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The Lady Leaves A Legacy : The Belleview Biltmore and Her Place in Pinellas

Deirdre L. Schuster

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The Lady Leaves A Legacy: The Belleview Biltmore

and Her Place in Pinellas

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Liberal Arts
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my mother-in-law, Grace Schuster, who has supported me throughout the years both financially and emotionally. I also dedicate this to my husband and children, who have always been there to pick me up when I was at the lowest points. I could not have done it without you.

I would like to thank my family for putting up with all the hours researching away from them and for their positive support, always being there when I needed reassurance. I would like to offer thanks to Dr. Gary Mormino for believing in me and encouraging me to "stay on the chariot." Thanks are also given to the folks at the Clearwater Historical Society, Chuck McPherson and Michael Sanders, who graciously gave of their time and efforts to aid in this endeavor.

Thanks to Cathy Harlan, who spent a day trudging around Belleair looking along the nature trail for "Florida’s only natural waterfall."

Special thanks go to my grandmother, Harriet Smith, who always encouraged me to go on when I did not think I could- your "littlest angel" did it.
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The Bellevue Biltmore Hotel has been a regional icon in Pinellas County, Florida for over one hundred years. Due to its annual winter residents, the Clearwater area flourished and prospered. Spring closings led to subdivisions, known historically as colonies, to spring up; becoming known for their prosperity and glamour. As Pinellas County changed economically, the hotel changed, as well, still maintaining its presence, giving the region a distinctive air of grandeur on the west coast of Florida. Known as the White Queen of the Gulf, the Bellevue spawned the Springtime City of Belleair. In a land where reptiles and “critters” roamed, a hotel of such magnificence was an anomaly. Regionally distinctive and world renowned, the Bellevue Biltmore has closed for a restoration that has been delayed. The grand lady has left her legacy in the region even though springtime has come for the Queen.
INTRODUCTION

Pinellas County, Florida is the most densely populated county in the state. It does not boast of immigrants, like Miami, nor does it have the historical significance of St. Augustine. It lacks the political importance of Tallahassee; it has no football university like Gainesville. Tourism, more than any other reason, has shaped this peninsular peninsula.

Originally, the land sustained a wide array of crops and critters. The climate was conducive to healing various ailments and, as northern cities grew and the economy fluctuated, Florida became the destination for families looking for a new start. Even though Frederick Jackson Turner announced the closing of the frontier in the 1890s, the frontier of Florida remained open to all who wanted entrance. With the passage of the Armed Occupation Act in 1842, 160 acres were open to any who wanted to settle and make improvements to the land. A few families took advantage of that in what was known as West Hillsborough County, establishing themselves as Pinellas’ first families. Toponyms of the area give away the secrets of the families: Turner, McMullen, Booth, Bryan, Ulmer, Disston, and Belcher are just a few.
The main artery of downtown Clearwater, the county seat, is Ft. Harrison Avenue. The fort, built at the end of the Indian Wars became a hospital for recovering veterans of the 6th Infantry. Its location is marked with a placard in the historic Harbor Oaks district on Druid Road.

This locale is one of the region’s highest topographies. The bluffs of Clearwater Harbor provided a view of the barrier islands and the waters beyond. A natural waterfall also attracted settlers to the area. Few people today can appreciate what the area was like before concrete blocks obstructed the view of the Gulf of Mexico.

As railroad tycoons Henry Flagler and Henry Plant vied for control of the state, the west coast drew Plant’s attention. Sent to search for a perfect vacation locale, Plant’s man noticed the stunning bluffs. After building a hotel in Tampa, Plant realized that winter visitors yearned for spectacular locations. Clear Water Harbor provided a welcome distraction from the bustling city for visitors while they wintered in southern climes. After completing the railway to the region, the Belleview Hotel was started in 1895. Upon opening in 1897 it attracted America’s aristocracy. With the completion of true golf greens, the Belleview attracted the crème de la crème of the world, including the Duke of Windsor, Hollywood actors and literary giants.
Even the Great Depression did not close the hotel. Opening every January, the White Queen of the Gulf, as she became known due to her painted sides, stayed open for winter visitors until April. Every spring she would be shut down until December renovations occurred inside and outside of the hostelry. Visitors would be transported in their own railroad cars, which brought them directly to the hotel. “Underground” tunnels were created for the transportation of the luggage to guest rooms. No room was the same, each providing a unique experience for the three months residency of its occupants. A launch would take them across the harbor to the barrier island and the Cabana Club for beach excursions during the day. Dances and dinners were provided during the evening. The hotel was entirely self sufficient, except for shopping. Visitors were encouraged to travel the short distance to Downtown Clearwater for their shopping needs.

The Bellevue attracted both the aristocracy and the laboring classes. Few native residents lack a connection to the hotel. Mike Sanders, president of the Clearwater Historical Society, recalled seeing a girl at the hotel and asking her out. A local boy, he thought he had hit the big leagues. After dropping her off at the entrance after their date, he noticed her move around the building and get into a beat up car for her drive home. She was a girl who worked at the hotel! Ties with the hotel could improve personal and business relations. Ceraolo
family gatherings are ripe with stories of the Bellevue. Rosemarie Ceraolo-O’Donnell recounts stories of her grandfather, Carmel Ceraolo, delivering fruits and vegetables to the hostelry since the early twentieth century. His shop was on the other side of the railroad tracks, where he also built cottages to provide housing for the workers at the Bellevue. The other side of her Italian family, the Paoletti’s, also served the Bellevue from the Little Big Fruit Market on South Ft. Harrison Avenue. As business boomed, more family members came to the area, settling around the fruit stands of the Ceraolo’s and Paoletti’s. Visitors were enthralled with the beauty of the area and wanted to come earlier or stay later. With this in mind, two colonies were established on hotel land: Harbor Oaks and Belleair Estates. Cottages provided the amenities at first, but the number of permanent residents grew. Dean Alvord founded Harbor Oaks in 1914 and John Nolan planned Belleair Estates in 1923.\(^1\)

The coming of World War II marked the first time the hotel closed. The Army Air Corps leased the building for training, along with two other area hostelries: the Gray Moss Inn and the Fort Harrison Hotel. Other hotels in St. Petersburg were utilized, as well. During the year it was leased, the Bellevue was transformed by army drab paint

\(^1\) Michael Sanders, interview, Deirdre Schuster (September 2010). Rosemarie Ceraolo-O’Donnell, interview, Deirdre Schuster (24 August 2010).
and one of the golf courses was demolished as it was transformed into a training ground, complete with obstacle courses.

After World War II, the middle class envisioned Clearwater as a dream destination in a dream state. A number of changes occurred during this time, as the population surged. The Japanese Gardens were renamed and eventually developed into homes. The Coe Road Casino, a popular destination during the twenties and thirties, transferred hands and was raided and closed down. New subdivisions took the place of agricultural land: gladiola farms and citrus groves no longer paid the bills. Clearwater was being transformed from a rural center into something else. Land was the commodity that brought profits. As the decades progressed, the hotel could no longer compete with the Holiday Inns and Hyatts around the world. Land was sold to United States Steel to pay for needed renovations. Changing hands a few times, the Belleview never lost her purpose, however, retaining her purpose as a tourist destination. Purchased by the Japanese in the 1990s, she underwent some renovations, but it seemed her demise was imminent. A group of local citizens took it upon themselves to place the Belleview on the historic registry, saving her for the time being. With land at a premium in built-out Pinellas County, it is a wonder that the one hundred plus year old hotel still stands.
Pinellas County radiated a sense of place in her beginning years. The Belleview Hotel helped to define that. The hotel was instrumental in bringing people to the area when nothing else would. Due to her multiple charms and uses the people who encountered the region through their visits returned to the charm of the peninsula. A true sense of place is hard to define in a state as transient as Florida. Early settlers took heart to find a land they could call their own. Through physical and economic storms it was theirs. The White Queen of the Gulf has witnessed great changes in Pinellas County: even the name of the county itself. She represents what native Floridians have gone through over the past century. She has remained a regional icon, drawing people to the area, bringing in economic stimulus along the way. To lose her would be to lose a sense of place in a state that needs to find its way.
CHAPTER 1

PINELLAS COUNTY BACKGROUND

THE IMPORTANCE OF PLACE

Former Pinellas County Judge Cathy Harlan and I walked along Bayview Drive in Belleair, Florida, with the breeze flowing off the water. This was a peaceful experience. As we got closer to the small bridge and looked away from the water, she pointed out a clump of trees. I closed my eyes and heard the trickling of water. This is what we had been searching for: Belleair’s natural waterfall. As we ventured along the little brookside path leading up to Palmetto Road I had to take notice not to walk into the banana spider webs. We tracked the running water, finding a few little dams made from broken concrete and tree limbs, but we found no waterfall. As we walked back to the bridge, I looked to the right and saw the green roof of the historic Belleview Biltmore. If only I could blot out the monstrosities across the waterway, it would be easy to imagine what the area was like centuries ago when Pánfilo Narváez sailed the coast looking for gold or Captain Johnson delivered supplies to pioneer settlers. The peninsula and the area that would become the greater Clearwater area have
experienced profound changes over the years. Whether it is Indian mounds rediscovered along Tampa Bay by archaeologists, Spanish architecture found on houses and commercial buildings, or founding families giving name to local roads, all of these changes have been intertwined with the presence of the Belleview Biltmore Hotel.

Native Americans and the Spanish

The area that would become Pinellas County attracted settlers from early on. Natives of the region, members of the Tocobaga tribe, were largely agricultural, establishing a pattern that persisted in the area until the latter half of the twentieth century. In a real estate pamphlet from around 1925, Belleair: the Alluring, the discovery of Florida by Spaniard Pánfilo de Narváez is written in prose that makes the state a tranquil escape from the sea. However, looking for gold, Spaniards abused the natives. The Tocobaga had a high level of civilization, according to paleontologists. They used tools and weapons made from shell, since rocks were scarce on the peninsula. Apparently, their most deadly weapons were sharpened fingernails used to maim and kill in close combat.²

² June Hurley Young, Florida’s Pinellas Peninsula (St. Petersburg, FL: Byron Kennedy and Co., 1984), 10.
Though this would not help them when confronted with the guns and steel of the Spanish, it was enough for them to captured Juan Ortiz, a cabin boy who accompanied a second group onto the peninsula. In a story that predated the Pocahontas myth, Ortiz was saved from a fiery death by the chief’s daughter, Ulelah, until Hernando de Soto landed almost ten years later. During this time Ortiz was protected by Ulelah’s lover Mucoso. The Chief, Ucita of the Hirrihigua tribe denied their wedding until Ortiz was returned to his own people. Ortiz joined de Soto’s expedition as an interpreter and guide. More Spaniards followed, all looking for the elusive treasure desired by so many. All they found were pine tree after pine tree, giving the region the name “punta pinal” – point of pines. According to local historian W.L. Straub, native Muscogees named the peninsula Ikan-faski or the Pointed Land.\(^3\) The Spaniards eventually left the region, but their diseases remained, helping to wipe out a majority of the native population. The remaining populations were assimilated into Northern tribes that moved further south throughout the eighteenth century.

\(^3\) W.L. Straub, *History of Pinellas County Florida: Narrative and Biographical* (St. Augustine, FL: The Record Company, 1929), 23.
The First Families of Pinellas

The first permanent white settlement in the area was established by Odet Philippe in the eastern area of the peninsula. Part of Philippe’s homestead became a favorite respite for weary citizens. Philippe Park allows visitors to step back in time, experiencing Florida as the Tocobaga did. Philippe is credited with beginning the citrus industry in the area. His daughter married into another pioneer family - the Booths. Seven brothers joined these two families, making the McMullens the third founding family of the region. The McMullens were third-generation Americans, being descended from Scottish relatives who settled in Georgia after the American Revolution.

