

# *Britt's* *Donuts*

*Since 1939*



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CAROLINA BEACH | NORTH CAROLINA



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Halyn Prusa

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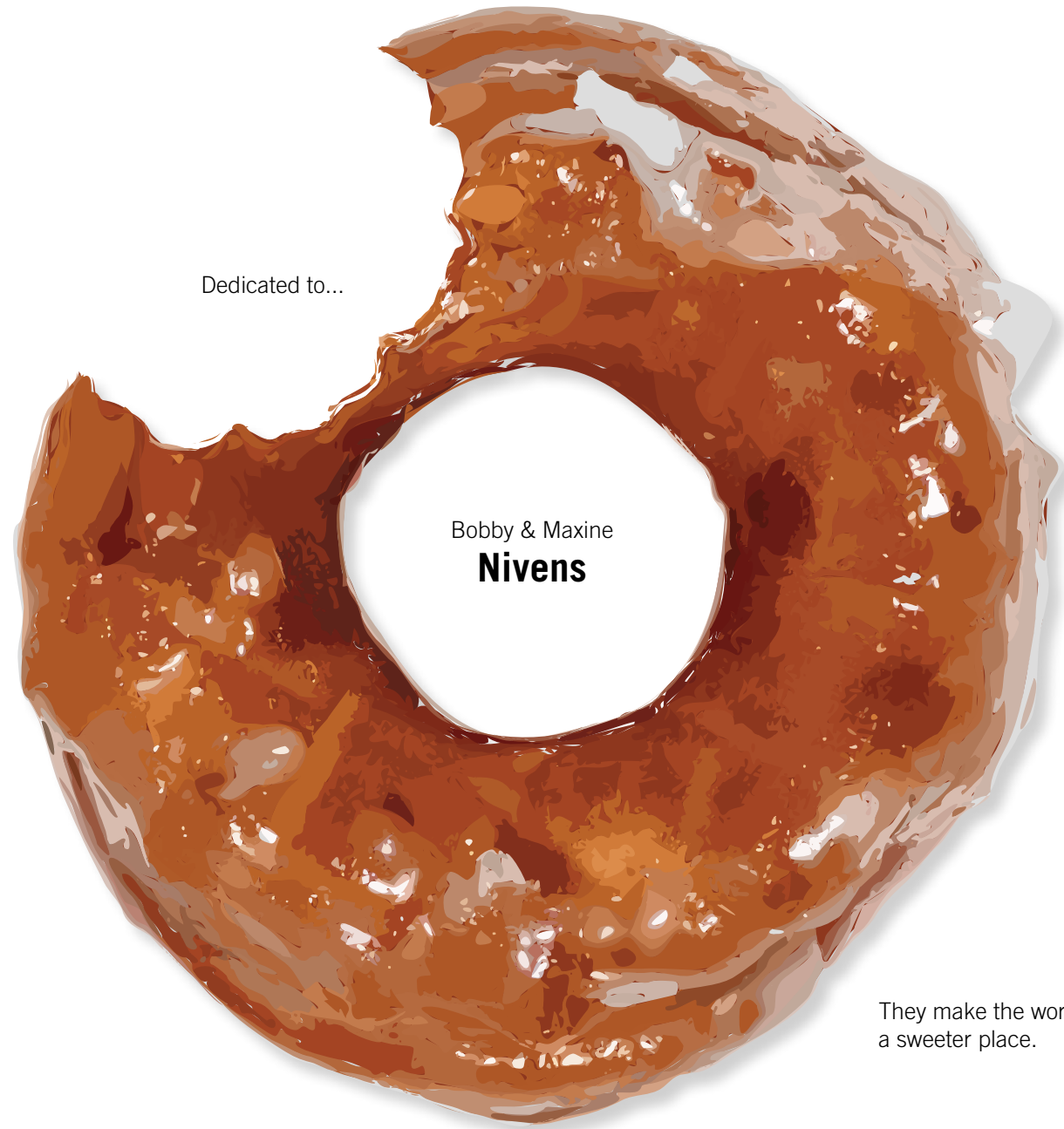
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Dedicated to...

Bobby & Maxine  
**Nivens**

They make the world  
a sweeter place.



