accounts be set up to give these people confidence and this was done.

Mr. Armbrecht came into the picture again to draw up trust agreements, and bankers and bond attorneys who have read that trust agreements all agree that it is a masterpiece of simplicity for the operation of so complicated a proposition. This agreement in full is shown on following pages. The trust agree-
ment set up three operating bodies and
detailed exactly the duties of each and
how the monies would be divided
among them. The agreement was set
up for a period of ninety-nine years
with the Trust Department of the Mer-
chants National Bank being named the
Trustee for the Property Owners As-
sociation and Park and Beach Board
and the First National Bank as Trustee
for the Bridge Fund. It provided that
one-half of all of the gross sales on
Dauphin Island would be given to the
Mobile Chamber of Commerce to be
expended by it for all expenses such
as legal fees, engineering fees, plan-
ning, real estate commissions, and any
other proper fees that could be con-
sidered part of the actual development.
Broadly speaking, this money was to
be spent on anything that was for the
general good of Dauphin Island, and
could not be spent for any other pur-
pose.

The other half of the proceeds from
the sales of the lots was to be divided
seventy percent to a body to be known
as the Dauphin Island Property Owners
Association. This group was required
to expend their funds only on Island
projects pertaining to the improvement
or upgrading of property owners' com-
mon areas, such as private parks,
beaches, water service, etc. The remain-
ing thirty-percent of that half to a
body to be known as the Dauphin Island
Park & Beach Board. The Park & Beach
Board was to consist of three members
to be nominated by the Mobile County
Board of Commissioners to the Gover-
nor of Alabama who, if he approved,
would in turn issue a commission to
these three. The first three for the Daup-
phin Island Project were Mr. E. Roy
Albright, Chairman, Dr. Victor H. Hud-
son and Mr. Sydney S. Pfieger. Their
commissions were to run for a period
of six years, at which time new com-
misioners would be appointed if
thought necessary, with staggered terms
of office. They were charged with vari-
ous duties of handling all public pro-
erties on the island, and all of the
funds they received from the trust were
required to be spent solely on public
projects on the island am on nothing
else.

This provision was interpreted later
to allow the Property Owners Associa-
tion and the Park and Beach Board to
participate in the dredging of channels
and installing of concrete seawalls, so
that low lying properties could be re-
covered from marsh and flooded areas.
and sold, at which time these two agencies would get back not only the money that it had used to assist the project but also would share in their portion of the income from the sale of the new lots. It proved to be very successful all along the line.

I find it difficult to hold this narrative to strict chronological order, because what is not obvious is the fact that while some of these legal requirements were being taken care of, feverish activity was continuing in other areas. Suffice to say at this point that three of Mobile’s top legal firms were working diligently to bring all of the legal matters under control and many of these could not be done simultaneously — they were required to dovetail into each other as different phases of the project developed. The firm of Inge, Twitty, Armbrecht and Jackson, the firm of Holberg, Tully & Hodnette, and the firm of Pfleger & McDermott were each working on a different phase of the work. These firms agreed to provide the necessary legal services for handling the different phases of the Dauphin Island development project with the understanding that if and when funds were available from this project they would be paid reasonable fees for their services, an amount to be agreed on as mutually satisfactory by each of these attorneys and our Board of Directors.

During all of this time those of us at the Chamber of Commerce had been extremely busy working out details of finance, contracts for the building of the bridge, selling bonds, setting up restrictions, setting up a trust, and all of the myriad things that had to be done to get a project this big on the road before too much time had elapsed. This being our first venture of the kind and being a civic venture it was not the easiest thing we had ever done, but it was probably the most interesting, and we were all sincere in devoting as much time and thought to it as we possibly could. Mr. Hays was carrying a tremendous load of this detail work. He was making trips with the rest of us who would go down to see that the streets were marked, that they weren’t cutting the wrong trees, where we would put the golf course and various clubhouses, and such things as that. We inspected every part of the island on foot to get the whole picture.

On these trips one of our strong supporters was Mr. A. B. Jefferies, Chairman of the County Board of Revenue and Road Commissioners. Mr. Jefferies
made frequent trips with us to the island. The islanders were a fine and sincere people and always greeted us in a very friendly manner. With no restaurants on the island they would invite us to a fish fry in one home or another, or in most cases we would go to the store on the island and eat sardines and crackers and cold drinks when ice was available. But things were humming in every direction from the financial, legal, civic, tree cutting, engineering and planning and promoting stage. Richard Scott took on the job of marking trees to be cut in the proposed street rights of way, principally because the workmen in many cases were not sure which way they were going and they would cut trees that did not need to be cut. It was our purpose to preserve just as many as we possibly could.