Like many who came to the state, James McMullen came to the area due to ill health - tuberculosis - in 1841. After rehabilitation, he returned to Georgia and he spoke of the wonders of the peninsula - “the closest thing to heaven that he could imagine.” He encouraged his brothers to follow him back and returned and settled in the area now known as Safety Harbor. With the passage of the Federal Armed Occupation Act in 1842, any 18-year-old male who could defend the territory and live on the land could gain 160 acres. In 1850, Daniel McMullen settled further south in what is now Northeast Largo. Together the brothers rustled cattle for a living, continuing this during the “War of Northern Aggression.” They later switched to citrus and
“designed the first orange crates putting a bunch of men in the woods to split boards and fasten them with palmetto stems.” Two other brothers settled near their pioneering siblings, while the three remaining brothers settled outside of the area in what is now Lakeland, Polk, and Perry. The McMullen family remains one of the largest families in the region and celebrates every July 4th with a family reunion. They are so close-knit that descendants travelled to Georgia to retrieve the matriarch’s remains. They returned, placing the mother of seven brothers in her final resting place: McMullen Cemetery on Coachman Road.4

Other pioneering families were the Wallaces, Johnsons and Turners. Robert Wallace came in 1873 from Mobile, Alabama with his son-in-law, Albert Pierce, and bought ten acres near Cleveland Avenue. They grew Sea Island cotton near the area now inhabited by North Ward School. As the price of cotton dropped from 75 cents to 21 cents per pound the family grew vegetables until their citrus trees bore fruit. All commodities were shipped by boat to Cedar Key and then by rail to Jacksonville and northern destinations. The family homesteaded 120 acres west of Ft. Harrison Avenue and south of the Atlantic Coast

4 Young, 22. Evelyn McMullen Hinsey and Rhoda Lane McMullen, “McMullens were Pinellas Pioneers,” Clearwater Sun, 29 May 1980, 6F. Margaret Word Burnside, “Ask Margaret,” Tampa Bay Magazine, January/February 2006, 178-179. McMullen-Booth Road runs a good length north to south along the peninsula. In 1880 the McMullens made up 10 out of the 100 Pinellas residents.
Railroad to the area now occupied by the Belleview Biltmore Hotel. The actual Fort Harrison was built in the area, although there were never any battles fought in Pinellas during the Seminole Indians Wars. Never used as a military instillation, it served to recuperate sick and wounded veterans. The fort’s lasting legacy would be the name it gave to the main thoroughfare and a plaque in the historic Harbor Oaks neighborhood.⁵

The Johnson family settled after a ship wreck in the early 1870s. Captain Charles Wharton Johnson and his son, Levin, were rescued off the coast of Clear Water Harbor. Once on dry land, they were impressed by the high bluffs of what is now Belleair and homesteaded the land that the Belleview Hotel now occupies. They built a tower to observe the coastline, north and south, so that the family could watch for the men’s return from sea. They owned two ships, the Evening Star and the Morgan. Solidifying their place in the region, Johnson’s granddaughter, Edna Catherine, married Alonzo McMullen.⁶

The Turner family probably takes the prize for most influential in the Clearwater area. David B. Turner came and homesteaded the area. He was the first post master of Clear Water Harbor. The mail came by

⁵ William Wallace, “Wallaces Came to Clearwater by Land and Sea,” Clearwater Sun, 29 May 1980, 30F.

⁶ Kathryn Johnson Wilcox, “Johnson Family has Deep Roots in Pinellas,” Clearwater Sun, 29 May 1980, 35F.
stagecoach from Alligator, Florida – now Lake City – to a point on the 
Suwannee River. Mail was then transported by steamer to Clearwater 
from Cedar Key. Turner Street was named after Arthur C. Turner, the 
second postmaster and owner of the West Hillsborough Times, now the 
St. Petersburg Times. He was the first County Treasurer, returning half 
of his commissions to the School Board. He was also instrumental in 
abolishing the office of county treasurer. He was a member of the 7th 
Florida infantry; his family stated he valued his Confederated Cross of 
Honor at one million dollars. In his lifetime, he had three wives and 
twenty children. He was also in the mercantile business until 1885 
when he started the Times with a hand press he bought from Dr. 
Edgar and Joel McMullen. R.J. Morgan bought it in 1892 and moved it 
to St. Petersburg.  

Angelina Belle Turner, a true pioneer woman of Florida, inherited 
80 acres from Drew Street to Turner Street, Greenwood Avenue to the 
Bay. She married Julius De Witt Rogers in 1855 and they developed a 
citrus grove on what is now Druid Road between South Myrtle and 
Greenwood Avenue. Original lots in the Clearwater area were valued 
at fifty dollars each. They were sold during the boom of the 1920s for 
40,000 to 50,000 dollars. Robert Henry Padgett came to the area in

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7Straub, 92 and 481. Joseph Turner, Sr., “Turner Family One of City’s 
Oldest,” Clearwater Sun, 29 May, 1980, 36F.
1895 as a real estate developer and married their daughter. Belle’s sister Margaret Ann married Joel W. Rogers, again keeping it all in the family. 8

In 1853 David Turner and Robert J. Whitehurst bought 160 acres from John Taylor Sr. for 800 dollars. They operated a sawmill by the now elusive waterfall on Bayview Drive in what is now Belleair. Life on the peninsula was slow paced and agricultural, but that would soon change.

Railroads and Tourists

As early as the 1880s, tourism brought needed populations and, with them resources, for the slowly growing Florida economy. Western Hillsborough County was uniquely situated for this boom. A peninsula on a peninsula, with areas of high elevation along the Gulf of Mexico coast, the Clearwater/St. Petersburg area was prime real-estate. Ideal climate year round, with winds coming off the Gulf of Mexico and Tampa Bay, provided the impetus for many travelers. Lauded by Dr. W.C. Van Bibber, the “healthy climate” drew many to the region. W.L. Straub, in his 1929 History of Pinellas County, Florida stated that “weather records from all parts of the United States show that no

section has what might be regarded as perfect weather, but Pinellas peninsula comes as near it as any other locality in the world.” The Orange Belt Railroad, brought to the area in 1888, went directly to the end of the peninsula and into the water, to be used as a harbor.  

According to June Hurley Young, Peter Demens brought the railroad to the peninsula because: “The terminus of the road is the most important feature of the whole business and is in such a shape that I do not dare write about it. I will only state that we have a chance to have the only harbor which exists in Florida on the Gulf Coast and to build a city of international importance.” He completed the railroad, but many financial factors brought about its eventual failure. Added to the fact that it was quicker to walk than to ride, the rains, the freeze of 1894 and a yellow fever epidemic; the Orange Belt was turned over to a creditor syndicate. When Henry Plant purchased the railroad in 1895 he converted its track to standard gauge and in 1902 it became part of the Atlantic Coast Line. The purchase and expansion fit perfectly into Plant’s state expansion plan, bringing tourism to the West Coast.  

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9 Pinellas County Planning Department, Pinellas County Historical Background (Clearwater, FL: Pinellas County Planning Department, 2008), 2-4. Straub, 20.

10 Young, 40-41.
CHAPTER 2
HENRY PLANT BUILDS HIS QUEEN

The Belleview Hotel

As the railroad progressed, towns popped up around the stops. Among these was Clear Water Harbor. Plant’s agents spent seven years scouring the coast looking for a spot for a luxury resort on the west coast. One that could utilize the railroad would only increase his profits since Tampa was proving to be a poor choice for a tourist spot. Taking advantage of the saltwater craze, the agents found the best location in Western Hillsborough, as it “enjoyed more days of sunshine per year than any other area.” The entire state had become a premier winter vacation destination. From January through March, the region played host to a wide range of American dignitaries and their families, all traveling by private railroad car. Competing with Henry Flagler, who was establishing the east coast, Henry Plant took on the west. In addition to the Tampa Bay Hotel along the Hillsborough River and the San Marino Hotel in Sutherland – now Palm Harbor - Plant was intent on providing adequate lodging for his guests on the West Coast. Plant’s agents were as enthralled with the bluffs over the intracoastal
waterway as Charles Johnson was decades before. Plant purchased the property from Johnson and brought in over 300 laborers to clear the land and build his hotel. Architects from Tampa, Michael J. Miller and Francis J. Kennard, designed the Victorian structure and began building the 145 room hotel. In addition to the Belleview, St. Margaret’s Inn was first completed to house the laborers. Ella Eldridge remembered her husband closing the deal with Mr. Plant. Apparently, Plant liked Mr. Eldridge so much that he hired him to be paymaster for the erection of the new hotel. The Eldridge home was build on the Belleview grounds, keeping the management and running of the resort smooth.11

Buying the Orange Belt Railroad the same year he broke ground on the Belleview, Plant made sure that his lines went directly to his hotels, for efficiency and ease of travel for his guests. Nothing was ever left to chance at a Plant hotel. Guests were entertained with dances, dinners, and outdoor activities throughout the day and night. A house orchestra serenaded visitors nightly, leading to the Belleview becoming the only hotel to have a waltz named after it: the Belleview Waltz, composed by Stella Spurlin. A launch would take visitors across

Clearwater Harbor to Sand Key Beach where a Cabana Club was established so guests could frolic in the clear blue waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

As cycling was becoming the rage at the turn of the century, a bicycle track was put in place for guests to enjoy. Guests could traverse a five-mile ride through the surrounding countryside, taking in the exotic vegetation, like orchids, bougainvilleas, and jacarandas. The Eldridges used the numerous bicycle paths to travel back and forth from Belleair to Clearwater. As the children came along, her husband “built a basket on the front of his bicycle to carry them in.” When not used by cyclists, the track doubled as a horse racing track. Grandstands were built for viewing pleasure under a roof that provided needed shade from the Florida sun. The track was “completely modern in every respect,” with turns banked and an asphalt track. Mrs. Eldridge reminisced about the thrill of seeing the finest champions from all over the world: August Lehr from Germany, Martens from Switzerland, Nat Butler from Boston, Arthur Gardner from Chicago and Clarence McLean, a trick rider. McLean left an impression in his “royal purple and white tights and velvet jacket” as he completed the stunt of taking his bicycle to pieces, yet still being able to ride.12

12 Meador, “Ella Eldridge.”
Inside the hotel, everything was provided for guest luxury and comfort. Rooms had incandescent light, fireplaces to keep the chill off at night, polished floors and cherry and oak furniture. Telegraph, telephone and newsstand were inside to keep the guests in touch with the business world outside. A barbershop and billiard tables were located in the basement, as well. Built in a region “barren of any trace of civilization,” the wilderness ambiance and jungle outpost atmosphere was what lured American aristocracy to the Belleview.\(^{13}\)

Not getting the chance to enjoy his success for very long, Henry Plant died in 1899. His son, Morton, took over and had the hotel painted white. The roof was refashioned with green shingles, replacing the red tiles from before. At this point the hotel earned the name “White Queen of the Gulf.” Clint Mitchell recalls growing up in the area and being able to see the Belleview from all the islands. “No matter where you were over on the islands, you could see the hotel. The old rainbow bridge showed you how elite it was.” Under Morton’s ownership the Belleview expanded in 1910 with an east wing that doubled the occupancy of the hotel to 290 guest rooms and a large swimming pool was added. He also brought in Donald Ross to design the grass greens for the hotel. Morton also was instrumental in starting construction on the cottages, so guests could extend their

\(^{13}\) Board, 21.
stay. Under his name, an endowment of $100,000 was begun for maintenance of a hospital which still operates today. Morton Plant Hospital opened its doors in 1916 with twenty-one rooms.

Hunting, fishing, yachting, tennis and skeet shooting were also readily available. A nine-hole golf course was originally established and eventually, converted to grass. This would bring professionals and fanatics to the West Coast. Two eighteen-hole golf courses were eventually established, being designed by the world renowned Scot, Donald Ross. Visiting the Belleview Hotel was a truly unique experience. Even if one was not a guest at the hotel, there were ways to feel a part of the American aristocracy. The Japanese Gardens, located near the heart of Belleair provided one of those opportunities. Visits here were publicized in the local papers and throughout the North. A trip to the Pinellas peninsula would not be complete without enjoying the “Gardens of the Far East.”

Amidst the Belleview realm, Dean Alvord, planner of Harbor Oaks, developed 65 acres of waterfront land as one of Florida’s most creative tourist attractions: Eagles Nest Japanese Gardens. In 1938, Alvord hired Fumio Hawakawa, a traditional Japanese-Hawaiian horticulturalist to reproduce a Far East garden. Pulling from generations of experience, “Kawa” created a land of Asian splendor. Here, along the quiet breezes of the Harbor, were “authentic
reproductions of mystic Temples, tapering Torii, pendant Pagodas, and quaint Bridges.” Like the botanical gardens at Sunken Gardens in St. Petersburg and the plantation atmosphere of Cypress Gardens in Winter Haven, visitors were invited to lose themselves among the fragrance of the flowered gardens as they strolled amongst the “placid pools” filled with water lilies. A natural spring fed the ponds and waterways of the Gardens, allowing visitors to sit on the benches provided and enjoy the peace and tranquility of nature. Musical programs were provided or guests could enjoy a luncheon in the authentic Tea House. Girls in native costume would give “superlative service.” The entrance to the Gardens was off of Rosery Road with a ticket house on the corner. The only things that remain today are the stone eagles that flank the entrance to the subdivision now known as Eagle’s Nest. If close notice is taken, the designs of a few pine trees hint of Japanese bonsai. One royal palm survives, near a small rivulet that is all that remains of the flowing waters of the Gardens. Surviving for almost twenty years, post World War II sentiments harmed the financial stability of the Gardens.14

Another past-time for Belleview guests was the Coe Road Casino. Although not officially connected to the hotel, the land was

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made available to William S. Coe. Coe built a two-story Spanish styled casino with a dining room that could accommodate fifty people.

According to Mike Sanders, famous guests like the Duke of Winsor and actor Tyrone Power, graced the gambling tables of the casino; driven there in limousines provided by the Belleview. Under Coe’s ownership the casino was legitimate. Having been partner of the Palm Beach Club with Col. Bradley, Coe was honest. Bradley made arrangements for his club to close upon his death. Coe was not as fortunate.