# Britt's Donuts

*Since 1939*

## *A note from the authors.*

About 20 years ago, Bobby Nivens, my friend and owner of Britt's Donuts, encouraged me to photograph and video the Carolina Beach Boardwalk. He told me that things change so fast, we sometimes don't realize it and we shouldn't just let our history slip away. This deeply resonated with me. Eventually, the effort morphed into my two books about Carolina Beach. Our local history is rich and interesting and I'm proud to be preserving it for future generations.

For over 75 years, Britt's Donuts has served up the world's best donuts on the Carolina Beach boardwalk. Hanging out at Britt's Donuts has allowed me to incessantly pester Bobby about the history of his shop. Bobby is the second "caretaker" and back in the 1950s, he worked for its namesake, H.L. Britt. Britt's Donuts has long been the cornerstone of the boardwalk and for Carolina Beach. Its significance grew over the years and Britt's Donuts truly became a cultural phenomenon when Bobby Nivens took the reins in the early 1970s.

*Britt's Donuts - Forever Sweet* includes an accurate history of the shop's origins, its proprietors, employees and attempts to decipher what makes the experience of eating a glazed Britt's donut so special. It tells how Bobby, Maxine and family are a shining beacon of goodness in our community and it illustrates the impact they have had on many people's lives. Without them, and the shop they have so lovingly curated, Carolina Beach would not be the same sweet place it is today.

– Daniel Ray Norris

I feel so lucky to have been able to work with my grandparents and mama in our family business. It never fails to amaze me when I see the interest people take in our donuts. I hope you enjoy this book and the stories that are so close to my heart. For me, they will always be - *forever sweet*.

– Halyn Prusa



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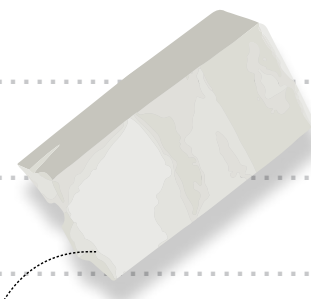


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chapter one

## *Bobby & Maxine*

A new year brings new people to Carolina Beach and the Boardwalk – people who have not yet been indoctrinated, people who are curious about the “donuts”. “Are they as good as everyone says they are? How can a simple glazed donut cause such a fuss?” Every Spring, I wait with baited breath for those blue garage doors to be rolled up on opening day. I don’t remember my first Britt’s donut. I was too young, just a toddler. But like so many people who have tried Britt’s donuts, I judge all good and sweet things by their yardstick. I actually feel guilty if I eat a sweet treat when Britt’s donuts are in season. Yes...they are that good.

This part of the story actually begins in 1974 with the reign of Bobby Nivens, current proprietor. I was six years old when Bobby began operating the business. And today, Bobby has a unique perspective about how he runs his business. He told me one day, “Daniel, we’re just caretakers of this business. It is its own thing.” The history of Britt’s Donuts actually goes way back to 1939 when Harvey Britt began it as a seasonal summertime business at the Carolina

(L to R) Donald James, Lynn Barbee, Tammy Martin Gainey, Lynn Welbourn, Lynn Nivens Prusa, Bobby Nivens, Maxine Nivens and David Ellers.





chapter four

## *It starts with flour*

Flour, water and yeast are the bare necessities for making donuts. Bobby Nivens has stuck with his favorite brand of all-purpose flour for decades. He swears by the brand and the qualities it imparts to his donuts. He used to wear a hat that was embellished with a character that looked mighty similar to a certain neckerchief-wearing mascot. But the flour is not the secret. While it is good, it is not proprietary.

Perhaps it is the yeast? Beverage companies extol the virtues of using special types of yeast. They claim that their yeasts, single celled fungi that reproduce by budding, have been carefully cultivated for hundreds of years. Today, the yeast they use is actually a descendant of some ancient and special strain. But alas, Bobby makes no claims there. His yeast is sort of pedestrian. It does what it does. It makes the dough rise. Carbon dioxide is carbon dioxide.

What about the water? I have heard of bagels, a close cousin of the donut, being made quite special with a certain type of water that is available only from the Catskill Mountains in New York state. It is supposed to make them legendary. I remain skeptical.

I think Bobby has the legendary thing all figured out.





mix.



rise and rest.





rolling.



cutting.





rest again.



laying out for cooking.





the oil.



cooking.





turning.



golden perfection.





dipped.



done.





... not going to make it home.





