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Heritage Villagers: A Social History of the Pinellas Peninsula as Revealed through the Structures at Heritage Village

James Anthony Schnur

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Heritage Villagers:  
A Social History of the Pinellas Peninsula as Revealed through the Structures at Heritage Village  

James Anthony Schnur  

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Acknowledgements

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Leaders at the Florida Humanities Council, most notably Fran Cary and Susan Lockwood, worked closely with the humanities scholars and Heritage Village project managers throughout all phases of the grant.

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Many volunteers assisted me with research. I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to J. B. Dobkin and Joyce Pickering, librarians and historians who gave countless hours of assistance in uncovering archival treasures, deciphering genealogical connections, and helping me separate fact from fantasy. Scholars of Florida History at the University of South Florida assured that my research addressed broader social, political, and economic issues related to the human geography of the Pinellas Peninsula. I appreciate the camaraderie and support offered by Raymond O. Arsenault, Mark I. Greenberg, and Gary R. Mormino. As a colleague in this project, Stephanie Ferrell authored excellent narratives that outlined the architectural history and preservation concerns for each of the buildings. Docents and volunteers who provided assistance during the course of this project include: Susan Anemaet, Janet Brewster, Sandra Crist-Apple, Everett Daniel, Verna Daniel, Bob Delack, Sue Searcy Goldman, Frank T. Hurley, Donald J. Ivey, Joe Knetsch, Randy Lightfoot, Vincent Luisi, Barbara Neville, Harriet Protos, Sandra Rooks, Michael Sanders, and Wesley Stewart. My colleagues at the Nelson Poynter Memorial Library, under the leadership of Kathleen Hardee Arsenault, the library Dean, also showed support throughout the duration of this project.

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Heritage Village: An Introduction

Historical Overview: From a Park to a Village

The open-air Pinellas County Historical Museum at Heritage Village occupies a twenty-one acre site in central Pinellas County. Along with the neighboring Florida Botanical Gardens and Gulf Coast Museum of Art, this popular venue serves as an important anchor of the Pinewood Cultural Park complex. Originally known as “Heritage Park,” this historical village opened to the public on a ten-acre tract that includes the southern half of the present-day property, bordered by 125th Street North and Walsingham Road. The site later expanded to its present size of twenty-one acres. Since the mid-1970s, workers have moved or reconstructed nearly thirty historical structures amidst the pines and palmetto scrub. Funded by the Board of County Commissioners, Heritage Village benefits from the guidance of advisory bodies such as the Pinellas County Historical Commission and the support of non-profit cultural organizations, including the Pinellas County Historical Society. During the summer of 1995, officials changed the name of “Heritage Park” to “Heritage Village” to emphasize the difference between a traditional park with picnic benches and playgrounds and a village that preserves important historical structures. For the sake of consistency, subsequent chapters will refer to this location as “Heritage Village.”

The plan to develop an open-air museum took shape in the mid-1970s. The emphasis on American history surrounding the Bicentennial celebration, threats to the Plant-Sumner House, and the availability of the House of Seven Gables propelled many concerned citizens, organizations, and government officials into action. The Bicentennial Committee of the Board of County Commissioners, the Pinellas County Historical Commission, and the Junior League of Clearwater led efforts to locate funding and resources. The county had acquired the parcel of land from Frank and Ursula Shirvis nearly three decades earlier, but did not have specific long-term plans for it. With developers planning to build new structures on land then occupied by Plant-Sumner and Seven Gables, local architect Don Williams designed a site plan for the original ten acres of the Heritage Village site that included those two structures. In 1976, the county
allocated approximately $60,000 to construct a Florida “Cracker” dwelling that served as the first museum building. Before Kendrick Ford even began his first day on the job as director, plans to move Plant-Sumner and Seven Gables were “done deals.” Four large moving vans transported archival and museum collections from the basement of the Pinellas County Courthouse in downtown Clearwater to the secure, climate-controlled structures at Heritage Village.¹

Controversy followed the creation of Heritage Village. Some donors and public officials angrily demanded that items deposited in the courthouse archives should remain in Clearwater—the seat of government for Pinellas County—rather than at a building nestled in the remote palmetto scrub on a tract of unincorporated land south of Largo. Others condemned the relocation of buildings from their original settings. Historical preservationists usually prefer that structures remain at their original locations whenever possible. However, the ever-changing and urbanizing landscape of the Pinellas Peninsula threatened many older buildings as residential communities and commercial enterprises uprooted citrus groves and obstructed coastal vistas. Public officials and concerned citizens had to make a choice of either relocating these structures or witnessing their demise. During its early years, one preservationist lambasted Heritage Village as representing nothing more than a “zoo for buildings.” Ford, members of the Pinellas County Historical Commission, and other supporters also had to fight against the common assumption that many citizens held during the early 1970s: “If it’s old, tear it down.” Finally, in an area with few natives and many transplants, residents often knew little about the history of the Pinellas Peninsula. The success of Heritage Village thus required a strong emphasis on public education and assistance from outside organizations, such as the Pinellas County Historical Society. This non-profit organization, established in 1976, supports the mission of Heritage Village, aids in the preservation of artifacts, and promotes scholarship and historical education programs and activities.²

Despite obstacles, challenges, and funding limitations, excitement prevailed as official broke ground and dedicated the open-air museum. Don Jones, chair of the County

¹ *Clearwater Sun*, 1 April 1976; Interview of Ken Ford, former director of Heritage Village, by Stephanie Ferrell and Jim Schnur, 3 May 2003, Heritage Village, Largo.
² *St. Petersburg Times*, 13 April 1980; Ken Ford Interview.
Commission, told those at the spring 1976 groundbreaking ceremony that “we are honoring those people in the past who were good enough to work for the future.” George Gramling, chair of the Pinellas County Historical Commission, saw Heritage Village as the crossroads for “a confederation of local historical societies, rotating exhibits, museum outreach, and education for all and an outreach program into the schools.” In June 1977, commissioners, other county officials, and dignitaries traveled by bus from Clearwater for the dedication ceremonies. They enjoyed box lunches provided by the Junior League of Clearwater during the ride. This ceremony marked the formal opening of Heritage Village as a fully-operational museum with public history programs and exhibits.  

**More than a Pioneer Village**

Many visitors to Heritage Village mistakenly view the museum as an assembly of “pioneer” buildings. While certain dwellings (the McMullen-Coachman Log House, Daniel McMullen House, Boyer Cottage, etc.) represent some of the oldest existing structures on the Pinellas Peninsula, any characterization of their occupants as pioneers who led simple, agrarian lives fails to provide a complete—or accurate—picture of the social history of early settlers. For example, Joshua and Mary Boyer’s cottage became an important meeting place for Hamilton Disston and Anson Safford, notable entrepreneurs who reshaped the Pinellas frontier and, indeed, much of peninsular Florida. Captain James Parramore McMullen’s log house served as an early hospital and provided a resting place for those making the long overland trek to Tampa. Members of the McMullen family did much more than farm: As a young child living with his parents in the McMullen-Coachman log house during the 1850s, Bethel McMullen assiduously collected and voraciously read volumes of poetry. According to family histories, Union troops burned his small library of books during the Civil War when they visited the cabin. Just as Bethel’s photographic memory and ability to recite long passages of poetry continued to amaze family members at gatherings in the early twentieth century, his early years at the cabin included many hours of reading and studying, as well as the plowing of the fields and other “pioneer” activities.

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3 *Clearwater Sun*, 1 April 1976, 22 June 1977.
In the summer of 1914, one of the earliest “pioneers” of the Pinellas Peninsula described changes along the frontier up to that time that illustrated the complexity of life during the early days of settlement. Barely two years after independence from Hillsborough County, William F. “Uncle Billy” Meares recalled events he had witnessed since arriving in the Lowe’s Landing area nearly fifty-four years earlier by dividing the history of settlement into four distinct periods. According to “Uncle Billy,” the first period covered the earliest settlement before the mid-1870s, a time when “nothing was obtainable except what was provided by nature on the land and in the water.” Prosperous times arrived by the 1870s as farmers enjoyed woods full of cattle and planted large citrus groves. A brief recession followed as some settlers abandoned their land and left the area. The final period, a time of “development and prosperity,” arrived by the late 1890s and, in the opinion of Meares, would remain a permanent fixture on the landscape. “Uncle Billy” Meares’s narrative indicates that any attempt to define early settlement patterns—and by extension the structures occupied by early settlers—in a simple “pioneer” motif inhibits an understanding of the complex web of family, commercial, and social interactions of early residents.4

Overview of the “Pinellas County Stories” Grant

Jan Luth, Director of Heritage Village, submitted a grant proposal to the Florida Humanities Council in 2002. This ambitious project sought funding to research and design narratives that explored Pinellas County’s history through the structures located at Heritage Village/The Pinellas County Historical Museum. This project served a variety of purposes: to evaluate the present archival holdings related to the history of structures at Heritage Village, to compile accurate information about the owners and occupants of the buildings, and to develop scholarly resources that benefit those interested in the social history of the Pinellas Peninsula. The Florida Humanities Council awarded a grant entitled Pinellas County Stories Revealed through Heritage Village (Grant number 1102-28831690) in late 2002. The timeline for the grant covered the period from February 2003 through January 2004.

4 Largo Sentinel, 9 July 1914.
Two humanities scholars participated in this project. Stephanie Ferrell, a Fellow in the American Institute of Architects, crafted narratives describing the architectural background, primary uses and modifications, present physical condition, and preservation concerns for the major structures at Heritage Village. James Schnur, a librarian and adjunct instructor of history, conducted research of primary and secondary sources documenting the buildings, known and possible occupants, and the social history of the region. In mid-February 2003, Ferrell and Schnur developed research outlines and timetables that corresponded with the grant parameters. Between February and late summer 2003, Ferrell and Schnur conducted architectural and historical research on the buildings, their owners and occupants, associated families, and their cultural and geographical milieu. Both scholars examined materials located in the Heritage Village Library and Archives, conducted interviews with individuals familiar with the buildings, and consulted other repositories for additional information. They also worked closely with Heritage Village staff and a steering committee comprised of academicians, docents, genealogists, public historians, and other volunteers.

The research methodology included an extensive review of primary sources, starting with those kept at Heritage Village. A review of biographical and building files at Heritage Village produced mixed results. Some buildings (i.e., Union Academy) and families (such as the McMullens) included a veritable cornucopia of material, while other structures and individuals remained shrouded in mystery. For example, the builders and early occupants of the Greenwood House, originally located near the Clearwater waterfront in the area of Turner Street, remain unknown. Records in the building files at Heritage Village offer more information about the air conditioning system installed in the Greenwood House after its arrival on site than the families who resided at the structure between 1888 and 1982.

After evaluating materials at Heritage Village, the humanities scholars broadened their research to cover other repositories. Indexes, including the Florida History card catalogue at the main branch of the St. Petersburg Public Library and the Pinellas County newspaper index compiled by the Works Progress Administration, provided citations for notable events (dedications, obituaries, etc.) associated with some buildings and occupants. City directories, census records, property records, newspaper clippings, and
other documents offered insight into the changes in ownership and use of many of the structures. Even when structures had an obvious pedigree, researchers looked for additional information to trace patterns in ownership or occupancy. For example, Joshua and Mary Boyer moved out of the Boyer Cottage in 1898; other families lived in and took possession of that structure in subsequent years. A thorough narrative of the Boyer Cottage—or any of the other structures examined under this grant—required researchers to examine land use and ownership patterns prior to the building’s construction, as well as during periods after the original occupants had moved out of the structure.

In many cases, significant gaps appeared in the historical record. To reconstruct the social history of a family, researchers require a variety of primary sources that describe events at home, as well as primary and secondary sources about the community that provide a broader context. Diaries, journals, ledgers, genealogical records and similar materials allow scholars to trace events and understand patterns that docents, curators, and public historians craft into dialogues, displays, and presentations. A wealth of information simplifies this task. For example, Dr. Samuel Henry Forrer, a longtime resident of Polk County in central Florida, kept meticulous diaries about the activities of him and his life, Louise. He not only described their visits to restaurants, but also what they ate! Gatherings of friends, weather conditions, and detailed notes about Samuel and Louise filled the pages of these journals. Lacking such thorough diaries for the buildings at Heritage Village, researchers tried to compensate by examining extant public records, newspaper articles, photographs, and other documents.

After completing the research phases, the humanities scholars wrote research notes and offered public lectures about their findings. Ferrell’s architectural history briefs reside in the building files at the Heritage Village Library and Archives. These narratives also provided invaluable assistance to Schnur as he attempted to illustrate the social history associated with major structures at Heritage Village in the chapters that appear in this book. Ferrell and Schnur shared their findings in programs sponsored by the Florida Humanities Council and Heritage Village during the fall of 2003. Ferrell offered an architectural walking tour at Heritage Village on November 9. Schnur presented three

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5 The Samuel H. Forrer diaries reside in the Special Collections Department, Tampa Library, University of South Florida.
lectures that traced settlement patterns reflected through these buildings from the pioneer days of life in Western Hillsborough through the mid-twentieth century. The first lecture, “Life on the Pinellas Frontier: Early Settlers along the Peninsula,” took place on October 12. On October 20, he examined structures associated with the period “From Railroads to Real Estate Booms.” Finally, on November 17, he described how successive generations went about “Building a Sense of Community” through the construction of social and cultural institutions.

**Format for this Publication**

Subsequent chapters evaluate the social history of significant structures located or reconstructed at Heritage Village. Each chapter contains two sections: The Brief Introduction outlines the history of the site’s use and ownership before construction, architectural information about the building, a history of the occupants, important events and activities that took place, and the circumstances surrounding the structure’s move to Heritage Village; the Narrative offers a short overview of the structure before describing its significance to the history of the Pinellas Peninsula. Chapters generally follow a chronological development of the structures and relate events at the buildings to broader themes in Pinellas history at the time. When appropriate, narratives also mention areas for further research, gaps in the historical record, or inconsistencies between different sources.

Given the magnitude of this project, the author has limited the coverage of the narrative to the major historical structures at Heritage Village. Chapters describe all of the major buildings moved or reconstructed at Heritage Village except for the Beach House, a former residence once located at 15356 Gulf Boulevard in Madeira Beach that now serves as a gift shop. Space and time limitations prevented an extensive discussion of other smaller structures at Heritage Village, such as the outhouse, smokehouse, water tower, and windmill. Despite these limitations, the author hopes that the following chapters provide a framework that allows present and future researchers to appreciate how the structures located at Heritage Village reveal important information about the history of Pinellas County.
Boyer Cottage: A Brief Introduction

History of Site before House was Built

- Aside from itinerant fishermen, few settlers lived in the area around Tarpon Springs during the 1870s. The area did receive attention from planters and farmers in more settled areas such as Brooksville, because of the excellent fishing in the waters of the Anclote River.
- A. W. Ormond and daughter Mary traveled through Florida in 1876, and arrived in the area of present-day Tarpon Springs.
- A year later, Joshua Boyer arrived from Key West during a trip along the Anclote and happened upon the Ormond residence. He decided to stay in the region and homesteaded forty acres. A native of Nassau, Boyer frequently sailed around the Keys and along the Gulf coast of Florida. An obituary also claims that Boyer’s parents had lived in Nova Scotia at some time in the past.
- Joshua and Mary fell in love, and genealogical records indicate that they married in April 1877 in the City of Tampa, seat of Hillsborough County.
- Many histories of the Tarpon Springs note that the city probably got its name from Mary after she saw tarpons springing from the bayou, though some believe that Josh Boyer, because of his experience as a fisher, gave the community its name. Boyer himself credits Mary for naming the town in honor of “the great numbers of tarpon fish that frequent the springs.”

Construction Information

- Original structure (similar in appearance to its present condition) was a small square home of approximately fourteen by fourteen (280 square) feet built near Spring Bayou. Constructed sometime in 1878, and considered a “temporary structure” until the Boyers could erect a more permanent dwelling.
- Representative of wood-frame Gulf Coast vernacular architecture found in similar structures of the period along the coast from Florida to Texas. The one-room cottage had board and batten exterior siding and a shingled, high-peaked roof.
- Subsequent additions to the structure appeared after 1906, including two side sections and a rear section. These areas were damaged by a fire before the cottage moved from Tarpon Springs to Heritage Village.
- Although Tarpon Springs did have an electric plant before the turn of the century, this structure lacked electricity throughout its history in Tarpon Springs.

History of Occupants

- Joshua and Mary Boyer occupied the structure by 1878. In 1881, Hamilton Disston purchased approximately four million acres of land in Florida for a quarter an acre. This purchase included many valuable acres throughout present-day Pinellas County. Part of Disston’s purchase in Tarpon Springs included the site the Boyers squatted upon; Joshua Boyer had to repurchase his land at $1.25/acre. As the Lake Butler Villa Company developed lands in and around Tarpon Springs, Boyer gave up control of much of his holdings in the region.
- An 1878 Sunland Tribune article about the “Anclote Region” notes that while the area had received only occasional attention since the Civil War, “more recently it
has been settling up quite rapidly.” The article touted the Anclote River area as the best large-scale fishing area between the mouth of Tampa Bay and the Cedar Keys area. The few families along the northern Pinellas region often engaged in farming and/or citrus cultivation.

- In January 1883, a *Sunland Tribune* reporter making the long trip from Tampa to Tarpon Springs met Boyer and had venison—“which is not an unusual dish with them”—at the cottage before visiting the “proposed city.” By that time, town entrepreneurs had approximately 20,000 feet of lumber on hand for construction projects, with more on the way. After clearing trees along the right-of-way, city leaders had started to construct thirty-foot wide avenues.

- Boyer built a barn that apparently became a home and boarding house that served as the town’s first hotel. The structure was known as “Long House” and the “Tropical,” and was later held by Walter Meres of the pioneer Meres family. Guests included A. P. K. Safford and other notable early visitors.

- Though the 1880 census notes Boyer’s profession as “sailor,” Boyer operated a ferry to Cedar Keys, a regular coach to Tampa (then a two-day trip), and a livery stable during the 1880s and 1890s.

- By 1885, Joshua’s brother, mother, and two sisters came to the areas. Boyer’s nephew (son of his brother, John), D. P. Boyer, remained in Tarpon and served as a leader in the community (city judge).

- In 1898, Joshua, Mary, and her father (A. W. Ormond) moved to Eau Gallie in Brevard County. The 1900 census has Joshua as a fisherman and his father-in-law as a farmer. A false legend claimed that A. W. Ormond later helped to establish Ormond Beach. By 1910, Joshua managed a meat market and Mary ran a boarding house in Brevard County. The Boyers occasionally visited Tarpon, and news of their arrival often appeared in the *Tarpon Springs Leader*.

**Significant Events/Activities**

- During the early 1900s, elegant homes sprouted up in the area around Spring Bayou. The simple cottage seemed out of place alongside such impressive structures. The cottage moved to 140 Orange Avenue in 1920.

- The Protos family purchased the home and held it for many years.

**Moving of the House to Heritage Village**

- The building suffered from fire damage shortly before its planned move to Heritage Village.

- Approval to move the cottage occurred at the March 1978 Historical Commission meeting.
Boyer Cottage

Overview

A native of the Bahamas, Joshua C. Boyer sailed along the Anclote River to Spring Bayou in early 1877. At that site, he met Alexander M. Ormond and his daughter, Mary Ormond. The Ormonds, natives of North Carolina, had recently homesteaded on a parcel near present-day Pinellas Avenue in Tarpon Springs. Joshua Boyer wed Mary Ormond in April 1877. They built a small cottage near the intersection of Boyer Street and Pinellas Avenue, and soon thereafter constructed stables for livestock. Many sources credit Mary Boyer for giving Tarpon Springs its name in 1879 or 1880.

The Boyers lived in this cottage for approximately twenty-one years, from 1877 until 1898. This period roughly corresponds with the Gilded Age of American history, a period between Reconstruction and the Progressive Era characterized by the expansion of railroads and frenzied business speculation. The Boyers certainly witnessed a “gilded age” of sorts along the northern Pinellas Peninsula. After Philadelphia magnate Hamilton Disston acquired substantial tracts of land throughout Florida, he dispatched his representatives to examine his purchases. Soon the Boyers served as hosts for Anson Safford, a former gold miner and territorial governor of Arizona, as well as many other agents of Disston. By the 1880s, their quiet settlement along the Bayou grew into the largest city in Western Hillsborough County. Many meetings to cement business deals during the early 1880s occurred either at the Boyer Cottage or a small hotel he operated.

Joshua and Mary Boyer witnessed substantial changes in Tarpon Springs during their time at this cottage. By 1898, they moved to Eau Gallie, a small settlement along the Indian River in Brevard County. They continued to visit family and friends in Tarpon during the early 1900s, and their small cottage—with subsequent additions—remained on Pinellas Avenue until about 1920. From there, the Boyer Cottage moved to Orange Avenue, a block north of the main business district, until 1978. During this time, the cottage became one of the few residences in the City of Tarpon Springs that lacked electricity. In early 1979, members of the Protos family that had owned the building decided to donate it to Heritage Village.
A Safe Place to Anchor

Although Panfilo de Narvaez had visited the Pinellas Peninsula in April 1528, extensive settlement of this region did not occur until the late 1800s. Many of the indigenous Native American cultures had disappeared by the early 1700s. By the mid-1700s and early 1800s, itinerant fishers of Spanish ancestry regularly sailed along Florida’s West Coast. During these excursions, some parties anchored near the wide mouth of the Anclote River or ventured along the river to camp in its protected harbor. Others trolled the waters of Tampa Bay, a large body of water that often appeared on early maps with its given Spanish name, “Bahia del Espiritu Santo” (in translation: “Bay of the Holy Spirit”).

“Anclote” derives from a Spanish word for a kedge or small anchor commonly used by sailing vessels. Similar to Boca Ciega Bay in southern Pinellas—a twisting bay meaning “Blind Mouth” or “Blind Pass”—Anclote seems an appropriate name given the river’s ability to hide and protect sailors who encountered rough weather or hostile parties. Spanish and French maps of the early 1700s prominently noted the Anclote cape and river regions. Cartographers designed many of these early maps by using the sketchy navigational notes of Gulf Coast expeditions while working in their European studios. Some illustrative examples follow.¹ A 1718 French map of Louisiana and Florida includes a “Cap Anclote” designation for Anclote Key near a site referred to as “Tampa.” The wide mouth of the Anclote River made it appear that this inland waterway connected with Tampa Bay, creating an image of the Pinellas peninsula as an island entirely disconnected from peninsular Florida.² English mapmaker Iohn (John) Senix duplicated this 1718 map in his 1721 rendition.³ A 1720 image created by H. Moll, a geographer, also separates much of Pinellas south of the Cape of Anclote from the rest of Florida.⁴

¹ Bertha E. Bloodworth and Alton C. Morris, Places in the Sun: The History and Romance of Florida Place Names (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1978), 98
² For an image of this 1718 map, Carte de la Louisiane et du cours du Mississipi [i.e. Mississippi]: dressée sur un grand nombre de mémoires entrautres sur ceux de Mr. le Maire / par Guillaume Del'isle del Academie R'le. des Sciences, see: http://fcit.coedu.usf.edu/florida/maps/1700/ct000666.htm.
³ For an image of Senix’s map, A map of Louisiana and of the river Mississipi [i.e. Mississippi] : this map of the Mississipi [i.e. Mississippi] is most humbly inscribed to William Law of Lanreston, esq. / by John Senex, see: http://fcit.coedu.usf.edu/florida/maps/1700/ct000682.htm.
⁴ For an image of H. Moll’s 1720 map, A new map of the north parts of America claimed by France under ye names of Louisiana, Mississippi [i.e. Mississippi], Canada, and New France with ye adjoining territories of England and Spain : to Thomas Bromsall, esq., this map of Louisiana, Mississipi [i.e. Mississippi] & c.
1744 French map places “Caye d’Anclote” much further north of Tampa Bay. A Spanish map of Florida and Cuba released in 1757 places an island of Anclote well offshore and northwest of Tampa Bay. Mention of “Cayo del Anclote”—literally “Anclote Key”—appears in William Roberts’s 1763 *Account of the First Discovery, and Natural History of Florida*. This publication, released the year Great Britain acquired the Florida territory from the Spaniards after defeating France and Spain in the Seven Years’ (or French and Indian) War, includes maps of Florida. One plate depicts peninsular Florida as a series of disconnected islands from south of present-day Marion County to the mouth of the St. Johns River. Like a dish smashed into pieces, this map gave an impression of island chains with interconnected (and unexplored) bodies of water. For example, another map plate in this book includes an image of Bahia del Espiritu Santo (Tampa Bay) that connects through an interior waterway (possibly the Manatee River) to the Laguna del Espiritu Santo (possibly Lake Okeechobee) and the St. Johns River. Roberts notes that the “very large and noble” Tampa Bay “is capable of receiving the largest fleet that ever was collected in this part of the world, and may, in case of any future rupture [war], be of great importance to the crown of Great Britain.” He devotes little attention to Anclote, however, briefly mentioning that the lands surrounding this area constitute “a place but very little known.”

Navigational maps of the Tampa Bay region improved during the late 1700s and early 1800s. A fairly accurate 1777 map of Espiritu Santo Bay shows the Pinellas islands from approximately Redington Beach southward, and differentiates between Espiritu Santo (lower Tampa Bay) and Tampa Bay (now old or upper Tampa Bay). Expeditions along the land also noted a reservoir of fresh water at the site of Mirror Lake in this rendition. Maps published after Florida became a state in March 1845 generally offered accurate illustrations of Florida’s gulf coastline between Cedar Keys and Tampa Bay.

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5. For an image of this map, Carte de la Louisiane cours du Mississipi [i.e. Mississippi] et pays voisins : dédiée à M. le Comte de Maurepas, ministre et secrétaire d'état commandeur des ordres du roy / par N. Bellin ingénieur de la marine, 1744 ; Dheuilland sculp, see: http://fcit.coedu.usf.edu/florida/maps/1700/ct000661All.htm.
These images clearly marked the area around the mouth of the Anclote River as a notable and prominent area, and most showed the islands, keys, and land areas along the Anclote River with excellent detail. For example, an 1875 map clearly outlined the Anclote River, nearby islands, Lake Butler (now Lake Tarpon) and other navigable waterways in and around Tampa Bay.

Early arrivals to the region braved hostilities during the Civil War. By 1864, William Lawrence Thompson and wife Julia Holland moved with family members from Hamilton County to an area about four miles south of present-day Tarpon Springs. Some narratives note that they became the first farmers to cultivate oranges in the northwestern corner of the Pinellas Peninsula. Their son, William Benjamin Thompson, cleared lands (possibly further south near Curlew) and planted citrus by the 1880s.9

The first settlers came to the Anclote region after the Civil War. Frederic and Franklin B. Meyer left their Marion County farmsteads in 1867 and settled north of the mouth of the Anclote River. They may have heard about the region’s excellent reputation for fishing from other farmers in west central Florida. For example, planters living in and around Brooksville occasionally ventured to the mouth of the Anclote during the antebellum period in search of fish. While such visits probably subsided during the Civil War, interest in the area increased by the late 1860s and 1870s. In time, the families huddled along this area established a small settlement near the mouth of the river known as Anclote. R. F. Pent, a June 1878 native of the Tarpon Springs region and grandson of B. F. Meyer, described the isolated Anclote settlement in his 1964 history of Tarpon Springs. While local forests offered an abundance of game, other provisions required long trips to a cabin near Clear Water Harbor, or more distant locations such as Tampa or Cedar Keys. Daniel Brinton’s 1869 guidebook to Florida described many of the “low and marshy” rivers north of the mouth of Tampa Bay as “producing little of value except a fine variety of cedar.” At this time, most new arrivals to Tampa Town, a community of approximately 600 residents, reached their destination by taking a one-day trip by a steamer from Cedar Keys along the Gulf for a fare of $10. During passage between Cedar

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Keys and Tampa, travelers may have noticed the small settlement that began to take shape at Anclote by the early 1870s; Brinton certainly learned of the spongers that had started to harvest the reefs in the area by the late 1860s.\footnote{R. F. Pent, \textit{History of Tarpon Springs} (St. Petersburg: Great Outdoors, 1964), 7; \textit{Sunland Tribune}, 25 May 1878; Daniel Garrison Brinton, \textit{A Guide-Book of Florida and the South}, Facsimile Series (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1978), 96, 106-108.}

Indeed, divers from Key West and other coastal outposts began to collect sponges as the small Anclote community attracted settlers. By Pent’s estimate, over ninety percent of the spongers and sailors who visited Anclote from the Keys came from “British extraction.” Some of these men originally came to the Keys from the Bahamas or British West Indies to perform the dangerous tasks of “wrecking” and salvaging on the many boats damaged while journeying near the Florida reefs. In time, some Conch transplants became spongers who harvested the Gulf waters and socialized with the local women during their visits to Anclote. Between 1868 and the mid-1870s, Anclote attracted sponging fleets and residents from the Keys, other areas of the American South, and distant lands such as England. Pent’s narrative describes some of these early residents, including Captain Samuel Hope, who arrived by way of Brooksville, and Arthur Farquar, a native of England who constructed a sawmill at the site later occupied by the former Stauffer Chemical plant. During this period when Anclote had a grocery and post office, Pent noted that Tarpon “remained an unsettled forest” where deer, bobcats, turkeys, and other animals freely roamed.\footnote{Pent, \textit{History of Tarpon Springs}, 7-15; Brinton, \textit{A Guide-Book}, 98-99.}

\textbf{A Fishy Story of How New Settlers Sprung into Action and Built a Town}

Alexander W. Ormond and his daughter, Mary E. Ormond, settled in the area of present-day Tarpon Springs in 1876. A native of North Carolina born in August 1822, he fathered Mary with a woman originally from North Carolina who is unnamed in census records. Mary, the only known child of A. W. Ormond, came into the world about 1853 in her parents’ home state of North Carolina. While all published accounts note their arrival in Florida by 1876, records from the 1870 federal census indicate that they may have lived in Hillsborough County much earlier than originally thought. A man named “A. W. Orman” and his daughter, “Mary Orman,” lived at Stephen Knight’s homestead
in Hillsborough County. While their reported ages do not correspond exactly with other
records, both claimed to be natives of North Carolina. “Orman” worked as a farm hand.
Further research of property records may therefore place the Ormonds in Hillsborough
County—probably closer to Tampa than the upper Pinellas Peninsula—by 1870.\footnote{12} By
1876, Alexander and Mary Ormond decided to move to the upper Pinellas Peninsula.
They cleared land and constructed a small cabin near the present-day intersection of
Martin Luther King, Jr., Drive and Pinellas Avenue.

A native of the Bahamas soon joined the Ormonds as a nearby neighbor. Joshua
C. Boyer, eldest child of Abraham and Hannah Campbell Boyer of Nassau, became a
proficient navigator by the mid-1870s. Born circa December 1851 in Nassau, Joshua had
one younger brother (John Grey, born September 1859), and two younger sisters
(Elizabeth, born circa 1860, and A. G. Boyer, born about 1864). Boyer’s parents may
have lived in Nova Scotia before moving to the Bahamas. As a young man, Josh made a
journey similar to other early sailors who arrived along Florida’s West Coast by way of
the Bahamas, including descendants of the Lowe and Meares families of Anona. Boyer
left the Bahamas, immigrated to the United States in 1869 or 1870, spent time in and
around the Florida Keys, and traveled northward along the Gulf Coast. An 1877 fishing
trip brought him to the small Anclote settlement, and he decided “by chance” to stop at
the Ormond residence near the protected waters of Spring Bayou. Within a short time, he
constructed his “permanent home” south of Boyer Street and Pinellas Avenue. He soon
erected a livery stable that later became the area’s first “hotel.”\footnote{13}

Shortly after arriving, Joshua Boyer wed Mary Ormond and they built a small
cottage on his land. They courted for a brief period before exchanging vows in Tampa in
April 1877.\footnote{14} Intended as a temporary structure, the fourteen-by-fourteen wood

\footnote{12} Census records used in this research appear in files located at the Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo.
\footnote{13} Genealogical research on the Boyer and Ormond families appears in files held at the Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; St. Petersburg Times, 17 May 1933; Pent, History of Tarpon Springs, 18. For a brief autobiographical account of Boyer’s life in Tarpon Springs, see the typewritten “Some Early Reminiscences of Tarpon Springs, Florida, by J. C. Boyer, Eau Gallie, Florida.” A copy of this narrative appears in files at the Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo. The story also appeared verbatim in an issue of the Tarpon Springs Leader. In an extract from the 1900 census, Boyer claimed he emigrated from the Bahamas to the United States in 1869.
\footnote{14} Gertrude Stoughton’s history of early Tarpon Springs marks the wedding date of Joshua and Mary Ormond Boyer as 14 April 1877. Some genealogical sources, possibly using Stoughton as a source, also
“Honeymoon cottage” built by Boyer had one room and a high-peaked roof with wooden shingles. Similar in form to many early cottages constructed along the Gulf Coast between eastern Texas and Florida, this compact wood-frame vernacular building included board and batten siding with interior floors showing tongue and groove planking and a covered front porch.\textsuperscript{15} During the early 1900s, Joshua Boyer fondly remembered those first few years living in relative isolation near Spring Bayou:

Everything there was ours. The land and the game and fish were as free as the air. In the words of another, ‘We were monarchs of all we surveyed.’ Our nearest neighbor was Mr. Asa Clark who lived in the Whitcomb place a mile away. Our next nearest neighbor was W. B. Thompson, in the Curliru Settlement, four miles distant. There was also the Myers (sic) family, three miles down the Anclote River.\textsuperscript{16}

Wild deer, turkey, squirrels, and other animals provided a steady diet of meat for their table. Josh and Mary did much of their trading at the sawmill and mercantile located at the Seaside settlement located west of their homestead. With the nearest frontier post office then located at Clear Water Harbor (now Clearwater), settlers retrieved mail for neighbors whenever they traveled south for supplies.\textsuperscript{17}

By the late 1870s, others had started to visit the area around Spring Bayou, an inlet given that name because of the occasional upwelling of water through an underground spring connected to Lake Butler (now known as Lake Tarpon). The turbulent waters and protected enclave attracted a variety of marine life, including schools of tarpon. The abundant fauna and fish sustained these settlers, and soon the remote settlement attracted farmers and speculators in search of lands in the unnamed settlement around the Bayou. A May 1878 article published in Tampa’s \textit{Sunland Tribune} claimed that settlers had quickly learned of the excellent fishing along the Anclote, “the

\textsuperscript{15}Architectural research by Stephanie Ferrell appears in site files located at Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo.
\textsuperscript{16}Joshua Boyer, “Some Early Reminiscences of Tarpon Springs.”
\textsuperscript{17}Ibid.
best place for fishing on a large scale to be found anywhere on the coast between Tampa (B)ay and Cedar Keys.” Lands along the interior coast of the river provided abundant opportunities for farmers, some of whom had already started cultivating oranges. A letter written by an Anclote resident in the 29 June 1878 *Sunland Tribune* touts the area’s healthful climate, as well as its “romantic building sites, and beautiful bay views.” To those questioning the quality of the soil, this columnist celebrated the orange and lemon groves, as well as a fertile soil along the interior that could sustain corn, cotton, and other agricultural commodities. Praising the abundantly stocked waters as the best fishing spot between Tampa Bay and Cedar Keys, this article argued that starvation could not occur because of the mullet and trout frequenting the river that “would be sure to jump in his line of vision.”

Recorded narratives generally credit Mary Ormond Boyer for giving Tarpon Springs its name. However, the quotes and circumstances in these accounts do have slight variations. In his 1929 history of Pinellas County, W. L. Straub claimed that Mary exclaimed “See the tarpon spring!” while with others at an 1880 gathering along the bayou. Thus, it is no surprise that this quote appears verbatim in Josh Boyer’s 17 May 1933 obituary in Straub’s *St. Petersburg Times*. Gertrude Stoughton’s 1975 account adds a sense of dramatic flair as the young mountain woman encounters the noble fish of the Gulf:

To the girl from the South Carolina mountains much was new—the sea, the marshes and the moss-draped trees—but she was particularly amazed by the giant tarpon that swarmed in the bayou, leaping in the sunlight and tossing off showers of spray. In 1879, she proposed a name for the tiny settlement—Tarpon Springs.

George Frantzis’s account conveniently places the event in 1883, noting that entrepreneur John Cheyney and his wife stood by the Bayou and witnessed the event along with Mary’s husband, incorrectly identified as D. P. Boyer (Joshua’s nephew). According to

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18 *Sunland Tribune*, 25 May 1878, 29 June 1878.
20 Stoughton, *Tarpon Springs*, 7
Frantzis, Mary said, “See the Tarpon in the Springs!”\textsuperscript{21} Longtime area resident and columnist Glen Dill, Sr., author of many “Suncoast Past” articles in north Pinellas and Pasco County publications, embellished the tales of Frantzis and Stoughton in a September 1977 clipping:

Anyway, one day in 1879, Mary was standing at the Bayou, probably with Joshua and her father, and noticed a big commotion in the water. According to historian George Frantzis, she loudly exclaimed, ‘See the tarpon in the springs!’ That remark about the great fish that used to swarm in Spring Bayou is how the city got its name of Tarpon Springs.\textsuperscript{22}

The most authoritative account on the matter appeared in an early typewritten statement by Josh Boyer held by family members, one that later appeared in an issues of the \textit{Tarpon Springs Leader} and the archives of the Tarpon Springs Historical Society. Boyer proclaimed: “In 1880 my wife gave the name, Tarpon Springs, to the town. This name was selected because of the great numbers of tarpon fish that frequent the springs.”\textsuperscript{23}

The 1880 federal census notes four residents in the Boyer Cottage. Father-in-law A. W. Ormond (miswritten by the census taker as “Norman”) was fifty-eight years old, without a listed occupation, and either widowed or divorced. As head of household, twenty-seven year old Joshua worked as a sailor. His wife and Elizabeth (his twenty-two year old sister) shared duties by “keeping house.” Neighbors at the time included Captain Hiram F. Pent, R. F. Pent’s father, who regularly traveled by boat to Cedar Keys, and members of the Gause and Youngblood families. Joshua’s sister, Elizabeth, soon fell in love with John P. Youngblood. Four days after receiving a marriage license on 22 March 1822, they exchanged vows in a ceremony in Tampa. John P. and Elizabeth Boyer Youngblood continued to live as neighbors for the next few years.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Suncoast Shopper & News}, 7 September 1977.
\textsuperscript{23} Joshua C. Boyer, “Some Early Reminiscences of Tarpon Springs.”
\textsuperscript{24} Census information appears in files at Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo. A digitized image of John P. and Elizabeth Youngblood’s marriage license is available through the digitized Hillsborough County Marriage License Collection, University of South Florida Libraries, Tampa. See also: Pent, \textit{History of Tarpon Springs}, 28.
A Gilded Age in a Small Gulf Shore Community

While the Boyers christened the settlement’s name, events in Tallahassee and Philadelphia soon unsettled their tranquil and remote frontier. With coffers running low, leaders in the State of Florida negotiated a real estate transaction with Philadelphia entrepreneur and manufacturer Hamilton Disston that allowed Disston, his brother Jacob, and other associates to acquire four million acres of Florida lands for one million dollars. Although authorities pledged to transfer swamp and submerged lands that required reclamation, in reality the Disston land purchase included many handsome tracts without flooding problems. Notable tracts covered much of present-day Pinellas County. By early 1882, advance members of Disston’s expedition had arrived at Tarpon Springs to claim their purchase. Major Mathew Robinson Marks, a former officer in the Union army who worked as an engineer and attorney, surprised the Boyers as he arrived with a surveyor (Captain John B. Walton), a bookkeeper (W. N. Conley), and legal counsel (John C. Jones). The Boyers provided shelter and hospitality to these men as they examined the lands purchased by Disston and developed plans for establishing a city. Before the end of the year, the Boyers also served as host to the family of Anson Peacely Killen (A.P.K.) Safford, a Vermont native and third governor of the Arizona Territory. A former gold miner who spent time scouring the West in search of mineral treasures, Safford had joined into a partnership with Hamilton and Jacob Disston before arriving in Florida. By 1883, Safford made plans to sell parcels around Tarpon Springs, while Marks and Walton surveyed the land and designed the town. They crafted a map of the planned community by 1884.25

Disston’s purchase did spur controversy for many homesteaders. W. L. Straub’s account of the Disston land purchase enshrines this speculator in hagiographic terms. Noting that many squatters had previously homesteaded on lands acquired by Disston, Straub proclaimed that “in his magnanimous (sic) spirit, which characterized his actions at all times, [Disston] allowed settlers to remain, authorizing the State to issue them deeds, and thus the settlers came into good titles, without the necessity of paying for their homes.” Recognizing Disston’s entrepreneurial spirit, Straub asserted that Disston “goes

25 Straub, History of Pinellas County, 260-261; Stoughton, Tarpon Springs, 8-10.
down in history as the pioneer who blazed the way, the Saviour of the State.”

Contradicting this effusive encomium, Boyer and others who settled in the areas around Spring Bayou actually had to repurchase their lands from Disston’s enterprise at about $1.25 an acre. The 1884 town map of Tarpon Springs designed by John Walton shows that Boyer had lost any claim to lands around the Bayou, including tracts then held by Hamilton Disston, A.P.K. Safford, Major Marks, and others.

While many accounts credit A.P.K. Safford as the “founder of Tarpon Springs,” Joshua Boyer could rightfully claim a place as the settlement’s first ambassador. Safford and other early arrivals stayed at the town’s first “hotel,” a structure located near Pinellas Avenue just south of Boyer Street that had originally served as the stable for the Boyers’ horses. Boyer had relocated the horses, renovated the building, and opened it as The Long House. Within a short while members of the pioneer Webster, Noblit, and Meres families arrived in Tarpon. Soon, Walter Meres took over The Long House, but Boyer kept his horses and continued to meet with newcomers. An account in the 11 January 1883 Sunland Tribune—written shortly after Governor Safford’s arrival—mentions a trip to “Tarpon City” by a correspondent staying at Yellow Bluff, near present-day Palm Harbor. Members of the entourage met Josh Boyer and Captain John B. Walton as they approached the remote community. Boyer and Walton treated the party to a feast of “fine venison”—a dish commonly enjoyed at Boyer’s residence—before touring the “proposed city.” According to the newspaper article:

We saw improvements going up on all sides; at the spring they have a substantial wharf, large and strong enough for the accommodation of large steamers to load and unload, which shows some of Captain Walton’s genius in construction. We also notice a large warehouse, which will be used to store the furniture now en route for the new hotel which is to be built in the near future.

26 Straub, History of Pinellas County, 261.
27 Stoughton, Tarpon Springs, 8-10, 12.
28 Stoughton, Tarpon Springs, 10-11; Pent, History of Tarpon Springs, 18. The reader should note that the Meres family possesses a different ancestry than the Meares family that occupied Lowe’s Landing and Anona by the late 1850s.
29 Sunland Tribune, 11 January 1883.
By one estimate, Boyer and other developers had already secured or prepared nearly 20,000 feet of lumber board for construction projects. Local boat builders had started to construct a “large lighter” (not the shallow steamer Mary Disston) to meet deep-water vessels near the mouth of the Anclote River that brought furniture, provisions, and freight. Boyer claimed that he “had to take care of all of these new-comers in [his] residence until later in the year [1883]” when the Tropical and Tarpon Springs hotels opened for business. Meanwhile, the article credits Major M. R. Marks of Orlando for his work on behalf of Disston interests to clear trees and “growth of every kind” while platting avenues thirty-feet wide.30

The Boyers joined other speculators in panning for speculative wealth during Tarpon Spring’s “gilded age.” As the Disstons, Safford, and other conducted business through the Lake Butler Villa Company, Boyer expanded his agricultural enterprises and operated a regular mail coach across the barely improved roads between Tarpon Springs and Tampa. Boyer hired Osmond Knowles as his driver and maintained a livery barn. The journey between Tampa and Tarpon Springs generally took two days under favorable weather conditions. Still a proficient sailor, Boyer maintained his sloop, the Tantalus, in excellent condition and it remained one of the fastest boats on the coast. Boyer often competed in races against the boats of other civic leaders, including James M. Vinson’s Vinessa. Boyer gained great notoriety as a guide who took fishing parties along the Anclote and into the Gulf of Mexico. As his commercial activities grew, Boyer encouraged family members to move to this frontier boomtown. By the early 1880s (possibly 1882), Josh’s brother—John Boyer—and their mother arrived from the Bahamas and built a house close to the Boyer Cottage, near the southwestern corner of the intersection of Pinellas Avenue and Lime Street. Other family members arrived by 30 June 1885, when the Florida state census listed many members of the Boyer family living in close proximity. Joshua, then thirty-three years old, listed his occupation as “speculating,” while twenty-six year old John claimed to work as a “farmer.” Sister A.G. Boyer lived at John’s residence, along with mother Hannah. The Youngbloods remained nearby neighbors, though a twenty-three year old Florida native named A. J. Youngblood lived as a “servant” with the Boyers. Two boarders who were probably Boyer’s nephews,

Frederich and Osmond Knowles, also resided with the family. The John Boyer home, a center of much activity during the 1880s and 1890s, remained at the busy corner near the center of Tarpon Springs for over eight decades.  

Three events in 1887 illustrated the maturation of Tarpon Springs: the city’s incorporation, the construction of the lighthouse on Anclote Key, and the arrival of the Orange Belt Railway. Stoughton mentions a February 12 meeting at the settlement’s schoolhouse where most of the registered voters decided to incorporate Tarpon Springs as a city. Joshua Boyer joined Anson Safford as two of the inaugural aldermen who served with Mayor Wilber F. De Golier. While the lighthouse offered protection to boats sailing along the Gulf shores near the Anclote River, the arrival of the Orange Belt solidified Tarpon Springs’ position as the predominant city of Western Hillsborough well into the 1890s. The locomotive had bypassed the small and declining settlement of Anclote. In time, Anclote largely disappeared in a fashion similar to Hamilton Disston’s dreams of a megalopolis of Disston City when “General” John Constantine Williams persuaded Peter Demens to turn the Orange Belt away from Disston’s holdings in southern Pinellas and towards the tiny settlement of Wardsville that became St. Petersburg. The arrival of the railroad in upper Pinellas led to the demise of Tarpon’s most notable steamboats. The larger Governor Safford departed for service as a ferryboat in New York and South Carolina before sinking in 1908; the smaller Mary Disston brought equipment to lower Pinellas (before the completion of the Orange Belt) and later fell apart near Key West. A fourth event in 1887 demonstrates how transportation remained dangerous in the region. R. F. Pent recalled an incident when Mary Ormond Boyer rode on her buggy along Pinellas Avenue. The horse, named Jim, became agitated and frightened, possibly by Mary’s umbrella. Jim took off and Mary held on for dear life as the buggy roared along the sandy and rutted roadway. The horse did not stop until she lost her umbrella.  

31 Frantzis, Strangers at Ithaca, 37; Straub, History of Pinellas County, 163; Stoughton, Tarpon Springs, 12; Pent, History of Tarpon Springs, 18-19, 29,42. United States Archives and Records Service, Schedules of the Florida State Census of 1885 (Washington: National Archives, 1970); Tarpon Springs Leader, 13 May 1921, 19 May 1933. According to Pent, Knowles also operated a hardware store with Horace Webster.  
32 Stoughton, Tarpon Springs, 17-22; Pent, History of Tarpon Springs, 57-58. Images from the Stokes Photographic Collection digitized by the University of South Florida Libraries capture views along the route of the Sanford and St. Petersburg Railway during its construction. Photographs taken along the Anclote River show a variety of boats, a growing number of boathouses along Spring Bayou, and other scenes that capture Tarpon Springs during the mid and late 1880s.
Both Tarpon Springs and the Boyer family witnessed dramatic growth during the 1890s. Rapid development followed the arrival of the railroad. During this decade, John K. Cheyney consolidated his business holdings in the nascent sponge-diving enterprises. Meanwhile, Josh’s brother—John G. Boyer—had a fruitful union with Annie M. Priemen. A native of Michigan born in November 1871, Annie had parents of German ancestry who arrived in the United States during the mid-1800s. John and Annie were married by a Catholic priest in Tampa on 26 May 1891, the same day the court clerk issued their marriage license. They probably went from the courthouse directly to the church. They promptly returned to Tarpon Springs and started a family. After giving birth to a son, Denza P. (or Dienza P., often “D.P.”) Boyer in February 1893, Annie and her husband celebrated the arrival of Marguerita (born March 1894), Ina Victoria (born 1896), Hannah (born July 1898), Raymond (born circa 1900), Elizabeth (born about 1905), and Joseph (born circa 1908-1909).  

A New Home on Florida’s Opposite Coast

In 1898, as the Tampa Bay area became a focal point for the Spanish-American War, Joshua and Mary Boyer moved from Tarpon Springs to Brevard County. They settled in the small town of Eau Gallie, north of Melbourne and along the Indian River. The 1900 census describes forty-eight year old Joshua as a “fisherman,” and his seventy-seven year old father-in-law, A. W. Ormond, as a “farmer.” John Boyer and his family remained in Tarpon Springs. While the older children attended school, John worked as a sponge clipper. Although the exact reason for their departure remains unclear, Josh and Mary Boyer and A. W. Ormond relocated to an area with a history of development that closely resembled the early years of Tarpon Springs. In Carolynn A. Washbon’s research on the settlers of Indian River Country, she describes settlers moving to Eau Gallie in 1875, the year the Ormonds settled near present-day Tarpon. Families that homesteaded along the Indian River, like those pioneering souls huddled along the Anclote, inhabited an inaccessible region with few neighbors and many challenges. Similar to the upper

33 A digitized image of John G. and Annie Boyer’s marriage license is available through the digitized Hillsborough County Marriage License Collection, University of South Florida Libraries, Tampa. Census information available in research files at Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo. An alternate spelling of D. P. Boyer’s name is “Dyenza.” See: Tarpon Springs Leader, 24 January 1933.
Pinellas Peninsula, early residents of coastal Brevard could enjoy an abundance of wildlife and seafood, but had difficulty obtaining provisions. As early families tried to cultivate crops, they also demanded better steamer transportation in the area. While Henry Flagler’s Florida East Coast Railway had launched its operations before the Boyers moved to the region, the developments along the shoreline of Indian River seemed familiar to those who witnessed similar changes along the Anclote. Meanwhile, the new owners of the Boyer Cottage, members of the Segonias family, remembered that the addition of two smaller rooms to the rear of the building took place sometime after they acquired the structure in 1906.34

During the 1910s, members of the Boyer family contributed to the development of both Florida coasts, as well as the safety of soldiers overseas. By 1910, Josh managed a meat market in Brevard County, while his wife of thirty-two years operated a boarding house. The census lists two boarders at their home on Highland Avenue: Joseph Hendricks, a thirty-two year old native Floridian who painted signs, and a sixty-year old James Gordon, a house laborer who emigrated from Scotland in 1905. At John Boyer’s home in Tarpon Springs, the seven children ranged in age from just over one year to seventeen years old. D. P. Boyer, the eldest son, worked as a “telephone lineman,” while John continued to work in an important local industry as a “sponge packer.” Research by Glen Dill placed D. P. Boyer in the Navy by 1912; he built mines used in battles during World War I while stationed in Norfolk and later moved to Indianapolis where he met Gayle Stapp. He married Gayle and returned to Tarpon with her and their baby, Mary Jane, in 1920. A 1918 city directory placed John Boyer’s family at 215 West Lime, though some of the older children had already left home. Captain John Boyer took a number of children and church members from St. Ignatius Catholic Church to a picnic at Pinder’s Park on the Anclote River in March 1918. Among those in attendance were Soledad Bonillas Parken (widow of Anson Safford, who had died in 1891), Anna Boyer, Elizabeth Boyer, and young Joseph Boyer. Members of the excursion and picnic counted at least seven alligators during their journey. Ina Victoria Boyer had moved to 1743 Boulevard Street in Jacksonville by 1918. By August of that year, she entered service as

34 See Carolynn A. Washbon’s chapter in James J. Horgan and Lewis N. Wynne, Florida Decades: A Sesquicentennial History (St. Leo, FL: St. Leo College Press, 1995), 55-67; Records of the Pinellas County
a nurse. She worked overseas during the months after the end of World War I. By June 1919, she returned to the United States and assisted physicians at Walter Reed General Hospital until May 1920, about the time of her discharge.35

By 1919 or 1920, Joshua Boyer’s cottage moved from its original site to 140 East Orange Avenue. The rear-room additions came along with the original one-room cottage and porch. Sanborn fire insurance maps from 1930 and 1945 indicate that the structure sat in the middle of the property, not near the street corner like other neighboring buildings. In fact, another building close to the street that shared the same address may have partially obscured the right front corner of the patio. Although Tarpon Springs possessed an electrical plant before other locations on the Pinellas Peninsula, the Boyer Cottage remained without electrical wiring during its time at both locations.36

The Boyer family remained an important part of the growing Tarpon community during the 1920s and 1930s. Joshua occasionally visited Pinellas County, such as when he stayed with his brother, John, in April 1921. Captain John sailed family members along the Anclote to the lighthouse on the Ina, a boat named after his daughter, during the early 1920s. In March 1925, however, John Grey Boyer passed away. With his father’s burial at Cycadia Cemetery, D. P. Boyer became the leading member of the family in the community. An alternate city judge since 1931, D. P. Boyer received an appointment to serve as Tarpon’s municipal judge in January 1933. “Dee” Boyer, as many in the community knew him, also operated a successful Chevrolet dealership between 1923 and 1948. He served as president (1931-1932) and secretary (1929-1931, 1934-1935) of the Tarpon Springs Rotary Club and had a reputation of never missing a meeting. As a civic leader, D. P. Boyer also supported the Shriners and led the Fernald-Millas Post of the American Legion. With the support of a supervisor from the federal Reconstruction Finance Corporation, his wife became the first social worker in the area. Unfortunately,

35 See research files at Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo, and “Boyer, Ina Victoria,” Available from World War I Service Cards online at the Florida State Archives; Suncoast Shopper & News, 7 September 1977; (Tarpon Springs) Evening Leader, 18 March 1918.
limited federal and state funds limited her ability to assist impoverished families in Tarpon during her first years of service.\(^{37}\)

Joshua Boyer made his final trip to Tarpon Springs in 1933. On May 16, at the age of eighty-two, he passed away at his home in Eau Gallie, Brevard County. Within two days, his body arrived for services at the Vinson Funeral Home. Rev. Louis J. Richards of the Church of the Good Shepard led the ceremonies, which also included a quartet that sang two hymns. City Judge D. P Boyer, B. J. Knowles, and Osmond Knowles, all nephews of Josh Boyer, attended the funeral and oversaw the burial alongside his brother, Captain John. Mary Ormond Boyer returned to Brevard County. At the time of her death, she was buried in that county along with her father, A. W. Ormond.\(^{38}\)

**Did the Ormond Family Name Two Florida Cities?**

While Mary Ormond Boyer probably gave Tarpon Springs its name, later claims that she or father Alexander named the community of Ormond Beach seem implausible. Josh Boyer’s obituaries in the *Tarpon Springs Leader* and *St. Petersburg Times* claim that Alexander W. Ormond established Ormond Beach after leaving Tarpon Springs. Most accounts of the history of Ormond Beach in Volusia County consider Captain James Ormond as the town’s namesake. James Ormond came from the Bahamas to Florida during the second Spanish period after receiving a land grant from the Spanish government. Ormond, who apparently developed a 2,000-acre plantation in Florida, died at the hands of a runaway slave circa 1815. Settlers to the coastline in Volusia County had originally planned to name the settlement New Britain, after their hometown in Connecticut. The name Ormond was chosen by April 1880, however, long before A. W. Ormond settled in the area.\(^{39}\)


\(^{38}\) *St. Petersburg Times*, 17 May 1933; *Tarpon Springs Leader*, 19 May 1933.

A Small Cottage Not Forgotten

In the years after Boyer’s death, members of his family passed away or moved to other communities. The cottage, however, remained firmly perched in its new location one block away from the business district. Although the small home seemed out of place just a few steps away from Safford Avenue and the booming stores along Tarpon Avenue, this simple cottage caught the eye of a young boy raised in a home across the street, at 137 East Orange. Born in the Fourth of July in 1937, George D. Protos lived in a family that treasured its Greek roots while celebrating the new opportunities offered in America. Most sources credit the arrival of John Cocoris and his work with John Cheyney for the transformation of the sponge-diving industry in Tarpon Springs. During the early 1900s, Cocoris encouraged many divers to move from their ancestral islands along the Mediterranean to harvest the treasures of the Gulf of Mexico. As a young man with a strong interest in history, Protos needed only to look across Orange Avenue to see a small wooden homestead that told a large story. He graduated from Tarpon Springs High School, earned a pharmacy degree at the University of Florida, and returned to his home across from the Boyer Cottage. By the mid-1960s, George married, started a family, and continued to serve the community as a pharmacist, a director at St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Cathedral, a board president of the Sponge Exchange, and a member of Tarpon’s Old Timers Club.  

The Protos family maintained the building until 1978. By that time, George and Anita Protos decided to donate the historic cottage to Heritage Village in Largo. They had first checked to see if the City of Tarpon Springs had the financial resources to preserve the structure before making their decision. Members of the Pinellas County Historical Commission approved the plan to move the cottage at their meeting on 20 March 1978. About one month before the planned move of the Cottage, someone entered the building and started a fire that gutted part of the interior. Although Commission members expressed concern about the cottage’s structural integrity, Park Director Kendrick Ford reassured them that the charred inside rooms did not compromise the building or weaken its foundation. In any case, the Boyer Cottage would have required

demolition and rehabilitation whether or not the fire had occurred. The cost to move the cottage remained at $2,500.  

In late April 1978, George and Anita Protos watched as the structure left the city that sprang up around it. A future mayor of Tarpon Springs who shared her husband’s passion for their community, Anita Protos told a reporter that “the house looked like it was crying. . . . I’m happy, yet I’m sad.” Restoration efforts focused on the original fourteen-by-fourteen foot structure, and workers removed the subsequent additions. George and Anita Protos took great pride as their daughter, Harriet, cut the ribbon at the dedication of the Boyer Cottage at its new home in Heritage Village. Just as Joshua Boyer saw the city of Tarpon spring up around his small cottage, the Protos family witnessed how their efforts to preserve the cottage saved a large and important piece of our county’s history.

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41 Records of the Pinellas County Historical Commission, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo, 8 March 1978, 21 June 1978; *St. Petersburg Times*, 30 April 1978.
42 Records of the Pinellas County Historical Commission, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo, 17 May 1978.
Greenwood House: A Brief Introduction

History of Site before House was Built
➢ Original location near Clear Water Harbor was close to early core of the small community that evolved into present-day Clearwater.

Construction Information
➢ Built in the 1880s on Turner Street, near Clearwater’s harbor.
➢ Originally designed as a three-room house, with bedroom and living room in the front, and a dining room/kitchen area in the rear. Additions to the structure (present-day kitchen, bathroom, and storage areas) appeared after the house moved from Turner Street to 503 South Greenwood Avenue. Maps indicate that some additions had occurred by October 1929.

History of Occupants
➢ Earliest recorded owners located to date: D. F. and Emma Crawford (through February 1926). Leland and Nannie Waldrop acquired the house from the Crawfords. Genealogical records link these families together. Other occupants (possibly renters) before 1940 included Stephen and Carrie Griffith, Bartow and Mattie Blanton, and William Maddox.
➢ Leland and Nannie Waldrop resided in the structure until 1943, when Louis and Bernice Fulopp purchased the home.
➢ The Fulopp family owned the structure until sold to Rehabilitative Associates and Clearwater Limb and Brace in 1982. Then located near a convenience store, the property was better suited to commercial activities rather than use as a personal residence. The new owners donated the house and moving costs so that the Greenwood House could move to Heritage Village.
➢ For many years since its arrival at Heritage Village, the Greenwood House served as the offices of the Pinellas County Historical Society. The kitchen area of the building has served as a staging area for occasional events, such as Holiday celebrations sponsored by the Historical Society.

Moving of the House to Heritage Village
➢ The building came to Heritage Village in poor condition. Walls and shared fireplace are original. Floors and the roof required reconstruction. Vocational-technical students did some of the work to restore the building.
➢ Shortly after the structure arrived in 1982, park leadership noted that the structure, once restored, would serve as the offices for the Historical Society and also provide small-group meeting space to take “a little pressure off the church.”
Greenwood House

Overview

The Greenwood House, a typical Gulf Coast wood frame vernacular cottage, represents one of the earliest structures in the area of Clearwater. An unknown settler constructed this three-room home in 1888, the year the Orange Belt Railway completed its journey along the Pinellas Peninsula. At that time, less than twenty families lived in the small settlement then known as “Clear Water Harbor.” Originally located near the waterfront on Turner Street, this home sat in an area close to what some may consider the “birthplace” of Clearwater: The house occupied land near the former Fort Harrison, an early outpost used during the Second Seminole War. Members of the pioneer Turner family owned lands close to this house, and may have had some involvement with the structure’s early years.

Around 1910, the Greenwood House moved to 503 South Greenwood Avenue. Now known as Martin Luther King, Jr., Avenue, this north-south roadway served as a boundary between the city and county as late as the 1940s. The first recorded owners of the home, David Filmore and Emma Rebecca Crawford, sold the house in 1926 to Emma’s sister, Nannie, and her husband Leland G. Waldrop. The Waldrops worked extensively on the house, adding a tin roof and additional rooms. They decided to sell the property to Louis and Bernice Fulopp in 1943. Although residential developments had started to encroach upon the neighborhoods surrounding the Greenwood House by that time, the Fulopps continued to raise chickens and other animals on the property for many years.

In 1982, the Fulopps sold the dwelling to Rehabilitative Associates, Inc., and Clearwater Limb and Brace. Learning of the house’s history from Louis Fulopp, company representatives approached Heritage Village with an offer to donate the house and the cost of moving it in exchange for tax considerations. By 1982 and 1983, vocational students restored the building while the Pinellas County Historical Society provided the funds for materials and appliances. For nearly two decades, the Historical Society has used the Greenwood House for its offices and as a storage area.
Pioneer Settlers in Clear Water Harbor before the Railroad Arrived

The first notable occupation of the area around downtown Clearwater occurred during the Second Seminole War (1835-1842). An outpost known as Fort Harrison sat upon land in the present-day Harbor Oaks neighborhood. The large log cabin that served as Fort Harrison occupied lands at the current intersection of Druid Road and Orange Place. Used from April through October 1841, this facility also included quarters for officers on property later owned by the Turner family, along Turner Street. An informal, typewritten history of Clearwater by members of the city’s woman’s club placed the officers’ quarters on the exact site of the home once occupied by A. C. Turner. Unlike Fort Brooke (Tampa), Fort King (Ocala), and other military stations, Fort Harrison primarily served as a place for injured soldiers to recuperate rather than as a defensive outpost.¹

Settlers arrived in the Clearwater area after 1842 to take advantage of the Armed Occupation Act. Passed by Congress near the end of the Second Seminole War, this law encouraged citizens to move to the sparsely-populated areas of the West Coast and central Florida. Twenty years before the well-known Homestead Act of 1862, the Armed Occupation Act permitted settlers to claim tracts of land in areas formerly controlled by Seminole Indians and thereby serve as a buffer between remaining bands of Indians to the south and the growing agricultural enterprises of Middle Florida. Early residents, such as Odet Philippe’s family and the McMullens, soon shared the Pinellas Peninsula with the Booths, Coachmans, Taylors, Turners, Whitehursts, and other pioneer families. Many consider James Stevens “the father of Clearwater” because he submitted the first of approximately 1,300 land claims in the area. According to the historical account produced by the woman’s club, Stevens took possession of lands west of Fort Harrison Avenue (Alternate U.S. Highway 19) between Drew and Jeffords. Stevens soon persuaded John S. Taylor, Sr.—a friend of his who owned property in Brooksville—to acquire land south of Clearwater. A couple of early narratives about the Clearwater region claim that Taylor, a slave owner at the time, made an interesting offer on some of the land: Allegedly, one of Taylor’s female slaves had attempted to harm him and his
family by poisoning their coffee. Taylor supposedly traded this woman for some of Stevens’s land. Thus, according to the typewritten narrative from the woman’s club, “the greater part of Clearwater once sold for a (N)egro woman, and a very unamiable one at that.” David B. Turner arrived in 1854, soon joined Robert J. Whitehurst in acquiring Taylor’s property, and created the area’s first post office by 1859. Whitehurst operated the post office after the end of the Civil War. By the late 1870s, the few settlers in the area visited the Turner family’s log house that served as a local mercantile store. For the record, an examination of W. L. Straub’s 1929 History of Pinellas County and the 1917 typewritten history by the Woman’s Club of Clearwater proves that Straub liberally copied from the earlier document.2

The settlement at “Clear Water Harbor”—as it was then named—remained quiet and remote until the arrival of the Orange Belt Railway in early 1888. Provisions, mail, and other materials generally came either from Tampa or Cedar Keys. With few primitive roads in the region, citrus, cotton, and other agricultural products from the area traveled by boat to Tampa, Cedar Keys, or St. Marks. The Whitehurst and Turner families grew oranges and grapefruits. Early residents also cultivated corn and sweet potatoes. Livestock roamed freely along the range. In addition, while the waters offered a bounty of fish throughout the year, during mullet season “at low tide the men could walk out and kick them ashore; the women scooped up aprons full at a time.” By 15 September 1877, the area had attracted enough settlers that the “pioneer” citizens of the time decided to create an Immigration Committee at Clear Water Harbor “for the purpose of protecting society in this vicinity, and to assist immigrant(s) of good character in making suitable locations. The members of this committee will furnish all needful information to any worthy applicant for same.”3

The railroad brought settlers to the area in greater numbers. Early histories of the region indicate that Clear Water Harbor had only about eighteen families when the Orange Belt Railway first came to the area in 1888. The town incorporated in 1891, and

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by the mid-1890s, workers had paved parts of Cleveland Street and Fort Harrison Avenue with shells from a nearby Indian mound. By the late 1890s, the community had grown into a substantial settlement, with Henry Plant’s nearby Belleview Biltmore attracting seasonal visitors along the railroad line. The municipality’s name evolved as more settlers moved into the area. By 1895, Clear Water Harbor became “Clearwater Harbor,” and the “Harbor” officially disappeared from the city’s name by 1906.  

**An Early Gulf Coast Cottage on the Central Pinellas Frontier**

Much of the Greenwood House’s early history remains shrouded in mystery. Built as a three-room structure circa 1888, the house originally sat along present-day Turner Street near Clear Water Harbor. The home occupied an area close to the site of the officers’ quarters of Fort Harrison, and about two blocks from the original fort. If built in 1888 as generally believed, the Greenwood House represents one of the earliest structures in Clearwater. Unfortunately, nothing is known about the occupants of the home before it moved to Greenwood circa 1910. One may speculate that the families living in the building used it as their primary residence, because few wealthy seasonal visitors would have stayed in a smaller home. The occupants may have engaged in agricultural activities or fishing during the early years, but participated in other non-agricultural vocations as the City of Clearwater grew around them. The shared fireplace between the bedroom and living room indicates a more sophisticated structure than the simpler log cabins or smaller cottages (such as the Boyer Cottage of Tarpon) often built during the late 1800s.

The Greenwood House’s original proximity to the Turner property certainly merits further investigation. Ernest Dibble’s 1982 research into Pinellas County property records failed to locate any transactions of the Greenwood House between 1912 and 1926. A cursory examination of Hillsborough County records also provided little information, though additional cross-referencing of Turner’s original land claim with subsequent land plats granted by the 1890s may reveal new information. For example, many of the properties along Turner Street carry the short legal description “Turner’s, A. C.” first appearing in plat books circa 1892. With fewer than twenty families in the

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immediate area of Clear Water Harbor at the time of the Greenwood House’s construction, it may be possible that Turner or another pioneer family had an original interest in the property that they maintained for many years, until circa 1910.⁵

While additional research may prove or disprove a direct connection between the Turners and the Greenwood House, occupants of the structure certainly knew about the many contributions of the Turner family. David B. and Mary Campbell Turner lived in Madison County, Florida, during the early 1840s. While there, Mary gave birth to A. C. (Arthur Campbell) Turner on 26 February 1844. The Turners moved to Benton County, in the area now part of Hernando County, from 1848 until 1850. After relocating to Tampa, the Turners settled at or near Indian Rocks Beach by December 1851. They later relocated to the area that became Clear Water Harbor. David became the first postmaster of a post office along the Pinellas Peninsula, at a location close to the original site of the Greenwood House. Straub’s History of Pinellas County described the circuitous route of the weekly mail deliveries from Middle Florida. During the 1850s, the weekly parcels first traveled to Alligator (now known as Lake City) by stagecoach, then by steamer along the Suwannee River with a stop at Cedar Keys before arriving at Clear Water Harbor. During the Civil War, both David and A. C. Turner joined a military company organized by James McMullen known as the “Home Guards.” After an interruption of mail service during the Civil War, A. C. Turner followed in his father’s footsteps by serving as postmaster from 1874 until 1885. By the 1880s, he also operated a small mercantile store for the settlers in the area. Turner printed issues of the Hillsborough Times on a small hand press he had acquired from Edgar and Joel McMullen, and later served as a Hillsborough County commissioner representing the central Pinellas Peninsula during the 1887-1888 and 1907-1908 terms. Before his death, A. C. Turner had married three times, and bore twenty children. By the early 1900s, A. C. Turner’s family became a prominent part of Clearwater’s society.⁶

The home probably moved from Turner Street to 503 South Greenwood (now Martin Luther King, Jr.) Avenue at a time when waterfront construction, rising property values, and massive redevelopment of the nearby downtown may have made this simple

⁵ Memo from Ernest F. Dibble to Heritage Village, 6 May 1982, located in building research files, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo.
cottage appear out of place. Larger and more ornate homes appeared along the bluffs during the first decade of the 1900s, such as David N. Starr’s Seven Gables, a winter home completed in 1907 that also resides at Heritage Village. Laborers probably transported the home due east along Turner, and placed it on the second plot of land just northeast of the intersection of Turner and Greenwood. Tragic events along Cleveland Street during the summer of 1910 marked an important turning point in Clearwater’s young history that may have possibly played a role, though this remains speculation at best. During the early morning hours of 24 June 1910, a fire swept across and destroyed most of the wooden buildings along the north side of Cleveland Street in the downtown area between Fort Harrison Avenue and Osceola Avenue. As city leaders created a volunteer fire brigade to guard against future conflagrations, merchants and property owners along Cleveland Street replaced their wooden tinderboxes with block and concrete structures. Thus, one may speculate that the Greenwood House moved from docks near Turner to the boondocks along Greenwood as the building frenzy sparked a renaissance in downtown Clearwater.7

The Greenwood House Grows, as Families Come and Go

The Crawford family represents the earliest known residents of the Greenwood House. David Filmore and Emma Rebecca Crawford moved to Pinellas Peninsula by the 1920 census. David, a native of Kentucky born 20 February 1866, married a woman also from Kentucky who did not appear in census records. They became a couple by about 1890, moved to Alabama, and had three children: Edna (born circa 1891), Frank (born circa 1893), and Hall Crawford (born circa 1895). By the late 1890s—possibly 1898—David F. Crawford married his second wife, Edna R. Griffith, a native of Alabama. The family apparently lived in Alabama during the first decade of the twentieth century, with 1910 census records placing David, Emma, and the three children in Bessemer City, Alabama. At the time, forty-three year old David worked as a track supervisor for a railroad company. By February 1920, David and Emma Crawford lived in southern Clearwater, where he worked as a farmer in an orange grove and both of them became

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6 Straub, History of Pinellas County, 481-482; Woman’s Club of Clearwater, A History of Clearwater, 4.
7 Coleman, Clearwater, 31; Woman’s Club of Clearwater, A History of Clearwater, 8.
active members in the local Methodist church. The Crawfords made acquaintances with members of the McMullen family. The three children lived outside of the Greenwood House by that time. An abundance of nearby citrus trees along the outskirts of Clearwater provided steady employment during the fruit-harvesting season for Crawford. On 16 February 1926, the Waldrops of Alabama acquired the Greenwood House from the Crawfords. After the Crawfords sold the Greenwood House in early 1926, they apparently moved to a residence along Turner Street valued at about $5,000. There, at the age of sixty-four, Crawford worked as a fruit grower on a grove. He and wife Emma also hired a seventeen-year old Tennessee native to act as their live-in “servant,” Juanita Agee. Pallbearers at Emma’s funeral in October 1943 included E. R. Turner and Dr. Byrd McMullen. After his wife’s death, David Crawford moved to Tampa and later spent the last two years of his life at the Masonic Home in St. Petersburg. He died on 26 March 1949.8

Family ties between the Crawfords and the Waldrops merit further investigation. While available census records failed to give Emma Crawford’s maiden name, her 1943 obituary mentions a brother, H. A. Griffith of Alabama, and a sister, “Mrs. L. G. Walldrop” of Clearwater as survivors. The Crawfords had sold the Greenwood House on 16 February 1926 to Leland Gordon Waldrop and his wife, Nannie Griffith Waldrop. Thus, a cross-reference of census records and obituaries proved that David and Emma Crawford sold the house to Emma’s sister and brother-in-law. The oldest of six children born to Almus Baxter and Maturia Victoria Griffin Waldrop, L. G. Waldrop entered the world on 7 November 1873 at the family homestead in Shelby County, Alabama. His parents lived much of their lives in Jefferson County, Alabama, where his two brothers and three sisters were born. Leland married Nannie Griffith, also a native of Alabama, probably on 21 November 1899. Leland’s career with the railroads sent him and Nannie throughout the South. During the 1910 census—while David Crawford worked as a track supervisor on Leland’s home turf of Jefferson County, Alabama—Leland rented a home in Sheffield, Alabama, where he served as a railway official. By 1920, Leland and Nannie lived in Belmont Heights (Davidson County), Tennessee, and he listed his occupation as

8 Census records described in this narrative reside in building files located at Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; Ernest Dibble memo. Emma R. Crawford’s October 1943 obituary claimed she had lived
railroad superintendent. After purchasing the Greenwood House, L. G. and Nannie Waldrop still spent most of their time outside of Florida. As late as 1930, they rented a home valued at $5,950 in Nashville, where Leland continued to work as a superintendent for a railroad company. While Emma and Nannie connect the Crawford and Waldrop families as owners of the Greenwood House, further research of the similar paths taken by David and Leland in the railroad industry during the early twentieth century might also uncover heretofore unknown connections.  