Former Belleview manager Don Church recalled, “After the war the casino was purchased by an organization we understood was part of a Chicago syndicate.” Mayor at the time, Lucius Ruder, called Bernie Powell to make sure the Belleview had no connections. Assured they did not and elated with their support, the casino was raided on 25 February 1949. Sheriff Todd Tucker arrived with deputies to catch employees dismantling the gambling room. Gambling paraphernalia was seized off a truck. The raid put to rest rumors that there were lifts that brought the gambling floor into the basement. Another local rumor was a tunnel that ran from the hotel to the Casino. With all the construction in the area, it has never been found.¹⁵

The casino was gone, but the building itself had a second life as the home of Trinity College. Graduate Billy Graham attended the campus when it was located in Tampa. As Michael Sanders stated: “the world-famous evangelist certainly wouldn’t have liked graduating from a former casino.” The college made its final move to the old Fenway Hotel in Dunedin, still maintaining a waterfront locale. Coe’s building was leveled when U.S. Steel purchased Bellevue grounds, to make way for condominiums.\(^{16}\)

The Bellevue itself was self sufficient, having its own fire department and police force. Drinking water was piped into the hotel from a fresh water spring located in the middle of a body of salt water. Lake water was used for bathing and other purposes. Even children were taken care of, with a school providing lessons for students away from their studies up north. Games, swimming and “afternoon frolics” were enjoyed by the students after their lessons. Annual circus events and swim meets were presented by the children at the end of each season. As spring approached, visitors headed back North to enjoy the cooler weather. Some visitors however, enjoyed the area so much that they wanted to stay. As interest in the area increased, the “cottages,” built near the Bellevue, were not enough. The need for a

\(^{16}\) Sanders, 41.
town developed. Plant had already purchased thousands of acres, which included the areas to become Belleair and Harbor Oaks.¹⁷

The Colonies of the Belleview

FIGURE 1: The Belleair Community, circa 1900. Note the bicycle track in the upper right. The Belleview is in the upper left corner. Courtesy of Clearwater Historical Society.

It was a small town lit with a ruby
Lathed with down
Stillier than the fields at the full dew.
Beautiful as pictures no man drew.
Almost contented I could be
‘Mong such unique society."¹⁸

¹⁷“Children of Hotel Guests Entertained,” Clearwater Sun, 10 February 1932, 4.

¹⁸ Salamanca, 15.
As part of Henry Plant’s original plan, the land surrounding the Belleview Hotel was laid out for guests who wanted to come earlier or stay later than the tourist season. Guests stayed in cottages that were built directly next to the hotel, but eventually, city planners were brought in and they founded colonies like Harbor Oaks and Belleair Estates which had residential lots “laid out with an eye to the artistic.” With hotels closing up until the following winter, both of these areas became prime locations for founding families and still pack a premium on real-estate prices.\footnote{Wayne Ayers, “Belleair – Henry Plant’s Vision,” \textit{Belleair Area Neighborhood Newsletter}, August 2009.}

Dean Alvord and his brother started to plot streets and houses just north of the Belleview Hotel in 1914. A New York developer, Alvord was a guest at the hotel who purchased the land from E.H. Coachman. According to historic realtor Tiffany Metzig, Coachman sold the land because he would not subdivide it himself. Establishing a neighborhood of winter homes for affluent Northerners like Brooklyn Dodgers owner Charles Ebbets and inventor of the amphibious vehicle, the alligator, Donald Roebling, Alvord introduced paved streets, curbs and sidewalks to the area. The neighborhood encompassed land that was used for the old Ft. Harrison and was meant to house the well-to-do. The first house built was at 802 Druid Road and the historic Ft.
Harrison placard is placed out front of this historic home, nicknamed Century Oaks. Continuing down Druid Road the owners of the homes reads like a Who’s Who list: M.A. McMullen, Studebaker, Charles Ebbets, and Taver Bayly. Other roads include Magnolia Drive –yes, it is lined with magnolia trees-, Lotus Path, and Jasmine Way, continuing the feeling of a tropical paradise.

In a 1915 advertisement, the neighborhood was being publicized as “The Pearl of the Pinellas Peninsula.” Located in the county seat of Clearwater, “on a commanding bluff,” this now historic neighborhood, boasted of “all the conveniences and finish of the best suburbs of long-settled sections, pleasingly combined with the distinguishing characteristics of the Florida Gulf Coast at its best.” Like the Belleview Hotel, developers of Harbor Oaks mentioned the 1887 statement that the area was the most healthful spot in the country. Century-old oaks and orange groves covered property that was ensured of maintaining its value and beauty. “Shrewd investors and homeseekers of discriminating tastes” were encouraged to come down quickly, by way of two available railroads, to see it for themselves. Its close proximity to the Belleview’s 36 hole golf course, as well as the security provided from the “occasional storms on the Gulf,” enticed those “who want comfort without extravagance.” It stills remains a close-knit community with neighborhood traditions, such as lighted luminaries
every Christmas. A dock built in 1925 at the end of Magnolia Drive was destroyed by a storm in March 1993. It was rebuilt in 1998 and is the site of crowds from all over the city on the Fourth of July for fireworks.\textsuperscript{20}

Belleair, Florida, also known as the Springtime City, was founded in 1925 by Belleview Biltmore resident Roland Conklin. American writer, Rex Beach, also a familiar winter resident became president of the country club. Touted as “America’s Most Desirable Residential Colony,” John Nolan planned the illustrious town in an attempt to give wealthy Americans a piece of paradise permanently. Nolan had previously been commissioned to plan part of St. Petersburg. With a natural setting like that of southern France, Nolan was optimistic that preserves and parks could be established to attract residents and tourists alike. When it came to bringing his ideals of civic virtue and nature together in the “colored area” of St. Petersburg, quick profits and local racism outweighed his plan for Eden. He moved on to other areas, including Belleair.\textsuperscript{21}


Set on the approximate three square miles just to the south of the Sparkling City of Clearwater, Belleair still attracts the rich and famous with its neatly planned streets along the balmy Gulf of Mexico. In her pamphlet Belleair- the Alluring, Lucy Nuttall Salamanca drew investors in with her historical prose and the majesty of Pinellas County: “The high bluff proved to me the perfect site for romantic Belleair Estates, ‘the result of an ideal,’” that was not just the result of another real estate venture. Compared to neighboring Hillsborough County, Pinellas’ incorporated areas are remarkable, based on tourism and agriculture, small towns developed along rail lines, major roads and beaches. They could support themselves economically and chose to govern themselves, too. 22

Homes were designed by James H. Ritchie and built by Franklin J. Mason on the “wide and well laid public thoroughfares, parks and boulevards, shore drives and the big community open air theatre.” Plans were submitted to an art jury, which consisted of Earle E. Carley, Rex Beach, James H. Ritchie, and Roland R. Conklin for approval. Conklin also founded the “colonies” of Hyde Park, Chicago, Euclid Heights, Cleveland; Roland Park, Baltimore; and Sheldon Park, Kansas City. Like Harbor Oaks, the Belleair community was promoted by its

22 Lucy Nuttall Salamanca, Belleair-the Alluring, (St. Petersburg, FL: Tourist News Press, 1920s). Pinellas County Historical Background, 2-7.
proximity to the Bellevue Biltmore, along with its well-planned style toward a Florida utopia:

    Aladdin’s lamp could bring you nothing to compare with this opportunity created by nature’s charm and man’s money magic” and “Spanish homes already completed and others in projection; with every possible attribute that makes for beauty and comfort; with the most glorious sunsets daily flooding the Heavens in a medley of gold and bronze and scarlet viewed through the black maize of stately pines, what homesite could have more allure?23

Belleair Heights was incorporated June 6, 1923 and abolished June 8, 1925. The town of Belleair was created in its place, retaining its board of commissioners. Seawall and paving contracts were issued in 1924 and bonds were issued to pay for them. In 1925 a bond issue was proposed for a water and gas system within the town and a water tank. These “homelier, practical things of life” were promoted in Belleair-the Alluring, “so residents may enjoy utmost comfort and convenience.” The exhausted businessman and his “socially fatigued wife” would be able to “refresh themselves daily in an atmosphere of Valencia, Andalusia,” and other romantic locales. The homebuilders were successful in building the ideal city of “permanence and grandeur.” Pioneers had struck off into the wilderness of the

peninsula, while these new residents would experience the comforts of hard surfaced roads.\textsuperscript{24}

Having the Bellevue Biltmore hotel, “certainly one of the most exclusive hotels on Florida’s west coast,” within its town limits provided a certain attraction for future residents. The Bellevue Biltmore provided the only commercial business during the winter season. Other shopping was found in Clearwater and Largo. A municipal water system came from three drilled wells with a storage tank that held 350,000 gallons. The Ross-designed golf courses, the 18 hole Pelican Golf Club and the 36 hole Bellevue Biltmore course were open to residents, for a fee. Also available to residents were the social activities at the Bellevue Biltmore Hotel. Over seventeen miles of paved streets were cleaned by town personnel. Along with police, fire and sanitation, all services were furnished without tax levies. A majority of residences were promised to be within 5 blocks of Clearwater Bay. Schools were provided by the county as well in nearby Clearwater.\textsuperscript{25}

Plans for the town were as romantic as the prose that advertised its land. Harbor Oaks may have had the waterfront property, but Belleair could promise the only waterfall in Florida. Along with the

\textsuperscript{24} Salamanca pamphlet. Personal Letter to Mr. J.I. Pavey of the South Bend Lumber Company. 26 October 1938. Town of Belleair Archives

\textsuperscript{25} “Belleair Estates.”
natural beauty supplied by the coastal bluffs, developers promised the
*Bayview Esplanade*. This cement bulkhead was to extend three
hundred feet into the Bay to take advantage of the fresh water spring
that bubbled up through the salt water. Over the spring was to be the
*el Sancho Fuente* fountain house to provide a public drinking place. In
addition to the spring would be the Pompeian Pool and Casino for
dancing and still water bathing. Guaranteed to be the showpiece of
Greater Clearwater, the pool, casino, esplanade and fountain house
were never realized.

Like elsewhere in the state, while developers planned and
thousands were drawn by the sun and surf during the land boom of
Florida, it would soon come to an end. The promise of fortunes made
on tropical crops and the rejuvenating effects of the sea air on illness
ridden organs proved to be a good draw for northerners, but like the
rest of Florida, Belleair was hit hard prior to the 1929 stock market
crash and the Great Depression. Land development came to a
standstill during 1925. Weeds grew out of the cracks in the newly
paved roads. The Belleview Hotel made it through this period,
continually drawing its usual crowd; however, not without some
changes.
CHAPTER 3
GREED SAVE THE QUEEN: THE DEPRESSION YEARS

FIGURE 2: The Belleview Biltmore just prior to closing in 2009. Courtesy of Jared Hall, photographer

The 1920s was a decade of exuberance, glamour, and high rolling spenders. After the Great War in Europe, Americans wanted to spend the money they earned and live life to its fullest. Florida became the new American Mediterranean. As technology made travel and living in the tropics a reality for many, advertising was a catalyst for growth in what would become the Sunshine State. Even as already
populated areas grew, new regions sprouted. Speculators flocked to the state to purchase cheap land, lure tourists and transplants, and secure grand wealth. Great landmarks of tourism already dotted the coastal regions. Included in this was Pinellas County. Following the Gilded Age of the late nineteenth century, industrialists rose in prominence and wealth. As they did so, they fell into what Thorstein Veblen called “conspicuous consumption.” Parading his wealth, Henry Plant had already established his dominion with a number of hotels with railroads bringing guests directly to the resorts for the winter season. The Bellevue, known as the White Queen of the Gulf, was one of his greatest legacies.

By the 1920s, the Queen had changed hands when it was purchased by John McEntee Bowman. With an $800,000 addition of a new southern wing in 1924, the 1925 season was a smashing success, a stunning symbol of the Florida Boom. All indicators pointed to the Bellevue Biltmore continuing on its prosperous path. However, Clearwater was a growing city, with new hotels competing for dominance. The Fort Harrison Hotel opened in 1927 with 11 stories and events that were open to the public. However, maintaining its aloof stature, only locals as employees were allowed in the Bellevue Biltmore. George Fulmer recounts that the closest locals got to the resort were the horse stables off of Ft. Harrison near the railroad
tracks. As a boy, he would go with other scouts under the direction of Sheriff Tucker to saddle the horses and ride them down to Clearwater Beach for exercise. “This was unheard of due to the bridle paths at the Bellevue, but the sheriff had a deal with the hotel to keep the horses from getting fat.”

As the twenties progressed, the Bellevue Biltmore continued to entertain and expand, spending more money each summer to reopen bigger and better the following winter season. Even the stock market crash in 1929 could not dim the festivities in Belleair. With the death of John Bowman in 1931, all the spending on the Bellevue came to light, and the Queen fell into the hands of its stockholders. Federal courts placed the resort into receivership, but wealthy visitors continued to come south for the winter. Mirroring the nation, the owners of the Bellevue continued to spend, selling off property to pay for improvements, and counting on the future to be brighter than before. As the thirties came to a close, a buyer was finally found in the form of Arnold Kirkeby, Chicago hotelier. The 1938 and 1939 seasons were back with a bang. Wealthy visitors came down in larger numbers, different names with the same social status as those who came before. Local Belleair bondholders and the wealthy northerners,

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26George Fulmer, interview, Deirdre Schuster (April 2006).
who just could not let go of their wealthy winter Queen, saved the
Belleview Biltmore from total bankruptcy and closure.