While the Mobile County work crews had agreed to cut the trees in the street rights of way and a deal had been made with a lumber company to remove the pulpwood and saw up the large trees, still very little thought had been given to disposing of the stumps that would be left. We all had been thinking of so many things so rapidly that this little matter slipped up on us, and it turned out to be not such a little matter. We realized that to dump several thousand huge stumps into the Gulf would not only create a navigation hazard, but the chances were excellent that they would all wash back up on the beach and make an unsightly mess. The only thing remaining was to burn them, but before they could be burned they had to be removed from the ground and this turned out to be a considerable job. We found that there was a layer of hardpan under the subsoil on Dauphin Island at depths of about twelve to fifteen feet and the huge trees that were virgin pines had never been cut and had developed an enormous root system that spread out much farther and heavier than trees in the highland area of Mobile County.

One of our operators claimed that he had stumped many areas, using dynamite and that he was qualified to handle this dangerous project. He felt that it would be no trick at all if we could just get the required amount of dynamite to the island. So early one morning we arrived at Cedar Point with a pickup truck loaded with dynamite and dynamite caps. There was some hesitancy by the captain about loading it on to his boat we were going to cross
in and some of the people were a little bit queasy about going with us. We finally got across and unloaded the dynamite and set out to see the first stumps fly into the air out of the ground, but it didn't happen. The blasting expert knew exactly how to handle his dynamite and it was supposed to move the stumps but it appeared that no one had told the stumps that they were supposed to move. After a large explosion, flying dirt, and debris, the stumps grunted a little bit and settled back down where they were before. We had brought just enough of the blasting material to make a thorough test but after blasting all day we had removed two or possibly three stumps, and there were thousands of them to be removed. So this method was abandoned.

The next step was to barge a huge bulldozer to the island and we tried this method. It began to show some improvement, but with the blade on the bulldozer it picked up too much soil and did not do enough lifting on the stump. We finally replaced the blade with a heavy instrument built of steel that was shaped somewhat like a snout. This proved to be very promising and a number of of the small stumps were removed very handily. We could see that with thirty miles of right of way to be cleared, it would take too long at the rate we were going. We decided to barge another heavy bulldozer to the island and equip it with a similar type of equipment instead of a blade. On the especially large stumps we would have the two bulldozers charge the stump from different angles and it at about the same time. The stumps would eventually give way. They were huge. I would sit off the side and wonder how those men could sit on that behemoth of a bulldozer and be charging along and come to a sudden stop on collision with the stump.

Well, needless to say, we ended up with huge piles of stumps, some as high as a two story building, and it now became a job to dispose of them. We tried various ways but burning proved to be the most successful method. Using diesel oil and old tires to get the fires started, we kept fire crews on the island twenty-four hours a day burning. Great clouds of smoke were going up all over the place. It took about three to four weeks to get all of the stumps disposed of so that the graders could then go to work shaping up the roads and getting ready for the
final paving crews to come in.

In July of 1954 Mr. Marx wrote a letter to all realtors who had sold lots on Dauphin Island, and one paragraph of that letter was especially interesting — "You will be interested in knowing that just over 80 percent of lot purchasers paid cash in full and less than 10 persons failed to respond to requests for payment. This means several nice things to us but two stand out. First, Dauphin Island is on its way to a wonderful development and second, the brokers of Alabama have earned for themselves and enjoy the confidence of a statewide clientele." It was also a matter of great interest to us that about 80 percent of all purchasers paid cash for their lots and not more than four lots that were sold on a vendor's lien deed were foreclosed for non-payment of notes. Since about 1800 lots were sold in the first three days of the venture this is a record, we think, of which anyone could be justifiably proud.

The last two items in Minute Book No. 1 of the Dauphin Island Land Sales Corporation are two resolutions passed by the Corporation and signed by all of Corporation's directors. The first is a resolution complimenting R. D. Hays and his staff at the Chamber of Commerce on the marvelous work which they did in connection with the development and sale of Dauphin Island. And the second is a resolution signed by the same Board of Directors to S. Blake McNeely and associates complimenting them on the splendid job they had done in advertising, publicity and public relations in connection with the Dauphin Island project. I am sure Mr. Hays was extremely proud of his resolution and certainly I cherish mine.