The Greenwood House remained in an undeveloped area east of Clearwater until the early 1940s. Sanborn maps from October 1929 and 1949 show the structure on the east side of South Greenwood Avenue, between Chestnut (now Court) and Turner streets. Less than one block away at 423 South Greenwood sat a Church of God for African-American parishioners that changed its name to Emanuel Tabernacle by the 1940s. Steven (or Stephen) O. Griffith—nephew of sisters Emma and Nannie—lived or oversaw tenants at the Greenwood House in 1931 with his wife, Carrie M. At the time of David Crawford’s death, an obituary noted that David’s nephew, S. O. Griffith, had moved to St. Petersburg. Here again, further research of the Griffith family may reveal new connections. The only “S. O. Griffith” located in St. Petersburg at the time was a Steven Oscar Griffith, who lived with his wife “Mayme” at 1521 – 19th Avenue South. As early as 1926, this Griffith worked as a firefighter in St. Petersburg. By 1930, he became a lieutenant and Mayme worked as a waitress at the Peoples Quick Lunch restaurant on 627 Central Avenue. During that year, they lived at 1212 Highland Street North, in St. Petersburg. They remained at their Highland Street home in 1931—the same year a Stephen O. and Carrie M. Griffith supposedly occupied the Greenwood House. It is possible, though still conjecture that the Griffiths may have served as landlords for the Greenwood House while living in St. Petersburg. The Griffiths moved from Highland Street to Nineteenth Avenue South by 1933. Aside from a stint in the United States Coast

9 Ibid. Additional information on the Waldrop family came from information located on Ancestry Plus, http://awt.ancestry.com. Records supplied by the Waldrop family place the marriage of Leland and Nannie Waldrop on 21 November 1889, which would have made Leland sixteen and Nannie only twelve years of age. While “child brides” remained common in rural areas well into the late 1800s, self-reported information from census records has Leland’s age at or about twenty-six and Nannie at or about twenty-two when they exchanged vows. Thus, they probably married on 21 November 1899, with the first reported date representing a typographical error.
Guard during World War II, this S. O. Griffith rose from lieutenant, to assistant fire chief, and ultimately fire chief (during the 1950s and early 1960s) of the City of St. Petersburg. Additional genealogical research may indicate whether Stephen O. Griffith of the Crawford/Waldrop families is the same Steven O. Griffith who led the St. Petersburg Fire Department (also, was Carrie M. Griffith’s middle name or nickname “Mayme”?).

Although they did not live year-round in Clearwater at the time, the Waldrops made substantial changes to the house during the 1920s and 1930s. L. G. Waldrop added rooms to the house (the present-day sewing room, bathroom, and kitchen areas) by extending the roof along the back and one side. A “buggy shed” on the property had at one time served as a garage for carts and other vehicles. This structure may have arrived with the house circa 1910. Waldrop removed the wood shingles from the house and shed—probably during the 1930s—when he placed metal roofs on both structures. He used some of the wooden shingles to cover walls of the buggy shack.

The Waldrops rented the Greenwood House to tenants before they retired to Clearwater in 1941. For example, Bartow Z. and Mattie M. Blanton rented the home by 1934. The Blantons had two sons, Palmer A. and Percy P., and operated Blanton’s Market at 301 South Fort Harrison. They lived in the home until at least 1937. By 1939, William M. Maddox, a shipping clerk, moved into the Greenwood House. He may have wanted to live in close proximity to a Charles M. Maddox, who then occupied 506 South Greenwood. The 1941 Clearwater city directory revealed that Leland and Nannie Waldrop had finally moved into their house by that year.

The Fulopps purchased the Greenwood House from Nannie Waldrop on 8 May 1943 and held it for the next thirty-nine years. Louis and Bernice Fulopp first settled in

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12 See available issues of: R.L. Polk’s Clearwater (Pinellas County, Fla.) City Directory.
Pinellas County in 1940. A native of Czechoslovakia born on 20 June 1903, Louis had also resided at the Isle of Pines, Cuba. Handy with tools, he became a molder at the Rotary Juice Press in downtown Clearwater by 1944. Before retiring, Louis also worked on foundries for Clearwater-based Aerosonic, Inc. He married Bernice, a native of Pasadena, California, born on 23 July 1906. While Louis practiced Catholicism, Bernice joined the First United Methodist Church after they settled in the city. They shared the home with three children, Adrienne ("Dede"), Yvonne, and Robert. As a young man, Kendrick Ford, former director of Heritage Village, knew "Dede" as a friend and acquaintance.13

A recent interview with Robert Fulopp revealed details about the interior of the Greenwood House. During the school year, the three children did their homework at a table in the living room. The parents often listened to the radio in the living room; after the family purchased a television, the children had an incentive to finish their homework quickly so they could watch the tube. A telephone table sat in the far corner of the room, away from the porch and doorway. Bernice, Adrienne, and Yvonne often played the piano. As father, Louis had his own chair that "nobody would dare sit in" whenever he was at home. Other family members shared a couch perched alongside the living room window. Parents Louis and Bernice slept in the original bedroom. Bob remembers that his father often kept the window open during cool winter nights to remind himself of Czechoslovakia, forcing Bernice to cover herself with quilts to keep warm. The present kitchen area of the Greenwood House served as the daughters’ bedroom and storage area for pantry goods, while Bob slept in the small room next to the dining area and adjacent to the living room. The kitchen and bathroom occupied the far right corner of the building. The family used the kerosene stove in the kitchen to cook meals and help heat the home during cold winter evenings. Lacking a water heater, the Fulopps had to heat kettles of water in order to take warm baths.14

Bob Fulopp also described the property and the “buggy shed.” Living in a semi-rural area, the Fulopps raised chickens in their yard. Louis purchased “a couple dozen” chickens from a feed store located on Park Street each year. Young Bob’s chores

included feeding the chickens, providing them water, and collecting eggs. During his conversation, he recalled that he often grew fond of the fowl and became sick in the stomach when it came time to slaughter the chickens for food. One year, Louis brought home a small chicken that had a bad leg. Robert named the bird “Benny” and kept it as a pet. Benny followed Bob around the yard, and Bob kept her away from his father’s hatchet and the dinner table. Benny, who once laid an egg while sitting on Bob’s lap, died on a summer day when Bob began a trip to Tallahassee. Bob remembers that his mother often made shirts for him out of chicken feed sacks. He and his friends spent many afternoons playing in a bamboo thicket, until he encountered a rattlesnake. After that, he remembered exercising a great deal of caution whenever a ball landed in the bamboo. For awhile, the family owned a goat that Yvonne cared for and fed. Seven Australian pines provided shade in front of the house along Greenwood. The property also included hedges, two camphor trees, a persimmon tree, holly, a jacaranda, and other shrubs. The “buggy shed” already sat on the property when the Fulopps purchased the Greenwood House from the Waldrops. Since they had neither a buggy nor an automobile when they moved into the house, the Fulopps originally stored their bicycles and other possessions in this shed. When a neighboring parcel changed hands, surveyors learned that the garage crossed over the Fulopp’s property line, leading the family to demolish the buggy shed.  

A Rehabilitative Move

Louis and Bernice Fulopp decided to sell their home along South Greenwood in 1982. Then in their late seventies, they may have wanted to move to a quieter residential setting. Since at least 1973, the property north of their home—at the southeast corner of Greenwood and Court Street—had operated as a convenience store (most of that time as a 7-Eleven). Address directories from the early 1990s placed Louis Fulopp at 1546 Simmons Drive, in the Belleair Park Estates subdivision one block west of Lake Drive, between Nursery and Belleair roads. Records of the Pinellas County Property Appraiser’s office available electronically indicate that their vintage 1968 home was purchased for $60,000 in November 1981. With their son living in Georgia and daughters nearby, the

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14 Summary transcript of interview with Bob Fulopp.
15 Ibid.
Fulopps decided to sell the Greenwood House in early 1982 to Rehabilitative Associates, Inc., and Clearwater Limb and Brace. During discussions with Rehabilitative Associates, Louis Fulopp told Dr. Donna J. Rodriguez—that company’s executive director—about the house’s earlier history. Fulopp mentioned to Rodriguez that “Mrs. Hart of Hart Cleaners” was born in the Greenwood House. As the Fulopps settled into their new home on Simmons Drive, leadership at Rehabilitative Associates contacted Heritage Village about the possibility of moving the structure. Meanwhile, the Fulopps enjoyed their final years of their sixty-five year marriage at their home on Simmons Drive. Bernice passed away on 21 March 1997, and Louis joined her in eternal rest on 7 February 1998.16

The owners of Rehabilitative Associations, Inc., and Clearwater Limb and Brace donated the Greenwood House to Heritage Village in early 1982. These entities also paid the moving expenses as part of a tax write-off. Due to the presence of other structures on the western and southern boundaries of Heritage Village, movers had to bring the Greenwood House onto the property along Walsingham Road behind the site of the Safford Pavilion, a structure that arrived in pieces from Tarpon Springs in May 1982. Members of the Pinellas County Historical Commission discussed possible uses for the Greenwood House at their 19 May 1982 meeting. Director Kendrick Ford told commissioners that plans called for the Pinellas County Historical Society (PCHS) to use the structure for storage and office space after restoration, and that the building may also offer a venue for smaller meetings in order to take “a little pressure off the [Safety Harbor] church.” Ford added that the Historical Society had already discussed the possibility of refurbishing the back room as a kitchen for events at the park. By November 1982, administrators at the Pinellas County Vocational Technical Institute approved a plan to allow students to assist with the restoration. The Historical Society covered the cost of materials required during this project, estimated at $7,000-8,000. This total included funds for appliances and a central air conditioning system. While workers replaced the tin roof with wooden shingles similar in form to the original rooftop, PCHS leaders formed a “Greenwood House Committee” in early 1983 that selected items and

furnishings for the restored structure. Park employees cut out the opening between the dining room and the kitchen area. The walls of the original three rooms required little work, though vocational students and other workers had to replace some of the tongue and groove planking of the floors. Society officers established their headquarters in the building after workers completed the rehabilitation.\(^\text{17}\)

Harris School Replica: A Brief Introduction

History of Site before Actual Structure was Built

- Original school built in eastern Lealman community at 4600 Haines Road.
- In the early 1900s, the Lealman area had few settlers and remained decidedly rural in character.
- Earlier schools in Lealman area (but not on the same site) included the “Hammock” School (opened 1880), Lealman School Number One (built 1898), and Lealman School Number Two (replaced the 1898 structure in 1908).

Construction Information for Original Structure’s Namesake

- Named in honor of William Beasley “Uncle Bill” Harris, who served as a school trustee for fourteen years and as a county commissioner for fourteen years.
- Harris’s maternal grandfather was Elza B. Lealman, a Georgia native and early settler along the Pinellas peninsula who is the namesake of the unincorporated Lealman communities.
- In November 1901, Harris married Mary Ellen “Mamie” McMullen, eldest of John James McMullen’s ten children.
- William and Mary Ellen (Eleanor) Harris had six children who endured long horse-and-buggy journeys to distant schools.
- Harris cultivated citrus and helped to develop roads and internal improvements in the Lealman area.
- Daughter Myrtle Elsie Harris later served as a teacher and principal at Lealman Avenue Elementary during the early 1930s (a different school).
- “Uncle Bill” died on the evening of Halloween 1940. Colleagues on the county commission promptly expressed their grief at his passing.

History of Use

- Harris recruited volunteer labor and donated land and money for the school.
- Harris School fell under Special School Tax District Seven, the Lealman district.
- Classes began at the school in 1912 and continued through 1923.
- Replica at Heritage Village resembles building as it was originally constructed.
- By late 1910s, school officials modified the structure to include indoor flush toilets, a workroom, and a larger blackboard.
- Overcrowding of school by early 1920s (as enrollment approached forty students) led school officials to replace this structure and construct new buildings on the Harris campus.

Significant Events/Activities at the Structure and in the Surrounding Community

- The Harris School served children of remote areas in eastern Lealman.
- By 1916—as a way of teaching agricultural skills to students in rural schools—Superintendent Dixie M. Hollins launched a “Pig Club” in many schools. Students in this club learned how to cultivate crops and raise pigs during summer months and lulls in the citrus growing and tourist seasons. Frank Maurice Harris, one of “Uncle Bill” Harris’s sons, participated in the Pig Club.
Enrollment at school increased as infrastructure improvements and the “good roads movement” brought more residents into eastern Lealman.

Construction on a replacement building occurred as the 1912 structure experienced overcrowding. During the 1924-1925 academic year, enrollment in the “new” Harris School soared to over 100 pupils.

Creation of the Replica at Heritage Village

As early as May 1980, park management planned to construct or (preferably) relocate a schoolhouse to Heritage Village.

An examination of former school buildings in Ozona, Dunedin, and elsewhere failed to locate an appropriate (and ready-to-move) structure. Park leaders looked at least as far as Walton County, Florida, for a suitable structure.

Planned as a partnership project between Heritage Village, the Board of County Commissioners, and the Pinellas County School Board.

Don Williams’s architectural firm, students at the Vocational-Technical Education Center, and other partners assisted with the supplies and labor for construction of the replica.

Constructed in 1987 to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of Pinellas County’s independence and the county school system.

Book closet in Harris School replica came from old Largo High School building, once located on the present site of the Pinellas County Schools administrative offices.
Harris School

Overview

The Harris School replica at Heritage Village, constructed in 1987, commemorates the seventy-fifth anniversary of Pinellas County’s independence and the beginnings of the Pinellas County school system. This structure also recognizes the creative labors of William Beasley “Uncle Bill” Harris, a longtime resident of the Pinellas peninsula who served fourteen years as a school trustee and fourteen years as a county commissioner. Through a partnership between the school board and the Pinellas County Board of Commissioners, county officials commissioned Williams Architects Chartered Ltd. to draw plans to recreate the one-room schoolhouse originally located at 4600 Haines Road.

The first Harris School served the Lealman community from 1912 until 1923. With volunteer labor and materials donated from the community, Harris oversaw construction of this one-room boarded structure. As one of its earliest official duties, the newly-formed Pinellas County Board of Public Instruction provided seats and desks for the structure. By the early 1920s, enrollment rose from fifteen students to nearly forty. During its eleven years of service, school officials also redesigned the structure with an addition near the portico that provided indoor water flush toilets, a workroom, and more space for a larger blackboard. A nearby windmill sat to the rear of the school building, along the west side of Haines Road. Despite these improvements, the school’s physical plant could not accommodate the growing number of school-age children who lived in the area as the land boom brought new settlers to Pinellas County. Classes came to an end at the original Harris School in 1923. The following year, a new Harris School—with space for six teachers—opened on the site.¹

Pioneer Settlers and Education in the Lealman Area

The unincorporated Lealman community derives its name from Elza (Elsey) Beazley Lealman. Natives of Georgia, Lealman and his wife, Elenor, settled in Hamilton

¹ Pinellas County, Board of Public Instruction, The Golden Anniversary of Pinellas Schools, Celebrating 50 Years of Educational Progress: Superintendent’s Semi-centennial Report, 1912-1962 (St. Petersburg: Modern Printing & Publishing, 1962), 14, 49; Senior Voice Newspaper, January 1987. The seats and desks in the Harris School replica are not from the original structure.
County by the late 1840s as farmers. Sarah, their daughter, was born in northern Florida about 1849, probably on the farmstead. Records indicate that Lealman purchased land in Florida as early as 1 April 1859, when he acquired a 40.07 acre tract from the Newnansville land office in Alachua County. Sarah Lealman later married James W. Harris, who was also a native of northern Florida. In 1873, James and Sarah Harris had a son, William, while living in Suwannee County. A few years later, they moved to the Pinellas peninsula, where they homesteaded on a parcel about 5½ miles north of present-day downtown St. Petersburg. Thus, W. B. Harris—whose patronage of the Harris School benefited early settlers in Lealman—can claim that community’s namesake as his maternal grandfather.²

Although parts of Haines Road pass through St. Petersburg and the boundary between the city and unincorporated county appears transparent today, early settlers in the Lealman area truly lived in a remote, rural setting. Before the “good roads movement” reached the Pinellas peninsula in the late 1910s and early 1920s, many areas of unincorporated Lealman seemed far removed from the new city of St. Petersburg. A primitive structure known as the “Hammock” School opened in 1880 as the earliest school building in the Lealman area. The school operated out of a house once owned by a man named Hammock. Students sat on split-log benches added to the simple home, where Mary Marston earned $15 per month plus boarding expenses to offer a three-month term of classes.³

Lealman School Number One, constructed in 1898, marked the first formal schoolhouse in the Lealman area. J. C. Williams, a St. Petersburg entrepreneur and son of “General” John Constantine Williams, donated an acre of land for the school site with the stipulation that Lealman residents would receive support from Hillsborough County to construct the one-room frame schoolhouse. Kate Blanton served as the first teacher. For

² United States Census Office, *Population Schedules of the Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Florida* (Washington: National Archives, 1964). Digital images from many census records are also available through genealogical databases, such as http://www.ancestry.com. W. L. Straub, *History of Pinellas County, Florida* (St. Augustine: The Record Co., 1929), 317; *St. Petersburg Times*, 31 October 1940; *Clearwater Sun*, 31 October 1940. According to obituaries appearing in the *Clearwater Sun* and the *St. Petersburg Times*, W. B. Harris first came to the Pinellas peninsula in 1878 when five years of age. Straub’s *History of Pinellas County*, however, claims that Harris first arrived in 1876, when three years of age.

³ *Golden Anniversary of Pinellas Schools*, 10.
the next ten years, this small structure built near the present-day intersection of 42nd Avenue and 46th Street North served the students of the Lealman frontier. By 1908, community members auctioned this original structure and secured $840 from the school district trustees for a new building. Lealman residents provided the labor, and classes soon began at Lealman School Number Two, located on the same site as the recently sold 1898 building. This two-room building had a removable partition to separate the pupils. Students in the front room enjoyed factory made desks and seats, while students in the other room used the older hand-made furniture from the 1898 school. In 1917, five years after Pinellas County’s independence, authorities approved the construction of a stucco building known as Lealman-Clearview School. After the October 1921 hurricane destroyed the bridge to Seminole near Long Bayou, enrollment at Lealman-Clearview grew. By 1922, the school employed Gladys Walsingham as an “assistant teacher” to work with the new students. To accommodate continued growth in the unincorporated area, the school board purchased a ten-acre parcel for $40,000 in December 1925 near present-day 41st Avenue and 35th Street North that became the site of Lealman Junior High (now Lealman Intermediate). Classes began at the junior high in September 1927. By 1931, a newly-constructed Clearview Avenue Elementary replaced the 1917 stucco structure as enrollment continued to increase.4

The Harris Family and the 1912 Schoolhouse

W. B. Harris married into a Pinellas pioneer family when he exchanged vows with Mary Ellen (or Eleanor) “Mamie” McMullen on 11 November 1901 in a ceremony held in the Largo area. Mary McMullen, born in Largo on 27 May 1881, was the eldest of ten children born to John James McMullen (born on the McMullen homestead near Coachman on 15 October 1853) and Joseph Drayton “Jo” Ramage McMullen (born in Ocala on 11 November 1857). Shortly after their wedding, William and Mary Harris established a family at their home in the Lealman area. They celebrated the arrival of six children: Frank Maurice (the eldest, born in 1902), Edna Gertrude, Vera (Verne) Claire, Myrtle Elsie, and twins Orville S. and William August. By the end of the first decade of

the 1900s, either Harris or his wife had to endure the daily journey by horse and buggy to Lealman School Number Two so that their eldest children could attend classes. With his growing business interests in St. Petersburg, Harris soon grew tired of the trek along unimproved roads and paths to the distant school. Hoping to see his children gain an education closer to home, Harris took matters into his own hands, recruited volunteer labor, and donated land and money for the construction of a one-room schoolhouse for children who lived on the outskirts of St. Petersburg.5

Classes at Harris School began in 1912, the same year that the Pinellas peninsula gained its independence from Hillsborough County. Fifteen pupils—including Harris’s children—attended the first term of classes taught by Rosa Kilgore. During its early years, the school lacked indoor plumbing, water, or toilet facilities; workrooms or storage areas; and an adequate blackboard. Indeed, the replica at Heritage Village portrays the structure as originally constructed, without subsequent improvements. While county coffers provided a minimum foundation for schools, local areas and municipalities established special school tax districts as a way to supplement county expenditures. In his January 1916 report that reviewed the first four years of the Pinellas school system, Superintendent Dixie M. Hollins fondly described the “Will Harris” School in Special School Tax District Seven—the Lealman district—as a “modern one-room building, erected after a model exhibited at the St. Louis exposition.” By early 1916, both Harris School and Lealman School Number Two had enclosed fences, improved schoolyards, and small library collections. Both operated for eight-month terms and each had graduated students from the eighth grade during the 1914-1915 academic year.6

While Superintendent Dixie Hollins touted the progress of Pinellas schools since independence from Hillsborough, many of the earlier educational traditions remained. Despite the growth of St. Petersburg, Clearwater, Tarpon Springs, and other municipalities along the peninsula, the county’s character remained decidedly rural and agricultural. Educators, realizing that many citrus and tourist-related jobs disappeared

6 Golden Anniversary of Pinellas Schools, 14; Largo Sentinel, 13 January 1916.
during the summer months, sought a solution to keep boys and young men from becoming too idle as the school year came to an end. Hollins had a solution: After talking with several community leaders, he approached the school board with a plan to organize a Pig Club for boys throughout the county. According to Hollins’s plan, bankers and members of the business community would advance funds to allow the school district to buy a number of pigs and give them to boys throughout the county.\(^7\) Hollins continued:

[Each participant] will agree to repay, when he disposes of his hog, the cost of the pig with the usual rate of interest on the money, and will agree to raise in the aggregate one-half acre in various crops with which to raise and fatten the pig and to report his success at given times.\(^8\)

The board strongly endorsed his plan, and in early 1916 Hollins began to develop a system of prizes for the boys who participated. By May 1916, Hollins’s “Pinellas County Pig Club” saw fifty young men engaged in a “fever heat” competition as they selected their hogs, planted their crops, and tended to the animals. A newspaper report claimed that one boy traveled six miles from his home to town to retrieve his pig, which he carried back under his arm. Another boy met Hollins at a train depot to get his pig; this lad brought the pig home on his wheelbarrow. Children of some pioneer families—including Stansel Taylor of Largo and Sumner Lowe of Anona—became charter members of the Pig Club. Frank Maurice Harris, son of W. B. Harris, also joined the inaugural class of this porcine project. Indeed, the younger Harris may have received guidance from his father, a man who regularly traveled by horse through central Pinellas to tend to his hog traps. Jay B. Starkey, Sr., occasionally accompanied “Uncle Bill” on these journeys.\(^9\)

Enrollment increased in the Lealman school sub-district as infrastructure improved and families came to the area to take advantage of the land boom. On 5 October 1915, Pinellas County commissioners approved a resolution to issue $715,000 in bonds to construct a network of hard-surface brick roads. This plan called for substantial investments to improve transportation and connectivity in the area.

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\(^7\) *Largo Sentinel*, 13 January 1916.
\(^8\) Ibid.
improvements to Haines Road and other arteries that connected the Lealman area with St. Petersburg, Pinellas Park, Seminole, and other communities. In November 1916 rankings of attendance and tardiness among the county’s twenty-six schools for white children, Harris ranked sixteenth in standing based upon tardiness and last based upon attendance (with an average attendance of 83.6% of pupils, compared with Pinellas Park’s top rate of 99.6%). While agricultural duties may have provided some children in the Lealman area an excuse to play hooky, freeholders in the Lealman district knew that growth in enrollments stretched resources at the two area schools. By the fall of 1917, thirty-one students attended “Will Harris” schoolhouse and thirty-eight went to Lealman School Number Two. By early 1918, members of the Lealman sub-district, including trustee W. H. Harris, voted twelve-to-one to approve $6,500 in bonds for two projects: $2,000 to remodel Harris School and $4,500 to replace the 1908 School Number Two with a new structure (Lealman-Clearview School). The district then modified the original frame building at Harris School by adding indoor plumbing and other amenities to accommodate its growing student body. Photographs of the original Harris School indicate the presence of an addition near the stairs and portico entryway by 1919.10

A New Building Replaces the 1912 Structure

Despite the 1918 improvements to the original Harris School, the land boom sealed the fate of this structure. Families continued to move into new subdivisions along St. Petersburg’s border with unincorporated Lealman. While between thirty-four and thirty-eight students crowded into this wooden structure for classes each term between the 1919-1920 and 1922-1923 school sessions, the growing population required a larger facility. Estelle Chapman, acting as both principal and teacher, experienced “school overcrowding” as she tried to instruct and supervise nearly forty children in cramped quarters. By 1923, construction began on a new Harris School. When classes moved from the 1912 structure to the new building with three classrooms in 1924, enrollment

10 Largo Sentinel, 4 November 1915, 9 November 1916, 1 November 1917, 21 February 1918. For photographs of the original Harris School before and after renovation, see: Golden Anniversary of Pinellas Schools, 14.
increased to seventy-one students. By the 1924-1925 school year, enrollment again soared to 105 pupils.\(^\text{11}\)

Like its 1912 predecessor, the new structure became an educational cornerstone for the residents of eastern Lealman. In 1926, school officials constructed a cafetorium adjacent to the right of the 1924 building as a place for lunches, assemblies, and programs at the school. By early 1927, concerned parents had formed a Parent Teachers Association (P.T.A.) at Harris School that raised funds to open and equip the cafeteria, acquire a telephone for the school, purchase reference books, and establish a small circulating collection of books for the library. For a brief period during the Depression, authorities closed Harris School and sent children to 54th Avenue Elementary, a boom-era school opened in January 1928 on a site acquired from the O’Berry Grove. When state officials hoped to economize during this period by permanently closing Harris School, its P.T.A. members mobilized and a petition drive began to not only keep the school open, but also to add more classrooms to Harris School. Indeed, by the spring of 1933, P.T.A. members held “penny marches” at the end of each monthly meeting and occasional “spoon shower” pot luck gathering to raise funds and lobby for the school. In an interesting spin on rewarding school achievement, the 1933 Easter egg hunt featured prizes for students who found both the largest number and the least number of eggs.\(^\text{12}\)

The Harris Family and the Development of Pinellas County

Members of the Harris family continued to participate in the political and economic development of Pinellas County long after the 1924 structure replaced the original namesake school. In earlier years, “Uncle Bill” Harris worked as a pioneer farmer who cultivated fruit (especially oranges) and also helped to develop roads in the Lealman region. He served as a school trustee for fourteen years and later, for fourteen years, as District 1 Commissioner for Pinellas County. A member of the Democratic Party, Harris built a strong following in St. Petersburg. For example, during June 1926 nominations for the County Commission, Harris defeated Ernest Davis by a margin of

\(^{11}\) Golden Anniversary of Pinellas Schools, 49; United States Works Progress Administration, Pinellas County Newspaper Index : W.P.A. Project No. 2865, 1938-1939 (Pinellas County, Fla.: Board of County Commissioners, 1939), vol. 4, 112.

\(^{12}\) Golden Anniversary of Pinellas Schools, 49, 57; St. Petersburg Times, 5 February 1927, 18 April 1933.
388 to 136 votes. During the boom era, he became a partner in the Largo real estate firm of Harris and McMullen. He also held posts as a member of the Elks and as a director of First Security Bank in St. Petersburg. Meanwhile, after graduating from St. Petersburg High School, daughter Myrtle Elsie Harris studied music at the Florida State College for Women (now Florida State University) in Tallahassee. She returned to Pinellas County as an educator who, continuing the commitment to education in the Lealman area shown by her father, taught and served as a principal at Lealman Avenue Elementary from 1930 to 1936. In July 1935, she married C. O. (Clowny Oswald) Lowe, the son of landowner and banker Clowney Edgar Lowe.13

Newspapers reported the passing of “Uncle Bill” Harris on the morning of Halloween, 1940. On the evening of 30 October, feeling in great health after a recent trip to North Carolina, he experienced “a slight attack of indigestion.” The pain intensified and at 10:00 p.m., he dropped dead at the entrance to the bedroom after suffering a heart attack. His death brought grief to county commissioners and many residents of Lealman who appreciated his “quiet, soft-spoken, and publicity-shunning” demeanor. Commission Chair W. J. Christie lamented the loss of his colleague, noting that Harris “was conscientious and sincere in his duties. . . . There was only one Bill Harris and I don’t believe there could ever be anyone who could replace him.”14

Controversy later erupted as members of the Pinellas County school board considered closing Harris School in the early 1973. Members of the Harris family had donated the original parcel for the 1912 school with the condition that school officials maintain this site for educational purposes. Any other use invalidated the original deed of gift and would allow the Harris heirs to reclaim the title. In 1931, an adjoining piece of land became part of the Harris School campus when Albert Hoxie deeded part of his holdings to the school system at the time of his death. Similar to Harris, Hoxie provided his parcel with the condition that officials “maintain a building . . . for school purposes.” Hoxie’s deed further restricted the site for use by “white pupils only.” In February 1973, members of the Pinellas County School Board voted to close the 1924 Harris School and

13 Genealogical information the C. O. Lowe family derived from information available through Ancestry World Tree, at http://awt.ancestry.com. Clearwater Sun, 31 October 1940; St. Petersburg Times, 31 October 1940, 8 January 2000; Tampa Morning Tribune, 10 June 1926; Straub, History of Pinellas County, 317; Costrini, Tradition of Excellence, 133.
transport its students to either Lealman or 54th Avenue elementary schools. Louise H. Kaleel, Hoxie’s granddaughter, threatened litigation if the board followed through with its plans to close the school. She had no interest in enforcing the Jim Crow provision of the deed, but hoped her efforts would continue the educational legacy of the Harris School. She could trust in the counsel of her husband, prominent St. Petersburg attorney William C. Kaleel, Sr., to assist her in this endeavor. School administrators revisited their decision, and Harris School remained open.15

**Commemorating Harris’s Legacy and Early Education in Pinellas County**

The Pinellas County Historical Commission discussed plans for a one-room schoolhouse at Heritage Village long before construction began on the Harris School replica. Meeting minutes indicate that as early as 21 May 1980, Director Kendrick Ford told the Historical Commission that the proposed 1980-1981 budget included funding requests for three major improvements, including $25,000 to relocate and restore a schoolhouse. Under new business during its 11 June 1980 meeting, the Historical Commission listed the acquisition of a school building as the highest priority at the park, ranking above twenty other suggestions. By February 1981, Ford had searched for a suitable schoolhouse, but had little success. Structures in Ozona and Dunedin were “not very satisfactory.” Ford later had to drop plans for the schoolhouse due to budgetary reductions in the 1981-1982 fiscal year. Four years would pass before funding resources permitted the Commission to revisit this proposal.16

The Pinellas County School Board and the County Commission planned many events to celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the peninsula’s sovereignty in 1987. The school district hired Patricia Perez Costrini to oversee its commemorative efforts. Costrini contacted Ford in 1985 to mention the district’s interest in either moving an existing school building to Heritage Village or constructing a replica. By this time, Ford had concluded that no suitably-sized structure (such as a one-room schoolhouse) existed

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14 *Clearwater Sun*, 31 October 1940; *St. Petersburg Times*, 31 October 1940.
15 *Golden Anniversary of Pinellas Schools*, 49. During this same meeting, members of the Pinellas County School Board decided to close another longstanding school in southern Pinellas County, Roser Park Elementary School. *St. Petersburg Times*, 6 February 1973.
in Pinellas County and had even started to look as far away as Walton County for a building. While members of the Historical Commission agreed to assist Ford in his search for an appropriate, existing structure, Ford and the Commission had to work on a tight deadline: If they failed to locate a structure by February 1986, they would have to move forward with plans for a replica. By May 1986, Ford and Commission members had to select a site for the structure. They considered two locations: one close to the Safety Harbor church and the other adjacent to the Lowe Barn. After examining drainage patterns at these sites, they selected a location north of the Lowe Barn, though they modified their plans in September by aligning the school between the Lowe Barn and the museum building to place it on higher—and drier—ground. The construction team included Bob Fritz of Don Williams’s architectural firm and John Buckles of the Vocational-Technical Education Center. Roesch Housemovers, Inc., built the foundation at no charge and Weiss Lumber Company donated some of the wood used for the replica. Groundbreaking ceremonies for the Harris School replica took place on 25 October 1986, during the Pinellas County Historical Society’s annual Country Jubilee. During late 1986 and early 1987, students in the vocational program provided much of the labor to build the structure.¹⁷

This wood-frame vernacular replica, opened in 1987, portrays the original Harris School as it might have appeared during the period from 1912 to 1918. Many relics adorn the schoolhouse, none of which are originally from the Harris School. These include pictures of President William Howard Taft and President George Washington, an American flag from the period, inkwell desks, movable chalkboards, slates and chalk, and McGuffey’s Eclectic Readers and spellers. Desks came from a variety of sources, including Tom Brown (a member of the Campbell family) and an antique shop in Dillard, Georgia. One chalkboard was purchased, the other donated. The book closet came from the old Largo High School, now the site of the school district’s administration building.¹⁸ In front of the school an old bell waits to be rung by the teacher to call pupils into the classroom.

The Harris School replica serves as an invaluable educational resource for the community. Teachers who bring classes to this structure may devise their own lesson plans or may acquire some from the Heritage Village pre-visit information packets. Though Pinellas County no longer resembles the agrarian landscape known by “Uncle Bill” Harris, this replica of his namesake school allows students and teachers to experience a rugged structure similar to many found in the pine scrub of early twentieth century Florida.

18 Interview of Ken Ford, former director of Heritage Village, by Stephanie Ferrell and Jim Schnur, 3 May 2003, Heritage Village, Largo.
Heritage Mercantile: A Brief Introduction

**History of Site before Structure was Built**
- Located along southern boundary of original (August 1888) town plat of St. Petersburg.
- Land once owned by “General” John Constantine Williams, Sr.
- Part of “Williams Grove” on original town plat.
- Land was subdivided and sold in parcels after Williams’s death in 1892.
- Former Williams House (built in 1891) later became Manhattan Hotel, a nearby source of customers for the business. The Williams House presently resides on the campus of the University of South Florida St. Petersburg.
- Improvements to nearby Bayboro Harbor and Salt Creek brought more settlers, as did the creation of Charles Roser’s subdivision, Roser Park.

**Construction Information**
- Built in 1915 at the southeast corner of Sixth Avenue South and Fifth Street in St. Petersburg.
- One-story wood frame vernacular building.
- Two addresses associated with structure: 468 Sixth Avenue South (smaller area), 470 Sixth Avenue South (larger area).

**History of Use**
- Larger area was known as H.C. Smith Grocery and South Side Grocery (through mid-1930s), Harrod’s Bake Shop and Deli, Herman Boehm Grocery, Sixth Avenue Food Shop (or Meat Market, though mid and late 1940s), and Bill’s Grocery (through 1955).
- Smaller area was a butcher store and a residence for the many proprietors of the larger store through the mid-1950s.
- City directories indicate both areas as ‘vacant’ during much of the period between 1956 and the mid-1980s, with occasional mention of seasonal residents or other uses (including an Amway Products wholesale outlet in 1974). This is misleading, however, because the Preston family used the larger area for storage and the smaller area as a rental space for seasonal residents during much of this time.

**Significant Events/Activities at the Structure and in the Surrounding Community**
- Well-positioned during early years to serve residents and tourists in the areas just south of downtown St. Petersburg.
- Development of Fourth Street corridor (especially after opening of Gandy Bridge and beginning of the Bee Line Ferry) placed the store in a visible, high traffic area through the 1940s.
- Nearby competition, including an A&P store at 824 Fourth Street South, and the emerging Webb’s City shopping complex, steered traffic away from older, smaller merchant stores by the late 1940s and early 1950s.
- Suburbanization and new transportation corridors (notably the shifting of US 19 to 34th Street in St. Petersburg) opened up new communities as residents and visitors moved to other locations.
By 1970s and 1980s, the neighborhoods surrounding Mound Park, Bayboro, and Roser Park suffered loss of longtime residents and problems associated with short-term rentals and transients.

The University of South Florida St. Petersburg (Bayboro Campus), established in 1965 along Bayboro Harbor, expanded during early 1980s, but still needed additional space.

By mid-1980s, city officials in St. Petersburg started to acquire parcels for the expansion of USF St. Petersburg. The Preston family, owners of the mercantile and adjacent properties since the 1930s, sold the store and land to the city.

Moving of the Structure to Heritage Village


Hexagonal blocks used for floor resembled those frequently found on St. Petersburg sidewalks and in some similar buildings from the period.

Building restored to resemble a 1920s-era grocery, garage, barber shop, and post office through the efforts of park staff and associated groups (including Pin-Mar).
Heritage Mercantile Store

Overview

Built in 1915, the mercantile store originally faced north at the southeast corner of Sixth Avenue South and Fifth Street in St. Petersburg. This one-story wood frame vernacular building with a flat roof and parapet front had many proprietors and occupants during its four decades as a grocery store between 1915 and the mid-1950s. On some occasions, the store’s smaller area served as a separate business, such as a butcher shop. At other times, the operators of the grocery lived in the smaller space; by 1955, seasonal residents rented this area while the larger space served as storage for the property’s owners. In an era before air-conditioned shopping centers and supermarkets, mercantile stores provided groceries and other necessities to people in nearby neighborhoods. This store opened for business at a time when the Bayboro district, the Mound Park neighborhood, and nearby Roser Park enjoyed prosperity as new areas of development.

Though commonly known as H. C. Smith’s grocery during the 1910s and 1920s, the merchants in this building operated under other names at different times. City directories reveal that merchants also sold commodities in the building under the names South Side Grocery, Sixth Avenue Food Shop, and Bill’s Grocery. The Preston family purchased this structure in 1935 and owned it for over fifty years. The building’s use as a grocery came to an end by the mid-1950s, possibly due to the presence of larger stores nearby (especially Webb’s City), post-war trends of suburbanization, and changes in consumer shopping patterns as customers preferred chain supermarkets over smaller merchants. The city’s plans in the mid-1980s to acquire land for the expansion of the nearby University of South Florida St. Petersburg campus jeopardized the building’s existence. After discussions between owner Richard Preston, city officials, and the leadership at Heritage Village, Roesch Housemovers transported this structure to Heritage Village in early 1988. Once renovated, the former H. C. Smith’s became known as Heritage Mercantile.
Development of the Surrounding Neighborhoods

This store once sat upon land near the southern boundary of the original town plat of St. Petersburg. Completed in August 1888, this plat described lands approximately from Fifth Avenue North to Seventh Avenue South, and from Beach Drive (then actually along the bay) west towards Reservoir Lake (now Mirror Lake) and south of the Orange Belt Railway towards Twelfth Street. Much of the section south of present-day Fourth Avenue South to about Seventh Avenue and west of Fourth Street appeared on the first plat as part of “Williams Grove.” This land belonged to “General” John Constantine Williams, Sr., and wife Sarah. The elder Williams, considered “the father of St. Petersburg” by many early residents, first arrived in the area in 1875 and purchased much of the land appearing in this original plat. In 1890-1891, Williams constructed a large Queen Anne mansion on the northern area of his grove that, according to historian Raymond Arsenault, “gave St. Petersburg its first touch of Victorian decadence.” The efforts of Williams and Peter Demens to bring the Orange Belt Railway to southern Pinellas had put this small settlement of St. Petersburg on the map.¹

During the city’s early years, most of the development took place north and northeast of the “Williams Grove” area. The village’s population soared from 273 in 1890 to 1,575 in 1900. By 1920, as the land boom began to explode on the Pinellas peninsula, over 14,000 residents lived in St. Petersburg. Early hotels such as the Hotel Detroit and the Manhattan Hotel accommodated a growing number of seasonal visitors. The three-story Manhattan Hotel, constructed in 1905, actually existed as an addition to the original Williams House. This structure, less than two blocks from the site of the mercantile store, provided a regular stream of customers who would have enjoyed the convenience of visiting the nearby market after it opened in 1915. The land later occupied by Heritage Mercantile appeared in the Hillsborough County plat books by 30 June 1905. Records denote the site as block seven, north 1000 feet of Lot Nine,

¹ Raymond O. Arsenault, *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream, 1888-1950* (Norfolk, Va.: Donning, 1988), 59-60, 70. The University of South Florida St. Petersburg received a special category historic preservation grant that allowed that institution to move the John C. Williams House from the 400 block of 5th Avenue South to its present location along Second Street South in March 1995. Later additions to the structure, including the wooden, three-story Manhattan Hotel room buildings attached to the Williams House in 1905, could not be saved and were demolished in the spring of 1995.
Benjamin’s Fourth Addition to Mound Park Addition. An indenture filed on 29 January 1913 by E. Frazier and Kate M. Frazier covers this mercantile site.\(^2\)

Soon after the Manhattan Hotel opened, developers started to envision subdivisions at nearby Bayboro Harbor and Salt Creek. The War Department had given permission to dredge a channel at St. Petersburg by April 1906, though federal engineering officials rejected subsequent plans for a commercial harbor in 1907. Upset by this decision, city leaders lobbied for a deepwater port and Governor Napoleon Bonaparte Broward supported their efforts by May 1908. Some dredge-and-fill operations around the harbor began by 1910, the same year the Bayboro Investment Company regularly advertised lots for sale in the *St. Petersburg Times*. Predicting a busy tourist season in late 1910, the Trolley Company even secured a lease with the Bayboro Investment Company in October 1910 to erect “several scores of tents, at once, to care for the overflow from the hotels and boardinghouses.” With a large dining room planned at the site, this tent city would also include “a complete sewerage system, water, and lights.” Emphasizing its cleanliness, Trolley officials noted that “no persons having any kind of disease will be permitted to secure homes there.” Officials thus considered the Bayboro tent city a better alternative than turning away the overflow of seasonal visitors. By 1913, extensive dredging and channeling of Bayboro Harbor and Salt Creek occurred. This flurry of commercial and tourist activity certainly would benefit nearby businesses, such as the mercantile store.\(^3\)

**A Grocery and Mercantile Store on a Busy Corner**

The store presently known as Heritage Mercantile opened for business at an opportune time. Sitting on the southeast corner of Sixth Avenue South and Fifth Street, this 1915 structure served the new and booming subdivisions in the area. Charles M. Roser had launched Roser Park in the summer of 1913, with its brick streets and “every other city convenience” just south of the city limits along Booker Creek. Within a few

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\(^2\) Research by Ernie Dibble, located in the Heritage Village Library and Archives, includes ownership history of the parcel once occupied by Heritage Mercantile.

\(^3\) *St. Petersburg Times*, 27 September 1910, 7 October 1910; For more information about early activities at Bayboro Harbor, please consult: *Pinellas County Newspaper Index: WPA Project*. (Clearwater: Pinellas County Board of Public Commissioners, 1939).
years, Roser Park—later incorporated into the city—had nearly sixty new and fancy homes located just a short stroll away from the grocery store. The opening of Mound Park Hospital in the early 1920s and the continued construction of homes and small businesses in the Bayboro area encouraged commercial activities in the district. The 1923 Sanborn fire insurance map reveals many residential dwellings in close proximity to the store. Improvements to the regional transportation infrastructure certainly helped business. Traffic started to use the Gandy Bridge and its associated causeways that connected St. Petersburg to Tampa in November 1924. In addition, the Bee Line Ferry’s regularly scheduled service beginning in February 1926 offered motorists a quicker route between the southern tip of the Pinellas peninsula and Manatee County for the next twenty-eight years until replaced by the first Sunshine Skyway bridge in 1954. Thus, by the mid-1920s, the Fourth Street corridor became an important north-south artery through the Sunshine City. With its location one block west of Fourth Street, this store probably received more than its fair share of business.  

The mercantile store actually had two mailing addresses, and at times different proprietors used the separate parts of the store. The smaller room recreated as a barber shop, post office, and telephone exchange carried the address of 468 Sixth Avenue South. The grocery and garage area appeared in city directories as 470 Sixth Avenue South. During the mid-1920s and early 1930s, Edward Fisher operated a butcher shop and meat market out of the smaller store. Directories from the time refer to the occupant as “Edward Fisher, Meats.” By 1931, Edward and his wife, Maude Fisher, lived at 1304 Fourth Avenue North in St. Petersburg. By 1918, Henry C. Smith established a grocery store in the larger portion of the building. In 1926, a grocer named Jos. Q. Watson and wife, Emma L., took control of the grocery; they may have lived in the store for awhile. By the end of the decade, the Watsons changed the name of the store to South Side Grocery and lived in a separate dwelling. By 1929, Henry C. Smith reacquired his interest in the property and changed the store’s name back to H. C. Smith’s. While operating the store, Henry and Bertha Smith lived at 1904 Seminole Boulevard South, in

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St. Petersburg. By 1934-1935, Alma Harrod established Harrod’s Bake Shop and Deli in the larger portion of the building.⁵

Charles E. Preston purchased the building in 1935 for $3,000, a substantial price at the height of the Great Depression. He delivered a $1,000 down payment to State Adjustment Company of St. Petersburg on January 26 and closed on the property by February 5. Shortly after Preston acquired the property, the larger store became a delicatessen known as the Sixth Avenue Food Shop (or Herman F. Boehm, Grocer) and the smaller room served as an apartment for the store and delicatessen manager. During some of this time, Charles Preston used the rear area of the building as storage for his nearby rental properties; he often kept his 1931 Ford automobile in the area presently used as a garage.⁶

A market operated out of this building through the mid-1950s. Herman F. and Elizabeth M. Boehm lived in the smaller area of the building from at least 1936 through 1946, while they ran the Sixth Avenue Food Shop, also known as the Sixth Avenue Meat Market. This name remained associated with the grocery store through the 1948 edition of the R.L. Polk city directory, though different proprietors did live in the smaller area. In 1946-1947, Herman and Elizabeth Boehm turned over the operation of the Sixth Avenue Food Shop to Gus and Mary Kostis. The Kostis family lived in the store during 1947, but sometime in 1948 they moved into a trailer near their new store, Aloha Grocery Gardens, a market once located at 2200 Tyrone Boulevard. In 1948 John and S. Addele MacDonald lived in the smaller room while the Sixth Avenue Food Shop operated in the larger area. By 1949, William and Catherine A. Williams occupied the structure. They lived in the smaller area while the market remained open in the other part of the building. This store, Bill’s Grocery, operated until the mid-1950s, with an entry last appearing in the 1954 city directory. As a child growing up in the Roser Park neighborhood, former-park director Kendrick Ford regularly visited this store while delivering copies of the St. Petersburg Evening Independent on his newspaper route.⁷

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⁵ An examination of R.L. Polk’s St. Petersburg (Pinellas County, Fla.) City Directory provided useful information about the occupants of this structure.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.
Competition, Suburbanization, and an Empty Storefront

City directories between 1955 and 1971 generally refer to both portions of the building as “vacant.” While the building’s owners did use the structure for storage or as a dwelling for occasional tenants during this period, post-war changes in the region’s demographic and commercial landscapes—as well as ever-changing consumer expectations—rendered the building inadequate as a grocery store. In the mid-1920s, James Earl “Doc” Webb had opened a small apothecary that soon mushroomed into Webb’s City, the “World’s Most Unusual Drugstore.” By the end of the Second World War, Webb’s City occupied numerous structures and many city blocks. With a hub located at Ninth (Dr. Martin Luther King) Street and First Avenue South, this nearby business and its retail grocery operations certainly harmed smaller markets in the vicinity. Jim Rosati’s suburban Tyrone Gardens shopping center (Tyrone Boulevard at Ninth Avenue North), the substantial Central Plaza shopping center (34th Street at U.S. Highway 19), and other venues that began to appear in the mid-1950s served the needs of a growing number of suburban residents. The presence of these shopping centers also enticed other residential developers to craft new communities, such as Meadowlawn, Harshaw Lake, Maximow Moorings, and Lakewood, to name a few. As people flocked to new suburbs and their air-conditioned commercial outlets, fewer customers visited smaller stores in downtown St. Petersburg or the Bayboro district.8

New transportation routes affected traditional traffic patterns throughout Pinellas County by the early 1950s. The realignment of U.S. Highway 19 to 34th Street in St. Petersburg and the opening of Central Plaza and the Sunshine Skyway enticed many residents and tourists to look at property in southern and western St. Petersburg, Gulfport, Kenneth City, Pinellas Park, and other areas of lower Pinellas. While St. Petersburg’s main north-south traffic artery moved west from Fourth Street to U.S. 19, in north county communities like Tarpon Springs, Palm Harbor, Dunedin, and Clearwater, the newly opened segments of U.S. 19 redirected traffic flow eastward away from the centers of those cities. Just as the construction of Interstate highways doomed many mom-and-pop businesses and roadside attractions as motorists selected the expressway rather than the

7 Ibid.; Interview of Ken Ford, former director of Heritage Village, by Stephanie Ferrell and Jim Schnur, 3 May 2003, Heritage Village, Largo.
back roads, small stores like the former H. C. Smith’s seemed too small and off-the-beaten path to match the competitors in suburban communities or along recently improved roads. The presence of other nearby markets, such as the well-stocked A&P grocery store at 824 Fourth Street South, also discouraged the continued existence of a market in this building.

The Preston family held title to the property until the late 1980s. Charles Preston rented the apartment to seasonal visitors and generally used the larger area for storage. Winter resident Clara A. MacKenzie leased the small apartment area in 1972 and N. P. Alcala stayed there in 1981. For many years during the 1970s and 1980s, however, the city directory lists 468 Sixth Street South as “vacant.” This may have occurred because agents for R. L. Polk visited or contacted the location at a time between renters, or after the snowbirds had returned home. After the death of Charles Preston, his son Richard took control of the building. The estate of Charles Preston granted Richard I. Preston control of the building by 30 April 1973. Richard rented the larger space to an Amway distributor during 1974 and also a non-denominational church. In 1974, Ronald Preston occupied the smaller area of the building. During this period, the Prestons held other nearby real estate properties, including the Preston Apartments that once sat next to the grocery with a mailing address of 460 Sixth Avenue South.9

An Expanding Campus and a Market on the Move

As Bill’s Grocery closed its doors in the mid-1950s, educators and lawmakers debated the future of higher education in Florida. Decisions by legislators in Tallahassee and city officials in St. Petersburg between 1956 and the early 1980s brought new opportunities to the Bayboro district and—for a time—cast an uncertain shadow over the future of the grocery building. Enrollment increases at Florida’s other public universities encouraged lawmakers to approve the creation of a new public institution of higher learning in 1956. With plans to locate the campus in west central Florida, a political dogfight ensued between Pinellas and Hillsborough County political leaders, as well as other officials, as all parties searched for a suitable location. After much deliberation, the

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8 Baker, Mangroves to Major League, 149, 206-207; Arsenault, 309.
state secured a large site that had once served as part of a former army air field along Fowler Avenue, north of Tampa. Construction and planning immediately began on this site, often referred to as Temple Terrace University (among other names). As buildings appeared among the sandspurs and anthills, the state officially christened this institution the University of South Florida (USF).

While USF began offering classes in the Temple Terrace area by 1960, students also enrolled in a new college with facilities temporarily located in the Bayboro Harbor district. Florida Presbyterian College, a private liberal arts institution later named Eckerd College, scheduled its earliest classes in the former barracks and offices of the United States Maritime Service (USMS). As war clouds loomed on the horizon in the late 1930s, the government had constructed a USMS Training Station along the bayside rim of Bayboro Harbor. Decommissioned in the mid-1950s, the station later became the site of classes offered by Florida Presbyterian (Eckerd) College and—by the summer of 1965—the University of South Florida. USF St. Petersburg, fondly known by many as the “Bayboro Campus,” expanded by the late 1970s and early 1980s as community leaders (including longtime St. Petersburg Times publisher Nelson Poynter), lawmakers, and local officials secured parcels adjacent to the original site on the Bayboro peninsula.10

Plans for a new round of campus expansions threatened the future of the Heritage Mercantile structure. During the early 1980s, USF St. Petersburg hoped to acquire additional land for classroom space, other structures, and parking facilities. Federal Aviation Authority regulations limited the vertical growth of campus structures because of airplane flying patterns used at the adjacent Albert Whitted Airport. When city officials decided against closing or modifying Albert Whitted in July 1984, they offered to pledge their financial support to acquire nearby properties so the campus could grow. Using approximately $9.8 million in utility bonds, council members voted to budget nearly $12 million to acquire land for the university’s growth. City officials also agreed to pay property owners up to fifteen percent above the appraised value of their properties as a way of encouraging them to sell the land. Between 1983 and September 1986 the

9 Information obtained from various annual issues of R.L. Polk’s St. Petersburg (Pinellas County, Fla.) City Directory.
city had purchased ninety-nine parcels. Officials quickly worked with landowners and their representatives to acquire the remaining forty-three lots in this tract, including the site of Preston’s mercantile garage.\textsuperscript{11}

Meetings between Richard Preston, park staff, and members of the Pinellas County Historical Commission spared the mercantile store from the wrecking ball. Ken Ford and members of the commission had envisioned the addition of a country store as part of the open-air museum as early as March 1980. The acquisition of an old store ranked second highest on an 11 June 1980 list of priorities for future park structures. In early 1981, Ford reported that he had examined the 1915 store as a possible candidate for relocation; though the owners had not yet agreed to the move, they did tell Ford that they had no immediate plans for the structure. Predicting a tight budget in the forthcoming fiscal year, Ford considered the mercantile store as an exhibit space that “could produce revenue for the Park and the County.” As the city began to purchase parcels for the expansion of USF St. Petersburg, Ford and Preston continued their discussions about the store. Preston sold the property to the city in 1988, and Ford immediately contacted Roesch Housemovers, Inc.\textsuperscript{12}

The City of St. Petersburg donated the building to Heritage Village in early 1988. According to Ford, the building arrived “pretty much intact,” though without its original floors. Through the cooperative efforts of the Pinellas Model A Restorers (Pin-Mar) Antique Auto Club and some creative work by park staff, this structure was fashioned to resemble a 1920s local grocery, with garage, service station, barbershop, telephone exchange and post office. Pin-Mar pledged to donate an old gas pump and to develop displays in the garage area of the structure. Meanwhile, Ford acquired the hexagonal blocks used on the floor from a representative of Terra Excavating in St. Pete Beach. Ford considered the hexagonal blocks an appropriate choice for the floor at the building’s

\textsuperscript{10} Clippings and other archival materials related to the history of the United States Maritime Service Training Station at Bayboro Harbor and the USF St. Petersburg campus may be consulted at Special Collections and Archives, Nelson Poynter Memorial Library, USF St. Petersburg.


new location given the history of using similar blocks on sidewalks and within certain structures in St. Petersburg. When the store building arrived on site, Ford also contacted the Navy Seabees for their assistance in renovating the structure. During the 1988 Country Jubilee, the open space of the larger room provided an excellent venue for the flea market. Park staff constructed the counters and shelves. Labels copied from Kovels’ catalogues and similar sources provided a cost-effective way to recreate period pieces for the store.\(^{13}\)

The mercantile store contains a variety of artifacts dating from the early 1900s, as well as many replicas of period pieces. Although the exhibits and artifacts do not correspond with the exact layout of the store as it existed, they do portray historical elements commonly found in such structures at the time of the store’s heyday. The 1925 Model T Ford truck in the rear garage, household appliances, canned goods, old catalogues, and cold soft drinks for sale make the Heritage Mercantile store a popular place to visit.

**One Final, and Ironic, Note**

Heritage Village obtained the mercantile store because the City of St. Petersburg sought land for the expansion of the USF campus along Bayboro Harbor. While negotiations saved this building from possible demolition, most structures on other parcels obtained during this phase of expansion faced the wrecking ball. Many small cottages and a few larger homes, all within walking distance of the former H. C. Smith’s grocery, disappeared from the landscape as the university expanded its boundaries during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Two notable structures—the Potter and Black houses—sat along the western side of Second Street South between Fifth and Sixth avenues. By the time the city had obtained these properties—sites of historic significance—the homes had deteriorated beyond repair. For a few years after the demolition of the Potter and Black houses, these parcels became a parking lot for the Campus Activities Center at USF St. Petersburg. In an ironic turn of events, the land once occupied by these signature homes of the Bayboro district later served as the site of the Florida Center for Teachers building and headquarters of the Florida Humanities Council.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 17 February 1988, 18 May 1988, 17 November 1988; Ken Ford Interview.
Lowe House and Barn: A Brief Introduction

Construction Information
- The home, a board and batten structure, largely the work of Wesley Lowe, contained pine and cypress. The two-story building certainly stood out along “The Narrows” and in the Anona area after its construction in 1888.
- The barn, constructed in 1912, replaced a smaller barn that once sat on the Lowe property. Some of the wood may have come from an earlier structure.

History of Occupants
- The Lowe family, led by Captain John T. Lowe, came to the area by the late 1850s. A native of the Bahamas born in 1830, John Lowe’s ancestors had previously lived in the Carolinas and other British colonies. As Loyalists during the American Revolution, some probably fled to East Florida, then to the Bahamas. John Lowe came with family members to Key West as a child in 1840. He married Laura Meares, a native of Nassau. Members of the Lowe and Meares families helped to establish the Anona settlement and lived in the Seminole/Largo area near “The Narrows” of Boca Ciega Bay. The families came to the area from Key West. Captain John Lowe had made frequent trips along Florida’s west coast between Key West and Cedar Keys.
- During the Civil War, some members of the Lowe family fought in distant battles for the Confederacy, while those who remained on the homestead suffered the effects of the Union blockade (the “Anaconda” Strategy).
- Lowe and his children (especially Jefferson T. Lowe and Wesley Lowe) played an important role in the development of the Anona settlement. Younger son Asa M. Lowe would later become a business leader in the Tarpon Springs community.
- Wesley Lowe and family lived in the structure until the 1930s.
- By late 1940s, Paul Randolph and Hugh Ford acquired the property. Shortly after this transaction, with Randolph planning to demolish or remove the structure, Maurice and Corinna Lowe Condrick acquired the house. Corinna was a granddaughter of Capt. John T. Lowe and daughter of Wesley. As a young woman, Corinna taught in Tarpon Springs schools and spent a lot of time with her uncle, Asa M. Lowe. She married Maurice Condrick and moved to southern St. Petersburg.
- The Condricks had the Wesley Lowe House dismantled (numbering each piece) and reconstructed on a tract of land at 800-37th Street North in St. Petersburg (a block south of the St. Petersburg Public Library’s main branch).
- After the Condricks died, the structure was given to the St. Petersburg Historical Society. The Society, with limited funds and a tight deadline, was able to have the structure moved (in one piece) to the Haas Museum complex near Central Plaza in 1970. The house remained at that site until moved to Heritage Village.

Moving of the Barn and House to Heritage Village
- The Lowe Barn came directly to Heritage Village (not through St. Petersburg, like the Lowe House) in late 1976. Work on the Lowe Barn’s restoration was nearly finished by the fall of 1977. One of the earlier structures brought to Heritage Village.
Village (along with Seven Gables and Plant-Sumner), the barn arrived as park officials planned to move the McMullen-Coachman log cabin.

- The barn remained on the Randolph site for over twenty years after the Condricks had moved the Lowe House to St. Petersburg. By the early 1970s, plans were made to develop the remaining portion of the original Lowe homestead as part of a condominium complex located at Randolph Farms. The barn was donated to the Largo Historical Society in 1976, and reconstructed at Heritage Village in January 1977 of the following year.

- When the St. Petersburg Historical Society planned to close the Haas Museum complex, that organization offered the Lowe House to the County Historical Commission and Heritage Village. There was some concern that the house might be destroyed if the society did not find a new and secure home. At the time, the park administration had started to pursue the Daniel McMullen house and worried that moving the Lowe House to Heritage Village would take away necessary space. Members of the St. Petersburg Historical Society worked closely with Heritage Village, since members considered that to be the best and most logical place for the structure to move. The County covered the moving costs of the Lowe House from the Haas Museum to Heritage Village.
Lowe House and Barn

Overview

Members of the Lowe family first settled on the central Pinellas Peninsula by the late 1850s. Many branches of the family lived in the Bahamas during the 1700s and early 1800s. Some moved to the upper and lower keys, including Key West, by the mid-1830s. Similar to Joshua Boyer, the Lowes looked to the sea for economic opportunities during the mid-nineteenth century. Led by Captain John Thomas Lowe, a small group arrived at “Lowe’s Landing,” a site along the intracoastal waterway between Indian Rocks Beach and Anona. Family members fought in the Civil War, established citrus groves and farmsteads, and joined other early settlers in developing the west central Pinellas Peninsula. By the time the Orange Belt Railway reached the new settlement of St. Petersburg in 1888, Lowes and affiliated families lived throughout the Tampa Bay region. Captain J. T. Lowe partitioned his original land claim, providing tracts for his children: Jefferson Theodore, Wesley Brownell, Mary Ellen, and Asa Milton Lowe.

The Lowe House, built largely through the efforts of Wesley Lowe, became an important meeting place for many pioneer families of Anona. Friends and relatives, including members of the Meares, Wilcox, Walsingham, Whitehurst, McMullen, Bayly, and Logan families, to name a few, gathered at the Lowe homestead during the formative years of Pinellas County’s history. Young Wesley Lowe went to Key West in the mid-1880s. While there, he met and married Mary Pinder. They returned to Anona circa 1888 to farm on his family’s land. During this period, Wesley and his father built the Lowe House.

A board and batten structure built in the late 1880s, the Lowe House contains vertically placed boards with narrow strips of lumber atop each seam. Cypress wood was used for its original (and replacement) shingles and the foundation, while pine provided the primary building material for the rest of the house. The parlor, dining area, and kitchen occupied the lower floor, while stairs led to three bedrooms and an open hall area. Windows that expose nearly the full length of upper floor rooms provided excellent cross ventilation for hot days. In the early 1900s, Wesley Lowe built an additional room
for his aging father, Captain J. T. Lowe. Later restoration efforts removed this room, along with other modern amenities such as indoor plumbing and electrical wiring.

Wesley lived on this property until the 1930s. By 1912, he constructed a larger barn to replace an earlier and smaller one that had existed since the late 1800s. Meanwhile, other members of the family became commercial and civic leaders in Tarpon Springs, St. Petersburg, and Fogartyville (near present-day Bradenton); other branches of the family remained in Key West and other Monroe County settlements. Wesley’s daughter, Corinna Lowe, moved to Tarpon Springs and became a fifth-grade teacher for a few years. She often spent her free time with Wesley’s brother (and her uncle), Asa M. Lowe. While in Tarpon, she fell in love with Maurice P. Condrick, a native of Pennsylvania. They married and settled in St. Petersburg. As Wesley grew older, he sold the Lowe House and barn to the Merritt family in the mid-1930s. By the late 1940s, owners of the land had created a ranch on part of the property and decided to demolish the house. Learning of these plans, Maurice Condrick purchased his wife’s childhood home, had it disassembled and the pieces numbered, and moved it to the 800 block of 37th Street North in St. Petersburg. The Condricks lived in the house by the early 1950s, and continued to reside there until their deaths. In October 1970, the St. Petersburg Historical Society acquired the property and had it moved to the Haas Museum complex. That organization received a grant in 1988 to refurbish the building and research its history. Meanwhile, the Largo Historical Society received the Lowe’s barn as a donation by 1976 and worked with leadership of the newly-established museum at Heritage Village to bring that structure to its new home in early 1977.

The Lowe House rejoined its former neighbor, the barn, in May 1991. By late 1990, the St. Petersburg Historical Society had decided to consolidate its operations and close the buildings at the Haas Museum. After a period of uncertainly, county funds allowed for the firm of Roesch Housemovers to bring the Lowe House to Heritage Village.

The Lowe Family History and Early Years of Settlement

Although members of Captain John T Lowe’s family first settled along the Pinellas Peninsula in the 1850s, family tradition notes that some of Lowe’s ancestors had
visited Florida nearly seven decades earlier, under difficult circumstances. As Loyalists during the American Revolution, Lowe’s progenitors fled the Carolinas for safe haven in other British colonies. Family histories claim that some relatives traveled to East Florida and stayed in St. Augustine before resettling in the Bahamas. A few members of the family arrived in the Bahamas as early as the 1720s, though the exact year that Lowes first ventured to these Caribbean islands remains unclear. Genealogical research at Heritage Village has traced this pioneer family’s lives and activities to the early 1700s. According to family records, Gideon Lowe and his brother wrecked their ship along the island of Bermuda. A mariner by trade, Gideon later settled on Harbour Island in the Bahamas and exchanged vows with Nancy Saunders. Their union produced at least six children, the eldest of which was Matthew, born in 1775. In April 1783, Captain Gideon battled against the Spaniards who attempted to capture the Bahamas during the closing days of the American Revolution. Gideon received a land grant for his services from the crown, and by 1807 he occupied 240 acres on Green Turtle Cay in the Abaco Islands. Matthew and some his brothers followed in their father’s footsteps by becoming sailors at a young age and assisting their father in the profitable—if dangerous—salvage operations of sunken vessels known as “wrecking.” Matthew married a woman named Sarah and they couple raised seven children. The oldest child, William, entered the world on 6 April 1805.  

In time, young William Lowe became a sea captain that sailed along the waters of the Caribbean and lower Gulf of Mexico. In her extensive research of the Lowe family, historian Joyce Pickering notes that William—Gideon’s grandson—became the progenitor of most of the Lowes residing on the Pinellas Peninsula. William wed Mary Anne Russell, daughter of Joseph and Sarah Russell, an 1806 native of the Bahamas, in 1828. William and Mary Anne Lowe had seven children, six natives of Green Turtle Cay

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in the Bahamas, and the youngest a native of Key West, Florida: William C., John Thomas, Amos, Lorenza, Mary Elizabeth, Robert, and Sarah Jane. The second of seven children born to William and Mary Anne Russell Lowe, John entered the world on 15 February 1830 at Green Turtle Cay. He spent much of his childhood in and around Nassau and the islands, though events within the British Empire soon brought members of his family to the Florida Keys.²

Some residents of the Bahamas left the islands after the United Kingdom Emancipation Act took effect in 1834. In August 1833, Parliament had passed this act, one that required either outright manumission or apprenticeship for the former slaves by the summer of 1834. With slavery coming to an end in their homeland, some Bahamian “Conchs” decided to relocate to the Florida Keys to take advantage of new economic opportunities, including “wrecking.” At the age of ten, John T. Lowe joined his family as they left Nassau for Key West in late 1840. Lowe, his parents, and siblings became citizens of the United States in 1845, the year that Florida entered the Union as the twenty-seventh state. During this period, William began running a schooner between Key West and Cedar Keys that carried mail, lumber, and other provisions. As he grew older, John often accompanied his father on these journeys.³

As a young man, John T. Lowe honed his navigational skills and became a sea captain. His travels along the sea would take him to distant locations, such as New Orleans and Honduras. Soon he joined his father, William, in operating schooners along the west coast of Florida, generally between Key West and Cedar Keys. Due to the lack of trails and primitive roads in southwest Florida south of Tampa Bay, their travels served as an important link that connected Key West with the rest of Florida. David Levy

² Ibid.
Yulee’s selection of the Cedar Keys region as the southern terminus of his cross-state railroad to Fernandina by the late 1850s solidified the importance of this water route by the beginning of the Civil War. Family members also became experts at fishing. Captain J. T. Lowe married the former Laura D. Meares, a Nassau native and daughter of William and Miriam Roberts Meares, in a Key West ceremony on 28 December 1853. During their trips, the Lowes occasionally stopped along the bluffs south of Clearwater Harbor in search of fresh water and a safe place to anchor. In 1858, John T. Lowe transported government surveyors to the region and learned that officials had never completed formal surveys of many areas in southern Florida, including the Pinellas Peninsula. After the surveyors had finished their work, Lowe secured a homestead along the sparsely settled Pinellas Peninsula.4

Lowe arrived at a site south of Clearwater harbor, known as “The Narrows,” in June 1859. He had homesteaded approximately eighty acres along the intracoastal waterway at a place later known at “Lowe’s Landing” for $1.25 an acre. Lowe and his wife, who was pregnant (with son Wesley B. Lowe) at the time, traveled to this remote location on their schooner Seadrift with their three year-old son Jefferson and Captain J. T.’s parents (William and Mary Anne Russell Lowe). An August 1996 St. Petersburg Times article on the early history of Anona mentioned that the young family brought all of its belongings on this journey. Also making the voyage were Laura’s mother (Miriam Roberts Meares), her two brothers (William and Richard Turtle Horn Meares), other members of the Meares family, and Captain August Archer.5

Lowe’s remote homestead offered the settlers protection and an abundant supply of food. According to a story passed along by J.T. Lowe’s grandchildren, family members saw a mother bear and two cubs near a large oak tree along the shoreline shortly after they arrived. One of the cubs became the first meal for the settlers, who believed that the old, majestic tree must have served as a landmark for the Indians that had once lived in the region. The Lowes and Meares families cleared some of the coastal hammock, cultivated vegetables and citrus, raised livestock, and enjoyed a bounty of fish

and shellfish in nearby waters. They constructed simple log cabins and a log church. They started a cemetery next to the church after the death of William Lowe on 9 November 1859. Shortly after William’s death, the Lowes celebrated the birth of Wesley Brownell Lowe on December 6. Captain Lowe may have been the first settler to construct a frame house along the Pinellas peninsula. Some of the Meares clan settled lands about two miles below the Lowe homestead, in present-day Oakhurst.6

Members of the Lowe family participated in the Civil War. On 10 January 1861, the state’s General Assembly voted in favor of secession from the Union. Within a month, delegates from Florida traveled to Montgomery, Alabama, to formalize the Confederate government. While the remote settlement at Lowe’s Landing seemed distant from Fort Sumter and other battlefields, the Union’s “Anaconda” strategy to blockade Florida’s coastline threatened to halt schooner trips by the Lowe family. Although no evidence indicates that the Lowes possessed slaves in 1861, one may also speculate that they may have sympathized with the Confederacy as a response to the emancipation order of 1834 that prompted many Bahamians to leave the islands. Indeed, the presence of Union troops and military facilities at Key West may have encouraged them to depart. Before they entered service with the Confederacy, J. T. Lowe and relatives Alfred (born 20 July 1840 in the Bahamas) and William E. (born 1833 in Bahamas) served as members of the state coastal forces who worked as blockade runners. Alfred and William E. Lowe, descendants of Gideon Lowe’s third child, John Lowe, probably settled in Manatee County with their parents William A. and Caroline A. Saunders Lowe. A family history notes that in 1862 J. T. Lowe’s three year-old son Wesley, while hiding in nearby mangroves, saw Union forces board and commandeer his father’s sloop, the Cayto. He allegedly ran to his mother and said, “Cayto gone!” 7

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6 Ibid. The article in the 22 August 1996 St. Petersburg Times notes that Capt. August Archer homesteaded near the Anona Heights area and that one of his descendants later married a member of Richard Meares’s family.

