



THE TOWN OF KIAWAH ISLAND IS A RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITY WITH A RESORT SURROUNDED BY A UNIQUE AND BEAUTIFUL NATURAL SETTING.

-Town of Kiawah Island Community Vision

History of Kiawah Island

Native Indians, reformed pirates, wealthy plantation owners, enterprising lumbermen, Kuwaiti investors: these are some of the predecessors to current-day Kiawah Islanders.

Early History: Before 1717

Kiawah Island was named for the Kiawah Indians, who inhabited the island before the 1670 arrival of the English in South Carolina. Although generally settled near the Ashley River, the Kiawah Indians lived and traveled widely in the local area. They fished, hunted, and gathered food, herbs, and other materials for clothing, shelter, weapons, and tools from the marsh, island, river, and mainland environments. Communication and trade of their locally produced surplus were facilitated with other local tribes through tobacco sharing rituals. When the English arrived in 1670, Cassique, chieftain of the Kiawah Indians, led the colonists to settle at Charlestowne Landing, near the Indian settlement so that trading could easily occur. Today, this location is protected by South Carolina as a State Historic Site. In 1675, the Kiawah Indians ceded Kiawah Island to the English Lord's Proprietor, Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftsbury. The early settlers regarded the Kiawah Indians as friends; however, continued European occupation brought disease and warfare which dramatically reduced the Indian population. By 1685, the tribe had moved to Kiawah Island, before leaving in the 1690s.



The Lord's Proprietor granted the land, described as a 2,700 acre plantation, to Captain George Raynor in 1699. Raynor was a mariner, merchant, and assemblyman, who sailed out of Port Royal, Jamaica, a notorious Caribbean pirate town. Some suggest that Raynor was a reformed pirate who had been associated with Captain Kidd and had sought a quieter life as a planter and more legitimate businessman. In 1701, Raynor sold half of Kiawah Island to Captain William Davis, a fellow assemblyman and Johns Island landowner.



The Plantation Era - Stanyarne, Gibbes, and Vanderhorst: 1717-1950

In 1717, John Stanyarne, a wealthy planter who lived on Johns Island, bought the half of Kiawah Island that had been owned by Captain Raynor and, in 1737, bought the remaining half that had been owned by Captain Davis. Stanyarne used his Kiawah plantation for cattle ranching and indigo production. In 1767, he built an overseer's house near the current location of Old Dock Road; 150 acres had been cleared for the indigo crops. Stanyarne died in 1772, leaving the western half of the island to his granddaughter, Mary Gibbes, and the eastern half to his other granddaughter, Elizabeth Vanderhorst. This division of Kiawah Island into two plantations would last until the early twentieth century.

Mary Gibbes married Thomas Middleton in 1774. She died in childbirth the following year, leaving the western half of the island to their daughter, Mary Gibbes Middleton. Elizabeth Vanderhorst and her husband, Arnoldus Vanderhorst II, built a home on the eastern half of Kiawah Island in 1775, most likely very near the present Vanderhorst house. Arnoldus Vanderhorst II was a general in the South Carolina militia serving under Francis Marion during the Revolutionary War and was Governor of South Carolina from 1794 to 1796. Their home was burned by the British in 1781.

In 1797, Mary Gibbes Middleton married James Shoolbred, the British Consul for South and North America. They built an elaborate home along the Kiawah River in the Rhett's Bluff area. The Vanderhorsts began construction of a new home in 1801, the existing Vanderhorst house. Sea Island cotton was the major crop of the plantations and over 100 slaves tended and processed the crop. In 1808, Mary Middleton Shoolbred died, leaving the estate to her husband James, who died in 1848, leaving the western half of Kiawah to his children. Arnoldus Vanderhorst II died in 1815, leaving the eastern half of Kiawah to his brother, Elias Vanderhorst. During this time, the Shoolbred and Vanderhorst plantations continued to plant Sea Island cotton and suffered the vagaries of the weather and the boom-or-bust cycles of the cotton market.

During the war period in the mid-1860s, slaves were removed from Kiawah Island and Elias Vanderhorst's son, Arnoldus Vanderhorst IV, joined the Confederate service, seeing combat under General William Whiting. In 1863, he returned to Charleston to wed Adele Allison, a member of another large planter family. At various times during the war, both Confederate and Federal troops bivouacked on Kiawah Island. In 1862, Confederate troops occupied and ultimately destroyed the Shoolbred plantation and, in 1864, Federal troops nearly demolished the Vanderhorst plantation. After the war, the Vanderhorsts took loyalty oaths in order to have their lands restored and began to re-build their plantation to produce cotton with freed slave laborers. The cotton market continued to decline during the latter half of the 1800s. While managing their plantation for lessened demand, the Vanderhorst family also used their plantation for recreational pursuits, including swimming, fishing, and hunting.



In 1874, Elias Vanderhorst died, leaving his plantation to Arnoldus Vanderhorst IV. He died seven years later, in 1881, as a result of an accident during a hunting expedition on the island. His wife, Adele Vanderhorst, and his mulatto son, Quash Stevens, then managed the plantation. In 1900, Adele Vanderhorst purchased the western half of the island from the Gibbes family, uniting Kiawah under a single owner for the first time since John Stanyarne's death in 1772. Arnoldus Vanderhorst V began to rent the Vanderhorst home as a lodge for hunters and, in 1911, daily passenger and freight service by boat from Charleston began. Adele Vanderhorst died in 1915 and left her estate, including Kiawah Island, to her six children. The heirs argued about how best to settle the estate for over 30 years. The plantation continued to produce Sea Island cotton and palm trees, and beginning in the 1920s, fruits and vegetables, and in the 1930s cattle.