After the 1924 renovations, passengers of the Atlantic Coast Line
and Seaboard Trains flocked to the Belleview for the enjoyment of the
warmer Pinellas County climate. Visitors to the resort enjoyed two golf
courses, an Olympic sized pool, tea gardens, and the musical talents of
the Kentucky Serenaders. A celebration for Washington’s Birthday was
the highlight around the county, marked by the annual dinner and
dance, “West Florida’s gayest and most fashionable social event.”
Prominent socialites were present, with novelist Rex Beach, Countess
de Marelas, and George Ade sharing some of the tables with five
hundred other couples. The Studebakers hosted a table of fifteen,
while the tables for two included Mrs. Kennesaw Mountain Landis, wife
of the baseball commissioner.27

During this time of plenty, the commissioners of Clearwater
attempted to extend the boundaries of the city and pull in the
Belleview acres to raise their tax revenues. To counter this, hotel
managers quickly formed the town of Belleair. As the list of seasonal

27 “Royalty May Be Incognito at Hotel, Is Rumor,” St. Petersburg Times, 22
Belleview,” St. Petersburg Times, 24 February 1925, 15. “Soreno, Belleview to have
Brilliant Fetes,” St. Petersburg Times, 23 February 1925, indicated that there was a
choice for St. Petersburg residents: the Belleview or St. Petersburg’s own Soreno
Hotel.
visitors to the area increased, the list of potential Belleair residents also grew. Advertisements in the *St. Petersburg Times* encouraged investors to visit the Belleview and sit on the second story balconies to enjoy the view of what could be theirs: a view of the water along the world renowned golf courses. As an extension of the Belleview, “water, gas, light and power, telephones, paved streets and sidewalks, storm sewers, public parks, waterfront promenade, and other improvements” would also be an advantage for the new residents. Northern newspapers helped the town grow by interviewing Rex Beach and Roland R. Conklin, president of the Belleair Development Company. To aid in the purchase of a new Belleair home, financing was provided by Ross Real Estate, Inc. to cover 75 percent of the total cost, leaving the interest and payments equal to only a fraction of what a winter rental would be.\(^{28}\)

As the first mayor to take office, Earle E. Carley was determined to make Belleair an ideal residential park. His initial goal would be to overcome the antipathy that existed between hotel and outsiders over the past forty years. The feelings of resentment were “well founded on the part of the local residents, the fruit growers, merchants, and

farmers” due to the fact that the hotel management only bought what
was absolutely necessary for the running of the hotel from the area.
One local citizen was quoted in a local paper: “They treated the local
people as aliens and in turn were regarded as such by them. There
was no feeling of co-operation. The hotel left very little money in the
community and kept aloof from its problems. The grounds were
considered sacred and intruders warned off.” Mayor Carley changed
that by enthusiastically entering into community problems and being a
“good neighbor.” He gave orders that everything should be bought
locally. Materials for the first fifty houses, along with material for the
streets, sidewalks, etc. were ordered from local contractors.29

The newly formed town commission appropriated $300,000 for
the dredging of the bay, which benefited both the town and the hotel.
The process would provide sand to reinforce the sea wall for the hotel,
as well as generate deeper channels for boats from other coastal
resorts and private yachts. A large island and a one-an-a-half-mile
shore promenade would also be crafted. Mayor Carley set aside a
portion of the island for sea planes to land, believing that this would
attract tourists from other resort areas, including boaters who had not
yet traversed across the Keys to the Gulf of Mexico. “Col. Clarence
Chamberlain, the famous trans-Atlantic flier arrived in a ‘baby’ plane

with a 26-foot wing spread and a weight of 650 pounds.” His eventual ambition was to meet and exceed the population of Clearwater and equal the city of St. Petersburg. According to the *St. Petersburg Times*, this would not be very difficult. Developer Roland E. Conklin stated that he was receiving inquiries every week from the social elites of New York regarding the Belleair region. Statistics back up Carley’s wishes, as 1925 land sales topped $43 Million. According to W.L. Straub, Pinellas County’s financial statement in 1929 showed an estimated actual valuation of $500,000,000, as against an assessed valuation of $38,437,674. He also stated that “The magnificent Belleview Hotel, with its spacious grounds and famous golf courses, naturally drew about it homes, stores and other developments of an urban character, and the people there coming to consider theirs a sufficiently separate community.”

The next few years indicate that the Bellevue and Belleair were prospering. At least weekly columns in the *Clearwater Evening Sun* reported, “News of the Bellevue Hotel” throughout the 1925 season. Included in these columns would be golf news, social additions, as well

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as the Thompson & McKinnon Stock Letter. With the excess spending going on in the United States, there were warning signs. In the 10 February 1925 edition, Thompson and McKinnon saw advancing shares as a dangerous proposition, not to be viewed as only “interesting.” “Do you think yesterday’s market was a good one? I don’t. I never did like a market that had any element of sensationalism in it, because I know it is not healthy.” Even with this warning, winter visitors would flock to the ticker tape office of the Bellevue to view their stock gains, playing the precarious game of speculation. 31

Season after season, the military-like staff made sure that the Bellevue ran with precision, staffing the dining room with 140 “privates,” as well as providing private kindergartens and elementary classes in the large Tiffany ballroom for the children of Belleair and the guests of the Bellevue. The Donald Ross constructed golf courses remained in play, as well, with tournaments for men and women each season. Also, in military fashion were the annual opening ceremonies. The 1928 season opened on 7 January with J.G. Kirkland, division passenger agent of the Atlantic Coast Line, raising the flag at the Bellevue. Hotel management spent thousands of dollars making improvements to the hotel, including a 200 foot pier for the 10 foot

passenger boat that brought visitors back and forth across Clearwater Bay. The second golf course had been lengthened and the first
improved. All the improvements provided an “exceptional season,” as people came early and stayed late to enjoy the swimming, tennis,
riding, and trap shooting. Hotel visitors enjoyed the new cabanas added to the beach, especially when in conjunction with the “Pirate Treasure Hunt.”

The year of the Crash, the Belleview was turning people away. As the “southern stopping point for many of the country’s most
wealthy and fashionable people,” reservations were needed well in advance. With five hundred rooms and additional cottages, additions
were expected to accommodate future millionaires. Even the 1930 season was expected to be the most successful to date. William
Welch, the greens keeper, had stayed on throughout the summer in order to maintain and improve the golf courses. New fairways were
added along with new greens at some holes. Workmen had been hired for over a month to reconstruct older sections of the hotel, as well as
build a new dock to accommodate thirty-four speed boats. More dredging was done to allow for larger yachts, with the sand to fill in

behind the sea wall. New bathing facilities were built at the Beach and a playground was created for the children of visitors. Each new southbound train brought new guests and more people to the Bellevue than at any corresponding time in past seasons. Clint Mitchell recalls that the Bellevue did very well during the Depression years. His grandmother lived at the spur of the railroad leading into the Bellevue. As a young boy, he saw many wealthy people going into the resort. Contrary to Fulmer, Mitchell “went down there all the time,” and saw people living in the “chalets.”

Even though the guests of the Bellevue may not have been touched by financial disaster, they were aware of those less fortunate in the area. Mrs. Truman Newberry, wife of former secretary of the Navy and Michigan senator, took an interest in the local YWCA. She aided the local Girls Reserves in forming a sewing guild to help the “poorer negroes in the city.” Along with volunteer “colored women,” they fashioned numerous outfits for local children. The Women’s Beta Club hosted a bridge party at the Bellevue to raise money for the colored children’s day nursery. Thirty bridge tables were originally set up at five dollars each. Eventually over 50 tables would be set up in

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the converted ballroom for the charity event. Mrs. John Charles Kingsbury sponsored a benefit at the country club to benefit Morton Plant Hospital, with some proceeds going for lab equipment. These benefits were not surprising given that Julian Price, president of Jefferson Standard Life Insurance, gave Pinellas County a higher economic rating than any other county in the state.34

The 1930 season ended exceptionally well. Well known people like Babe Ruth, Charles Schwab, and others from Miami and Palm Beach, came to finish out the season at the Bellevue. The Pirate Treasure Hunt finished out the season with a Gasparilla type event from the island to the hotel. On the island were games, treasure hunts, a buffet supper enjoyed while watching fireworks and “a bevy of mermaids garbed in white bathing suits” forced to walk a plank. Dancing commenced at the grill back at the hotel. Enjoying the festivities were a number of railroad businessmen: Thomas Hulme, Daniel Willared, F.C. Batch, and L.A. Downs. Along with Robert Maffitt, first assistant to Bowman, they were optimistic about Florida’s prosperity. Maffitt stated:

Florida’s natural advantages, especially with regard to its location and convenient accessibility relative to great

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northern centers; its delightful climate and the fertility of its soil, constitute assets of immense value that should contribute greatly to the prosperity of its people...Florida deserves to prosper, for she has ever been willing to do everything possible to win the favor and appeal of the rest of the country.

With “progressive, public-spirited” people, road building, and improved railroad schedules, Florida was more reasonable to vacationers from New York and Chicago.\(^{35}\)

The season of 1931 proved to be lackluster with the usual opening ceremony followed by the usual dances and dinners. The Beta Club once again hosted a charity benefit at the Belleview with proceeds aiding the local clinics with medicine, milk and other essentials for the “under-privileged children of pre-school age.” The season ended uneventfully and the year progressed with the usual closure of the Belleview. However, on October 28, John Bowman suddenly died after a routine operation. The flag was flown at half mast two days later, and within the week, his successor was named and was visiting the Belleview. George W. Sweeney, former vice-

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president and sports enthusiast, took over what was to become a losing venture.36

Although the local papers reported that the Bellevue was having a series of successful seasons, Plant and Bowman had spent too much money on the White Queen of the Gulf. The hotel was turned over to stockholders in Belleair and went into receivership. The federal court in Tampa named a company to operate the Bellevue under the management of Frank W. Regan. Being closed up for nine months of the year, however, still meant that extensive improvements had to be made to the golf courses, and the buildings had to be repainted. At the peak of the 1933 season, the Bellevue housed 350 guests. This would not be enough to pay off the $889,000 in debt and delinquent tax notes. Belleair took advantage of the Wilcox Act in 1935. The petition in Tampa, the first of its kind, would allow the town of Belleair to take advantage of national bankruptcy laws, effectively refunding the thirty year bonds. This attempt failed when the Supreme Court found the act unconstitutional and it appeared that the town would have to raise taxes. Of course, Belleair was not alone. Clearwater, Dunedin, and Safety Harbor had also filed suits prior to the court

ruling and commissioners hoped that new legislation would aid them in their time of economic distress.\textsuperscript{37}

In 1936, the residents of the town of Belleair ended up suing the state of Florida for the purpose of getting a refund for $1,049,000. Judge John U. Bird, at the time, ruled against the bondholders and the case was appealed. Later that year, the Supreme Court ruled that taxes might be levied in order to pay $160,000 representing gas and water bonds. However, taxpayers filed in circuit court to keep the town from levying taxes to pay the remainder of the $89,000 in paving and seawall bonds. The following year, the town taxed the hotel on its assessed property, which they found to be $1,400,000. This was due to the fact that the paving of the roads and seawall improvements benefited the Belleview Hotel, as well as the town of Belleair. Tampa appraiser C.P. Glover found that the hotel and property were only worth $552,000; therefore the town had over taxed the “swanky Bellevue-Biltmore.” In addition to that, attorneys for the Belleair property owners argued that the original bond issue was illegal.

because it was “purely for the benefit of a private enterprise instead of the municipality.”38

All these lawsuits and injunctions did not stop the Belleview from opening for the winter season. Regan opened the forty-second season with lobbies and public rooms completely renovated and redecorated. The former Blue room (card room and sun lounge) was converted into a cocktail lounge with low tables and comfortable chairs to go with the latest type of bar. The Grand ballroom was repainted ivory and pale green, while the main dining room was a soft rose to compliment the ceiling, with its creamy white trim. The southeast corner room was converted into an east lounge with a new picture window and chintz hangings in a soft green. On January 10, the usual attendees raised the flag with “what [was] expected to be the most active season in years.” Jacob S. Disston, M.A. McMullen, and John E. Barbour became the new regulars as the cottage colony became crowded, The hotel planned a full calendar of social affairs along with the country club and Carlouel Yacht club. Japanese Gardens, supper dances, weekly bridge

tournaments, nightly games, and concerts of chamber music on Sundays were once again common.\textsuperscript{39}

Guests during that year’s season experienced the usual golf tournaments, tri-weekly keno games, and the third annual aquatic competition for children, which included a diving exhibition from the roof by instructor Ansten Wetherill. Wetherill taught the children of the Bellevue to swim in the Olympic size pool, including future Navy SEAL and children’s show host Fred Rogers. Another benefit was hosted at the Carlouel Yacht club on Belleview Island, with the profits to go the American Red Cross for flood sufferers in the Mid-west. This would be one of those rare occasions when locals, other than registered Clearwater members, rubbed shoulders with the nation’s wealthiest people. As the season ended, a faction of Belleair commissioners opposed the hotel’s remaining open because of its failure to pay its taxes and maintained that the management be analyzed by the district court. Nevertheless, in September, the town dropped the six suits, some going back almost ten years. Officials believed the town had no improvement lien claims against the

properties that benefited from the bonds. This did not stop new cases from being brought forth by bond holders.  