During the war, members of the Lowe and Meares families fought in distant battles. On 25 April 1862, John Thomas and Alfred arrived in Tampa to enlist in Company K, 7th Florida Infantry, of the Confederate States Army. They served under Colonel Madison Starke Perry, leader of the 7th Infantry and former governor of Florida (1857-1861). William E. Lowe enlisted as a private on 1 May 1862 and also served in Company K. John Thomas, Alfred, and William E. Lowe later transferred to service in the Confederate Navy (J. T. joined in Savannah in 1863). Alfred witnessed the capture and occupation of Savannah by Union troops; fought at Fort Fisher in Wilmington, North Carolina, before it fell to Union forces; and went to Richmond, Virginia, where he served in the rear guard as Confederate forces retreated. He claimed that he was with General Robert E. Lee’s army at the surrender at Appomattox. According to one source, J. T. Lowe fought in General Braxton Bragg’s forces in Tennessee. Richard Turtle Horn Meares served with Confederate forces, while William Brownell Meares fought in a Florida regiment until suffering wounds and losing an eye in battle.  

Family members struggled during the war years. The blockade limited their ability to acquire provisions, such as flour. With John away from the home for more than three years, his wife and children spent a lot of time hunting, fishing, growing sugar cane, and harvesting salt from the nearby waters. John and Alfred returned to Lowe’s Landing after the war. Though neither suffered wartime wounds, the walk from Virginia to their homestead must have exhausted both of them. According to one family account, when Wesley saw a man with a long beard and ax approach his home, the young child fearfully hid and his mother fainted. That bearded “stranger” was none other than Captain J. T. Lowe returning to his homestead.  

During the mid 1860s and 1870s, the Lowes resumed their maritime travels along the west coast of Florida. W. A. “Uncle Billy” O’Quinn, whose family arrived from Taylor County in 1868, recalled seeing his relatives ship their farm products from Lowe’s

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8 Ibid., *St. Petersburg Times*, 22 August 1996; “Wesley Lowe House” pamphlet; Genealogical research appears in building files, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo.

Landing on one of Captain J. T. Lowe’s schooners. The O’Quinns provided a
genealogical link between the McMullen and Walsingham families. Alfred Lowe
exchanged vows with Mary J. Whitehurst, a member of a pioneer family in western
Hillsborough County, on 10 October 1867. They soon settled in Key West. Alfred and
Mary Lowe lived together until his death on 1 December 1921. Mary filed for a widow’s
pension claim shortly thereafter, and maintained her residence at 1404 White Street in
Key West. Alfred’s father, William A. Lowe, settled near Clear Water Harbor by about
1865. Alonzo Lowe, William’s son and Alfred’s younger brother, later acquired land
along present-day Indian Rocks Road north of J. T. Lowe’s property and married Julia
Whitehurst. Meanwhile, Captain J. T. Lowe traveled between Lowe’s Landing and Key
West for Laura’s health and so the children could attend schools in Monroe County. On
10 March 1867, J. T. and Laura Lowe welcomed a daughter, Mary Ellen, and on 30
November 1872, Laura gave birth to their youngest child, Asa Milton Lowe. During this
period, the Captain constructed and ran schooners—including one known as the Sea
Drift—for mail and freight service between Cedar Keys and Key West.10

The Development of the Anona Community

The settlements around Lowe’s Landing expanded in the years following the Civil
War. The Captain constructed a clapboard house and a small general store along the
Narrows by the 1870s. According to Milton Logan, one of the Captain’s grandsons, the
Captain’s board and batten home had a shingle roof and cypress stumps as piers for its
foundation. Expanded over time to accommodate his children and their families, the
home had a living room, dining area, kitchen, parlor and bedroom on the first floor, with
two upstairs bedrooms. As the community around the Lowe property grew, it needed a
name. Either J. T. Lowe and Captain Hamlin—one-time postmaster at Cedar Key who
also trolled the waters between Key West and Florida’s big bend—named the place
“Anona” for the sweet apples brought to the settlement from Key West. Ironically,

10 Ibid.; Affidavit of marriage, Florida Confederate Pension Application Files, Record Group 137, Series
587, State Archives of Florida, Tallahassee [Available electronically at:
Confederate Pension Application Files, Record Group 137, Series 587, State Archives of Florida,
Tallahassee [Available electronically at: http://fmp.dlis.state.fl.us/fpr/A05782/002.pdf and 003.pdf]; Largo
Sentinel, 3 January 1946.
many—if not all—of these apples disappeared from the region after the rough freezes of the early 1890s. Jefferson, John’s oldest son, distributed mail and operated the store for the nascent community by 1883. Jefferson served as the only postmaster at Anona, a mail point that operated between November 1883 and February 1922. By the late 1800s, Jefferson also built a two-story residence.

J. T. Lowe also donated approximately two acres of land to serve as the site of the Anona Methodist Church and cemetery. Services began in 1872 as members organized a community church serving all Christian faiths. Earliest services probably took place in private homes. Captain Lowe, Jefferson, and Wesley joined members of the Meares and Kilgore families and George Hammock in erecting a “rough board house” that served as Anona’s church until 1882 and as the area’s schoolhouse from at least 1874 until 1890. At this time, the Methodist circuit riders who offered services at Anona also led congregations at Clear Water Harbor, Sylvan Abbey, Indian Pass, Bay View, and other locations on the peninsula. Since this early structure lacked heating, parishioners and schoolchildren often met near a large bonfire during winter cold spells. Miriam Meares Wilcox described dramatic plays on the building’s porch, when curtains covered the porch as a stage, and kerosene lamps and torches provided light. People traveled from at least as far as Dunedin to watch these performances. In 1882, settlers built a permanent church made by cypress and other trees felled in the area, sent on J. T. Lowe’s schooner to Cedar Keys for sawing into boards, and brought back to the site. They also moved the remains of those interred at the original cemetery to a new location. A new school opened in 1890 on property provided by Richard A. Meares. In an article appearing in the St. Petersburg Times, Miriam Cornelia Meares described candy pullings (boiling molasses or sugar cane, stretching it, and cutting it into hard candies), horseback rides, and numerous swimming parties along the Gulf of Mexico during this period. Milton Logan claimed that Monday and Tuesday were days to wash and iron clothes, while soup became a common meal in many homes.\footnote{“Wesley Lowe House” pamphlet; \textit{St. Petersburg Times}, 22 August 1996; “Anona: Ghost Town” \textup{[http://www.ghosttowns.com/states/fl/anona.html]} (3 June 2003); Genealogical research located in building files, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; \textit{Largo, Then Til}, 82, 104-106. The present Anona Elementary School opened by 1916, four years after the creation of Pinellas County. By November 1951, members of the Anona United Methodist Church moved into their new sanctuary, and the 1882 structure became a Sunday school annex. Many reverends who served at the Safety Harbor Methodist Church, also
Florida’s 1885 state census indicates the growth in the Anona community. Living with J. T. (age: 54) and Laura (age: 50) were children Wesley (age: 26), Mary Ellen (age: 18), Asa M. (age: 12), and the Captain’s eighty-year-old mother, Mary Anne Russell. Other family members, including Jefferson T. Lowe, lived nearby. Jefferson, like Alfred and Alonzo Lowe, married a member of the Whitehurst family when he and Josephine Catherine Whitehurst exchanged vows in Hillsborough County on 1 June 1881. A correspondent for the *Sunland Tribune* claimed that the “matrimonial fever [was] getting up a boom in the Clear Water section” after Rev. C. S. Reynolds married Whitehurst and Lowe at Indian Pass. A sailor by profession, Wesley Lowe returned to Key West for about three years, where he worked as a cigar maker and operated a boat line. He married Mary Louise Pinder, daughter of Jabez and Drucilla Pinder, in Key West by January 1889. The Pinder house still stood on Southard Street in Key West as late as the 1970s. Mary Pinder and a woman named Elizabeth Lowe apparently moved from Key West to the Upper Keys at some point before 1885 to work as schoolteachers at one of the small schools along the islands. Wesley probably made many trips by boat between Key West and Anona during this period, as he oversaw construction of the family’s new house.12

Wesley B. Lowe built a new, two-story home on his family’s land in Anona in the mid-1880s. A version of the “Homestead House” popular in the late nineteenth century, this two-story structure had board and batten siding and porches on both ends of its ell-shape frame. The balloon-frame construction with vertical posts that reached from the base to the attic provided a strong foundation to protect the structure from high winds. Large windows provided excellent cross-ventilation. The home had unvarnished floors of

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“scrubbed raw wood.”\textsuperscript{13} By the time the newlyweds settled in their new home at Anona, their neighbors had started to witness dramatic changes to the area around Lowe’s Landing. The construction of the Orange Belt Railway along the Pinellas Peninsula, and through nearby Largo, brought much activity to the region around The Narrows. Over the next few years, the iron horse replaced the boat as the primary means of travel for many settlers. Just as the arrival of the Orange Belt led to the growth of Tarpon Springs at the expense of the smaller settlement at Anclote, the path of the rails through present-day Largo led to wide-scale development to the east and northeast of Anona. In time, railroads replaced shipping as the preferred form of transport, and many farmers along the central Pinellas Peninsula decided to send perishables by rail. Indeed, by the early 1890s, Captain J. T. Lowe retired and decided to sell his schooners—the \textit{Emma} and \textit{Asa M.}—to spongers in Tarpon Springs. Many families lived near Lowe’s Landing and Anona, including the Lowes, McMullens, Hammocks, Meares, Walsingham, Logans, Oliffs, Hamlins, Baylys, and Wilcoxs. Despite this influx of families, the settlement at Largo soon eclipsed Anona. By the early 1900s, Largo took on the moniker “Citrus City” as nearby farms and groves continued to expand.\textsuperscript{14}

Jefferson and Josephine Lowe celebrated the arrival of seven children between 1883 and 1895. While keeping shop and serving as Anona’s only postmaster, Jefferson Lowe found time to spend with twins Laura and Eugene (born 9 April 1883), and their five siblings: Newton Phillips (born 25 May 1885), Emma Henrietta (born March 1887), Ernest Elwood (born 13 July 1889), Paul Rutledge (born 17 October 1892), and Victor Emory (born 21 March 1895). Josephine passed away on 3 June 1896 at Anona, leaving Jefferson to raise the seven children. On a subdivision of his father’s land, Jefferson cultivated citrus and other crops. Jefferson’s store also served as a local packing house. In October 1908, he married his second wife, Barbara Ellen “Nellie” Hammock McMullen, daughter of Thomas and Christiana McCall Hammock. Nellie had previously

\textsuperscript{13} Architectural research files created by Stephanie Ferrell reside in the Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; “The Lowe House Architecture and Restoration,” undated manuscript, probably written by Howard Hansen, located in building files at Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; Milton Logan interview.

\textsuperscript{14} “Wesley Lowe House” pamphlet; \textit{Largo, Then Til}, 32.
been married to John Thomas McMullen, and had at least two children from that earlier union: Angus and Bolivar McMullen.\textsuperscript{15}

Captain’s Lowe’s other children also married and took possession of some of the family farmstead. In June 1896, Mary Ellen Lowe tied the knot with Murdo Logan, a native of Scotland born on 10 February 1867. Exactly one month older than Mary Ellen, Murdo had arrived in the United States in 1888. Murdo assisted Captain John and other Lowe family members on the farmstead’s growing citrus acreage. Murdo and Mary Ellen Logan raised five children: Janet (born 1898), Guy Southwell (born 10 August 1902), Jessie Shirley (born 1906), John Milton (born 17 May 1909), and Maurice Fraser (born 25 December 1915). After the death of Mary Ellen on 29 September 1916, Wesley and Mary Pinder Lowe brought the infant Maurice to the Lowe House and helped to raise him. Born prematurely, young Maurice required special care. During a cool winter, Wesley and Mary kept the child by their wooden stove. Meanwhile, Asa Milton Lowe celebrated his 1 January 1896 nuptials with Mary Emily Stowell, a resident of Brookfield, Massachusetts, born in May 1875. Asa and Mary had two children: Earl Stowall (born 15 October 1901) and Marion Jennie (born in Tarpon Springs after 1900). Though Asa received a portion of the original lands claimed by his father in the late 1850s, he soon moved away from the homestead to work as a grocery clerk while living in St. Petersburg during the spring of 1900. Asa later moved to Tarpon Springs and Tampa as he pursued other business opportunities.\textsuperscript{16}

Wesley Brownell and Mary Pinder Lowe started a family in their new home. Mary gave birth to Corinna Lois Lowe, their oldest child, on 28 April 1894 at the Lowe House. Sumner Russell Lowe entered the world on 14 April 1902. Three years later, in 1905, the parents celebrated the arrival of Laura Miriam Lowe. Early that year, on 21 February 1905, Wesley mourned the loss of his mother, Laura Dorothy Meares Lowe. They may have named their infant daughter in her honor. Young Laura often slept on a brass bed with her cousin, Maurice, in the Lowe House. After the elder Laura’s death, Wesley built an addition to the Lowe House for his father, Captain J. T. Lowe, who had

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.; Genealogical research appears in building files, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
switched from working as a mariner to growing fruit—especially citrus—on about seventy acres of his land.\footnote{Genealogical research appears in building files, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; “The Lowe House Architecture and Restoration” manuscript.}

The family constructed a small barn to hold supplies for its growing agricultural operations. The exact date of this original structure remains unknown, though Wesley may have built the barn shortly after the completing the Lowe House in the late 1880s. This original barn sat close to the Lowe House. By 1911, the family decided to replace the small barn with a larger structure, the barn presently located at Heritage Village. Sumner Lowe, then a small child, recalled that the building of the new barn coincided with the uproar throughout the Pinellas Peninsula as residents “declared their independence” from Hillsborough. He remembered helping his father, Wesley, by “handing wood up from the little barn” as the family used some of the best lumber from the dismantled smaller barn for the present barn. Wesley procured additional lumber from Hussey’s sawmill in Largo, a business that operated near the Atlantic Coast Line (former Orange Belt Railway) tracks and provided lumber for many early structures during the 1910s. The family used part of the barn to store hay and kept horses and cows in stalls on the other side of the structure. Sumner recalled that his father kept a horse-drawn buggy and wagon in the barn before the family purchased an automobile. He later parked his Model T Ford, a gift from his mother, in the barn near the cows and horses.\footnote{Sadie Johnson and Ken Ford, “Lowe Barn,” undated manuscript, located in Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; Largo, Then Til, 9. St. Petersburg Times, undated clipping (circa February 1977).}

By the time Pinellas received its independence from Hillsborough, members of the extended Lowe family had established firm roots in Monroe, Pinellas, Hillsborough, and Manatee counties. Many branches of the family continued to live in Key West, the seat of Monroe County. Those who lived along the Pinellas Peninsula frequently visited the Keys. For example, Corinna Lowe traveled to Key West in December 1913 with plans “to spend several months” visiting family. Others came from the Keys to the Tampa Bay region: Charles Lowe’s wife spent time with kith and kin in Tampa. She also enjoyed a visit with Robert McMullen’s family in St. Petersburg in February 1916. V. S. Lowe, Monroe County’s superintendent of public instruction, paid a visit during the spring of 1917 on his way back from a meeting in Lake City. He had previously visited
the central Pinellas about 1903, and mentioned the “many improvements” to the area that he witnessed. After his stay, he traveled to Port Tampa to catch a P & O steamer to Key West. Connections between the Lowe family and pioneer families of Manatee County deserve further exploration. For example, John and Mary Elizabeth Lowe of Key West had seven documented children, including a son named Stephen Francis Lowe. Born on 19 August 1872, Stephen spent two years in Brooklyn before moving to Fogartyville, a small settlement along the Manatee River that took shape long before the incorporation of Bradenton. Many members of the Fogarty family also had strong ties to Key West. On 26 April 1904, Stephen married Grace Fogarty. By 1908, Stephen and Grace moved to Elizabeth Street in Key West to oversee the family’s commercial interests.  

Meanwhile, Jefferson Theodore Lowe and many of his children lived along the Pinellas Peninsula for most of their adult lives. In 1911, after the legislature approved the separation of Pinellas County effective the following year, Governor Albert Gilchrist appointed “Uncle Jeff” Lowe as one of five original members of the Pinellas County Commission. Two years after his initial appointment, voters elected Jefferson to a second term that ended in 1915. Jefferson maintained a busy schedule, balancing his duties on the family land and at the post office with his countywide responsibilities. He frequently visited with local civic groups and met with constituents. For example, he attended a spring 1914 meeting of the Largo Board of Trade to describe plans for an improved road between St. Petersburg and Largo. The editor of the Largo Sentinel visited “Uncle Jeff” and his second wife, the former Barbara Ellen Hammock McMullen, in February 1915, at the invitation of Angus McMullen, one of Barbara’s children from her earlier marriage to John Thomas McMullen. Angus chauffeured the editor and his family, while the Lowes provided an “excellent and bountiful dinner” at noon. After their meal, the editor and family members enjoyed a “delightful drive” from Anona to Indian Rocks along Lowe’s “excellent road.” Victor Lowe, one of Uncle Jeff’s sons, worked in a limestone quarry in the area that provided rocks for the paving of Indian Rocks Road by the 1920s. Meanwhile, Eugene M. Lowe worked as a locomotive engineer. In his later years, he retired to 11534 Lowe Road in Anona, his home at the time of his death on 8 January 19

Largo Sentinel, 1 January 1914, 17 February 1916, 3 May 1917; Ollie Z. Fogarty, They Called It Fogartyville: A Story of the Fogartys and Fogartyville (Brooklyn: Theo. Gaus’ Sons, Inc., 1972), 214, 243;
1966. He passed away during a stay at Morton Plant Hospital. Newton P. Lowe left Anona during some of his adult years to work as a marine engineer for P & O Steamship Company out of Key West. Newton’s wife, Madeline, became involved with the Anona Methodist Woman’s Society for Christian Service. She also served refreshments at group gatherings. Emma participated in an early sewing circle for ladies by 1914. After a spur of the Tampa and Gulf Coast (“Tug and Grunt”) Railroad arrived at the present-day site of Kolb Park in Indian Rocks Beach by the mid-1910s, Ernest Lowe operated a gasoline-powered “dinky.” Before her death in October 1939, Nellie became an active advocate for the Anona Methodist church and community organizations. Jefferson remained active well into his eighties and nineties: He rode his tricycle around Anona by the 1940s, lived a moderate life, ate many vegetables, and abstained from alcohol. He only smoked on one occasion; he lit a cigar while trying to rob a beehive of honey. After becoming ill from the smoke, he never touched tobacco again. Jefferson passed away on 2 December 1952 at the age of ninety-six.  

While Jefferson remained in Anona, his brother Asa M. Lowe became an important civic leader and public servant in Tarpon Springs. As a young man, A. M. Lowe worked as a clerk in a St. Petersburg general store operated by John Constantine “Tine” Williams, Jr., son of “General” John C. Williams. He later served as a cashier in the Central National Bank and as an educator, and soon became president of Tarpon’s Sponge Exchange Bank. In this capacity, he worked closely with the Noblits, Vinsons, Gauses, and other leading families of the community. He joined L. D. Vinson, Granville E. Noblit, S. S. Coachman, John K. Cheyney and numerous other county leaders in coordinating a daylong “Pinellas Patriotic Pageant” on 22 February 1918 with appearances by Governor Sidney J. Catts and his wife at a number of events in Tarpon. Between 1916 and 1920, A. M. Lowe represented the Tarpon Springs and north Pinellas district of the county school board. In October 1919, he earned a seat on the Tarpon Springs city commission, joining fellow members J. W. Alderman, W. E. Little, Willis

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20 Sue Searcy Goldman, A History of the Board of County Commissioners of Pinellas County (Clearwater: Pinellas County Government, 1996), 15; Largo Sentinel, 22 January 1914, 19 March 1914, 10 May 1951, 26 September 1957, 13 January 1966; St. Petersburg Times, 29 October 1939, 30 October 1939, 22 September 1957, 9 January 1966; Clearwater Sun, 29 October 1939, 22 September 1957; Indian Rocks Area Historical Society, Indian Rocks, 42; Largo, Then Til, 8; Milton Logan interview.
Castaing, and Harry Shaw. The Tarpon Springs Leader often noted his frequent business trips to Clearwater, Tampa, and other cities in the paper’s “Local and Personal” column. On occasion, his business commitments required journeys to distant venues. For example, Asa and his wife drove to Miami in April 1921—long before the “good roads movement” or the Tamiami Trail simplified the journey—to attend a meeting of the Florida Banker’s Association. No stranger to automobile travel in the days before highways or uniform traffic laws, Asa took his wife and two children on a weeklong motor tour of cities along Florida’s east coast, traveling through Orlando, Sanford, New Smyrna, St. Augustine, and Jacksonville. His meetings with other community leaders often combined business and recreation. For example, Asa M. Lowe and Granville E. Noblit enjoyed a shark fishing trip in 1921. After a long day, they rowed back to the dock at Dunedin and placed their boat on a trailer. During the drive back to Tarpon, they experienced two flat tires; the men did not get back to their homes until well after midnight. Unfazed by this experience, they took a boat into the Gulf of Mexico for a tarpon fishing trip just a few weeks later. While they enjoyed their time on the water, they remarked that “the mosquitoes and sand-flies came near putting them out of business the first night.”

The family came together at Anona to mourn the passing of Captain John Thomas Lowe in August 1921. Captain Lowe, who lived with Wesley at the Lowe House during this time, became ill in July 1921. Asa M. Lowe drove his family from their home in Tarpon to visit the family patriarch in mid-July. Though healthy and robust in his late eighties, newspapers reported that he had recently suffered great pain after one of his lower limbs erupted and he picked up an infection. On August 4, Captain Lowe “was up . . . and about the place.” At 7:30 the following morning, he passed away at the Lowe House. The Captain’s death on August 5 shook members of the family. “Uncle Jeff,” the Captain’s son who sometimes appeared in early newspapers as “J. T. Lowe, Jr.,” became patriarch of the Anona branch of the family. By August 19, A. M. Lowe resigned his seat on the Tarpon city commission, citing “conflicting business interests,” though his father’s death may have played a role. To add insult to injury, shortly before vacating this office,

robbers entered Asa’s Tarpon Springs home and stole $80. Although Asa kept a gun in the bedroom for protection, the stealth bandits came into the house and left without notice.\textsuperscript{22}

**Corinna Lowe Moves to Tarpon, Teaches Classes, and Falls in Love**

Corinna Lowe, Wesley’s daughter, decided to enter the teaching profession during the mid-1910s. Kith and kin around Anona assembled at the home of Emma Lowe on 28 April 1914 to throw a surprise twentieth birthday party for Corinna. A few weeks later, Corinna traveled with her father to Sutherland, now Palm Harbor, to attend commencement ceremonies at Sutherland College. By the fall of 1915, she joined her mother as a member of the Anona school’s parent-teachers’ association (PTA). Corinna volunteered as secretary of the Anona PTA, while mother Mary Louise served as the organization’s vice president. She spent four months in St. Petersburg during the spring of 1916 attending a training institute for teachers. She enjoyed a weeklong visit to Bert McMullen’s family in Bay View that summer while preparing for her next round of tests. Corinna spent much of the first week of September 1916 taking teacher certification examinations in Clearwater. After passing the tests, she received an appointment to teach the fifth grade class at Tarpon Springs Elementary School. She continued to teach fifth grade during the 1917-1918 school year, and probably continued to work at the school through the 1921 school year; in May 1921, she took her fifth grade class to a Saturday picnic at Wall Springs. Her younger sister, Laura Miriam Lowe, came to Tarpon by late May and attended the elementary school’s commencement exercises. The *Tarpon Springs Leader* mentioned many visits by Laura to her older sister’s Tarpon residence during the early 1920s. By early June, after the end of the school year, Corinna returned to Anona with her cousin, Marion Lowe, for an extended stay at the Lowe House.\textsuperscript{23}

Corinna apparently spent much of her free time in Tarpon with her uncle, Asa M. Lowe, and his family. She often accompanied them on automobile trips throughout

\textsuperscript{22} *Tarpon Springs Leader*, 15 July 1921, 5 August 1921, 17 August 1921, 19 August 1921.
Florida. For example, Corinna joined A. M. Lowe’s family and other in-laws for a March 1918 trip to Tampa. They made the journey in part to witness an exceptionally large fish that attracted much curiosity. Before its final disposition, the fish also went on exhibition in St. Petersburg a few days later, where interested parties could witness the specimen after paying an admission charge of fifty cents, a hefty sum at that time. Corinna also assisted with social activities at the A. M. Lowe house. In May 1918, she became the hostess for a gathering of Epworth League members for the local church held at A. M. Lowe’s home. These events increased the young woman’s visibility in Tarpon; soon she met a newcomer to the community and fell in love.24

Corinna Lowe caught the eye of Maurice P. Condrick, a Pennsylvania native and recent transplant to the city. Born in the Bryn Mawr-Haverford area just west of Philadelphia, Maurice entered the world on 11 February 1890. As a young man, he joined the United States Navy and rose to the rank of lieutenant during World War I. He moved to Ocala after the war ended and engaged in commerce. He arrived in Tarpon by the spring of 1922. Although documents examined do not indicate where he met Corinna, he may have had his first encounter with her at the local post office. By early 1922, Corinna had left the classroom to accept a job at the Tarpon post office. By early January 1923, Wesley and Mary announced the engagement of Corinna to Maurice Condick. Within a month, Corinna and Maurice—partners who had “a wide acquaintanceship among the younger set” of Tarpon residents—tied the knot in a noontime ceremony in Tampa. Before returning to their home on Levis Street, they took a honeymoon trip that covered the circuit of local relatives: They ventured to Anona, St. Petersburg, Bradenton, and Sarasota. The Condricks raised two sons. Corinna gave birth to their eldest son, John Wesley, on 2 June 1924. On 19 October 1926, Maurice and Corinna celebrated the arrival of Frances Joseph. By this time, the Condricks had moved from Tarpon Springs to a St. Petersburg residence located at 974 Fourth Street South, near Bayboro Harbor.25

At about this time, Sumner Lowe made a long-distance and short-term journey. By the time he reached his early twenties, Sumner had seldom traveled even as far as

24 Tarpon Springs Evening Leader, 18 March 1918.
Genealogical research appears in building files, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo. Residence
Tampa. When a young doctor and his wife asked Sumner if he could drive them to California in the early 1920s, he felt the wanderlust and received Wesley’s permission. The trip in a Model T Ford took three weeks as they followed the southern route through the American Southwest, driving through Tucson and Phoenix before arriving in Los Angeles. While traveling through Texas, Sumner frequently had to open and close cattle gates along the roadway and open range of Texas. During his eighteen months in California, Lowe seldom saw the waterfront and frequently kept two fulltime jobs. Tired of his Western adventure, Sumner returned to Pinellas County, joined the Masonic Lodge in June 1926, became an early member of the Clearwater Lions Club at their organizational meeting in August 1931 at Seven Gables, operated a restaurant on North Garden Avenue in Clearwater, served as a Clearwater city commissioner from 1941 though 1945, and sold Buicks for over thirty years at local dealerships.

Wesley Lowe suffered the loss of two close family members in 1925. His wife, Mary Louise Pinder Lowe, died on February 15. His youngest child, Laura Miriam Lowe, also died in 1925. Wesley probably became the sole occupant of the once-crowded Lowe House by this time. After these deaths, Sumner returned to the family homestead in Anona. He may have lived there until his wedding to Joanna Brandon on 14 September 1929. After their marriage, Sumner and Joanna moved to a house on Drew Street in Clearwater. At some point after Mary’s death, Wesley decided to marry her sister, the former Anne Pinder Martin-Vegue, who came to the area from Miami. She remained Wesley’s companion until he passed away in January 1942.

**A Family with Connections throughout the Region**

Although many of the pioneer settlers had passed away by the 1920s, ties remained strong among the original families of the Anona area. In the mid-1920s, members of early families—most notably the McMullens and the Meares clans—began to hold reunions that attracted hundred of members. Beginning on Thanksgiving Day, 1927, over 125 members of the Meares family assembled for their first annual reunion.

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26 *St. Petersburg Times*, 14 August 1982.
Four generations of descendants of Richard and William Meares, and Laura Meares Lowe, congregated at Indian Rocks Beach. William “Uncle Billy” Meares, patriarch of this family, considered the gathering an excellent way of “bringing the members together and celebrating in a fitting manner” their contributions to the Pinellas Peninsula. People came from throughout Florida for this reunion: about forty relatives traveled from St. Petersburg, forty from the Seminole-Largo area, and the rest from other Pinellas settlements, Hillsborough County, Jacksonville, and even Key West. Wesley and Jefferson Lowe enjoyed the assembly, one that featured “an old fashioned picnic” with plenty of roast duck and turkey. During the second reunion on Thanksgiving Day, 1928, old-timers mentioned that the Meares “boys” had helped collect some of the shells and Indian relics gathered in the region by the Smithsonian Institution. Seventy members attended the third gathering, held at the county fair grounds in Largo. They enjoyed duck, crab meat, and other homemade delicacies. Jefferson Lowe hosted a Thanksgiving reunion in 1933 with a noontime meal and music provided by members of John McMullen’s Clearwater family. At these reunions, older members passed along their family history to the younger generation. For example, at the seventh gathering in 1934, “Uncle Billy” Meares described how he left Anona for Tampa during the Civil War to avoid capture by Union soldiers, while Richard “Uncle Dickie” Meares mentioned that Union sailors had forced him to launch the family sloop Osceola that the family had hidden along Indian Rocks. During this reunion, Maurice Condrick—related to the clan by his marriage to Corinna Lowe—read about other incidents during the Civil War from a family diary. By the fifth generation, members of the Meares family had married many other pioneer families. In addition to the close connections with the Lowes, they had tied the knot with the Campbells, S. D.(Samuel Davis) Harris’s sister, McMullens, Walsinghams, Belchers, Booths, Hammocks, and Wilcoxs, to name a few. A genealogy of the Meares family provides a web that connected many families of the Pinellas Peninsula.

27 Genealogical research appears in building files, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; “Wesley Lowe House” pamphlet; St. Petersburg Times, 14 April 1982; Milton Logan interview.
28 St. Petersburg Times, 25 November 1927, 30 November 1928, 2 January 1930, 3 December 1933, 2 January 1934; Largo Sentinel, 4 January 1934.
The Condricks of St. Petersburg, and Changes in Anona

Maurice P. and Corinna Lowe Condrick raised their children in St. Petersburg as other family members entered new phases of their lives. By 1929, the Condrick family had moved from the Bayboro area home to a residence at 767-15\textsuperscript{th} Avenue South. They following year and for most of the next two decades, the Condricks lived at 1120-15\textsuperscript{th} Avenue South. During this period, Maurice worked as a plumber. He often made it a tradition on Memorial Day to place flags on the gravesites of Civil War veterans at cemeteries in southern St. Petersburg. As young John and Francis Condrick started primary school, Asa M. Lowe retired as president of a Tarpon Springs bank in 1929 and moved to a home at 1818 Watrous Avenue in the Hyde Park area of Tampa by the early 1930s. Asa’s daughter, Marion Jennie Lowe, married Melster Byrd McMullen, son of Dr. Byrd McMullen of Clearwater, in an April 1932 ceremony in Tampa. Marion, a native of Tarpon Springs, had moved to Tampa several years earlier, probably after completing her studies at the Florida State College for Women in Tallahassee and Florida Southern College in Lakeland. Melster, a native of Clearwater, attended Emory University. By 1933, Asa and Mary Lowe, and their son Earl, moved to a home on 1309 South Rome Avenue, just three blocks away from Mary’s unmarried sisters, Katherine and Faith Stowell. Although retired from the bank in Tarpon Springs, by 1933 Asa worked as the treasurer for the National Thrift Organization of Florida, located at 309 Franklin Street in downtown Tampa. Before his death in April 1950, Asa moved in with Melster and Marion Lowe McMullen at their Lakeland home. Meanwhile, by the fall of 1933, Milton Logan became the tender of the old Indian Rocks Bridge.\textsuperscript{29}

Elder pioneers of the Meares family passed away by 1940. George W. Meares, brother of Richard and William Meares, originally came to the Anona area about 16 October 1861, possibly to get away from the Union troops controlling Key West during the Civil War; he first moved to Clear Water Harbor, then purchased land near present-day Lakeview Avenue (22\textsuperscript{nd} Avenue South) in St. Petersburg by 1878 as a newlywed with his wife, the former Ellen Louisa Leonardy. At the time he arrived at his tract near

Lake Maggiore, about seven families lived along that area of the southern Pinellas Peninsula. According to W. L. Straub’s 1929 history of Pinellas, George had advocated that Hillsborough County commissioners set aside rights-of-way for early roadways in the region, including Lakeview and Tangerine avenues, and Ninth and Disston streets. Disston was renamed 49th Street by the mid-1920s. George died in early 1930. A few months later, in mid-September, Richard T. Meares died at his home in Indian Rocks. Wesley and Jefferson Lowe served as pall bearers at his Anona funeral. Shortly before she and her husband—“Uncle Billy” Meares—would have celebrated their sixty-seventh anniversary, Amanda Kilgore Meares passed away in February 1938. At the time of her death, Amanda and W. F. Meares were the oldest married couple in Pinellas County. Later that year, someone entered Uncle Billy’s name in a contest sponsored by the Florida Theatre and the St. Petersburg Times to locate the oldest Pinellas resident who had never watched a motion picture show. Of the twenty-three entries submitted, the nonagenarian from Anona won the prize: He received a check for five dollars and two tickets to see a movie at the Florida Theatre. When asked why he had never entered a movie palace, W. F. Meares replied he “never had been interested in such.” In late April 1940, death came to “Uncle Billy” Meares, the Key West native and longtime citrus grower and sawmill operator who first arrived in the area with Captain J. T. Lowe.30

By the time Wesley Lowe died in January 1942, family members had sold most of their land holdings around Lowe’s Landing. Although older brother and Key West native Jefferson T. Lowe outlived him by more than a decade, Wesley’s death marked the passing of the oldest native of the Pinellas Peninsula at that time. Ill for three weeks, he died after leaving his home to recuperate at Morton F. Plant Hospital. Primary builder of the Lowe House, many at the time remembered Wesley for his leadership among citrus growers, his generosity in donating family lands for the cemetery and Methodist church at Anona, and the delicious bread he baked for his neighbors. A rough-spoken yet quiet man, what Wesley lacked in formal education he possessed with his good temper and “heart of gold.” Long before his death, Wesley had met with Abraham Merritt, a magazine editor and publisher from New York. Sometime in the mid-1930s, the Lowes

30 William L. Straub, History of Pinellas County, Florida: Narrative and Biographical (St. Augustine: The Record Company, 1929), 386; Largo Sentinel, 18 September 1930; 11 February 1938, 6 September 1938;
sold the site of the Lowe House and barn to the Merritts, who soon turned the area into a tropical garden. Wesley then moved in with Milton Logan, his next-door neighbor at the time. The barn provided an excellent storage area for equipment, fertilizer, and materials required to maintain the citrus and exotic plants. During this period, Eleanor Merritt lived in the Lowe House. Arnold Miller, his wife, and two sons—Ralph and Ronnie—also occupied one of the former Lowe homes and groves in the Anona area by 1950-1951.\textsuperscript{31}

Moving the House, Piece by Piece

Corinna Lowe Condrick became interested in the fate of her home by the late 1940s. According to her husband’s 1970 obituary, Maurice served in the Navy and the Merchant Marine during World War II. Between 1944 and 1948, city directories do not place the Condricks at the 15\textsuperscript{th} Avenue South address, though Corinna and her sons may have continued to live there during this time. By 1948, Abraham Merritt passed away and his widow sold the old Lowe property in Anona to Dr. Hugh Ford and Paul F. Randolph. Renamed Ranford Properties, this parcel provided the Randolphs land for their farm animals, while Hugh Ford took control of the groves. Longtime owner of a Clearwater real estate firm, Randolph co-founded the Carrouel Yacht Club in 1934 and oversaw the development of the Carrouel subdivision along northern Clearwater Beach. At some point before the end of 1949, Corinna learned that the Ranford interests had no use for the Lowe House, and planned to remove it. Concerned that her birth home might become little more than scrap wood, Corinna worked with her husband to obtain the home from Anona and have it placed on land they owned in St. Petersburg along the 800 block of 37\textsuperscript{th} Street North. The 1949 city directory lists that site as “under construction,” indicating that Maurice may have started to clear and improve the tract by that time. According to a retrospective article written by longtime \textit{St. Petersburg Times} columnist Dick Bothwell, Maurice paid a few hundred dollars to Randolph for the Lowe House, and numbered the boards as he took the home apart. By 1950, Maurice had arranged to have the home disassembled and moved to their property at 800 – 37\textsuperscript{th} Street North. For an

\textsuperscript{27} April 1940.
unknown period of time, the Condricks patiently reconstructed their jigsaw-puzzle home while continuing to occupy their primary residences at 1120 – 15th Avenue South. Directories listed Corinna and Maurice at their 15th Avenue South residence until 1953; the following year, they resided at the rebuilt Lowe House on 37th Street, though their son Francis continued to live at the former house during that year. By the time they occupied the 1880s structure, the home had electrical wires (originally added by the 1920s), a gas heater, an interior bathroom (rather than an outhouse), running water in the kitchen, and a metal roof.32

The Condricks enjoyed their later years while Randolph’s farming operations prospered. Corinna and Maurice watched a subdivision sprout up around their house. They witnessed the construction of the new “main branch” of the St. Petersburg Public Library across the street from their home, along Ninth Avenue North. Their sons had completed college and started successful businesses as doctors. John worked as a professor of veterinary medicine for the University of California in Davis, California, while his brother Francis established a dental practice in Rockville, Maryland. Both children had decided to change the spelling of their last name from Condrick to “Kendrick” at the request of their father, Maurice, who believed that the new spelling was easier for others to remember. By the early 1960s, Ford had decided to sell his share in Randford Properties to the Randolph family. Randolph Farms operated as a successful ranch during the 1950s and 1960s. John C. King, an employee of Randolph for twenty-two years, frequently herded cattle across the quiet and sparsely traveled Indian Rocks Road in the early 1950s from the site of a pasture at present-day Serenity Gardens Memorial Park to nearby dipping vats. With their numerous show horses and farm animals, the Randolphins probably added the extension to the Lowe barn in the 1940s or early 1950s. According to one story discovered by longtime Largo historian Sadie Johnson, a lumber company originally sold the Italian pine used for this extension to a church. When builders learned that a sawmill had cut the lumber improperly, the church agreed to sell it to Paul Randolph. With the expansion complete, King claimed that the

barn easily accommodated fifty tons of hay. By the mid 1960s, Randolph had sold parts of the land, including a section of the pasture that became the cemetery at Serenity Gardens in 1964. As new homes and subdivisions appeared on portions of the Lowe’s original homestead along Indian Rocks Road, a matriarch of the family passed away: Corinna Lowe Condrick died on 8 December 1967 while visiting John’s home in California.33

**An Uncertain Future and Another Move**

With the death of Maurice Condrick in May 1970, the Lowe House once again faced possible demolition. Edward P. Landt, a St. Petersburg realtor and construction company owner, took control of the property and planned to build an apartment complex on the site. With the main branch of the St. Petersburg Public Library across the street and other new subdivisions planned nearby, Landt saw the economic potential of the property. Realizing the house’s history, he and John Kendrick contacted the St. Petersburg Historical Society to offer them the house if that organization could raise funds to move the house by the end of June at its liability. The Kendrick children agreed to donate the furnishings as well as the structure to the society. Oma Cross, curator at the St. Petersburg Museum of History and a long-time friend of the Condricks, visited the house in early June. A *St. Petersburg Times* article claimed that while supervising the removal of non-historical items by the Salvation Army, Cross looked through cupboards, boxes, and drawers “with all the adventurous spirit of Columbus.” In addition to an old pair of ice skates, she located a linen-backed map of St. Petersburg dating to 1925. With utilities disconnected in the house, the teetotaling curator washed the dust from her hands with an unfinished bottle of gin. Meanwhile, Walter Fuller—a society director—told members that “(w)e should do anything we can to save it” and start an “all-out public campaign” to raise funds. Fuller, who had visited the site in early June, told members that the house contained “four trunks of virtually untouched Floridiana,” as well as an

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unpublished Civil War diary by a Confederate soldier who was “a good writer (that) could hold his whisky.”  

A lack of funds and city council deliberations nearly derailed the effort. The society’s monthly financial report in June 1970 showed year-to-date profits at $1,161, and debts of $1,181. Society directors called for an emergency committee meeting to search for possible funds to move the structure to the Haas Museum at 3511 Second Avenue South. They estimated that the move would cost about $3,000. After raising the money, the society learned that the city’s House Moving Board had turned down its request to move the structure for fear that “this house would be a detriment to the neighborhood where it would go.” Members of the board claimed that the structure posed a fire hazard and would fit too tightly on the proposed site. Lorin Smith, executive director of the historical society, responded that neighbors of the Haas Museum had no objections to the structure. Noting that Landt had consented to a delay on the proposed move, society Attorney Seymour Gordon feared that the house would face demolition if city officials did not approve the move. At first, the St. Petersburg City Council refused to act on the society’s request to overrule the House Moving Board because council members wanted to visit the house and the proposed site before making a decision. 

Members of the St. Petersburg City Council signaled their approval on July 23. After garnering three quick votes in favor of the move, supporters grew tense when Councilperson Horace Williams, Jr., expressed concern about a lack of available parking. A “yes” vote by Councilperson C. Bette Wimbish, however, provided the needed majority to override the House Moving Board. With a five-to-one vote in support of this measure, the St. Petersburg Historical Society finalized plans to move the structure to 3527 Second Avenue South. On the morning of 5 October 1970, drivers along U.S. 19 watched as the house slowly moved along the highway, past the Central Plaza shopping center, and to its new home at the Haas Museum. 

On 20 June 1971, Father’s Day, the Lowe House opened to the public for the first time as part of the Haas Museum complex. Between October 1970 and June 1971, 

members of the St. Petersburg Historical Society had renovated the structure. Rooms included a variety of antiques, a pump at the kitchen sink, and an old wall telephone, as well as some furnishings from the Condricks, including a brass bed that Wesley Lowe’s children slept in that was originally in the south bedroom. When she examined the house’s contents in June 1970, Oma Cross had first noticed this bedstead, painted a dull brown, in the former bedroom of Maurice and Corinna Condrick. Sumner Lowe, born in the house in April 1902, attended the grand opening and seemed surprised when he jokingly noted that he had to pay an admission fee of “seventy-five cents to go into my own house.” The Lowe House joined other structures of the Hass Museum, an extension of the St. Petersburg Historical Society’s museum started in the early 1960s in a bungalow donated by history buff Edna Haas.37

Moving the Barn for the First Time and the House Once Again

While visitors to the Haas Museum enjoyed the restored Lowe House, the Largo Historical Society hoped to preserve the barn. To take advantage of the region’s demographic explosion, Lee Dorian established Dorian Housing Corporation and acquired the Randolph Farms property in 1971. Dorian soon planned a new condominium complex on the former Lowe holdings, a large development that kept the Randolph Farms name but eclipsed the rural character of the land and the barn. In 1976, as county officials planned for the opening of Heritage Village, Dorian offered the barn to the Largo Historical Society (LHS) for removal and preservation. That organization invited recently hired park Director Kendrick T. Ford and the chair of the Pinellas County Historical Commission (PCHC) to a meeting where they discussed the fate of the barn. LHS officers had received an estimate of $6,000 to move the structure, and agreed to cover half of the costs if the Board of County Commissioners paid the other half. Roger M. Carlton, an assistant to the county administrator, told Ford that sufficient funds existed, and Ford used approximately $500 of his budget for the new park to clear lands around the proposed site for the barn. With the PCHC’s approval, the Lowe barn became the third structure moved to Heritage Village (after Plant-Sumner and Seven Gables) and


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the fourth structure overall (arriving after workers had completed the Phase I building of the Historical Museum). Workers prepared the barn for its move in January 1977, and the PCHC celebrated its arrival by early February. That spring, student members of the American Association of Architects used photographs and drawings of the Lowe barn and the recently-moved Coachman-McMullen cabin to rehabilitate those structures. By the summer of 1977, laborers had completed restoration on the barn, and members of the Largo Historical Society began to place farm equipment and tools in the structure for an exhibit.\(^{38}\)

In 1988, the St. Petersburg Historical Society secured a $25,000 grant from the State of Florida to research and restore the Lowe House, still located at the Haas Museum complex. State Rep. Peter Rudy Wallace provided assistance in securing the grant, and Howard Hansen—a local architectural historian—oversaw preservation efforts. The dismantling of the structure by Maurice Condrick circa 1950 complicated this project; fortunately a 1906 photograph allowed Hansen and others to workers to understand the earlier appearance of the building’s exterior. During this project, workers examined layers of paint to determine earlier colors and newer pieces of lumber not originally part of the structure in the 1880s. Maurice Frasier and John Milton Logan, children of Mary Lowe and Murdo Logan and grandsons of Captain J. T. Lowe, provided invaluable information during interviews in the late 1980s. Maurice and Milton, both natives of Clearwater, recalled the appearance of the house during their childhood years while walking through the building over seven decades later. During this project, workers cleared the house of furnishings, replaced the metal roof with cypress shingles, and removed the interior wiring and plumbing. The Lowe House also required tenting because of a termite infestation. Workers replaced newer door locks with earlier ones obtained from the Hotel Detroit in downtown St. Petersburg. Some doors came from turn-of-the-century homes slated for demolition for the expansion of the University of South Florida’s Bayboro Campus.\(^{39}\)

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\(^{39}\) “Wesley Lowe House” pamphlet.
Despite this ambitious project, the closing of the Haas Museum left the restored structure’s fate in jeopardy once again. At a 14 August 1990 meeting, trustees of the St. Petersburg Historical Society decided to consolidate collections and operations by closing the Haas Museum in early 1991. PCHC members convened at the Haas complex on September 19 to discuss this matter with Ford and Mary Wyatt Allen, president of the St. Petersburg Historical Society. Ford expressed some reservations about taking this structure. He worried about overloading the staff and overfilling the park. By this time, discussions had started with members of the McMullen family about the possibility of moving Dan McMullen’s home, and he worried that the addition of Lowe’s 1888 structure might become “just another house” on the limited acreage at a time when visitors enjoyed the Mercantile store and other non-residential buildings. Fearing the cost of moving this structure, some PCHC commissioners wondered if it might make sense to keep the building in the St. Petersburg area and allow St. Petersburg Preservation to operate it, or perhaps even move it to the Eckerd College campus. Most in attendance agreed that Boyd Hill could not maintain the site, but discussion centered on the St. Petersburg Historical Society’s belief that Heritage Village offered the best alternative. Assuming that funds might become available, the PCHC debated potential uses for the Lowe House (a museum with walk-through displays, office space, a gift shop, a place to demonstrate crafts, administrative offices, etc.) as well as an appropriate location (i.e., should it sit next to the barn?). While commissioners discussed the merits and liabilities of a possible move, they also encouraged the historical society to consider other possible locations in St. Petersburg.\footnote{Records of the Pinellas County Historical Commission, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo, 19 September 1990}

By October 1990, Ken Ford reported to the PCHC that he obtained a firm price of $40,000 from Roesch Housemovers to bring the Lowe House to Heritage Village. Howard Hansen had reassured Ford that if Heritage Village did not accept the house, he would work with Mary Wyatt Allen to prevent its demolition. Ford, who had also started discussions with Nancy McMullen McLaughlin about the Dan McMullen house, worried that his maintenance budget could not support the ongoing needs of any new structures. At a special PCHC meeting held on November 14, members further discussed this urgent...
matter. Hansen presented the concerns of the St. Petersburg Historical Society: Board members hoped to see the Lowe House occupy a site near the barn, but they would work on other options if Heritage Village declined their offer. After much discussion, commissioners approved a motion to accept the Lowe House if the St. Petersburg Historical Society funded half of the moving costs and if the Board of County Commissions provided sufficient funds and allowed Ford to hire an additional employee for park maintenance. In a move to save the Lowe House, Ford worked with County Administrator Fred Marquis on an alternative plan where the county covered the cost of the move, with payment deferred until the beginning of the new fiscal year in October 1991. To get the project rolling, the Pinellas County Historical Society agreed to tender an $8,000 down payment to Roesch and receive its reimbursement, without accumulated interest, sometime in the fall of 1991. Between May 7 and May 8, Roesch brought the Lowe House to Heritage Village, and took a few additional days to get the house from the entrance by Heritage Mercantile to its place near the barn. Workers spent the next two months painting and patching the structure. Aside from a few small exhibits that came from its years at the Haas complex, the Lowe House remained sparsely furnished through the early 2004, due in large measure to security concerns. Despite all of the uncertainty that swirled around this important pioneer structure on so many occasions, in retrospect Ford claimed that “this was the easiest project for the park.”

McMullen-Coachman Log Cabin: A Brief Introduction

Construction Information

- Exact date of construction remains unknown, though it was built no later than 1852. Most family sources place 1852 as the year of construction, though other sources mention earlier years. It was possibly the second (or later) structure occupied by the McMullens, who had certainly established some sort of shelter shortly after the time of their arrival on the peninsula.
- Captain Jim’s family—along with some slaves from the area—cleared the land and constructed the house.
- This double-pen log house has pine logs originally joined by pegs rather than nails.
- Large open porches, a broad stairway, and excellent ventilation (including openings between some of the pine logs) made it easy for James P. McMullen to overcome bouts with consumption (tuberculosis). He wanted cracks “large enough to throw a cat through” to get sufficient fresh air.
- The upper story had its own breezeway. Much of the original furniture was made from nearby materials (including the Spanish moss mattresses).

History of Occupants

- Captain James P. McMullen and wife Elizabeth were first owners of the cabin. Throughout the late 1800s, the cabin became an important gathering place for many members of the McMullen clan. James homesteaded on a 240-acre land grant. He spent a great amount of time in and around upper Tampa Bay.
- Captain Jim McMullen operated the first formal school on the Pinellas peninsula.
- Elizabeth was a midwife for many women in the area. She worked on the fields during the Civil War. When marauders threatened them during the war years, Elizabeth and her children spent some time at a fort in the Keystone area, where—according to a family history—she patrolled the fort with musket in hand.
- Along with his brother Daniel, James McMullen engaged in the cattle business in addition to cultivating crops on his homestead.
- Captain Jim founded the Bay View community in an area he probably first visited when he came to the region in 1842. By some accounts, James McMullen and Dick Booth weathered the notorious 1848 hurricane at an Indian mound that partially blew away. The force of the winds may have convinced him to build this cabin away from the waterfront.
- The Coachman family purchased the cabin and surrounding lands in 1901. Members of the Coachman family came to the area from Georgia, though some came to Polk County by the 1880s before moving to the Pinellas peninsula. The Coachmans lived in the cabin through the 1920s (sometimes using it as a summer camp or storage area), and constructed other buildings on the property. A fresh water well was located adjacent to the cabin. Other structures near the intersection of NE Coachman and Old Coachman Road included: H. M. Coachman’s home, the Coachman depot along the railroad lines, packing houses (one burned down in 1951), the sweet shop (located at the intersection of these roads and the railroad...
tracks), a barn, gardens, and animal pens. By 1937, the Coachmans operated the Kumquat Shop on this tract of land.

- By the time the Coachmans acquired the structure, it needed some maintenance. Windows had shutters, but no glass. The Coachman family filled the cracks between the logs. They added a kitchen and dining room, as well as a large back porch. With the assistance of McMullens, they located some of the original furniture and in February 1936 the Clearwater chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution dedicated the cabin as an historic structure. A bronze plaque was placed on the front wall at that time.

- The Coachman family allowed members of the public to visit the cabin by the mid-1930s. A “congenial hostess” often greeted each visitor by giving them a glass of orange juice and describing—much like a docent—life along the Pinellas peninsula during the early years. After World War II, the structure was closed to the public. For awhile, members of the Coachman staff used the space for their work duties. By the late 1960s, the Coachmans used the cabin as storage space.

**Moving of the House to Heritage Village**

- Long before the establishment of Heritage Village, the Pinellas County Historical Commission held discussions about preserving the log cabin. In June 1961, they discussed the possibility of securing the cabin from the Coachman family and developing a county park at or around the structure. Historian Ralph Reed reported to commission members that the Coachman family did not have any interest to selling or donating the cabin at that time. Since the cabin was generally not used by the mid-1960s, a Commission member decided to contact the Coachman family again in the spring of 1966 about preserving the structure. Commission members even discussed the possibility of having the State of Florida intervene in the interest of preserving the cabin.

- By the spring of 1968, Mack Coachman informed the Commission that the family did not want the structure to deteriorate, but had no plans to have the building or site become a memorial.

- After the arsonist had damaged the cabin, Mack Coachman gave permission for the movement of the log cabin to Heritage Village. During the month of November 1976, the structure suffered from eight fires of “mysterious origin.” After the last blaze, Assistant Fire Chief Dave King considered the structure “a total loss.” A sixteen year-old boy confessed to setting the fires, and was arrested.

- By June 1978, the cabin was placed on its foundation, and an outside firm sandblasted and washed away charred and damaged areas of the logs.

- Restoration of the cabin continued over the next couple of years, with much of the labor performed by workers in the federal CETA (Comprehensive Employment and Training Act of 1973) program beginning in early 1979.
McMullen-Coachman Log House

Overview

Captain James Parramore McMullen and members of his family built the McMullen-Coachman Log House circa 1852. The oldest residential structure in Pinellas County, this dwelling served as his family’s residence for the next half century. A bad bout with tuberculosis first brought “Captain Jim” to the area in the early 1840s. After recovering from his illness, Jim told his seven brothers that the area’s climate restored his good health. Each of the brothers McMullen settled in the area for a period of time. In 1844, Jim married Elizabeth Campbell of Brooksville, Florida, and in 1848, he arrived in upper Pinellas to claim his 240-acre parcel received under the Armed Occupation Act of 1842. During the Civil War, he briefly commanded a company of volunteers called the “Clear Water Guards,” and later served as a member of the Confederate “Cow Cavalry” that led cattle drives to supply beef, tallow, and hides desperately needed by Confederate armies to the north. At the close of the war, McMullen returned to the Pinellas Peninsula, where he pursued his farming and cattle interests and established a settlement at Bay View. By 1875, McMullen began to cultivate citrus and soon possessed one of the largest groves in the area. Sources also give credit to Captain Jim McMullen for designing the orange crate. His spouse, Elizabeth Campbell McMullen, served as a well-known midwife, and delivered many children in the log house, a structure that may have served as the Pinellas Peninsula’s earliest “hospital.”

Captain McMullen, his family, and servants built the two-story Georgia-style house with heart-of-pine logs. They notched the logs to interlock with one another and used pine floor planks. With its central “dog-trot” breezeway and large cracks between the log sides, the house allowed plenty of fresh air to circulate throughout the structure. The porch contained cypress stumps and hand-rived cypress shingles covered the roof. Though possessing a chimney initially made of mud and sticks, the family soon replaced these materials with bricks fired at the site.

When Solomon Smith Coachman purchased the house in 1902, his family filled the cracks between the logs in an attempt to “modernize” the residence. Coachman, a grower and entrepreneur, left a substantial impression as one of Clearwater’s early
business leaders. He also became a passionate advocate of the separation of Pinellas from Hillsborough County. Many rallies and events took place at the log house during the battle for secession. Recognizing his efforts on behalf of the creation of Pinellas County, Governor Albert Gilchrist named Coachman as an inaugural member of the Board of County Commissioners. He served as chair during their first meetings in 1912.

The Coachmans lived in the log house from about 1909 until 1921. At that time, they moved into a two-story structure along N. E. Coachman road on the family estate. The cabin sat empty or served as storage space adjacent to the Coachman Packing House until about 1926 when Jessie Coachman, Solomon’s wife, led restoration efforts. By the 1930s, the area around Coachman Station included a substantial grove, family dwellings, a large packing house, and Jessie’s “Kumquat Sweet Shop” near the railroad line. The Clearwater chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution placed a plaque in front of the cabin in 1936 celebrating it as “The Oldest Existing Log House in Pinellas County.” Despite attempts to create a “county shrine” or historical park on the premises—or move the log house to another site—the structure once again became a storage room by the 1960s and early 1970s. In November 1976, an arsonist set at least eight fires at the Coachman estate, with the last blaze badly damaging the McMullen-Coachman Log House and destroying most of its second floor. The Coachman family decided to donate the building to Heritage Village in 1977. Extensive restoration began in 1978, and the McMullen-Coachman Log House opened to the public in 1979 after workers restored this rustic relic to its earlier grandeur.

An Early Visitor to a Sparsely-Settled Frontier

The McMullen family, originally of Scottish descent, made the journey to Bay View across three generations. In the 1700s, a young boy named James McMullen came from his native Scotland and later became a drummer for the patriots during the American Revolution. James named his third son James, and, following that tradition, the third son of the third generation—James Parramore McMullen—entered the world on 11 June 1823 at the family’s homestead in Telfair County, Georgia. With six brothers and five sisters, James P. McMullen came from a large family. By the early 1840s, he set out on a journey to west central Florida to recover from an illness and, in the process, laid the
healthy foundation for a family that claimed nearly one-thousand members in west-central Florida by the 1900s.

Poor health brought James Parramore McMullen to Florida for the first time. As an eighteen year-old man, he suffered from “consumption,” a highly communicable disease today known as tuberculosis. Fearing that other family members might contract this illness, his father decided to send him away from his home in Quitman, Georgia. According to history passed down through the family, young James gathered his bedroll, gun, horse, and dog, and left his home in southern Georgia to recuperate in the Territory of Florida. When James crossed from Georgia into Florida, he entered a war zone: Skirmishes and battles of the Second Seminole War (1835-1842) continued to rattle parts of peninsular Florida, with some efforts to remove and relocate Seminoles occurring as far north as Georgia’s Okefenokee Swamp. Whether Jim participated in any of these actions remains unclear. After a journey of approximately 250 miles, James settled along the shoreline at Rocky Point, on the Tampa side of the Courtney Campbell Causeway. He stayed there for awhile before deciding to move to a higher bluff near the current western end of the Courtney Campbell and the present-day northern end of the Bayside Bridge. Over the next few decades, this portion of west central Pinellas along Tampa Bay became known as Bay View, sometimes written as “Bayview.” In that area, southwest of Espiritu Santo Springs, McMullen lived in relative isolation during 1841 and 1842. According to one family story, he selected this area because of its larger trees, profuse shrubbery, and “strip of sandy white beach, lapped by blue green deep water.” While camping at this site, he saw few humans, except for an occasional Indian who came near his place on the bluff. Abundant wildlife and seafood sustained Jim, while the region’s climate and his seclusion allowed his acute tuberculosis to go into remission.1

1 Robert C. Harris, “The Seven McMullen Brothers of Pinellas County,” Tampa Bay History 1 (Fall/Winter 1979), 62-63; June Hurley Young, Florida’s Pinellas Peninsula: A Historical and Pictorial Commentary on the Growth and Development of This County on the Gulf Coast (St. Petersburg: Byron Kennedy, 1984), 20; Clearwater Sun, 20 November 1949. For a thorough discussion of the Second Seminole War, see the excellent chapter found in: Joe Knetsch, Florida’s Seminole Wars, 1817-1858 Making of America Series (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2003). Newspaper articles and other publications refer to the settlement as both “Bay View” and “Bayview.” Generally—though not always—members of the McMullen family used the first spelling rather than the second. For consistency’s sake, the narrative will follow this convention, although both versions are correct. Some accounts placed James P. McMullen’s arrival in 1841, while others claimed that he arrived in 1842.
McMullen squatted south of the settlement and plantation of Odet Philippe. Though many of his travels and activities remain an enigma to this day, Philippe’s early footprints on the Pinellas Peninsula make him a true pioneer of the region. Always in search of new opportunities, Philippe arrived in Tampa—then a small settlement adjacent to the Fort Brooke military outpost—by early 1839, though his travels along the Gulf of Mexico may have brought him here during the early 1830s. A handful of opportunists came to the area in search of business contracts with the military outpost during the Second Seminole War. Philippe acquired properties near and along the Hillsborough River, and maintained at least three female slaves at his residence in 1840. By the following year, he engaged in occasional trade with local Indians. During the closing months of the war, Philippe acquired land from sutlers—civilians providing provisions to Fort Brooke—as these individuals made plans to leave the area. The Armed Occupation Act of 1842, passed by Congress on August 4, allowed Philippe to acquire a substantial parcel of land and establish a plantation. On November 1, he put in a claim for 160 acres at “Worth’s Harbour” along the western shore of Old Tampa Bay. This area, around an elevated Tocobaga Indian mound at a point known as “De Soto’s Landing,” became the location of Philippe’s plantation: St. Helena. The county park department presently operates Philippe Park as a preserve on some of this original land grant.²

Philippe cultivated crops on his homestead and his family built close ties with other peninsular pioneers and maintained business interests in Hillsborough County. One document noted that by December 1842 his estate in Tampa and at St. Helena included: four houses, a billiard hall, an oyster shop, a ten-pin alley, his plantation, a wagon, slaves, cattle, hogs, and other animals. Long before the creation of Ybor City and West Tampa, Philippe brought the cigar industry to Tampa during the antebellum period. Shortly after establishing St. Helena, Philippe met an English sailor exploring the area who had discovered his settlement. This man, Richard Booth, married Philippe’s daughter Melanie (sometimes known as “Malina” or “Merlineya”) on 10 May 1847. The Booths spent some time in Key West in 1848 and 1849, where they celebrated the arrival of Ortencia

² J. Allison DeFoor II, Odet Philippe: Peninsular Pioneer (Safety Harbor: Safety Harbor Museum of Regional History, 1997), 35-43. In his research on Odet Philippe, Allison DeFoor has corrected and clarified many legends about “Count” Philippe. Some aspects of Philippe’s life remain topics of
“Tansy” and Richard Julius Booth. The Booths returned to St. Helena by the summer of 1853. Odet William “Keeter” Booth, a son of Richard and Melanie, became one of the first children of European descent born on the Pinellas Peninsula when he entered the world on 4 August 1853. By the time of his death in 1869, Odet Philippe and his family could claim credit for introducing the cultivation of grapefruit—then often called “pomelos”—to Florida.³

Starting a Family and Building a Home in the Wilderness

While Philippe developed his plantation at St. Helena, James P. McMullen returned to Georgia with a stop near present-day Brooksville. One family account claimed that “as soon as he had become brown and strong from Florida wind and sunshine,” he returned to Georgia. On the return trip, Jim met Elizabeth Campbell and family oral histories indicate that they corresponded for awhile before exchanging vows on 16 December 1844 at the settlement of Melendez, near present-day Brooksville. Daughter of Nancy Taylor and the late John Campbell, Elizabeth was born on 25 February 1825 in Appling County, Georgia, and came south to Benton (now Hernando) County with her family. Her father had died in 1838 while fighting in the Second Seminole War. Hernando County carried the name “Benton County” from March 1844 through December 1850 to honor Thomas Hart Benton, a United States senator from Missouri who championed Jacksonian Democracy and the distribution of public lands to frontier settlers. His sponsorship of the Armed Occupation Act of 1842, a provision that opened substantial portions of peninsular Florida to settlement, became one of the most notable acts of Benton’s thirty-year tenure in the Senate. Newlyweds Jim and Elizabeth McMullen started a family at their Benton County farmstead. Elizabeth gave birth to three children while living at or near Brooksville: Bethel (born 23 December 1845), Margaret Nancy (born 1 April 1848, and died on 19 September 1849), and Sara Jane “Sally” (30 March 1850). During a visit with his family in Georgia, James told his six

³ Ibíd., 43-49, 53; William L. Straub, History of Pinellas County, Florida: Narrative and Biographical (St. Augustine: The Record Company, 1929), 33, 205; Evelyn C. Bash, “Profiles of Early Settlers on the Pinellas Peninsula,” Tampa Bay History 5 (Spring/Summer 1983), 82-93. Inconsistent genealogical records make it difficult to ascertain the first white child born along the Pinellas Peninsula.
brothers about the beautiful lands and healthy climate of the peninsula, a place considered “the closest thing to heaven that he could imagine.”

The McMullens returned to the Pinellas Peninsula by the late 1840s. By some accounts, they settled near Old Tampa Bay or Worth’s Harbour around 1848 in a small log house built by Jim McMullen on at least 160 acres he homesteaded under the Armed Occupation Act. Most family histories claimed that James P. McMullen never held slaves. However, a granddaughter, Nancy Meador, wrote in a November 1949 article that “Pa (James P. McMullen) found his newly-acquired land suitable for growing citrus, so with the help of slaves he cleared the land, planted a portion of it in groves, and built the log cabin which still stands.” Hostile Indians probably encouraged the McMullens and their infant children to abandon their small, remote cabin and return to Benton County by 1848 or 1849. Newspapers of the time reported on a number of “Indian Outrages” along Florida’s west coast during the summer of 1849. For example, a Tallahassee paper noted that Indians attacked the Payne, Whidden, and McCullogh families in the Peas (Peace) Creek and Alifia River areas in mid-July 1849. Seminoles killed at least two family members by gunshot before escaping into the palmettos. A military expedition to eastern Hillsborough arrived by July 25, only to find the trading house burned to the ground with human bones nearby. The correspondent considered this “proconcerted (sic) movement” evidence that Indians planned “to carry on the worst of all wars—a guerilla war.” General David Emanuel Twiggs arrived at Tampa Bay by August 24 to guard against Indian attacks. Twiggs even dispatched a captain named Casey “to see what was intended by the feathers, &c., at the door of the Spaniard, Philippee (sic).” Tensions continued into the fall, when one correspondent from Tampa claimed that “we and these Indians cannot live side by side in peace; that the property of this section of Florida, in consequence, depends upon their removal.”

It is possible, though not certain, that the horrific “Gale of 1848,” a September hurricane that inundated much of the peninsula and modified the Pinellas shoreline, may have also prompted the relocation of the McMullen family. According to one family

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4 Harris, “Seven McMullen Brothers,” 64; Genealogical research on the McMullen family appears in building and other research files located at Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; Young, Florida’s Pinellas Peninsula, 22; Clearwater Sun, 20 November 1949; Donald J. Ivey, “The Life and Times of
story, Jim McMullen and Richard Booth camped along a spring in the Safety Harbor area as the storm arrived; they took cover at a nearby Indian mound, but the wild winds blew part of that mound away. Some believe that this experience convinced Jim to build his cabin inland, away from the water. By some accounts, Indians burned their simple log cabin to the ground. Other family stories claim that either Daniel or Thomas Fain McMullen—brothers of Jim—may have occupied this small building for awhile before it “simply rotted away.” Either way and even if Jim continued to visit the region, Elizabeth gave birth to Sara Jane “Sally” during the spring of 1850 in Brooksville.  

Newspaper accounts from the spring of 1850 described Benton County sugar lands and the Tampa Bay region at the time of Sara Jane’s birth. A correspondent from a Tallahassee newspaper traveled south from Levy County past the “Large Sulphur and Iron Springs” of the Withlacoochee River, and large hammocks along the Crystal River that offered excellent potential sites for sugar plantations. Along the Homosassa River, a waterway “wide enough for steamboats” with numerous cross rivers, the writer noted an abundance of fish and excellent lands nearby for the planting of sugar, potatoes, corn, pumpkins, turnips, and other crops. He continued his journey along the coast of present-day Pasco and upper Pinellas, examining lands that could serve as sugar and crop plantations, as well as grazing areas for livestock. Another writer traveled to Tampa Town and described areas around Old Tampa Bay. While sailing from Fort Brooke to the mouth of Tampa Bay, the writer noted that the water “presents the appearance of a vast inland sea, but . . . from the centre it appears a perfect circle surrounded on all sides by dense forests of pine.” As the party approached the western shore of Tampa Bay, somewhere along central Pinellas probably near Bay View, the correspondent encountered “a beautiful white sand beach, free from marsh, with abrupt Bluffs at intervals ten or fifteen (feet) in height, and the land in many places a few hundred yards from the shore seems to attain an elevation of eighty to one hundred feet.” They sailed by


the residence of Elias J. Hart, an early settler in the Bay View area who had an infant son, William, born at the family’s homestead in 1849. Hart’s other children married into pioneer families. Elpenice “Mittie” Hart later exchanged vows with Samuel Kilgore, a member of a family that settled near Largo; Emma Hart, born 7 July 1851, married Alexander Valentine Campbell. In 1822, Elias’s father—Isaiah D. Hart—had laid out streets at a settlement then known as “Cow Ford,” site of present-day Jacksonville. After passing the Hart residence, this expedition camped along Cooper’s Point, a peninsula jutting northward towards Safety Harbor along the Courtney Campbell Causeway, with the campus of Clearwater Christian College presently at its southern end. The party feasted on oysters harvested from the bay and rested for the night. The following morning, they arrived at “Phillippi’s (sic) Point (,) on which is situated De Soto’s mound, a vast pile covering three-fourths an acre at the base, and rising to a height of seventy feet from the beach.”

The correspondent described the lands around Odet Philippe’s St. Helena as follows:

[The mound] is undoubtedly the work of art and formed the chief work of defence in those extensive fortifications which are yet easily to be traced covering half a square mile. The view from the summit of the mound was truly grand. I had seen much of the mountain scenery, but the appearance of this beautiful bay, as the sun rose in the East, I had never seen surpassed. Worth’s bay or Safety Harbour, being a small bay three miles long by two wide, forms the head of Tampa Bay . . . It is undoubtedly the safest harbour I ever saw, being securely sheltered on all sides.

Although James McMullen probably never read this May 1850 column, the writer described the potential of the region in a way that the McMullens could certainly appreciate. The writer claimed that a canal could connect the Anclote and interior waters along upper Pinellas to Old Tampa Bay, and that the depth of Espiritu Santo Bay to the mouth of Tampa Bay could certainly accommodate “the largest class of merchant ships.”

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6 Floridian and Journal, 27 April 1850, 4 May 1850; Bash, “Profiles of Early Settlers,” 82-93; Harris, “Seven McMullen Brothers,” 64; Jacksonville History Timeline,” a chronology created by the Jacksonville Public Library located at: http://jpl.coj.net/DLC/FLorida/JacksonvilleHistory.html.