Vanderhorst house on Kiawah Island in late 1930's.
Courtesy of the Historic Charleston Foundation

In 1943, Arnoldus Vanderhorst V died and Charlie Scott, the last African American tenant farm worker on the island, was paid to serve as caretaker for the estate. The remaining heirs petitioned the Probate Court for instructions on how to settle Adele Vanderhorst's estate and, in 1947, Judge William Grimball decreed that Kiawah Island would be sold.

Early Development: 1950-1974

In 1950, the island was sold to C. C. Royal, a lumberman from Augusta, Georgia, for \$125,000. While logging the island's pine trees, Royal took steps to modernize the island. In 1952, a causeway and bridge were built to connect the island to the mainland and provide access by car and truck. Electric lines were also brought onto Kiawah Island. In 1954, Royal began development of a small oceanfront community along Eugenia Avenue, named for his wife. Royal died in 1964 – 18 vacation homes were on the island - and in 1974, his heirs sold the island to the Kuwaiti Investment Company for \$17,385,000.

Great thanks and acknowledgements to Ashton Cobb's 2007 book, *Kiawah Island: A History*.



Kiawah Island Developed as a Residential Resort Community: 1974-2010

The Kuwaiti Investment Company undertook to develop Kiawah Island as a world-class resort and began efforts to plan, build, and manage the resort. In 1976, the Kiawah Island Resort opened, with the Kiawah Island Inn – including two swimming pools, two restaurants and a bar – and the Marsh Point (subsequently renamed Cougar Point) golf course designed by Gary Player. The Kiawah Island Company began to sell real estate. Also in 1976, the Kiawah Island Company and Charleston County opened Beachwalker Park, a public beach on the western end of the Island. In 1988, Kiawah Resort Associates (predecessor to Kiawah Development Partners) acquired the Kiawah Island Resort, golf courses, tennis facilities, town center, utility, and remaining land for development. Also in 1988, the Town of Kiawah Island was incorporated. Kiawah Resort Associates sold the resort assets to Landmark Land Company in 1989. Landmark Land Company filed for bankruptcy in 1991 and the Virginia Investment Trust purchased several resort assets in 1993 and the Ocean Course in 1995. In 2004, a top-ranked luxury beach hotel with 255 rooms, The Sanctuary at Kiawah Island, opened. Resort and residential development continues to be sensitive to the island’s natural setting and environment, earning the 1981 Izaak Walton League National Conservation Award for efforts to help protect the Atlantic Loggerhead Sea Turtle. In 1996 the Urban Land Institute Award was earned for Excellence in Large Scale Residential Development.

Golf remains a major theme in the recent development of the island. In 1981, the Turtle Point golf course designed by Jack Nicklaus opened, followed by the Tom Fazio-designed Osprey Point golf course which opened in 1988. The Pete Dye-designed Ocean Course opened in 1991 and immediately played host to the 1991 Ryder Cup where the United States team won the Cup for the first time in 10 years at the “War by the Shore.” The private Kiawah Island Club developed two courses: the River Course designed by Tom Fazio opened in 1995 and the off-island Cassique course designed by Tom Watson opened in 2000. In addition to the 1991 Ryder Cup, the Island’s courses have hosted numerous important golf tournaments through the years; some of these include: 1997 World Cup of Golf, 2001 UBS Cup, 2003 World Golf Championship – World Cup, 2003 Palmer Cup, 2004 UBS Cup, 2005 PGA Club Professional Championship, 2007 PGA Senior Championship, and 2009 USGA Mid-Amateur Championship. The 2012 PGA Championship is scheduled to be held at the Ocean Course.

Since 1994, land use on the island has been subject to development agreements. Two have been signed with the Island’s chief developer, Kiawah Resort Associates, in 1994 and 2005, and two with the Kiawah Island Golf Resort, in 2001 and 2010. These agreements specified development of selected parcels of land consistent with the Town’s Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Regulations.



Town of Kiawah Island Vision

The Town of Kiawah Island Vision is:

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This Vision was originally developed as part of the Town's 1994 Comprehensive Plan. Research conducted to update that Plan in 2005 supported the Vision statement and concluded that it should be continued. The Planning Commission completed this 2010 review with input from the public and support and guidance from the professional staff of the Town of Kiawah Island and the Charleston County Planning Department. Accordingly, the Comprehensive Plan seeks to accomplish the Town's Vision by articulating goals to guide future Town Council actions regarding the pattern and intensity of land use, the provision of public facilities and services, economic development, housing availability, and natural and cultural resources.

On balance, the Town's pre-eminent goal is to protect and preserve the residential character of the community while maintaining the benefits inherent in the resort component. As a result, the Plan encourages high quality development of residences and resort, commercial and recreational facilities in an environmentally compatible setting. Low density development that is being designed in harmony with nature is consistent with this Vision while tall, massive buildings are inconsistent because they dominate the landscape rather than blending-in and meshing with it. Large homes, hotels, and other large buildings should be located on large parcels or lots and should be set back from property lines to reduce their visual impact from streets, the beach, other open spaces, and neighboring lots. Careful siting and attention to design will serve to achieve this goal and to retain the natural character of Kiawah Island. Tourism plays a very important role as part of the Town's economic vitality and the Town supports businesses and facilities that in turn support Kiawah Island's owners and visitors. In this plan, it is important to keep in mind that the Town of Kiawah Island is unique: most of the Town is within a private, gated community. Although zoning and development are governed by Town ordinances, the infrastructure inside the gate is owned and maintained by the Kiawah Island Community Association (KICA) and other private organizations.