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Wicked Edisto: The Dark Side of Eden by Alexia Jones Helsley

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Abstract
Review of Wicked Edisto: The Dark Side of Eden by Alexia Jones Helsley.

Keywords
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Every good story has an element of conflict and suspense, but how about a story with three centuries of unexplained deaths, crime and scandals? That’s what readers will find in Alexia Jones Helsley’s new book, *Wicked Edisto*. Spanish pirates, antebellum duels and drug smugglers are just a sampling of incidents that reveal the dark side of Edisto Island. Alexia Jones Helsley delves into Edisto Island’s past to uncover tales of marauders and murderers, adulterers and illegal slavers. Her thorough research portrays a glimpse of Edisto overlooked in most history books.

Edisto Island, a barrier island off the coast of South Carolina, roughly forty miles from Charleston, is surrounded by salt marshes, creeks and rivers. Native Americans fished and farmed the land and later Spanish pirates plundered and ransacked the island’s homes. Slaves were brought to the island to harvest rice and continued long after slavery was outlawed. The marshes, bays and creeks around Edisto, were particularly inviting to bootleggers and smugglers because of the easy access to inland. During the Prohibition bootleggers operated on Edisto and fifty years later the largest marijuana drug bust in South Carolina took place on the Island.

Alexia Jones Helsley, an adjunct professor at the University of South Carolina in Aiken, has a thirty-seven year career as an archivist at the South Carolina Department of Archives and History. She recently taped *Branches*, an eight-part program on how historians and genealogists can use state records, for SC-ETV. Author of fifteen publications, she is an expert on South Carolina history, slavery and the Civil War. She has been awarded for her efforts to promote the research and preservation of SC History. Currently, she manages a historical and genealogical consulting business.

*Wicked Edisto* is Helsley’s third book in the Wicked Series from The History Press. The other titles are Wicked Columbia and Wicked Beaufort. The History Press promotes local authors who write stories about their community. Since 2004, they have published nearly two thousand local and regional history titles. In July, 2014 Arcadia Publishing acquired the Charleston-based U.S. subsidiary of the British-owned The History Press Ltd.

Helsley’s book is a historical account of the wicked events that occurred on this beautiful, serene island. Although accurate, Helsley does indicate when the evidence is not very clear, or the outcome is purely speculation. The book is short, only 132 pages, with black and white photographs. Readers will be overwhelmed with all the violence or excited by the gruesome tales. History buffs will enjoy collecting stories to impress their friends. Those who prefer a blend of the good and evil would do better with *Tales of Edisto* by Nell S. Graydon while others desiring more details and drama on smuggling operations should also read *Jackpot* by Jason Ryan. *Wicked Edisto* is recommended for public libraries.

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