7 Floridian and Journal, 4 May 1850.
As early as 1850, those familiar with the waterways and terrain along the upper Pinellas Peninsula believed that engineers should develop a canal or railroad terminus in the region to take advantage of its geographical and speculative potential. Building upon such statements, a columnist claimed that “Tampa Bay is not surpassed in the South” in its potential as “a good, safe and convenient harbour and one easy of access, with sufficient depth of water for all commercial purposes.” Among the many “perpetual springs,” the writer mentioned the famed De Soto Spring, a “fountain of perpetual youth,” located along “Point Pinalos” near present-day Safety Harbor. With a climate he considered “the finest in the world,” the writer lamented that the Tampa area lacked a hotel. In a proposition that Henry Plant would bring to fruition nearly four decades later, he proclaimed:

I would say to the man of enterprise who wishes to find a Gold mine, establish an (sic) Hotel at Tampa, and it would soon vie with the most famous in the United States, and should the terminus of the Gulf and Atlantic Railroad be on Tampa Bay, thus expediting travel from the North, . . . [other resorts] would find a rival.

Despite the region’s potential, ongoing battles with local Indians and David Levy Yulee’s railroad with a terminus at Cedar Keys postponed the arrival of the iron horse in the Tampa Bay region until the 1880s.

James Parramore McMullen decided to build his Georgian-style log house near Alligator Creek on the interior of the Pinellas Peninsula. The McMullens, possibly with the help of slaves, built the structure out of round logs and pegs rather than metal nails. Cypress posts supported the structure, while hand-cut cypress shingles covered the roof. Lacking glass windows, the log house originally had only wooden shutters. A center breezeway known as a “dog-trot” provided stairway access to the second floor. Wide porches covered both ends of the structure. Gaps between the heart-of-pine logs provided excellent ventilation, as well as a convenient entryway for all varieties of small animals and insects. But Jim, remembering his earlier bout with consumption, reportedly told family members that “I wouldn’t give anything for a house that didn’t have cracks wide

8 Ibid.
enough to throw a cat through.” In an area near Bay View, family members described a huge eagle’s nest in a large pine tree. As they settled into the cabin, family members occasionally noticed small groups of Seminole Indians who lived in the area and roamed in the woods near the homestead. The family slept on mattresses made of corn shuck or Spanish moss. They built the “sleeping rooms” on the second floor. At a later date and as the family grew, Jim added a kitchen and dining room area as an annex to the cabin. The family also replaced the “mud and sticks” fireplace with one made from bricks. Since Elizabeth served as a midwife in the area, the log house became the first “hospital” along the Pinellas Peninsula. Nearly sixty members of the McMullen family alone were born in the cabin before 1900. Its prominence along the sparsely-settled frontier also made the cabin a de facto stagecoach station during the years before the construction of the Orange Belt Railway. Residents of upper Pinellas who traveled to Tampa on county business frequently stopped at the cabin; many even spent the night.¹⁰

The exact age of the Coachman-McMullen Log Cabin remains a mystery. Various family interviews and printed sources place the date of construction anywhere between 1848 and 1852. In her comprehensive history of the Bay View community appearing in the Clearwater Sun in late 1949 and early 1950, Nancy Meador—granddaughter of Captain Jim and longtime historian of the McMullen clan—claimed that he constructed the “sturdily built double pen log cabin” in 1848. A 1 February 1940 obituary of Jim’s son, Dr. Bethel McMullen, claimed that the family first occupied this cabin in 1848. One of Bethel’s granddaughters claimed that stories passed down through the generations placed the year of construction as either 1849 or 1850. A St. Petersburg Times story describing the February 1936 ceremony where the Daughters of the American Revolution dedicated a bronze tablet at the log house claimed that Captain James erected the home in 1850. Other articles, such as an extended essay entitled “The McMullens of Pinellas” that appeared in the “Floridian” magazine of the 6 August 1967 edition of the St. Petersburg Times, claimed the McMullens raised the building in either 1850 or 1852. When longtime Times columnist Dick Bothwell visited the cabin to interview family in August 1956, he learned that the McMullens built the house in 1852. Most historians and family members

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⁹ Ibid.

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believe that McMullens occupied the present structure by early 1852, though W. L. Straub placed the year of construction as late as 1856. This log house may have included wood or other materials salvaged from an earlier structure. Although the exact date of construction remains a mystery, one can assume that the dwelling resembled its present form by the early 1850s, as more members of the McMullen clan came to the area.\footnote{Clearwater Sun, 20 November 1949, 5 February 1950, 30 November 1976; St. Petersburg Times, 20 February 1936, 19 August 1956; Harris, “Seven McMullen Brothers,” 67-68.}

The immediate and extended families of Jim and Elizabeth McMullen continued to grow along with his homestead. Captain Jim held about 240 acres by the early 1850s. Between 1852 and 1860, the McMullens welcomed five additional children to the brood, in nearly two-year intervals: Daniel Campbell (born 18 March 1852), Mary Katherine (born 16 March 1854), James Robert (born 20 May 1856), Lydia Elizabeth (born 14 June 1858), and William W. (born 19 June 1860). Young William lived less than four years, perishing on 27 February 1864 at Clear Water Harbor. To meet the educational needs of his growing family, Captain Jim established the first school on the peninsula, a simple log cabin built about 1853 or 1854 at a site south of Sunset Point/Main Street and east of U.S. Highway 19. During a trip to send crops out of Florida, James McMullen searched for a teacher to offer instruction to his children and other youngsters in the area. He recruited a teacher and brought her and her daughter to his cabin. Originally, students met in the attic of Jim’s sugarhouse; this classroom had benches and a teacher’s desk built by Jim. Known as the “McMullen Log School,” members of the McMullen family also called this structure “Sylvan Abbey,” the name of the first teacher’s daughter. During this time, young Bethel McMullen owned and voraciously read many volumes of poetry. As more children attended classes, James McMullen and Dick Booth decided to build a larger one-room log school with a chimney and fireplace on a parcel east of his cabin. By the late 1850s, nearly thirty children came to this early schoolhouse on the frontier. Lee Harn, a member of an early family, recalled that students during the time often strung wild blueberries on wiregrass to make edible necklaces. The early school building also served as the Sylvan Abbey church, with many family members and guests gathering at one of

\footnote{Clearwater Sun, 1 February 1940, 5 February 1950; Marjorie McMullen Keery to Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, 18 June 1971; St. Petersburg Times, 20 February 1936, 6 August 1967, 19 August 1956; Straub, History of Pinellas County, insert between p. 28 and p. 29, 34.}
the nearby McMullen homes for dinner before their long journey back to Clear Water or Largo.

Captain Jim’s brothers also started to arrive in the area. Daniel McMullen, born in 1825, came to the area about 1851. He had married Elizabeth’s younger sister, Margaret Ann Campbell, at a ceremony in the Spring Lake Methodist Church near Brooksville on 18 November 1851. They probably built a small log cabin on the original family homestead, where they started to cultivate crops and herd cattle. In addition to having sisters as their wives, James and Dan McMullen also worked closely on raising cattle along the family’s lands. While staying at Jim’s log cabin, Daniel and Margaret McMullen celebrated the birth John James, their first child. John Fain McMullen moved to the Pinellas Peninsula and settled near the site of present-day Wilcox Road and Indian Rocks Road. After about five to seven years at this site, he apparently sold some of his land to Captain John T. Lowe, leader of an early family that established a settlement at Anona. John Fain then returned to Madison County, Florida, by the late 1850s. A few years later, John trekked to Georgia to fight on the side of the Confederacy. After the end of the Civil War, he would return to Florida, along with the other McMullen brothers.12

**Wars Reach the Pinellas Peninsula**

The battlefield disrupted the agricultural activities of James P. McMullen’s family as early as the 1850s. Battles of the Third Seminole War (1855-1858) came to Hillsborough County by early 1856. In February 1856, Captain Richard Turner organized residents into a militia that pledged to fight against Indians who encroached upon homesteaded lands. Abel Miranda served as a first lieutenant and Elias Hart acted as a second lieutenant. John A. Bethell also fought in these battles. Miranda had settled on Big Bayou in 1857; Bethell arrived on Little Bayou by 1859. Bethell’s sister, Eliza, later married Abel Miranda. Other companies mustered in the Tampa area, including one led by cattle rancher William B. Hooker. Captain Jim served with Hooker during the

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12 Genealogical research on the McMullen family appears in building and other research files located at Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; Harris, “Seven McMullen Brothers,” 64-65, 73; Ivey, “Uncle Dan McMullen” manuscript, pp. 3-4; Patricia Perez Constini, ed., *A Tradition of Excellence, Pinellas County Schools: 1912-1987* (Clearwater: Pinellas County School Board, 1987), 11; Pinellas County, Board of Public Instruction, *The Golden Anniversary of Pinellas Schools, Celebrating 50 Years of*
skirmishes of 1856, enlisting on January 3 at Fort Meade in eastern Hillsborough (now Polk) County. James served until February 21, and probably returned to his homestead shortly thereafter. “Keeter” Booth recalled an uprising in about 1859 when settlers around present-day Safety Harbor area saw a number of Indians come from the Alligator Creek area, where they had lived on the fish and oysters along the creek. Local residents, probably including members of the McMullen and Booth families, “promptly hustled [them] out to join their own people down towards the Everglades.” After the war came to an end, Captain Jim returned to his cabin and resumed his cultivation of crops and livestock. According to the 8 October 1859 issue of Tampa Town’s Florida Peninsular, James P. McMullen won an election to serve as a commissioner in Hillsborough County. At that time, a total of eight men from “Point Pinellas” voted in the election! By the 1860 census, he worked as a farmer and claimed lands valued at $850 and a personal estate worth $2,150.13

The McMullen brothers served the Confederacy during the Civil War. Nearly one year before the firing on Fort Sumter, James Parramore McMullen received a nomination as a candidate “for Major of the 20th Regiment of Florida Militia.” Despite his involvement in the military activities, James initially expressed opposition to secession, according to some sources. In 1861, James became a captain stationed at Clear Water Harbor under the command of General J. M. Taylor. This volunteer unit trained men to drive cattle from Florida to other Confederate states. Captain Jim mustered the troops on July 20 and the men left by October 20 with the expectation that they would join other Confederate forces. After the company’s disbandment, James continued to work as a member of the Quartermaster Corps of the Confederate army throughout the war and to serve with the “home guard.” He also celebrated the arrival of Lucy Marian McMullen on 19 April 1862. Records indicate that Elizabeth gave birth to Lucy in the Keystone Park area, rather than at the family’s log cabin; the family may have abandoned the homestead during this period because of encroaching Union forces along the Pinellas Peninsula.

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13 Ernest Lauren Robinson, History of Hillsborough County: Narrative and Biographical (St. Augustine: The Record Company, 1928), 38; Harris, “Seven McMullen Brothers,” 64; Young, Florida’s Pinellas Peninsula, 24; John A. Bethell, Bethell’s History of Point Pinellas (St. Petersburg: Great Outdoors, 1962),
According to one story, the family temporarily settled near Fort Keystone during the spring of 1862 before returning to the Sylvan Abbey area. The danger was real: Military forces burned the first log house built by Richard J. Booth at Philippe Hammock; in 1866, the Booths built a new log structure. Bethel McMullen claimed that Yankees also burned his library of poetry books at the cabin during the Civil War. Some of Captain Jim’s siblings had moved to other areas of Florida prior to the Civil War. Thomas Fain McMullen tied the knot with Mary Jane McCloud on 21 May 1844 and started a family while living in Georgia. This 1817 native of Georgia moved his family from their homestead in Thomas County, Georgia, to Madison County, Florida, by the late 1840s. About a decade later, his brother David McMullen also came to Madison County as a laborer who built a railroad spur between Madison and Tallahassee. While Thomas Fain returned to Georgia at the beginning of the Civil War, younger David stayed in Florida and fought in the Second Florida Cavalry. Research by Robert Harris and others indicates that two of the McMullen brothers (James and David) performed their Civil War military service in Florida, while four others (Thomas, Daniel, John, and Malcolm) returned to Georgia to fight for the Confederacy. Daniel returned to Florida by September 1863 and enlisted in a company of the Florida Infantry located in Brooksville under the command of Captain John McNeill. The oldest brother, William, remained sympathetic to the Confederacy, but apparently did not fight in the Civil War. Meanwhile, Bethel McMullen, Captain Jim’s oldest son, also fought in the war when he enlisted in Captain L. G. Leslie’s First Battalion Special Cavalry at Brooksville in 1863.  

James and Daniel McMullen served in the “Cow Cavalry” by 1863. This unit included many experts at raising and herding cattle who received orders to gather livestock from peninsular Florida and bring the animals to northern regions of the Confederacy for slaughter. The meat, tallow, and hides helped to feed, clothe, and sustain the struggling Confederate forces. During this period, James led cattle drives to locations

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14; Census information included in building files, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; Ivey, “Uncle Dan McMullen” manuscript, p. 5; [Tampa] Florida Peninsular, 8 October 1859.
14 Florida Peninsular, 14 April 1860; Harris, “Seven McMullen Brothers,” 64-66; Straub, History of Pinellas County, 35-36; Ivey, “Uncle Dan McMullen” manuscript, pp. 7-8; Safety Harbor Herald, 23 June 1939, 5 October 1951; Clearwater Sun, 1 February 1940. Bethel McMullen’s records, along with some other family members who fought in Florida, appear in the Florida Confederate Pension Application Files, Record Group 137, Series 587, State Archives of Florida. The Florida State Archives has created a searchable index on the internet located at: http://dlis.dos.state.fl.us/barm/PensionFiles.html.
such as Charleston, South Carolina, and Savannah, Georgia. In his research of Dan McMullen, Donald Ivey included an excerpt describing one cattle drive led by Captain Jim:

A detail of six men, under the command of Mr. James P. McMullen, was ordered to the cattle pens at Fort Meade to take charge of a herd of 365 beef cattle bound for Savannah. . . . The course was a northerly one. . . . The cattle were driven along at a ‘grazing rate’ of speed, usually averaging around 8½ miles per day. . . . 362 head out of the original herd of 365 had made it. Besides the two that were drowned, one was also lost somewhere between Fort Meade and Savannah. The herd was actually in far better condition than when they left their prairie home in Florida five weeks earlier.

Daniel, James, and James’s son, Bethel, may have served together in this Cow Cavalry by October 1864.

Expanding Families and Agribusiness Activities

Family members returned to their commercial activities—and to the Pinellas Peninsula—in the years following the Civil War. James and Elizabeth rounded out their family with the youngest of their eleven children: Birten Lee (“Uncle Birt”, born 25 May 1866) and George Ward (born 1 December 1870). Captain Jim continued to grow cotton and raise livestock during the late 1860s and early 1870s, though interviews with family members indicated that he focused his efforts on the citrus trade by 1875. Jim and Dan McMullen often sent cattle to Cuba in exchange for Spanish doubloons. Rather than dumping oranges in large barrels or storage areas of boats, James McMullen hired others to construct citrus crates from boards harvested from local trees that the workers fastened with palmetto stems. He partnered with Gustave Axelson, owner of boat fleet, to ship his citrus from Bay View to other ports, such as Cedar Keys, Pensacola, and Mobile. By the summer of 1869, Jim’s workers also built syrup barrels of “superior” quality that he sold to merchants and shippers in Tampa. Sugarcane grindings became regular events at many

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15 Ivey, “Uncle Dan McMullen” manuscript, pp. 8-9.
16 Ibid.
McMullen farmsteads. Captain Jim also served as a self-taught dentist on the frontier, a profession his eldest son, Bethel, also practiced by the 1870s. Daniel also returned to the Largo area by 1865 and acquired a homestead near the site he occupied in 1852. He built the Dan McMullen House, currently located in Heritage Village, in 1868. David McMullen arrived by 1866 and settled in the Morse Hill area of Safety Harbor, between St. Helena and Bay View and adjacent to brother Thomas Fain’s property. After a short while, David returned to Madison. He later moved to Lakeland after the Florida Southern Railroad reached that settlement in the mid-1880s. There, he built a two-story wooden structure known as the Sunnyside Hotel, a business he operated until his death in 1896. In 1868, William McMullen obtained tracts near Ridge Road in the area around 102nd Avenue North and Walsingham Road. Thomas Fain McMullen also acquired parcels in 1868; his land holdings covered properties west of Safety Harbor near McMullen-Booth Road at a site once known as the “Davey Place.” At that location, he cultivated a variety of vegetables and cotton, and raised cattle. The last two brothers arrived by 1871. John Fain returned to the area and acquired a tract in the Lealman area near U.S. Highway 19 and 54th Avenue North, while Malcolm’s parcel rested near the intersection of East Bay Drive and Belcher Road. John raised cattle and citrus for a few years before moving to Perry, Florida, the seat of Taylor County, by about 1878.18

Census information from 1870 offers a portrait of agricultural activities on the McMullen properties. James and Elizabeth claimed land they appraised at $2,000, and a personal estate worth a similar amount. A thirty-two year old North Carolina native, Elicy Simers, lived at Captain Jim’s house. By this period, the family held Saturday evening gatherings on the porch, attracting family members from afar for dances to guitar, fiddle, and organ music. According to the 1870 census, Thomas Fain McMullen listed real estate valued at $3,000, and a personal estate worth $320. His oldest sons—Rufus (then age twenty), James (then seventeen), and John (then twelve)—assisted him as laborers on the family farm, while Jane (then fifteen) and Joel (then eight) worked around the house. Two boys, James and Leander Blakely, also lived with the family.

17 Ibid.
18 Harris, “Seven McMullen Brothers,” 66-67, 70-73; Ivey, “Uncle Dan McMullen” manuscript, p. 11; Florida Peninsular, 25 August 1869; Clearwater Sun, 1 February 1940; St. Petersburg Times, 6 August 1967.
Rufus Fain, the oldest son of Thomas Fain, exchanged vows with Georgia Ann Hammock at Captain Jim’s log house on 21 February 1874. Rufus moved to the Largo area after his father passed away in 1888. Rufus sold his crop of oranges for near $1,200 during the 1900-1901 growing season. During the early 1900s, Rufus, John J. McMullen, and A. M. O’Quinn became important grove owners in the Largo area.19

The Growth of the Bay View Community

James P. McMullen believed that Bay View offered the best location for agricultural development in the Tampa Bay region. He frequently touted the settlement during visits across the bay to Tampa. For example, in late December 1878, he visited the office of the *Sunland Tribune* newspaper to present the editor with sugar cane specimens ten feet in length. The following week, he dropped off an orange that weighed over one pound while conducting business in Tampa. His reputation in raising cattle grew throughout the region. John C. White, a visitor to the area, wrote a letter to his uncle while anchored at Johns Pass in March 1883. In his correspondence, John mentioned that “if you can find any person that wants to buy Florida cattle they can address James P. McMullen, Bay View, Fla.” Florida’s 1885 agricultural census offers a glimpse at J. P. McMullen’s agricultural holdings: He kept 1,000 acres as woodland, and grew crops and raised animals on much of his other holdings. He claimed a farm and outbuildings valued at $2,500, along with $80 in equipment, $400 in livestock, produce valued at $600, and wages paid to others listed at $120 per annum. At that time, James kept two horses, two mules, thirty-six cows, ten swine, sixty-two poultry, and about forty other animals. Two of Captain Jim’s sons advertised in the *Sunland Tribune* by January 1882 to sell some of their groves and acreage. Daniel C. McMullen offered a 200-acre tract “under good fence,” with fourteen acres under cultivation at the time. The plot included 400 orange trees “in fine order,” available for “easy terms.” Meanwhile, Dr. Bethel McMullen planned to sell two separate forty-acre tracts, with “some fifty acres under good fence and cultivation, [and] good water.” The 1000 fruit trees included about 200 orange trees. The property also came with “a good plain building . . . in a healthy location.” William

19 Harris, “Seven McMullen Brothers,” 70; *Tampa Weekly Tribune*, 7 January 1904; *St. Petersburg Times*, 7 September 1901, 19 August 1956.
McMullen, Captain Jim’s oldest brother, cultivated oranges in the Clear Water area, including ten large specimens that weighed a combined fifteen pounds during the spring of 1880. J. J. McMullen and J. P. Nash offered large groves and lots for sale in early editions of the *West Hillsborough Times* by 1886. By the summer of 1890, young John T. McMullen of Bay View had patented “a most complete orange clipper” that he planned to place on the market to expedite crop gathering.20

Captain Jim and his sons developed Bay View into a town by 1874. Originally known as “Eagle’s Nest” for the large nest Captain Jim spotted in a tree by the 1840s, the settlement became known as “Swimming Pen Point” as early residents began to bring cattle to the region. The deep water along the shore allowed boats to sail into the area by the mid-1840s, a few years after Captain Jim’s initial visit, and transport produce and livestock to distant markets. Early settlers of the region often herded cattle from as far north as Taylor County and as far east as Polk County to the area. They kept cows in pens until schooners arrived along Tampa Bay. The farmers then brought about six cows at a time out of the pen, and had them swim from the shoreline to the boat, using horses and rowboats to herd them into schooners. During the late nineteenth century, strong family ties connected Bay View to Tampa. For example, members of the McMullen family regularly traveled to Tampa to conduct business or participate in politics. Members of the Culbreath family, notable in Tampa business and social circles by the early 1900s, first settled on a seventy-acre parcel near Bay View in December 1866 after moving from South Carolina. Expecting the railroad to reach this site in the near future, James P. McMullen built a sawmill, a packing house, and a hotel with two stories and about forty rooms at Bay View. Meanwhile, his son, Dan C. McMullen operated one of the two stores in Bay View by the mid-1870s. Dan—not to be confused with “Uncle Dan” McMullen who had since moved to Largo and built his residence—shipped approximately 2,000 “fine” cabbages from his Bay View property to merchants in Louisville, Kentucky, by March 1881. The community celebrated the dedication of Bethel Presbyterian Church in Bay View on 1 April 1887, a structure built from cypress logs shipped from Pensacola by Captain Jim. One son, James Robert McMullen, left the

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20 *Sunland Tribune*, 4 January 1879, 27 May 1880, 4 September 1880, 26 January 1882; *West Hillsborough Times*, 1 April 1886; John C. White to Uncle, 22 March 1883, Heritage Village Library and
area to study law at the East Florida Seminary (the precursor to the University of Florida). After meeting Caroline McBride Summerlin, he fell in love, quit school, and raised cotton on forty acres. Young Jim and Caroline wed in a 7 June 1881 ceremony at Anona. While waiting for his citrus crops to mature, Captain Jim’s namesake son built a boat named the *Carrie Bell* that he later expanded and renamed the *Gypsy Maid*. His navigational skills soon won him the nickname “Captain Jim Junior,” though close family members distinguished him from his father by calling him “Jimmie.” By the 1880s, the junior Jim regularly ran shipments of crops, including watermelons, to Tampa, Port Tampa, Sarasota, and other venues along the Gulf. By the end of Reconstruction, members of the McMullen family (including William and John) served as delegates to the Hillsborough County Democratic Party, led at the time by Captain John T. Lesley.21

The McMullen family also has a direct connection with the legendary kapok tree along McMullen-Booth Road. Daniel C. McMullen, a leader at the Friendship Methodist Church, received kapok tree (*Bombax ceiba*) seeds from a church missionary. Captain Jim’s son took the seeds to the nursery of Robert D. Hoyt. A noted taxidermist, Hoyt visited Payne’s Prairie in Alachua County and other Florida sites during the years after the Civil War to collect specimens. During one trip to Florida, he met Agnes Denny, a young woman who had moved from Illinois to teach at the Bay View schoolhouse. Robert and Agnes soon married in Illinois and moved to New York. Within a short period of time, Agnes fell ill and the doctor suggested that she return to Florida. When the Hoyts came to the Seven Oaks area about 1875, they stayed at Captain Jim’s cabin for awhile. Later, they purchased about 100 acres from the McMullens, planted citrus trees, and grew exotic crops. They called this settlement—located on McMullen-Booth south of Alligator Creek—“Seven Oaks” for the majestic oaks on the property. Agnes’s sister, Emma Denny, became postmistress at Seven Oaks. Soon, the Hoyts built a greenhouse and established a mail order nursery that sold their exotic plants to patrons throughout the world. Hoyt grew two small kapok trees from Dan McMullen’s seeds; both survived the freezes of the 1890s because Hoyt and McMullen kept the small plants in the greenhouse.

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After 1895, Hoyt sold his holdings in the business, which later became American Exotic Nurseries, an early place of employment for a young teenager named John S. Taylor who rode his bicycle from Largo to work at the location long before becoming a state senator. Hoyt maintained an extensive collection of stuffed animals from the local area, including tigers, wildcats, minx, alligators, numerous birds, raccoons, possums, snakes, and a large black bear. These specimens became an attraction for visitors to Bay View. Hoyt sold the business, but kept his kapok: As the trees grew, Hoyt placed one on his property and Dan planted the other. Dan’s tree perished after the 1962 freeze, while the sapling raised by Hoyt became the impressive behemoth that adorns the site of the former Kapok Tree Inn Restaurant along McMullen-Booth Road.22

While the McMullens and Booths share their names on a road, early family leaders played a large role in building early road networks along the Pinellas Peninsula. The extended Bay View community covered a broad portion of the east-central Pinellas Peninsula by 1880. In October of that year, Captain Jim retrieved his sharpest hatchet and climbed upon his strongest horse for a ride to see Richard “Uncle Dick” Booth. Together Jim McMullen and Dick Booth carved a pathway between Uncle Dick’s cabin, near present-day McMullen-Booth (once Haines) Road, to Bay View. Robert Hoyt agreed to construct a bridge across Alligator Creek if Booth and McMullen built an extension to his house. In time, the families built what McMullen family member Nancy Meader called “the first road in Pinellas County laid-off and built according to surveyors’ specifications.” At Bay View, Captain Jim had erected his store and hotel. The old “Swimming Pen” docks remained an important site for visiting steamships. A journey north along present-day McMullen-Booth took early settlers past the James R. McMullen’s home, the kapok tree site, and the Hoyt home. After crossing Alligator Creek, travelers saw G. Ward McMullen’s home and the Booth house north of present day Main Street. Sylvan Abbey church and lake became a focal point along present-day Main Street/Sunset Point. A path from Sylvan Abbey generally following Coachman Road took early travelers to Captain Jim’s log cabin and the McMullen cemetery. Dan C. McMullen’s farmstead sat near the current intersection of Drew and Belcher, while

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22 For a discussion of the “Kapok Tree” story, see: Katherine C. Downs, My Memories of Safety Harbor, Florida (December 1835 to February 1896) (N.p.: n.p., 1986); Clearwater Sun, 4 December 1949.
Bethel McMullen lived near U. S. Highway 19 near Druid Road. Within a few decades, the McMullens, Booths, and other early families had carved a substantial settlement out of the wilderness. Ironically, by the early 1960s it took a “complicated series of parliamentary maneuvers” to preserve the name of McMullen-Booth name on that road. Members of the Pinellas County Historical Commission wanted the road to honor the families that had cleared the original path. At the time, most maps referred to the two-lane thoroughfare as North Haines Road, an extension of Haines that followed the path of present-day U. S. Highway 19 to its junction with present-day Haines Road in Pinellas Park. After debating the issue, the Board of County Commissioners agreed to restore the McMullen-Booth designation. Not everyone in the audience agreed with the outcome: One North Pinellas resident told a newspaper reporter, “They already have a McMullen Road and a Booth Avenue. . . . If they want a monument let them put one up on private property.”

The McMullens and Booths celebrated their combined families. Lucy Marian McMullen, Captain Jim’s youngest daughter, left for school at Valdosta, Georgia, in about 1878, after completing her primary education at the original Sylvan Abbey. On 23 November 1886, she married DeJoinville Booth, son of Richard (Dick) and Millicent Booth and grandson of Odet Philippe. The newlyweds followed in their parents’ footsteps by establishing citrus groves in the Safety Harbor area. Lucy’s work with the Sylvan Abbey’s missionary society helped lay the groundwork for the establishment of the Safety Harbor Methodist Church, also located at Heritage Village. DeJoinville maintained a longtime membership in the Safety Harbor church. After an extended illness that sent him to Clearwater’s Morton Plant Hospital, he returned to his Safety Harbor home where he passed away on the afternoon of 18 September 1939. Known as “Aunt Lucy” in her later years, by the time this matriarch passed away on 3 October 1951, she left seven children, eighteen grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren. Both DeJoinville and Lucy occupy plots at the McMullen family cemetery. One of their sons, Leland Byrd Booth, grew citrus and worked as agricultural inspector from 1924 until 1959. Roy Booth, an early Pinellas County sheriff and the son of Odet William “Keeter”

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23 Clearwater Sun, 4 December 1949; St. Petersburg Times, 13 December 1962.
Booth, also married a McMullen when he exchanged vows with Margaret Rose, daughter of William A. McMullen, Sr.\textsuperscript{24}

Captain Jim also enjoyed time spent with an “adopted” member of the family. Juan Patricia (sometimes spelled “Patrecia,” “Petrecia,” or “Betriese”), was born probably in the 1820s in Vera Cruz, Mexico. Losing his father at a young age, Juan left Mexico in the early 1830s on a Spanish boat. According to family stories, he became a servant in the Havana palace of a governor general in Cuba. He claimed he had stolen a boat and sailed single-handedly from Havana to Key West, with a later journey to New Orleans. By this time, he went by the Anglicized name “John Sanders.” He caught a ship from the Crescent City filled with cotton and bound for Liverpool, England, but that boat apparently sank off the coast near Manatee County after getting hit by lightning. Juan said he arrived at Tampa by 1856, in time to see the Seminoles deported during the closing battles of the Third Seminole War. Juan later found his way to present-day St. Pete Beach, and hid from troops during the Civil War in the Coffee Pot Bayou area of St. Petersburg. After the war, he spent time with Abel Miranda near Pinellas Point, before finally drifting to Captain Jim’s log cabin. Juan apparently respected James P. McMullen because Captain Jim never made remarks about the Mexican’s short size. He lived at the estate from about the late 1860s until Elizabeth McMullen’s death in 1890. During this time, “Uncle Johnnie” took care of the chickens and cultivated crops in the garden at Captain Jim’s home. Between 1890 and his death in 1920, Juan spent much of his time with the family of Bethel McMullen. Members of the McMullen clan buried Juan in the family cemetery after he passed away.\textsuperscript{25}

Educational facilities expanded by the late 1800s. In 1880, settlers of Bay View built a new log schoolhouse to replace the Sylvan Abbey structure. Ten years later, they replaced this structure with a two-story building that also included an upstairs office for the local Masonic Temple. This building had two doors: the left door offered a covered staircase to the meeting hall, while the right door opened into the classroom. Students attending classes often stopped at the cloak room, just to the left of the school entrance. Inside this closet, nearly every student’s family kept a labeled bottle of syrup. School

\textsuperscript{24} Safety Harbor Herald, 22 September 1939, 5 October 1951, 15 May 1959; St. Petersburg Times, 19 September 1939, 17 August 1970; Clearwater Sun, 19 September 1939.
lunches, brought by the students from home, often included cold hominy and possibly a slice of bacon, sweet potato, or biscuits. Students grabbed their bottle of syrup, and poured it on the bread for dipping at lunchtime. An outdoor well and pump provided a “drinking fountain” for the school, though students often had to worry about frogs getting caught in the pipes. On more than a few occasions, frogs became mangled in the pump and students had pieces of frog “meat” in their water. Like the “soccer moms” of today, parents sometimes escorted their younger children part of the way to school. These concerned parents did not fear vehicular traffic; instead, they worried that livestock and wild young horses in the woods might harm their children. As early as 1882, some members of the small community even hoped to establish a college in the area, a very ambitious proposal given the region’s small population and rural character. On 18 May 1882, Captain Jim told a correspondent with Tampa’s *Sunland Tribune* that he had started to solicit “aid for the purpose of constructing and equipping the College building at Bay View.” By that time, J. P. McMullen had acquired 160 acres of land and $1,930 towards this project. Although this facility never opened, probably in large measure because the Orange Belt Railway and other transportation networks bypassed Bay View by the 1890s, the up-and-doing attitude illustrated the enthusiasm that Captain Jim had for the community. 26

**Pioneer Settlers Pass Away and the Train Bypasses the Region**

As members of the McMullen family grew older, Captain Jim established a family cemetery in 1881 on about ten acres of land southwest of his log house. He probably dedicated this land after the death of Mary Katherine Belcher, his third daughter and former wife of William Alexander Belcher. Mary passed away on January 31. Members of the Belchers and McMullens gathered for a funeral service at Jim’s log house before her burial, the earliest interment at the family cemetery. William A. Belcher married another of Captain Jim’s daughters, Sarah Jane, on 12 October 1881. Captain Jim remained active in the family’s business throughout the 1880s. He hired a Philadelphian named H. L. Huff to ship oranges from his property in the fall of 1890; Huff also assisted

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26 *Clearwater Sun*, 18 December 1949; *Sunland Tribune*, 18 May 1882.
Robert Whitehurst’s family by preparing their crops for shipment. Marriages and children expanded the family. George Ward McMullen married his wife, a native of London, England, in April 1891. She had arrived in the St. Petersburg area as a teenager, and soon met members of the McMullen family. After their ceremony, the newlyweds continued to live at the family cabin for awhile before moving to Safety Harbor.\(^{27}\)

Bay View’s fortunes began to change after the arrival of the Orange Belt Railway to the Pinellas Peninsula in 1888. At the time when the iron horse reached the small and remote settlement at St. Petersburg, residents of Bay View enjoyed a thriving commercial deep water port that rivaled others in the region. Although the Orange Belt followed a path from Tarpon Springs along the western end of the Pinellas Peninsula that bypassed Bay View, the settlement continued to enjoy regular steamship service into the 1890s. For example, during the summer of 1890 the steamer *Erie* regularly traveled the “Old Tampa Bay Route” from Tampa to Bay View and Safety Harbor, with extended service around Pinellas Point to Dunedin and Clearwater. Despite the settlement’s decline in prominence by 1900, the *Tampa Weekly Tribune* continued to publish an occasional column, “Brevities of Bay View,” after the turn of the century. As early as the winter of 1904, leading residents of Bay View wanted Hillsborough County officials to allocate funds for a spur road—probably following the general route of Gulf-to-Bay Boulevard—that would connect their settlement with Clearwater. By this time, residents considered Bay View more of an enclave of Clearwater than a separate community. The construction of the Tampa and Gulf Coast Railroad—often called the “Tug and Grunt”—brought rail service to the region by the mid-1910s; however, the growth of St. Petersburg, Clearwater, and other cities had eclipsed Bay View by that time. Myron A. Smith, a man who purchased James R. McMullen’s old Bay View home in 1917, played an important role in having Bay View incorporated into the City of Clearwater in 1925. Shortly thereafter, city leaders placed gas lights along the eastern portion of Gulf-to-Bay Boulevard and widened the roadway that connected Bay View to Gulf-to-Bay. By early 1925, developers McKinley and Langston had purchased twenty acres in Bay View and

\(^{27}\) Harris, “Seven McMullen Brothers,” 68; *Sanland Tribune*, 19 February 1881; *Largo Sentinel*, 28 September 1933; McKay, *Pioneer Florida*, vol. 3, p. 117. For a list of those buried at the McMullen Cemetery, please consult a database created by members of the Pinellas Genealogy Society at:
began selling lots for as low as $950. As the land boom exploded, some properties sold for as much as $25,000. Smith and “Uncle Birt” McMullen donated lands for picnic areas and a park. During the early 1930s, Smith assisted Ben T. Davis in the construction of Davis (now Courtney Campbell) Causeway.  

The 1890s marked an important transition period as four of the seven brothers McMullen passed away during that decade. Thomas Fain, the first brother to die, had passed away during the previous decade, in 1888. His family buried him at the Sylvan Abbey cemetery in Safety Harbor. John Fain perished in 1895, probably at his home in Taylor County. That same year, James Parramore McMullen died on April 17 in the Clearwater area. After services commemorating his active life on the Pinellas frontier, kith and kin buried Jim at the family cemetery he had established fourteen years earlier. He rested at a site near his wife, Elizabeth Campbell McMullen, who had passed away on 17 December 1890. With Captain Jim’s passing, his eldest son, Bethel, became the patriarch of that branch of the McMullen family. Son Jim purchased Captain Jim’s hotel in Bay View from his siblings for $900, tore the building down, and constructed a large home and store along the bay. This was the home Myron Smith had purchased in 1917. David perished in 1896. He had moved to Lakeland about a decade earlier. The Lakeview Cemetery in Lakeland was his final resting place. William, the oldest brother, died in 1898. Family members placed his body at the Lone Pilgrim Cemetery on 102nd Avenue North near Ridge Road., a site established two years earlier by the Long Pilgrim Primitive Baptist Church. Other members of his immediate family, as well as relatives from the O’Quinn and Walsingham families, also occupy plots at Lone Pilgrim. The last surviving brothers perished during the first decade of the twentieth century: “Uncle Dan” McMullen perished 1908 and rested with many members of his branch of the family at the Largo Cemetery. Malcolm, the youngest of the seven brothers and the last to die, was interred at the McMullen family cemetery after his death in 1909.


28 Tampa Tribune, 26 June 1890; Clearwater Evening Sun, 3 January 1925, 10 January 1925; Clearwater Sun, 22 January 1950, 29 January 1950; Tampa Weekly Tribune, 11 February 1904. For an example of the “Brevities of Bay View” column, see: Tampa Weekly Tribune, 11 July 1901.

29 Harris, “Seven McMullen Brothers, ” 73; Clearwater Sun, 29 January 1950. Members of the Pinellas Genealogy Society have joined others who have compiled cemetery information as part of a “tombstone
Long before his father’s death, Bethel McMullen became an important leader in the Tampa Bay region. Captain Jim’s oldest son and a native of Brooksville born in December 1845, Bethel came to the Pinellas Peninsula as a young child during his father’s treks to the area in 1848. He enlisted in the Confederate forces at the age of sixteen and fought alongside his father and other family members during the later stages of the war. After the Civil War, Captain Jim gave Bethel a dentist’s kit and taught him basic skills. Shortly thereafter, Bethel began traveling along sand and dirt roads to Tampa, Brooksville, and other locations to build a clientele. After an 1868 law required college course work to practice dentistry, Bethel raised $100 of the required $600 tuition by driving oxen for a year. He earned additional funds by bringing cedar logs from Brooksville to Tampa, along both the Weeki Watchee River to the Gulf and the Hillsborough River directly to Tampa. During this early part of the Reconstruction era, he worked with Jude, an African-American woman and former slave, who rode the logs with him as a lumberperson. Bethel and Jude often hired former slaves to ride in a raft in front of them and use long poles to scare away the alligators that populated the rivers. In 1872, Dr. Bethel McMullen completed his studies at the Baltimore College of Dental Surgery and became the first professional dentist in Hillsborough County. Chartered by the General Assembly of Maryland in 1840, this educational institution later became part of the Dental School at the University of Maryland. He soon established a practice that spanned from Perry to Key West, often with stops in settlements such as Brooksville, Fort Meade, and Bartow. He often traveled by buggy, and frequently spent up to a week in each community taking care of residents. Even before finishing his classes, Bethel solicited patients in an advertisement appearing in the *Florida Peninsular*, a Tampa newspaper, in May 1871: “Dentistry: Dr. B. McMullen offers his professional services to the citizens of Tampa, and requests a share of their patronage.” Newspapers often announced Dr. Bethel’s “professional tours,” such as when a September 1878 issue of the *Sunland Tribune* told residents along the Alifia River told residents there that “those having dental work to be done cannot consult a better dentist.” Bethel made at least one mistake, however, during his six decades as a dentist: Brother James Robert McMullen
once visited him to have a tooth pulled. Lacking anesthesia, Bethel and James decided to have a few drinks so that Jim’s face would become numb and Bethel could prepare himself for the painful procedure on his brother. Bethel performed the procedure, and Jim returned home only to find out after the alcohol had cleared his system that his older brother had yanked the wrong tooth.30

Bethel started a family after marrying Nancy “Nannie” Elizabeth Taylor on 24 March 1874. Daughter of John S. Taylor and Margaret Carter, Nannie entered the world on 1 March 1854. Bethel and Nannie tied the knot in Brooksville, and returned to the Pinellas Peninsula to start their family. They raised eight children: Blanche, Francis Paramour, Eliza, James Swinson, Frederick Bethel, Mildred Elizabeth, Millie Carolyn, and Julia. While building his dental practice, Bethel also remained an avid farmer and gardener. He served as a member of the Hillsborough County School Board in the early 1880s, at a time when the schools operated on a five-month term and teacher salaries averaged one dollar per pupil per school month. Bethel built the first house made from lumber in Bay View; other structures of the time were log cabins. He also owned one of the first automobiles in Clearwater, an “Overland” model that he purchased for $885. By 1909, Bethel and Nannie owned a parcel valued at $1,730 and at least $200 worth of cattle and livestock. Known for his photographic memory, Dr. B. McMullen frequently cited long passages of literature and poetry, including works by Robert Burns. Indeed, his childhood passion of reading poetry, academic training in Baltimore, and professional activities along Florida’s Gulf coast dispel commonplace notions about the “simple” lives of many frontier residents. During the early 1900s, Bethel attended the annual Blue-Gray reunions of Civil War veterans; his last trip took place in the summer of 1938, when son Frank escorted his ninety-two year old father to Gettysburg.

After fifty-eight years as a professional dentist, Bethel retired from his practice in 1930. His son, Dr. Fred McMullen, became the third generation to practice dentistry. Bethel and Nannie remained prominent residents of the area until their deaths. On their sixtieth anniversary in March 1934, seven children, twenty grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren joined them to hear their milestone mentioned by an announcer on the

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30 Clearwater Sun, 29 October 1939, 1 February 1940, 27 November 1949; Florida Peninsular, 27 May 1871; Sunland Tribune, 28 September 1878.
national “Cheerio” radio program. Well into his nineties, Bethel worked in a garden east of his Druid Road home and walked daily to a nearby bakery to purchase bread. An intellectual by nature, he remained interested in world events until the day he died. In January 1940, the United Daughters of the Confederacy honored Dr. B. McMullen at a luncheon at the Clearwater Yacht Club. Bethel suffered a heart attack on the afternoon of 31 January 1940 at his residence of 609 East Pine Street. Before his death, Bethel was the last living Confederate veteran in Pinellas County and possibly the oldest member of the Masonic Order of the United States. His wife, ill at the time, joined him in eternal rest when she perished on March 21.  

The Coachman Family Acquires Part of the James P. McMullen Estate

The heirs of James Parramore McMullen decided to sell the log cabin and much of the accompanying lands to Solomon Smith Coachman in 1902. An article in the 10 April 1902 Tampa Weekly Tribune claimed that Coachman purchased the grove property for $8,100. Second of five children born to Hugh McCauley and Frances Moselle Lane Coachman, S. S. Coachman entered the world on 4 April 1862 in Echols County, Georgia. Known to family members as “Smith” or “S. S.,” Coachman attended Valdosta Institute in 1870. In the early 1880s, Coachman arrived in Polk County, Florida, where he taught for awhile at a school in a village north of Lakeland known as Foxtown. He later lived in Webster, a community in Sumter County, before opening a sawmill business in the new settlement of Lakeland in about 1883. He may have taught at a school in Plant City by 1884. During his travels in the region he met Ella Tucker, a resident of Richland, a small community in eastern Hernando (now Pasco) County between Dade City and Zephyrhills. On 6 January 1887, he married Ella—daughter of Joseph W. and Elizabeth Tucker—in a ceremony at Richland. This union produced two children, both born in Richland: Hattie Lane (born April 1888) and Joseph Herbert Coachman (13 May 1889). W. L. Straub and other sources claimed that S. S. Coachman arrived on the Pinellas Peninsula by 1886 and established a sawmill near the present site of the Belleview

31 Clearwater Sun, 29 October 1939, 1 February 1940; St. Petersburg Times, 12 May 1957; Tarpon Springs Leader, 2 February 1940; Sunland Tribune, 21 May 1881, 12 October 1882; Bethel McMullen’s records, along with some other family members who fought in Florida, appear in the Florida Confederate Pension Application Files, Record Group 137, Series 587, State Archives of Florida.
Biltmore Hotel in Belleair. If he settled near Clear Water Harbor at this early date, Ella must have traveled to her parents’ homestead at Richland to have their children. He undoubtedly settled at Clear Water by the early 1890s, where three of his brothers (Benjamin Green, Hugh McCauley, and Edwin Horace) joined him. He made an unhappy visit to Richland in 1892, after his wife passed away. Coachman had her buried at the Tucker Cemetery, the oldest graveyard in present-day Pasco and resting place for many of her kin.  

The Coachman brothers operated a profitable sawmill by the 1890s. They supplied wood used for many early buildings in present-day Clearwater, including the Verona Inn (later renamed Gray Moss Inn) that opened in the late 1890s and the first section of the Belleview Hotel. Solomon soon opened a general merchandise store at Fort Harrison Avenue and Cleveland Street, while his brother, Edwin, worked at both the mill and the store, and later entered the banking business and played a part in organizing the First National Bank of Clearwater. In 1894, S. S. Coachman helped to construct this bank, one of the first brick buildings on the Pinellas Peninsula. He also hired “Old Uncle Jack,” an African American man, to deliver groceries from the Coachman mercantile store, serve as a porter, and perform various jobs. By June 1900, S. S. Coachman resided on Fort Harrison Avenue with his two children (Hattie and Joseph) and his sister, Hattie Massie. Meanwhile, Benjamin Green Coachman, Solomon’s older brother, worked as a butcher and lived on Cleveland Street with wife Bell, and their six children: Loveridge F., Mammie I., Lula, Hugh, Estell, and Benjamin G. Coachman. Ben, who abandoned a grove north of Tampa during the terrible freezes of the 1890s, may have served as the first butcher in Clearwater. Edwin Horace Coachman operated a sawmill around the turn of the century.

Solomon met Jessie Candler while visited his sister’s lodge, the Seaora. This structure along North Osceola Avenue later became the Sandcastle Inn. Eldest of five children raised by Samuel Charles Candler and Jimmie Beville, Jessie was born on 19

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September 1877 in Villa Rica, Georgia. She attended public schools in Villa Rica before completing her studies at the West End Institute then located at Cartersville, Georgia. After teaching for about four years, her health declined and her father encouraged her to travel to Florida to recuperate. She first visited some of her mother’s relatives in Sumter County before venturing to Clearwater. In January 1901, Solomon and Jessie became acquaintances, and soon learned that they had a shared ancestry and were fourth cousins. By March 1901 Solomon and Jessie announced their engagement. Solomon married Jessie as his second wife at a 27 June 1901 ceremony at her family’s home in Villa Rica. An uncle, Bishop Warren Candler of the local Methodist church, united them in matrimony. Warren later served as the leader of Emory University in Atlanta. A July 13 edition of the *St. Petersburg Times* announced the return of the honeymooners as they arrived by train in Clearwater.33

Another one of Jessie’s relatives, Asa Candler, had business connections that brought him great wealth. Asa left the family farmstead near Villa Rica, studied medicine, and worked as an Atlanta druggist. He became acquainted with Dr. John Stith Pemberton, a pharmacist who developed Coca-Cola as a tonic. After Pemberton’s death in 1888, Candler consolidated his holdings in the enterprise and soon obtained control of the manufacturing process for this beverage. By 1892, Asa Candler incorporated the Coca-Cola Company. Before 1900, the company successfully distributed Coca-Cola syrup to independent bottlers under licensing agreements that brought the soft drink to all forty-eight states of the Union, as well as the provinces of Canada. Candler sold the company for $25-million in 1919 and soon thereafter helped Emory College relocate to the Atlanta area and expand into Emory University. An examination of Asa Candler’s business activities may uncover possible speculative or commercial connections between him, his niece, and the Coachman family.34

S. S. and Jessie Candler Coachman celebrated the arrival of seven children. Genealogical records indicate that Jessie gave birth to their three oldest children while


living in Clearwater at a home on North Fort Harrison near Cleveland Street or at a rooming house in the Harbor Oaks area: Solomon Smith (born 19 August 1902), Samuel Candler (born 6 December 1904), and Hugh “Mack” McCauley (born 6 January 1907). Although the Orange Belt had arrived many years earlier, Clearwater still resembled a small “cow town” during the early years of the twentieth century. In a retrospective interview, Jessie C. Coachman remembered the town in about 1901:

The sand was two feet deep on Fort Harrison Avenue . . . where we lived was country—deep woods all around. One night I started across the street to see one of our few neighbors . . . It was quite dark and I fell sprawling over a cow and nearly broke my neck.

Although S. S. Coachman had acquired the former McMullen residence, the family initially lived in downtown Clearwater for a few years before moving into the cabin. The Coachmans wanted to live near Samuel and Jimmie Beville Candler—Jessie’s parents—who resided at the Gray Moss Annex during the early 1900s. As their children grew older and more automobiles began to clog city streets, the Coachmans decided to move from their residence on Fort Harrison in the center of the city to the log house in the countryside. According to stories passed down to relatives, they initially planned to stay in the cabin for a summer but soon decided to remodel and improve that dwelling as their residence. The Coachmans sealed the cracks that Captain Jim had included in the building for excellent ventilation; windows replaced the wooden shutters. Jessie gave birth to at least four of her five youngest children at the former McMullen cabin: Anne (born 20 July 1909), James Warren (born 14 March 1911), Francis Lane (12 December 1912), Jessie Candler (20 April 1916), and Bonnell Ponteau (6 April 1920). In 1909, Solomon Coachman and Daniel Campbell McMullen, one of Captain Jim’s sons, hung the first telephone line in the area outside of Clearwater when they connected the log cabin to the nearby Coachman store and Dan McMullen’s house. This simple, three-way telephone system allowed the Coachmans and Dan McMullen’s family to contact each

36 Meador, “Jessie Candler Coachman Recalls” clipping.
other, but the lines did not connect anywhere else for quite a while. Though he claimed to be an “orange grower” in the 1910 census, S. S. Coachman remained involved in many business ventures in upper Pinellas.\textsuperscript{37}

The Coachmans moved to the Bay View area at a time when residents of the area demanded better infrastructure and facilities. As previously mentioned, when the Orange Belt Railway bypassed the region, settlers in Bay View and Seven Oaks became part of the extended Clearwater area, yet lacked adequate roads to Clearwater, Sutherlin, or other communities in upper Pinellas. Citrus growers around the Seven Oaks area demanded better infrastructure, with one correspondent reporting that “petitions for hard roads are as common now as poor men.” They also clamored for a packing house in that area. Although Coachman may have built a packing house on his property as early as 1903, it resembled a small shed. Many of the oranges and grapefruit harvested in Safety Harbor, Seven Oaks, and around Bay View traveled overland along the poor and contorted roads to packing houses and shipping facilities at Largo, Clearwater, or Dunedin. Citrus operators in Bay View finally built a shared packing house about 1909. Transportation to Tampa also remained difficult. Although occasional steamship service connected Tampa with Bay View, St. Petersburg, and other settlements in western Hillsborough County, the Plant Railroad System did not provide a fast, direct route. Maurice McMullen once described a horse-and-buggy journey from the Safety Harbor area to Tampa along the established dirt road as a two-day journey past Oldsmar and around the northern shore of Tampa Bay. Travelers often camped overnight along the way, and during the winter months Maurice McMullen even filled his wagon with sand and lit a fire within the wagon to keep warm.\textsuperscript{38}

**Declaring Independence from Hillsborough County**

S. S. Coachman strongly advocated the creation of Pinellas County. As a leading entrepreneur on the Pinellas Peninsula, Coachman understood the difficulties of conducting business in a distant county seat when a poor transportation system isolated the Pinellas Peninsula from most of Hillsborough County. While W. A. Belcher first

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
broached the issue in the mid-1880s, momentum for the division of Pinellas from the rest of Hillsborough County began to take shape by 1907. W. L. Straub’s *St. Petersburg Times* launched an appeal commonly known as the “Pinellas Declaration of Independence” in February 1907. During the 1908 political campaigns, three candidates for Hillsborough’s senate seat debated the issue of separation. F. A. Wood of St. Petersburg ran as a strong candidate of division. Robert McNamee, a Tampa attorney with earlier connections to St. Petersburg, ran as a “wet” candidate who opposed attempts to legislate prohibition. Don McMullen, a native son of Pinellas and of “Uncle Dan” McMullen who had moved to Tampa to practice law, became the third candidate in the competition. McMullen had wed the former Mary Lou Ball in the fall of 1903, and they settled in to a Hyde Park home after their honeymoon. McMullen, a strong advocate of prohibition, told his supporters along the Pinellas Peninsula that he could not let the issue of division harm his chances of losing the election. The three candidates came to a debate at Courthouse Square in downtown Tampa in late April 1908. McMullen the prohibitionist stood between Wood, the “county division candidate,” and McNamee, the “local option candidate.” Both Wood and McNamee hurled criticism at McMullen, considering him the most vulnerable candidate, but for different reasons: Wood thought his focus on “dry” laws made him a traitor to those in Pinellas, while McNamee condemned his stand on prohibition.  

The debate focused on two issues: prohibition and county division. McNamee and Wood came together to condemn McMullen for his advocacy of a prohibition amendment for Florida constitution. Realizing the importance of winning over the Tampa audience, McMullen joined with McNamee in questioning the need for a new county as proposed by F. A. Wood, “the St. Petersburger.” McMullen emphasized his previous government service and “his devotion to Tampa.” McMullen, who maintained strong ties with family members throughout the Pinellas Peninsula, nevertheless claimed Wood wanted division only to increase the value of a subdivision he planned to build near St. Petersburg, arguing that if St. Petersburg became the seat of a new county Wood would reap great profits. Meanwhile McNamee claimed that if McMullen’s plan for prohibition had come

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into place twenty years earlier, “Tampa would be today still a hamlet, without a cigar factory, without a magnificent building or business enterprise.” S. S. Coachman attended this Tampa speech and assisted “in arousing enthusiasm in regard to county division.” Coachman’s opinion placed him at odds with a prominent member of the family that had built and once owned his residence. Don McMullen modified his position in a statement to the St. Petersburg Times in early May when he proclaimed:

I am opposed to division. I do not believe it best for the people of the West Coast, but that it is for them to say. But if a division bill comes to the senate during my term I will not permit it to be defeated by unfair tactics. I will call it up and have it considered on its merits. I will give it a square deal.

During the primary, Wood won St. Petersburg, but ran a distant third in the county. Despite his stand against division, McMullen received support many from Pinellas voters during the runoff who had decided to defer their dreams of division. Don C. McMullen, a prominent member of the McMullen family during the early twentieth century, later gained recognition when he probably become the first public speaker to use commercial air service to get to his speaking engagement. After completing his duties at a Hyde Park Sunday school in Tampa, McMullen flew to St. Petersburg on the St. Petersburg-Tampa Airboat Line. According to the 29 January 1914 Largo Sentinel:

In order to make a prohibition speech in St. Petersburg on last Sunday without missing his Sunday school or being compelled to take a long, hard drive in an automobile, [he] consented to go to St. Petersburg in the passenger airboat, now operating between that city and Tampa. So far as known, this is the first time in history that a public speaker has gone to his appointment by flying.

The battle to create Pinellas County succeeded during the 1911 legislative term. Coachman worked day and night to rally support for this legislation. Jessie Coachman

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39 Straub, History of Pinellas County, 52-55; Tampa Weekly Tribune, 22 October 1903, 23 April 1908.
40 Tampa Weekly Tribune, 23 April 1908, 30 April 1908.
41 St. Petersburg Times, 6 May 1908.
42 Straub, History of Pinellas County, 55; Tampa Weekly Tribune, 18 June 1908.
43 Largo Sentinel, 29 January 1914.
later claimed that she “had made and served more cookies and lemonade on her front porch to political caucuses than any other woman in Pinellas.” Although a Pinellas Peninsula legislator strongly opposed the measure, when the bill reached the upper house Senator Don McMullen did not derail the measure. On 23 May 1911, Governor Albert Gilchrist signed Chapter 6247, an act that provided for the creation of Pinellas County. That evening, many people came to Clearwater for a street dance and celebration, sponsored in part by the Coachmans, who did not get back to their log cabin until after three in the morning. Solomon’s happiness for the creation of Pinellas was cut short by the death of his oldest brother, Benjamin, on 7 August 1911. The bill required that voters in the proposed county affirm this measure by referendum, and John S. Taylor, A. C. Turner and other leaders created a “Pinellas County Club” to muster support for the required three-fifths majority vote. After winning popular approval for division, authorities established the constitutional officers of the new county before separation occurred on 1 January 1912.44

The log cabin became Coachman’s home office during the important period of Pinellas County’s history. In December 1911, Governor Gilchrist selected S. S. Coachman as the first chair of the Board of County Commissioners. Other commissioners included L. D. Vinson, Jefferson T. Lowe, F. A. Wood, and O. T. Railsback. One of his first duties of business was to reaffirm the location of the county seat. Although section three of Chapter 6247 specified that the “Town of Clearwater shall be the County Seat of said county,” residents of the booming St. Petersburg area hoped to place government offices at the south end of the county. Almost overnight, Clearwater residents quickly constructed a two-story frame courthouse to establish a seat of government in their city. Lit torches allowed workers to erect this building without interruption, while armed patrols prevented malicious St. Petersburg residents from destroying the structure. S. S. Coachman assisted in the construction, while his wife joined other women in boiling endless pots of coffee to keep workers on task. Jessie refused to allow her husband to run for a third term, later claiming that she told him that if she “had wanted to run the grove with Tom Taylor (one of their hired hands), I would have married him” instead of

44 Straub, *History of Pinellas County*, 56-58; Meador, “Jessie Candler Coachman Recalls” clipping; Sue Searcy Goldman, *A History of the Board of County Commissioners in Pinellas County* (Clearwater:
Solomon. In addition to his service to the new county, Coachman also became a member of the Clearwater city council. According to a family story, Jessie answered a knock at the door while Solomon was away from the property. As soon as she opened the door and recognized the people on the porch, she exclaimed, “I know what you want and the answer is ‘No!’.” She then slammed the door on the men, knowing that they had paid a visit to encourage her husband to run for governor.

In addition to overseeing her husband’s busy political and business schedule, Jessie also coordinated restoration efforts to keep the old “double-pen” cabin in good shape. At some point by the early 1900s, probably about 1910, the family had attached a separate kitchen “cabin” to the original structure, complete with its own fireplace and a second chimney for the cooking stove. When the old cypress roof shingles deteriorated by the early 1930s, Jessie located a ninety-four year old African-American man who hived new shingles from cypress logs. Unfortunately, many of the smaller outbuildings originally erected by the McMullens had deteriorated beyond repair by the early 1900s.45

Coachman’s leadership of the commission benefited Clearwater and the Bay View area, but not without controversy. On 3 December 1912, voters approved $370,000 in bonds for the construction of hard-surfaced roads. Nancy Meador once remarked that Coachman built the first brick road in Pinellas County, a thoroughfare that extended from Clearwater along Drew Street to Safety Harbor, through his land holdings at Captain Jim’s former estate, then often referred to as “Coachman.” This road connected Coachman’s extensive land holdings with commercial enterprises in Clearwater at a time when other public works projects languished. This and other projects resulted in a September 1914 grand jury investigation chaired by Straub. The St. Petersburg Times editor condemned the commissioners for condoning “pork-barrel” projects. Jefferson T. Lowe and Coachman garnered the most criticism, with the grand jury indicting Coachman for using convicts to dig ditches to improve his property. Neither Lowe nor Coachman faced a conviction, and both claimed that Straub and others had a political

Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners, 1996), 13-14.

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motivation for their charges. Just a few years after obtaining independence from Hillsborough, this drama indicated a rift forming within Pinellas County.\textsuperscript{46}

Coachman also lobbied for a new railroad to crisscross his property. By 1914, workers cleared right-of-way along the route of the new Tampa and Gulf Coast Railroad. Commonly known as the “Tug and Grunt,” this line when completed would offer direct service between Tampa and St. Petersburg by way of an extension through upper Pinellas County. Coachman encouraged the company to bring the line through his property at the present-day intersection of Old Coachman and Coachman roads. Straub later claimed that Solomon’s move increased the value of his land “immeasurably.” When opened, the Tampa and Gulf Coast offered stops in Safety Harbor, Dellwood (near present-day Alligator Creek and McMullen-Booth Road), Coachman Station, and Clearwater. Residents of Bay View could make a mile-and-a-half trek to Dellwood to catch the train. By 1914, R. J. “Bob” Knight built a packing house at Dellwood that expanded upon or replaced the earlier building to allow local growers to prepare their fruit for shipment in the Bay View area rather than sending them to other areas of the county. As the Coachmans expanded their business activities on the former McMullen homestead, the regular visits of trains to Coachman Station proved profitable for the family. It also expanded family ties: Estelle Coachman, a relative of S. S. Coachman, fell in love with Joseph R. “Captain Joe” Drane, a crew member on the first “Tug and Grunt” train to pass through Coachman Station in September 1914. Joe and Estelle soon married. He remained a train conductor after the Seaboard Air Line Railroad (SAL) took over the route. A notable event during his fifty-two year tenure on local railroads was when he conducted SAL’s last train to leave downtown St. Petersburg.\textsuperscript{47}

Solomon maintained his commercial and citrus interests while holding public office. By 1916, his namesake five-story office building opened in downtown Clearwater at the intersection of Cleveland and Fort Harrison. When S. S. Coachman built this structure, it represented one of the largest buildings in the county and the largest edifice in northern Pinellas. Although he had one of the largest groves in Pinellas, Coachman

\textsuperscript{46} Meador, “Jessie Candler Coachman Recalls” clipping; Straub, \textit{History of Pinellas County}, 68; \textit{Largo Leader}, 2 December 1999.
often came to the aid of those who owned smaller nurseries. During a meeting of the Pinellas County Plant Board, Coachman and Largo nurseryman Barnard Kilgore protested an order compelling growers to scrub their trees, arguing that it burdened those who owned smaller groves and those who could not afford to hire additional field workers. Representatives of the Taylor Groves replied that clean and “absolutely sanitary groves” improved business prospects for all growers. Despite this debate, members of prominent Pinellas citrus families, including the Coachmans, worked closely to promote the bountiful cash crop that brought wealth to the region. A February 1917 Sanborn map of downtown Clearwater listed S. S. Coachman as owner of the West Coast Fruit Company, prominently located on Railroad Avenue between Drew and Grove streets. When not growing crops or attending to business or his duties as commissioner, Coachman continued to herd and raise livestock. Many issues of the Largo Sentinel during the fall of 1914 included this prominent advertisement: “Mules! Mules! Do you want [a] good team? See, ’phone, or write Coachman, at Clearwater, Fla. He has them and those that are good.”\footnote{Largo Sentinel, 8 October 1914, 13 December 1917; Sanborn Map Company, Fire Insurance Maps: Florida (Teaneck, N.J.: Chadwyck-Healey, 1983), February 1917 map, microfilm reel 1; Straub, History of Pinellas County, 234.}

The family decided to move to a new house on the property in the early 1920s. During the 1920 census, seven family members and one servant lived at the original homestead. Solomon and Jessie shared their residence with children Samuel, Hugh M., James W., Francis, and young Jessie. A sixty-five year old African-American woman named Reda Graham lived on the premises and worked as a cook and servant. Hidden within the groves near the intersection of Coachman and Old Coachman roads, a new two-story home rose on the property by 1921. This structure had four large bedrooms, four fireplaces with a wide chimney, a formal foyer area, twelve-foot high ceilings, and a wide staircase with polished banisters. Coachman had devised an early “air-conditioning” system by including a large attic fan that pulled cooler air into the rooms. A nearby well in the groves provided water, and a small room with a toilet and sink on the back porch offered an attached “outhouse.” The dwelling passed its first structural test when it
survived the 1921 hurricane with minimal damage. Over the years, the home became an important meeting place for family and friends.\textsuperscript{49}

Although S. S. Coachman retired during the early 1920s, he did not immediately slow down. The estate continued to grow as family members expanded the packing house and hired many seasonal workers. Hugh “Mack” Coachman’s 1922 graduating class at Clearwater’s grammar school included names associated with many pioneer families that remained in the area. Principal E. W. McMullen oversaw commencement exercises and Nannie McMullen offered a piano solo. Candidates for graduation included Mack Coachman, Daniel and Nannie McMullen, Brownell Meares, Jennie Plumb, and Oween Sumner. During the Great Depression, Mack attended college in Georgia and became a member of the Sigma Nu fraternity. Western Electric and Bell Labs had even offered him a position in St. Louis as soon as he earned his degree. However, he cut his studies short and quickly returned to the Clearwater area after the death of his father. S. S. Coachman suffered a heart attack in the late evening of 9 March 1931. Family members placed the patriarch of the Coachmans in their family lot at Clearwater Cemetery. As residents of the Clearwater area mourned Solomon’s passing, the sons assisted their mother with the operation of the groves and the other business interests of the family.\textsuperscript{50}

Jessie Coachman possessed a strong entrepreneurial spirit. With passenger trains of the Seaboard Air Line regularly passing along the family’s property at Coachman Station, Jessie and family members erected another log cabin alongside the train station at the intersection of the tracks and roadways. She opened her famous Kumquat Sweet Shop, a store that also included numerous “antiques of rare description.” Throughout the year, but especially during tourist season, the Orange Blossom Special passenger train made a stop at Coachman Station to allow passengers to purchase marmalades, preserves, boxed fruit, and other items at the store. During the winter, the Coachmans celebrated their Georgia roots by making and selling pecan pralines. She compiled some of her favorite recipes into a popular cookbook. At one time, a large sign announced the

\textsuperscript{49} Census information included in building files, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; Clearwater Sun, 25 October 1982.
\textsuperscript{50} Clearwater Sun, 5 August 1984; St. Petersburg Times, 11 March 1931; “Graduation Exercises of the Grammar School of Clearwater,” commencement program, 18 May 1922, located in building files, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; Meador, “Jessie Candler Coachman Recalls” clipping; Shirley Coachman Moravec interview.
location as “Coachman’s Kumquat Shop.” The structure, designed to resemble the older log house built by James P. McMullen, included shelves for sundries and products in front of a shipping counter. Behind a counter, a cooking and food preparation area included a large sink and gas stoves. Jessie maintained her sales offices in an attached companion structure across an elevated catwalk. Behind her desk sat a large fireplace, and in front of the building rested a large kumquat tree. Family members assisted Jessie with the business. They also hired Mary Mann as a secretary, and Columbus Moore, an African-American man who worked with the Coachman family for thirty years. Moore and another man of both Indian and African-American heritage known as “Uncle Jack” brought fruit from the groves and kept at least six stoves with large ten-gallon porcelain pots boiling every day. Columbus Moore tended the family’s gardens, packed and shipped fruit, and performed many other chores on the Coachman property.51

The Coachman complex became a stopping place for many locals and tourists during the early era of Florida’s roadside attractions. Although the groves, cabins, and train station lacked the natural beauty of Florida’s many springs or the amazing architecture of Bok Tower, many visitors flocked to Coachman station for Jessie’s famous marmalades, jellies, candies, and honey. The family also sold gift boxes of fruit and fruit products, and even developed a “Log Cabin Brand” label by January 1934 that commemorated the old log house on the property. During the mid-1930s, Mrs. B. W. Laws welcomed visitors to the Coachman property. As a hostess, Laws served guests a glass of orange juice as well as a good dose of history. Visitors often took tours of the original cabin. They saw a large spinning wheel near the fireplace brought to the area by Captain Jim and Elizabeth McMullen about 1850, an old brass kerosene lamp left by the McMullens, as well as a muzzled rife used by Captain Jim during the Civil War. Many McMullen handicrafts remained in the historic cabin, including hand-built chairs with cow hide bottoms, a long bench with peg legs, a bookcase built by Captain Jim, and a wall cabinet that held china over 250 years old, as well as dolls and other mementos. Several blue plates and a glass water pitcher, allegedly brought from France to America by Odet Philippe, also adorned the room. By the 1930s, Jessie’s preserves and sweets

51 Clearwater Sun, 25 October 1982. Researchers may also wish to examine copies of photographs included in building and site files, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; Meador, “Jessie Candler
won rave reviews at the annual Pinellas Free Fair, quite an achievement in a county with a cornucopia of citrus champions, such as the McMullens, Kilgores, and Walsinghams.\textsuperscript{52}

The Coachman homestead included a number of buildings by the mid-1930s. A 1934 city directory lists Jessie, sons James and Francis, and daughter Jessie living at her large Coachman Station home located on N. E. Coachman road to the east of the railroad tracks. Jessie managed the Kumquat Sweet Shop at the time. A large garden and pig pens occupied lands west of the Sweet Shop and train station, and a large packing house with at least 100 employees sat at the other side of the SAL tracks. The family maintained a barn along Old Coachman, north of the packing house and west of the road. Across the street, a small dirt road led to Captain Jim’s original log cabin and a nearby well and shop used to repair farm equipment and lawn mowers. Large guava trees, a source of many family recipes, adorned the landscape around the cabin. This estate provided ample room for many social gatherings, such as an April 1933 birthday party for seventeen year old Jessie that included a hayride, a picnic lunch at Alligator Creek, and a “manless wedding” for the young ladies. Mack and Evelyn Coachman served as chaperones for this event. Mack lived across the street from Jessie and managed the S. S. Coachman and Sons firm. Family members noted that Mack had moved his house from its original foundation in Safety Harbor to the new location on the family property. Despite the sluggish market, other family members dabbled in real estate. For example, Edwin H. Coachman operated a real estate firm in downtown Clearwater with Cleveland Street offices on the same block as the namesake Coachman Building while living with his wife, Mary, at 114 North Osceola.\textsuperscript{53}

The Clearwater chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) placed a shrine at the McMullen-Coachman Log House in a 22 February 1936 ceremony. By the early 1930s, members of DAR and other groups interested in the county’s history considered the cabin a “true relic” of pioneer life in the region. Nancy Jean and Elizabeth Ann McMullen, six year-old twins of Hugh McMullen and great-granddaughters of

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\textsuperscript{52} Largo Sentinel, 11 January 1934; St. Petersburg Times, 20 February 1936; Shirley Coachman Moravec interview.

\textsuperscript{53} City Guide and Directory (Clearwater and Tarpon Springs) (N.p.: C. L. Coy, 1934), 14; Clearwater Sun, 23 April 1933; Shirley Coachman Moravec interview.
Captain Jim, unveiled the DAR plaque.\textsuperscript{54} Recognizing the nascent stages of the historic preservation movement and evincing a spirit of boosterism, a March 1 editorial in the \textit{St. Petersburg} Times encouraged community leaders to make the structure a county shrine:

The coming of those seven McMullen brothers into this Florida wilderness . . . marked the beginning of the first epoch of Pinellas history, and the building of this homestead by Capt. James P. McMullen, the most outstanding pioneer of them all, was indeed an historic event.

