

Hilton Head visionary McIntosh quiet, effective

John M. McIntosh Sr. was never the household name on Hilton Head Island that he was in his native city of Savannah.

But he should have been.

The 86-year-old retired business, civic, church and sailing leader died March 23. He was the last of his generation in a family that shaped modern Beaufort County.

He was a son of Olin T. McIntosh Sr., a magnate of the naval stores industry in Savannah.

The senior McIntosh was in on the deal when three Georgia families bought 20,000 acres on Hilton Head in 1950 and 1951. The \$1.1 million investment was recouped quickly through timber sales. Then those families — the Frasers, Hacks and



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McIntoshes — cast the die with their differing views of development.

As a young man, John McIntosh built 51 cottages at Folly Field. They were called Holiday Homes, and from their porches, the sandy

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sun-lovers who plunked down \$4,400 for them could hear the roar of the Atlantic Ocean. Their true purpose was to stir up enough ferry traffic to convince a skeptical legislature to build a bridge to Hilton Head.

The McIntoshes — who John called “boat people, water people” — developed Spanish Wells Plantation, with its Brams Point slicing into Broad Creek and Calibogue Sound like the bow of a keel-boat. John McIntosh bought out his siblings to own Spanish Wells.

It had no sophisticated master plan, and fewer of the

meddlesome restrictions of other island developments.

The 200 lots were each at least an acre. It had a dock, but still no guard gate; a golf course, but no tee-times. “We thought it was the kind of place people would like to live,” he told me in his usual, quiet way.

John McIntosh helped found both St. Luke’s and All Saints Episcopal churches. His father and partner Fred C. Hack gave the land for First Presbyterian Church. And even though McIntosh ran a thriving building supply company in Savannah, and then the Savannah Electric and Power Co., he and his late wife, Barbara Ann McIntosh, lived at 58 Brams Point Road for about 20 years. She even asked him to burn

the bridge his family worked so hard to get.

John McIntosh won more than 500 sailing trophies, taught generations of young people to sail and was instrumental in getting the 1996 Olympics to Atlanta and its sailing competition to Savannah.

The McIntoshes deeded the 9-hole golf course to the club at Spanish Wells. Today, a plaque on an oak-shaded bench by the first tee reads:

“As you look down this beautiful fairway, always remember Spanish Wells Club is a gift from John McIntosh.”

People wonder about Hilton Head’s core values. They should sit on that bench and study John M. McIntosh Sr.