The next year, 1938, the Bellevue opened as usual, yet changes were coming. The Atlantic Coast Line put a flagman at the Belleair Crossing and the Seaboard freight station was removed because it was shown to be a traffic hazard, blocking the vision of drivers entering Ft. Harrison Avenue from the west. At the end of the year, the debt was too large and the Federal District Court ordered the Bellevue be put up for auction. The five hundred plus acres had been in the hands of the receiver for the past five years with bonds that totaled nearly $1,000,000. The hotel and grounds represented an investment of around $5,000,000 if put into the right hands. As Don Brown stated at the time, “Legend tells of innumerable millionaires who have stayed at it. It also tells of as many penniless persons entertained by Morton Plant, who took no interest in making the hotel a paying proposition.” The hotel and grounds were designed to provide complete privacy for its wealthy guests, with a guard at the entrance, its own fire department, water system, and power plant. A private dock with yachts, golf courses, and grounds made it like a miniature city. With

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the addition of the two islands also part of grounds - one with twelve
cabana cottages – it would surely bring money if properly managed. It
was sold in four minutes to the bondholders, who were the only ones
to enter a bid, still with nearly $800,000 of outstanding bonds. 41

After another $250,000 to prepare the Queen for a successful
season, guests arrived from almost every state in the Union. Landis
and Newberry returned and took up residence in their cottages.
Charity benefits were once again held for Morton Plant Hospital. Golf
and swimming were again vogue and news worthy. Things were
looking up. And yet, it was not enough. In May 1939, M.A. McMullen,
attorney for the Belleview, stated he could see no other way to pay off
the debt than by selling the hotel on the auction block. Frank Regan,
who held $125,000 in receiver’s certificates, returned to New York City
to manage another hotel on Park Avenue. Judge Alexander Akerman
signed a lease to Kirkeby Hotels, Inc. Kirkeby also operated the
Blackstone and Drake hotels in Chicago and others in New York and
Los Angeles. Bondholders for the town of Belleair continued to file for
forgiveness of the bonds that were issued to benefit the Belleview. The
bondholders continued to claim that the town was not responsible for

41 “A.C.L. Puts Flagman at Belleair Crossing,” St. Petersburg Times, 11
Don Brown, “Belleair Hotel Has Colorful History,” St. Petersburg Times, 4 December
1938, 8. “Belleview-Biltmore is Sold in 4 Minutes for $350,000,” St. Petersburg
Times, 6 December 1938.
them. With a new manager, Kenneth Kenyon, the hotel had more improvements made in order to open the new season. In 1940, the town of Belleair formed a syndicate, that included Arnold Kirkeby, to refund their debt under the Wilcox Act. The bondholders accepted a new twenty-year refund in an amount that would equal the sum they expended in buying up the original Belleair bonds. Kirkeby ran the Belleview successfully until the hotel was drafted into service by the Army Air Corps in 1942. The next year would be the time period that Clint Mitchell states it started going downhill. After the war, Mitchell would work at the Belleview putting it back in order after the Army “destroyed” it.\textsuperscript{42}

CHAPTER 4

THE WHITE QUEEN GOES TO WAR

Recruit William Tordoff walked out of his room, one he shared with seven other trainees, turned right and then strolled down the elegant staircase to the even grander foyer of the Queen of the Gulf. At 20 years of age, Bill was one of thousands drafted into the Army Air Corps and trained at the Belleview Biltmore during World War II. A
self-described farm boy from Iowa, he could not help but be slightly in awe of the grand lady who housed him while he trained for almost two months before being sent off to Europe to “fight the Japs.” On this particular day in January 1943 it was cool enough to wear an overcoat, but he knew it would warm up considerably in the area known as the Sparkling City. The training grounds, once a world renowned golf course, were muddy in places with tree trunks, fences, and other objects to be used in training young men for war. For two days in a row, other trainees had been pulled out to act as drill instructor. Today was Bill’s turn. “Why haven’t you been DI yet, recruit?” Bill’s reply was one any visitor to the Sunshine State might make on a day that was going to turn out to be a “hot one,” “Bad enough to be drilling in the hot sun. I don’t want to be yelling things, too!”

Arriving in January of 1943, Bill would have his “butt worked off” by the marching, drilling and “playing soldier” that taught these fresh recruits how to be soldiers. Every one of them was proud to serve. Bill fought a 4-F designation, meaning that he was physically unfit for duty, due to an earlier car accident that made his neck “crackle” with movement, but he swore it didn’t hurt. The Army doctors let him in and he left his wife, Erma, and three month old baby on Christmas night 1942. Overall, his stay at the Belleview was enjoyable, even though some of his training caused sore spots. On one occasion, the
trainees had to jump into a ravine to elude “the enemy.” What they did not know, was that Florida’s ravines are filled with prickly things called sandspurs. He spent the weekend picking those out and was more careful in the future when jumping into places. All part of the training to “look before you leap.”

The Bellevue Biltmore, built in 1897 by Henry Plant with 145 rooms, was a grand resort with 425 rooms by the time the Army Air Corps leased the building and grounds from owner Arnold Kirkeby. A self sufficient resort, with its own post office that also served the nearby town of Belleair, it was the perfect spot to barrack the overflow of military staff from bases MacDill and Drew Fields in Tampa, Florida. On the gulf coast and near the sparkling city of Clearwater, the Bellevue, along with the Fort Harrison Hotel and the Gray Moss Inn, housed over 3,000 soldiers for over a year. Training on the grounds of the resort, as well as drilling out front of city hall, civilians were inexorably drawn into the life of the military. Dimouts, rationing and rat patrols became the name of the day along with weekly parties and special entertainment events. Crime dropped and juvenile delinquents had little to do with the arrival of so many men in uniform. Pinellas county itself was transformed with men from the Army Air Corps, Marines (in Dunedin), and Coast Guard (in Tarpon Springs).

43 William Tordoff, interview, Deirdre Schuster (21 November 2008).
The Belleview was sold to Kirkeby in 1939 after a number of resorts had gone bankrupt and closed. Luck would have the Belleview being kept open by its own stockholders until the sale. When Kirkeby leased the Queen to the Army a quick inventory had to be done. Clint Mitchell was a young man when he helped to move out furnishings from the hotel. “The only things left were a bed, a dresser, and a nightstand. Everything else went: lamps, chandeliers, pictures, everything.” The beautiful wallpaper and carved wood moldings would prove to be a beautiful backdrop for many men who previously would never even dream of staying in the Belleview Biltmore. August 1942 was the turning point for the Belleview as thousands of trainees came over from MacDill. Pam Dubov’s father, stationed at MacDill, was envious of those trainees who were able to stay at the Belleview. Furnishings, pictures, rugs and other items were sold, placed in other Kirkeby hotels, or put into storage in the Weaver Grocery warehouse in Clearwater. The government and Kirkeby made no provision for maintenance of the hotel. As the world’s largest in use wooden structure, fire was always a worry and the soldiers would go on fire watch. Eventually, the Army would install a $200,000 sprinkler system. It was finished the day the Army moved out and is still in use
today. As of 2009, according to the last hotel manager, Tom Bouchard, the system was still up to code and ready to be used, if needed.\footnote{Clinton Mitchell, interview, Deirdre Schuster (26 November 2008). Pam Dubov, interview, Deirdre Schuster (10 December 2008). “Belleview is About Ready for Army,” Clearwater Sun, 5 August 1942. Tom Bouchard and Sharon Delahanty, interview, Deirdre Schuster (11 November 2008).}

As the soldiers prepared to be moved into the Belleview on 2 August 1942, the Army was negotiating the use of two other hotels in the area: the Fort Harrison Hotel and the Gray Moss Inn. The original 400 soldiers, transferred from the St. Petersburg Replacement Training Center were part of a permanent unit to be stationed at the Belleview (to become the Group C Replacement Training Center). The 918 and 588 Special School Squadrons were to be “instructed in the rudiments of army life.” This included the usual basic training in military law and customs, as well as first aid and sex hygiene. After this three week course of training, the recruits were to be sent to various places depending upon their abilities. The first wave of soldiers was also in charge of getting the Belleview ready for use. The list of home states of the soldiers that passed through the Belleview was as varied as its resort guest list. In addition to St. Louis, Kansas City, Sioux Falls, Omaha, Keesler Field, Hollywood, and L.A., there were trainees from China, England, and “full-blooded Piute Indian, from Flagstaff.”

Private John Truehorse was described as “one boy that can really say
he’s a full blooded American.”  

With the arrival of more soldiers and officers, commanding officer Colonel Floyd E. Lindley expressed some displeasure with the fact that his officers could not find affordable housing in the Clearwater area; therefore, they would stay at the Belleview, as it was “sufficient for all officers” until the rents came down in the area. Throughout August the central job at the Belleview was “policing the grounds, trimming hedges, mowing the lawns, weeding,” and other jobs that would have the resort resembling its appearance “at the height of the tourist season in winters past.” Once that was accomplished, the Belleview was opened for a public viewing. Citizens who could only dream of being admitted to the posh resort were suddenly welcome to view the grand Queen. However, visitors to the open house were only allowed to view the main floor, as the upstairs floors and cottages housed the soldiers. The Army Air Corps’ fifty-eight piece band played music, the military police controlled traffic patterns, and a “time-honored retreat ceremony” and parade entertained the general populace on the Belleview’s “two swanky golf courses.” During their off time, soldiers made their way to the downtown area, crowding Cleveland Avenue’s restaurants and shops. As soldiers from Squadron

588 were transferred to the Fort Harrison and Gray Moss and the 413 was added to the Bellevue, the area’s business began to boom and changes were needed in regulations and hours.  

Concerns in the Sparkling City arose over the use of the three hotels that included the lost revenue from the tourist industry. In one article printed by the Clearwater Sun, State hotel commissioner Hunter G. Johnson and Chamber of Commerce secretary Fred J. Lee assured tourists that over one hundred hotels were still available for those wishing to “find sleeping accommodations in Florida, to fit any purse.” The Clearwater Sun ran a full page ad throughout the season with a question and answer page that included information regarding recreational facilities, beach use, blackouts, and transportation.

Along with tourist issues, the city had to contend with liquor laws and business hours. Lt. Colonel Lindley requested that the hours for liquor stores be altered so that beer and liquor could not be sold after midnight and stopped completely on Sunday. A limit on package goods was also requested. The sheriff, Todd Tucker, attending the meeting

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to insure that he could get other cities to cooperate with the request. In the end, Lindley gained some measure of control. Dealers were not to sell liquor, beer, or wine after midnight, seven days a week. Servicemen were banned from buying before five in the evening, except on Saturday and Sundays and hard liquor was banned for everyone from midnight Saturday to eight o’clock Monday morning. The package sale ban was also adopted in an attempt to keep the soldiers from stocking up for parties in their rooms. 48

Time not spent drinking was taken up with shopping in Clearwater’s stores. Usual hours ended at six o’clock in the evening. This proved to be a problem for soldiers who did not get off duty until five. In order to give the servicemen time to shop for “certain commodities,” one store stayed open until seven. This sparked a discussion with the Chamber of Commerce and led to other stores following suit. 49

The relationship between soldiers and civilians was reciprocal. As shops and restaurants altered life for soldiers, the soldiers gave back: with entertainment. Some would say that boxing, wrestling and team sports, like baseball and basketball, were part of the training of a good


49 “Army Affects Hours of Stores,” Clearwater Sun, 11 October 1942.
soldier. It keeps him fit and able to go out there and fight the enemy. Beginning in October 1942, the Army began taking on the Marines from Dunedin in the boxing ring at the Municipal Auditorium. What exactly was there to do for recreation for the Army Air Corps in the area? As Private R.W. McClure answered in the local paper, “the Athletic and Recreation unit of Squadron 413 at the Belleview Biltmore Hotel has the answer.” Free game periods, calisthenics and sports were all available to “make conditioning a pleasure and a booster of morale.” He even quoted another private from Oklahoma, Jack Powell: “‘If the fellows at home could see this, they’d all be in the air force.’” And why not, when a person would get to stay in a luxurious resort, be entertained, and have activities scheduled by the Clearwater Civilian Defense Council? Writing and reading rooms, games, pool and ping pong tables, juke, radios and dancing were available every day, in addition to art instruction, dancing instruction, and basketball and volleyball.\footnote{\textit{Recreation for Air Forces is Varied}, \textit{Clearwater Sun}, 25 September 1942. \textit{Recreation for Servicemen}, \textit{Clearwater Sun}, various dates throughout 1942 and 1943.}