On February 4, 1954 the first meeting of the incorporators of Dauphin Island Property Owners Association was held in the chambers of the old Customs House building at the corner of St. Francis and Royal Streets, where the First National Bank Building now stands. The ground floor of this building was the Mobile Chamber of Commerce. The following persons were present at that meeting: O. H. Delchamps, Sr., R. D. Hays, A. B. Jefferies; Julius E. Marx, S. B. McNeely, John A. Roberts, Herman D. Todd, John E. Toomey. John W. McConnell, Jr. was also present at that meeting, acting as attorney for the incorporators.

Bob Hays made the motion and it was seconded by Mr. Jefferies and
unanimously adopted, naming the following as the initial directors of this association: William H. Armbrcht, Jr.; O. H. Delchamps, Sr.; R. D. Hays; A. B. Jeffries; Julius E. Marx; S. Blake McNeely; J. R. Mighell, Jr.; John A. Roberts, and John E. Toomey. The incorporators then went into a regular business meeting and the following officers were unanimously elected by the board: S. Blake McNeely, President; Julius E. Marx, Vice-President; Herman D. Todd, Treasurer; Robert W. Gay, Secretary. Mr. Gay left the Chamber shortly after that and A. A. Weiskopf succeeded him as Secretary. Thereupon, considerable time and study was given to the preparation of the By-Laws, and as finally worked out, they were unanimously approved. The document would be very interesting to anyone in the future who might desire to develop an island or any other similar area.

At the same time, at this meeting, a Constitution of the association was also adopted. It set forth the various duties, rights and privileges of the officers, directors and members of the association how money was to be received by the association from the trust fund and how these monies should be spent. It was very complete in setting up the duties and expectations of such an association as representing all of the property owners. It referred to the trust created by the indenture dated November 18, 1953, between the Mobile Chamber of Commerce and the Merchants National Bank of Mobile, whereby the funds derived from the sale of lots by the Chamber of Commerce should be distributed to the Chamber for certain purposes and to the Property Owners Association and the Dauphin Island Park and Beach Board.

From this point on the Association began to operate in a firmly constituted and business like manner. Meetings were held and planning was considered and either accepted or rejected. It was decided when first things should be placed first and the very first thing that the Association did was to enter into a contract with the Layne Central Company, a world-wide water developing corporation, to dig a test well on Dauphin Island and spend up to $6,500 for the test. This was a touch and go proposition as a sufficient amount of fresh water on an island as small as Dauphin Island was extremely doubtful. There was sufficient shallow well water for the present inhabitants of the island though it was of low quality. Fore-
seeing the growth that was bound to come, a much more copious supply of water was absolutely necessary.

It was agreed that this test would go down a thousand feet as an exploratory operation and then a finished well would be placed where it was decided the best water could be found. The record log of the drilling would be of considerable interest to anyone interested in short-range geology. There would be a layer of sand and shell, then muck and then a firm layer of clay, then a stratum of fresh water, then shell, sand and clay and another stratum of salt water. This was repeated many times for the full thousand foot depth of the hole. After the engineers and experts at Layne-Central studied the log it was decided to pull back and take the water from a stream of fresh water at 353 feet. The well was securely plugged below the fresh water level to avoid any contamination of salt water intruding into the fresh water stream. Pumping machinery was put into place and when the test pump was run and a copious supply of good potable water was found it was a day of rejoicing for all of us. Another crisis had been successfully passed. We then installed the 135,000 gallon “golf ball” type tank and we had a fine central water system. It was at this time that the water people advised us to place a restriction against anyone drilling a well deeper than thirty feet on the island for fear of interrupting the flow of fresh water or contaminating it with a salt stream.

There was an artesian well at the east end of Dauphin Island that had been dug many years ago by the Coast Guard in an effort to supply water for some of their people stationed on the island. The flow was a rather heavy one and when attended would rise to about two and one-half to three feet above the ground level. The water tended to be brackish and was not acceptable to the public health services for general use although some people used it and it was very helpful in watering the shrubbery and grass that we were planting at that time around the old Fort Gaines Club.