This, the oldest structure now standing . . . in what is now Peerless Pinellas county, is worthy to be made . . . a veritable County Shrine. As has been done for so many other shrines in our country, beginning with Mount Vernon, [citizens] should have the old McMullen homestead at Coachman together with a suitable area of its land owned and maintained as a monument and shrine to the memory of the pioneers who began here what is now one of the gems of American home development.\textsuperscript{55}

A member of the Coachman family had a modern use for part of this “shrine” during this time. Mack Coachman set aside storage space in the log house as a place to store his growing collection of photography. By this period, the family had added electrical outlets to parts of the cabin. In a retrospective interview, his son, Michael Coachman, described Mack’s hobby: “We’ve got a house full of pictures that go back to the early days. There’s a lot of history. . . . My whole childhood is in pictures. He had a darkroom in the old cabin where he used to live, and he did all his own developing.” Thus, while DAR members celebrated the cabin’s place as one of the earliest dwellings on the Pinellas Peninsula, Mack Coachman enjoyed his “high-tech” hobby in the oldest existing dwelling on the peninsula.\textsuperscript{56}

The Coachmans remained important members of the Clearwater community during the post-war years. In about 1945, E. H. Coachman sold the City of Clearwater some of his downtown land holdings on the bluff for $40,000. Part of this tract later

\textsuperscript{54} \textit{St. Petersburg Times}, 20 February 1936, 22 February 1936.
\textsuperscript{55} \textit{St. Petersburg Times}, 1 March 1936.
became Coachman Park, a site familiar to many as the venue for the annual Clearwater Jazz Holiday. Other portions of the land include parking lots and the Harborview Convention Center. Edwin Horace Coachman died on 6 February 1949, and his wife—the former Mary Serena Moase—joined him in eternal rest on 30 January 1950. Tragedy came to Coachman Station in November 1951. An early morning blaze destroyed the Coachman Packing Plant located directly across the SAL tracks from the railroad station. Three fire battalions from Clearwater, one from Safety Harbor, and additional firefighters from Dunedin responded to the call and battled the flames for more than four hours in their successful attempt to keep the fire from spreading to a nearby room that housed explosives. Lacking a hydrant, the crews drew water from a creek approximately 1,500 feet away from the blaze. At the time of the fire, the plant employed nearly 160 people. Losses, estimated at $250,000, included over 4,000 boxes of citrus located in the building at the time. The family later built a new packing house southeast of the original building between Old Coachman and the railroad tracks that operated into the 1970s. As she grew older, Jessie remained an active gardener and continued to sell her homemade preserves. She also opened a popular Coachman Coffee Shop, frequented by patrons who enjoyed “a good pungent cup of coffee” served with a large dose of conversation. She continued to operate the coffee house until she became ill in the spring of 1959. By early July, family members placed the Coachman matriarch in Morton Plant Hospital. She passed away at noon on 9 July 1959. Shortly after the death of the lady known for making the “world’s finest marmalade,” telephone operators in the Clearwater area reportedly received “an unprecedented number of queries” from people throughout the region expressing disbelief at her passing. When asked to describe his mother, James gained his composure and said:

I remember when mother made some wonderful marmalade and the president of the Seaboard Air Line Railroad came to our home on Coachman Road. He tasted mother’s marmalades at breakfast. And he went back to his railroad and later we

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56 *Clearwater Sun*, 5 August 1984; Shirley Coachman Moravec interview.
57 *St. Petersburg Times*, 10 July 1959, 12 April 2001; *Clearwater Sun*, 30 January 1950, 10 July 1959; *Safety Harbor Herald*, 23 November 1951.
learned that Mom’s marmalade was a regular item on the menu of all dining cars.  

By the time of Jessie’s death, members of the Coachman family no longer offered tours of the McMullen-Coachman Log House. They used the structure for storage.

**Early Attempts to Preserve a County Shrine**

Nancy Meador, a granddaughter of Captain James P. McMullen, enlightened and entertained readers with her occasional newspaper columns on local history that appeared in the *Clearwater Sun*. In late 1949 and early 1950, she offered weekly installments that described life in Bay View during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She gathered many family archives and photographs, became the McMullen family’s historian, and called for the preservation of the cabin her family had sold to the Coachmans in 1902. On 21 June 1961, Meador asked her colleagues on the Pinellas County Historical Commission (PCHC) to allow County Historian Ralph Reed to meet with Hugh “Mack” Coachman to discuss the possibility of acquiring the cabin and creating a public park on the site. Although many people in Pinellas referred to the structure as the “Coachman cabin,” Meador reminded her colleagues that they should refer to the structure as the “McMullen log cabin . . . to avoid any inference that the building was erected by anyone other than Jim McMullen.” In the July 1961 meeting, Reed informed PCHC members that Mack Coachman had no interest in selling, donating, or otherwise disposing of the cabin. The physical deterioration of the cabin bothered Meador, who in May 1966 volunteered to write to the Coachmans on the Historical Commission’s behalf to urge that family to preserve and hopefully sell the cabin. Meeting minutes from the time indicate that the Coachmans “did not want to bother” with the matter; PCHC members even considered the possibility of contacting state officials for assistance. Two months later, Meader reported that she could not “accomplish anything further” with plans for the Coachmans either to sell their property or allow county officials to move the cabin, perhaps to Philippe Park or the McMullen family cemetery. Part of Nancy Meador’s urgency no doubt came as the youngest and last of Captain Jim’s

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58 *St. Petersburg Evening Independent*, 10 July 1959.
59 *St. Petersburg Times*, 19 August 1956.
children had passed away: George Ward “Uncle Ward” McMullen, then the oldest native born resident of the Pinellas Peninsula, died in Clearwater on 1 June 1966. Two years later, Meador mentioned another conversation with Mack Coachman where he promised not to let the cabin deteriorate, but had neither plans for its use nor any interest in permitting the county or state to make a memorial at the building. By mid-1971, Marjorie McMullen Keery, a great-granddaughter of Captain Jim, wrote to officials at the Florida State Archives and the United States Department of the Interior to encourage those agencies to preserve the log cabin.60

**A Fire Storm and a Fresh Start**

Mack Coachman’s decision not to sell the property in the 1960s became a flashpoint of controversy in the fall of 1976. Despite prominently posted “No Trespassing” signs at the Coachman, its location left it vulnerable to unwanted visitors. In November 1976, someone started a fire on the loading dock of the Coachman family’s fertilizer warehouse. Moments later, someone discovered a burning doormat at one of the Coachman cabins. An hour after that, flames spread across the cabin’s hallway wall and floors. A fourth fire in that same day damaged a caretaker’s mobile home near the cabin. During their investigation at that time, investigators detected the presence of an oily substance used as an accelerant. A total of eight fires took place at the Coachman property during the month of November, with the worst occurring on the early morning of November 29. Mack Coachman went by the building at 7:30 and did not see any problems. Less than an hour later, at 8:15 that morning, an anonymous caller notified the Clearwater Fire Department that flames had engulfed Captain Jim’s 1850s-era cabin. The fire scorched branches on a large tree located at least fifteen feet away from the roof. Firefighters climbed atop the cypress shingles to put out flames shooting through the roof. Within ten minutes, the fire brigade brought the conflagration under control, though some of the eighteen firefighters at the scene found smoldering embers over an hour later.

Speaking at the cabin, Dave King, the city’s Assistant Fire Chief, considered the structure “a total loss.” Almost the entire second story had collapsed. He noted that “I can’t place a monetary value on it. Some of the Coachmans were born in it.”  

As authorities searched for the culprit, many pioneers mourned the demise of the oldest cabin in Pinellas County. Mack Coachman, distraught at the sight of the damage, told a newspaper reporter, “It looks like someone is out to get us. . . I hope they find out who before this whole place goes up in flames. . . . I’m a grove man; I’m not a fireman,” he continued, “It’s driving me to ruin mentally.” Noting that the future of the site remained undecided, Evelyn Coachman—Mack’s wife—stated that, “It’s too soon. There hasn’t been enough time.”  

Nancy Meader arrived at the cabin with a strong, and well-understood, sense of bitterness:  

“*We’re all heartsick about it. It’s almost like having someone in the family die. . . . I’m glad Uncle Ward doesn’t have to see this. . . . I’m so disgusted with the sheriff’s office and the Clearwater Police Department. They should have had a guard out there day and night.*”  

By the end of the day, police arrested a sixteen year old who confessed to all of the fires at the Coachman property. The teenager apparently resented that his father had refused to take the family on a vacation; to vent his rage at his father, the boy decided to take his anger out on the cabin near to his house. Sometime in the days following the fire, scavengers visited the site and probably stole the plaque placed by DAR in 1936.  

Mack Coachman contacted Director Kendrick T. Ford shortly after the fire about the possibility of moving the damaged cabin to Heritage Village. Ford reported at the January 1977 PCHC meeting that Mack had agreed to move the structure, though Ford required the approval of the Historical Commission before the county would pursue the matter. In the late spring, Coachman signed a contract with the Pinellas County Historical Society absolving that organization or the county of any responsibility for further

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62 Ibid.  
63 *Clearwater Sun*, 30 November 1976.  
64 Ibid.; interview of Ken Ford, former director of Heritage Village, by Stephanie Ferrell and Jim Schnur, 3 May 2003, Heritage Village, Largo; Records of the Pinellas County Historical Commission, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo, 21 June 1978.
damages caused by the move of the structure. By early July, workers began to clear palmetto and pine scrub from an area of the park. On the morning of July 21, the McMullen-Coachman Log House started its four-hour trip to Heritage Village. As temperatures surpassed ninety degrees, stunned motorists remained patient as the slow moving flatbed truck provided by Edifice Wrecks stalled six times along the way. A family-owned business, Edifice Wrecks covered $1,000 towards the $3,000 moving cost.65

Restoration efforts started after the new fiscal year began in October 1977. Ford received $7,000 from the Board of County Commissioners for the project. Outside organizations, including the Daughters of the American Revolution, also expressed interest in providing assistance. Workers salvaged and reused the original foundation sills from the cabin. By the spring of 1978, laborers placed the charred structure on its foundation and Ford contacted a company that had developed a water-and-sandblasting process to remove charred sections of the logs. The county also submitted a federal Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) grant for approximately $28,250 to assist with labor costs. CETA personnel and materials arrived in January 1979. Throughout the spring and early summer of 1979, CETA workers spliced logs, rebuilt the second story, and fashioned a new roof under the leadership of Bob Powell. The blasting of the logs revealed that despite the intensity of the fire, much of the structure’s base remained in good shape. By the early fall, crew members restored the fire place.66

As Heritage Village opened the cabin to visitors by 1979, some of the Coachman children continued to live on their family properties into the 1980s. By the 1970s, family members had rented out Solomon’s 1921 house on the property; Paul and Ann Neiberger lived there for four years before purchasing a home in Safety Harbor. Unfortunately, the house fell into disrepair by the fall of 1982 and Solomon’s descendants planned for its demolition. Hugh “Mack” McCauley Coachman developed some of the unused land as the Coachman Lake Estates (started in 1964) and Coachman Hill Estates (started in 1974) subdivisions. Mack also sold the City of Clearwater lands used as the site of Moccasin

Lake Park and Alligator Creek Park. In addition to his real estate holdings in Coachman Properties, Inc., Mack continued to operate the S. S. Coachman and Sons packing and shipping business until it ceased operations in about 1980. H. M. Coachman had married the former Evelyn Morrison, an Atlanta native who came to the area in 1930 and became a charter member of the Clearwater Historical Society. Before his death on 3 August 1984, Mack claimed a forty-nine year membership in the Downtown Clearwater Rotary Club. He also served as a charter member of the city’s Downtown Development Board, and continued to have a strong interest in keeping the downtown “alive” throughout his life. Mack died at his home, 2254 N. E. Coachman Road. His wife passed away on 9 May 1997 at Morton Plant Hospital. James Warren Coachman, Mack’s younger brother, had held positions as a general manager of S. S. Coachman and Sons and treasurer of Coachman Properties. A World War II veteran who served in the United States Navy, James also served as past-president of the Gift Fruit Shippers Association of Florida, held membership in the Clearwater County Club since the mid-1930s, and later joined the Clearwater and Pinellas County historical societies before his death on 19 October 1994.67

A Legacy Made from Sturdy Logs

The McMullen and Coachman families have left an indelible impression on the Pinellas Peninsula. Upwards of 1,000 members of the McMullen family gathered for annual reunions by the 1920s, with large assemblies continuing through the 1960s. A story about the McMullen clan appearing in 1915 issues of the Largo Sentinel and Tampa Times noted the number of family members holding office at the time by stating that “no one knows just how many McMullens there are in Pinellas (C)ounty, but it is probably safe to say that the number would easily mount into several hundred and very possibly well towards a thousand.” E. B. McMullen, the first tax collector of Pinellas County, once counted fifty-seven on the rolls during the mid-1910s, but knew this represented only a small number. This much is certain: At that time, family members occupied many

positions in the new county, including county commissioner (Dr. Byrd McMullen), state attorney (M. A. McMullen), county engineer (Clements McMullen), former chief deputy sheriff (Grover McMullen), chief deputy clerk (B. H. McMullen), and tax collector (E. H. McMullen). By the 1890s, the Coachmans also became a bulwark of Clearwater’s budding business community. In July 1915, a correspondent penned the following passage about the strong presence of the McMullens in Pinellas, a statement that one could easily extend to the Coachmans and many others that became part of these families:

And so they are. Canny, careful, respectable, respected citizens, always active in good works for the upbuilding of their county. Always among the best known and best liked citizens of their communities. And prolific, too. They read their Bibles and they have minded that injunction about multiplying and ‘occupying the land.’

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Daniel McMullen House: A Brief Introduction

Construction Information
- This is the second oldest structure in Heritage Village, built in 1868.
- Original home site was along Rosery Road. The family moved into the house in August 1868. They lived close to Lake Largo, a beautiful lake at the time. The town of Largo was named after the lake, a body of water drained during the early 1900s and used by many farmers (including McMullens and Jesse Ancil Walsingham) as a site to cultivate crops.
- This structure, presently at about 1450 square feet, includes additions made over the years. The original home, built of native pine, had two formal rooms and two “shed” rooms connected by a breezeway.

History of Occupants
- Members of the McMullen family continuously occupied this home throughout its history until the structure moved to Heritage Village.
- Born in Georgia in 1825, “Uncle” Dan McMullen died at his home in August 1908. He homesteaded 160 acres near the intersection of Rosery Road and Missouri Avenue in Largo by 1852. Joined brother James P. McMullen in the cattle business. His first child was born at the family’s log cabin in the Coachman area.
- Daniel McMullen returned to the family homestead in Georgia by 1857, probably so he could care for his elderly parents and watch over their farmstead.
- Leaving his wife and children in Georgia (probably for their safety), Daniel McMullen returned to Florida by September 1863 to enlist in the Florida Infantry on the side of the Confederacy. McMullens probably fought on the side of the Confederacy to protect their holdings, rather than because of sympathy for the Confederate cause.
- Daniel McMullen’s pension application for his service in the Confederacy indicates that he was present with forces that surrendered to U.S. troops in Sumter County, Florida. By the fall of 1865, he traveled by wagon back to the homestead area in Largo. He acquired a 160-acre tract near Rosery Road and Highland Avenue. He soon began raising crops, cattle, and other farm animals. He cultivated citrus by 1875, and was possibly the “biggest cattle rancher” along the Pinellas Peninsula by the mid-1880s. In 1900, though nearly seventy-five years of age, census reports note Daniel McMullen continued to engage in “fruit growing.” He also played a role in the creation of the Bank of Largo in 1907. He also was a part-owner of the Alliance store in Largo, a two-story building that sold groceries, hardware, and other commodities during the early years of Largo’s history.
- At the time of his death on 5 August 1908, Uncle Dan had sixty-five children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.
- He often sat on his front porch and talked with family members. At times he lit his pipe with a strong magnifying glass.
Significant Events/Activities

- Members of the McMullen family held reunions on the Dan McMullen property by the 1920s. Reunions often coincided with the July 4 weekend.
- Into the late 1940s, the family maintained a twenty-acre grove in back of the house.
- The McMullen family occupied the land and house for approximately 123 years before deciding to have the house moved to Heritage Village.

Moving of the House to Heritage Village

- By the fall of 1990, park administrators had talked with members of the McMullen family about the possibility of moving the house to Heritage Village.
- In May 1992, park administrators noted that Nancy McMullen McLaughlin had moved from this house to live with a daughter in Bronson, Florida. The McMullens had lived in the house continuously since its construction, and by the early 1990s, the tract still included 8.3 acres with century-old oaks and numerous citrus trees. The structure, then located along Rosery Road, became property of the county, with the Pinellas County Historical Society assisting with costs to maintain the security system before the house moved. Plans to move the house by the autumn of 1992 encountered delays. According to one newspaper article, the movers separated the structure into three pieces before moving it to Heritage Village.
Daniel McMullen House

Overview

Daniel McMullen brought his family to the Pinellas Peninsula in the early 1850s, following in the footsteps of his older brother, James Parramore McMullen. Daniel and his wife, Margaret Campbell, secured a 160-acre homestead in the Largo area. They abandoned their Florida landholdings before the beginning of the Civil War, probably so Dan could return to the family farmstead in Quitman, Georgia, and take care of his elderly parents. During the Civil War, Daniel participated in the Confederate “Cow Cavalry” while Margaret and the children remained in Georgia. The family returned to the Pinellas Peninsula in the fall of 1865, acquired a parcel of land, and built a substantial Florida Cracker house by the summer of 1868. The homestead eventually grew to 200 acres in the area that later became Rosery Road near the present East Bay Drive in Largo. Dan raised cattle and grew cotton, but eventually joined his brother James in cultivating citrus by the mid-1870s.

“Uncle Dan” McMullen lived in the house for forty years until his death in 1908. By 1910, one of his daughters, Margaret Nancy McMullen Hardage, moved into the house with her husband to raise her youngest brother’s six children after their mother had died. One of these children, Nancy McMullen McLaughlin, resided in the house for more than eighty years until 1992, when she donated the residence to Heritage Village.

The white clapboard house made of native pine initially had two rooms and two shed rooms on either side of a “dog trot.” As the years passed by, successive generations added other rooms and outbuildings. By 1900, the Daniel McMullen House had four bedrooms, a dining room, kitchen, living room, and large porch. Since authorities assessed closets as rooms for tax purposes during this period, only two closets existed inside the entire house. Daniel’s daughter, Nancy McMullen Hardage, modernized the house with a bathroom and electricity in 1923. The twelve-foot high ceilings and low windows allowed for cross-ventilation, but in later years, Carl and Nancy McMullen McLaughlin added single room air conditioning units.

At the time family members donated the Daniel McMullen House to Heritage Village, it represented the oldest continuously occupied dwelling in Pinellas County,
having housed four generations of the McMullen family for 124 years. The Pinellas County Historical Society and the McMullen family underwrote the cost of moving the structure to Heritage Village. The house now serves as a fiber arts center that features a variety of craft demonstrations and displays.

**Early Settlers in the Largo Area**

Members of the McMullen family proudly trace their ancestry from Scotland to Florida. By the mid-1770s, three brothers from Scotland came to Halifax, Nova Scotia. James McMullen, the youngest of the three, apparently became a drummer during the American Revolution. Family tales claimed that he had participated in the skirmishes at Lexington and Bunker Hill. After the war came to an end, James received a land grant of approximately 300 acres for his service. He married Sarah Minton in 1781, and the couple moved to a plantation in Georgia that James McMullen called “Halifax.” In 1788, the McMullens had a son, James McMullen, Jr., who exchanged vows with Rebecca Fain in 1811. James and Rebecca raised twelve children: seven sons and five daughters. Between 1841 and 1871, each of the McMullen brothers settled in the Tampa Bay area. James Parramore McMullen became the first family member to arrive at Tampa Bay, though he made his initial journey by necessity rather than choice: The Telfair County, Georgia, native came to Florida an eighteen year-old man suffering from tuberculosis, then often known as “consumption.” In order to prevent exposure to other family members, James McMullen’s father told his third and namesake son to leave the Quitman, Georgia, area until his health improved. Young Jim then decided to follow a path into the Territory of Florida in search of a solitary location to overcome tuberculosis. James arrived in the Rocky Point area on the Tampa side of the Courtney Campbell Causeway sometime in 1841. He later moved to a higher tract of land at a bluff near the west end of the Courtney Campbell and the north end of the Bayside Bridge. While living in solitude, James P. McMullen enjoyed a bountiful supply of seafood, wildlife, and sunshine. Soon, his tuberculosis went into remission and he returned to Georgia. After witnessing Jim’s recovery and hearing his description of the sparsely settled lands as “the closest thing to heaven he could imagine,” other brothers of the McMullen family
decided to visit the Pinellas Peninsula. Daniel McMullen, the fourth brother, became the second to establish a claim in the area.\(^1\)

Born on 12 July 1825 in Telfair County, young Daniel McMullen moved with other family members to their new farmstead at Quitman at a young age. He spent much of his childhood assisting family members with chores on the farmstead. When Dan reached the age of seventeen in about the spring of 1843, James Parramore McMullen rejoined the family at Quitman and told his siblings about the remote frontier. By December 1844, Jim had returned to the settlement of Melendez in Benton (now Hernando) County to marry Elizabeth Campbell. Over the next few years, Jim and Elizabeth started a family and settled on the Pinellas Peninsula. Dan followed his older brother’s path. He exchanged vows with Margaret Ann Campbell, the younger sister of Elizabeth, at an 18 November 1851 ceremony at the Spring Lake Methodist Church near present-day Brooksville. A daughter of the former Nancy Taylor and John Campbell, Margaret Ann entered the world on 17 April 1833 at Hamilton County, Florida. During her childhood, the Campbell family moved from north Florida to Hernando County. Margaret’s father had perished in 1838 during a battle of the Second Seminole War. In 1851, Dan and Margaret Ann secured a homestead in the Largo area, near the eastern boundary of the current intersection of Missouri Avenue and Rosery Road, including part of the site commonly known as the “Markley Grove” property.\(^2\)

The newlyweds probably settled on their land in the Largo area by the winter or spring of 1852. They constructed a log cabin, smaller in size than the McMullen-Coachman cabin built by James on his homestead. The elevation of the land and good drainage provided an excellent location for the cultivation of crops and vegetables. At this time, very few settlers lived in the general Largo area, though a surveyor named A. M. Randolph had set aside township and range boundaries in the area by 1844 and had noted the presence of a large body of water indicated as “Lake Tolulu.” Later known as Lake Largo, this fresh water reservoir occupied an area south of East Bay Drive between

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\(^1\) Census information included in building files, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; Robert C. Harris, “The Seven McMullen Brothers of Pinellas County,” *Tampa Bay History* 1 (Fall/Winter 1979), 62-64, 73; Donald J. Ivey, “The Life and Times of Daniel ‘Uncle Dan’ McMullen (A.D. 1825-1908): A Chronological Biography,” undated manuscript, pp. 1-4, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo. Some accounts placed James P. McMullen’s arrival in 1841, while others claimed that he arrived in 1842.

\(^2\) Ibid.
Seminole Boulevard/Missouri Avenue and Starkey/Keene Road. John Fain McMullen, another brother, moved from Georgia to the area near the current intersection of Indian Rocks Road and Wilcox Road, probably by the end of 1852. He stayed in the area for about five years before selling or transferring some of this property to Captain John T. Lowe, an early settler who later developed the Anona settlement. By the late 1850s, John Fain McMullen relocated to Madison County, Florida. 3

Dan and Jim McMullen collaborated on agricultural pursuits and expanded their families during the 1850s. Together, they raised and herded livestock, especially cattle, on the open range in and between present-day Largo and Clearwater. With few nearby settlers, they could carry on their activities with little interruption or interference. Both brothers also grew crops. The brothers McMullen and sisters Campbell also witnessed the growth of their families: James and Elizabeth raised eleven children, while Daniel and Margaret Ann had nine children. With Elizabeth acting as a midwife, J. P. McMullen’s log cabin became one of the earliest “hospitals” in the region. During the fall of 1853, Dan and Margaret Ann came to Jim’s log home so Margaret could give birth to that couple’s first child, John James McMullen, an infant probably named in honor of the other two brothers living in Florida at that time: John Fain and James Parramore. Genealogical records mark the date of his birth as 15 October 1853. Less than two years later, on 12 May 1855, Dan and Margaret celebrated the arrival of William Alonzo McMullen at their own homestead in Largo. The debate over slavery and other related issues exacerbated sectionalism as a growing chorus of Southern “fire-eaters” passionately called for secession from the Union throughout the 1850s. By 1856, Dan and Margaret sold their land, left the Pinellas Peninsula, and settled in southern Georgia. Recollections by family members indicate that Dan most likely returned to the McMullen farmstead to take care of his aging parents. He may have sold most of his land to Scott Whitehurst. While living in Brooks County, Margaret gave birth to Daniel Thomas, the third child and son, on 24 June 1857. About a year later, on 7 May 1858, Rebecca Fain McMullen—family matriarch and the elder Daniel’s mother—passed away on her sixty-fifth birthday. According to federal census records from August 1860, Daniel and his

3 Largo, Florida, Then Til . . . (Largo: Largo Bicentennial Committee, 1979), 3; Harris, “Seven McMullen Brothers,” 64, 73.
family lived in the “Tall Oaks” region of Brooks County on lands next to his father, seventy-three year old James, and brothers David and Malcolm. Daniel valued his personal estate at $1,350 in that year.  

The elder Dan McMullen joined five of his six brothers in fighting on the side of the Confederacy during the Civil War. While James Parramore organized a company of volunteers at Clear Water Harbor during the summer of 1861, Dan lived on the Georgia side of the Florida-Georgia border and celebrated the arrival of his first daughter and fourth son: Josephine Catherine arrived on 8 May 1860 and Eli Bartow entered the world on 19 June 1862. Like Daniel Thomas, both Josephine and Eli were natives of Brooks County. While research by former curator of collections Robert Harris noted that Daniel served in the Quartermaster Corps of the 19th Georgia Infantry, Confederate pension files maintained by the State Archives in Tallahassee and additional research by curator Donald Ivey mentioned his later activities in Florida. On about 19 September 1863, Daniel left his family at their Georgia farmstead, an area away from the battles of the war, so that he could enlist in the Confederate forces. He joined Captain John McNeill’s Independent Company, a unit of the Florida Infantry based at Brooksville. Earlier that summer, James Parramore McMullen had enlisted in the same company. By October 10, Daniel transferred to Captain William B. Watson’s Independent Company of Cavalry. In time, this unit became Company D of the 1st Battalion of the Florida Special Cavalry, under the leadership of Colonel Charles J. Munnerlyn. This unit included experts at herding cattle who had the responsibility of driving cows from grazing fields in Florida to locations in Georgia and the Carolinas and removing Union sympathizers from peninsular Florida. The livestock led by members of this “Cow Cavalry” provided the hides, tallow, and meat needed by Confederate forces to sustain the war effort. After General Robert E. Lee surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox, other Confederate
units also abdicated to Federal forces. Daniel, still a member of Watson’s company, ended his service at Adamsville in Sumter County, Florida, during the spring of 1865.⁵

Dan McMullen brought his family back to central Pinellas by the fall of 1865. He probably spent some time in the Quitman area, settling his family’s estate and packing his belongings into a wagon. The journey along the small paths and corduroy roads took nearly one month, as Daniel and Margaret Ann—who was pregnant at the time—also had to watch over their children (John, William, Daniel, Josephine, and Eli). According to one family history, during one of the journeys between Georgia and Florida young John James remembered seeing twigs and stones set in a pattern along the trail, probably as messages from one group of Indians to another. They reached the Pinellas Peninsula in October 1865, and certainly noticed dramatic changes to the sparsely-settled landscape: During the war, Union forces and Southern marauders had damaged many cabins and farmsteads; some residents abandoned their frontier homes either to serve in the military or to live in more settled and secure areas. Dan reacquired his land holdings in the Largo area and reestablished a homestead. Within a short time, on November 8, Margaret gave birth to Margaret Ann McMullen, the couple’s sixth child and their youngest daughter. Family narratives mentioned that the other children suffered from the measles in early November, forcing Margaret Ann to stay at her mother’s residence, located south of present-day Cavalry Baptist Church along the Clearwater bluffs near Turner Street. While Nancy Campbell and daughter Margaret Ann McMullen celebrated the arrival of a namesake daughter, Dan diligently cleared the land and started to raise crops. At that time, an abundance of bears, deer, and turkeys populated the frontier. John James remembered on many occasions hearing the loud squeal of pigs in the night, knowing then that a bear had attacked some of the family’s swine for a meal. Meanwhile, Captain Jim McMullen returned to his two-story log residence at Coachman and another brother, David McMullen, moved to the Morse Hill area of Safety Harbor in late 1865 or early 1866.⁶

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⁵ Ibid.

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An Impressive Home Surrounded by Fertile Fields

Daniel McMullen built bridges with his neighbors, erected a signature house on the frontier, and strengthened his agribusiness holdings. During 1867, Dan held public office for the first and (most likely) only time when the Board of County Commissioners in Hillsborough named him to a one-year term as one of three road commissioners for District # 1, the Old Tampa district. His knowledge of the disjointed road network throughout Western Hillsborough made him a logical choice for this appointment. By the spring of 1868, family members prepared the lumber from native pine and started to build the original rooms of their home. The family moved into the Daniel McMullen House on 8 August 1868. At that time, the structure included two rooms used as living areas and two “shed” or storages rooms connected by a “dog trot” breezeway. An expanded version of the Florida Cracker house, this vernacular dwelling included an elevated first floor, a large front porch, and a fireplace. Subsequent generations of the McMullen family modified the home to suit their needs for the next 124 years. Dan also built a log smokehouse, corn crib, and other structures on the property. The family cultivated cotton, sugar cane, and vegetables. Dan also raised chicken, hogs, and cattle along the frontier. According to the 1870 census, he estimated the value of his lands at $600 and his personal estate at $475, amounts no doubt lowered by the malaise that had stifled the region’s economy in the years immediately following the Civil War. By the 1870s, Dan shifted from cotton to citrus, a move accelerated as reliable railroad networks reached the region in the late 1880s. During this period, he also acquired additional acreage for his growing cattle enterprises. He paid only fifty cents per acre to obtain forty additional acres. According to some family narratives, Dan had acquired nearly 1,500 cattle by 1890, making him one of the largest—if not the largest—cattle farmer in Western Hillsborough.7

Daniel and Margaret Ann McMullen cherished the arrival of their youngest children while living in their new home. Robert Lee “Dr. Bob” McMullen entered the world on 14 October 1868, barely two months after the family settled into their home.

6 Ivey, “Uncle Dan McMullen” manuscript, p. 11; Nancy and Carl McLaughlin interview; St. Petersburg Times, 13 August 1967.
Nearly three years later, on 10 October 1871, the McMullens welcomed Donald Campbell, their eighth child and sixth son. At about this time, Malcolm McMullen, the youngest of the seven brothers, homesteaded on lands just southeast of Dan’s property near the present intersection of Belcher Road and East Bay Drive. Margaret gave birth to the ninth and last child, Charles Breckenridge, on 9 June 1874. At some point shortly after the birth of Charles, Margaret Ann fell ill. She spent much of her life from the mid-1870s until her death on 21 April 1909 as an invalid who never fully recovered her vitality. For example, the 1880 census listed her as experiencing an illness noted as a “female complaint.” Her daughter, Margaret Nancy McMullen, apparently shouldered a large part of the burden in raising her younger siblings. An 1894 photograph preserved by the State Archives of Florida shows the extended family of Daniel and Margaret Ann McMullen at their farm. In this image, an incapacitated Margaret Ann rests in a simple wheelchair or bed next to her husband with children and grandchildren surrounding her and Daniel. Gladys Tucker Booth, a member of a pioneer family, noted that Margaret Ann often spent time at Captain Charles Wharton Johnson’s residence in the Safety Harbor area to take advantage of natural spring waters. The Johnsons originally settled near the current site of the Belleview Biltmore Hotel and later acquired other properties in central and northern Pinellas, including parcels in the Green Springs area that later became part of the Safety Harbor Methodist Church, now located at Heritage Village.8

Daniel remained close to James P. McMullen during the late 1800s. For example, he joined James and three other brothers—John, David, and Thomas—as five of eleven leaders in Western Hillsborough who met to establish a Masonic lodge on 14 August 1875 at J. P. McMullen’s new settlement in Bay View. After the Masons granted a charter on 13 January 1876, they met at Jim’s hotel in Bay View. By 1889, they had converted the third floor for use as a lodge. Daniel enjoyed participating in Masonic gatherings. He served as treasurer for the lodge between 1894 and 1900, and again from 1902 until 1905. After 1908, this lodge moved from Bay View to Largo. By the mid-1870s, Daniel also joined James Parramore in converting family farmlands from cotton to

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7 Census information appears in building files at Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; Ivey, “Uncle Dan McMullen” manuscript, pp. 12-13, 16; Harris, “Seven McMullen Brothers,” 68-69; Nancy and Carl McLaughlin interview.
citrus to meet the growing demands of merchants in the North. Daniel’s children welcomed this move, preferring the gleaning of oranges and grapefruit over the harvesting of cotton. For example, Robert L. McMullen noted his pleasure when his father, Daniel, switched from fields to groves: “I hated picking cotton and was mighty glad when the citrus trees brought in income so we did not have to grow it.”

Daniel also diversified his business holdings during the end of the 1800s. He still conducted cattle drives across the Pinellas Peninsula, including trips that brought herds to the bluffs near the present-day grounds of the Belleview Biltmore Hotel. The family’s citrus holdings continued to expand, especially as many of Uncle Dan’s children became farmers and grove owners. In 1891—fourteen years before the incorporation of the Town of Largo—R. J. Whitehurst commissioned D. W. Meeker to survey the first subdivision in the area. Some of the others involved in this enterprise included Daniel McMullen, W. A. Belcher, and Alonzo Lowe. Uncle Dan became a partner in Largo’s first ice company and held an interest in the Farmers’ Alliance Exchange, the largest mercantile store in region by the 1890s. As a member of the growing business community, he also held interests in the Largo Bank, an institution chartered on 21 October 1907. His son, Donald Campbell McMullen, served as the bank’s first president.

By 1900, the children of Daniel and Margaret McMullen had engaged in business and most had started families. The 1900 census revealed that Daniel continued to cultivate crops at the age of seventy-four. That year, a twelve year-old boarder named Elmer Roesseau lived with “Uncle” Dan and attended a Largo school. Daniel’s youngest son, Charles B. McMullen, lived on lands adjacent to his parents and frequently visited them. As a young child, Louise Rosanna McMullen, daughter of John James, vividly remembered seeing her grandfather after the turn of the century. She considered Dan a “gentle, intelligent, kindly old man with a long gray beard, who always had time to talk with children.” He often sat on the porch and spent time with his children and grandchildren while smoking his pipe. On some occasions, he even lit his pipe by using a strong magnifying glass. She recalled his many trips to Largo on his buckboard wagon to

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8 Genealogical information appears in building files at Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; Ivey, “Uncle Dan McMullen” manuscript, pp. 11-15; Harris, “Seven McMullen Brothers,” 73.
9 Ivey, “Uncle Dan McMullen” manuscript, p. 15.
check on business at the Alliance store, a two-story structure he operated with others that included hardware, clothes, and groceries. Louise remembered his generosity, such as when he provided funds to support the first band in Largo. On 15 November 1907, Daniel applied to the State of Florida for his Confederate service pension. Although he described himself as “old and feeble,” he did not elaborate on any specific illnesses. Officials approved his application on 8 February 1908 and awarded him an annual stipend of $120.11

Daniel McMullen’s death marked the passing of an era. On the morning of 5 August 1908, Don McMullen learned that his father had fallen ill and quickly came over from Tampa to get to his father’s bedside. Louise McMullen remembered seeing her father, John James, cry for the first time. The eighty-three year old patriarch passed away at about 3:00 p.m., surrounded by many loved ones. At the time of his death, he and Margaret Ann had sixty-five family members—children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren—most of them living in the Tampa Bay area. The Tampa Weekly Tribune mourned the passing of one of the region’s “noblest characters” in a lengthy obituary, while the St. Petersburg Times briefly noted his passing. The funeral at Largo’s Methodist church attracted a large gathering, including many residents of Tampa who made the journey to pay their final respects. Margaret Ann, his widow, had already suffered from years of incapacitation. She joined her husband in eternal rest on 21 April 1909. Although saddened by the death of Daniel and Margaret Ann, family members could also celebrate the contributions of the nine siblings and their growing families to the Largo area. The Daniel McMullen Home and farmlands remained an important gathering spot for family members for the next eight decades; the children reared in the house and their subsequent families had notable careers in agribusiness, commerce, and public service. Indeed, many chapters of Pinellas’ history have their origins with the extended family that lived in this structure.12

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10 Largo, Then Til, 27; Harris, “Seven McMullen Brothers,” 69-70; Ivey, “Uncle Dan McMullen” manuscript, p. 17.
11 Genealogical information appears in building files at Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; St. Petersburg Times, 13 August 1967; Ivey, “Uncle Dan McMullen” manuscript, p. 17; Largo, Then Til, 155; Dan McMullen’s records reside in the Florida Confederate Pension Application Files, Record Group 137, Series 587, State Archives of Florida.
John James and William Alonzo McMullen

John James McMullen became an early educator on the Pinellas Peninsula who also started a large family while living in the Largo area. Educated in log cabins, John James later taught classes in some of the first school facilities in the central Pinellas region—including the Anona School—for about fifteen years. He married Joseph Drayton “Jo” Ramage, an 11 November 1857 native of Ocala and daughter of a Colonel Ramage and Rosannah Kilgore. The ceremony took place on 18 July 1880 at Clear Water Harbor. Between 1881 and 1901, John James and Jo Ramage McMullen conceived ten children. The eldest, Mary Ellen “Mamie,” entered the world on 2 May 1881. Mamie later married William Beasley “Uncle Bill” Harris, patron of the original Harris School in eastern Lealman portrayed by a replica at Heritage Village. In 1883, John James entered public life as a member of the 1883 Florida Legislature. His leadership efforts in the Hillsborough County legislative delegation won him praise from state Senator John T. Lesley of Tampa. In a letter to the senior Daniel McMullen, Lesley praised John James as a “young man of no ordinary talent and if a field is offered him, his future is a fixture, his station high, and far above the mediocrity of man.” As the legislative session came to an end, Josephine gave birth to John Ramage on 4 June 1883. Other children included: Lillian Elvira (born 19 March 1886), Catherine Rebecca (born 8 December 1888), Daniel Drayton (born 13 August 1891), David (born 9 February 1893; died in infancy), Josephine Nancy (born 16 July 1896), twins Daphne Mae and Louise Rosanna (born 10 November 1898), and Margaret Eugenia “Jean” (born 26 June 1901). Louise later followed in her father’s footsteps, serving as a teacher at the Clearview and Seminole elementary schools. She also became the deputy chief clerk for the Board of County Commissioners for many years. John James supported his large family by farming, growing citrus, and raising chickens and livestock. He acquired large land holdings in the Seminole/Largo area. By 1929, then in his mid-seventies, John had reduced his acreage to about eighteen acres of citrus, though he still continued to raise cattle, hogs, and chickens “on a considerable scale.” He passed away at the age of eighty on 21 November 1933 at

12 *Tampa Weekly Tribune*, 6 August 1908; *St. Petersburg Times*, 8 August 1908; *Largo, Then Til*, 155.
Morton Plant Hospital in Clearwater. His wife, Josephine Drayton Ramage McMullen perished on 11 May 1946 in Largo.¹³

William Alonzo McMullen followed a path similar to his older brother, John James. He fell in love with Rosanna Benjamin Ramage, younger sister of Josephine Drayton Ramage and 24 December 1862 native of Ocala. A member of the pioneer Dieffenwierth family conducted their 12 July 1883 wedding ceremony in the Largo area. William Alonzo and Rosanna Ramage McMullen raised four sons and three daughters while living in the Largo area. Their eldest child, Alonzo Benjamin, entered the world on 1 June 1884. On 24 November 1908, Alonzo B. McMullen married Edna Katherine Jeffords at a ceremony at Captain Charles W. Johnson’s large three-story home once located southeast of East Bay Drive and Seminole Boulevard. During the ceremony, family members placed bed sheets on the porch and steps to protect the dresses of the wedding party. Gas mantles provided ample light. Alonzo attended Washington and Lee University in Virginia and lived in the Tampa area during his later years. Alonzo died on 19 March 1957 in Tampa¹⁴

William Alphonso, another grandchild of Daniel and Margaret and the second child of William Alonzo and Rosanna, had an active life as one of the earliest professional engineers in the region. Born on 26 October 1886 at the family’s log house two miles east of Largo—in an area near Dan McMullen’s homestead—young William had many close calls during his childhood years on the Pinellas frontier. As a small child, he followed older brother Alonzo and a cousin in about 1888 as they picked blueberries along the open range. Young William fell into a spring and nearly drowned. The cries of Alonzo summoned father William, who grabbed his young namesake son by the heels and rolled him back and forth to resuscitate “the lifeless body.” By the early 1890s, the family had moved from the cabin to a house built with sawed timber. On one afternoon, he saw his father and Uncle Bob (William’s brother and Daniel’s son, Robert Lee McMullen) capture a young buck that foraged in the garden for sweat sweet potatoes. By

¹³ Ivey, “Uncle Dan McMullen” manuscript, pp. 4, 12; Harris, “Seven McMullen Brothers,” 69; John T. Lesley to Daniel McMullen, 14 February 1883, copy available in Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; William L. Straub, History of Pinellas County, Florida: Narrative and Biographical (St. Augustine: The Record Company, 1929), 407; St. Petersburg Times, 13 August 1967.
¹⁴ Ivey, “Uncle Dan McMullen” manuscript, p. 4; Largo, Then Til, 15, 191. In Largo, Then Til, William’s middle name appears as “Adolphus” rather than “Alonzo.”
1902, young William learned that an atrophy of the optic nerve threatened to blind him in his right eye. Between 1902 and 1904, William Alphonso attended the South Florida Military College in Bartow, where he took classes and played football without his parent’s permission during his senior year. After the 1905 Buckman Act reorganized public higher education in Florida, William received a bachelor of science in Civil Engineering from the University of Florida. For awhile, he held jobs with a railroad line in Alabama, a northern coal-mining firm, and a Virginia railroad company. By 1907, he returned to the Tampa Bay region to work as a surveyor on dredging operations in the bay and near Egmont Key; he also assisted with the building and repair activities at Fort Dade and Fort Desoto at the mouth of Tampa Bay. Between 1907 and 1909, he inspected progress on the dredging of the first major channel into Tampa, and soon oversaw other outside engineering work funded by federal dollars in the Tampa region. Seeking advanced training, he resigned as an engineer in the fall of 1910 and enrolled in the Rensselaer Institute of Technology to continue his studies. While at the campus in Troy, New York, he also played football, coached baseball, and managed the Glee Club. By 1914, he earned another degree in Civil Engineering. On 17 October 1916, he married Annie Maude Laird, a native of Indiana and graduate of Purdue University who majored in Home Economics. During World War I, blindness in his right eye prevented William Alphonso from serving in the military. Instead, he worked for Hillsborough County as an engineer for brick road construction and served as an engineer for the Lake Largo Drainage District (and similar entities in other areas). As the land boom hit St. Petersburg, William moved to the Sunshine City by 1921 to serve as that city’s chief engineer. He later returned to private practice. As the Great Depression persisted during the mid-1930s, William Alphonso found a job as the Works Progress Administration’s State Director of Operations and later Assistant State Administrator. In July 1937, he returned to Largo and became the engineer for Pinellas County. Although he later lost sight in his other eye, McMullen continued to work as an engineer in Pinellas during the early 1950s. He passed away on 18 December 1958 in Largo. His wife, known as “Miss Ann” to many in Largo, died in 1970.15

The other children of William Alonzo and Rosanna Ramage also made important contributions to the community. Margaret Rosanna, the third child and first daughter, was born on 6 April 1888 in Largo, at about the time that workers from the Orange Belt Railway struggled to build tracks from Sanford to St. Petersburg. Margaret attended Florida Southern College and also married Richard Leroy Booth on 31 December 1919 in a ceremony at Largo. Frances Eleanor came into the world on 3 February 1890. She earned an A. B. degree from Florida Southern College in 1907. Clements Manly arrived on 5 February 1892 at the family’s home in Largo. Clements learned how to fly airplanes by January 1918 while stationed at Kelly Field in San Antonio, Texas. He later served as an officer and pilot in the Army Air Corps (now the United States Air Force), with tours of duty during World War I, World War II, and Korea. At National Air Races in St. Louis in 1923, he reached 139 miles per hour in his airplane and received the Liberty Engine Trophy. In 1930, he set a long-distance speed record by flying from New York to Buenos Aires in fifty-two hours, thirty minutes. Clements attended Washington and Lee University, retired as a major general, and served at one time as commanding general at Kelly Air Force Base at San Antonio until his retirement on 28 February 1954. He perished on 9 January 1959. After the 1895 freeze damaged the family’s citrus trees, William Alonzo had difficulty getting many vegetables to grow during the chilly winter, except for beans. Thus, beans became a regular companion at the dinner table until springtime brought warmer weather. Philip Ramage joined the family as the youngest son on 8 February 1897, five years after Clements's birth. As an adult, he attended the University of Florida during the early years of the Gainesville campus. In April 1901, young William Alphonso returned from town to discover their family home on fire. Despite his efforts to douse the blaze, the conflagration consumed the house. Until the family built a new home, family members often slept in the barn. On August 25 of that year, the family welcomed its youngest member, Lillie Evelyn. She attended classes at

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McMullen, Jr., one member of the Board of County Commissioners, Ed Beckett, raised a loud and sustained protest against recruiting McMullen from his Works Progress Administration post in Jacksonville. W. B. Harris (builder of the Harris School in Lealman) rebutted “There’s not a better engineer than Mr. McMullen.” Beckett, however, remained unconvinced.
the Florida State College for Women (now Florida State University) in Tallahassee before returning to the region.\footnote{Ibid., 5; Genealogical research located in building files, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; \textit{Largo Sentinel}, 17 January 1918. Graduates of (Florida) Southern College, 1890 to 1934, located at: http://www.tblc.org/fsc/archives/grads1890to1934.html; \textit{St. Petersburg Times}, 10 January 1959.}

\textbf{Young Daniel McMullen and His Sister, Josephine, Start Families}

Siblings Daniel Thomas and Josephine “Joe” Catherine also found spouses, raised families, and maintained strong connections with central Pinellas after leaving the Daniel McMullen House. Daniel Thomas McMullen became a Methodist minister who rode the circuit, though he later decided to pursue farming and citrus growing. He also taught classes at a school in the Curlew area during the early 1880s. His younger sister, Margaret Nancy, often called him “Tommie.” At some point, family members also gave him the nickname “Seat” (or “Sete”). The junior Daniel courted Symadocia Ella “Docia” Freedman; they exchanged vows on 17 April 1887. Daniel and Docia raised nine children while living at a home in the Largo area. Reverend Dan McMullen fertilized his groves by penning the cattle in the area near his trees. In 1903, his groves yielded approximately 800 boxes of citrus. Meanwhile, Josephine McMullen raised a family with Elias E. Belcher. The native of Henry County, Virginia, married Josephine on 29 November 1877. They raised six children: Margaret A., George Horton, D. Bascomb, Elias E., William Henry, and Kate. William Henry Belcher, their fifth child, worked as a deputy sheriff in Pinellas County from 1924 until 1932. He also held public office as mayor, commissioner, and town manager of Largo, as well as a twelve-year stint on the Board of County Commissioners between 1939 and 1951. Other branches of the Belcher and McMullen clans also came together during the late 1800s. For example, William A. Belcher and the former Sally McMullen—daughter of Dr. Bethel McMullen—lived in the Largo area during the 1880s, where Sally gave birth to a son, Irving James Belcher, on 8 June 1883. Irving graduated from the University of Florida in 1906 and earned a medical degree from Vanderbilt University four years later. By 1911, he became a notable physician in the Tarpon Springs area who also held substantial real estate and citrus interests. During his life, he also had a growing interest in Tarpon’s booming sponge
industry. For almost six decades, he practiced medicine in Tarpon Springs. Irving passed away on 24 June 1968.17

“Uncle Eli” McMullen’s Family

Eli Bartow McMullen started a large family and served as the first tax collector in Pinellas County. Fondly known as “Uncle Eli” to kith and kin, he tied the knot with Emma C. Cox on 4 March 1885. Published histories, including W. L. Straub’s History of Pinellas County, noted that Cox lived in the area of present-day St. Petersburg during the mid-1880s before she married into the McMullen clan. Eli and Emma had nine children: Winifred, Chester Bartow, Clara, Mabel, Margaret, Mary (who died as a one year-old infant), Melvin, Grover Cleveland, and Newton. By 1890, E. B. McMullen worked in the mercantile business. He soon became the manager of the Farmers’ Alliance Exchange, the largest store in the Largo area. Beginning in 1903, he opened his own store and ran it for nine years with the assistance of his sons. “Uncle Eli” entered public service after Pinellas gained its independence from Hillsborough County: Governor Albert Waller Gilchrist named Eli as the tax collector in December 1911. He served in that capacity from 1 January 1912 and won successive elections on the Democratic ticket until he stepped down seventeen years later on 8 January 1929. Throughout this time, E. B. McMullen remained a devout member of Largo’s Methodist church, singing in its choir for nearly forty years. After learning about the possible discovery of oil in a well near Bushnell, Eli signed a five-year lease with F. E. Fenderson of St. Petersburg on 29 July 1921 to search for gas and oil reserves under his land in Largo; apparently, Fenderson failed to locate any subterranean oil or gas. By 1929, he opened a real estate office in the Largo area. After Emma passed away on 14 January 1923, Eli married Florida Dewar—

17 Genealogical research included in building files, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; Nancy Meador, “Nancy Hardage, 85, Helped Invalid Mother Raise Family,” undated Clearwater Sun clipping, circa 1950, located in Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; Ivey, “Uncle Dan McMullen” manuscript, p. 6; Straub, History of Pinellas County, 184-187; Tampa Weekly Tribune, 3 December 1903; Largo, Then Til, 13; St. Petersburg Times, 25 June 1968; Sue Searcy Goldman, A History of the Board of County Commissioners of Pinellas County (Clearwater: Board of County Commissioners, 1996), 45; Largo Sentinel, 8 December 1949.
an Anona native and Largo-area schoolteacher—on 26 August 1925. “Uncle Eli” passed away at Morton Plant Hospital on 4 August 1934 at the age of seventy-two.\textsuperscript{18}

Two of Eli’s children married members of the Ulmer family. Winifred exchanged vows with Henry Ulmer, an entrepreneur who organized the Indian Rocks Fruit Packing Company in the 1920s and by the mid-1940s expanded this business along Oakhurst Road to include a gift shop and restaurant. Chester Bartow McMullen, a 1920 graduate of Largo High School, married childhood friend Veda Ulmer in 1923. Chester graduated from the University of Florida in 1924 with a law degree and established a practice in Clearwater later that year. Governor John W. Martin appointed him as prosecuting attorney for Pinellas in 1927. Three years later, he won office as the state attorney for Florida’s sixth judicial circuit covering Pinellas and Pasco counties, a position he held without opposition until he stepped down in 1950. He then ran for Florida’s First Congressional District in the House of Representatives after the incumbent, J. Hardin Peterson, had resigned. He ran on a platform that called for adequate old age assistance and the exemption of families earning less that $2,500 per year from federal income tax. While campaigning in Largo, he drove through the community in a convertible with a loud speaker that reportedly proclaimed, “I love those dear hearts and gentle people that live and love in my home town.” He defeated J. Tom Watson of Tampa in the second primary, nearly carrying the majority in Hillsborough County because of his stand that supported changes to the Taft-Hartley Act favoring labor. With this victory, Chester B. McMullen became the first native of Pinellas County elected to Congress when he served in the House of Representatives from 1951 to 1953. His first bill as a member of Congress called for veterans serving in the Korean conflict to gain eligibility for benefits offered under the G. I. Bill of Rights. He condemned the average disbursement of $44 per month to elderly Americans little more than “slow starvation” and advocated on their behalf. Chester and Veda opened their home at 1008 South Druid in the Harbor Oaks area on 30 October 1951 for the annual membership tea of the Democratic Women’s Club of Upper Pinellas County. Nearly 200 women attended, with Nancy Meador in charge of arrangements and many other McMullen women also involved in the planning. On 16

\textsuperscript{18} Straub, History of Pinellas County, 58, 406-407; Largo, Then Til, 22; Tarpon Springs Leader, 29 July 1921. Straub claimed that E. B. McMullen became involved in the Farmers’ Alliance Exchange by 1889,
January 1952, Chester decided against running for a second term due to “personal financial considerations” and returned to his law firm—McMullen, McMullen, and Pogue—after leaving Congress in early 1953. Later that year, he suffered an illness that lasted for months. At 10:55 a.m. on November 3, he passed away in a Clearwater hospital at the age of fifty. The following day, the St. Petersburg Times ran a leading editorial that paid tribute to the county’s first home-grown member of Congress: “Of all the large and useful family McMullen, none ever served his native county more faithfully or ably . . . than Chester B. McMullen. . . . Pinellas County has lost one of its finest citizens, and the people of Pinellas one of their warmest and most genuine friends.”

“Aunt Nannie” McMullen Hardage
Margaret Nancy (Nannie) McMullen married James Newton Hardage on 2 January 1902. As a child, Nannie attended classes at a log school near the Largo Road at Curlew. For awhile, she boarded at the home of Walton Whitehurst while taking classes at the school where older brother “Tommie” also worked as a teacher. She enjoyed picking violets and buttercups, and spent endless hours roaming through the woods near the Daniel McMullen Home “on a magic carpet of pine needles.” She remembered seeing her father arrive at the homestead on horseback with two bears he had killed in the nearby woods. Clara Duncan, a neighbor whose family grew citrus near present-day Keene Road, offered young Nancy piano lessons as soon as the child learned how to read. In time, she learned how to play the organ for services at Curlew’s Methodist church. As previously mentioned, her mother became ill after the birth of Charles B. McMullen in the mid-1870s, forcing “Auntie Nannie” to assume a large role in raising her three younger brothers (Robert Lee, Donald Campbell, and Charles Breckenridge). In a retrospective interview, Nannie claimed that: “The boys just had to help. I often told my mother I did a better job rearing the last three boys than she did the first ones, because they learned to do everything around the house as well as the farming.” Every week, she

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while the commemorative history of Largo noted that he had started in the mercantile business in 1890.
collected the laundry and made a horse-and-buggy journey to Captain Jim’s log house where a Mrs. Black helped her with it. In what may have been one of the earliest “Chamber of Commerce” publicity stunts along the Pinellas Peninsula, Nannie wrote a letter to a “Family Circle” column that appeared in the Kansas City Times. Apparently, Uncle Dan’s family received a subscription to that newspaper while living on the Largo frontier. In her letter, she described the beauty of the Pinellas beaches, Indian mounds, and the woods. Soon, Nancy received a “deluge” of letters from people throughout the United States who wanted to learn more about Pinellas. This event occurred about three years before Dr. W. C. Van Bibber’s famous 1885 report on “Health City” touted the wonders of Pinellas. Daniel sent Nancy to a Largo sawmill to get boards for orange crates sometime in 1890. While there, she met the proprietor, “a handsome young man” named James Hardage who apparently told some of his employees he expected to meet Nannie again, even if it meant that “he had to walk a hundred miles.” They courted for a decade, with James moving the sawmill near the Dan McMullen House so he could work close to his in-laws. Hardage later joined Robert and Don McMullen in establishing the Indian Rocks Investment Company, a firm that oversaw construction of the first bridge between Indian Rocks and the mainland. “Dr. Bob” McMullen visited the bridge on a daily basis while workers built the structure. Located at The Narrows and later known as the “Old Bridge,” this structure opened on Thanksgiving Day 1915 and remained a toll bridge until purchased by Pinellas County in 1937 for $16,350. Hundreds came from throughout Pinellas, Tampa, and other areas to celebrate the opening of the span in an atmosphere that resembled a fair. Members of the Largo School band played at the opening ceremonies. For awhile, swimming in the moonlight became popular as people traveled across the bridge and parked along the Gulf of Mexico. Although James and Margaret never had children, they did take care of the six children of her youngest brother, Charles, after the death of his first wife, the former Mattie Abigail Caruthers, in 1908.20

20 Meador, “Nancy Hardage” clipping; Ivey, “Uncle Dan McMullen” manuscript, pp. 11, 14; Indian Rocks Area Historical Society, Indian Rocks, 24; Largo Sentinel, 2 December 1915; Largo, Then Till, 46-47; Largo Sentinel, 8 December 1949. Charles’s middle name appears in some records as “Breckenridge” and in others as “Breckinridge.”
“Doctor Bob” McMullen, Dentist and Innovative Farmer

Robert Lee McMullen worked as a dentist and farmer along the Pinellas Peninsula. He attended local schools while living at the Daniel McMullen Home. His oldest brother, John James, even served as one of his teachers at the Anona School. Bob later moved to Atlanta to enroll in dentistry classes at Southern Medical College, a school established in 1878 that later merged with other institutions to form Emory University’s school of medicine. Valedictorian of his class, R. L. McMullen returned to Florida and established a practice in St. Petersburg in 1896. Every two weeks, he made a steamboat trip to Palmetto to meet with patients in Manatee County. He later moved to the area east of Largo by 1898-1899 and built a two-story dwelling on old Keene (now McMullen) Road. “Dr. Bob” was not the first member of the extended McMullen family to practice dentistry in the region: James Parramore McMullen offered his services as a self-taught dentist, and his son, Bethel, completed his course work in dental science at a Baltimore college by 1872. Doctor Bob even made a trip to Cuba in late 1901; at some point, he worked in a Cuban cigar factory. Robert McMullen fell in love with Frances L. Mason of Clearwater. Then considered by many to be “a leading dentist of the West Coast,” Bob had a difficult time securing his marriage license due to poor weather. When storms prevented him from making a Saturday trip to Tampa, he decided to travel to the county seat on the following Monday, bringing M. J. McMullen along for the treacherous buggy ride. Fallen trees, swollen streams, and damaged bridges made Cupid’s quest quite a challenge. With license in hand, Dr. Bob finally exchanged vows with Frances on 14 September 1903. While living at their home in the Largo area, Robert and Frances welcomed the arrival of one daughter, Lucy.21

Robert L. McMullen enjoyed showing visitors his grove and describing his agricultural innovations. Small in stature but with an immense imagination, “Doctor Bob” always looked for ways to improve the productivity of his lands. He experimented with various plants. During the summer of 1891, he planted a potato patch at his home

21 Ivey, “Uncle Dan McMullen” manuscript, p. 12; Largo, Then Til, 23; Tampa Weekly Tribune, 17 September 1903; St. Petersburg Times, 28 December 1901, 1 September 1950. Additional discussion of James Parramore and Bethel McMullen’s work as dentists appears in the chapter on the McMullen-Coachman Log House. See page 23 of Largo, Then Til for a 1905 photograph of Dr. Bob McMullen’s two-story residence with family members on the porch and their horse, “Old Traveler;” patiently waiting in front of a buggy.
near present-day downtown Largo, one of the earliest dwellings in the community. Seedling oranges, pecan trees, and other specimens cultivated by Bob continued to bear fruit long after his death. During his life, he planted more than 100 varieties of citrus trees on his acreage. His pecans and cassava plants won accolades from many. The pecans often won honors at the county fair, while cassava roots made an excellent crop for fattening hogs and cattle. Florida farmers could easily cultivate between five and ten tons of cassava roots per acre. Bob enjoyed tapioca pudding, a dessert he often called “cassava pone,” as a regular staple at the dinner table. At times, he also made puddings out of sweet potatoes. An early leader in the movement to secure a “Free Fair” in Pinellas County, R. L. McMullen worked closely with Jesse Ancil Walsingham and a number of women who hoped to establish an annual gathering in the Largo area. A 12 September 1920 issue of the *St. Petersburg Times* praised “Doctor Bob” as “the original county fair booster . . . the most persistent worker for the fair.” During the 1917 Pinellas County Fair, Bob McMullen won first place for best display of citrus fruits and second for best display of threshed rice, among other honors. He continued to collect blue ribbons in subsequent fairs. Family histories claim that he possessed “a yen for show business” and often organized small performances with others that allowed for him to play the “talented end man.”

“Doctor Bob” lived at his home on Keene Road for nearly forty-seven years. By the late 1940s, he suffered from a number of heart attacks. After working all day on 30 August 1950, he became ill after supper and died later that evening. His wife, Frances, lived for over five more years before also succumbing on 27 December 1955. After Bob and Frances passed away, their daughter, Lucy, occupied the home with her husband, Alec White. An agricultural agent in Hillsborough County for a quarter of a century, White helped Lucy maintain bound volumes of the family’s genealogy and history in the large study room. As late as the 1970s, Alex and Lucy maintained 130 acres of the R. L. McMullen homestead, with a fence surrounding 8.6 acres that included the original home built in the late 1890s, a structure draped by pecan and shade trees.

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22 *Largo Sentinel*, 1 February 1917, 7 June 1917, 6 July 1950, 7 September 1950; *St. Petersburg Times*, 12 September 1920, 13 August 1967; *Largo, Then Til*, 23.
23 *St. Petersburg Times*, 1 September 1950, 13 August 1967; *Largo, Then Til*, 23; *Largo Sentinel*, 7 September 1950.
Naming a Lake, Naming a Town, Draining a Lake for the Town

During an October 1949 interview, Dr. Bob McMullen told a correspondent with the *Largo Sentinel* how pioneers selected “Largo” as the name of the settlement. In about 1881, Hamilton Disston had dispatched a man named Livingstone to examine lands he purchased as part of a larger acquisition of four million acres throughout Florida. Livingstone had hired Malcolm Campbell McMullen, one of Doctor Bob’s uncles, to assist him in this endeavor. One evening, young Bob followed his father, Daniel, to the campsite shared by Malcolm McMullen and Mr. Livingstone. During their conversations, Livingstone said he planned to rename the body of water once known as “Big Lake” or “Lake Tolulu.” He called the impressive body of water “Lake Largo,” using the Spanish word *largo* to denote the lake’s large size. Since Disston’s purchase included the lake, Livingstone certainly did not have to seek outside permission from other settlers to adorn the lake with a new name.24

The settlement west of Lake Largo needed a name as the Orange Belt Railway moved south along the Pinellas Peninsula from Clear Water. According to Doctor Bob, in late 1887 or early 1888 Gideon Blitch, Joel McMullen, and Rufus McMullen met with others who planned to erect a railroad station for the settlement. Discussion centered on “Luluville” as a possible name that would honor Lulu, one of Blitch’s daughters. Such practices were common when naming new settlements: For awhile, a small station about one mile north of Largo went by the name Armour, in honor of H. O. Armour of Chicago, one of the men who helped Peter Demens finance the construction of the narrow-gauge railroad. As the oldest man present, Rufus suggested that the depot carry the name “Largo,” reflecting the name of the nearby lake. Rufus donated land for the station, and soon people knew the community as Largo, the “Citrus City.”25

Local truck farmers hailed the drainage of Lake Largo as a progressive measure to increase crop yields. Members of the McMullen family, along with Jesse Ancil Walsingham and other local farmers, completed this task by early 1918. The once-impressive reservoir stocked with large schools of fish soon became moist, nutrient-rich

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24 *Largo Sentinel*, 20 October 1949; *Largo, Then Til*, 24-25.
25 Ibid.

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muck that provided bountiful harvests during the early twentieth century. Unlike later dredging operations that reshaped the Gulf Beaches, created Lake Seminole, and carved drainage canals throughout an urbanizing region, this early project reclaimed lands for agricultural purposes. Although many early residents enjoyed meals made with ingredients harvested in the former lake bed, some later regretted the decision to replace the water with farmlands. In a *Clearwater Sun* column written by Nancy Meador in about 1950, eighty-five year old Nancy Hardage lamented the loss of Lake Largo, a place where she spent “so many happy hours fishing and picnicking.” Nancy McMullen McLaughlin, raised by “Aunt Nannie” from infancy, echoed these sentiments in an August 1979 oral history interview: “It was a beautiful lake and the best fishing lake in the whole county. I will never understand why they did it.”

The Honorable Don, Tampa Lawyer and Public Servant

Donald Campbell McMullen became a notable lawyer, public servant, and staunch advocate of prohibition. He left the Pinellas Peninsula in the 1890s to attend Mercer University in Macon, Georgia. Don graduated from Mercer with a law degree in 1896 and established a practice in Tampa by 1899. That same year, he served as a Hillsborough County delegate in the Florida House of Representatives. On 14 October 1903, he married Mary Louisa (“Mary Lou”) Ball, a Tallahassee resident and daughter of William and Annie Calhoun Ball. The newlyweds settled down in their Hyde Park home, where they raised two daughters and two sons. As a prominent attorney in a rapidly growing city, Don often had to forge a delicate balance between his civic interests in Tampa and the growing movement to create an independent county along the Pinellas Peninsula. Many of his childhood friends, relatives, and business acquaintances in Western Hillsborough expected him to remember his Largo roots and advocate for division. While W. A. Belcher discussed the idea of a new county as early as the 1880s, the independence movement gained steam by 1907, especially after W. L. Straub published his famous “Pinellas Declaration of Independence” in a February issue of his *St. Petersburg Times*. By 1908, Don McMullen hoped to win Hillsborough’s senate seat

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26 Meader, “Nancy Hardage” clipping; Nancy and Carl McLaughlin interview. For additional discussion on the draining of Lake Largo, please see the chapter on the Walsingham House.
in the upcoming election. Although he sympathized with those who favored division, he realized that he could not advocate that position from a perch in Tampa, especially while he remained deadlocked in a battle to win the Democratic primaries that centered on the issue of prohibition. His opponents, F. A. Wood and Robert McNamee, hoped to derail his campaign using different tactics. Wood, a St. Petersburg resident and strong advocate of separation, portrayed McMullen as a “traitor” who placed the debate over prohibition above the wellbeing of his kith and kin. McNamee, a Tampa attorney and “wet” candidate, condemned McMullen’s position on making Florida’s constitution a “dry” document. During one debate at the courthouse in Tampa, Don felt compelled to win over the locals by questioning Wood’s plan for an independent Pinellas and by professing his devotion to the Cigar City. McMullen ultimately won the primary and represented Hillsborough County as a senator during the 1909 and 1911 biennial sessions.27

During his terms as senator, the Hon. Don C. McMullen introduced many important pieces of legislation. Before the passage of “home rule” legislation in the mid-twentieth century, lawmakers confronted an amazing number of bills to regulate local activities now handled by municipal and county officials. In 1909, he introduced Senate Bills 57 and 59, measures that updated city charters in Tampa and Clearwater, respectively. Senate Joint Resolution 68, a measure dealing with intoxicating liquors, also passed the chamber during the 1909 session. Between the exhaustive legislative sessions, McMullen returned to Tampa and practiced law. He made frequent visits across the bay, often to encourage prohibition. For example, in October 1910, he joined Reverend J. W. Carpenter in a “grand Temperance Rally” held under the grove trees at Largo. In 1911, Governor Gilchrist signed into law Senate Bill 65, a measure proposed by McMullen to provide a $30,000 appropriation for the Florida State Mid-Winter Fair, located in Tampa. Recognizing the importance of division to many friends and family members, McMullen did nothing to harm the passage of a bill that separated Pinellas into an independent county. This measure received approval on 23 May 1911, and took effect on 1 January 1912 after receiving the blessing of peninsular voters in a referendum. After the session ended, Don continued his fight for “dry” legislation in the Tampa Bay region. For

27 Ivey, “Uncle Dan McMullen” manuscript, p. 13; Straub, History of Pinellas County, 52-58. An extended discussion of the 1908 senatorial debate in Tampa appears in the chapter on the McMullen-Coachman Log
example, he assisted members of a “Civic League” in Pinellas who sought a vote to close drinking establishments in the newly created county. By 1915, however, he resigned his post as state president of the anti-saloon league. D. C. McMullen remained an important leader in Tampa for the next three decades. He died on 29 September 1947 in Tampa, and was buried in the family graveyard at the Largo Cemetery.28

“Uncle Charley” McMullen and His Citrus Groves

Charles Breckenridge McMullen, the youngest of Uncle Dan’s nine children, devoted much of his life to citrus cultivation in central Pinellas. Although he never held political office like brothers Eli or Donald, he remained “a staunch Democratic worker all his life.” He lived at the Daniel McMullen House and grew citrus in the areas around McMullen Road. On 27 June 1895, he married Mattie Abigail Caruthers and they started a family of two sons (Robert Campbell and George W. McMullen) and four daughters (Elizabeth, Pat “Mattie,” Ruby Elna, and Nancy). During this time, “Uncle Charley” also joined the Largo Methodist Church as a charter member. Mattie passed away at a time when all of the children were young and needed a great deal of attention. Although Charley tied the knot with Hallie Cree Bynum Ellis in the early 1920s, his sister—Margaret Nancy “Aunt Nannie” Hardage—played an important role in raising his children. Charles remained active in his groves well past his eightieth birthday, even winning membership in the Golden Age Club of Largo. A 1957 photograph taken at Charles B. and Hallie McMullen’s homestead includes nearly forty members of the McMullen, McLaughlin, Kearney, and Ellis families. Charles passed away on 3 September 1959 at the age of eighty-five.29

28 Journal of the State Senate of Florida of the Sessions of 1909 and 1911 (Tallahassee: State of Florida); St. Petersburg Times, 4 October 1910; Straub, History of Pinellas County, 57-58; Largo, Then Til, 46; Ivey, “Uncle Dan McMullen” manuscript, p. 13.
29 St. Petersburg Times, 4 September 1959; Nancy and Carl McLaughlin interview; Ivey, “Uncle Dan McMullen” manuscript, pp. 13-14. To examine the photograph of Charles B. McMullen’s extended family, visit the Florida Photographic Collection at the State Archives of Florida’s website, located at: http://fpc.dos.state.fl.us/prints/pr06328.jpg.
New Generations, Large Family Reunions, and a New Life for a Large Home

Margaret Nancy “Aunt Nannie” McMullen lived in her parents’ home nearly her entire life. As noted earlier, after she married James Hardage the couple lived in close proximity to Daniel and Margaret Campbell McMullen during their declining years. Despite Margaret’s illnesses, Nannie considered her mother “the dynamic spirit in our family . . . although mother was confined to her bed, she managed her family well.” In 1910, Mattie McMullen passed away a few months after the birth of her youngest daughter, Nancy, leaving Charles B. McMullen as a widower with six young children. Charles brought the children to James and Nancy McMullen Hardage, who raised the children. At the time, only Robert Campbell “Robbie” stayed with his father, Charles, while the others resided in the Daniel McMullen Home. Robbie often joined his younger siblings for meals with “Aunt Nannie.” Without children of their own, the Hardages helped Charles raise his children in Dan’s 1868 dwelling. Over time, family members expanded the building, adding rooms and covering part of the patio. James and Nancy added a bathroom and electricity to the structure in 1923. As the children grew older, the Hardages took them on summer vacations to Kennesaw Mountain and the area around Marietta, Georgia. Nancy McMullen, youngest daughter of Charles, continued to live at the home with “Aunt Nannie,” except for brief periods when she attended the Florida State College for Women and lived in Dunedin. She later married Carl McLaughlin, and they stayed on the property with Nancy Hardage.³⁰

To commemorate the 100th anniversary of Uncle Dan’s birth, descendants of all seven brothers came together at the Daniel McMullen Home for the first annual McMullen family reunion in July 1925. However, descendants of Uncle Dan held large reunions at the residence long before then. In June 1914, Dan’s children and their families assembled to celebrate the fortieth birthday of the youngest sibling, Charles. Approximately sixty family members arrived at the home, sat on its porches, and enjoyed conversation and music. They gathered at a long table under shady trees to enjoy lunch, and took photographs of the various groups after their meal. The 1914 celebration paled in comparison to the more than 650 relatives who attended the first reunion for all branches of the family in June 1925. Over 100 automobiles followed signs posted

throughout the area with the message, “This Way to McMullen Picnic” as they drove on the dirt, shell, and wood roads to the Daniel McMullen House. After cars filled the area, people visited the registration tables that included addresses and other information about members of the family. By the early afternoon, children played under the moss-draped trees, while elders sat on orange crates under shady trees and reminisced. A tent covered an area with ice water, a certain necessity during the warm afternoon. Those in attendance enjoyed a “massive fish fry” and picnic. African-American cooks assisted the reunion organizers in preparing the food for such a large crowd.\footnote{Harris, “Seven McMullen Brothers,” 72; Largo Sentinel, 4 June 1914, 18 June 1914; St. Petersburg Times, 12 July 1925, 13 July 1925.}

Reunions became popular events for members of the McMullen family. In late December 1933, the McMullens held another large-scale reunion, this time at the Clearwater city auditorium. Bolivar McMullen, a grandson of Thomas Fain McMullen, helped to arrange the picnic. He also worked with others interested in the expansive genealogy of the McMullens to collect information about the different branches of the family. As part of the process, those in attendance registered at the event. Each family brought a basket lunch, with food placed on large tables throughout one half of the facility; the remaining area served as a venue for socializing and sharing stories. More than 1,000 McMullens participated in this reunion. E. W. McMullen, then principal of Clearwater High School, served as the master of ceremonies. Donald C. McMullen offered the keynote address, reviewing the history of the family for those in attendance. After his remarks, others performed musical and vocal selections.\footnote{St. Petersburg Times, 24 December 1933, 30 December 1933, 2 January 1934; Largo Sentinel, 4 January 1934.}

Picnics continued through the early 1970s. According to one anecdote that illustrates the prominence of the McMullen family, one of James P. McMullen’s daughters once cautioned a newcomer at a church not to “make any disparaging remarks” about anyone in the congregation because everyone at the service was related to her. During the spring of 1937, approximately 500 McMullens gathered at B. L. “Uncle Birt” McMullen’s “Badwater” farm near Roosevelt Boulevard. While Uncle Birt circulated around the tables and cracked jokes with kinfolk, three guitarists and a fiddler played music and family members sang along with the tunes. Those in attendance at the 1
January 1940 reunion at the fair grounds in Largo enjoyed the McMullen string orchestra, square dances, and a picnic lunch topped off with coffee and orange juice. At the fall 1957 reunion on the county fairgrounds, the registration table had eight large pads overflowing with names and addresses. Meanwhile, eighty-six year old George Ward “Uncle Ward” McMullen danced with his niece and proclaimed, “I don’t know the half of my kinfolics, but neither does anybody else.” Those in attendance looked forward to the prizes for oldest and youngest family member, largest family, and various other categories. In July 1960, about 200 McMullens met at the fairgrounds to enjoy baked and fried chicken, ham, rice, pies, and other items. Six years later, 400 arrived for the annual Fourth of July gathering, this time at the municipal auditorium in Clearwater. Bluegrass music filled the room, as family members enjoyed picnic baskets with fried chicken, cole slaw, and potato salad. By this time, Nancy McMullen Meador, a longtime family historian, served as publicist for the event. Five-hundred arrived the following year for the 1967 reunion, and 400 attendees consumed more than ninety gallons of iced tea at the 1972 gathering.33

Nannie Hardage continued to live at the Daniel McMullen House until her death in March 1957. The old trees planted by Uncle Dan on the twenty acres of grove behind the house continued to bear fruit in 1949, though not with the yields found in earlier years. After Nannie’s death, Carl and Nancy McMullen McLaughlin lived in the house and tended to the groves. Over time, family members sold much of the original homestead, though members of the McMullen family continued to live in—and visit—the Dan McMullen House along Rosery Road into the early 1990s. After Carl’s death, family members worried about Nancy McLaughlin occupying such a large structure. One evening, police officers chased a burglar through palmetto scrub bushes on her land. Worried that she “couldn’t feel safe there anymore,” she decided to start discussions with Heritage Village about the possibility of donating the house.34

Early discussions on the fate of the Daniel McMullen House began by 1990. At the 17 October 1990 meeting of the Pinellas County Historical Commission, members

33 M. W. Moore, Dunedin, Overlooking Clearwater Bay and Gulf of Mexico (Dunedin: M. W. Moore Real Estate, 192?), 29; St. Petersburg Times, 2 May 1937, 1 September 1957, 5 July 1960, 5 July 1966, 5 July 1967, 5 July 1972; Tarpon Springs Leader, 19 January 1940; Clearwater Sun, 3 September 1957, 1 July 1966, 5 July 1966.
debated the possibility of moving the Lowe House from the Haas Museum complex in St. Petersburg. As commissioners discussed this issue, Director Kendrick Ford mentioned to them that he had also started preliminary conversations with Nancy McMullen McLaughlin about the future of the structure built by “Uncle Dan.” Discussions continued into the spring of 1992, when Nancy McLaughlin moved out of the house to live with her daughter in Bronson. During a summer 1993 interview, McLaughlin said that she enjoyed living on the cattle farm along Alt. U. S. Highway 27 in Levy County, claiming, “It’s nice up here. It’s like Largo used to be.” Then eighty-three years old, Nancy nevertheless found it difficult to move from her home of more than eight decades: “It nearly killed me to leave there. But I’ve learned to just accept things. I could worry about it and it wouldn’t do any good.” She had offered the property to the City of Largo and to a local church, but neither entity expressed interest. Following the advice of relatives, she sold the parcel to Gerald Leach, a land developer from Seminole, and donated the Daniel McMullen Home at 1551 Rosery Road to the historical museum. The Pinellas County Historical Society paid to maintain the fire and security system while waiting for Heritage Village officials to secure funds for the move. The Society agreed to sign the contract with Roesch Housemovers to cover part of the $25,000 relocation expense.\(^{35}\)

Logistical problems slowed the move of the Daniel McMullen House. The structure’s height required the relocation of some telephone wires. County Administrator Fred Marquis spoke with utility officials and agreed to split the cost of the bill. In September 1992, members of the Historical Commission concurred with Ford’s plan to place the structure between the Walsingham House and Heritage Mercantile. Complications with the size of the house delayed its arrival and raised the cost of the move to $40,000. Workers had to transport the building in three sections. After movers reassembled the residence at Heritage Village, restoration of the interior allowed for the building’s use as an educational center for fiber arts and a weaver’s guild.\(^{36}\)

\(^{34}\) *Largo Sentinel*, 8 December 1949; *St. Petersburg Times*, 5 September 1993.
The Fabric of History that Binds the Past and the Present

For nearly 125 years, members of Daniel McMullen’s family occupied the wooden home he built on the Largo frontier in 1868. Until Nancy McMullen McLaughlin moved from this home in the early 1990s, it represented the oldest residence continually occupied along the Pinellas Peninsula, and one of the oldest in the Tampa Bay region. Four generations and countless cousins lived in or visited the home between 1868 and 1992. Those who walked upon the porch as children often cut paths later in life through a rugged and sparsely settled frontier, navigated capitol buildings in Tallahassee and Washington, and traveled to distant corners of the globe. In time, however, many of them returned, whether at large reunions with hundreds of relatives, or for occasional visits to the ever-changing Largo area. Some stayed close to home, tending citrus groves that later became subdivisions; others fought in distant wars or won distinct achievements that brought pride to the McMullen family. The dwelling that now showcases great quilts and crafts has displayed a human patchwork that blankets much of Pinellas, as well as places far away.