*Britts*  
*Donut Shop*  
Since 1939

**OPEN**  
SAT. FRI. 4:PM  
SUN. 8:30 AM







Donuts  
Tax Inc.  
Drinks  
Coffee  
Milk  
Free Refill



Britt's  
Donuts

Britt's  
Donuts  
Open When Served

Pepsi  
Donuts  
Open When Served









chapter five

## *In the beginning*

Don Haye's career in the "entertainment services industry" began in the early 1950s on Carolina Beach's booming boardwalk – where at 11 years old, he and his best friend, Buddy Brown, were shoe shine boys. "Folks dressed up more at the beach back then," explains Don, "not suits but just nicer." Don and Buddy eventually worked chasing surf mats that patrons rented by the hour from Batson's bathhouse. When time was up for mat "number 50", they'd go out into the surf to retrieve it or the 25¢ that was owed, so the patron could use it for another hour.

The old bus station at Carolina Beach (now BB&T) was a busy place. While it served as the main transportation hub for the beach, it was also home to a lunch counter eatery called The Coastal Grill. Mr. and Mrs. Pascal ran the station and the luncheonette there that served breakfast, lunch and eventually supper. The Pascals lived just off island, down Myrtle Grove Sound road, not far from Don's family. Don started working there when he was a little older. He was taller too but still too short to reach from one sink to the other (wash sink, rinse sink, sterilize sink), so he had to stand on drink crates or ask for help when it came time to move a tray of dishes.





The Original location for H.L. Britt's Donut Shop was between the 25¢ rifle range and Allen's Beach Wear on the North end of the Carolina Beach Boardwalk. Note the Pepsi sign and the first two letters of DO-NUT. Mr. Britt had a satellite location in downtown Wilmington from 1939 until 1956 at 222 Princess Street.



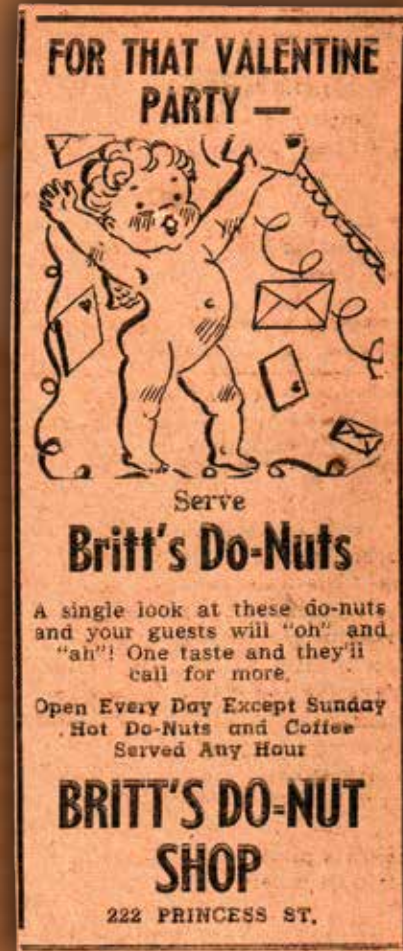
HARVEY LEWIS BRITT  
CIRCA 1969

Summertime life ran at a frenetic pace during peak tourism months. Don worked at The Coastal Grill every summer and by the time Don was 17 years old, he was asked by the Pascals to keep the grill open late at night. One night, after a long day that started with cooking up breakfast for the early rising fisherman and trying to explain grits to some nice old ladies from NJ, Don was beat. He just needed to sit down and rest his tired feet or he was gonna fall over. So Don sat sideways in one of the booths out front and drifted off to sleep. Right when he was good and

asleep, he was unceremoniously snapped awake. Mr. Britt hollered, "Boy - somebody's gonna rob you blind if you don't pay attention!" Mr. Britt then, without further ado, proceeded to ask Don if he'd like to come work for him over at his donut shop at the boardwalk. Don thought about it for a second and figured there might just be more pretty girls over there across the road. And to top it all off, he'd be making 50¢ an hour. That was 5¢ more an hour than what he made running the Coastal Grill. It would be a win-win situation. So, Don accepted H.L. Britt's impromptu and







February 13, 1945, *Wilmington Post*



H.L. Britt keeping sentry between the adjacent pizza joint – Snuffy's (left), the Sweet Shop (far left) and his donut shop. circa 1970.



generous offer. The next day, he told the Pascals and he helped them find a replacement for his position. Later than morning, Don walked over to the boardwalk where Mr. Britt handed him an old leather strap with the keys to Britt's Donut Shop.

