

AS SEEN IN The JOURNAL *Publications*

HISTORIC HAVENS by Lori Draz The Sandlass House



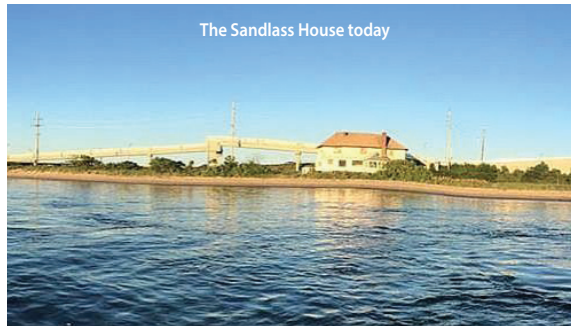
Front of Sandlass House in 1940, just after it was moved across the street at the original Highland Beach resort.

As any student knows, forgetting a fact or two about history is fairly common, but to forget an entire town – one that created the whole concept of a day trip to the Jersey Shore – seems mind-boggling. Yet, for many, the knowledge of Highland Beach doesn't even exist.

While other seaside resorts like Long Branch and Atlantic City attracted the rich and famous, William Sandlass wanted to create a place for everyman. So he leased 10 building lots from the Highland Beach Improvement Company in 1887. Highland Beach lined the western shoreline of Sandy Hook. Its original attraction, a gravity ride called the Great Switchback Rail Road, was a version of a roller coaster. The three-story thrill ride would be tame by today's standards, but it was a big enough rush to fuel the development of a bustling resort that grew to have its own restaurants, railway and ferry stops, hotels, merry-go-round, outdoor movie theater, and entertainment. It attracted thousands of work-weary New Yorkers and North Jerseyans who came for a day at the shore. For a fascinating crash course on Highland Beach, please watch Chris Brenner's well-researched documentary. Look for the documentary link "Highland Beach: Destinations Past" at www.destinationspast.com.

William Sandlass operated the excursion resort until his death in 1938. The Gravity Rail Road was dismantled in 1893, and he continued operating the resort under an agreement with the Highland Beach Improvement Company, who subletted the land where the attraction had once stood. Their agreement encouraged Sandlass to construct "a building (William Sandlass House) not more than two stories high for use as a store, bowling alley, billiard room, and upstairs living apartments at the Sandlass Pavilion, Highland Beach." Sandlass used the timbers from the railroad to build the home and lived there for the next 45 years, raising his family and expanding the entertainment offerings to the public. One of his innovations was the addition of the Bamboo Garden, an outdoor bar built with bamboo imported from Cuba and center-pieced with a real palm tree – a novel experience at the time.

Due to its location, the property became entangled with United States



The Sandlass House today

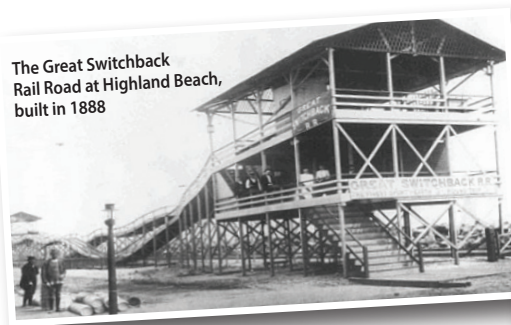
Federal Government and, years later, with the National Park Service, who have used Sandy Hook for decades; an entanglement that continues to this day. In 1940, the United States Federal Government wanted to widen the access road to its property at the very north end of Sandy Hook. The 1893 William Sandlass House was deemed to be "an encroachment" on the government's right of way. An ensuing lawsuit in federal court resulted in a judgment in favor of the U.S. government and the house was moved to its current location, at the entry to the Sandy Hook peninsula.

The 122-year-old house, unoccupied for many years, stands on land owned by the State of New Jersey. The National Park Service, which administers the property, has applied for demolition funding, which would take down the last remnant of this once booming chapter of the Jersey Shore. The fate of the home's preservation is being led by the SAVE SANDLASS organization, headed by the granddaughter of William Sandlass, Susan Sandlass Gardiner, who grew up in the home.

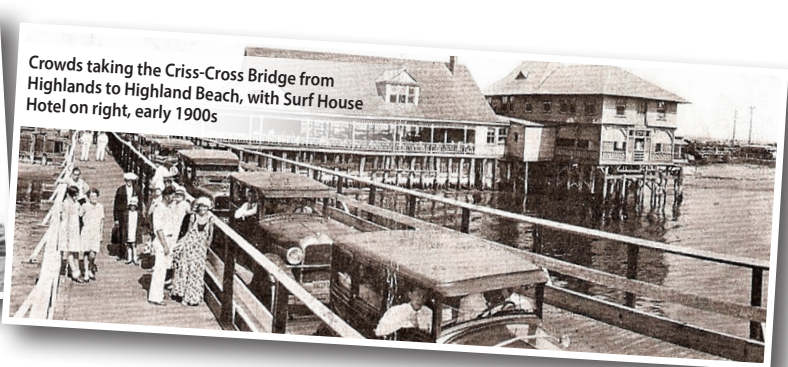
Sean Moran of Rumson said, "The Sandlass House represents one of the last physical ties to the Golden Era of Highland Beach and the dawn of the country's foray into 'leisure time' for the working man and woman. Many of us travel past each and every day, yet we have few to no true representations of that era. Preserving the Sandlass House will mean much more than saving a structure. It will be a celebration our past that led to the success of our collective culture along the shore."

Local historian and journalist Rick Geffken said, "Many people who grew up in the area have memories of Highland Beach, renamed Sandlass Baths in the late 1930s. Some may have memorabilia from its golden days. We encourage them to help us preserve this last-of-its-kind historic building and to share their memories and treasures." Those people are invited to contact Susan Sandlass Gardiner at SaveSandlass@gmail.com or by calling (732) 784-7616. You can also visit www.facebook.com/SaveSandlass.

(Photos courtesy of Susan Sandlass Gardiner)



The Great Switchback Rail Road at Highland Beach, built in 1888



Crowds taking the Criss-Cross Bridge from Highlands to Highland Beach, with Surf House Hotel on right, early 1900s