Jeff Miller, a 1959 native of St. Petersburg, took office in the House of Representatives for Florida’s First Congressional District in October 2001. A 1984 graduate of the University of Florida, Miller represents constituents along the western portion of Florida’s Panhandle, including the following counties: Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, Walton, Holmes, and Washington. Although he lives near Chumuckla, in northern Santa Rosa County, family connections remain strong with his many relatives in the Tampa Bay region. A grandson of Nancy McMullen McLaughlin, Miller can also claim lineage as a great-great-grandson of Daniel and Margaret Campbell McMullen. Like Chester Bartow McMullen, who represented Florida’s First District in Congress from 1951 to 1953, Miller continues the long tradition of public service by descendants of the original seven McMullen brothers in Florida.37

On 15 September 2003, Nancy McMullen Wallace McLaughlin passed away at her daughter’s home in Jay, Florida. The last of Daniel and Margaret Campbell’s sixty-

three grandchildren, she lived twice as many years in the Daniel McMullen House as its namesake architect. Although “Uncle Dan” passed away two years before she entered the world, Nancy provided a bridge between the generations of McMullens, many of whom have different last names and live in distant areas. Just as Aunt Nannie nurtured young Nancy at the family homestead, Nancy in turn preserved the family landmark through her diligent efforts. When age and declining health took their toll, she gave new life to the family’s oldest occupied home in Florida by donating it to Heritage Village.
George Washington Moore House: A Brief Introduction

History of Site before House was Built
- The parcel where this house once stood was part of a land grant from the Armed Occupation Act of 1842.
- George Washington Moore’s original home, built on his homestead in 1875, probably burned down. The house at Heritage Village was the second house built by Moore in the Clearwater-Dunedin area.

Construction Information
- This Florida “Cracker” house, a Gulf Coast cottage, is built from native pine. The structure has board-and-batten exterior siding.
- The structure originally had only two rooms with open porches on the front and rear. When occupants required additional living space, they enclosed the rear porch and part of the front porch. These additions transformed the structure into a five-room house, with a room that could be used as a kitchen. An outhouse used as the bathroom also came to Heritage Village from this original property.

History of Occupants
- George Washington Moore was born in 1845, the year Florida became the twenty-seventh state, in Bedford, Virginia (now part of West Virginia). He met wife Francis A. Meador while living in Virginia and had two children while living there. He arrived in the Pinellas peninsula in 1875 and established his residence in the Clearwater-Dunedin area. His three younger children are natives of Dunedin. His father also came to the area in 1875. Both George Washington Moore and his father died in the same year, 1887.
- In 1879, he built the Moore House near the present location of Highland Avenue and Sunset Point Road. Though census records of the 1880s note his occupations as blacksmith and machinist, he also started an orange grove and cultivated crops.
- During this period, landowners operated under the “open range” system that allowed their cows, hogs, and other animals to roam freely.
- While on a business trip to Tampa in 1887, Moore caught yellow fever and died there shortly thereafter. Although the epidemic left Tampa under quarantine, only two Pinellas peninsula residents (including Moore) died from the outbreak.
- Son Moffet W. Moore played an important role in the Dunedin business community for many years. His jobs included making cement blocks, operating a feed store, delivering ice, making ice cream for commercial sales, manufacturing cigar boxes, operating the Dunedin cemetery, and engaging in real estate. He helped to organize the Dunedin Chamber of Commerce on 18 February 1926.
- It is believed that a member of Arthur Lewis Duncan’s family brought grapefruit from the Odet Philippe plantation to cultivate in the Dunedin area by the 1890s.
- Daughter Effie married Arthur Horace Duncan (not known to be a relative of A. L. Duncan), an entrepreneur who developed Clearwater Nurseries (with his twin brother, Albert N.) and served as postmaster at the Keene post office. Arthur was born in Keene, New Hampshire. Their children (G. W. Moore’s granddaughters)—Gladys and Elsie Duncan—visited the Moore House on many
occasions after the family sold it in the early 1900s. During their childhood, the Moore Home sat far away from the small communities that existed along the Gulf. Duncan employed workers on the grove for about fifty cents a day. Many slept on hay in the lofts of a big barn.

- An 1882 *Sunland Tribune* lists participants at the second annual Fair of Western Hillsborough, held in Clear Water. Members of the Duncan family took many awards for farm products. G. W. Moore won an award for the best vehicle, a one-horse wagon. Files indicate that members of the Coachman family also owned parts of the original parcel that served as a grove into the mid-1900s.

**Moving of the House to Heritage Village**

- Often referred to as the “Grove House” in early Historical Commission meeting minutes, this dwelling arrived at Heritage Village in the summer of 1981.
- There were still some fruit trees on the property at the time the house moved to Heritage Village.
George Washington Moore House

Overview

A native of Virginia, George Washington Moore brought his family from Hopkinsville, Kentucky, to the area near Clearwater and Dunedin in 1875. His parents had arrived along the Pinellas Peninsula earlier that year after receiving a 160-acre homestead. The first house G. W. Moore built for his family probably burned, and in 1879 he constructed a new residence for his wife, Frances Meador Moore, and their children. Built of native pine, the Moore House featured board and batten construction. The original layout of the house contained two large rooms, an open front porch and an open back porch. As the family grew, the Moores enclosed the back porch to provide the home with two more rooms. Later on, half of the front porch became a room that was never connected to the interior of the house. This homestead occupied lands along present-day Highland Avenue near Sunset Point Road in north Clearwater. Moore worked in a sawmill, as a blacksmith, and cultivated citrus. Members of the Moore family won quick recognition in early fairs and other gatherings for their mechanical and agricultural talents.

G. W. Moore traveled to Tampa in 1887 on a business trip. While there, he contracted yellow fever, became quite ill, and perished. After Moore’s death his widow and children continued to live in the residence until 1910. Son Moffett W. Moore became an important business and civic leader in Dunedin during the 1910s until his death in the mid-1930s. Daughter Effie Moore married a member of the Duncan family in the Keene area, east of Clearwater and northeast of Largo. Two children from this marriage, Gladys and Elsie Duncan, made notable contributions to the community and later commemorated the arrival of their grandfather’s home to Heritage Village in 1981.

The Moore House resembles many late nineteenth-century farmhouses along the Pinellas frontier. This grove house also signals the transformation of agriculture in the Dunedin area from its previous emphasis on cotton cultivation to the newer focus on citrus production. The Pinellas Peninsula became the stage for many early citrus producers, especially those who grew grapefruits for commercial distribution. Dunedin resident and Wisconsin transplant A. L. Duncan—a man not known to be related to the
Duncans of Keene—developed an early grapefruit in the area that soon won acclaim as the first named variety of grapefruit. The Moore House presently occupies an area amidst the pine woods, with the back door leading to a garden similar to what a farm wife might have kept for vegetables and herbs during the late 1800s. The structure arrived at Heritage Village in 1981, and a dedication at the Pinellas County Historical Society’s 1982 Country Jubilee brought Gladys and Elsie to the park to celebrate the renovations and open the structure to the public.

More than an Isolated Cottage on the Clearwater-Dunedin Frontier

George Washington Moore came into the world in 1845, the year that Florida became the twenty-seventh state of the Union. Born in Bedford City, Virginia, George was the only child of James Madison and Nancy A. Moore documented in census records. Both of his parents originally came from Virginia and both were born in 1819. James and Nancy Moore homesteaded on 160 acres south of Dunedin near Sunset Point Road and east of the opening of Stevenson Creek. On their land, they constructed a log cabin.¹

Stevenson Creek commemorates one of the region’s earliest settlers in the area bordering northern Clearwater and southern Dunedin. An 1813 native of Canada, Samuel H. Stevenson arrived in Florida by 1828. He lived in Duval County during the 1840 census, and filed for a claim of land in November 1842 under the provisions of the Armed Occupation Act. This legislation, passed by Congress in August 1842 just a few months after the conclusion of the Second Seminole War, allowed squatters to build homes and claim 160 acres of land if they agreed to “bear arms and live on the land in a fit habitation” for a period of at least five years and improve at least five acres of their lands for the crop cultivation. By the end of the 1840s, Stevenson improved his land and brought his family from Marion County. Soon, members of the Garrison and Somerville families arrived in the area. The quickest land route to Clear Water Harbor at the time

¹ Genealogical research on the Moore family appears in the building files at the Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo. A typewritten “Moore House History” paper in the building files claims that James and Nancy Moore arrived in 1865, whereas W. Lovett Douglas’s *History of Dunedin* marks their arrival ten years later, in 1875. Most sources point to the latter date as the more accurate of the two, although additional research of land records associated with the elder Moore would clear up this discrepancy. See:
was a crooked sand road to Stevenson Creek that required settlers to ford across the creek at low tide.²

Although many published accounts of Dunedin claim that the town represents the oldest settlement on the West Coast of Florida south of Cedar Keys, the area during the mid-1800s faintly resembles the community that existed by 1900. Allen Gouley Andrews, who came to the region in 1874, mentioned in a 1924 interview that “this territory around here was practically all wilderness and one could hardly drive a horse between the palm trees, while the roads or paths were as crooked as a snake.” During the 1860s and 1870s—even after the Civil War—cotton remained the king crop of the region. Maj. M. G. Anderson arrived by 1868 and established a horse-operated gin to accommodate the pioneers in the region who grew cotton at a time before anyone cultivated citrus for commercial distribution. Lacking a wharf, local cotton producers took their cotton bales from this gin to rowboats that then transported the cotton to larger vessels. According to Andrews, cotton remained the chief industry in the areas around Stevenson Creek and Curlew until 1878, when local residents started to raise oranges. The gin soon fell into the hands of the Douglas and Somerville families, and they opened an early trading post.³

George W. Moore came to the Pinellas Peninsula in 1875 by way of Kentucky. Family members claimed that Moore fought in the Civil War. By 1868, he resettled in Hopkinsville, Kentucky, a city about twenty-three miles north of Clarksville, Tennessee. He met and courted Francis A. “Fannie” Meador, a Hopkinsville native born in 1849. George and Francis exchanged wedding vows in 1868, and soon decided to start a family. Between 1870 and 1882, the Moores had two sons and three daughters. The two oldest children, Moffett Warren (born August 1870) and Nannie Meador (born October 1872) claimed Hopkinsville as their hometown. The three younger children, Effie Louis (born 3 October 1877), James Madison (born 10 January 1880), and Blanche (born June 1882) were natives of Dunedin. While some accounts refer to the young James as “Junior,” one

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² Dunedin Times, 3 April 1924. For a brief over of Stevenson and other early Pinellas Pioneers (including some who occupied buildings located at Heritage Village), see: Evelyn C. Bash, “Profiles of Early Pioneers on the Pinellas Peninsula,” Tampa Bay History 5 (Spring/Summer 1983): 82-93.
³ Dunedin Times, 3 April 1924.
must remember that James Madison Moore, Jr., was the grandson—not the son—of James M. Moore.4

The Moore House at Heritage Village represents the second structure built by George Washington Moore. The family probably traveled south along established railroad lines to Cedar Keys, then took a raft along the Gulf of Mexico to reach the lands owned by James M. Moore. When the family arrived in 1875, G. W. Moore received approximately eighty acres of his father’s homestead along a boundary roughly corresponding to Highland Avenue on the east, Palmetto Street on the south, Kings Highway on the west, and the “rear lot line” of homes on the southern side of Sandy Lane to the north. This area, south of Dunedin and east of the wide opening of Stephenson Creek, included fertile croplands. The creek meandered through this property, an area just to the north of the present-day Clearwater Country Club. Moore built a temporary or smaller home on his land; the original home may have suffered damage or destruction by fire. In 1879, his family moved into the home preserved at Heritage Village, a Gulf Coast vernacular cottage constructed with native pine that includes board and batten exterior siding. When first occupied, the 1879 structure had two rooms with open porches on both the front and rear of the cottage. Over time, occupants transformed the left half of the front porch and the entire back porch into interior rooms. Now a five-room dwelling, the structure included a variety of window sizes and lacked indoor restroom facilities throughout its existence. The outhouse to the rear of the George Washington Moore House also came from the family’s property.5

Soon after their arrival, the Moores planted citrus groves on the northern portion of their property and engaged in farming. The home later became popularly known as the “Moore Grove House” because of the number of grapefruit trees planted on the property. Family recollections note that George W. Moore worked in a sawmill, operated a blacksmith shop (according to the 1880 federal census), and cultivated vegetables and livestock. The family’s cows and hogs roamed freely in the area south of Dunedin in the

4 Ibid. Some sources refer to the spelling of Moffett W. Moore’s first name as “Moffet.” Most residents of Dunedin probably called him “M. W. Moore,” the name often associated with his many business interests. 
5 Architectural research files created by Stephanie Ferrell reside in the Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; “Moore House History” manuscript.
years before the closing of the range, while chickens stayed close to the family’s quarters. Children walked to school in Dunedin.\(^6\)

The small communities of Clear Water and Dunedin near the Moore homestead offered convenient meeting places for many families living on the coast of the Pinellas Peninsula. Clear Water Harbor became an important stopping point for early settlers, offering the closest post office and place to obtain provisions. During Christmas celebrations in 1881, many residents and visitors came to the home of Walton Whitehurst. Captain Samuel E. Hope brought his family to the gathering from their home along the Anclote River, near Tarpon Springs. Those in attendance enjoyed fireworks near the wharf of J. O. Douglas and James Somerville, notable Scottish immigrants who played an important role in establishing Dunedin. A newspaper article remarked that some women at the gathering kept celebrations under control: “No eggnog, no drunk. The old hens held a temperance meeting and resolved to encourage no mixing of sugar, eggs, and whiskey.”\(^7\)

An advertisement by pioneer settler George L. Jones in the 11 June 1881 \emph{Sunland Tribune} indicated how quickly citrus fever gripped the residents of Dunedin and provided an excellent portrait of the community at that time:

\begin{center}
For sale . . . a beautiful and thriving young Orange Grove, containing 175 Orange Trees of the choicest sweet variety, some in bearing, 25 or 30 will bear in another season; also Grape Fruit, Lemon, and Citron on the place. A dwelling house with 4 rooms, hall, and piazza extending all around the house, also kitchen and other outhouses on the place, all frame buildings. Front yard with flowers, laid off tastefully and walks shelled—Water the best on the coast. Post-office within 100 yards, also 2 stores. Hotel and dwelling houses within 150 yards of the bay. Society excellent; Churches and Schools good. The healthiest spot on the earth. Sold only to pay debts. The owner expects to live near here balance of life. Fine fishing and yachting, and handsomest bay in the State; Scenery grand. Steamer running here regularly. Price $2000, $1300 cash down,
\end{center}

\(^6\) “Moore House History” manuscript; Census research appears in files at Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo.
\(^7\) \emph{Sunland Tribune}, 26 January 1882.
balance in 3 years, secured by land note or mortgage.  

The culinary, agricultural, and mechanical talents of the Moore family won them honors in early gatherings during the 1880s. Approximately thirty-five years before the annual Pinellas County Fair started in Largo, the farmers along the sparsely settled Pinellas Peninsula conducted an early version of this event in an assembly known as the Fair of Western Hillsborough. Held at Clear Water for the first time in the spring of 1881, this fair allowed farmstead families from throughout the region to celebrate their harvests, compare their livestock, judge their handicrafts, and swap their recipes. The 21 May 1881 edition of the Sunland Tribune listed awards received by those who participated in the contests. Francis A. Meador Moore won honors for best light bread, tomato preserves, and pickles in a jar. Meanwhile, G. W. Moore submitted the only exhibit for the contest sponsored by the Committee on Farm Improvements, a one-horse cart exhibiting “excellence of material and superior construction.” Members of the Moore family also did well in the second annual Western Hillsborough Fair held in 1882. G. W. Moore received an award for best one horse wagon, while judges recognized his mother for her jelly and light bread.

Enterprises at the Moore homestead became more sophisticated by the mid-1880s. According to the 1885 Florida census, sixty-seven year-old James Moore worked as a fruit grower and shared his farmstead with Nancy. Son G. W. Moore continued to live on the adjacent plot of land, though his listed occupation of “machinist” does not tell the complete story of life at the grove house. Then thirty-eight years old, George Washington Moore and thirty-nine year-old Fannie raised their five children—Moffett (age 15), Nancy (age 12), Effie (age 8), James (age 4), and Blanche (age 3)—while tending to the family’s growing citrus crops, farm animals, and other agricultural

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8 Sunland Tribune, 11 June 1881.
9 Early descriptions of the area refer to the settlement at Clearwater by its earlier names of “Clear Water Harbor” and “Clear Water.”
10 Sunland Tribune, 21 May 1881, 4 May 1882.
pursuits. By this time, George’s agribusiness activities required him to make occasional
trips to the seat of Hillsborough County government, Tampa.  

In Search of “Health City,” But Finding Yellow Fever

Railroads, real estate speculation, and the hope of physical recuperation brought
many settlers to central and southern Florida after the end of Reconstruction. The recently
opened railroad networks south of Cedar Keys—including the Orange Belt Railway that
spanned the Pinellas Peninsula by 1888—transported many travelers to towns and
settlements. Hamilton Disston’s purchase of four million acres of land along the
peninsula of Florida enhanced property values and accelerated real estate transactions.
Invalids, consumptives, and others seeking a healthy climate began to arrive in Florida in
greater numbers during the early 1880s, searching for their version of the “Fountain of
Youth.”

Early boosters of the Pinellas Peninsula touted the region’s healthy setting. For
example, George Jones of Dunedin described a visit by Joseph Wilcox of Philadelphia to
the upper Pinellas groves of Captain Richard Booth in a January 1882 issue of the
Sunland Tribune. Claiming that the region promoted health “the year around,” Jones
considered the Pinellas Peninsula the “healthiest spot this side of heaven. And we will be
glad to see those fellows who are settling near hammock lands about next chill and fever
time and sell them a summers (sic) health retreat.”  

A dispatch appearing in the 9
November 1882 Sunland Tribune touted the potential of the “Gulf Coast Reserve,” an
area from Point Pinellas on the south to lands north of the Anclote River. In celebrating
this region—and encouraging prospective buyers to purchase tracts from Disston
representatives—the writer proclaimed:

It is impossible to give an adequate description of
this beautiful region in mere words, combining, as it
does, so many qualities of beauty and value. The
settler has it at his choice to select lands comprising
all the advantages of sea fronts, or, if he prefers,
high, dry, and healthy locations inland.

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11 Census information located during the research phase of this project appears in the Moore House files
located at the Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo.
12 Sunland Tribune, 26 January 1882.
13 Sunland Tribune, 9 November 1882.

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W. C. Van Bibber, a doctor from Baltimore who had acquired land on the southern end of the Pinellas Peninsula, claimed to have found an excellent location for a “Health City.” Raymond Arsenault’s narrative on the history of St. Petersburg describes a talk delivered by Van Bibber at the 1885 American Medical Association convention. Van Bibber hoped to answer a call issued eleven years prior by a British physician who asked his colleagues to find the best location for living a long and healthy life. In his lecture, Van Bibber praised the area near Point Pinellas for its curative climate that promoted health and longevity. Van Bibber’s recent purchase of lands in Pinellas and his interests in speculation may have led some to dismiss his claims, but a growing number of visitors and settlers along peninsular Florida proved that many welcomed such messages.14

Despite these cheerful pronouncements, residents of nineteenth-century coastal regions such as peninsular Florida feared the sudden onset of illnesses such as yellow fever. The semi-tropical climate promoted a number of epidemics that could quickly transform a salubrious setting into a quarantined quagmire. Epidemics of yellow fever—also known as yellow jack—a quick-spreading virus transmitted by the *Aedes Aegypti* mosquito, caused havoc in Tampa, Key West, and other coastal communities. Small and sporadic outbreaks had hit Fort Brooke and Tampa Town in 1839, 1841, and 1849. As more residents arrived in the region, the summer outbreaks of the 1850s and beyond grew into epidemics. According to research by Eirlys Barker, at least two hundred cases of yellow fever occurred in Tampa during each of the outbreaks in 1853, 1858, and 1867. After a small yellow fever outbreak in the fall of 1871, Tampa remained free from the epidemic until 1887. During this sixteen-year period, the small town had transformed into a booming community, new immigrants began to settle in Ybor City, and Henry B. Plant’s railroad and steamship enterprises fueled even greater real estate speculation.15

Outbreaks of yellow fever provoked fear because physicians did not understand the origin of the illness. Before 1901, doctors often attributed the painful epidemic to miasma, poor ventilation, and other sources rather than the mosquitoes that actually

transmitted the virus. Dr. John P. Wall, a Tampa physician exposed to the disease during the fall of 1871, knew that panic resulting from fears of a yellow fever outbreak might quash the speculative spirit of the growing city. When yellow jack hit Key West in the spring of 1887, Tampa officials hoped the illness would bypass their city as they immediately imposed quarantines and supported the establishment of a refugee station at Egmont Key by the U.S. Marine Hospital Service in the summer of 1887. Unfortunately, documented cases of yellow fever appeared in Tampa by September 1887; within a month, panic gripped the city and news of the outbreak reached the pages of the *New York Times*. This devastating epidemic led other Florida cities to impose strict quarantines prohibiting Tampans from entering their communities. During the summer and fall of 1887, Wall believed that the Tampa area and Hillsborough County suffered approximately one hundred deaths and nearly one thousand cases of yellow fever. The epidemic continued at a diminished pace into early 1888, when about ten people perished in three hundred new cases of yellow fever.  

As Tampa struggled with yellow fever, tragedy also came to the Moore family in 1887. George Washington Moore traveled to Tampa to conduct business in the county seat. Shortly after his arrival, he contracted yellow fever and became quite ill. He died at the age of forty-two. Research by W. Lovett Douglas and others attributes only two deaths in the upper Pinellas Peninsula to this outbreak: G. W. Moore and Elias Hart, a settler who lived east of Clear Water. Indeed, one could make a strong argument that the relative isolation of the Pinellas Peninsula and restrictions imposed on travel to Tampa prevented more residents of the area from contracting yellow fever. In a 1988 conversation with Gladys and Elsie Duncan, two granddaughters of G. W. Moore, the Duncan sisters claimed that Nancy Moore died within a few hours of her son, and neither knew about the other’s death. Unfortunately, census and burial records examined do not provide conclusive evidence of the exact date and time of death, so this story remains unconfirmed. Sometime in 1887, G. W. Moore’s father, James Madison Moore, also died

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16 Ibid., 4-20.
of unspecified causes. Thus before the end of the year, seventeen year-old Moffett W. Moore became the male head of the family and operated the farmstead.  

During the 1880s and 1890s, the Moore family continued to live in the 1879 house constructed by G. W. Moore. Moffett quickly assumed the responsibilities of maintaining the family’s agricultural interests. The younger children walked to a school in Dunedin. They occasionally enjoyed the early dismissal of classes to meet steamboats bringing supplies from Cedar Keys and Key West. The construction of the Orange Belt Railway brought excitement to Dunedin. Children left their classes to witness the arrival of trains. A small portion of the Moore property, located along the Pinellas Trail, became part of the right-of-way for the Orange Belt.

M. W. Moore, in his early history of the community—Dunedin, Overlooking Clearwater Bay and Gulf of Mexico—mentioned challenges faced by his grandfather, James M. Moore, during the 1880s. Moffett, regarded by many as Dunedin’s first historian, issued this pamphlet in the late 1920s or early 1930s through his real estate firm. He described an attempt by his “dignified” grandfather one early morning to move a yoke of oxen onto the recently built dock at Clear Water. The wooden docks, wet with dew, caused the oxen to slip and soon they took Moore with them into the water and “got a good drenching.” The elder Moore grew sugar cane and, like many farmers in the region, boiled the cane in a kettle to make sugar and syrup. During this process, farmers skimmed the kettles and stored the “skimmings” in barrels to use as animal feed. Moffett mentioned an episode when one of his hired hands decided to give a “liberal” amount of the fermented feed to about a dozen of James Moore’s hogs. Members of the Moore family watched the “gloriously drunk” swine swagger and stumble around the farmstead.

18 “Moore House History” manuscript.
19 William L. Davidson, Dunedin thru the Years, 1850-1978, 2d. rev. ed. (Charlotte: Delmar, 1988), 6; M. W. Moore, Dunedin, Overlooking Clearwater Bay and Gulf of Mexico (Dunedin: M. W. Moore Real Estate, 192?), 29.
A Grapefruit League of Their Own: The Tales to Two Duncan Families

In addition to the Moores, other new settlers invigorated the Pinellas Peninsula during the 1870s and 1880s. Two families with the last name of Duncan came to the region by the mid-1870s. Although they hailed from different regions of the United States and settled in different areas of the peninsula, they each contributed to the development of citrus culture in the region and also interacted with members of the Moore family. Additional genealogical research may uncover possible ancestral connections between these two families, though no conclusive relationships appeared in census records examined to date. A discussion of Arthur Lewis Duncan of Wisconsin who settled Dunedin and the Duncan family of Keene, New Hampshire, who originally homesteaded in the Clearwater-Largo area illustrates their involvement with agricultural enterprises in Pinellas.

Arthur Lewis Duncan had arrived in the Dunedin area from his native Wisconsin. According to a published history of Dunedin, he joined a local church in 1875 and became a grower of crops and citrus. Other sources place him in the area no later than 1883. His family also participated in the social activities of the growing Dunedin community. Articles in the 1 April 1886 *West Hillsborough Times*—forerunner to the *St. Petersburg Times*—announced a successful “Ye Old Folks Concert” and a forthcoming minstrel show. These stories praised the programs as evidence of the settlement’s growth, noting that people “began to arrive early from every point on the compass. They came in vehicles of every shape, color, and time of service; they came in carriages, carts, and saddle” to enjoy a variety of musical performances and entertainment. Those who attended heard a piano duet by members of the Duncan family. Indeed, a correspondent for the *Times* claimed that “the name of the town ought to be changed to Duncanedin, for while Mr. Duncan is carrying on horticultural operations, Mrs. Duncan is sustaining the church, and bringing [up] the social element as no woman has ever done before.” During the 1870s and 1880s, A. L. Duncan certainly crossed paths with fellow farmer G. W. Moore on numerous occasions.\(^{20}\)

\(^{20}\) *West Hillsborough Times*, 1 April 1886; Davidson, *Dunedin thru the Years*, 47. The 7 February 1924 issue of the *Dunedin Times* had a cover story that also described A. L. Duncan’s arrival. This account places his arrival in 1883 and notes his affiliation with the Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company of Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
In 1892, A. L. Duncan introduced the first named variety of grapefruit. The cultivation of grapefruit—originally known as “pomelos”—began in Florida with the arrival of Odet Philippe to the Tampa Bay region. Philippe—a pioneer settler whose ancestry and life remain the subject of much speculation, mystery, and controversy—settled along Old Tampa Bay near present-day Safety Harbor. He established his plantation, St. Helena, on the present site of Philippe Park. Philippe, his family, and slaves began to cultivate citrus at one of the first citrus farmsteads in Florida. A. L. Duncan took samples from the St. Helena site, harvested them near Dunedin, and developed the seeded grapefruit *Citrus paradisi* for commercial distribution. His expertise at budding and grafting shortened the bearing time for seedlings from ten years to about five years. By this time, Duncan had built a close partnership with Lee Bronson (L. B.) Skinner, another Wisconsinite who had settled in the Dunedin area and established the Milwaukee Groves. As manager of the Milwaukee Groves, Duncan crafted this cold-hardy species that flourished as freezes of the early 1890s decimated citrus crops in other regions of Florida. Just as Philippe deserves recognition for introducing grapefruit and other citrus to the region—not to mention his efforts in bringing Tampa its first cigar industry—A. L. Duncan must receive credit for his ability to transform grapefruits into a profitable agricultural commodity.  

Meanwhile, the Duncans of New Hampshire homesteaded on 160 acres near Druid Road, Lake Avenue, and Keene Road by 1878. Originally from Keene, New Hampshire, this Duncan family started to grow citrus in mid-Pinellas shortly after their arrival. Mr. Duncan (no first name given in census records examined) married Annie Newton, a woman born on 1 August 1817. The elder Duncans had three children: Clara (born in September 1851) and twins Arthur Horace and Albert N. (born 11 August 1856). According to a family interview, the Duncan family settled in the area in 1877 or 1878 and established a presence near Keene Road, a path named in honor of their hometown.  

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A Keen Union in the Moore House

In October 1896 Arthur Horace Duncan married Effie L. Moore—daughter of the late George Washington Moore—at the Moore homestead. Fannie watched as her daughter exchanged vows with A. H. Duncan in a ceremony officiated by Rev. I. M. Auld. In 1896, according to an oral history interview, the newlyweds constructed a two-story farmhouse on the family’s land near present-day Keene Road. Women in the family, including Annie N. Duncan and daughter Clara (or Claire) opened a “Keene Post Office” at the house and distributed mail to nearby residents. The union of Arthur and Effie Duncan produced four children, all natives of Clearwater: Louis Arthur (some records note him as Lewis Arthur, born 11 July 1904), Gladys (born 2 November 1905), Elsie (born 2 February 1910), and Mary Lou (born 1916). An undated letterhead held in the Heritage Village archives notes that by the 1890s A. H. Duncan served as proprietor of the Clearwater Nurseries, originally established 1877. This nursery, located along the Orange Belt (Sanford and St. Petersburg) Railway touted the “finest variety of oranges, lemons, and pomelas [grapefruit] a specialty.” The family homestead, simply known as “P.O. Keene,” served as the company’s offices. Within a year of this marriage, Arthur’s twin brother—Albert Duncan—wed his wife Mattie, a woman born in Missouri in 1870.23

Changes came to the Duncan and Moore families during the early twentieth century. According to the 1900 census, Albert and Mattie Duncan grew fruit on their homestead. “Bert” Duncan later moved to St. Petersburg by the mid-1930s. Albert opened the Old Curiosity Shop, a second-hand clothes and merchandise store, at 307 Ninth Street South, a site presently near the AAA building and the western parking lot at Tropicana Field. Arthur and Effie Moore engaged in farming. Clara Duncan, the older sister of Albert and Arthur, lived with Arthur and Effie during the 1900 and 1910 census periods. “Aunt Clara,” as she was fondly known by the children of Arthur and Effie, remained an important part of the household, at times assisting with the postal duties and

22 Transcript of interview of Gladys and Elsie Duncan, 11 October 1986, located in Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; Census records on file at Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo. 23 Clear Water Press, 8 October 1896; transcript of interview of Gladys and Elsie Duncan, 11 October 1986; Genealogical research files reside in the Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo. Some records, including those of people interred at Largo Cemetery, denote the spelling of Louis’s name as “Lewis.”
always supportive of the small children. Meanwhile, by 1900 the Moore House had eight occupants. Fannie, G. W. Moore’s widow and family matriarch, served as head of household. Moffett, then thirty years-old, worked as a farmer, while his younger brother James engaged in carpentry. Blanche attended school, and sister Nannie shared part of the cramped quarters with her husband Charles Wesley Rousseau and their two children, Sybil and Doris. Charles Rousseau worked as a mail agent for the railroad in 1900; he had married Nannie in about 1896 or 1897, after the birth of Sybil but before the arrival of Doris. Other members of the Rousseau family settled in lands east of Clearwater and established a cemetery in 1870 along present-day South Hercules Avenue after family patriarch William Henry Rousseau (1818-1870) passed away. Charles Wesley Rousseau was buried at this cemetery after his death in 1931. Many members of the Harn and Rousseau families, along with some members of the Allen, Blanton, Booth, and McMullen families, occupy sites at this cemetery.24

By 1910, the Moore family moved from the G. W. Moore cottage. Fannie had grown tired of maintaining the home and lands, while son M. W. Moore had found new business opportunities in Dunedin. They sold the homestead and moved to Scotland Street in Dunedin. Before the end of the year, Fannie passed away while visiting one of her daughters (probably Blanche) in Jacksonville. The family brought her remains back to Dunedin, and she found her final resting place in the Dunedin Municipal Cemetery. Except for Effie Moore Duncan, all of the G. W. and Fannie Moore’s children and G. W. Moore’s parents rest at the Dunedin Cemetery. Effie, her husband A. H. Duncan, and their children occupy sites at the Largo Cemetery.25

While maintaining an active family life, Moffett W. Moore engaged in a variety of businesses and became an early civic leader in Dunedin. He first married to Lottie Grant (1873-1912)—daughter of Alfred J. Grant—probably after 1900. The Tampa Weekly Tribune announced the arrival of a daughter to Lottie and M. W. Moore in

24 Census information appears in building files at the Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; see the 1933 and 1937 editions of R. L. Polk’s St. Petersburg (Pinellas County, Florida) City Directory. For an index of those interred at Rousseau Cemetery, see a list compiled for the Pinellas Genealogical Society: http://ftp.rootsweb.com/pub/usgenweb/fl/pinellas/cemetery/rousseau.txt. The 9 April 1914 issue of the Clearwater News included numerous jottings about the Duncan and Moore families in a section on “Keene” written by a special correspondent.

25 “Moore House History” manuscript; genealogical records included in Moore House files, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo.
November 1903. They had one boy (Warren), and three girls (Margaret, Francis, and Hazel). After Lottie’s death in 1912, Moffett exchanged wedding vows with a woman named Florence Malone. Florence participated in the local Village Improvement Society by 1915, and both Moffett and Florence became charter members of the Dunedin Eastern Star on 5 April 1923. After working in the citrus industry as a young man, M. W. Moore fabricated cement blocks and dock pilings, created the first cement sidewalks in the community, operated a feed store and ice house, manufactured ice cream and cigar boxes, and worked in the real estate business. He also took charge of the Dunedin Cemetery for nearly three decades. In March 1914, he finalized plans to construct a building to house a cabinetmaker and a warehouse for a feed-and-grain business in Dunedin. During one busy week in April 1924, Moore’s real estate firm sold three business and two residential lots, and his nursery and banana farm supplied local farmers with excellent plants, as he and wife Florence traveled to St. Cloud, Orlando, and Bartow on business. Issues of the 1924 *Dunedin Times* regularly included advertisements for M. W. Moore Real Estate and Insurance. One of his advertisements touted “A High Class estate in a High Class modern town on water front, two blocks from Post Office. Beautiful house and grounds; large palms; all kinds of fruit; can be subdivided to advantage.” Between 1924 and 1926, he worked with other business leaders to secure properties along Main Street that allowed for its extension. This new section of road opened for traffic on the nation’s sesquicentennial, 4 July 1926. He joined members of the Grant and Douglas families and other leaders as a founding member of the Dunedin Chamber of Commerce on 18 February 1926. In addition to these many commitments, Moffett became Dunedin’s first recognized historian and served one term on the City Commission. He regularly wrote columns in the *Dunedin Times* and published a thirty-one page account of the city’s early years.  

M. W. Moore outlived his second wife, Florence Malone. She passed away in 1934. An Elder in the First Presbyterian Church, Moffett conducted a prayer meeting at the church in 1936, experienced a heart attack, and died within a few moments. His death

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26 Tampa Weekly Tribune, 12 November 1903; Clearwater News, 12 March 1914; Douglas, *History of Dunedin*, 71-72, 138-139; Davidson, *Dunedin thru the Years*, 39, 84, 161; Dunedin Times, 27 March 1924, 1 May 1924. For an example of Moore’s articles, see: “Dunedin Was Jonesborough,” *Dunedin Times*, 17 April 1924.
marked an important transition point in the history of Dunedin. Other family members, most notably Elsie and Gladys Duncan, kept the family’s heritage alive until after the Moore House arrived at Heritage Village.

The Duncan sisters grew up on the outskirts of Clearwater. In a 1986 interview, Gladys and Elsie mentioned that they traveled on horseback or by horse and buggy to get from their farmstead near Keene and Druid roads to South Ward Elementary School in Clearwater. Other children, including members of the McMullen family, also brought their horses to school. The children tied their horses to trees east of the South Ward campus, across South Fort Harrison Avenue near Druid. Elsie once told a reporter that she often rode her horse named “Pet” to the school. By the 1920s, the family had a Model T automobile.

Only one of the four children in the Arthur H. and Effie Moore Duncan household decided to get married. Louis Arthur Duncan exchanged vows with Mary Nell Bagby in December 1925. A laborer in a fish house in 1920, Louis worked on an orange grove by 1930. He and Mary bore two sons in the late 1920s, Louis A. and Walter E. Duncan. Meanwhile, sisters Gladys, Elsie, and Mary Lou remained single throughout their entire lives. Mary Lou, the youngest child, left Florida and died in New York City in August 1946. Gladys and Elsie decided to remain in Florida. According to the 1930 census, twenty-three year old Gladys served as a stenographer for a local lawyer. She later worked for twenty-seven years as the town clerk of Belleair. Elsie Duncan graduated from the Florida State College for Women—now Florida State University—in Tallahassee, and completed graduate course work at the University of Colorado and the University of Florida. In A Tradition of Excellence, the school district’s commemorative history, Elsie Duncan recalled earning $90 per month as a teacher at North Ward Elementary School in Clearwater during the Depression years. Except for books brought by teachers into their classrooms, the campus lacked a library. One Friday afternoon during the 1930s, her principal told her to report to the high school because of a drop in enrollment at North Ward. During World War II, Elsie served in the USO (United

27 Douglas, History of Dunedin, 139.
28 Transcript of interview of Gladys and Elsie Duncan, 11 October 1986, located in Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; Undated clipping from the Elsie Duncan files of the Pinellas Genealogical Society.
Service Organizations) away from Florida. She returned to North Ward in the late 1940s and became the school’s principal in 1954, after the retirement of longtime administrator Frances Belcher. Duncan led North Ward through a surging enrollment caused by transplants and baby boomers, as well as school integration in September 1965. One of the first white schools to accept African-American children from nearby neighborhoods, North Ward’s black enrollment jumped from about ten percent in 1965 to fifty percent by the late 1960s. Duncan’s leadership brought the school into this new era without any violence or difficulty.29

The Duncan Sisters Celebrate the Moving of Their Grandfather’s House

Gladys and Elsie Duncan witnessed incredible changes along the Pinellas Peninsula. Born in the frontier at a time before the separation of Pinellas from Hillsborough, they watched as many acres of former family groves in Dunedin and Largo became subdivisions. During their lifetimes, the isolated settlements of Clearwater and Dunedin transformed into contiguous communities surrounded by new developments. After their father—A. H. Duncan—passed away in August 1938, they took care of their mother, Effie Moore Duncan. They occasionally drove her past her childhood home, the Moore House, at its location on 1740 North Highland in Clearwater. In an undated clipping, one daughter noted that “Mother loved to come past and see the freshly whitewashed house—it was always so pretty.” Effie died on 26 April 1971 at ninety-three years of age. A few years after her death, the grove house on Highland received a reprieve for a new life.30

Tom Holland of 1466 Grove Circle in Clearwater, a seasonal resident who also owned a home in Ohio, had acquired the Moore House and its property during the 1950s. By early 1980, Holland contacted administrators at Heritage Village to discuss the possibility of moving the grove house. Director Kendrick Ford visited the house and considered it an appropriate structure in suitable condition. The Moore House, in his opinion, required minimal restoration. Papers held by the Holland family indicated that

members of the Coachman family might have also held title to the land at one point. Ford promptly contacted Cathy Slicker, chair of the Pinellas County Historical Commission (PCHC) and encouraged her to convene a meeting to discuss this matter. PCHC members supported the proposal, and Ford called Roesch House Movers and received an estimate of $4,950 to relocate the home to Heritage Village. With $12,500 available in the Heritage Village budget, Ford had sufficient resources to move the Moore House. Discussions continued with Holland as he investigated the possibility of receiving a tax write-off for donating the Moore House to Heritage Village.31

By the late spring of 1981, park staff prepared the site that the Moore House would occupy. The Moore House arrived at Heritage Village in July 1981. Restoration efforts included the repair of walls that had suffered considerable termite damage and the removal of asbestos shingles added to the structure after 1900. Ford told PCHC members on 16 September 1981 that he had learned the home originally belonged to George Washington Moore. Gladys and Elsie Duncan, Moore’s granddaughters, contributed many family furnishings for display in the house. In addition, a gentleman who repairs timepieces willingly donated a clock that had belonged to Moore’s mother. With these original fixtures and the testimony of the Duncan sisters, the Moore House resembles its appearance at or about 1900. Elsie and Gladys participated in a ribbon-cutting ceremony to celebrate the opening of the Moore House during the 1982 Country Jubilee. The sisters continued to visit the Moore House at its new setting for many years. Gladys passed away on 16 June 1995, at the age of eighty-nine; Elsie died on 3 September 1997. Though longtime visitors to Heritage Village may miss their presence, their efforts to preserve their grandfather’s home will never be forgotten.32

30 Undated clippings consulted in this research project reside in files located at the Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo.
Plant-Sumner House: A Brief Introduction

History of Site before House was Built
- Located near Henry B. Plant’s Belleview Hotel (now the Belleview Biltmore).

Construction Information
- Probably built in 1896 with modern amenities for its time (running water, indoor plumbing, electricity). Exact pedigree of the structure still uncertain.
- Similar in construction to the Plumb House, another “Plant” House bought and moved by the Plumb family.
- Modern kitchen and side porches added to the structure by 1930s.

History of Occupants
- By many accounts, the home originally served as a home for the railroad supervisor responsible for trains coming from the Clearwater city depot to the Belleview Hotel.
- Robert Sumner, a minister who came to the area from Maitland, moved into the home with his family in 1912. Sumner served as the postmaster, a dairy farmer, and a minister in the area.
- A member of the Whitehurst family lived in the house from the mid-1950s until the early 1970s.

Significant Events/Activities
- While living in the house, the Sumners kept several cows on their property and sold some of the milk to neighbors. The 1910 census notes that Sumner had owned a dairy farm while living in Maitland.
- By 1920, Sumner served as Belleair’s postmaster.

Moving of the House to Heritage Village
- By the early 1970s, the house had suffered from extensive termite damage.
- Fearing that the house’s condition might lead to its demolition, the Clearwater Junior League began searching for a suitable location to move the house (within Clearwater city limits). George Mallory donated the structure.
- This house became the first structure brought to Heritage Village.
- Vandalism at the park during its early days (late 1976), led to the erection of the fence around the park’s perimeter. There was concern about damage to Plant-Sumner and Seven Gables, the only two structures on the site at that time.
- The house had deteriorated to the point that it required both reconstruction and restoration. Many parts of the house were “built” in the mid-1970s to replace areas where termite damage and other deterioration had required demolition.
- In February 1977, volunteers from the Junior League of Clearwater painted the house. Work on restoring and rebuilding Plant-Sumner was almost finished by the fall of 1977.
Plant-Sumner House

Overview

At the time of Henry Bradley Plant’s death in 1899, the Plant railroad system controlled 2,100 miles of railroad and possessed large holdings of steamship lines and hotels. The Plant-Sumner House, constructed in the late 1800s, symbolized Plant’s contributions to central Pinellas, and especially his efforts to expand and develop the City of Clearwater and the Town of Belleair. Located near the site of Plant’s Belleview Hotel—now the Bellevue Biltmore—the Plant-Sumner House and other dwellings provided homes for the construction project supervisors and their families. By the late 1890s, the eastern portion of the property sat alongside a railroad line that included a spur connected to the Belleview property. This house served as the residence for the supervisor of the railroad that ran from the Clearwater depot to the Biltmore Hotel project.

The house possessed very modern facilities for 1896, such as electricity, running water, and indoor plumbing. One may speculate that Plant built these houses with such modern conveniences so he could entice tradesmen to move their families into the area while they worked at the Belleview Hotel. With seven spacious rooms for a growing family, the house also included picture and plate rails, a built-in china cabinet, four fireplaces, a wood cook stove, and icebox, all desirable amenities at the height of the Victorian era. However, in the early twentieth century, these Plant homes became “eyesores” to those managing the exclusive hotel. Belleview officials sold some of the dwellings at low prices with the understanding that the new owners would move the houses away from the Belleview Hotel.

Robert Sumner purchased the Plant-Sumner House in 1912. The previous owners, Newman and Brown, probably had some connection with the Plant Investment Company. The Sumners raised their children in the home and kept cows on their property. In the Belleair community, Sumner held a variety of positions: the Belmont Methodist minister, Belleair postmaster, dairy farmer, and occasional veterinarian. In 1934, workers modernized the kitchen and installed a gabled roof and side porches. By
1950, the family added a second bathroom on the west side of the house. For over forty years, the Sumners occupied the “A” street residence.

By the mid-1950s, C. C. Whitehurst moved into the Plant-Sumner House. Native of a pioneer family, Whitehurst lived at the home for approximately eighteen years. During part of that time, he worked at the nearby Kilgore Groves and West Coast Fruit Company. He retired from the citrus industry by the mid-1960s, a time when residential subdivisions started to appear on many of the former citrus groves, and other industrial and commercial facilities replaced many of the old packing houses. As Whitehurst prepared to move to a new home in 1973, members of the Junior League of Clearwater and the Seminole chapter of the Questers learned about the home’s history after meeting with Ralph Reed, then Curator of the county’s historical museum.

The Questers and League members soon discovered that Plant-Sumner’s new owner planned to burn down or demolish the structure. Massive termite damage had destroyed significant portions of the home. Intense lobbying by these women to members of the Pinellas County Historical Commission and the Board of County Commissioners saved Plant-Sumner from the pyre or trash pile. Rather than demolition, the house faced a massive renovation and a much anticipated relocation to the site of the county’s open-air museum along Walsingham Road. Indeed, in 1976 Plant-Sumner became the first house transported to Heritage Village. The Junior League of Clearwater paid $50,000 for reconstruction costs, and the local chapter of the Questers furnished the dining room and the nursery. Not only did the efforts of Junior League members save this house; their advocacy encouraged the creation of Heritage Village and brought substantial historic preservation grants to Pinellas County during America’s bicentennial.

The Railroad Opens the Belleair Region for Development

Before the arrival of the Orange Belt Railway in 1888, most settlements along the west central Pinellas Peninsula sat along or very close to the water. Settlers at early outposts such as Dunedin, Clear Water Harbor, Anona, Indian Rocks Beach, Bay Pines, and Johns Pass conducted much of their commerce and travel along the intracoastal waterways and the Gulf of Mexico. Supplies often arrived by boat from Cedar Keys or Key West. Due to the primitive network of paths and roadways, even shipments from
Tampa often came either by schooner around the Pinellas Peninsula, or by boat to Bay View. Homesteaders of interior parcels—pioneers such as Daniel McMullen, Andrew M. O’Quinn, John J. McMullen, Samuel H. Kilgore, and Albert N. Duncan, to name a few—often used part of their land to cultivate citrus, grow crops, or herd livestock.

In 1870, Captain Charles Wharton Johnson regularly sailed his ship, The Evening Star, along the Gulf coast between Cedar Keys and Fort Myers to deliver mail, supplies, and occasional travelers. According to a published history of Largo, he encountered bad weather while traveling near Clear Water Harbor during one of his trips. Some residents along the bluff witnessed Captain Johnson in distress, and brought him and his son, Levin William Johnson, to shore. Other narratives claim that Johnson happened upon the ridge where the Belleview Biltmore Hotel currently sits and explored the area. However he arrived, he soon applied for a homestead on the land now occupied by the hotel and brought his family from Cedar Keys. He built a small home on his parcel in Belleair by 1872. After awhile, he purchased other lands around the intersection of Bay Drive and Seminole/Missouri where he built a three-story dwelling near the present-day Largo Library and Largo Cultural Center. This impressive residence included five fireplaces, a cistern that provided running water, mahogany paneling and banisters crafted from wood Johnson had obtained in Honduras, and a flush toilet on the second floor by 1908, certainly a rarity in this region at that time.¹

The Kilgore family also homesteaded in the area in the mid-1800s. James Summers Kilgore acquired a 100-acre homestead near Anona and became one of the earliest pastors at Anona Methodist Church. His son, Samuel Henry Kilgore, homesteaded on 160 acres of land west of present-day downtown Largo (generally south of West Bay Drive and Indian Rocks Road). An 1845 native of South Carolina, Samuel Henry Kilgore came to Florida with his family in 1852. He fought in the Ninth Florida Regiment during the Civil War, and ended his military service when Robert E. Lee surrendered Confederate forces at Appomattox. According to a published history of Largo, Samuel married Elpenice “Mittie” Hart, the sister of Clear Water Harbor’s fourth mayor, Will Hart, and the niece of Reconstruction-era Governor Ossian Bingley Hart.
Born in March 1850 on her father’s homestead, Mittie told others during her life that she believed she was the first white female child born and raised on the Pinellas Peninsula. Samuel had four sons from an earlier marriage or marriages: James E., Henry Alvin, Jessie Barnard, and Reginald. These men became expert cultivators of citrus who built close ties with other pioneer families. For example, Henry Kilgore tied the knot with Mary Belcher, while his brother, Jessie Barnard Kilgore, exchanged vows with Gussie Belcher. Rev. James Summers Kilgore officiated unions between members of the Hart, McMullen, Meares, Summerlin, and Whitehurst families, to name a few. Even as late as the 1930s, many pioneer families went to a site in Anona known as the “Kilgore oyster camp” for picnics and church gatherings. Kathleen Plumb, then a Sunday school teacher at Clearwater’s First Methodist Church, brought her pupils to that site for a “steak fry party” in December 1933. Later generations of the Kilgore family became important growers in and around Largo, a community commonly known as “Citrus City.”

The construction of the Orange Belt and an eventual change in the line’s ownership accelerated development in the areas of Belleair, Largo, and southern Clearwater. In the early 1880s, Hamilton Disston had purchased substantial acreage throughout Western Hillsborough. Soon, Disston brought in associates and agents to parcel, sell, and develop his holdings from Tarpon Springs to Disston City (now Gulfport). Meanwhile, Henry Bradley Plant had acquired a charter to bring a railroad line to Tampa. A native of Connecticut, Plant first came to Florida in the spring of 1853. After the Civil War, he expanded his interests in the shipping and transportation businesses. Plant’s trains pulled into Tampa Town by early 1884, and over the next decade he expanded his network to include steamships and an extension of the railroad lines to Port Tampa, along the Interbay Peninsula. He soon began to design an opulent resort—the Tampa Bay Hotel—along the western banks of the Hillsborough River. This structure, presently the campus of the University of Tampa, dominated the skyline of the growing community by the early 1890s. Also, the recent arrival of cigar workers to Ybor


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City and West Tampa fueled Hillsborough County’s land boom at a time when much of the Pinellas Peninsula remained “off the beaten path.” Disston hoped to secure a railroad along Pinellas to serve as a catalyst for his interests, but animosity between him and Plant forced him to look for another locomotive company. By late 1886, Disston decided to visit Peter Demens, a Russian immigrant who had recently taken control of the Orange Belt Investment Company’s line from Sanford to Oakland, near Lake Apopka. Throughout 1887 and early 1888, workers extended the Orange Belt from Lake Apopka to southern Pinellas, though not to Disston City. A disagreement between Disston and Demens led to a new agreement between the Orange Belt Investment Company and “General” John Constantine Williams that brought the iron horse to the future site of Demens’s Landing.3

The railroad’s arrival in St. Petersburg promoted settlement and commerce, as well as a regional rift. Demens and his partners had borrowed funds from a Philadelphia syndicate. In 1889, Demens could not make interest payments on the loan. Soon, the Russian sold his interest in the project and left Florida. The narrow gauge line, though poorly constructed, brought settlers to the communities along the Pinellas Peninsula’s backbone. By the 1890s, Tarpon eclipsed Anclote, Largo absorbed Anona, and St. Petersburg overshadowed Disston City. Although the arrival of the railroad promoted urbanization, regularly scheduled train service also fostered agricultural pursuits as large landowners expanded their groves, cultivated bountiful and diverse crop yields, and continued to raise livestock. Plant certainly viewed the development of hotels and resorts on the nearby Pinellas Peninsula as unwelcome competition; his quarrels with Disston and early demands for the secession of Pinellas from Hillsborough by some settlers also bothered him. The notable growth of St. Petersburg by the early 1890s concerned Plant, who by that time considered lower Pinellas and its growing legion of boosters a detriment to his commercial ventures. Always hoping to expand his operations, Plant often dispatched his agents to search for sites for future resorts and hotels. His overtures to civic leaders in St. Petersburg to construct a signature hotel fell on deaf ears as property owners refused to accept Plant’s offer on his terms. During a visit along the bluff in

http://fmp.dlis.state.fl.us/fpr/A02690/011.pdf; Largo, Then Til, 10-11; St. Petersburg Times, 29 December 1933.
Belleair, Plant decided to purchase some of the Captain Charles Johnson’s real estate. His acquisition of this property and the former Orange Belt Railway expanded his empire and sent a strong message to St. Petersburg’s business community.4

**Henry Plant, the Belleview, and Houses in Belleair**

Henry Plant hired workers to improve the railroad and commissioned architects to design a new hotel and subdivision. Laborers converted the narrow gauge rails of the Orange Belt into a standard gauge line. A new depot soon opened on Cleveland Street in Clearwater. The former Orange Belt soon became part of a larger railroad network in the Plant System that connected shorter roads in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina under a standard gauge. Meanwhile, Plant commissioned J. W. Newman to conduct a survey of the region and design plans for a community he named “Belleair” by 1896. Plant also hired Tampa architects Francis J. Kennard and Michael J. Miller to draw up plans for his hotel. By the summer of 1895, over three hundred workers came to the area to clear the land and begin construction of the hotel. Some also built homes near the rail lines and in Belleair for early guests and project managers.5 The Plant-Sumner House may have had its beginnings as one of these structures.

The Plant-Sumner House’s exact age and original design remain a mystery. Early clippings describing the opening of Heritage Village included statements that placed the date of construction as early as 1875. They also inferred that the original structure may have resembled a smaller cottage or “cabin” rather than a two-story edifice. Though purely conjecture, workers may have moved this smaller home to its location on “A” Street in Clearwater and expanded it during the mid-1890s. A brochure published the Junior League of Clearwater to commemorate the reconstruction of the house at Heritage Village places its year of origin at 1886, with Plant acquiring the home as part of his Belleair development a decade later. Later research by Cathy MacKinnon places the probable period of construction as the spring of 1896, after Plant had acquired the property and the Orange Belt Railway. In redesigning the rail lines, Plant’s crew planned to make the area northeast of the home and west of the former Kilgore family citrus-

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4 Ibid.
packing facility a switching area between track lines. Under this assumption, Plant’s interests built the Plant-Sumner House and other nearby dwellings as residences for those erecting the Belleview Hotel or supervising railroad operations. MacKinnon’s conversations with those familiar with the house pointed out that the installation of wires and plumbing probably took place at the time of construction, leading one to assume that construction did occur in the mid-1890s, not earlier. While additional research of early property records may establish a better understanding of the house’s early occupants and date of construction, one can assume that the house resembled its present form by 1896 or 1897, the period when workers built the hotel and other homes in the new Belleair subdivision.6

The Belleview’s opening on 15 January 1897 attracted much attention in the region. The original hotel possessed 145 rooms, large verandas, electric lights, telephones, and telegraph and newsstand facilities that allowed guests to keep in touch with events back home. Nearby structures benefited from their close proximity to this hotel: Although Clearwater did not have a municipal water works at the time, the Plant-Sumner House possessed plumbing and received running water from the Belleview’s system by the late 1890s. Some of the water came from a deep well pump and Lake Belleview located on the eastern side of the railway tracks at the end of “D” Street. From there, water passed through ten- and twelve-inch pipes, first to a large water tower (with a capacity of 85,000 gallons) at the eastern end of “D” Street, then by underground pipe to the Belleview. Whatever direct ties Henry B. Plant had with this home came to an end on 23 June 1899, when he passed away at his Fifth Avenue residence in New York. Henry’s son, Morton Plant, took over his father’s investment operations. Over time, however, Morton sold or transferred some of the holdings. If the Plant-Sumner House belonged to the Plant Investment Company outright in 1899, Morton had sold or relinquished claim on the “A” Street property by 1912. Morton F. Plant, a name associated with Clearwater’s early development, also provided an endowment of $100,000 to establish an

5 Ibid.
The present-day Morton Plant Hospital originally opened in the mid-1910s; it often appeared on early city maps as the “Plant Endowed Hospital.” The younger Plant remained an important civic leader until his death in 1918. A year later, John McEntee Bowman acquired the hotel as part of his Biltmore chain and renamed the structure the Belleview Biltmore. By 1924, workers completed an expansion of the structure to 425 rooms.\(^7\)

**The Sumner Family Arrives in Clearwater**

The Sumners acquired the house on “A” Street in 1912, the year Pinellas celebrated its independence from Hillsborough County. Earlier occupants remain unknown, though research by MacKinnon notes that Sumner acquired the property from two owners named Newman and Brown. Additional examination of pre-1912 deed records in Hillsborough County may reveal a connection between that Newman and J. W. Newman, the original surveyor of the Belleair community. If a connection exists, Newman may have received the house (and other associated properties) from a trust conferred by the Plant estate, or Newman may have merely acted as an agent assigned with the task of selling former Plant properties. In the latter case, records may still point towards the Plant Investment Company as primary owner of the property. In any case, Robert and Louise Sumner brought their family to the area from Maitland, a farming community near Orlando. The Sumners moved into the house in 1912.\(^8\)

Robert L. Sumner came from a large family. His parents, Robert and Martha J. Sumner, hailed from Georgia and entered the world in the late 1820s. According to census records, the couple had at least ten children, with five of them born before the Civil War: John R. (born circa 1851), Jesse K. (born circa 1853), James A. (born circa 1855), Joseph D. (born circa 1857), and William J. (born circa 1860). Robert and Martha worked as farmers in or near Swainsboro, Georgia, in 1860. This town—the seat of Emanuel County—sat approximately midway between Macon and Savannah. At the

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\(^8\) MacKinnon, “Story of Plant-Sumner” manuscript.
time, other members of the family apparently lived in Worth County, Georgia, between Tifton and Albany. The parents welcomed two children during the war years—Aminia M. (born circa 1862) and Benjamin L. (born circa 1864)—and one as the South began its earliest phase of Reconstruction, Eliza M. (born circa 1866). By 1867 or 1868, the Sumners decided to move their family to Hernando County, Florida, the birthplace of the couple’s youngest children, Sarah C. (born circa 1868) and Robert L. (born circa 1872). Robert, Martha, and their nine oldest children lived in the Fort Dade area of Hernando County by the time census-takers arrived in 1870. They occupied land near the Withlacoochee River and an old trail that connected Fort King (Ocala) to Fort Brooke (Tampa). Robert claimed to work as a blacksmith, though he probably also continued to farm. Other members of the Sumner family also came to Hernando County by 1870, possibly to start anew after the devastation of many Georgia farms and that region’s economy during the Civil War.9

Young Robert L. Sumner became the couple’s youngest child. A native of Hernando County, Robert no doubt assisted his parents on their farm in the late 1870s and 1880s. He courted and married Julia M., a native of Alabama, in about 1894. At some point by 1910, Robert L. and Julia M. Sumner moved to Maitland in Orange County, nearly due east from his childhood home. It is possible—though not confirmed—that the Sumners may have traveled between his childhood home in Hernando and his property in Maitland along the Orange Belt Railway and its successor lines, as the early roads and paths between those settlements followed a similar path around Lake Apopka. By 1910, the younger Robert and his wife lived at the intersection of Maitland and Howell Road. The family had four children by the end of the first decade: Luther, Mildred Agnes (born about 1902), and infants Louise “Oween” (born about 1908) and Ralph Marion (born about 1909). During this time, Robert owned a dairy farm.

The Sumners moved to Clearwater and acquired the Plant-Sumner House in 1912. Shortly after their arrival, Julia M. Sumner gave birth to the couple’s youngest child, Maurice Orien “Bill” Sumner, in one of the upstairs bedrooms. In her research, MacKinnon claimed that the child’s aunt, a woman named America Sellers, delivered

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9 Genealogical research on the Sumner family appears in building files located at Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo.
Maurice in or about 1913. As family members changed Maurice’s diapers, they could also look out the east window and watch workers add a spur line of the Tampa and Gulf Coast Railroad (T&GC, commonly called the “Tug-and-Grunt”) alongside the Atlantic Coast Line tracks on their property’s eastern border. Sanborn maps from 1917 show a two-story residence due west and adjacent to the Plant-Sumner House, and two one-story homes at the southeast corner of Fort Harrison Avenue and “A” Street as the only buildings on that block. An ell-shaped, one-story dwelling sat across “A” Street. A small outbuilding, perhaps an outhouse (for the growing family) or a shed, sat just south of the Plant-Sumner House. Robert Sumner began working as Belleair’s postmaster by April 1915, and the Largo Sentinel occasionally mentioned his visits to that city in that newspaper’s “Happenings In and Round About Largo” column. By 1920, Robert Sumner shared the home with his wife and their four youngest children (Mildred, Louise, Ralph, and Maurice Orien). At the time, the post office occupied space in a general store near where the former railroad tracks (and present-day Pinellas Trail) cross Fort Harrison. The Sumner family’s neighbors may have had earlier ties with their home. The 1920 census lists Nathan Brown and Nadine Newman as those living closest to Sumner. Nathan Brown and wife Jeanette lived on their property with six children and a son-in-law, Carl O’Quin. Nathan worked as a foreman in a citrus packinghouse. Meanwhile, Nadine Newman lived with her twenty-two year old sister and two tenants. Once again, additional genealogical and property records research may discover ties between these individuals and the Brown and Newman families that sold Sumner the house in 1912.10

In addition to his duties as postmaster, Sumner served as a pastor and veterinarian. Rev. Sumner delivered sermons at the Belmont Methodist Church, located near the intersection of Greenwood and Belleair streets. He probably filled in for other preachers on the local Methodist circuit, and certainly visited other central Pinellas churches. With a large backyard and the eastern portion of the property ending at the right-of-way for the Atlantic Coast Line (ACL) Railroad, the Sumners had sufficient land to raise cattle on their “A” Street property. Although they consumed most of the milk, they often sold some to their neighbors. Dr. Garfield Evans, one of Rev. Sumner’s

nephews, recalled that his uncle often helped other cattle owners in the southern Clearwater area tend to their animals. His previous ownership of a dairy in Maitland allowed him to serve as an amateur veterinarian for other cow farmers.\textsuperscript{11}

Rev. Sumner’s children became friends with children in the Plumb family. According to a family genealogy recorded by Mary Emma Plumb, her father Ralph Reynolds Plumb came to Western Hillsborough from Huron, New York, in 1873. He came with his mother, Jennie Reynolds Plumb, who brought Ralph and his brother, Robert, to Clear Water Harbor by way of Jacksonville, Cedar Keys, and Tampa. At the time of this journey, Robert had just turned five years of age. The Plumbs had family in the area, most notably Jennie’s brother and Robert’s uncle, Reverend C. Sumner Reynolds, who owned a store in the area. Jennie taught at a log church on the site of Clearwater Cemetery (on Myrtle Avenue) in 1874, a very short distance from the Plant-Sumner House. Jennie took possession of lands that became the Largo Cemetery. Robert later recalled in an interview that the family fertilized its groves by penning in the cattle, but branded them so that they could roam the open range and graze during the summer. The Plumbs of the Clearwater-Largo area ate turkey, deer, and occasionally bear during the late 1800s. Ralph married Florence Levincy Hammock, a 15 May 1874 native of the Anona area and daughter of George Wesson Hammock and the former Mary Levincy Whitehurst. The Hammocks—like the Kilgore, Lowe, and Meares families—were early settlers of the Anona area and one of the families that helped to establish a Methodist church in that area. Ralph and Florence started a family and raised many children in the Belleair community, including Elsie Vivien, Kathleen Grace, Newlan Claude, George Leslie, Myrtle Maxine, Mary Emma, Lester Daniel, Jennie Lillian, and Robert Bertram. The Plumbs also lived in a house associated with Henry B. Plant that Ralph later had moved from Fort Harrison to Myrtle Avenue. Additional genealogical research may uncover new links between that Plumb and Sumner families as later generations continued to live on the Pinellas Peninsula.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{11} MacKinnon, “Story of Plant-Sumner” manuscript;
\textsuperscript{12} Genealogical research on the Plumb family appears in building files located at Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; Transcript of interview with Robert Plumb, located at Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; Largo, Then Til, 12, 106; St. Petersburg Times, 8 September 1980. One of the Plumb children, Myrtle Maxine, married Otterbein C. Howell on 1 August 1934. Howell, who organized the first bible school at Anona Methodist Church in 1934, went on the following year to become the pastor at Safety.
The Sumners watched Clearwater transform into a city through the windows of the Plant-Sumner House. To the northeast of their house, beyond the end of “A” Street and the ACL and T&GC tracks, the family could watch citrus packers work during the harvesting season at the West Coast Fruit Company. This large rectangular building came to life as truck farmers brought their citrus crops by road or rail for cleaning, sorting, packing, and shipping. Platforms on the building sat alongside the T&GC spur line and tracks on the east side of the building accommodated trains from the Seaboard Air Line (SAL) Railroad. South of the house, beyond the trees, the family could see a fourteen-foot high railroad water tower that sat between “B” and “C” streets. A short walk to the end of “D” Street brought them to a much larger water tower (that approached ninety feet in height) near an abandoned railroad station, as well as the sophisticated power plant and waterworks for the Belleview Biltmore. The hotel obtained a steady stream of fresh water from Lake Bellevue, located just south of Lakeview Road. Before 1929, the West Coast Fruit Company’s building added condensers and a canning factory. By that time, buildings sat on the north side of “A” Street. To the southeast, the Biltmore had attached a large greenhouse building to the hotel’s original power plant. By the mid-1920s, developers touted the nearby Belleair Estates subdivision as a neighborhood with “ten miles of roads and twenty miles of sidewalks” connecting homes built with “every modern utility,” including gas, water, electricity, and telephone service. Nine holes of the eighteen-hole Donald Ross golf course awaited golfers by December 1926. While the city grew around them, the Sumners also celebrated their growing family. On 17 April 1922, Mildred Agnes Sumner—then about twenty years of age—married Sidney (or Sydney) B. Barger in a Clearwater ceremony. The Bargers soon moved to a house on Lotus Street and raised at least two children, Sydney S. and Myron L. Barger.¹³

Robert and Julia Sumner occupied the Plant-Sumner House from 1912 through the early 1950s. According to the 1930 census, Ralph (then twenty-one) and Maurice Orien (then seventeen) still lived with their parents. Nathan Brown and Chester Kilgore were neighbors along “A” Street, sometimes referred to as Corbett Street by this time.