The Carolina Beach Boardwalk was a different place back then. Some things haven't changed too much but 50 years is a long time. People came from all over to Carolina Beach to be entertained. "We didn't have massive entertainment industry to cater to every whim and folly - there just wasn't as much organized entertainment back then. But the beach was where it was at." Carolina Beach was compared favorably

with places like Daytona, Miami, Atlantic City etc. Our proximity to Fort Bragg, Camp Lejeune and other military facilities brought in a lot of soldiers and marines looking for a much needed change of scenery. Farmers, mill works and various laborers would all converge at the coast. Carolina Beach had a reputation as a nice place for the working class people who wanted a break from their seasonal work. Carolina Beach Boardwalk was a good place to play or relax. It had amusements like rides, a shooting gallery where you could shoot real .22 caliber rifles, carnival games



and more. As far as food was concerned, it was a cornucopia. There were candied apples, sno-cones, cotton candy, hot dogs, corn dogs and all sorts of good things to eat from multiple vendors. It was hard to decide what to eat first. But there was only one Britt's Donuts.

Actually, that's not entirely true. There were two Britt's Donuts. One was located, since 1939, a bit further north than where it sits today and on the other side of the main drag – just hollering distance from its current location. Current proprietor, Bobby Nivens worked there for a stint in the mid 1950s. Harvey Britt and family opened the original shop and also operated a satellite location in downtown Wilmington at 222 Princess Street. The Britt's had roots in Goldsboro, Carolina Beach and Florida. They split their time between various businesses. Mr. Britt's wife, Esther, helped at the donut shop. She ran the register and helped staff serve customers. Mrs. Britt wore flowery dresses, had a big pocket book and absolutely loved to play BINGO at Red & Eve's BINGO parlor on the boardwalk. This first location for Britt's Donuts was later replicated fairly accurately in the second boardwalk location. Same layout, same equipment and fixtures. Mr. Britt moved it there in 1969.

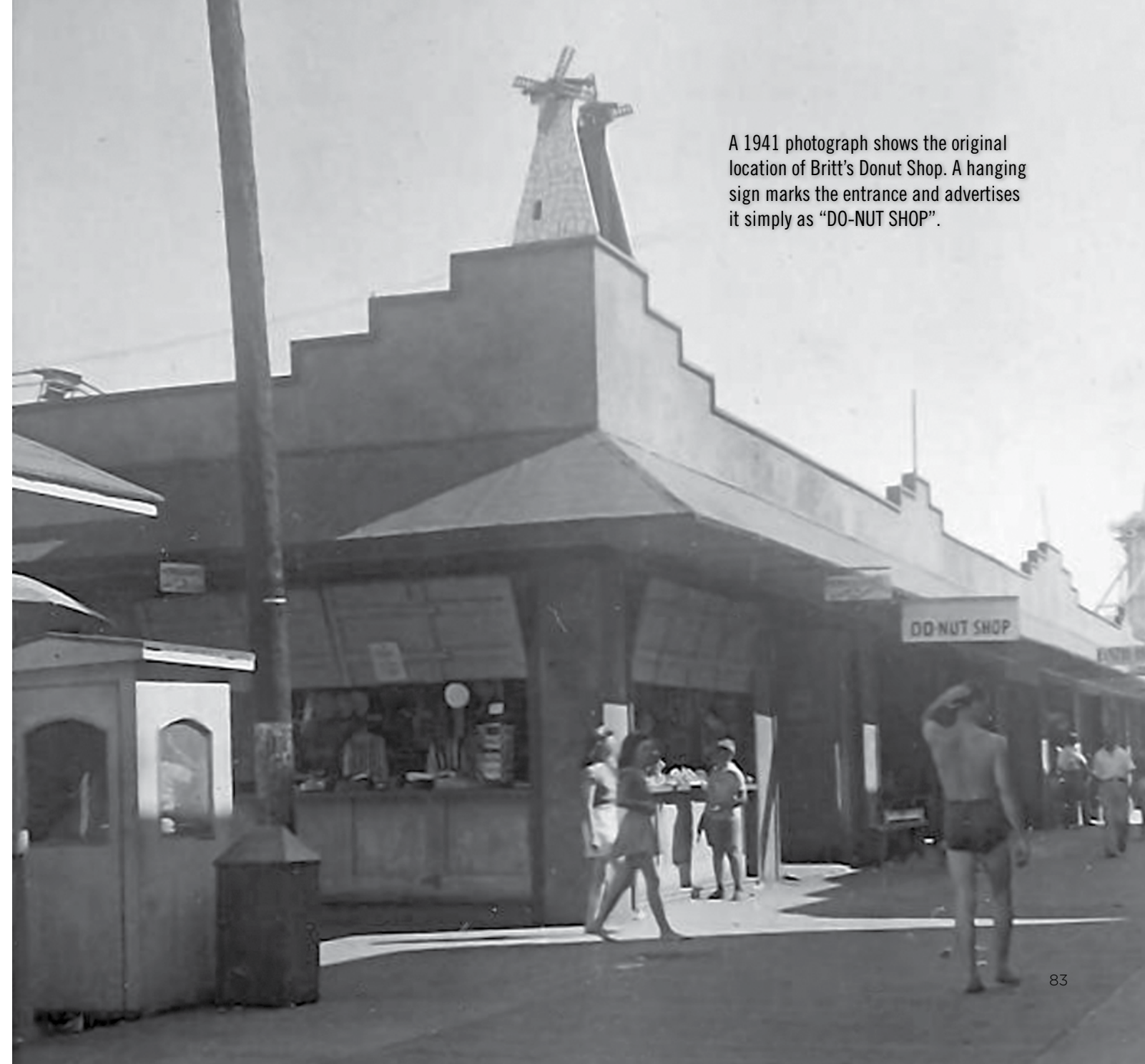
Britt's Donuts was kind of kitty-corner to the MaxWay store, and in front of their big, curved glass windows. The reflection afforded a kind of panoramic view of the crowds making their way down the boardwalk. Don hung out at the counter often and could see peo-