As the holidays approached, local families were asked to provide a bit of home for the recruits. “Want a Soldier for Thanksgiving?” “Pumpkin Pies for Soldiers Wanted.” These were some of the articles
printed in the local papers. Giving back for all that they received, the Army Air Corps staged shows and parades for civilians, as well as aided in fighting fires and preventing rat infestations. The Eleventh of November, Armistice Day, exhibited the largest military parade in the history of the Clearwater area, with over one thousand soldiers from the Air Corps, Marines, and Coast Guard in attendance. The local high schools, Clearwater and Largo, were also participants. The parade began at exactly ten in the morning on Cleveland Street and Garden Avenue and proceeded west to the Municipal Auditorium for a program that included the sale of war bonds and stamps.51

As Christmas drew near, the combined forces of the 588, 413 and 918 squadrons put on boxing shows, as well as a variety show at the Municipal Auditorium. Private George E. Reedy, Jr. acted as master of ceremonies and introduced acts that included a group of cross dressing soldiers that vastly amused the spectators. Roaring with laughter, families went home to celebrate the holiday. Astonishingly, Christmas 1942 proved to be a rather quiet time, with no DUIs given, no “large hauls made in jook joints,” and “only two negro youths were brought before [the] Magistrate on charges of fighting.” The reason

51 The largest forest fire at that time, in an area northeast of Dunedin, forced Fire Chief Martin to confer with the army air force official regarding aid to fight the fires. The cause was lack of rain in the area over an extended time. “Army to Aid in Woods Fires,” Clearwater Sun, 6 November 1942. “Greatest Military Parade Here Marks Armistice Day,” Clearwater Sun, 12 November 1942.
given for this was that people were either too busy, did not have gas or tires to go anywhere, or they were in the military.\textsuperscript{52}

Everything was not all rosy, though. In addition to soldiers making friends and getting shipped out to areas unknown, there were a few accidents at the Bellevue. On 17 December, the \textit{Clearwater Sun} reported the death of Private Edward H. Douglas, aged 22. He had been missing from the 918 for two days before his body was found at the bottom of an elevator shaft. A military investigation was underway and the general belief was that it was an accident. The following February there was an incident with a private from the 918 and the Southland Special on the ACL Railroad. Alex Ramsey either fell or put his own leg on the track, losing his right foot above the ankle. When aid arrived, they found that the private with a tourniquet formed from his own belt. The engineer and fireman of the train did not see anything, but a Pullman porter told how he witnessed the private “stick his foot under the train.” Newspaper accounts have various examples of soldiers having a “gay, old time,” but according to Bill

Tordoff there was no time for trainees to have any fun. This begs the question, was private Ramsey looking for a way out?\textsuperscript{53}

The New Year brought in a new outlet for the troops in the Sparkling City, the \textit{Clearwater Sun} ran columns created by the units. It began with “Dots ‘n Dashes From 588,” written by Private L.A. Leacacos at the Fort Harrison, telling stories of life as a soldier.\textsuperscript{54} Civilians in the area had an immense amount of curiosity and rumors abounded in the area. One major rumor surrounded the issue of food. Some in the area suspected the Army of wasting food. These rumors may have gotten their start from looking in the garbage cans. As Bill Tordoff remembers from his KP duty, “we had a garbage can full of those Swiss steaks. We had to throw them out.” Within a one week period at the end of March 1943, the Army met the rumors head on in the \textit{Clearwater Sun}. Captain Alfred Truitt prepared an article firmly denying that they were wasting food. As head of public relations, Truitt did a fine job explaining how serving a large number of people produces a large problem sometimes. He compared the mess cook with “Mrs. Housewife.” Reminder women in the area how difficult it is to cook for just one family with shortages and rationing going on,


imagine how difficult it is to get enough nutritious food for our boys training to fight. People were reminded that there was a war going on and “recruits undergoing a strenuous physical training program must be adequately fed...Soldiers are rationed, too.” Some people were even complaining that the soldiers were taking food away from civilians by eating in the area restaurants, causing prepared food to be thrown into the garbage. To this Truitt explained that what was not served was used the next day and posed the thought that there were those in the area who were trying to “stir up dissatisfaction,” which would be more dangerous than just rumors.⁵⁵

The following day, “a serious-faced Army officer,” along with the County Health Department, inspected area restaurants and other “eating places” in an effort to insure army men were taken care of with regards to their diets. Another article restating the explanation for supposed food waste was printed with even more detail regarding the army menu. The comparison was made again to the housewife trying to serve her child nutritious vegetables that he may not like, such as spinach. Imagine the amount left over to be retained and used in the next meal until it is “spoiled or completely inedible,” at which time it would then be thrown away. Soldiers, however were asked to eat at

⁵⁵ Tordoff, interview. “Rumors of Army Wasting Food Here are Denied,” Clearwater Sun, 28 March 1943.
their training centers by order of Colonel Eugene R. Householder. Not to be confused with making any concessions to complaining civilians, another article ran in the *Sun*. This one had a new tone of reprimand. The Army reminded once again that there was a war and the military had a certain way of doing things. What they did and how they did it was often times classified and none of the public’s business.

In war and peace, the Army in this country confines itself to the important business of training troops. That’s a big enough job. Whatever explanation it may make to the general public of its operations includes only that unclassified information which will not impede the effectiveness of this training program. However, it does attempt to describe to the citizens at home all they are entitled to know about what is, after all, a civilian Army preparing to defend and fight for the common good.

The article continued to remind the public that “far from ‘living off the fat of the land,’” soldiers were having to ration, too. It also explained that mess preparations had changed as the number of men eating there had changed. Perhaps there had been some waste in the beginning, but it had been curtailed according to the number of men actually eating there.56

At the request of Colonel Levy and Captain Truitt, county officials dined at the Belleview the next day. After dining on “roast beef, Irish

potatoes, gravy, corn, carrots, cold slaw, hot chocolate, raisin bread and a cup cake,” the Mayor and members of the Chamber of Commerce went on a tour of the facility. What they saw confirmed what the army had claimed and gave no basis to the rumors circulating the town. When they asked why they were given the tour, the answer was given: “if the public was not firmly in back of the army now, think what might happen if conditions got worse and the civilians were not backing the army.” Ultimately, the Sun concluded that the “Army Wastes Less Food than Millionaires,” comparing the current use to that when it was a millionaire resort. Added to this was the fact that the Army was salvaging everything possible: raked leaves for fertilizer, meat picked to the bones for soup, tin cans, fats and greases.57

With this outbreak of criticism, the halcyon days of the military in the Sparkling City seem to have ended. What had started as an outlet for soldiers and entertainment for civilians, the weekly boxing programs were ended. The Army fights had been so popular that no less than one thousand fans crowded the arena on any given evening. However, the ring had broken down, with no funds to secure another one. On top of the monetary issue came more criticism against the

army. There were citizens who complained that the fighters were
living the high life while their own boys were training elsewhere longs
days with no respite from hard labor. What these civilians seemed to
have forgotten was that the army fighters trained for the fights on
their own time after their own long and tedious military days.
Whatever the issue, the made the decision to have fights at the
Belleview for the Army only. 58

With renewed criticism and the war continuing for longer than
expected, the Army attempted to convince the public of its usefulness.
The month of March proved to be a rat infested one in Clearwater, with
the City Sanitary Inspector, T.L. Boteler, reporting that the rat
population was on the increase. Merchants were reporting that as
many as fifty young chickens were being killed by the rats. They were
requesting that the Army aid in the hunting of the rats, as well as
starting an anti-rat campaign of educating the public. To this end, two
privates were sent out on various evenings to search for where the
rats were living and what could be done to eradicate the unwanted
“saboteurs!” 59

58 “Army Puts Halt to Weekly Programs,” Clearwater Sun, 28 March 1943, 5.

59 “Army May Aid in Anti-rat Campaign,” Clearwater Sun, 17 March 1943.
“Merchants Ask for Anti-rat Ordinance,” Clearwater Sun, 19 March 1943. George
Louden made the comment in the latter article that “Rats are destroying hundreds of
pounds of food right here in Clearwater,” and “Rats are our worst saboteurs!”
The public had been kept aware of life at the training centers through the columns printed in the Sun. By reading “Inside the 918 Gate” and “On the Beam with 413th” the civilian population was informed of military life. Starting in January 1943, the Sun published these columns weekly. A couple days apart, Staff Sergeant Chick Rosnick from the 918 and Private George E. Reedy, Jr. from the 413, showered the people with news from the training lines at the Belleview. Rosnick, physical trainer at the center, began his column answering “how does it feel to live in the swankiest hotel in the country?” The answer came from Private X:

It’s like this. We have the softest mattresses on our hotel beds but they have to be always ready for inspection, so we can’t lie on them. We have a million dollar golf course, but all we do on it is the hardest kinds of exercises and obstacle running. We have beautiful green tennis courts, but that’s where we air our beds after carrying them down five flights of stairs. We have a spacious and fully equipped Recreation Room to be used in our leisure time, but I’ve forgotten what ‘leisure time’ means. We have lovely green velvet lawns, but we can’t walk on them. We have a telephone in every room, but we can’t talk through them. We’re pounding out feet when the beautiful dawn breaks and we’re knocked out when the glorious sun sets...

Other stories to lift the spirits of those training came, but at the same time proved the Army meant business.60 Soldiers at the Belleview

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60 Chick Rosnick, “Inside the 918 Gate,” Clearwater Sun, 10 January 1943, 7.
could visualize what it would be like if no war were being waged. While eating in the Belleview Dining Hall with its stained glass windows or observing human nature in the A&R Recreation Hall, soldiers picked up a number of stories ranging from philosophy to favorite authors, and women. One thing that occupied the mind of a rookie was “the delightful, charming and exciting girl in a downtown drug store,” or “the new girl at Reid’s who dresses the hamburgers with quotations from Shakespeare.”

As the troops in town delighted the young girls, where were the civilian boys to get their dates? Delmar Harris, a Clearwater High School youth at the time, muses how the high school girls dated the soldiers making it necessary for the high school boys to get dates from girls in Tampa. The streets of Clearwater would be crowded with people as they went to the dances and other forms of entertainment in the Auditorium. Harris recalls that the “big affairs were good entertainment.” Rosnick supported this when he reported that the fights and entertainment provided at the Auditorium created a “close knit” relationship between the “men of service and the community.”

There were also times when the Rosnick would act as matchmaker. In

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61 Rosnick, 19 January 1943, 5.

62 Delmar Harris, interview, Deirdre Schuster (3 December 2008).

63 Rosnick, 24 January 1943, 5.
the 14 March column, he espoused the virtues of one lieutenant who had “reached the stage where he longs for home cooking and the sight of a little child.” He also had a “most likeable personality,” making him “Clearwater’s Eligible Bachelor Number One...Clearwater Girls! TAKE OVER.”

As “winter” settled in, the weather proved perfect for the soldiers to take advantage of the golf course not being used as an obstacle course. Sergeants and privates played a round together, proving that it was difficult to punish a soldier at the Belleview. By restricting a man to the “base,” instead of letting him go in to town, it provided him with all sort of activities. There was the War Theater -located in the hotel-athletic facilities and games, and an Olympic sized swimming pool. Let’s also not forget the grounds themselves for roaming and enjoying the wonderful atmosphere of the Sparkling City. Sitting in their rooms at night, they could listen to the bugler – Hollywood’s own Bob Candreva. Candreva recorded trumpet sounds for Paramount Pictures. Even eating at the Belleview had its advantages. Private First Class Joe Reese became “stymied by a tangerine.” Apparently early for a date, he sat down in the Servicemen’s Center and noticed some tangerines. He “calmly peeled” and ate one, then another. He “lingered for a third,...loosened his belt, took off his blouse, and sat down to the table

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64 Rosnick, “Six—Oh!—Nine,” Clearwater Sun, 14 March 1943.
with the biggest pile of tangerines.” After consuming forty-four of the luscious citrus, he declared that he would never eat another tangerine as long as he lived! It’s a wonder more boys didn’t join up just for the chance to stay at the Bellevue.65

In March 1943, the squadron numbers were changed and a new one was added at the Bellevue. 413, under the command of Captain I.J. Richard became Group 601; 918, under Captain Frank Pruitt became Group 609; and the new Group 612, under Captain George Dix, had the privilege of billeting in tents on the golf course north of the garage. With these changes, came changes of the column names, too. “Inside the 918 Gate” turned into “Six--Oh!—Nine” and “On the Beam with 413” became “Strictly G.I.” Staff Sergeant Chick Rosnick continued to write the column under the new name. However, George Reedy, after a short stay in the Don Ce-Sar Hospital, was shipped out to Officer Candidate School. Private Floyd P. Jones took over for one week before finding “vital work elsewhere: radio,” so Privates Thomas L. Johnson and H.N. “Lucky” Rogers took over the last two installments of “Strictly G.I.” 21 March was the last publication of the column and Rosnick’s column disappeared after the 4 April installment.