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¹³ Harbor’s Methodist Church, a building also preserved at Heritage Village. A graduate of Clearwater High School and the Florida State College for Women (now Florida State University), Myrtle Plumb Howell served as a teacher and principal in Florida schools for forty-two years.
Rev. Sumner continued to serve as a Methodist minister. Between 1934 and 1936, he led morning and evening worship services at the Anona Methodist Church. By about 1934, the family remodeled the kitchen. This area of the home originally had a wood stove at the southeast corner with a single window along the south wall. Workers replaced the shed roof with a gabled roof, improved the layout of the kitchen, and added a side porch to the structure. Although their children had moved away from home by the late 1930s, the Sumners maintained an active life in the community. Ralph graduated from Florida Southern College in 1931 and became a reporter and district manager with the *Tampa Morning Tribune*, while Louise “Oween” earned her degree at Florida Southern in 1929 and later became a librarian at that institution in Lakeland. Maurice Orien “Bill” moved to Largo, sold electrical supplies, and became a charter member of that city’s St. Paul United Methodist Church. Grandchildren remembered visiting the house during the 1940s and early 1950s. By that time, the Sumners owned a large upright piano, kept a telephone on the wall closet under the stairway, and used heavy drapes to separate the living and dining rooms. Meanwhile, through the 1930s, the Belleview Biltmore operated as a self-sufficient entity that shared its postal, police, and fire department facilities with the Town of Belleair. According to a published history of the hotel, town officials assumed control of these departments and moved them from the Belleview campus by 1942. The hotel continued to maintain its own power plant for another year, until government authorities required them to connect the hotel to the Florida Power electrical grid. The power plant and greenhouse once located along the railroad tracks disappeared by 1949. Directories from the Peninsular Telephone Company indicate that the Sumners had a telephone by January 1946. An examination of telephone directories available in the special collections area of the Largo Library placed Robert as the head-of-household through the January 1954 edition. An examination of official city records for the Town of Belleair, as well as the microfilm archives of the *Clearwater Sun*, may allow future researchers to trace Rev. Sumner’s many contributions to the community.14

13 Sanborn Map Company, *Fire Insurance Maps*, June 1923 and April 1929 maps, microfilm reel 1; *Tampa Daily Times*, 4 December 1926.
14 Genealogical research on the Sumner family appears in building files located at Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; *Largo, Then Til*, 106; MacKinnon, “Story of Plant-Sumner” manuscript; MacKinnon, “Facts Gathered Up” manuscript; Board and Colcord, *Belleview Mido Resort*, 42; Undated note to Ellen Babb, located in building files, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; Sanborn Map Company,
Members of the Sumner family continued to live in the area after moving out of the house. The 1954 R. L. Polk city directory listed Julia M. Sumner as a widow living at 513 “A” Street. Maurice Orien, her youngest son, lived with her for part of the year, possibly to help her settle the estate. Orien also worked as terminal manager for the Central Truck Lines Company. Meanwhile, Louise and Ralph M. Sumner resided at 1229 Seminole in Clearwater, and Ralph worked for the *Tampa Morning Tribune*. At that time, Kilgore Groves carried an address of 524 “A” Street, across the street from the Sumners. Clark Concrete Products occupied land to the east of the house at 525 “A” Street, between the Plant-Sumner House and the railroad tracks. By 1957, Julia stayed at the Weimer Convalescent Home on 825 Wyatt, a retirement facility operated by Glen C. and Bernice Weimer. The 1958 and 1959 directories also placed the reverend’s widow at that rest home; however, she does not appear in 1960 or subsequent directories.¹⁵

**A Citrus Connection with the Whitehurst Family**

A member of the Whitehurst family occupied the Plant-Sumner House from circa 1957 until the early 1970s. Calvert Clifford “C. C.” Whitehurst, a native of Sutherlin (Palm Harbor) born 25 July 1902, descended from a pioneer family. By 1930, he lived with his wife, Pauline E. Whitehurst, at 421 West Grand Central Street, just a few blocks away from the Plant-Sumner House. Steven Whitehurst, Calvert’s brother, lived next to him at 423 West Grand Central with his family. In the 1950s, C. C. Whitehurst worked as a foreman at Kilgore Groves. He moved into the Plant-Sumner Home by 1957 and shared this residence with his wife, Maggie Mae Whitehurst.¹⁶

During his tenure at Kilgore Groves, Whitehurst drew a paycheck from one of the largest citrus operations in Pinellas County. About 1913, Jessie Barnard Kilgore

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¹⁵ Genealogical research on the Sumner family appears in building files located at Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; See available issues of: R.L. Polk’s *Clearwater/Dunedin/Largo (Pinellas County, Fla.) City Directory*. For a list of early graduates of Florida Southern, including many Pinellas families from the school’s earlier years, see: snoopy.tblc.lib.fl.us/fsc/archives/grads1890to1934.html. Researchers interested in activities at the Belleview Biltmore during the tourist season may want to consult columns that appeared in early issues of the *Clearwater Evening Sun* by the mid-1920s. For example, in January 1925, that newspaper ran a regular column entitled “News of the Belleview Hotel” that announced arrivals and departures and listed activities at the resort.

¹⁶ Ibid.
established the West Coast Fruit Company with loans from forty stockholders. Son of Samuel and Mittie Kilgore and a native of Largo, Barnard became familiar with the citrus industry as a child raised in the area’s groves. His company, located across the railroad tracks from the Plant-Sumner House, became an important processing and packing point for citrus shipped from the Clearwater-Largo area. By the late 1920s, the West Coast Fruit Company operated a grapefruit canning facility in addition to its regular shipments of boxed fruit. The physical plant of West Coast Fruit expanded by the 1940s to include an office building at the end of “A” Street, as well as other smaller structures on the west side of the tracks. The original fruit packing structure included extensions to the grapefruit canning factory and a large cooling room at the north end of the building to store processed fruits before shipping. Whitehurst, a member of a family with long ties to the citrus and agricultural history of Pinellas, worked at West Coast Fruit Company for many years. He had an easy commute: To walk from home to work, he merely had to cross the railroad tracks at the end of “A” Street.17

Whitehurst lived at the Plant-Sumner House after he retired from Kilgore Groves. During his tenure at the West Coast Fruit Company operated by the Kilgore family, C. C. Whitehurst held positions as a grove worker, maintenance staff member, foreman, and mechanic at the packing plant. He worked at Kilgore Groves until either 1966 or 1967, when that company ceased operations. Genealogical records indicate that his wife, Mae, died in July 1966. Calvert continued to live at Plant-Sumner after he retired, until at least the spring of 1973. By 1974, city directories placed C. C. Whitehurst at 1143 Howard Street, his home until he passed away on 17 January 1982 at the age of seventy-nine.18

The Questers and Junior League Lead Efforts to Preserve the House

Members of the Questers have long embraced efforts to preserve and promote local history. Margaret Roy, president of the Seminole chapter of the Questers, joined some of her colleagues to meet with Ralph Reed, County Historian and Curator at the Pinellas County Historical Museum’s old offices in the basement of the courthouse.

During this visit, Reed talked with the Questers about older homes in Clearwater that faced possible demolition. Reed showed pictures of some of these structures, including the “former H. B. Plant home” on “A” Street. The Questers became interested in the Plant-Sumner House, and decided to contact C. C. Whitehurst, owner of the home, during the spring of 1973. By May of that year, Whitehurst prepared to sell the Plant-Sumner House and land to his eastern neighbor, the Clark Concrete Property. The owner of that company told representatives of the Questers that he only had interest in the land and “plans to either burn the house or have it demolished.” The Questers hoped to move the home, a building Roy considered to be in “very good, movable condition.” Roy estimated that the move to a nearby, vacant property would cost $2,000, and that the home required about $500 in additional expenses for termite treatment. During a presentation at the 16 May 1973 Pinellas County Historical Commission (PCHC) meeting, Roy hoped for assistance and support from the Commission. She envisioned a plan to move the Plant-Sumner House to an empty parcel somewhere in Clearwater, renovate and furnish the building with period furniture, and hold chapter meetings at the structure. At this time, the PCHC lacked funds to assist in this endeavor, though the Commission did encourage the Questers to contact the Belleview Biltmore Hotel and the Town of Belleview about possible support or information that might allow them to preserve the house. These conversations occurred before the Board of County Commissioners had established a plan for the creation of Heritage Village.19

The plan to save the Plant-Sumner House led members of the Junior League of Clearwater to push for the creation of Heritage Village. The Junior League received permission to move the Plant-Sumner House by late 1974 from then-owner George Mallory, but needed a new location for the building. Officials in Clearwater notified the Junior League that the city could not provide money or land in support of this effort. In a retrospective interview, park Director Kendrick Ford recalled that many people held the common assumption “if it’s old, tear it down” during the early 1970s. After failing to obtain support from Clearwater, the Junior League approached the Pinellas County

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18 Genealogical research on the Sumner family appears in building files located at Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; See available issues of: R.L. Polk’s *Clearwater/Dunedin/Largo (Pinellas County, Fla.) City Directory,* St. Petersburg Times, 19 January 1982.
Historical Commission. Junior League members played an important role in the creation of Heritage Village by lobbying the Board of County Commissioners to create and fund an open-air historical park, and by encouraging their husbands—many of whom occupied positions of authority in Clearwater or county politics—to support this initiative. When early discussions took place about the possibility of establishing a historical preserve along Walsingham Road, some donors to the county’s historical museum balked at the proposal because they assumed that the treasures collected by Ralph Reed and others over the years would always remain in Clearwater. When county leaders failed to reach an agreement with the Junior League of Clearwater about providing a site for the Plant-Sumner House, the women of that organization made an appeal to the PCHC and the county administrator. After finally winning the Board’s approval, the PCHC commissioned Don Williams to develop a site plan for the original ten acres of the park. This plan included Plant-Sumner and Seven Gables, two buildings slated to move to the new park before Pinellas County had even hired a director. Ford began his tenure as director in April 1976, after PCHC members had approved the move of Plant-Sumner to the park; the house arrived by June 1976.  

The Plant-Sumner House arrived at Heritage Village as Pinellas residents planned to celebrate the nation’s bicentennial. To commemorate this structure’s journey to Heritage Village, the PCHC planned to hire a “Bicentennial bus” to transport guests from the county courthouse to the Plant-Sumner House at Heritage Village on June 22. Advocacy by the Junior League of Clearwater to preserve this house created other opportunities for historic preservation: The work of Junior League members helped Pinellas County qualify for a $25,000 grant from the Florida State Bicentennial Commission. G. L. Pucci, PCHC chair, reminded the Board of County Commissioners of this fact when some members discussed merging all budgetary and administrative

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20 Interview of Ken Ford, former director of Heritage Village, by Stephanie Ferrell and Jim Schnur, 3 May 2003, Heritage Village, Largo; St. Petersburg Times, 8 March 1976, 13 April 1980; “Plant-Sumner House Background,” undated manuscript, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo.
operations of the new open-air museum under the auspices of the Park Department in 1977-1978.21

By the time movers visited the structure on “A” Street, termite damage and wear-and-tear left the Plant-Sumner House in very poor condition. Workers had to discard substantial portions of the structure before moving the best parts of the dwelling to Heritage Village. John Logan led efforts to restore and reconstruct the house. Wall studs and frames, floors, porches, the toilet on the second floor, and most of the wood around the windows replaced original materials that workers could not save. Original portions of the home include the sink, fireplace mantle, door and window cases, cupboard and drawers, corner closets in the bedrooms, and the large bathtub.22

The Junior League of Clearwater remained involved with the Plant-Sumner House after it became the first building located at the new historic preserve. At this time, Heritage Village lacked a fence around its perimeter, and security became an issue because park employees stored many artifacts in Plant-Sumner before the completion of the library and archives. Despite regular monitoring by the Pinellas County Sheriff’s Office, by the fall of 1976 PCHC members thought it wise to encourage the installation of a fence to protect Plant-Sumner, Seven Gables, and the grounds during the evening and weekends. On Wednesday mornings during the spring of 1977, Junior League volunteers came to Heritage Village to paint Plant-Sumner. They brought their own equipment and hoped to complete their work before the summer rains and heat arrived. After they finished painting the house, League members planned to collect furniture stored at various homes. Though located at Heritage Village, the structure still belonged to the Junior League. That organization continued to pay for insurance coverage on the house. By some estimates, the Junior League spent between $45,000 and $50,000 to restore the house. During the summer of 1977, League members met with park and county officials to develop a formal transfer agreement to turn the “Henry Plant house” over to the county historical museum. Workers had completed approximately ninety-five

21 Records of the Pinellas County Historical Commission, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo, 16 June 1976; G. L. Pucci, chair, Pinellas County Historical Commission, to Jeanne Malchon, chair, Pinellas County Historical Commission, 2 May 1977.
22 Ken Ford interview.
percent of their restoration efforts by September 1977; at that time, they only needed to add accessories, such as curtains and carpeting.\textsuperscript{23}

Many visitors to Heritage Village enjoy tours of the Plant-Sumner House and its neighbor, the House of Seven Gables. While a number of sources document the home’s early history as part of Plant’s Pinellas empire and its forty-plus years of ownership by the Sumners, the later use of the house by a member of the Whitehurst family merits further investigation. As an employee at the nearby Kilgore Groves packing house, C. C. Whitehurst provides a connection between this structure and the citrus industry during its mid-twentieth century heyday and early stages of decline. While it may be too early to rename the building the “Plant-Sumner-Whitehurst House,” this chapter of the dwelling’s life may reveal new connections between residents, business, and industry in the communities of Belleair, Clearwater, and Largo.

Safety Harbor Church: A Brief Introduction

History of Site before Structure was Built

- Safety Harbor, once known as Green Springs, represented an early settlement site along the Pinellas Peninsula, near the Odet Philippe homestead and the Bay View community.
- Early services in the area were held at Sylvan Abbey Methodist Episcopal Church by 1886, but gatherings ended at the Abbey after 1900. The 1888 pulpit was brought from the Abbey to this structure.

Construction Information

- Built in 1905 as a one-room structure.
- Wood for the church came from E. H. Coachman’s sawmill, once located on a site within present-day Philippe Park.

History of Use

- Church had four names over the years: Green Springs Methodist Episcopal Church, South (1905-1917); Safety Harbor Methodist Episcopal Church, South (1917-1939); Safety Harbor Methodist Church (1939-1968); and First United Methodist Church of Safety Harbor (1968-2002). Suffering from declining membership, the church closed its doors in mid-2002. During its ninety-seven year tenure, the church had forty-two pastors and (only) five organists.
- The 1921 hurricane blew this structure off its foundation. Church members shored up the structure with bricks. They moved the structure to an adjacent block in 1926 and constructed a new Sunday school annex.
- This building suffered extensive damage (including a blown-off roof) during the 1935 hurricane.

Significant Events/Activities at the Structure and in the Surrounding Community

- Excellent records of church activities found in the archival materials donated by the church to Heritage Village. Regular articles in the Safety Harbor Herald also document events at the church, including Methodist coffee hours and summer school programs.
- Many early families of the region worshipped at the church and participated in its many social and educational activities. O. W. Booth and Dr. Byrd M. McMullen served as early superintendents of the Sunday school.
- Records kept by church members describe the contributions of many pastors. One pastor, Rev. O. C. Howell, led the flock during the repairs after the 1935 hurricane. Howell later served as a chaplain in the European theatre during World War II.
- With the construction of a new sanctuary in 1960, church members used the 1905 structure for Sunday school classes and other meeting areas. Drywall partitions and other structural modifications changed the interior layout (and later invited termite infestation). The 1905 structure was often referred to as the Fellowship Hall.
- The church launched a $15,000 fund drive to help build the new sanctuary.
Moving of the Structure to Heritage Village

- In June 1976, Historical Commission members discussed the possibility of moving the church from its perch in Safety Harbor.
- During discussions in early 1977 about the possibility of moving the church, park officials expressed concern with the building’s construction and the fact that it is “loaded with termites.”
- By late 1977, crews removed the stairs from the 1905 structure in preparation for its move to Heritage Village.
- Roesch Housemovers took the roof off the structure before moving it in two pieces from Safety Harbor to Heritage Village.
- The church has served as a venue for many gatherings, including wedding ceremonies, at Heritage Village over the years.
Safety Harbor Church

Overview

The 1905 Safety Harbor Church once stood on the corner of Second Street and Fourth Avenue North in Green Springs, now Safety Harbor. Some members of the original congregation previously met in an early church at Sylvan Abbey, but “discontinued” their religious gatherings there by 1905. Parishioners salvaged the pulpit and altar rails from the old church before abandoning it. The lumber to build the “newer” sanctuary came from E. H. Coachman’s sawmill at Philippe Hammock, now part of Philippe Park. The simple one-room, wood frame structure has windows on all four sides, and resembles many early churches built along the Pinellas Peninsula and Florida during the late 1800s and early 1900s.

The Safety Harbor Church building survived through almost a century of complications. Strong winds from the October 1921 hurricane lifted the church and moved it sideways. Members of the congregation left it standing that way until 1926. At that point, they moved the church to an adjacent lot on the same block. The 1935 hurricane tore off the roof and damaged the interior. Once again, church members came to the rescue of their beloved sanctuary. Besides surviving these hurricanes, the church also has endured arson attempts and vandalism.

This structure served as the First United Methodist Church’s main sanctuary from 1905 until the end of 1960. Fundraising activities for a new sanctuary gained momentum by February 1960, with construction of the new building beginning by that summer on the original site at the corner of Fourth Avenue and Second Street. During the early 1960s, crews divided the one room wooden church into smaller areas for use as an annex, nursery, and Sunday school classrooms. Heritage Village acquired the Safety Harbor Methodist Church in the fall of 1977. After the Pinellas County Historical Society moved and restored the building, it opened to the public. Over the years, many couples and organizations have rented the church for weddings and other gatherings. When the congregation decided to close its newer sanctuary and disband in May 2002, the archives at Heritage Village became the repository for many records associated with the church’s ninety-seven year history.
Abandoning the Abbey, and Constructing the Church

Residents of the upper Pinellas Peninsula near present-day Safety Harbor organized the Sylvan Abbey Methodist Episcopal Church in 1886. From the late 1880s until 1905, the handful of settlers in the area worshipped at the Sylvan Abbey Church. This church took its name from the first school on the peninsula, a log cabin erected in 1853-1854 on land south of Sunset Point/Main Street and east of US Highway 19. Commonly known as the “McMullen Log School,” members of the McMullen family also called this structure “Sylvan Abbey.” In the early 1850s, Captain James Parramore McMullen completed his log home. By that time, he and wife Elizabeth Campbell McMullen has started a family. With four children born by 1852 (Bethel, Margaret Nancy, Sara Jane “Sally,” and Daniel Campbell), the McMullens hoped to provide formal education for their growing family. According to history passed down from the McMullen family, during a trip to deliver some of his citrus outside of the state “Captain Jim” searched for a schoolteacher who wanted to come to Florida. He brought this teacher and her daughter to the family’s log house, and crafted a desk for her and benches for the pupils. The teacher soon conducted classes for the children in the attic of Captain Jim’s sugarhouse, a log structure originally assembled as a place to cultivate syrup from sugar cane. Within a short while, Captain Jim recruited other family members and Dick Booth to help him construct a one-room log school with a chimney and fireplace on land east of his cabin at Coachman. Nancy Meador, granddaughter of Captain Jim, told a reporter in a 1967 interview that upwards of thirty children attended class in this structure. According to an account written by Nancy Meador in 1949, James P. McMullen planned to name the school after the first girl who took classes at the cabin. That child turned out to be the teacher’s daughter, a girl named Sylvan Abbey.¹

The area around the school soon became known as Sylvan Abbey. The original school soon became “inadequate” and the McMullens constructed a second school closer to the present-day site of the Abbey cemetery on Main Street. By the 1880s, settlers

¹ Patricia Perez Constini, ed., A Tradition of Excellence, Pinellas County Schools: 1912-1987 (Clearwater: Pinellas County School Board, 1987), 11; Pinellas County, Board of Public Instruction, The Golden Anniversary of Pinellas Schools, Celebrating 50 Years of Educational Progress: Superintendent’s Semi-
helped the McMullen family construct an arbor shelter out of pine and palm leaves for camp gatherings and religious services. In time, they improved the facility and called it Sylvan Abbey First Methodist. Few documents or records from this church exist, except for occasional and fragmented recollections appearing in newspaper clippings or other secondary sources. The church sat on a path about halfway between Captain Jim’s homestead and the area of Green Springs (now Safety Harbor). Members of the McMullen and Booth families regularly attended services. Irene Campbell McElveen Mitchell, an 1883 native of Green Springs and daughter of George Campbell, attended school in the Sylvan Abbey log cabin and took Sunday school classes at the Sylvan Abbey church. During the early 1890s, McElveen remembered that only a couple of houses occupied present-day Safety Harbor; citrus groves covered much of the present downtown area. Services continued at Sylvan Abbey until 1905, when either the Florida Methodist Conference or parishioners “discontinued” sermons and approximately nine to twelve members of the Abbey launched a new church in the small settlement of Green Springs. Most other members of the former Abbey church attended services at a “Friendship” church near H. W. Sever’s home. The groups divided the furnishings, with the Green Springs church receiving the pulpit built in 1888 from timber donated by De Joinville Booth and cut by William M. Goode at a mill near Abbey Lake. According to a typewritten “short sketch” of the Safety Harbor church’s history, G. W. (George Ward) McMullen purchased the Sylvan Abbey church building to use as his home. Other accounts claim that members dismantled the original Abbey church and sold the lumber.  

A Place for the Holy Spirit, by “Espíritu Santo” Bay

The 1905 church occupied two lots at the northwest corner of Second Street and Fourth Avenue in Green Springs. The building sat at 401 Second Street North, on land platted in 1905 as Block 5 of Green Springs. Records kept by the church indicate that nine members of the Abbey became charter members of the new church. De Joinville

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2 Undated church history, possibly by Russell Couch, Safety Harbor Methodist Church Papers, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo (hereafter known as SHMC Papers); “History of the Safety Harbor Methodist Church [Short Sketch],” SHMC Papers; Clearwater Sun, 18 December 1949; Katherine C.
Booth (grandson of Odet Philippi) and his wife, Lucy Marian McMullen Booth (daughter of Captain Jim), were joined by Mr. and Mrs. H. W. Poole, Mr. and Mrs. R. T. Youngblood, Mr. and Mrs. A. N. Prichard, and Eugenia Youngblood as organizing members. Others, including Irene McElveen, also transferred to the new parish. Under the stewardship of Rev. J. W. (Robert J.) Wells, the church secured the two parcels without cost. One lot came from Captain Charles Wharton Johnson of Largo and the other from Jesse A. and Henrietta Boyd. Builders Charles Smith and A. R. Brittle oversaw construction of the one-room wood frame structure. They acquired lumber for the church from Edwin Horace Coachman’s sawmill located at Philippe Hammock, now part of Philippe Park. The building, then known as the Green Springs Methodist Episcopal Church, South, offered its first services in 1905. 3

Leading members of the church assisted the preachers by serving as officers. De Joinville Booth, R. T Youngblood, and H W. Poole became original Trustees of the church. O. W. (Odett William) Booth, popular known as “Uncle Keeter” by members of the church, volunteered as the first superintendent of the Sunday school for about six years. After Uncle Keeter stepped down, Dr. Byrd McMullen—son of Dr. Bethel McMullen, the area’s first academically trained dentist and a young dentist himself at the time—took over duties as director of the Sunday school for two years. Other early administrators of the Sunday school included H. L. Mitchell, R. A. Babcock, and A. E. Shower. While the church had forty-two pastors during its ninety-seven years of operation, Shower’s wife had a notable tenure as organist at the church from 1914 until 1955. In fact, the church had only four other organists during its ninety-seven year tenure: Doris Roddenberry (1955-1975), Margaret Gutermuth (1975-1992), Lou Vogelsang (1992-1997), and Elsie Ruble (through 2002). 4

Early pastors at the Safety Harbor church rode the circuit to serve other nearby congregations. However, poor roadways along the Pinellas Peninsula must have made short distances seem more like arduous adventures. In 1905, J. W. Wells split his

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3 Undated church history, possibly by Russell Couch, SHMC Papers; “History of the Safety Harbor Methodist Church.” SHMC Papers; Downs, My Memories of Safety Harbor, 88.
4 “Pastors Who Served First United Methodist Church of Safety Harbor,” manuscript created in 2002, SHMC Papers; “History of the Safety Harbor Methodist Church,” SHMC Papers.
pastoral duties between Green Springs, Bay View, and Largo. The following year, Rev. George W. Mitchell covered both the Green Springs church and one in Clearwater. Finley Patterson arrived in 1907, and spent much of his time crossing Tampa Bay by boat as he served flocks at both Green Springs and Port Tampa, a settlement on the Interbay Peninsula near present-day Mac Dill Air Force Base. Reverends B. K. Thrower and Paul Fletcher alternated between Green Springs and Sutherland (now Palm Harbor) from 1908 until 1910. In 1911, Rev. J. E. Lewis became the first recorded preacher to serve only the Green Springs church.\(^5\)

Circuit riding resumed in 1912, the year Pinellas County gained its independence from Hillsborough. During 1912 and 1913, R. F. Hodnett covered Green Springs and Sutherland. J. E. Lewis returned between 1914 and 1916. While he remained at Green Springs exclusively the first two years, he also covered services at Friendship in 1916. By that year, the church claimed eighty-two members. Lewis also helped to establish a troop for Boy Scouts in the community during the 1910s. While Rev. R. E. L. Folsom preached at this church and the one at Friendship, the community took on a new name. In 1917, the settlement abandoned its earlier name of Green Springs and officially incorporated as the City of Safety Harbor. This measure prevented any confusion between the growing municipality along Old Tampa Bay and Green Cove Springs along the St. Johns River in Clay County. Between 1917 and 1939, the church became known as Safety Harbor Methodist Episcopal Church, South.\(^6\)

The incorporation of Safety Harbor coincided with a growth in church membership and new challenges for the congregation. By 1918 Rev. E. H. Lantz balanced the rigorous demands of serving nearly 180 members at Safety Harbor while also visiting three additional churches at Ozona, Curlew, and Friendship. Jesse B. Reid took over this busy regimen from Lantz by 1919, and faced an additional challenge in October 1921: A devastating hurricane with winds approaching one-hundred miles per hour caused substantial damage throughout the Pinellas Peninsula. Wind gusts blew the Safety Harbor Church from its foundation and turned the building sideways. Rather than return the structure to its original location, members decided to place blocks under the

\[^5\] Ibid.
\[^6\] Ibid.
church’s new location where “the winds let it go.” While some parishioners repaired the main building, others began to construct a parsonage that opened in 1922 on the adjacent lot just west of the church. The Women’s Missionary Society assisted with this project, as did many members of the Safety Harbor community. Rev. C. W. Alford shared duties at Safety Harbor and Friendship from 1923 through 1925; one member of the congregation claimed that “(n)ever was the genuine old brotherly love so much in our church as it was at this time.” By 1926, Rev. John P. Gaines oversaw the purchase of a plot of land directly north of the original parcels donated in 1905. Gaines and church leaders coordinated the move of the 1905 building to this new parcel in 1926, allowing most of the original two lots (except for a portion occupied by the parsonage) to become open space. While records do not indicate a reason for this move, the open land on the corner might have allowed the church to provide additional parking spaces for members who drove from distant homes in the growing community. At about the same time, members watched the construction of a Sunday school annex on the newly acquired lot, behind the recently moved 1905 church building. T. W. Carlton assumed the pulpit in 1928 and encouraged members to purchase new pews (at a cost of $13.75 each) in 1929.7

The congregation weathered financial obstacles and a nasty storm during the 1930s. Many communities in Florida suffered as the Great Depression built upon the woes that began with the collapse of the land boom. To shepherd church members during this time of austerity, Rev. J. E. Lewis returned to Safety Harbor from 1930 through 1933. During this time, he also performed ministerial duties at Odessa in Pasco County, as well as at Keystone and Friendship. Membership had dropped from a high of approximately 190 members in the early 1920s, to about 125 members by the early 1930s. Fewer seasonal residents and the poor economic circumstances probably contributed to this downturn. Those who remained at the church, however, showed their support and strengthened their resolve. For example, R. J. Robinson and members of the church planted many trees and shrubs around the property during the spring of 1933. After George C. Powell’s one-year tenure in 1934, the Methodist conference sent Rev. O. C. Howell to the Safety Harbor Church in 1935. A newlywed, Howell had married the former Myrtle Maxwell Plumb in August 1934. The Plumbs represented one of the

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7 Ibid.
pioneer families of the region. Howell’s greatest challenge came in September 1935, when hurricane force winds tore the roof off the 1905 church and rainfall inundated its interior. While members attended church services in the Sunday school annex, Howell led efforts to repair the structure with assistance from C. S. Rosier and William G. “Bill” Weagraff, a new church member that would continue to serve the flock as the church’s volunteer custodian for nearly fifty years. Weagraff’s wife, Blanche, also became involved with the church, working as Sunday school superintendent and participating in other church-sponsored groups. According to one account, Rosier and Weagraff repaired the church in thirty-six days. Another church history claimed that Howell led the faithful as they resealed the interior, installed new lights, and reopened the sanctuary by early December as part of the church’s annual Homecoming program, a special sermon and gathering held in each fall beginning in the early 1930s.\(^8\)

The succession of pastors continued on an annual basis until the mid-1940s. After O. C. Howell’s departure, N. A. Darling served briefly during part of 1936 and Harry McDonnell encouraged improved programs for children in the community during his tenure in 1937. W. O. McMullen served in 1938 and early 1939; his wife battled with illness during much of his time here. A June 1939 issue of the Safety Harbor Herald announced McMullen’s replacement and the locations of other former pastors who had served the church. At their meeting in Tampa, leaders of the Methodist conference selected Rev. W. J. Nease as the church’s next pastor. Nease, who led flocks in Pensacola and at White Springs in north central Florida for the previous eight years, also struggled with poor health. Though doctors had just discharged him from an Atlanta hospital, he mustered his energy and delivered “cheerful” and impressive sermons from “his feeble body” while tending to an ill wife. During the summer of 1939, a pioneer resident and member of the Safety Harbor congregation passed away: De Joinville Booth, affiliated with the local church since its days at Sylvan Abbey, died on September 18. He had married Lucy McMullen in November 1886, the year the Abbey Church first offered formal services. J. E. Lewis, former Safety Harbor pastor then at Seminole, conducted the funeral services at the Booth home. Also during 1939, the congregation changed its name to “Safety Harbor

\(^8\) Ibid.; St. Petersburg Times, 16 April 1933; Undated church history, possibly by Russell Couch, SHMC Papers; “History of the Safety Harbor Methodist Church,” SHMC Papers.
Methodist Church” and Rev. McMullen moved to Homeland and Alturas, small Polk County settlements near Bartow. Other former Safety Harbor pastors also moved to new venues in 1939, such as G. C. Powell who arrived in Clermont, John P. Gaines in Williston, O. C. Howell in Key West, and T. W. Carlton in Ellenton and Oneco in Manatee County. Carlton returned to Safety Harbor in October to deliver a sermon as part of the seventh annual Homecoming program. Reverends R. Hiller, J. Hartsfield, C. G. Bell, N. A. Darling, and Earl I. Prosser served full or partial terms between 1940 and 1944.9

A former pastor’s leadership at Safety Harbor prepared him for the difficulties of overseas duty during World War II. In the aftermath of the 1935 hurricane, O. C. Howell had brought the Safety Harbor congregation together at a difficult time and led the reconstruction of the damaged church. As a chaplain in the United States Army, Capt. O. C. Howell sent letters to his wife in Clearwater after he reached Normandy in June 1944. Howell had crossed the English Channel into France a little more than a week after the D-Day invasion began. He reported to a hospital and comforted those in pain. On June 18, he wrote: “We have first-hand knowledge of the results of war, and it is not a Sunday picnic. . . . I do pray that I can be of help to these boys. I have prayed with a number of them in the wards, and they seem so appreciative. We have not had warm meals, altogether.”10 In a June 23 letter, he described the tragedy of battle:

I have met with some sad cases. Only today I had the privilege of trying to help a poor fellow to face the future bravely; he had lost a leg. Another will be blind completely. I feel that here is where I can do some of my most-needed work. . . . Some worry about what their folks will think when they learn they are wounded and in the hospital. All feel they have been fortunate not to have been killed. Here is where I plead God’s goodness and help them to trust our Lord in all of life.11

9 “Pastors Who Served First United Methodist Church of Safety Harbor,” manuscript created in 2002, SHMC Papers; “History of the Safety Harbor Methodist Church,” SHMC Papers; Safety Harbor Herald, 16 June 1939, 23 June 1939, 22 September 1939; St. Petersburg Times, 19 September 1939, 29 October 1939; Clearwater Sun, 19 September 1939.
10 “Chaplain’s Life At War Explained By Floridian,” undated clipping circa late June 1944, probably from St. Petersburg Times, appearing in building files, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo.
11 Ibid.
Howell took his first hot shower about ten days after he arrived in the Normandy hospital. On a Saturday evening, he reassured his wife in a letter that he kept healthy, had sufficient rations, and ate “nourishing and satisfying” meals. He told her of his priorities: “Tomorrow is Sunday, but I have had little time to prepare my messages; my contacts with patients in the hospital come first.” The next day, he delivered three sermons and visited the sick before retiring to bed. Howell, who had served his Methodist flocks at Safety Harbor, Clearwater, Crescent City, Key West, and western Florida, also thought about his loved ones at home: He had enlisted in June 1943, leaving wife Myrtle behind in Clearwater. In late 1943, Myrtle gave birth to a beautiful red-haired daughter, Twila Grace Howell.12

New Programs and a New Sanctuary

The First Methodist Church of Safety Harbor sponsored many events between the 1940s and 1960s. The Safety Harbor Herald regularly mentioned social events such as the Methodist Coffee Hour and the Women’s Society of Christian Service (WSCS) in its issues. Minnie Yant, a native of Canada, came to the area by the 1940s and launched a weekly coffee hour where members came together for devotional reading, fellowship, refreshments, and occasional entertainment. A clipping from the Herald described events at a typical Methodist Coffee Hour: In January 1963, forty-nine members gathered for the program coordinated by Yant. After opening prayers and a salute to the flag, attendees sang songs, greeted new members and visitors, ate “a delicious luncheon,” enjoyed a formal program, sang more songs, and heard a piano duet. Shortly after Yant’s death in 1963 or 1964, parishioners renamed the gatherings the “Minnie Yant Coffee Hour” and Doris Roddenberry became the president of this group during the mid- and late 1960s. WSCS circles offered venues for women members of the church to gather and discuss important projects. By 1951, members of Circle No. 1, WSCS, held regular meetings in the church annex. On 12 July 1956, eleven churchwomen met at the home of Gladys Tucker and formed an active WSCS circle named the Sylvia Stewart Circle in honor of the wife of former Pastor Paul Stewart. The original eleven members of this circle included Tucker, Yant, and Mrs. H. D. Cowan, wife of the current pastor at that time.

12 Ibid.
Blanche Weagraff joined soon thereafter. During this period, church members also enjoyed morning and evening worship services on Sunday, an excellent Sunday school program for their children, a “vibrant” Methodist Youth Fellowship, and a variety of other programs. Events such as the Methodist Homecoming and the Annual Bazaar became yearly traditions that brought many residents of Safety Harbor to the bustling church.  

Longtime residents and descendants of early settlers continued to embrace the church and its programs. For example, the presence of many members of the McMullen family at gatherings illustrated their support for the Safety Harbor Church. Robert McMullen regularly served in the Methodist Adult Fellowship during the postwar years. Younger members participated in youth fellowship activities. In July 1951 Bill Weagraff, John Rountree, and Rev. Paul Stewart escorted some of the youngsters for a week-long camp and retreat at Leesburg. Those in attendance included Sandra McMullen and Donna McMullen. Meanwhile, Betty Jo McMullen regularly participated in the council meetings of the Methodist Youth Fellowship. Summertime trips also included a church-sponsored outing for younger members of the church to Indian Rocks, where Rev. Stewart and other chaperones provided a hearty picnic of sandwiches, baked beans, potato salad, watermelon, and cold drinks to the children after their swim. Indeed, during the summer of 1951—and during other summers of that era—the Methodist Vacation School became an important place for children aged three to sixteen to enjoy games and strengthen their faith.

Plans for an expanded sanctuary began in the late 1950s. By Easter 1952, members had modified the interior of the 1905 building by adding plywood. While a clipping from the period claimed the plywood offered a “most pleasing” effect, over the next two decades termites began to live between the original boards and plywood, causing damage that required treatment when the structure arrived at Heritage Village. The various events sponsored by the church required additional space, and the original wooden building could not accommodate all of the programs. By one account,

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14 Safety Harbor Herald, 15 June 1951, 6 July 1951, 14 September 1951.
parishioners broke ground for a new sanctuary building in 1954, but fund raising became an important mission of the flock by the late 1950s and the early months of 1960. Rev. James W. Powell launched a five-day, $15,000 building fund campaign in mid-February 1960. At a supper meeting on February 5, Rev. John T. Adams—a campaign director for the project who previously assisted with church building fundraisers in Stuart, Boynton Beach, Grace, and Sanford—delivered a speech with the theme, “The Temple of God.” Campaign work continued during the weekend and over the next few weeks. Adams and John Rountree, a longtime church member who served as general fundraising chair, planned to speak at a “Forward Step” banquet sponsored by the Safety Harbor Women’s Club and coordinated by Blanche Weagraff. Church members selected Don Williams, a local architect, to develop a new sanctuary that harmonized with the other structures on the campus, including the 1905 building.15

The new sanctuary opened by the fall of 1960. Members of the Building Committee—a group that included Bill Weagraff, John Rountree, and Hurley Rountree—donated countless hours throughout the winter and spring of 1960 to raise funds for the project. Architects Wakeling and Levison began construction in July 1960 and finished the building in time for December services. The new building sat at the corner of Second Street and Fourth Avenue, at the prominent location where the original 1905 building once rested. Outer walls of the new building included Ocala block and Roman brick brought from Miami. Redwood and mahogany highlighted the interior, with pews of Appalachian oak adorning the structure. While the 1905 building could accommodate only about 100 persons at a time, the new sanctuary seated approximately 250, and included a church office, choir room, sanctuary, narthex, and a glass-enclosed “cry room” for baby-boomer families with small children. By 1961, the opening of the new sanctuary allowed members to redesign and partition the 1905 structure, which became the location

of a nursery and served as the educational building. By 1968, the flock changed the church’s name to the First United Methodist Church of Safety Harbor.16

A New Place for the House of Worship, and the New Worship House Closes

The Pinellas County Historical Commission (PCHC) first discussed the possibility of relocating the Safety Harbor Church at its 16 June 1976 meeting. Commissioners decided to create a subcommittee to evaluate the costs and possibility of moving the building to Heritage Village as a way to “round out the community” of structures at the park. Pastor W. Joseph Hamic invited Commission members to look over the building and architect Don Williams approached Director Kendrick Ford to discuss the potential move. By this time, church members hoped to construct a fellowship hall on the plot occupied by the older sanctuary. Some PCHC members had concerns after hearing reports about the “poor construction” of the 1905 structure, a building “loaded with termites.” Commissioner David R. Carr told colleagues that they should select potential structures for placement at Heritage Village based upon educational significance rather than availability. Concerned that County funds could not cover the move, PCHC members wondered whether the Safety Harbor Church, the city’s historical society, or an alliance of religious organizations (such as the Ecumenical Council) might fund this project. At their 20 April 1977 meeting, the Commissioners decided to meet with Rev. Hamic and Don Williams and further discuss the possible acquisition of the church. Williams called Ford in mid-July to say that another temporary and less expensive possibility may be to move the 1905 building to a vacant lot next to church property in Safety Harbor.17

Funds to move the Safety Harbor Church appeared in the 1977-1978 budget. Pinellas County Commissioners had appropriated $20,000 for building preservation and relocation, and Chair Jeanne Malchon sent PCHC members a memorandum approving the use of $10,030.65 of that allocation to bring the building to Heritage Village. By mid-September, employees of the Park Department began to fill the site of the structure’s new

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home along Walsingham Road with dirt to prevent drainage problems. Park staff and building movers planned to transport the building in two pieces, removing the roof to avoid the additional costs of temporarily relocating power lines. Bill and Blanche Weagraff, longtime members of the Safety Harbor flock, watched as workers prepared the building for its journey. Bill’s early efforts to rebuild the roof after the 1935 hurricane marked the beginning of his long involvement with the congregation. By the late 1970s, Blanche served as church historian. Church members gathered at around midnight on 28 September 1977 to see Roesch Housemovers of Pinellas Park take the old sanctuary from its prominent perch in downtown Safety Harbor. The proposed path for the move took the building to Bayshore Boulevard by the Safety Harbor Spa, south to State Road 60 (Gulf-to-Bay Boulevard), west to U.S. Highway 19, then to Ulmerton, and finally to its location along Walsingham Road. Though the Board of County Commissioners had allocated funds to move the church, the Pinellas County Historical Society helped with the restoration costs after the building arrived in the fall of 1977.\textsuperscript{18}

While park staff restored the 1905 structure at its new home, the First United Methodist Church continued its activities in Safety Harbor. Workers removed the paneling from the interior of the old sanctuary, killed the termites, and installed new flooring and siding. To accommodate those with disabilities, laborers constructed a ramp along the left side of the building that leads to the side entrance. Before opening to the public, the building also received a fresh coat of paint. With the original church at a new and safe location, Rev. Hamic and the congregation established a new Building Committee to plan for a 6,800-square-foot fellowship hall. This committee included Hamic’s wife, Ruth, and longtime member Jennie Campbell. When the new hall opened, many members and guests flocked to the building to enjoy the church’s legendary chicken dinners that included biscuits cooked with Jennie Campbell’s family recipe. The annual arrival of winter residents led to dinners that required two or three seatings, while church membership reached a peak of nearly 300 parishioners by the 1980s. Expanded


\textsuperscript{18} Records of the Pinellas County Historical Commission, 21 September 1977, 10 October 1977; Undated \textit{Clearwater Sun} clipping, probably late September of early October 1977, located in SHMC Papers; Undated church history, possibly by Russell Couch, SHMC Papers; \textit{Safety Harbor Herald}, 29 September 1977.
programs included Scout meetings, daycare programs, Alcoholics Anonymous groups, and other social outreach programs.¹⁹

Unfortunately, church membership declined by the 1990s. The chicken-and-biscuit dinners ended, elderly members passed away, new churches opened, and urban sprawl blurred lines between Safety Harbor and other nearby areas that had once created a sense of community. By the time Rev. John C. Hubbard retired and Hollis Boardman assumed the pulpit in 2001, attendance had dwindled from fifty-two and under twenty patrons. On 13 February 2002—Ash Wednesday of that year, Pastor Holly Boardman, District Superintendent Kevin M. James, and eighteen members attended a special conference to discuss the fate of their church. While members entertained a motion to keep the church open with a part-time minister, the ensuing discussion led most to believe that such an action would merely delay the inevitability that the church must close. During a painful vote, five opted for a part-time pastor, two abstained, and ten elected to close the church. After ninety-seven years, the church offered its final service on Mother’s Day of 2002. Only ten people attended Boardman’s sermon, where she opened with a litany of thanksgiving and encouraged those in the sanctuary to join another Methodist church.²⁰ During her greeting, Boardman proclaimed:

> The purpose of the organized church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. The church is called to teach, to preach, to heal, and to baptize. The church may be a great place to make friends and to hold profitable rummage sales and chicken dinners, but if such things have become our focus, then we’ve strayed from our center, and it is time to return to the center.²¹

Although the church closed its doors, members had the foresight and concern for preserving their sanctuary’s history when they donated their institutional records to the Heritage Village Library and Archives. The 1905 building lives on as a popular venue for weddings and other events.

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²¹ St. Petersburg Times, 14 May 2002.
Safford Pavilion: A Brief Introduction

History of Site before Structure was Built
- The pavilion recognizes Anson P. K. Safford (1830-1891) for his contributions to the Tarpon Springs area. A native of Vermont, Safford moved to the West and served in the California State Assembly and later as Governor of the Arizona Territory. He panned for gold while in California and also worked as a surveyor in Nevada. He died in Tarpon Springs in December 1891. He came to Florida and became involved in the speculation that took place in the 1880s after Hamilton Disston’s land purchase.
- Anson and wife Soledad Bonillas (a native of Mexico) started the first Catholic chapel and school in the area. She became involved in the creation of Tarpon Springs’ Woman’s Town Improvement Society in the early 1890s.
- Anson’s sister, Mary J. Safford, came to the region in 1883. The Saffords originally stayed with Mary Ormond Boyer, her father (A.W. Ormond), and her husband (Joshua C. Boyer). The Ormonds, Boyers, and Saffords formed a close friendship during the early years of Tarpon Springs’ history.
- Anson’s Tarpon Springs home has been restored and now serves as a museum.

Construction Information
- The pavilion appeared sometime in the mid-1890s, though no records have been located that give the exact date of construction. Longtime residents remember it on the landscape by 1900.
- It became an important landmark at the city’s cemetery (Cycadia Cemetery).
- Hexagonal block floors and cypress poles form the base of the structure.

History of Use
- Cycadia Cemetery was started in 1887 by a member of the Beekman family.
- The pavilion was used as a shelter for funerals and other gatherings at a time when few funeral homes existed.
- By the 1930s, John Cheyney donated additional land to the cemetery site, and the city took over control of cemetery operations by 1946. The Cycadia Improvement Association became an important force by the early 1950s for maintaining and improving the cemetery site.

Moving of the Structure to Heritage Village
- Historical Commission members approached the Tarpon Springs Historical Society about the possibility of moving the Safford Memorial as early as September 1979. At that time, Tarpon’s leaders decided to maintain the structure in that city.
- Structure arrived in May 1982, at about the time the Greenwood House arrived. It required some reconstruction. The removal of some cypress trees at a planned site for a shopping center provided wood for posts during the partial reconstruction.
The Safford Pavilion

Overview

For over eighty years, the Safford Memorial Pavilion occupied a prominent position in Cycadia Cemetery. This park and graveyard, located east of U.S. Highway 19 near Tarpon Springs, served as one of the earliest formal burial sites since organized settlement along the Pinellas Peninsula began in the 1800s. The shelter, built to protect visitors during inclement weather who attended funerals or other gatherings, honors Anson Peacely Killen Safford, a former Territorial Governor of Arizona who worked with Hamilton Disston to open the Pinellas frontier from the early 1880s until his death in 1891. Anson and his wife, Soledad Bonillas Safford, played an important role in the development of Tarpon Springs and the area around Lake Tarpon (formerly Lake Butler).

However, the story of Anson Safford and his family reaches far beyond the Pinellas Peninsula. From his early years panning for gold in California and climbing a gilded political ladder in Territorial Arizona, to his later involvement with Hamilton Disston and other financiers, Safford’s experiences before reaching the remote settlement around Springs Bayou prepared him for his leadership in banking, real estate, and public service in the growing community of Tarpon Springs. Other members of the Safford clan also made a lasting impression in the area. Anson’s younger sister, Dr. Mary Jane Safford, had served as a Civil War nurse, earned a medical degree from a New York college, and established successful practices in Chicago and Boston before becoming the first trained physician to live in upper Pinellas. Soledad B. Safford, Anson’s third and final wife, came with him to the area and soon joined other prominent women in civic activities, including a local town improvement association that sustained the Cycadia Cemetery for many years.

Although the Safford Pavilion recognizes the former governor for his efforts, by extension it also serves as a tribute to all members of the Safford family. Constructed during the 1890s with cypress poles and knee braces, the pavilion started to deteriorate by the 1970s. After discussions starting in 1979, the City of Tarpon Springs agreed to donate the Safford Pavilion to Heritage Village, and the Pinellas County Historical Society offered funds to move it onto its present site by the spring of 1982.
A Pioneer of the American West and of the Pinellas Peninsula

A native of Lamoille County, Vermont, Anson Peacely Killen (A.P.K.) Safford entered the world on 14 February 1830 as a child of Joseph Warren and Diantha P. Safford. Other children included a brother, Alfred, and a younger sister, Mary Jane (born 31 December 1834). The family moved from Hyde Park, Vermont, to Crete, Illinois, when young Anson was eight years old. Some biographical accounts note that the children failed to get a formal education because of the family’s poor financial situation. At the age of twenty, Anson Safford joined other residents of Will County, Illinois, who decided to move from the Midwest to California in 1850. His parents had recently died and the California “gold rush” had just come to life. As a young man, Safford mined for gold in Placer County, California, an area between Sacramento and the State of Nevada. Soon after feeling the sting of the gold bug, Anson sought public office. Though he failed to win a seat in the California state assembly during the 1854 election, he did serve as the delegate for the legislature’s Seventeenth District from 1857 until 1859. In 1859, he resigned his office and moved to San Francisco to engage in business. By the spring of 1862, Safford relocated to Humboldt County, Nevada. Before the end of the year, he became a county commissioner. During the mid-1860s, Safford took an extended tour of Europe “partly for health and partly to increase his knowledge of human affairs and the world’s resources.” From 1867 until 1869, Safford served as Surveyor-General of Nevada after receiving an appointment to that post from President Andrew Johnson.¹

An active member of the Republican Party, A.P.K. Safford obtained a commission from President Ulysses S. Grant to serve as the third Territorial Governor of Arizona in April 1869. He held this post for two consecutive terms, from 1869 until 1877. While some referred to him as the “Little Governor” due to his short stature, many Arizonians praised Safford as the “father of public schools” for his efforts to establish a comprehensive educational system in the territory. Although the 1870 census counted nearly two thousand school-age children in Territorial Arizona, no public schools existed

to serve this population before Safford took office. As chief executive, he worked diligently to recruit teachers to the Arizona frontier, codify educational practices, and establish a territorial tax for schools. Despite a strong initial opposition from lawmakers, Safford’s program to divide revenues among counties and provide free public schools for pupils scattered across the vast territory garnered praise from the residents. He also returned to the mining business during his stint as territorial governor, and engaged in other speculative activities. Some retrospective newspaper stories claimed that Safford left the governorship after two successful terms with little more than two mules and a buckboard wagon. Whether true or not, Safford quickly channeled his efforts into new mining opportunities near Tombstone. While Arizona seemed too remote for many consumptives and others seeking a healthful environment, Safford no doubt enjoyed the healthy physical and economic climate available on this frontier.2

Governor Safford did encounter criticism at a juncture between his private and personal lives. While receiving praise for his improvements to education and the infrastructure of the Arizona Territory, his January 1873 divorce of Jennie (or Jenny) L. Tracy sparked controversy. The daughter of a California carpenter, as a young woman Jennie Tracy held progressive views for the mid-nineteenth century: She championed women’s suffrage and lobbied against cruelty to animals. Jennie met Anson by early 1869, possibly during an April visit to San Francisco just before he received his appointment as territorial governor. While it remains unclear whether their romance had political overtones—possibly so Governor Safford would have a first lady during his public service—Judge John Anderson united them in matrimony during a July 24 ceremony in the territorial capital of Tucson. Less than two months later, a pregnant Jennie departed for San Diego, California, while Anson visited northern Arizona. They met again and stayed together for a few weeks in San Francisco in late 1869, though Jennie decided to return to San Diego rather than accompany Anson to Tucson. Frank Alfred Safford, their son, was born in July 1870; however, Anson probably did not visit his estranged wife until March 1871. Frank died as an infant on 28 August 1871. Jennie

refused to return to Arizona, and filed for divorce by December 1872. In bitter tones, she alleged that her husband had kept a mistress during their marriage and had kept her in the dark about his battle with syphilis. These allegations, whether true or not, prompted Safford to tell Jennie that he would settle the matter with the assistance of Arizona’s territorial legislature.\(^3\)

In January 1873, lawmakers passed a bill that officially divorced Anson and Jennie Safford. Only one member of the lower house, Jose Redondo of Yuma, voted against the measure. In an ironic twist, Governor Safford not only signed the bill into law, but by doing so also signed his own divorce decree. Those familiar with the controversy surrounding the Florida legislature’s 1901 law written solely to permit railroad tycoon Henry Flagler to divorce his institutionalized wife, Ida Alice, on grounds of insanity may note a peculiar similarity in the actions of the Arizona assembly. Within three months, Jennie married a man named Horace Loomis, leading many researchers to believe that she had questionable motives for her scandalous statements about Anson. With few Anglo women on the frontier, Governor Safford then followed a romantic path common among Arizona’s Anglo leaders: he exchanged vows with a woman of Mexican ancestry. Thomas E. Sheridan, an Arizona historian, estimates that sixty-two percent of marriages in Tucson and Pima County involving Anglos during the 1870s brought together Mexican women and Anglo men. Safford’s second wife, a Mexican named Margarita Grijalva, passed away in 1880 during childbirth, though their daughter, Marguarite (or Margarita), survived.

His third and final wife, Soledad Bonillas, remained a companion until his death in December 1891. A native of Mexico born in 1860, she married the former governor circa 1882. Many Hispanics in Arizona and other areas along the Borderlands resented the paternalistic leadership of Anglo politicians who seized political control after the United States acquired this region through the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo and the 1853 Gadsden Purchase. Among territorial governors, however, Safford remained popular with many Mexicans living in Arizona because of his marriages to Grijalva and Bonillas. As a footnote of some international significance, Soledad’s older brother played

an important and controversial role in diplomatic relations between the United States and Mexico in his later years. Born in Mexico in 1858, Ignacio Bonillas benefited from Safford’s educational platform as he attended schools in Tucson and later taught in Arizona. After graduating from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Soledad’s brother brokered contracts with American mining companies in Mexico and served as mayor of Nogales, Sonora (Mexico). Most notably, and long after Anson’s death, Ignacio received an appointment from President Venustiano Carranza to serve as the Mexican ambassador to the United States in 1917, at a time when American and Mexican leaders fumed over the raids of Carranza’s chief nemesis, Pancho Villa. Bonillas also tried unsuccessfully to win the presidency of Mexico in 1920. The intersection of Anson, Soledad, and Ignacio illustrates the fluid nature of the Borderlands frontier during this era.  

Safford remained in the Arizona Territory through the first part of the 1880s. The former governor served as an Arizona delegate at the 1880 Republican National Convention. Searching for new business opportunities and hoping to engage other speculative interests, A.P.K. Safford traveled to eastern cities, including Philadelphia. Through his dealings with wealthy manufacturer Hamilton Disston, Safford met other powerful entrepreneurs, including Henry B. Plant, and joined a partnership that soon brought him to the Florida frontier. Once Disston had obtained four million acres of land from the State of Florida, he and Safford became real estate prospectors who laid claim to the profitable mother lode of fertile land along the Pinellas Peninsula. By 1882, the Saffords and their three children (daughters Marguarite and Gladys, and adopted son Leandro) came to the Anclote River by way of Cedar Keys. W. L. Straub’s history of Pinellas noted that the Saffords happened upon Captain Sam E. Hope, who directed his son to lead them to the remote settlement of Tarpon Springs. After arriving at Spring Bayou, the Saffords lodged at the homestead of Joshua and Mary Ormond Boyer. Anson’s family soon moved to an unpainted, three-room cottage across from the Bayou.


A Successful Sibling Takes a Different Route to Tarpon Springs

Dr. Mary Jane Safford joined her brother Anson and his wife Soledad Safford as they moved to Tarpon Springs. Three years old when the family left Vermont for Illinois, Mary Jane Safford returned to her native state after her parents’ death in 1849 to take classes at an academy in Bakersfield. As a young woman, she became fluent in French and German. By the 1850s, she returned to Illinois and lived with Alfred, her elder brother, while she worked as a schoolteacher. As Anson panned for gold in the West, Mary Jane planned to help the wounded during the Civil War. In early 1861, she lived in Cairo, an Illinois town near the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. When the Civil War began, many volunteer troops from other areas of Illinois converged near Cairo to protect the strategic waterways. Close quarters brought epidemics to the camps. By the summer of 1861, Mary Jane Safford brought food and tended to ill soldiers. She soon won the trust of officers and surgeons at the encampments, and worked under the tutelage of noted nurse “Mother” Mary Ann Bickerdyke. Safford’s proficiency in French and German allowed her to tend to members of foreign brigades who fought in battles along the Mississippi. City leaders later praised Safford as the “Angel of Cairo” for her work during the Battle of Shiloh and other campaigns.

Mary Jane Safford’s nursing experience on the battlefield encouraged her to become a physician. Exhausted from her wartime service, Safford traveled through Europe during the later years of the Civil War. She returned to the United States in 1866, graduated from the New York Medical College for Women in 1869, and returned to Europe for advanced surgical training. While Anson established public schools in the Arizona Territory, his younger sister became the first documented female physician to perform a surgical removal of an ovary. By the early 1870s, Mary Jane returned to the United States, launched a private practice in Chicago, married a Bostonian named James

Pinellas County, Florida, Narrative and Biographical (St. Augustine: The Record Company, 1929), 163. Ongoing research of land records, railroad corporations, and other entities by historian Joe Knetsch has uncovered new business and social ties between Anson Safford, Hamilton Disston, Henry Plant, and others not adequately documented in newspaper articles or other sources.

Blake, and joined the faculty of Boston University School of Medicine and the staff of the Massachusetts Homeopathic Hospital. She divorced Blake in 1880 and brought her practice to Tarpon Springs as that town’s first resident physician and the first academically trained woman to establish a medical practice in Florida. Though short in stature like her brother—“Little Governor” Anson—Mary Jane filled a big role as she treated community members at the vintage 1883 Safford house she shared with Anson, Soledad, and their children. R. F. Pent, an 1878 native of Tarpon, remembered a childhood visit to this “quick and alert” doctor when his foot required “a little surgery” sometime during the 1880s. Mary Jane Safford retired from medicine by 1886.7

Building a Community Where the Tarpons Spring

By 1883, the Saffords constructed a frame vernacular house that doubled as Anson’s business office and Mary Jane’s clinic. The hard pine used in this structure came from Disston’s sawmill in New Jersey. One account of the house’s construction notes that mill workers numbered the planks and boards before shipping them to Florida, a process similar to that used in the movement of the Wesley Lowe House from its original site in Anona to its location along Thirty-Seventh Street circa 1950. A clipping cited in a 1990 St. Petersburg Times article proclaimed that “(b)y Soledad’s charm, grace of manner and beautiful character, her home became the social center of town, entertaining many distinguished guests.” Lumber for other early structures also came from Disston’s sawmills and business interests in Philadelphia and Atlantic City.8

Others early residents joined the Saffords in building the community of Tarpon Springs. A.P.K. Safford founded Tarpon Springs in 1882. Soon thereafter, Orlando lawyer Major Matthew R. (W. J.) Marks drew up the town site. Safford and Disston arrived via the Anclote in February 1882, met with Marks to examine lands in the Tarpon Springs area, and planned to visit Polk County in early March to inspect Disston’s holdings there. Marks oversaw construction of a hotel and other buildings before returning to Orlando, where he would serve as that city’s mayor by December 1888.

7 Ibid.; Pent, History of Tarpon Springs, 59; Tampa Tribune, 8 January 2000.
Anson and Soledad helped establish St. Ignatius of Antioch, a Catholic chapel, in the small community and provided land for its building in 1888. As Disston’s agent, Anson Safford controlled substantial acreage in parts of present-day Pinellas, Pasco, and Hillsborough counties that became organized under the Lake Butler Villa Company. Serving as president of this corporation, Safford acted as a land broker who sought to attract investors and residents for a winter colony. By 1884, Safford met Granville E. Noblit, a Pennsylvania native and rheumatic who came to Tarpon after stops in Eustis and Tampa. In a 1921 retrospective interview, Noblit told a reporter that he remembered seeing just “half a dozen residences and a few business houses” on this first visit to the heavily forested area. As Hamilton Disston worked to bring the Orange Belt Railway to the Pinellas Peninsula and his proposed community of Disston City, Safford sold tracts owned by Disston through the Lake Butler enterprise while Noblit helped to survey the proposed route. When the railroad terminus moved south from Tarpon towards St. Petersburg by 1888, Disston suffered financial difficulties and Noblit turned his other commercial activities, including a feed and hardware store. Before his death, Noblit established a 500-acre farm at Lake Villa that included dipping vats to eradicate ticks from livestock. By 1918, Noblit provided the labor and county authorities provided the material for the construction of a large cattle dipping vat for farmers around Tarpon Springs.9

John Cheyney, a Philadelphia native, worked with Safford on Disston’s local business interests. Straub’s biographical narrative notes that Cheyney served as a bank clerk in Philadelphia before arriving in Tarpon in 1889 at the urging of Disston, a family friend. Initially unfamiliar with the sponge business, Cheyney met with William Roberts and other longtime spongers from Key West. In addition to his leadership as the first commercial sponge operator of the city, Cheyney soon took an interest in real estate.

After Anson Safford’s death, Cheyney carried on the late governor’s work by becoming president of the Lake Butler Villa Company.  

Safford continued to engage in civic and business ventures through the 1880s. In 1885, Safford met with the then-Duke of Sutherland and Lady Caroline Blair after they docked their yacht *San Peur* along the Anclote River in search of supplies. The former governor introduced these English visitors to the local residents, and in short time the Duke purchased thirty acres on a bluff overlooking Lake Butler (now Lake Tarpon). One early resident remembered seeing Safford negotiate with the Duke of Sutherland along the beach in the moonlight. In time, the small settlement of Sutherland—now Palm Harbor—took shape south of Tarpon. A correspondent for the *West Hillsborough Times* praised Safford in the newspaper’s 15 April 1886 edition after visiting with him at Tarpon. The writer touted Safford as “the originator and presiding genius of the wonderful enterprise manifest in that beautiful and rapidly growing town.” The article complimented Safford’s “foresight, wise investment of capital, and indomitable energy as the founder and promoter” of the community. In 1887, Tarpon Spring’s fifty-two residents celebrated the town’s incorporation. The former governor also negotiated with a steamship company to ensure regular shipments between Tarpon and locations such as Tampa and Cedar Keys. An undated and typewritten promotional report on Tarpon Springs from the mid 1880s credited Safford’s “energy and perseverance” for the construction of the promenade around Spring Bayou and other community improvements. Safford and Josh Boyer served as two of the community’s first five aldermen. Early measures approved by this first town council included rules prohibiting both gunfire within the city limits and livestock roaming along the roads. By 1891, Safford had become president of the Bank of Tarpon Springs (with son Leondro serving as cashier and notary public) while still overseeing the Lake Butler Villa Company.

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Untimely Deaths and a Timeless Memorial

Two events in December 1891 shocked the residents of the community along the Anclote. In poor health through most of the late 1880s, Dr. Mary Jane Safford finally passed away on December 8. News of her death filled the front page of December 12 issue of the Tarpon Springs Truth. Exactly one week after Mary’s passing, on the morning of December 15, Governor A.P.K. Safford died suddenly after a prolonged illness. Both probably died of typhoid fever. An obituary in the Tampa Tribune credited Anson Safford as “one of the leading factors in the development of Florida . . . especially on the West Coast, where he was a power. To him more than any one man were the people of that section of the county indebted for the building of the Orange Belt Railroad.”

After Governor Safford’s death, John Wasson of Pomona, California—a friend and associate of Anson who had once credited Anson for taming the Arizona Territory at a time when it was “almost in a state of anarchy”—wrote the following about his contributions to the Pinellas frontier:

(H)e gave his time and personal labor especially to building the town of Tarpon Springs. This was purely pioneer work. The land was all in a state of nature. Where Tarpon Springs stands with its public schools, churches, hotels, banks, and other institutions, he practically found a forest. The building of a town was almost wholly (sic) his personal work.

Even before his death, A.P.K. Safford enjoyed recognition in the form of a steamship named in his honor, the Governor Safford that—along with a smaller boat, the Mary Disston—operated between Cedar Keys and the Anclote River years before the Orange Belt Railway arrived. An October 1885 column that originally appeared in the West Hillsborough Times boasted that Anson’s namesake steamer was even “fitted out with an electric light.”

Governor and Doctor Safford found their final resting place at Cycadia Cemetery. This graveyard garnered its name from the many cycads, or sago palms, originally

12 Tarpon Springs Leader, 6 January 1941, 6 January 1961; Tampa Tribune, 17 December 1891.
14 Weekly Floridian, 8 October 1885; Pent, History of Tarpon Springs, 21-22.
planted along the path to the cemetery by women leaders in the community. Women who worked to improve the town’s graveyard formed the Cycadia Cemetery Association circa 1884. During these early days, one of the women brought her mule and wagon to the homes of other members and shuttled them to the cemetery. The gravesites of Anson and Mary Jane Safford included large granite blocks that came by horse and wagon from their native Vermont. In February 1892, shortly after Anson’s death, Soledad Bonillas Safford became the founding president of the Woman’s Town Improvement Association (WTIA) of Tarpon. Although the cycads died in an early freeze, the women leaders of the WTIA maintained the graveyards as a civic endeavor for many years. The Tarpon Springs WTIA later became known as the Civic Club in 1906 and later the Woman’s Club. Similar to their sisters that launched the St. Petersburg Woman’s Town Improvement Association nine years later in 1901, these pioneer ladies tended to the town park (located at the intersection of Pinellas and Tarpon avenues), kept the streets clean (often with their own brooms), and also lit the city’s early street lights each evening.  

Sometime between 1892 and 1900, a pavilion was raised at Cycadia Cemetery to recognize the large contributions of the “Little Governor.” Built to the west of the Saffords’s tombs, this structure exhibits the Adirondack Rustic style’s focus on natural materials and designs that became popular during the late 1800s and early 1900s, although not generally found as widely in Florida as in other areas. The cypress and pine trunks and planks support a roof that provided shelter for funerals and other gatherings at Cycadia Cemetery at a time when solemn ceremonies occurred at graveyards instead of funeral parlors. Although the “Safford Memorial” sign adorning this structure probably referred solely to A.P.K. Safford, residents certainly recognized the contributions of other members of the Safford family. A 1961 article in the Tarpon Springs Leader also mentioned the possibility that Soledad may have sponsored this memorial; no precise records about its funding or date of construction are known to exist.  


16 Research by Stephanie Ferrell, located in the Heritage Village Library and Archives, discusses the architectural characteristics of this structure; Tarpon Springs Leader, 19 February 1953, 6 January 1961, 19
Although their large gravestones made the Safford siblings notable early occupants of the cemetery, they were not the first laid to rest on the site. Many of the earliest settlers around Spring Bayou considered the mineral springs and climate as proof that the Lake Butler Villa lands offered an excellent site for a health resort. In his history of Tarpon, R. F. Pent included a story about how the cemetery received its first “customer.” Pent claimed that on one early evening in the mid-1880s, a man named Conolly argued with Major Marks at the Tropical Hotel on the intersection of Tarpon and Pinellas avenues. When Conolly left the room to get his revolver, Marks fled the building and ran away. Conolly ran out onto the darkened streets and saw a shadow approaching from Spring Bayou. Thinking he had noticed the silhouette of Marks, Conolly fired his weapon and the shadow fell to the ground. Rather than settling an argument with Marks, Conolly had instantly killed an innocent man named Cork who became the first person supposedly buried at Cycadia. According to Pent, residents circulated a cruel joke that Tarpon’s healthful climate required that “someone had to be killed in order to start a cemetery.” A 1921 interview with early resident L. D. Vinson supports Pent’s story of the shooting at the Tropical Hotel, adding, “Tarpon Springs is the best city this side of Heaven, for a lot of people refuse to leave here for Heaven.” Records of Cycadia burials maintained by the Pinellas County Genealogical Society call into question Pent’s lively tale by listing a C. L. Webster, a teenager who died in 1872, as the earliest burial and one that predated the formal establishment of the cemetery. Most sources agree that Viola Keeney Beekman donated the first official parcel for the cemetery in 1887.17

Sometime in the mid-1890s (after 1893), Soledad B. Safford married William Walwork Parkin (or Parken), a friend of her deceased first husband. Some records, including tombstones at Cycadia, spell his family name as “Parken.” A short while earlier, probably during the 1893 recession, Soledad had sold some of her inherited property along Spring Bayou and had the Safford home disassembled and moved approximately 100 yards from its original site to its present location, 23 Parkin Court, on January 1961. Longtime resident H. Joe Smith remembers seeing the pavilion when he arrived in 1900; earlier memories of the pavilion have not yet been located as of December 2003. Smith and his wife supported the preservation efforts of the Cycadia Improvement Association as late as February 1953. 17 Pent, History of Tarpon Springs, 25-27; Tarpon Springs Leader, 22 April 1921, 19 January 1961. For a list created by the Pinellas County Genealogical Society, see: ftp://ftp.rootsweb.com/pub/usgenweb/fl/pinellas/cemetery/cycadia.txt
a parcel of land slightly north of Spring Boulevard that was also part of Anson’s original land holdings. Until Parken’s death in July 1903, he and Soledad split their time between residences in Tampa and Tarpon Springs. Parken and his parents (Nicholas and Emily) occupy cemetery plots near Anson and Mary Jane Safford. The Safford House became a boarding home known as the “Ansonia,” and later changed hands as a private residence until acquired by the City of Tarpon Springs in 1995 from then-owner Aldo Pelligrini. Restorations to this structure—the first building in Tarpon Springs to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places—continued during the late 1990s.18

Soledad Bonillas Safford Parken remained in Tarpon Springs until her death. In her later years, she married a cigar maker named Salvador F. Martin. She passed away in March 1931 without relatives to pay for a proper headstone. Placed in the family plot near the Safford Memorial Pavilion, her gravesite was marked by a simple wooden cross after her funeral. Termites and the rugged environment soon destroyed the cross, and for many years the burial site of this important community matron remained unmarked. By 1982, the Tarpon Springs Historical Society raised funds for a proper headstone, but—in a case of mistaken location—cemetery staff erected the marker at the wrong place. Rather than resting alongside Anson and Mary Jane, Soledad actually occupied a space on the other side of the Governor, between him and her second husband. In March 1990, the cemetery caretaker discovered the mistaken location of the headstone and finally put it in the proper place, nearly fifty-nine years after her death.19

Later Improvements to Cycadia Cemetery

As president of the Lake Butler Villa Company, John K. Cheyney remained an important community leader in Tarpon Springs throughout the early twentieth century. His patronage of the Cycadia Cemetery allowed for its expansion by the early 1930s. In 1934, Cheyney deeded ten acres south of the cemetery for use as a park, and seven acres north of the cemetery for an expansion of the gravesites. By the spring of 1935, workers with the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) cleared roots, stumps, and muck from the site. These New Deal laborers planned to dredge and create a lake in the

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18 St. Petersburg Times, 30 June 2000; Tarpon Springs Herald, 12 April 1973; Tampa Tribune, 8 January 2000. See also: box 6, folder 12, Ivey Papers, USF St. Petersburg.
center of the parcel. By July 1935, the *Tarpon Springs Leader* reported that Cheyney had transferred additional lands between Tarpon Avenue and the Seaboard Air Line to the cemetery association. By one account, Cheyney’s donations to the Cycadia Cemetery totaled nearly thirty-five acres by the summer of 1935. Officials from the Works Progress Administration (WPA) approved plans to continue the FERA’s efforts by allocating $3,525 in federal funds to convert this marshland to parkland.  