Henderson's Beach Shop (right) was immediately adjacent to Mr. Britt's original donut shop. Jeff Allen recalls the shop and his "2 foot" donut.

"My grandmother opened a drink stand on the Carolina Beach Boardwalk in 1938. Two years later a fire destroyed the Boardwalk and Mae Henderson (my grandma) rented a spot on the corner next to Britt's Donuts. My parents, Frank and Norma Allen, bought the place in 1953 and ran it for over 50 years. I used to go to the beach a lot and was a daily enjoyer of Britt's donuts. Mr. Britt used to make me a giant donut, about 2 feet wide, every spring. He was a very nice man and I was glad when Bobby and Maxine Nivens bought the place from him. The donuts today taste exactly the same as they did 60 years ago."



A 1941 photograph shows the original location of Britt's Donut Shop. A hanging sign marks the entrance and advertises it simply as "DO-NUT SHOP".





# The Carolina Beach Boardwalk

The locations of H.L. Britt's first donut shops were well situated. The main and first shop was near the north end of the most travelled part of the boardwalk. Mack's, the Wave theater and the original A&P were across the way. Right under the first "s" in Henderson's is the exact location. Little John's, located where Britt's Donuts would eventually move, was a full service restaurant at the time this map was drawn (1949). Carl Winner's Fishing Charters and boat launch are visible on the lower left near Peay's Grill. Up towards the highway is The Greystone Hotel, Mrs. High's Dining Room and the Hotel Royal Palm. Hotel Bame anchors the southernmost end and the famous Ocean Plaza, with its broad awning, holds sentry on the north end. The boardwalk at Carolina Beach was a bustling place when summer was in full swing. The beach front was packed with sunbathers and lifeguards from May until August. Today, it is still a great place for families to visit.

Mr. Britt opened shops at two other locations, both in Wilmington. He had a shop at 222 Princess Street (see ad page 80). And according to the city directory, for a short time in the mid forties, a shop was located at 223 Market Street. Today, Britt's Donuts is the oldest business operating on the Carolina Beach boardwalk.









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### Beverly Tetterton

*With her tireless help, encouragement and support, much of our local history has been documented. Every local writer, researcher and author owes her a tremendous debt. She is a true friend and without a doubt the “Grande Dame” of local history.*

### Elaine Henson

*Thank you for your prodding, support and postcard help. See you on Carolina Beach Avenue, North.*

*Thank you to all the staff of Britt's Donuts for tolerating my presence so well. I know I got in the way a lot but y'all treated me like I was part of your team. I am genuinely grateful for being allowed to peek inside the Britt's Donut world and feel like I was part of your family. Halyn and Lynn, thank you for your patience and willingness to help me with this book. **Daniel N.***

## Sources

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Amy M. Norris

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*Forever Sweet*