65 Rosnick, 8 February 1943, p. 6. 14 February 1943, 7. There was also an organ player – Edward Angulo. Unfortunately, there was no organ. 21 February 1943, 5.
The end of the columns coincides with the intense criticism that the Army was facing from the civilian population. After reprimanding the public on the reason for soldiers training in the first place, it seems that they took the path of turning 180 degrees. Instead of cooperating and giving out information, the Army just stopped sharing particulars of the soldiers. One last article elucidated exactly what was going on at the Belleview. Trainees were in the program for an extended time due to the need for additional skills needed in the war. Defense against chemical attacks, bayonet drills, grenade practice, camouflage and concealment were added. It was explained that the war was proving a need for new skills against a new enemy. Digging trenches and created other types and methods of concealment were now part of the training regimen. To aid in the proper method of attack and defense with a bayonet, a natural obstacle course was laid out on the Belleview grounds. Trainees had to hurdle barriers such as fallen trees, ditches, and muddy streams before coming face to face with the "enemy" – a straw dummy. Lectures on military rank, bearing, responsibility, appearance, and behavior were also part of the course.  

Earlier in 1943, Colonel Levy had escorted a group of county and city officials through the course and offered to let them try it out. "Like a swarm of bees," they crawled and hurdled and ran through the grounds.

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course, denying the reality that their bodies were older than their minds. As the Physical Trainer watched them leave with smiles of success on their faces, he knew what the morning would bring: “aching muscles, returned sciaticas, preschedule lumbagos, charley horses, rheumatisms, cramps, and a return of one-time athletic injuries. Today they played ‘soldiers at the front’” tomorrow they would decide with resignation and assurance that their future soldiering would be done on the home front.”

Like the civilians that day, training was not all bad. Bill Tordoff fondly recalls marching out of the Belleview to the courses for training, all the while singing cadences he can sing with verve still today:

Around her neck she wore a yellow ribbon
She wore it in the springtime
And in the month of May
And if you ask me why the heck she wore it
She wore it for her soldier who was far, far away

Far away, far away
She wore it for her soldier
Who was far, far away

Another favorite was:

There sits a preacher sittin’ on a log,
With a finger on the trigger and his eye on a hog.
Amen! Amen!

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67 Rosnick, “Inside the 918 Gate,” 8 February 1943.
The months following the criticism was full of rumors regarding the training centers being moved out to Lincoln, Nebraska. Confirmation of two Miami basic training centers moving to Mississippi and Texas came, with the leadership at the Belleair and Clearwater centers remaining silent. Even U.S. Senator Claude Pepper knew nothing. The Chamber of Commerce began the effort to find out exactly how the removal of the soldiers would affect the economy of the area.\(^{68}\) As dredging of the bay opposite the Bellevue in June was taking place, Congressman Lex Green commented that if the Army did move out of the hotels, some other federal project would take their place.\(^{69}\)

Two weeks later the Army cancelled the three one-year contracts in the area, along with hotels in the St. Petersburg and Miami areas.\(^{70}\) Contrary to a \textit{Tampa Tribune} article in 1970, the Bellevue was not leased for three years, only one.\(^{71}\) Along with the Fort Harrison and the Gray Moss, there were three one year contracts that ended in the summer of 1943. Through all the criticism, the fact remains that the armed forces in the area was an economic boost. Utility receipts

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\(^{68\text{a}}\) Army is Silent About Rumors of Moving,” \textit{Clearwater Sun}, 17 May 1943.

\(^{69}\) “Dredging in Bay Near Bellevue,” \textit{Clearwater Sun}, 7 June 1943.


increased, as did post office receipts. Even though soldier’s letters
were mailed for free, parcel post and registered mail increased more
than ninety percent. During the first six month period of the year,
stamp revenues went up $2,000,000. Movie revenues and local
businesses also saw an increase in profits. Any worry of lost revenue
with the three hotels being vacated by the military was expected to be
replaced with revenues from other Army installations nearby in
Dunedin, Oldsmar, and Largo. To that end, the Clearwater Transit
Company was planning on extending bus service to those areas.72

In August 1943, all three hotels were turned back over to their
owners and plans were made to reopen for the winter season. The
Gray Moss Inn was scheduled to reopen on October 1 and the Fort
Harrison Hotel would open December 15.73 The grand “White Queen
of the Gulf” would not be so lucky. Even though losses at the hotel
were “amazingly small,” after inspection by the Army and Kirkeby
agents, the decision was made by Arnold Kirkeby to sell the hotel to
local land baron Ed. C. Wright for $275,000 at auction. The Belleview
remained closed during Wright’s ownership, but was renovated and
sold to Bernie Powell. It reopened in 1947 and continued to prosper as

72 “Armed Forces Aid in Showing Record Business,” Clearwater Sun, 28 June
1943.

73 “Belleair Hotel May Reopen this Season,” Clearwater Sun, 6 August 1943.
the socially elite came back.⁷⁴ Clint Mitchell remembers working on the Belleview before the Army arrived and after it was sold to Powell.

As the owner of Clearwater Paint Company, Mitchell’s memory is long and tight. A youthful 81 years of age, Mitchell eats breakfast and shoots the bull every Wednesday morning in a Largo diner. He recalls that there were catacombs under the Belleview Biltmore where all the servants had to pass through. To get to them, one had to travel on a little dirt road, reminiscent of a castle in Europe. Painting the Queen took time and money. To help expedite the effort, local decorators were called out and asked to decorate a room, often in the cottages. Once done, Powell would have a party and the decorators were “advertised.” Thousands of dollars were saved by the owners of the Belleview with this ingenious plan.⁷⁵

Delmar Harris also remembered the Belleview as a young boy. He recalled one incident with the catacombs just before the military took possession. “There was a long trail under the hotel and in this tunnel they found a cache of German military rifles. It was a pretty good, high stack with Norwegian writing on the cases. Don’t know what they did with them, but there were always German tourists

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⁷⁵ Clinton Mitchell, interview, Deirdre Schuster (26 November 2008).
hanging around the tennis courts.\textsuperscript{76} This could be a reason why the military moved in to the Belleview in the first place. As an easily reached and isolated location on the Gulf coast, the Belleview was ripe for espionage. This would change as the decades would pass. Those who stayed at the Belleview during training would bring back memories and longings of the paradise on the peninsula; changing Pinellas County from a sleepy rural area, into a retirement and tourism mecca.

\textsuperscript{76} Delmar Harris, interview.
CHAPTER 5

REBIRTH AND RESTORATION:

THE END OF AN ERA

With the end of the war, came the end of innocence. The Japanese Gardens that had become so famous in the area underwent first a name change and then closure, as citizens in the area took to heart anti-Japanese sentiments. It became Marine Gardens in 1945, as the owners brought in water tanks and aquatic animals in an attempt to keep the attraction open. Public apathy and financial difficulty forced the gardens to be abandoned. It was purchased and restored by Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Waiss, who reopened it as Eagles Nest Gardens. In 1952, Marion Waiss Williams replaced the 40 acres of high land and 100 acres of bottom land with a plan for a 70 acre subdivision known as Eagles Nest.

Oddly, many of the homes that were built on this land retained Japanese architectural styles, such as moving walls and temple style designs on the windows outside. A couple lots were left to the city for a park. Here, too, you can see a pagoda style marker that commemorates the resident who donated the property. The residents
of 6 North Pine Circle hang a Japanese Rain Catcher outside their front door and retain a Japanese style rock garden, as well. Ironically, Clearwater, to the north, has had a sister city relationship with Nagano, Japan for the past fifty years. Annual visits of educators, students, and city leaders between the two cities keep the Japanese influence to the area unbroken.

The Coe Road Casino was raided in 1949, ending the Monte Carlo era in Pinellas County. The building was reopened as a college until the school was moved. The land, valuable waterfront property, was sold and the building razed. The town of Belleair itself had turned to weeds, becoming a haven for love birds picnicking at night. The abandoned Pelican Club House was used by the Clearwater High School “Deacons,” so named because the fraternity members met there on Sunday nights. Horses were available at the stables located near the corner of South Fort Harrison and Lakeview, where the J. Harrison Smith building is now, for hire to young people to explore the “ghost town” of Belleair. E.W. Hallett, a Minnesotan contractor, purchased Belleair Estates at the end of World War II. Like Ed Wright, Hallet picked up the Belleair property for a pretty penny and began rehabilitating the town. “Pine trees had grown so thick there, a man on a horse could not ride through them. There was wildlife everywhere, including snakes and alligators. There were lots of quail
and people from Clearwater used to come out to Belleair hunting. They were much put out when we bought the property and stopped them.”

New proprietors took three years to clean up the town, with only 300 determined pioneers making up the population. Continuing development along the plans set up in 1925, with the exception of lot sizes increasing to 100 feet, Hallett completed the planned community. Not one single lot was sold during the restoration of the town. The first house, built on the “snake farm,” was that of Mr. and Mrs. R.M. Thompson, Jr. on Laurel Road. It was so named because of the constant presence of the reptiles in and out of the house. This would be only the first of many to be built by older wealthy retirees, a continuation of its connection to the Bellevue Biltmore Hotel. As late as 1950, many critters still roamed the area, with the occasional skunk aroma wafting in the air. The Pelican Golf Course also offered locals an opportunity for first class quail shooting.

The 1950s proved to be the beginning of Florida’s population boom.Visions of the land boom of the 1920s were revisited as more and more people flocked to the warm weather paradise Florida promised. Clearwater and Belleair were not left out. Retired


businessmen and high ranking servicemen began to choose Belleair for their retirement homes. By 1955 the population grew to almost 2,200 people. Younger families were attracted by a Little League baseball team, organized by Ed Parker and Commissioner Bill Brewster. The games were played on a vacant lot, now the Town Hall. Until there were enough little boys, little girls were encouraged to “play ball.”

As the land surrounding the Belleview Biltmore began to be developed into subdivisions, the hotel lost its aura of secluded serenity. In 1969, United State Steel purchased 300 acres of undeveloped land from the Ed Wright estate for the purpose of condominium development. The town has continued to change in its housing styles, yet it maintains its unique character that “still affords its residents the greatest possibilities for enjoying life to the fullest in the perennially significant Florida sunshine.” Resident Peter Vasil moved to Belleair for “location, location, location.” He wanted a house in a good neighborhood, that was not too big, where people could find his accounting business. “I tell them where I am and they know exactly where it is. It’s safe and I don’t have to deal with all the you know what.” Coming from Boston, Vasil talked to a number of people, including the Pinellas County Property Appraiser, before purchasing his home. “Jim Smith told me that Belleair was the one non-waterfront area that holds its value like it is waterfront. It’s got its own police
force, it’s well-maintained and you don’t have to buy flood insurance because it’s up on the bluff.” His sister, Valerie, also purchase a home around the corner. He actually found it for her and put in the offer. He called her, sent her pictures, and she closed in one week. Renting it out for three years, she finally moved down from Boston, keeping her job via the internet. She also feels safe, safer than in Clearwater or Largo, and enjoys driving down Indian Rocks Road and seeing the palm trees lining the drive. With the well maintained lawns, it reminds her of Massachusetts.79

During the 1970s the hotel continued to change, attempting to keep up with the times. As new hotels and condominiums began to rise up on the barrier islands, it marred the peaceful vista seen from the resort windows and porches. The golf courses, now owned by U.S. Steel were renovated with new greens. Aluminum siding was installed on the Belleview in 1975. Taking a crew of fifteen men four months to install the 1,800-plus squares of siding and more than 5.8 miles of aluminum window trim, they worked ten hours a day, six days a week. This was all in an effort to save the one thousand gallons of paint needed to renew the Queen’s look every year.

Named on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979, the Belleview proved to be of value to the area. However important history

79 Peter Vasil, interview, Deirdre Schuster, (20 September 2010).
was to area citizens, a profit was needed to keep the hotel open. With shopping malls built in nearby suburbs, the downtown area began to suffer economically. In December 1985, the owners signed a three-year lease option agreement with a partnership comprised of developer Charles Rutenberg, spa executive Salu Devnani and Bellevue General Manager Christopher Reyelt. Opening year-round in 1986, the Bellevue had undergone a $10 million renovation of guest rooms and the construction of a new, luxurious, state-of-the-art spa.

Sold once more in 1990 by a Japanese company, the Bellevue lost Biltmore and added Mido to its name. Millions of dollars were again poured into renovations as a new entrance was added. A glass and steel pagoda style entrance was created to give the hotel a new updated look on the outside, but it did not blend with the historic quality of the Queen of the Gulf. Local citizens did not like the updated architecture, as the hotel was turned into a modern spa resort. After almost a decade of attempting to make a profit, Salim Jetha purchased the Bellevue in 1997 for $16 million. Manager Antonio Costa wanted to publicize the hotel and make it a popular local hangout, ending the austere aura it had exuded for one hundred years.  

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A 2003 article in the *Tampa Bay Business Journal* discussed the renovations occurring at that time, with $14 million being invested to upgrade the hotel. Richard Wilhelm, the CEO of Trust Hotels, stated “I believe time flies, and you can’t afford not to (invest in properties). While you may want to be frugal, it will catch up to you. You can’t just let a property go.” But let it go, they did. With only twenty percent of the occupancy taken up by repeat business, the projected occupancy was at 62 percent when compared to the county rate of 66 percent to 81 percent, the Belleview was not as profitable as expected.