While, of course it was important to have an adequate supply of potable water, it was almost equally necessary to be certain that this area was served by electricity. You must remember that Dauphin Island had stood still for hundreds of years and in spite of its proximity to the mainland, at the same time
it had no electricity, no streets or roads and no telephones. It was essential that we make every effort to supply all of these things before we could invite people to come to the island and develop it. Negotiations were started with the Alabama Power Company which had been supplying electricity to the southern part of Mobile County, but to take this electricity another four miles across the water was quite another matter and especially since in this passage there was an area where a high wire would be required to cross the channel that was used by the intracoastal waterway. In addition to this, the Power Company had in the past been supplying a smaller amount of power to facilities in south Mobile County than they would be required to supply to an island that was anticipated to develop into several thousand customers. This required an enlargement of their power substations in Theodore and other places, as well as the construction of an additional substation on Dauphin Island. I must say that the Power Company organization joined immediately with the enthusiasm that had been reflected on all sides. They made a very thorough feasibility study after which they came to the conclusion that they would join with us and supply electricity to the island. This project cost the Power Company in excess of one million dollars, and it must be admitted that they were taking a considerable chance, not knowing of course what would take place on the island in the future.

Remember, this was the first island that any of us had ventured to develop. Concurrently with the negotiations with the Alabama Power Company another group was in negotiation with the Bayou Telephone Company in an effort to get them to extend telephone service to the island. The Bayou Telephone Company of Bayou la Batre was a small independent operation. It was necessary for them to raise additional money to carry a line from Bayou la Batre to the island which would be some twelve to fourteen miles and a complete new line would have to be strung, as well as crossing the four miles of water. The telephone people showed a strong desire and determination to help carry the project through and they began immediately stretching their lines to join with the Power Company in reaching the island at approximately the same time the bridge was completed. Looking back over the development in the last years it is reasonable to assume that the risk
involved in the two projects has been justified.

Also at a meeting of May 24, 1954, a contract was let with Arch Winter and Howard Ellis, architects of Mobile, to design and plan for the construction of a clubhouse for the association. As I have stated in reviewing the minutes of the Chamber of Commerce and the Dauphin Island Land Sales Corporation, much work was being done on every hand with all of the details, multitudinous details that were involved.

Restrictions covering the buildings on the island, the type of materials, the location of the buildings on the properties, the zoning matters, were all worked out in fine detail and adopted by the various authorities and placed into effect. The first Architectural Control Committee for the island consisted of S. Blake McNeely, Chairman; John A. Roberts and Other C. Lockett.

As early as April, 1954 Mr. McNeely had a group of entomologists from the State Board of Health in Tuscaloosa come to Mobile and make a study of the mosquito problem on Dauphin Island with a view of attempting to eliminate them. It was felt that in the foreseeable future this could be accomplished.

It may be interesting at this point to clear up the reason why sewerage was not extended to all locations on the island. In the first place, to install a sewerage system where the flow is by gravity proved to be a tremendously expensive operation on Dauphin Island because of the high water table and flat terrain. Anytime a ditching machine went more than two and a half to three feet below the surface water rose in the ditch and all of the area required well—pointing to pump the ditches dry before pipes could be laid.

In the very beginning a study group from the State Board of Health visited Dauphin Island and made tests to see whether or not the area would be suitable for septic tanks. Their report was not 100 percent satisfactory. They said they believed that many of the areas were suitable and that some of the lower areas would probably be all right as soon as the streets and ditches were put in. They did say, however, that septic tanks would not be suitable on bathing beaches or fishing areas and that for the club, casino and motels, as well as the central commercial area, some method would have to be devised for installing a sanitary sewer system. With this ruling the Property Owners
Association then studied its finances again and finally voted to build a fine sewerage disposal plant to serve these required areas. This was a very expensive unanticipated operation, a non-profitable operation, and one that required a great deal of attention. But all agreed it was necessary.

When it was finally decided in 1955 to go ahead with the construction of a modern sewerage disposal plant it was decided to locate it north of the village area on a site at the extreme north end of Narvaez Street. Not realizing what a modern plant would look like, or how it would function, residents of that area objected strenuously. We tried for many days to convince them that the site would be attractive, have no odor and would not be objectionable in any way. We had a friend, a Mobilian, who owned a summer home right there in the village and we asked him to go down and tell the villagers just what the thing would be like. He had his weekend home there and he would have no objections to it being built. He did this and did his best to convince them of the advantages that would come to the area from the improvements that would be made. The night after he returned to Mobile his weekend home burned to the ground. We often wondered if it was a coincidence or a warning. Anyway, to try to keep good public relations with those who lived on the island before us we then moved the site up to a location on LeMoyne Drive where it is presently located, and there has never been the slightest complaint about its operation or its appearance.