Threatened with demolition, a nonprofit group was created: Save the Biltmore Preservationists, under the leadership of Diane Hein, launched a campaign that raised community support.

In May 2005, Nancy Stroud, a historic preservation attorney, drafted an ordinance that she hoped would save the Belleview from demolition. It was passed by the town commission on 26 October 2005. Urdang and Associates, a Pennsylvania investment firm that owned the Belleview, filed applications for demolition; however, all three times it was returned as incomplete. The demolition plans included leveling the buildings and replacing the 4.58 acres of paving with grass seed. A contract by DeBartolo Development expired after town residents rejected plans to build a community on the Belleview Biltmore golf course. A local real estate developer, Rory Hiller, added
his plan to purchase the hotel: save the main building, known to some as the “spine” of the resort, and turn the two wings into condominiums. The golf course would remain as it was. Town residents campaigned and gathered 4,100 signatures to bring all zoning or land-use changes to the residents.81

Two other Victorian hotels had been preserved with local support in the United States and remained operational: the Hotel del Coronado in San Diego and the Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island, Michigan. Both are cherished as landmarks in their regions. In like fashion, Friends of the Bellevue Biltmore, under the leadership of Rae Claire Johnson teamed up with Save the Biltmore preservationists. However, the dynamic duo split over disagreements on what to do with the hotel. Johnson was in support of partial demolition of the wings to rebuild them as condominiums, while Diane Hein was not.

In an answer to the prayers of the preservationists, the hotel was saved in 2007 when Legg Mason Real Estate Investors, now Latitude Management Real Estate Investors, purchased the hotel with the promise to restore it to its former glory. Keeping the resort open until plans could be financed, the hotel continued to draw the wealthy and famous. In September 2008, just before his election as the

President of the United States, Senator Barack Obama enjoyed a stay at the Belleview Biltmore. Unfortunately, he was called away due to the Wall Street crisis and had to shorten his trip. The Belleview Biltmore website shows the hoped-for-plans for restoration. These include tearing down the Japanese pagoda. This move was supported by many nearby residents and fans of the Belleview, as well as moving the kitchens down to the “catacombs” beneath the hotel. The parking lot would be moved “underground” as well, creating a more pleasing appearance upon arrival. The Cabana Club, on Sand Key was to be demolished and replaced with an eight-story Victorian hotel and restaurant, as well as a dozen cabanas. All restoration plans called for preservation as the primary motive, pleasing residents of Belleair and the surrounding community.\footnote{Terri Bryce Reeves and Lorri Helfand, “Grand Hotel, Grand Plan,” \textit{St. Petersburg Times}, 21 September 2007.}

The hotel closed in August 2009, with an auction lasting for over one month. Fans from all around came to purchase memorabilia, everything from menus and pillow cases to paintings and furniture. Not on the auction block were the Tiffany glass windows and the original chandeliers. The proposed restoration was to take three years, with the Belleview reopening in 2012. Funding for the restoration was lost; however, due to litigation by local residents, first from the Cabana
Club and then the town itself. Plans were altered for the new spa, changing from two-stories to one, so as not to block the intercoastal view for Belleair residents. The question now is what will happen to the Bellevue? Will her place and her legacy be lost to the history books and people’s memories?
CONCLUSION

SPRINGTIME FOR THE QUEEN

In 1980 a letter by Eugene L. Pearce was republished in the Clearwater Sun. In his editorial, Pearce bemoaned the loss of paradise. He recalled that Pinellas settlers came from “pretty good stock,” risking everything to go through swamps and pinewoods to reach the long and curving beaches. The roads and automobiles that bisected the paradise of Pinellas upset him. No longer was the county the “great stretch of woods as it once was. It is only a glimpse, but sometimes it seems the same...stormy, unbeaten, peerless Pinellas. It has been home and shelter to some of us for many a year. To me it has never seemed so very bad.” That 1926 lamentation was still pertinent in 1980, and could be yet today. There are places in Pinellas to find what those pioneers came for; one just has to know where to look. There are still isolated sections of the county where a person can get lost in time: Honeymoon Island, Caladesi Island, Philippe Park, Heritage Park, all preserved by county officials. Not many places remain privately owned and retain their historic qualities. The Bellevue Biltmore Hotel was one of those places where people could
go and sit on the veranda, taking in the view around them, and not worry about the daily grind in the business world.\textsuperscript{83}

As Herbert Hiller wrote in his 1986 \textit{Guide to the Small and Historic Lodgings of Florida}, “survivor is written all over the hotel outside and in. it is worth its girth in history.” As the largest occupied wooden structure in the world, the Belleview Biltmore was the most “treasured hotel of Florida’s belle époque.” Now the world’s largest wooden unoccupied building, the Belleview still holds sway over the area residents. “Small hotels and other intimate lodgings, by how they put us in touch with authentic hospitality elsewhere, can help us find authenticity in ourselves.” People of all ages can identify with her grandeur and benefit from their time near her, rather than the placenessness experienced by the ever growing corporate getaways.\textsuperscript{84}

As of October 2010, the Belleview Biltmore remained closed. Renovations were at a standstill due to lost financing and economic hardships around the nation. Two brothers from Miami, Daniel and Raphael Ades, from UBS International Financial traveled to Belleair to talk with the Mayor and commissioners about possibilities. Mayor Gary


Katica told them that the golf course, the former Pelican Golf Course, was off limits to further construction. Deputy Mayor Steve Fowler was in favor of being proactive. Fowler wanted to have a plan of action in place for when future prospectors came calling. This put some residents, like Bon-Sue Brandvik, at ease. Brandvik is a writer whose focus has been on the ghost stories and history of the Bellevue Biltmore. Her diligence in keeping the Bellevue Biltmore up and running is to be commended, with her monthly updates via e-mail and talks at local libraries and town hall meetings. Brandvik’s plan is to have local residents become stockholders as a non-profit group to maintain the hotel and her history. Possible plans from the Ades brothers include renovating the hotel and creating condominiums out of the top floors or making the hotel into an assisted living facility with a museum attached. Either plan may include more condominiums to join the ones erected by U.S. Steel in the 1970s and 1980s. Whatever the choice, David Ottinger, Belleair town attorney, is committed to research what other cities have done in similar situations, possibly including tax credit programs. The hope by many is that the Bellevue will not be demolished and turned into a taco stand. A song by the group Counting Crows seems to sum up what is happening to many regions of Florida: “Don't it always seem to go that you don't know what you got till it's gone. They paved paradise and put up a parking
lot.” As Lucy Nuttall Salamanca wrote in her 1920s pamphlet, Florida homebuilders have swept across the state, driven by an ideal, throwing up cities among waterfronts, and creating “cities of permanence and grandeur.” The hope remains that “in the wake of the dredge and tractor, beauty-beauty of strength and line and purpose” are still enhanced by the golden thread of nature.85

The historical importance of the Belleview cannot be clearer. Without this grand structure, it could be argued that the county would not have developed into the tourist and retirement destination it has become. The geography of Pinellas, physical and human, drew settlers to the area like few others. The hotel itself has withstood the test of time. As Beth Dunlop described in her analysis of Florida’s vanishing buildings: “our architecture-be it houses or churches or whole cities-stores history, definitively, in a way that no library can. In our buildings, we can reach out and touch history.” While other locations have been demolished due to modernization, this grand lady has remained an icon and a vision of memory for those who call this county home. She has brought investors and residents, housed soldiers and tourists, and created a generation of history lovers by her mere existence. Few hotels have done this. The Grand in Michigan, as

well as the Queen Anne and the Hotel de Coronado in California, have remained visions of a bygone era. Hotels like these capture the fantasies of dreamers. “They hold the promise that we’ll somehow not let past grandeur disappear, and fear, too, that in the end we’ll succumb to the bland realities of modern life.”

Once again, the Bellevue is going through a change. Whether she will become an assisted living facility, condominiums, a college, or developed into shops, the goal should be bringing her back to her greatness as the White Queen of the Gulf. There is no other structure like it in the world. Sharon Delahanty, former executive manager, would be the first to claim that the current structure is irreplaceable. The 292 room hotel with its 6,600 light bulbs, 1,700 windows, and six miles of carpeting is about to be reborn. Closed up once again, the White Queen of the Gulf, is slumbering, waiting for her restoration and reopening. Springtime has come for the Queen.

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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A: PINELLAS POEM

Some came in the eighteen hundreds,
Before Florida was a state,
They came for many reasons,
Some just to investigate.

They found the land was covered
With palmetto, pine and scrub.
They came with horse and oxen,
And many a broken hub.

There were ‘rattlers, ‘skeeters ‘n fever,
Scattered across the land.
It was harsh enough and hot enough,
To break most any man.

They cut and pulled and cleared,
And finally made a home.
Some planted crops or fished the bay,
Some let the cattle roam.

It wasn’t ‘til eighteen forty-five
That Florida became a state.
For many it was a joyous day,
For many it was too late.

There weren’t enough survivors
To have a different plan.
So they were carved with the east
To form the Hillsborough land.
By then there was a trail or two,
Even a little town,
But most, just hearty settlers,
Were all that could be found.

Then came the War Between the States,
And many went to fight.
And of the ones that came back home
Many wondered wrong from right.
On and on they did grow,
A hearty bunch of stock.
Those old time Cracker folk,
Were like a living rock.

'Twas in the freeze of ninety-five
The citrus all came down.
It took its heavy toll in
Both county and in town

The twentieth century started in
And the fight for Pinellas had begun.
On New Year’s Day nineteen-twelve,
The news proclaimed...Pinellas won!!

Carved from the west of Tampa Bay,
A little spit of sod,
Drenched each day by sunshine,
And blessed each day by God.  

87 Young, 16, Poem by Dave Sellers.
APPENDIX B: JAPANESE GARDENS POSTCARDS

Courtesy of Cathy Harlan
APPENDIX C: JAPANESE GARDENS PAMPHLET

The Tea House, of authentic Oriental design, stands on a terrace, overlooking the water, surrounded by green lawns. Here you can enjoy Luncheon or afternoon tea, with either American or Oriental dishes, which will please the most exacting connoisseur of fine foods.

Unusually attractive girls in native costume will give you superlative service. Luncheon is served daily from 11 to 2.

Visitors from all over the world visit and revisit Japanese Gardens for relaxation and enjoyment of a kind unobtainable at any other place. Plan to include this entrancing attraction as a “must” on your trip. It will be your greatest delight.
Japanese Gardens were designed and developed, almost two decades ago, by Fumio Hayakawa, the world-famous Japanese-Hawaiian horticulturist, still in charge of the gardens.

The present owners, Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Waiss, of Clearwater and Chicago, have continued their policy of annually spending thousands of dollars to add new and rare improvements to this Oriental bower of beauty.

As you wander across the bridges and through the grounds, soft music emanates from lofty pines to delight your ears. Appropriate musical programs are scheduled each hour.
EAGLES NEST
JAPANESE GARDENS
Clearwater, Florida

Resplendent in the gorgeous galaxy of Nature's most colorful floral creations, Japanese Gardens, at Clearwater, is the magical transportation of a veritable Oriental Garden, with all its authentic reproductions of mystic Temples, towering Torii, pendant Pagodas, and quaint Bridges, to the shimmering, sparkling shoreline of Clearwater Bay.

Here, in the quiet, almost monastic, sylvan retreat the visitor to Florida's west coast, can spend a day amid the woodland达, and the flowered gardens, almost crushing you with their fragrance, as you stroll through fairyland, green-velvet paths, bedecked on all sides with flowering lotus and azaleas.

No visitor can ever forget, once he has enjoyed a trip through Japanese Gardens, the memories of the vistas cross placid pools, the soothing splash of fountains into waters abloom with every type and color of water lilies. No artist, no poet, no orator nor word can fully describe the beauty of these amazing gardens. Come visit them, they are more beautiful today than ever in their history of many years of development.

A short drive from St. Petersburg or Tampa, Japanese Gardens are centrally located between Largo and Clearwater proper. They are easy of access: over good roads, from any point in Florida.
APPENDIX D: MAP OF 1920S BELLEAIR ESTATES

This was the plan for the Town of Belleair, known then as “Belleair Estates.” It is very close to what we have today. Notice the Tampa and Gulf Coast Railroad ran along the right side. Today, this is the Pinellas Trail. The train station was at the east end of Osceola Road.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Deirdre Schuster has received her Bachelor’s of Science in Secondary Social Science Education from the University of Central Florida. She has been teaching American History at the middle grades and high school level for seventeen years. In addition to that course, she has created a Holocaust curriculum for Pinellas County Schools, as well as developed curriculum for Anthropology at Countryside High School. She teaches AP Human Geography, as well, with 61% of her students passing the exam her first year. She is a member of the Florida Council for Social Studies and has presented at district and state wide conventions. She has traveled to Germany many times to visit family and looks forward to many more trips to other European nations. Deirdre has been married for seventeen wonderful years to Daryl and they have two children: Kurt, aged 13, and Simone, aged 11.