In March of 1955 a contract was entered into between the Association and J. B. Converse & Company to prepare the complete plan of supplying water to every lot that the Chamber was to sell on Dauphin Island. These plans were to look forward as far as they reasonably could and there would be no temporary construction in any area. Wherever an extension was made it would be extended according to the first master plan with full mains and fire plugs every 1,000 feet. This has been done consistently ever since the island started. J. B. Converse was also contracted at the same time to act as consulting engineers and general managers of the water and sewer system for a period of 25 years, and they have always performed agreeably and to the satisfaction of everyone.

Upon the recommendation of J. B. Converse & Company, the Association
entered into a contract with the Cole Construction Company for the construction of a 100,000 gallon elevated water tank at a cost at that time of $31,825 and to enter into a contract with the Layne Central Company for the digging and installation of a complete water well system adjacent to this tank at a cost of $18,759. It is interesting to note that a similar well which had to be dug in 1967 cost $37,000—just an indication of how the dollar value had slipped over the years.

Now, Mr. Forney Johnston and his group in Birmingham began to wonder whether their capital gains position was in conformity with Internal Revenue regulations so that they would not have to pay too heavy an income tax on the sale of Dauphin Island. They asked that we agree to wait six months before we made the final purchase but go ahead on our sales under our escrow agreements and option. It then dawned on us that we might be in a similar tax position and might be subject to income tax for buying an island and breaking it up into lots and selling it, even though it was a non-profit project to the Chamber. This was quite a disturbing proposition and William Armbricht and Bob Hays worked diligently on the matter, making several trips to Washington. On one of the trips they told the income tax people that we had an island that just had to be sold in November and December of that same year and we just had to have a tax ruling before we could go ahead with it. They told us in no uncertain terms that we were outranked a little bit because President Eisenhower at the same time had a proposition before the Bureau concerning a book he had written and he was also pressing for a similar ruling. Our reply to that was, “yes, but he was just one man and we’ve got a whole community involved.” Of course it was all more or less in a joking manner, but nevertheless, we were successful in getting a ruling ahead of President Eisenhower. I think what had a great deal to do with it was that Governor Gordon Persons’ brother, General Wilton Persons, was General Eisenhower’s military aide and General Persons was of tremendous help to us in getting the matter under early consideration.

Our dealings were mostly with the Chief of the Exempt Organizations Branch, and on November 5, 1953, the U.S. Treasury Department wrote the Chamber a letter over Mr. R. C. Dunlap’s signature stating that they had
given the matter detailed attention and his letter certainly bore out that fact. It set out the entire details of the project. This letter is included in the minutes of November 11, 1953 of the Chamber's Board of Directors. Mr. Armbricht read the letter to the Board of Directors, advising that the Chamber would not lose its tax exempt status and that the proposed trust and property owners association are the type regarded as tax exempt. The Park and Beach Board were exempt as they were a public body. With this information at hand Governor Persons was advised that all details of the Dauphin Island project up to that time were going along in fine shape and that everything was moving forward actively.

I had been associated with the possible development of Dauphin Island since about 1915 and felt I was in a good position to prepare such publicity and advertising as was needed. I designed the rough dummies and wrote all of the copy for the brochures, folders and newspaper ads. It was agreed that we would have three full page ads to run in various daily newspapers in Alabama newspapers that were pre-selected and that the principal strategy behind the program would be scarcity of island property, desirability of island property, the romance of island property, and on the basis of first come, first served. One of the early rules was that we would try to see that everyone who made an offer got at least one lot but in no case would anybody get more than one lot until all applications had been fulfilled. Even after that, no one would be allowed to purchase more than three lots. We did not want developers to buy up blocks of lots and hold for future development.

Our project was non-profit to the Chamber of Commerce, our sole purpose being to see this beautiful island enjoyed by as many of our people as possible. This strategy proved in the long run to be eminently successful. It was now a race to "get the show on the road" and the problem was to get the "props" necessary to put the show on in a worthwhile manner in the short time that was allotted. We had brochures printed in color, a booklet printed in color, three full page ads illustrated, the type set, engravings and newspaper mats made, and a number of proofs pulled of each. We took many photographs on the island and the best pictures we had enlarged into murals about 4 x 6 feet and mounted them on