Other improvements to the cemetery and pavilion occurred after World War II. Similar to the transfer of Williams Park in St. Petersburg from that city’s WTIA to the municipality in 1910, the ongoing maintenance requirements and the expansion of the grounds began to overwhelm the women who led the Cycadia Cemetery Association. By 1946, the association transferred title and management responsibilities to the City of Tarpon Springs. A non-profit Cycadia Improvement Association assisted city officials with projects at the facility, such as removing sandspurs and weeds, edging the lawn around grave markers, and fertilizing the grounds. During 1952, the Association spent $292.75 to purchase fertilizer, chicken manure, and other materials, as well as to cover labor expenses. This organization welcomed contributions as its only funding source, and could claim donations of approximately $306 for the year. By March 1955, cemetery officials formalized plans to construct a mausoleum on the site. Association members restored and repaired the Safford Memorial Pavilion circa 1960. In the late 1970s, city officials discussed the merits of using low-risk inmates from the Tarpon Springs Correctional Center as day laborers to provide supervised labor at the cemetery.  

**A Moving Monument and Monumental Similarities**  
Kendrick Ford, former director of Heritage Village, met Colonel Salley, a one-time member of the Pinellas County Historical Commission (PCHC), to discuss a possible move or reconstruction of the Safford Memorial Pavilion. At that time, in early 1979, Commission members had already considered the possibility of constructing a bandstand for public performances. Ford also asked Park Department employee Mike

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19 *St. Petersburg Times*, 27 March 1990.  
Corba to examine the structure. Both Ford and Corba noted that eight decades of exposure to the Florida climate had rotted the cypress posts and weakened the pavilion. By the late 1970s, the wrought iron “Safford Memorial” sign had been removed and was kept in Salley’s garage. Given the structure’s marginal condition, the PCHC voted to reject Salley’s original plan to move the structure intact and instead ask the City of Tarpon Springs for permission to obtain the hexagonal stones from underneath the pavilion and the sign for Salley, and build a replica at Heritage Village. Over the next few months, Ford and Salley attempted to reach an agreement with the city’s attorney to move the hex stones and leave the pavilion at the cemetery. Salley placed the sign at the Tarpon Springs Museum by June 1979, and pledged that Heritage Village could use it for a replica structure. When PCHC members learned in the late summer that the Tarpon Springs Historical Society expected to keep the memorial at Cycadia Cemetery, members agreed that the proposed bandstand would serve the same purpose, and they suspended their pursuit of the hexagonal blocks and sign.22

Interest in preserving the Safford Pavilion resurfaced over the next two years. By the spring of 1982, Ford arranged for movers to transport the roof, benches, and hexagonal blocks from Cycadia Cemetery to Heritage Village. The structure arrived in pieces on 6 May 1982. Some funds for this project came from the Pinellas County Historical Society. Most of the cypress posts, like the wooden cross that once graced Soledad’s grave, had rotted beyond use. However, the delay in acquiring this structure fortuitously coincided with plans to develop Loehmann’s Plaza at the corner of U.S. Highway 19 and Coachman Road. Frank Mudano brought some cypress cleared from this shopping center construction site and workers used these new beams to replace the damaged supports during the restoration of the pavilion.23

The Safford Pavilion represents much more than a shady seat on the corner of the park: Its location near the Boyer Cottage and the Williams Park Bandstand replica seems quite logical—even if originally unintended—given the close connections between Joshua and Mary Ormond Boyer and the Saffords during the early days of Tarpon

23 Ibid., 19 May 1982; Interview of Ken Ford, former director of Heritage Village, by Stephanie Ferrell and Jim Schnur, 3 May 2003, Heritage Village, Largo.
Springs, not to mention the amazing similarities between John Constantine and Sarah Williams of St. Petersburg and the Saffords at the northern end of the Pinellas Peninsula. Both Anson Safford and John Williams sought healthier climates, and each man engaged in a notable amount of real estate speculation along the Pinellas frontier. While histories of St. Petersburg often credit “General” Williams as the father of that city for his work in securing the Orange Belt Railway, Governor Safford could easily claim a similar title for his footprints in early Tarpon Springs. These men died within a few months of one other, and Safford’s December 1891 obituary in a Tampa newspaper credits the “Little Governor” for his work in bringing the railroad to upper Pinellas in similar tones to the praise later heaped upon John C. Williams for brokering a deal to move the railroad from its planned destination at Disston City instead to his substantial holdings along Tampa Bay.

Striking similarities also existed between Sarah Williams and Soledad B. Safford, often considered the “leading ladies” of their respective communities. Each met their spouse along a borderland: Soledad, a native of Mexico, became Anson’s third wife during his time in Arizona, while John C. Williams of Detroit exchanged vows for the second time when he wed Sarah Craven Judge of neighboring Ontario. Both women maintained their civic ties and public activities and remarried after their much older husbands passed away. Just a few months after Anson’s death, Soledad became the first member of the Woman’s Town Improvement Association in Tarpon Springs in early 1892. Nine years later, Sarah joined the St. Petersburg WTIA as a charter member in 1901. Although somewhat coincidental, these connections reinforce how the similar efforts of early families—like the Safford and Williams clans—shaped life on each end of the Pinellas Peninsula.

As a final note, the Safford Pavilion offers just one of many tributes to this family. Residents of Arizona established a city named Safford, in honor of the third territorial governor. Schools in the region also bear his name. In April 1961, a century after the beginning of the Civil War, the Daughters of the American Revolution chapter at Cairo, Illinois, announced plans to erect a memorial to “Angel of Cairo,” the city’s “outstanding woman in the Civil War.” The bronze plaque placed on a red granite boulder in front of the city’s Safford Memorial Library honors Mary Jane as “first woman
in the West to organize Camp and Hospital relief.” In a town on the crossroads of many Civil War stories, the heroics of Mary Safford brought great pride to the community, just as she, Anson, and Soledad did once again along the shores of the Anclote.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{24} *Tarpon Springs Leader*, 20 April 1961.
House of Seven Gables: A Brief Introduction

History of Site before House was Built

- Located in the area of the early “Clear Water Harbor” settlement.
- Land at the site originally acquired by James Stevens in 1842 as the result of the Armed Occupation Act. Other early owners of the land (before a structure was built) included John S. Taylor and David B. Turner. David Nevins Starr and wife Mary acquired the tract in 1896. Starr retired from his business activities in Rockford, Illinois, and came to the area in search of a warmer winter climate.
- Members of the Starr family visited the area before the arrival of the Orange Belt Railway.

Construction Information

- Seven Gables was built in 1907 on the bluff near the present-day Pinellas County Courthouse, an area with excellent views of Clearwater’s bay.
- This late Queen Anne style home occupied an impressive location in the growing community of Clearwater.

History of Occupants

- David N. and Mary Starr were the first occupants of the house. The Starrs also had a connection with John Cheyney, an early settler and “sponge hooker” in Tarpon Springs who played an important role in establishing the sponge diving industry. Cheyney had served as manager of the Anclote and Rock Island Sponge Company as early as 1891, nearly fourteen years before the first Greek sponge divers arrived in the region. Starr’s older brother, Henry, had a daughter named Mabel. This woman, David’s niece, married John Cheyney. David Starr frequently visited with John and Mabel Cheyney during his later years, and discussed business ventures, including Cheyney’s investments in a lumber mill and in citrus and developments around the Lake Butler region.
- After selling Seven Gables in 1917, Starr continued to visit the region. He lived the last six years of his life in Tarpon Springs.
- A number of owners and occupants stayed at the structure through the mid-1920s, including an Episcopal minister named Arthur R. Cornwell who lived at Seven Gables during the construction of his church’s rectory.
- Chester and Lucy Masslich owned the building from 1925 through 1943. During part of this period, city directories referred to the structure as “Seven Gables Inn” or noted that the boarding house had “furnished rooms.” The boarding house also included a gazebo by this time. For a brief period, near the height of the land boom, a “binder boys” club met/stayed at the home. These speculators often sold prime tracts of land for handsome profits during the land boom of the 1920s.
- Many tenants stayed in the guest rooms at the structure.
- Charles and Clara Dietrich acquired the house during the mid-1940s. They came from Ohio by way of Orlando. The Dietrich family sold the house in 1951 and returned to Orlando.
- The Hemerick family acquired the house in 1953 and made necessary repairs. They owned the structure through the mid-1970s. Williams & Walker architects
acquired the site from the Hemericks, and donated the structure for a planned historical museum that became Heritage Village. This structure and the Plant-Sumner House were scheduled to arrive before the museum complex had even been built.

**Moving of the House to Heritage Village**
- The structure traveled from Clearwater to the area near Walsingham Road on a barge along the Intracoastal Waterway.
- Shortly after Seven Gables arrived at the “Pinellas County Historical Park,” carpenters, members of the Clearwater Junior League, and others donated their time to rehabilitate the structure.
- By the fall of 1977, crews had finished nearly all of the major rehabilitative work on Seven Gables.
- A ribbon-cutting ceremony took place in October 1978.
- People visiting the structure for guided docent tours actually enter what was once the back door, and leave through the front door.
The House of Seven Gables has a rich and intriguing history. James Stevens obtained the land around present-day downtown Clearwater through the Armed Occupation Act. Passed by Congress in 1842, this law brought settlers to peninsular Florida who agreed to live on their land, cultivate at least five acres, build a dwelling, and bear arms in event of another Seminole war. After the property exchanged hands three times, David N. Starr—a retiree from Rockford, Illinois—purchased the parcel in 1896. Eleven years later, his family began to spend their winters at Seven Gables. This chapter includes a detailed examination of the Starr family’s business connections prior to the construction of Seven Gables to illustrate how financial and personal resources allowed the Starrs to enjoy an uncommonly ornate house during a time when many Pinellas residents lived in simple shacks, cottages, or small homes.

Originally perched on a bluff overlooking Clearwater Bay west of the present-day courthouse, this impressive house offered a magnificent view and occupied a prominent location in the growing city. The elegant residence contained thirteen rooms and seven gables, allowing for a spacious living area that suited Victorian tastes. The interior paneling is made of heart of pine and beaded tongue and groove that provided durability. Excellent materials and sound construction have allowed the house to survive the October 1921 hurricane, as well as other storms.

The Starr family sold the home in 1917. Two years later, a compassionate woman named Annie Kelley acquired the house. By the early 1920s, she allowed an Episcopal minister to occupy the house with his family until the architects could complete a new rectory at Clearwater’s Episcopal Church of the Ascension. Chester and Lucy Masslich purchased the home in 1925 for speculative purposes and rental income. Over the next two decades, a variety of proprietors operated an inn or rooming house at Seven Gables. During the mid-1920s, a group of realtors utilized the house as a social club for dinners, informal meetings, and card games attended by “binder boys,” young real estate operatives who placed a small down payment, or binder, on real estate during the Florida land boom with a promise to acquire the balance within a short period of time. As the
land boom came to an end, numerous residents rented the upstairs furnished rooms between the late 1920s and the early 1940s. For example, the Guzman family managed the property in 1931 and turned Seven Gables into a tearoom and rooming house with service that included “dinner on the veranda.”

Charles and Clara Dietrich fell in love with Seven Gables in 1944 and planned to retire there. They moved from Orlando to Clearwater and made some improvements to the structure. However, after seven years in the home, the house and stairs become too much for the elderly couple. They returned to Orlando after selling the house to John V. Neill in 1951. Two years later, Neill decided to sell to a young dentist named Frederick Hemerick. Members of that family kept the house until April 1975, when they accepted a purchase offer from Don Williams and Dixie Walker of the Williams and Walker architectural firm in Clearwater. Williams, a member of the Pinellas County Historical Commission and early developer of site plans for Heritage Village, donated Seven Gables and some of the costs associated with its move to Heritage Village in 1976. The enormous size of the house and its location in downtown Clearwater required movers to transport it by barge along the intracoastal waterway, an event that attracted a great deal of media attention. Since arriving at Heritage Village, many individuals and organizations have contributed to the restoration of this grand and elegant house to its original Victorian appearance.

A Starr is Born

The earliest permanent settlers in the Clearwater area arrived after the end of the Second Seminole War. They came to the region to obtain lands available through the Armed Occupation Act of 1842. Passed on August 4, the Congressional measure provided 160-acre homesteads along peninsular Florida to those who agreed to bear arms, clear and cultivate at least five acres of land, and live in a home on the land for at least five years. During a one-year window of opportunity, this act opened lands along the Florida peninsula south of Gainesville and Palatka to individuals over the age of eighteen and heads of household willing to defend their property from Indian incursions and provide a buffer between the Seminoles on the lower end of the peninsula and plantations and settlements to the north. Although this provision did not cover lands within close
proximity to military outposts, the closing of Fort Harrison prior to 1842 allowed applicants to select lands along the central Pinellas Peninsula.

James Stevens made the first land claim in the area of present-day Clearwater. Considered “the father of Clearwater” by many sources, Stevens settled on a parcel along the waterfront between Drew and Jeffords, an area encompassing the former fort site, the Harbor Oaks subdivision, and part of downtown Clearwater. Stevens later encouraged John S. Taylor, Sr., to move from the Brooksville area and acquire lands in central Pinellas. Stevens sold part of his homestead to Taylor on 26 March 1850. David B. Turner came to the area in 1854 and—along with Robert J. Whitehurst—acquired the Taylor tract on 25 March 1858. By 1859, Turner operated a remote post office on part of this land. After the Civil War, the Turner family opened a small mercantile outpost along the harbor. The settlement, then known as “Clear Water Harbor,” remained a quiet outpost until after the arrival of the Orange Belt Railway in early 1888. At that time, approximately eighteen families lived in the area.

David Nevins Starr purchased land at the original site of Seven Gables in 1896. Although born in Illinois, David came from a family with connections to antebellum Florida. His father, Melancthon Starr, a native of Albany, New York, entered the world on 14 April 1816. The elder Starr lived in Albany with his parents—Chandler Starr and Hannah Smith—and attended public schools in that city. By the early 1830s, Melancthon moved to Manhattan. For awhile, he worked as a hatter and lived with his brother. In December 1839, Melancthon married Lucretia Mary Nevins, a native of Norwich, Connecticut, born on 26 June 1817. They exchanged vows in New York City, probably at a time when Melancthon worked as a clerk in a wholesale dry goods store. Lucretia gave birth to their oldest child, Henry Nevins Starr, in New York City on 12 August 1840. Shortly thereafter, Melancthon became a broker and merchant who handled cotton transactions between southern farmsteads and northern merchants. His work brought him, Lucretia, and their infant son to Tallahassee in the early 1840s. While in Tallahassee, Lucretia gave birth to two daughters, Florida Lucretia (born 3 August 1842, 1

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a day before Congress passed the Armed Occupation Act) and Elizabeth Smith (born 5 January 1846). Despite the profits he earned from this work, family histories claimed that Melancthon despised the institution of slavery. In the late 1840s, he decided to leave Tallahassee and return to New York City, where he worked as a cashier in a Wall Street bank. In 1850, the family headed from New York to the Midwest. According to one account, as soon as the family came over the ridge and saw the small settlement on the Rock River, Lucretia became captivated by the beautiful village of Rockford, Illinois. The Starrs decided to stay in Rockford, the county seat of Winnebago County and the birthplace of their youngest three children: Chandler (born 29 April 1851), David Nevins (born 9 October 1853), and Lucretia (born 20 April 1857). They had settled in Rockford by the time census agents visited their home on 20 December 1850.²

As the Starr family grew in the community, the town of Rockford transformed into a city. During the early 1850s, Melancthon ran a dry goods market at the center of town. He soon formed a banking partnership with Thomas D. Robertson known as Robertson and Starr, a firm that later became Winnebago National Bank. He joined the local Unitarian church, one of two in Illinois at the time, and his strong feelings against chattel slavery led him to support the Republican Party. The Galena and Chicago Union Railroad arrived at Rockford in 1852. In that same year, the city received its charter. By the mid-1850s, a New York newspaper had dubbed the community “Forest City.” Though Melancthon enjoyed great success in business, the spring of 1857 brought him both joy and sorrow. On April 20, he and Lucretia celebrated the birth of their youngest child and her namesake, Lucretia Starr. Six days later, Melancthon’s wife passed away. During the late 1850s, Melancthon maintained his business enterprises and raised his children. Ellen Marilla Townsend, a young schoolteacher from New England, arrived in Rockford by 1859. Melancthon fell in love with Ellen, and they exchanged vows on 5 August 1861 in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. Ellen raised the younger children and joined her husband in supporting the prohibitionist movement by forming a local chapter of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union. Before his death in November 1885,

Melancthon served as vice president of the Winnebago National Bank, brought speakers to appear at Rockford’s Lyceum programs, and helped to fund and establish the Rockford Public Library in 1872.  

The Starr children contributed to the development of Rockford during that city’s early years. Henry Nevins Starr, the eldest child, attended Rockford schools and followed his father’s footsteps by operating dry goods stores in Winnebago County. According to family records, he opened Andrews & Starr Dry Good in or about 1858. On 17 July 1861, he married Emma Stewart. Emma gave birth to two daughters, Laura and Mabel, during the 1860s. For awhile, Henry ran a small mercantile at the Holland House, a famous hotel in Rockford. Between 1869 and 1882, he served as proprietor of the Holland House. Census records from 1870 place the value of Henry Starr’s personal estate at $13,000 and note that he, Emma, and their daughters shared their residence with Julia Stewart, a New York native who worked as a clerk in his dry goods store. Two years after Emma died in 1882, Henry married Caroline “Carrie” Humphrey. Henry had two children during his second marriage, Carroll H. and Lois S. Starr. After leaving the Holland House, Henry worked as a bookkeeper at a manufacturing company, a treasurer at the John P. Manny Mower Company, and secretary of the Rockford Cemetery Association. As Rockford’s mayor beginning in 1891, he became the first elected official to appoint women to the school and library boards of the city. Henry passed away in Rockford on 31 December 1921.  

Sisters Florida and Elizabeth—both natives of Tallahassee—also spent the bulk of their adult lives in Rockford. Family records indicate that Florida married Addison Brown, Jr., in the early 1860s. A few years later, she exchanged vows with John Pels Manny, a widower whose first wife, Eunice Hicks Manny, had passed away in 1867. In addition to the five children he had with Eunice, John Pels and Florida Manny celebrated the arrival of four children between 1869 and 1879: Mary E., John Starr, Henry H., and Virginia Manny. John’s family played an important role in developing agricultural machinery: Pels Manny invented a reaper by the 1840s and received a patent in 1849. He

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and his son, John H. Manny, created a horse-drawn reaper that reduced the time required to gather and stack wheat. In 1852, their reaper won a “gold medal of achievement” in New York; by 1853 the Mannys decided to move their enterprise to the booming agricultural heartland and selected Rockford for the company’s headquarters. John Pels Manny, John’s cousin and Florida’s future husband, had also joined the operation by 1853. One year later, J. H. Manny and Company began to attract notable financiers, including Ralph Emerson (a cousin of Ralph Waldo Emerson). The Mannys produced approximately 1,100 reapers and mowers in 1854, drawing the attention of Cyrus H. McCormick, a notable reaper maker from Chicago who held a similar patent. Soon, McCormick decided to sue John H. Manny’s company for infringing on the patent for his McCormick harvesting machine. Notable members of Manny’s defense team included Abraham Lincoln and Edwin M. Stanton, who later served as Lincoln’s Secretary of War. By the 1870 census, John P. Manny listed real estate valued at $30,000 and a personal estate in excess of $210,000.5

Elizabeth Starr, Florida’s younger sister, tied the knot with Charles Wetherbee Brown in Rockford on 20 August 1867. His father was Addison Brown, Sr., meaning that Florida’s first husband (Addison Brown, Jr.) was the brother of Elizabeth’s husband (Charles W. Brown). Thus, the two Starr sisters married two brothers in the Brown family. Similar to members of the Starr family, C. W. Brown operated a dry goods store in Rockford. By the 1870 census, Charles and Elizabeth Brown had celebrated the arrival of two children, Elizabeth and Melancthon Starr Brown, and shared their homestead valued at $5,000 with Kate Downey, a family servant who originally came from Ireland.6

David and Chandler Starr became baseball pioneers while young Lucretia grew into a teacher and supporter of the arts. Many young men gathered to play cricket in Rockford during the city’s early years. By 1865, an insurance agent named John Lewis had moved from Cincinnati to Rockford, and brought along a book of baseball rules. With assistance from older brother Henry, David and Chandler decided to create a

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4 Census records available at Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; Kearney, House on the Hill, 3-5.
baseball to Lewis’s specifications by getting an old shoe sole for the core, covering it with yarn, and using an orange peel as a model for the ball’s cover. The Starr brothers helped to bring together the Forest City Baseball Club in Rockford, a notable team during the early years of professional baseball. Albert Goodwill Spalding, a member of this team, went on to pitch for the Boston Red Stockings of the National Association and the Chicago White Stockings of the National League during the 1870s, where he compiled an amazing win-loss pitching record of 253-65. Spalding, an associate of the Starrs, later founded the company that manufactures sports balls of many kinds to this day. Meanwhile, Lucretia spent much of the 1860s attending local schools. By the early 1880s, she had joined the faculty of Rockford Female Seminary (renamed Rockford College in 1892). She joined the Church of the Christian Union, the local woman’s club, and other civic organizations. She also offered private music lessons. Chandler married Clara Blanche Ellis on 1 January 1874; Lucretia, the youngest sibling, remained single her entire life.7

David Starr, the fifth of Melancthon’s six children, became the first family member to acquire substantial landholdings in Florida. As a young man, David courted Mary Palmer Robinson, the daughter of Thomas Duncan and Elizabeth Ann Taylor Robertson. The 1870 census places the Robertson, Starr, and Manny families as neighbors along the same street. Each family also had two servants living with them. A native of Scotland, Thomas D. Robinson came to the United States in the mid-1830s. Shortly after his arrival, he settled in Rockford, studied and briefly practiced law, and later worked as a banker and a real estate speculator. His efforts helped secure an extension of the Galena and Chicago Union Railroad into Rockford. One of the city’s largest landowners during the 1800s, the Robertson family became prominent in the city’s expanding business enterprises. By 1870, Thomas Robinson listed his profession as attorney at law, his family’s real estate carried a value of $147,000, and his personal estate exceeded $50,000. Sixteen year-old David and fourteen year-old Mary—a native of Rockford and Thomas’s youngest child—certainly spent a great amount of time together during this period. Nine years later, Mary exchanged vows with David Nevins

6 Census records available at Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo.
Starr on 30 December 1879. By this time, Starr has worked in the store of his brother-in-law, C. W. Brown. The 1880 census even notes that the Starrs shared their home with a sixteen year-old servant named Mary Horley. Starr engaged in other commercial activities—including manufacturing—by the early 1880s; he also traveled to Pinellas Peninsula during this time.  

Starr Sightings and an Opulent House on the Bluffs

An early edition of the West Hillsborough Times noted that David Starr purchased land on the Pinellas Peninsula as early as the spring of 1886. Although he did not acquire the Seven Gables property until 1896—ten years later—Starr came to the small settlement of Clear Water Harbor two years before the Orange Belt Railway arrived with C. W. Brown. The following account appeared in the 1 April 1886 edition of the newspaper:

(T)he winter just past found Mr. Brown, with quite a crowd of relatives and friends, citizens pro tem. of our town. They leased the ‘Orange Bluff,’ and occupied it as a home for some months. Among the relatives of his, was a Mr. David N. Starr, a brother-in-law of Mr. Brown, and it was to this gentleman that the last sale, of one lot, was made.  

The article then inferred that Brown and Starr had visited Florida on earlier occasions:

Taking into consideration the fact that, these parties are not strangers to our State, and made these purchases just on the eve of their departure, and after they had spent sufficient time in Clear Water to get their eyes fully open, and the influence they wield at home, we are constrained to believe that another wedge has been entered, that will soon open up things on our side of the county.  

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9 West Hillsborough Times, 1 April 1886.
10 Ibid.
Starr, Brown, and other unnamed family members most certainly arrived by steamship. They stayed in the region during the winter months, and returned to Illinois as spring thawed the Rock River. Without a direct rail connection to Clear Water at that time, the correspondent believed that “the lack of speedy and frequent communications with the balance of the world” hindered settlement. Nevertheless, the article mentioned “the day is close at hand” for the arrival of the railroad, because of the resources that will follow “whenever such individuals can be induced to settle near our door.”

Although the Starrs visited the area by the mid-1880s, they continued to call Rockford their permanent home. The Starrs welcomed the arrival of two children, Virginia and Clinton Starr. Meanwhile, David worked in various business ventures during the 1880s and 1890s. Florida’s mild winter climate may have attracted Starr to spend time in Florida: According to research conducted by a member of the Rockford Historical Society, David Starr spent part of 1900 at the city’s tuberculosis sanitarium. Mary Starr’s father, Thomas Duncan Robertson, passed away on 4 February 1902. Robertson’s last will, written in September 1897, named three major beneficiaries: wife Elizabeth, son William T., and daughter Mary P. Starr. Rockford city directories between 1903 and 1920 place the Starrs in that community, but do not list any occupation. The size of Mary’s inheritance may have provided them with more than enough funds to allow David to retire and continue his involvement in Florida real estate. Early maps of Clearwater subdivisions often describe the area north of Harbor Oaks (between Druid, Fort Harrison, and Turner) as the “Starr and S. Avery” development.

The House of Seven Gables occupied a prominent location along the bluffs overlooking Clearwater Bay. The home sat on a large plot of land in the Markley’s Shore area, due west of the present-day Pinellas County courthouse. This asymmetrical structure included wings and gables in many directions, an impressive porch, and other features typical of Queen Anne homes from the late 1800s and early 1900s. First occupied in 1907, the House of Seven Gables served as the winter residence for the Starrs until 1917. As the Starrs enjoyed their retirement, they also spent a great deal of time

11 Ibid.
with a family member who moved to Florida and married an early resident of Tarpon Springs.

**Soaking Up the Sunshine with the King of Sponges**

Mabel Starr Englebretn—a daughter of Henry Starr and niece of David Starr—married John King Cheyney in Rockford on 17 July 1897. Mabel had originally exchanged vows with a Norwegian immigrant who lived in Illinois, probably in the late 1880s or by 1890. She had a daughter, Alma, from this first marriage. Her union with Cheyney marked her second marriage. Cheyney, an 1858 native of Philadelphia, worked in Pennsylvania banks from the age of sixteen. By 1889, he became a paymaster along the Altoona stretch of the Pennsylvania Railway. His father, Waldron Cheyney, had cultivated a partnership with Hamilton Disston and acquired large tracts of land in Pasco and western Hillsborough counties. John Cheyney decided to move to Florida to look over his father’s land holdings in 1889. Shortly after settling in Tarpon Springs, he expressed an interest in the phosphate business but soon thereafter took notice of the local sponge industry along the Gulf of Mexico and the Anclote River. At that time, nearly all spongers along the Florida coast based their operations out of Key West. By 1891, John K. Cheyney had established the Anclote and Rock Island Sponge Company. Cheyney soon brought associates from Key West, Apalachicola, Philadelphia, and other areas; he purchased land on Bailey’s Bluff, an area where divers brought their sponge harvests to cure, and entered into partnerships with other early families. H. F. Pent constructed a launch for Cheyney’s boats, including the *Asa Lowe* (named after a member of the pioneer Lowe family in Anona) and the *Silver Spray*. Soon, many of the early Tarpon residents—including members of the Fernald, Meres, Noblit, and Pinder families—engaged directly or indirectly in the sponge diving industry. Cheyney helped to transform Tarpon Springs into the center of Florida’s sponge industry. By the early 1900s, a formal sponge exchange existed; Cheyney hired John Cocoris, a Greek immigrant who encouraged others to move from Greece and the Aegean Islands to Tarpon.¹³

Mabel became a close companion with John Cheyney during his many business transactions. After selling his interests in the sponge business, John Cheyney established a large sawmill business, produced turpentine for two decades, and continued to oversee operations of the Lake Butler Villa Company, a firm that held approximately 30,000 acres along the Pinellas Peninsula in the early 1900s. Mabel and John also started a family: In early 1898, they celebrated the arrival of a daughter, Starr Cheyney. Mabel’s daughter from her first marriage, Alma, also continued to live with the Cheyneys at least through the spring of 1910. The Cheyney’s house was originally one of the small “cottages” along present-day Pinellas Avenue near Orange Street, part of the site of a large tourist hotel known as The Tarpon. After that hotel burned down, Cheyney bought one of the cottages, had it moved to West Tarpon Avenue, and built additional rooms. When the census taker arrived at the Cheyney home on 16 April 1910, Henry Starr—Mabel’s seventy year-old father—also stayed at the residence, probably as a winter visitor. Henry later returned to Rockford.14

The Starrs and Cheyneys spent a great deal of time at Seven Gables during the winter months. With the Cheyneys living in the area throughout the year, they probably checked on the house during their frequent visits and business trips to Clearwater. By early 1910, fifty-six year old David and fifty-three year-old Mary hired a live-in cook, Fanny Williams. An African-American and native of Alabama, the forty-two year old Williams claimed to have eleven children at the time of the census. It remains unclear where Fanny Williams lived on the property, whether she occupied the structure when the Starrs returned to Illinois, if any other members of her family lived or worked at the house, and how long she remained on the premises. A June 1913 Sanborn fire insurance map shows properties along Bay Avenue, but fails to include the western portion of the Starrs’s property, Seven Gables, or the bluff. It does, however, indicate the presence of a small, one story structure close to the road with the label “servts”; this tiny building,

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14 Straub, History of Pinellas County, 229; Census records available at Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; Tarpon Springs Leader, 21 May 1954. Before John and Mabel Cheyney passed away, their daughters—Starr Cheyney Kibbee and Alma Cheyney Wimsatt—regularly visited the house. In 1946, Starr Kibbee sold her parents’ house to David Black, who used the ten-room structure as a funeral home. The home, on a large lot of 110 by 170 feet, became the home of the George Washington Chapter 16, Order of Ahepa, in early 1954.
probably comparable in size to the restored Boyer Cottage, may have served as Williams’s residence. According to information compiled during the early years of Heritage Village, a longtime resident of Clearwater named Taver Bayley vividly remembered stopping at the house in 1912 after he returned from prep school because he “was courting Starr’s daughter at the time.” In reality, their daughter Virginia—who often went by her mother’s name “Mary”—had exchanged vows with James Edwin Armstrong in 1910. Thus, Bayley most likely spent time with Starr Cheyney, the daughter of John and Mabel, who would have been a teenager in 1912.\(^{15}\)

Though the Starrs sold the House of Seven Gables on 3 April 1917, they continued to visit the Pinellas Peninsula. For example, the 20 April 1918 \textit{Tarpon Springs Evening Leader} announced that “Mr. and Mrs. David Starr, of Rockford, Ill., arrived last night to be the guests for a time of Mr. John K. Cheyney. They will be welcomed by a host of friends here.” After settling in, the Starrs and John Cheyney “motored” by automobile to Clearwater and other areas to attend to business. Later that year, both the Starrs and Cheyneys watched as twenty year old Starr Cheyney briefly entered non-combat military service at the end of the First World War. She served in the United States Navy as a “landsman” at the Navy Yard in Washington, D.C. After the war ended, Starr Cheyney went on inactive duty on 30 January 1919 and received her discharge papers on 28 October 1920 with the rank of “Yeoman 3 Class Female.” The Cheyneys looked forward to their daughter’s return. In March 1921, the office of the \textit{Clearwater Sun} “was brightened” when Starr Cheyney telephoned them to say she had just celebrated her birthday and “was old enough to vote.” The following month, Starr traveled with Clearwater with her parents to watch the screening of the 1920 film “Humoresque” at the recently opened Capitol Theatre. About that time, John Cheyney’s mill located three miles east of Tarpon burned to the ground, causing him a loss of over $25,000. By the end of June 1921, Cheyney devoted his efforts developing the lands of the Lake Butler Villa Company.\(^{16}\)


\(^{16}\) “Seven Gables Actual Ownership Information,” compiled on 22 by William R. and Elizabeth H. Heath; \textit{Tarpon Springs Evening Leader}, 20 April 1918, 29 April 1918; \textit{Tarpon Springs Leader}, 28 March 1921, 13
By 1920, the Starrs had returned to Rockford. When census enumerators arrived on January 12, they found David and Mary Starr living next door to their daughter, Virginia (appearing on the census rolls at “Mary”), husband James Edwin Armstrong, and children Jack M. (age twelve) and Mary E. (age seven). The Armstrongs shared their home with Rose Wersa, a widowed servant from Germany. Meanwhile, Clinton Starr—David and Mary’s son—lived in Madison, Arkansas, with his wife, Evelyn, and their infant daughter, Edith. In 1920 and 1921, the elder Starrs decided to spend their winter months in Los Angeles. Mary did not feel very well in the autumn of 1921. After the Starrs arrived in California, Mary passed away on November 5. David returned her body for burial at the family lot in Rockford’s Greenwood Cemetery.17

David N. Starr returned to Tarpon Springs and purchased property there in the closing years of his life. As he reached his late sixties, in 1922 or 1923, Starr married Leadocia R. Hyans, a native of Louisiana twenty-eight years younger than him. By the mid-1920s, Starr and his new wife lived in Hollywood, California, during the summers, and spent some of their winters (as in 1926-1927) in Orlando, Florida. By April 1927, Starr decided to purchase land in Tarpon Springs and have his final retirement home built. While staying at the Cheyney’s home during a visit from Orlando, the Starrs saw a lot on the corner of Banana and Lemon streets in Tarpon that interested them. Mabel and Uncle David looked up the owner, asked him his price, and handed over a check. In a thirty-six hour period culminating on April 13, Starr acquired the land and contacted contractors Humphreys and Joy to build him a large cottage house costing about $10,000. David Starr enjoyed his new home, but his health started to deteriorate by the late 1920s. While driving with his wife on the afternoon of 28 April 1933, David quickly became ill and they promptly returned to their home at 122 Banana Street. By four o’clock, Starr had passed away. By April 27, members of the funeral party took a train from Tarpon to Starr’s final resting place, a cemetery in his second wife’s hometown of Baton Rouge.18

April 1921, 29 June 1921; “Cheyney, Starr,” available from World War I Service Cards online at the Florida State Archives; available at: http://floridamemory.com/Collections/WWI/index.cfm.
17 Census records available at Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; Lundy to Sheahan, 3 April 2000.
18 Tarpon Springs Leader, 13 April 1927, 28 April 1933; St. Petersburg Times, 26 April 1933. Files at Heritage Village include a certified copy of David N. Starr’s death certificate.
Cornwells, Chestnuts, Binder Boys, and Boarders

The House of Seven Gables served as a private residence, rooming house, and social club during the next twenty-seven years. Joseph B. Carse acquired the property from the Starrs on 3 April 1917. A native of New York, Carse probably came to Pinellas County to take advantage of the frenzied real estate speculation that resumed after the end of World War I. Substantial improvements to roadways connecting towns, regular train service, and other enhancements in transportation brought newcomers to the region after Armistice Day. Carse occupied Seven Gables for barely two years before selling the homestead to Annie D. Kelley on 16 April 1919. Carse then purchased a dwelling along First Avenue North in St. Petersburg. By the spring of 1920, the unmarried Carse worked as a real estate broker in the Sunshine City. He also shared his St. Petersburg home with a number of lodgers, although it remains unclear whether he took in boarders at Seven Gables. The six tenants at his new home included another real estate broker, a dressmaker, and a mechanic. Meanwhile, sometime in or about July 1920 Kelley allowed the new pastor of a local church to live in the House of Seven Gables for approximately three years while architects designed a new rectory.19

Annie Kelley’s generosity benefited Arthur Temple Cornwell, Rector of the Church of the Ascension. A native of Bayonne, New Jersey, born 27 October 1873, Arthur moved to Tarpon Springs as an eleven year old child in 1884. The following year, his parents—Arthur Temple, Sr., and Catherine DeCoudress Cornwell—decided to settle in Bradenton, then known as Braidentown. Arthur’s father began his duties as a Manatee County judge, while the Cornwell family played an important role in establishing an Episcopalian church on land donated by Captain John Fogarty at Fogartyville along the Manatee River. Arthur’s father served as superintendent of the Sunday school and as a lay reader on those Sundays when ministers could not travel to the small church. In a family history of Fogartyville, Ollie Z. Forgarty referred to the elder Cornwell as “a consecrated gentleman, an efficient leader (who) . . . served unstintingly until a full-time rector could be supported by the congregation.” By 1889, the congregation constructed Christ Episcopal Church on Sarasota Avenue, the first formal church for Episcopalians in

Manatee County. Catherine Cornwell provided the window over the altar at this imposing building on the frontier. In 1887, Judge A. T. Cornwell and members of the Fogarty family constructed Wilhelmsen Academy, one of the earliest schools in Manatee County. The Judge also conducted many weddings of pioneer families living along the Manatee River during the late 1800s, while his wife started a social group known as the Elysian Club for women who enjoyed cards and other gatherings. In 1891, the elder Cornwell acquired the *Manatee River Journal*, a weekly with a circulation of 300. A few years later, he purchased land on lower Anna Maria Island and oversaw the construction of cottages. By May 1903, Judge Cornwell became the first mayor of the newly-incorporated to City of Braidentown. He also served on the Manatee County Commission and the Board of Public Instruction.  

The younger Cornwell followed in his father’s business and religious footsteps. After graduating from the East Florida Seminary, now the University of Florida, Arthur worked as editor and general manager of the *Manatee River Journal*. He married Holly Murphy, daughter of a cattle rancher, in 1898. They had three daughters: Ellene Stanley, Emma, and Elizabeth. Arthur spent approximately nineteen years in the newspaper business and other commercial pursuits before beginning his training for the Episcopal ministry with a priest who individually tutored him. After his ordination in 1910, Arthur and his family served in several churches. By 1920, Cornwell came to Clearwater from a parish in Bolivar, Tennessee.

The Cornwells lived in the House of Seven Gables for nearly three years. They witnessed the wrath of the October 1921 hurricane that damaged structures throughout Pinellas County, though left their imposing house on the bluff untouched with only a few broken tree branches on the property. Soon after his arrival, Rev. Cornwell established two important goals for his tenure at Ascension: to obtain parish status for the church and to oversee the construction of a new house of worship. He realized his first goal by 30 March 1922, when the area’s Episcopal bishop signaled his approval of a new parish. He then sought to replace the small wooden building erected in 1887 at the former Haven.

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Street and Fort Harrison. In addition to his duties as rector, Cornwell put his previous business experience to work as chair of the building committee. He spent much of his time at Seven Gables planning for the new church and participating in community activities. Services began in the white stone Gothic structure in 1925. In addition to his duties at the church, Rev. Cornwell offered daily chapel programs for local students and taught science and history at South Ward when that campus served as Clearwater’s high school. After retiring from his duties as rector in 1937, the church named him Rector Emeritus. He remained in Clearwater and was buried in Clearwater cemetery after his death in 1955.22

The Seven Gables property offered ample space for picnics and other family activities. One daughter, Bradenton native Ellene Stanley, remembered frequent visits to the house when returning from her classes at the Florida State College for Women (now Florida State University) at Tallahassee. In a 1984 interview, she recalled her family’s time at the thirteen-room home in the 1920s:

I’d come home from FSU on holidays and in the summertime. Seven Gables was a lovely place to live and a nice place for young people to gather. I was one of three girls and we brought our dates there. We had picnics and card parties and enjoyed it very much. It was a very nice time in my life. . . . We had a dock out there and the bay was so clean and clear we’d swim off the dock. We had a boat we went fishing in. The fish and scallops and clams were so good.23

Stanley, a graduate of the high school at nearby South Ward, returned to the area after graduating from the State College for Women. As her father completed plans for building the new church, she exchanged vows in 1924 with John Chestnut, Sr., an entrepreneur who came to the region as an insurance broker. While John worked at Guarantee Abstract and Trust Company’s offices in Clearwater, she began her teaching career at Clearwater’s North Ward and South Ward schools. The Chestnuts had three children, including John Chestnut, Jr., a 1925 native who later served as a county commissioner.

21 Straub, History of Pinellas County, 251; Korosy, The First Hundred Years, 11-13.
22 Ibid., Clearwater Sun, 11 May 1984.
23 Clearwater Sun, 11 May 1984.
By 1984, Ellene Stanley Cornwell Chestnut lived in Oak Bluffs, a retirement complex in downtown Clearwater located on the former site of Seven Gables.\(^{24}\)

The House of Seven Gables changed hands twice in 1925. On April 29, Annie Kelley sold the property to Edith C. Moore. By this time, Rev. Cornwell had moved into the new rectory at the Episcopal Church of the Ascension. Seven months after acquiring Seven Gables, Moore decided to sell it to Chester B. and Lucy S. Masslich on December 17. During much of the next eighteen years, the Masslichs rented the property. Physical changes to the property occurred during this period: A comparison of drawings from Sanborn fire insurance maps indicates that later owners of the residence expanded the original home sometime between 1923 and 1929. Details about this expansion remain unclear, in part because the recessed location of the home on the property did not allow full access to Seven Gables for an accurate rendition of the structure. For example, as late as the 1949 revision, the waterfront side of Seven Gables—an addition probably built in late 1910s or early 1920s—appeared one-story in height even though the second story had been added by that time. Meanwhile, by 1923 the former servant’s home had disappeared, though two small structures, possibly outhouses, appeared on the southern property line halfway between Bay Avenue and the Seven Gables. By April 1929, these small buildings disappeared and a dwelling with an assigned address of 418½ Bay Avenue and an adjacent outbuilding appeared at the northern boundary. According to 1949 revisions of the Sanborn maps, these structures remained on the property without substantial modifications through the end of the 1940s.\(^{25}\)

The Masslichs rented the building to local “binder boys” during the height of the real estate boom in the mid-1920s. Binder boys assisted realtors by searching for prospective buyers, accepting a binder (usually a deposit of about $1,000) as a down payment on property, and passing the transaction along to an agent before the end of the binder’s financing period (usually one month, but sometimes longer). Often college-age and full of enthusiasm, their marketing efforts added fuel to the engine driving Florida’s real estate frenzy in the Tampa Bay area and southeastern Florida. In early research on

\(^{24}\) Ibid.; Straub, *History of Pinellas County*, 251.

the House of Seven Gables, Albert P. Rogers mentioned that he remembered the many meetings of binder boys during the mid-1920s. Rogers, who worked as a real estate broker in Clearwater for nearly fifty years, said that binder boys convened at Seven Gables for informal gatherings, card games, dinners, and other activities. Along with “bird dogs,” the male and female “couples” that also pounded the pavement in search of property purchasers, the binder boys encouraged many visitors to the area to acquire lands or homesteads along the Pinellas Peninsula. During their meetings at the beautiful home on the bluff, young and adventurous marketers certainly compared notes, practiced selling techniques, and tracked transactions. As the land boom sputtered during the late 1920s, many binder boys left the area in search of other work. Gatherings at Seven Gables probably ended long before the stock market crash of October 1929 accelerated America’s economic depression.26

By the 1930s, proprietors rented rooms at the structure to tenants. Known as the “Seven Gables Inn” and later listed in city directories as “Seven Gables, furnished rooms,” the one-time retirement home of the Starr family became a boarding house with a number of proprietors. By 1929 and until 1931, Keith A. and Myrtice P. Nisbet leased the building from the Masslichs and operated Seven Gables as a lodge during tourist seasons. In 1931, the Guzman family moved onto the property and opened a tea room and rooming house. Charles V. Guzman, a native of Louisiana, had married a Floridian named Sally. By the time they moved into the house, Charles was in his mid-sixties and Sally approached her sixtieth birthday. At least three children lived with them in the early 1930s: a daughter named Cary Rebecca, and two teenage sons, Liddle H. and Gardner. The family had previously lived in Louisiana, and moved into a dwelling on Osceola in Clearwater by the spring of 1930. At that time, Charles worked as an engineer for a pile-driving company, Sally as a practical nurse, and Cary as a drug store cashier. When the Guzmans took control of Seven Gables, they featured outside dining along the exterior porches. Although the 1934 city directory lists no occupants for this property,


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genealogical research indicates that the Guzmans continued to live in Clearwater. Some family members occupy sites at the Clearwater Cemetery.⁷⁷

Members of the Reilly family occupied the house during the mid-1930s. Neil Reilly lived in Seven Gables as a ten year old child in 1935. At the time, his mother took in five paying guests at the rooming house. The Reilly family lived downstairs, with part of the current kitchen area partitioned into sleeping space for him. His parents slept in the side parlor, and the older children slept in a detached garage (possibly one of the two structures appearing on the 1929 and 1949 Sanborn maps). The Reilly children played along the bluff and along the circular drive in front of the house that had bamboo planted in the center. They also spent evenings perched on the gazebo near the bluff that overlooked Clearwater Bay. When their parents were away, Neil and his brother used to take a cushion that once sat on the window seat at the stair landing and slide down the stairs. However, they avoided these bumpy journeys if they sensed the presence of any adults. Neil remembered roasting peanuts and selling small bags of the goobers at the nearby county courthouse. During this time, the second floor had two bathrooms: the one presently in the building and another in the small room near the hall. Family members ascended the back stairs to get to the first bathroom; tenants used the other one. During the depths of the Great Depression, men often came to Seven Gables in search of work. While the family had no jobs to provide, Neil remembers his mother always finding some food for those in need.⁷⁸

The Wyllie and Reid families offered furnished rooms at Seven Gables between the late 1930s and 1944. Nellie C. Wyllie, a teacher at South Ward and widow of Alfred Wyllie, appeared in 1937 and 1939 directories as the occupant of Seven Gables. During the summer of 1938, Lee H. Reid arrived in Clearwater with his family and began his duties as a northern Pinellas County fuel agent for the Shell Oil Company. The Reids moved into the House of Seven Gables by the spring of 1939. For over five years, including most of the Second World War, the Reids lived in the house. In a 1977 interview, Reid remembered that he paid rent on the house to Helen Weber, a local

⁷⁷ See available issues of: R.L. Polk’s Clearwater (Pinellas County, Fla.) City Directory; Census records available at Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; Sanders, “Seven Gables” manuscript.
realtor who represented the Masslichs. He recalled that the owners lived in the Philadelphia area at the time. His daughter slept on a “full-size double bunk bed” in the present kitchen, and the family cooked their meals in the small foyer near the side porch. The family ate in the adjacent room, which also served for a time as the father’s bedroom and sat atop a novelty in much of Pinellas: a basement area with a coal furnace. The elevation on the bluff allowed owners to place a basement on the site, although the date of the basement’s construction remains uncertain. Reid operated a filling station at 1740 North Fort Harrison by 1941, but tough financial times and wartime gasoline rationing during World War II forced the Reids to take in boarders in the two long and rectangular rooms on the second floor. He procured a sign that read, “Seven Gables Guest Rooms.” One tenant, Myrtle Williamson, rented the two small bedrooms above the living room for $8 per week, while the longer rooms went for $12 and $15 per week. Williamson, then a religious director at Clearwater’s First Presbyterian Church, lived in Seven Gables for nearly four years, and often kept a small oil burning heater near the fireplace in one of her rooms. Although they rented the rooms, the Reids did not provide meals to any of their tenants, including Williamson. From 1939 to 1941, a stenographer named Clara L. Cole lived in the smaller dwelling on the northern portion of the property (418½ Bay Avenue). By the early 1940s, Reid sought to purchase Seven Gables, but could not afford the $25,000 price. The family moved from Seven Gables to another home in Clearwater when the Masslichs decided to sell the property during the spring of 1944.29

The Dietrichs and Hemericks

Charles Fredrick Dietrich purchased the House of Seven Gables on 12 September 1944. Unlike the Masslichs, who used the property for a source of income, the Dietrichs acquired Seven Gables as their retirement home. They may have accepted occasional boarders, however, since city directories issued during their ownership mention furnished rooms at Seven Gables. An Ohio native born in 1872, Dietrich and his wife—the former Clara Mae Bennett of Michigan—had at least two daughters, Edith (born 1902) and Grace (born 1905), both natives of Ohio. Records from the 1910 federal census placed

the family in Pulaski Township, Williams County, Ohio. At that time, Charles worked as a retail merchant of implements. The Dietrichs moved to Orlando circa 1925, where Charles owned a merchandise store, transacted real estate, raised chickens, cultivated citrus, and restored properties for use by winter visitors. He leased many of these places to friends from Ohio who visited for the winter tourist season. The daughters married: Edith to a member of the Comstock family and Grace to Joseph Robinson. During a visit to the area, the Dietrichs “fell in love with the house on the bay” as soon as they saw it. They acquired Seven Gables, sold their properties in Orlando, and performed some restoration work, including the placement of a new tin roof on the structure. The labor and stair climbing soon proved too much for the Dietrichs, especially as Charles approached his mid-70s. On 18 April 1951, the Dietrichs sold Seven Gables to John V. Neill and returned to Orlando to live close to their daughters. Neill held the property until 24 March 1953, when he sold it to a young Clearwater dentist.  

When Frederick A. and Virginia M. Hemerick acquired Seven Gables, the structure required rehabilitation. During a July 2003 oral history interview, family members recalled that the paint had chipped along the walls, porch banisters required repair, and the interior required substantial work due to the wear-and-tear caused by years of tenants. Electric lights dangled from unsightly cords, and trash inside the home and on the grounds when the Hemericks first acquired the home provided evidence that vagrants had occupied the structure at some point. The family painted the house’s exterior, and the dry wood absorbed quite a bit of paint. The children—Harriette, Judith, and David—helped their parents restore the house. During interior remodeling, Fred decided to replace the large bathtub with a shower. Instead of lugging the heavy tub down the stairs, he broke it into pieces and threw it out of the bathroom window. The Hemericks also added a bathroom on the lower floor. According to later interviews, the Hemericks made some improvements to the structure with materials from other early buildings. For example, doors leading to the informal parlor may have come from an early grove house owned by the Brown family near present-day Gulf-to-Bay and U.S. Highway 19. The

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30 Census records available at Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; Charles O. Comstock, Sr., grandson of Charles F. Dietrich to Donald Ivey, 29 May 1996, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; see available issues of: R.L. Polk’s Clearwater (Pinellas County, Fla.) City Directory.
family also installed some window air conditioners in the house that he purchased at the Seaboard Air Line depot, probably in the 1950s.  

The interview revealed many details about life for the Hemericks during the twenty-two years they owned the home. The family originally came to the area in the mid-1940s. Frederick had joined the Army and transferred from Michigan to Drew Army Air Field during World War II. During some of their years at Seven Gables, the family enjoyed the services of an African-American maid, Eva Pollock, who cooked and cleaned for the family five days per week. One of the Hemerick children later took a job at Morton Plant Hospital at the same time the maid’s daughter worked there. They often kept the fireplace vent closed to prevent birds from flying into the house through the chimney, although they did remember bats occasionally getting into Seven Gables. Outside of the home, the property included a cistern by the time Hemericks acquired it. The gazebo remained, and a slope of the bluff resembled a jungle with all of the wild plants and tiger lilies. The family maintained a dock on Clearwater Bay alongside the bluff, and had a boat moored to the dock for their use. Gatherings on the Fourth of July with hot dogs, hamburgers, and watermelon, as well as religious services by family and church members, took place on the rear of the property. A small Indian shell mound once sat in the front yard. One time, Frederick wanted to host a cocktail party, and called a representative from the Campbell family’s pavement company to bulldoze the mound. The children remembered seeing some bones along with the shells after the bulldozer left the scene.

By the late 1960s, the Hemerick parents grew tired of living in such a big house. Frederick and Virginia had purchased another house in or around Belleair and decided to move to their new home. By this time, their children had left for college and started working. Harriette enrolled in the University of Florida’s pharmacy program in 1956. Judy spent time working as a dental hygienist in New Orleans. David, the youngest of the three children, earned an undergraduate degree at Florida Southern College before studying dentistry at Emory University. Although city directories list the structure as “vacant” or having “no return” in 1969, 1971, and 1972, son David lived in Seven Gables

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31 Transcript of interview of F. David Hemerick and Barber Hemerick Campbell by Ellen Babb and Alicia Addeo, 18 July 2003, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo.
during part of that time. The family also called Seven Gables “the halfway house of dentists” because Frederick often rented the home to new dentists who had recently graduated and started their professional practice. For example, the family rented the home to Dale K. Christensen in 1973. Roy A. Workman III, a longtime family friend, lived in Seven Gables in 1975.\textsuperscript{33}

**A Barge Ride and a New Home**

The Hemericks decided to sell the House of Seven Gables during the spring of 1975. The attractive waterfront property attracted much interest, and the family sold the tract to Enterprise Building Corporation and the architectural firm of Williams and Walker. After the closing, Frederick Hemerick provided enough money for each of the children to buy a new car. Meanwhile, Don Williams and Dixie Walker finalized their plans for an adult congregate living facility on the site. Realizing the historical value of Seven Gables, Williams considered the structure a perfect fit for the newly planned Heritage Village under design in unincorporated Pinellas County near Largo. Williams had developed the initial site plan for the park as a member of the Pinellas County Historical Commission (PCHC). In early 1976, Williams and Walker agreed to donate the house to the Historical Commission. Park Director Kendrick Ford and PCHC Chair George Gramling met with Don Williams during the spring of 1976 to discuss the relocation of Seven Gables. The parties hoped to transport the house by July, but worried about a shortage of funds and the logistics of such a move.\textsuperscript{34}

The size of the structure called for an innovative plan. While moving companies frequently have to remove roofs or “cut” structures before taking them to their new sites, the size and architectural layout of Seven Gables made any such plan difficult or cost prohibitive. Also, the home’s location in downtown Clearwater would have required incredible effort to remove and relocate telephone and electrical wires, street lights, tree limbs, and other impediments between Bay Avenue and Walsingham Road. Given these obstacles, Williams and others involved with the project decided that Clearwater Bay,

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.; Records of the Pinellas County Historical Commission, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo, 16 June 1976.
rather than Bay Avenue, offered the best route. They developed a plan to lower the House of Seven Gables onto a barge, float the structure along the intracoastal waterway to a location south of the Indian Rocks Bridge, then transport the home along Walsingham to its new plot at the park. An article in the 9 August 1976 St. Petersburg Times hinted that Pinellas County commissioners needed to approve $17,500 to fund this move, with other parties covering the remainder of the $72,550 required for this plan. Roesch Housemovers coordinated the move. The site of the grand gabled home floating along the waterway attracted international media attention. By the early fall, the House of Seven Gables occupied its new site on the southwest corner of Heritage Village; the second structure placed at the new park, this large building sat next to its only neighbor at the time, the Plant-Sumner House.35

Workers and volunteers promptly began restoration efforts. Less than one month after Seven Gables arrived, volunteers from Carpenters Local 1275 in Clearwater and Local 531 in St. Petersburg offered their time to repair porch flooring, seal joints around windows, repair beams and stairs, and perform other duties that saved county coffers in excess of $7,000. Students at the county’s Vocational Technical Institute near High Point also did masonry work and other improvements with materials supplied by Pinellas County. Workers peeled layers of linoleum from the kitchen floor; the entire kitchen required extensive restoration. Park Director Ford remembered that most of the upstairs rooms “were in bad shape, except for the floor.” Termites had infested the building years earlier, entering behind the drywall. At the 21 September 1977 PCHC meeting, Ford reported that workers had completed nearly all of the major renovations on Seven Gables. He hoped to have the structure painted during the fall and acquire appropriate furniture for the building so that public tours could begin by January 1978. By the fall of 1978, groups associated with Heritage Village prepared for the ribbon-cutting ceremony on October 7, an event that included many dignitaries. In time, park staff and associated groups acquired furniture and household materials to represent the earliest years of occupation.36

This substantial project to preserve an elegant chapter of Clearwater’s early history required great collaboration and coordination. The Board of County Commissioners provided resources to bring an important structure to a newly opened park. Don Williams and Dixie Walker donated the building, and Williams lent his talents to designing an early layout for the open-air historical museum. Oak Bluffs, Ltd., the company that constructed a senior residence on the site, and Enterprise Builders contributed nearly $30,000 towards moving expenses. Harris Paint Company of Tampa donated paint and coordinated efforts through the Painting and Decorating Contractors Association to find members willing to volunteer their time to paint Seven Gables. General Telephone Company covered $11,750 worth of labor and resources, while Florida Power Corporation assured the temporary lifting and relocation of electrical lines along the route. In addition, the Junior League of Clearwater, vocational students, local carpenters, members of the recently formed Pinellas County Historical Society, and many private citizens offered their support of this project.37

37 “History of Seven Gables” manuscript; Charles W. Finegan, president, Harris Paint Company, to K. T. Ford, 17 September 1976; George F. Gramling, PCHC chair, to Finegan, 4 October 1976.
Sulphur Springs Depot: A Brief Introduction

History of Site before Structure was Built
- Located along railroad property adjacent to Temple Terrace Highway, now Busch Boulevard. Sulphur Springs was a northern suburb of Tampa at the time.
- Although built many years after the Orange Belt Railway arrived along the Pinellas peninsula in 1888, this station signifies the importance of the Orange Belt, as well as the contributions of Henry Flagler, Henry Plant, and other railroad operators during the late 1800s and early 1900s to settlement along Florida’s peninsula.
- Even with the arrival of the Orange Belt, people demanded direct rail service between Tampa and Tarpon Springs by September 1890.

Construction Information
- Only major structure at Heritage Village that originally was built outside the boundaries of present-day Pinellas County.
- Constructed at a time (early 1920s) when railroad transportation was an easy way for many visitors to come to peninsular Florida. The “good roads movement,” tin can tourist camps, and the creation of automobile clubs encouraged travel after World War I and fueled the land boom.
- Work on rails to Sulphur Springs extension began May 1908.
- Tampa and Gulf Rail Line opens by 1910.
- This 1155 square foot station reflected the architecture found in many early Florida depots. Rail travel reached its peak during the 1920s, the period that this station (identical to the Yulee station in design) received its heaviest traffic. Emphasis was placed on utilitarian purpose rather than aesthetic design.
- The station also reinforced social customs and traditions of the period, as noted by separate waiting rooms and facilities for white and “colored” patrons.

Significant Events/Activities at the Structure and in the Surrounding Community
- The arrival of the railroad increased migration to the Pinellas peninsula by connecting many small communities to one another and to the outside world.
- Before the railroad, land routes proved difficult to travel (especially during wet summers) and most delivery of goods and services occurred through water transport between Tampa, Cedar Keys, or Key West.
- Before 1912, a lack of adequate transportation funding from Hillsborough County officials emboldened many residents along the Pinellas peninsula (then known as Western Hillsborough) to seek independence. While this station served residents after Pinellas became a separate county, the earlier battles over “good roads” and better transportation continued to dominate headlines.

Moving of the Structure to Heritage Village
- Park administration worked with other governmental agencies and outside organizations—including the Tampa Bay chapter of the National Railway Historical Society—to acquire and move the Sulphur Springs Depot.
Sulphur Springs Train Depot and Caboose

Overview

The Sulphur Springs Train Depot and nearby caboose allow visitors to appreciate the importance of railroad travel along the Pinellas Peninsula between 1888 and the mid-twentieth century. Built circa 1924 by the Tampa and Gulf Coast Railroad, the depot served passengers in Sulphur Springs, a community north of Tampa near the Hillsborough River. The building occupied a site along Busch Boulevard (once known as Temple Terrace Highway). Although this building did not arrive in Pinellas County proper until the fall of 1978—long after its service for rail passengers had ended—the Sulphur Springs depot did play a role in the history of transportation along the Pinellas Peninsula. The building included dedicated telephone/telegraph relays to Pinellas cities and offered an important stopping point for trains from Tampa to Pinellas County at the Gulf Coast Junction that brought railroads to Clearwater and St. Petersburg. Various rail lines operated the depot during its five decades of service. The Seaboard Air Line Railroad acquired the Tampa and Gulf Coast Railroad, and in 1967 Seaboard merged with the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad to create the Seaboard Coast Line Railroad.

The Orange Belt Railway arrived along the Pinellas Peninsula in late 1887 and early 1888. Originating at Sanford, the rail line passed through Winter Garden, Oakland, San Antonio, and other destinations before reaching Tarpon Springs. After reaching the Pinellas Peninsula, the Orange Belt generally followed the path of the present-day Pinellas Trail through Sutherland (now Palm Harbor), Dunedin, Clear Water Harbor (now Clearwater), Largo, Seminole, and, finally, St. Petersburg. Financial troubles placed the Orange Belt in jeopardy by the mid-1890s, until Henry B. Plant’s enterprises took over the operation and renamed it the Sanford and St. Petersburg Railway Company. By the early 1900s, the route became part of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad. Service continued along most of the line until the early 1980s, when Amtrak decided to terminate regular passenger rail service along the Pinellas Peninsula. After a debate about the possible use of this corridor, members of the Pinellas County Commission transformed a substantial portion of the right-of-way into the Fred Marquis Pinellas County Trail, an
excellent example of a “rails-to-trails” program that promotes recreation in a crowded, urbanized setting.

The Sulphur Springs Depot serves as a symbol of the impact of railroads to the West Coast of Florida. Iron horses transformed the economic climate and accommodated a substantial influx of visitors, new residents, and commercial and industrial growth. The rail system helped improve business opportunities by providing a much more efficient means of transportation to get sponges, citrus, various agricultural crops, and other commodities to distant markets. Soon after the railroad system entered St. Petersburg, that community quickly surpassed Tarpon Springs in population and developed into a booming city. While St. Petersburg became the dominant city on the Pinellas Peninsula after the Orange Belt arrived, the story of the railroads must consider how these iron horses transformed the entire region, not just one city.

The adjacent caboose also commemorates the importance of rail travel to Pinellas County. Former curator Donald Ivey’s research on the origins of the word “caboose” notes that it originates from the Dutch word “cabuys” meaning “cook’s quarters.” A train’s caboose served as crew quarters on freight trains. Dutch immigrants often referred to a small cabin as a “cabuys,” and the word eventually became “Americanized” into train lingo. The Buffalo, Corning, and New York Railroad first used the word “caboose” to describe the “rolling headquarters of the train crew” in 1855. Usually the last car on a freight train and seldom used on passenger trains, the caboose allowed trains to travel four or more days at a time without stopping by offering a living quarters for the conductor, engineer, fireman, and front and rear brakemen.

Caboose interiors usually contained two sections. The first housed the stove and icebox, two beds, and folding tables. The other section included the commode, two beds, more folding tables, flare boxes, and a desk for the conductor. Pipes ran overhead and along the walls so that the workers had something to hold onto when the ride became rough. A cupola or perch above the living quarters permitted crew members to watch for trouble over the train cars. As noted by Ivey, the Akron, Canton, & Youngstown Railroad first installed a window in a caboose to see the side of the train in 1923. Many railroad lines have started to phase out the caboose, with the Florida East Coast Railroad one of the first to discontinue its use. As an alternative, large locomotive cabins now contain
electronic devices that allow crew members to contact the conductor or engineer if any problems arise.

Though cabooses may soon become a passing memory in railroad history, the 1967 model at Heritage Village preserves their legacy for the park’s many visitors, especially young children. This caboose, once part of the Seaboard Coast Line’s fleet, came to Heritage Village in May 1983. Members of the National Railway Historical Society (NRHS) completely refurbished the caboose, assisted with the relocation of the Sulphur Springs Depot, and developed many of the exhibits located in that building.

A Difficult Road to Travel

The earliest settlers to the Pinellas Peninsula in the 1800s arrived by foot, buggy, horse, or boat. During the mid-nineteenth century, many residents settled on lands close to the water so they could travel to nearby towns (such as Tampa), or more distant communities (especially Cedar Keys or Key West). Joshua Boyer and members of the Meares and Lowe families of the Anona area originally came from the Bahamas by way of Key West. Many families with sufficient funds took the railroad to Cedar Keys or another coastal port then completed their journey to the Pinellas Peninsula by boat. Others followed established roadways and trails in the more populated areas of northern Florida and the Panhandle, then took their chances along the primitive paths south of Ocala and along the interior of the St. Johns River. Though settlements such as Brooksville appeared on the landscape before the Civil War, overland travel to the Pinellas Peninsula remained a difficult and foreboding challenge.

The insular nature of early settlements and farmsteads hindered roadway development along the Pinellas Peninsula. Early paths and trails tended to “follow the line of lease resistance” as travelers went around obstacles, such as trees and bodies of water. As ruts in sandy roads inhibited traffic, Pinellas pioneers often “repaired” the roads by using a commodity in great abundance: pine straw and needles. Dunedin historian William Lovett Douglas claimed that whenever a tree fell along the road near that community, settlers often chose to create a detour rather than remove the tree. With few signs along the narrow paths, Douglas noted that overland travelers to the Pinellas Peninsula needed “a compass, rope, and block and tackle equipment.” Although Florida’s
Territorial Legislative Council had passed laws regarding road construction as early as 1822, such regulations had little effect during the early settlement of Punta Pinal. Homesteaders under the Armed Occupation Act of 1842 had little incentive to connect their acreage to distant overland paths—with the possible exception of routes to Tampa—when they could instead travel a shorter path of “least resistance” to Tampa Bay, the Gulf, or other navigable waterways. Smaller boats could carry commodities to Tampa, where farmers and entrepreneurs could have their wares transferred to steamboats or larger vessels.¹

Most transportation between coastal settlements occurred by boat until the early 1880s. For example, an 1882 map of the Dunedin area contains only two substantial roads leading from that settlement: A southeast path that headed towards Safety Harbor and Bay View, and another overland route that took travelers towards the Oldsmar area and ultimately Tampa. No direct and improved road existed between Dunedin and other nearby communities, including Clearwater, Seaside (present-day Crystal Beach), Yellow Bluff (Ozona), or Tarpon Springs. Indeed, the quickest “land” route from Dunedin to Clearwater required travelers to ford across Stevenson Creek. Those who made the journey learned how to predict high and low tides and planned their schedules accordingly.²

The Iron Horse Follows the Orange Belt to the Pinellas Peninsula

Many Florida historians, amateur and professional, have described the arrival of the railroad to state’s peninsula. Rail lines constructed before the Civil War served plantations in Middle Florida and the Panhandle, and did not connect with railroad networks in other states. Though many Southerners condemned their “carpetbagging” Northern brethren during Reconstruction (1865-1877), some soon embraced the infusion

² Davidson, *Dunedin thru the Years*, 38.
of capital that occurred in the South after the dispute of the Samuel Tilden-Rutherford B. Hayes presidential election in 1876 led to a compromise ending Reconstruction. By the early 1880s, Florida teetered on brink of insolvency. Other speculators took notice when Hamilton Disston, a Philadelphia entrepreneur, acquired four million acres of Florida lands for one million dollars. The ensuing frenzy brought new capital and resources to many areas of Florida, including Disston’s extensive holdings along the Pinellas Peninsula. These isolated lands required reliable transportation, and railroads soon appeared on the landscape. The Sunshine State’s golden age of railroad development came in the 1880s, long after the locomotives of the Union Pacific had established regular transcontinental trips. Most histories of Florida focus on the “big three” railroad networks: Henry Flagler’s Florida East Coast Railway that ultimately spanned the islands towards Key West, the Henry B. Plant system that transformed nearby Tampa, and—to a lesser extent—William D. Chipley’s Louisville and Nashville line on the Panhandle. Disston, Flagler, Plant, Chipley, and others soon crafted business agreements with local landowners and others that reshaped settlement patterns in Florida and marked an early land boom. Along the West Coast of Florida, many settlers monitored the growing battles between Disston and Plant, struggles that had the potential to keep the railroad from selecting one community instead of another, thus sealing their fate as a place “off the beaten track.”

Smaller and spur lines connected some communities not covered by the larger rail networks. For example, by 1885, workers constructed rail lines in the area near Lake Apopka in Orange County for a recently chartered narrow-gauge locomotive enterprise known as the Orange Belt Railway Company. An 1850 native of Russia who came to the United States by 1881, Pyotr Dementyev had moved to Longwood, Florida, in the early 1880s and operated a sawmill near the railroad. Dementyev, who had anglicized his name to Peter Demens after arriving in America, profited from supplying lumber for railroad ties and buildings. When railroad officials could not pay him for his ties, Demens and his three partners (Henry Sweetapple, Joseph Henschen, and A. M. Taylor) assumed control of the Orange Belt charter and continued construction towards the

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southern shores of Lake Apopka. Soon Demens and his associates met with James Speer, an Orange County judge who persuaded them to direct the railway through a small settlement along the southern shore of Lake Apopka known as Oakland in exchange for 200 acres of property along the lake. With the route completed to Oakland in late 1886, Demens soon moved his Orange Belt Investment Company to the small town. Numerous accounts note that Demens wanted the settlement named “St. Petersburg” in honor of the waterfront Russian city where he came of age, but Speer and others vetoed this idea and kept the settlement’s earlier name. Although presently a small town between Clermont and Winter Garden near the line separating the counties of Orange and Lake, during the late 1800s Oakland became “the industrial and social hub of Orange County . . . the center of Orange County’s social and economic life with people of wealth and fashion.”

Peter Demens soon brought the Orange Belt Railway to the Pinellas Peninsula. Hamilton Disston, with his extensive landholdings, found it impossible to negotiate with Henry Plant. Their public feud encouraged Disston to pay a visit to Demens in Oakland in early December 1886. Demens, who had built the Orange Belt barely one step ahead of his creditors, certainly welcomed an opportunity to extend the locomotive route towards a destination on the Gulf Coast. Seeing Demens and his narrow-gauge as the only possible railroad to connect to his Pinellas holdings, Disston pledged generous land grants and other incentives if Demens quickly brought his Orange Belt to Punta Pinal. Demens received an amended charter that allowed him to construct an extension of approximately 120 miles from Oakland to Mullet Key along a path to the southern Pinellas Peninsula. Demens also asked for additional land grants from trustees in Disston’s Florida Land and Improvement Company. Although that company denied his request on 18 December 1886, Demens remained determined to bring the Orange Belt to Pinellas, even if it meant bypassing Disston City.

Events during December 1886 and January 1887 forever altered the urbanization patterns of southern Pinellas. Despite his stalemate with Demens about the Russian’s request for additional land, Disston still believed the railroad would proceed to his planned megalopolis near present-day Gulfport. To Disston, any plans to extend the rail

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lines elsewhere amounted to an expensive bluff and futile folly. In search of another
terminal, Canadian native and Demens’s associate Henry Sweetapple met with “General”
John Constantine Williams, Sr., and his wife, Sarah, owners of substantial land parcels in
and around present-day downtown St. Petersburg. Sweetapple and fellow Canadian
native Sarah Williams held many conversations that ultimately took shape as a 24
January 1887 agreement between the Orange Belt Railway and John and Sarah Williams.

Between January 1887 and the early months of 1889, Demens oversaw the construction
of the Orange Belt extension that opened the Pinellas Peninsula to commercial rail travel.
Demens and his partners soon ran into financial difficulties, with early loans from H. O.
Armour and Company and a syndicate of Philadelphia companies keeping the project
alive. By late 1887, long before the railroad arrived on Williams’s property, the
settlement received its present name, St. Petersburg. Unable to meet the original deadline
of 31 December 1887 to complete construction of the railroad to a wharf along Tampa
Bay, Demens and his partners did get the railroad to the edge of the Williams tract by 30
April 1888. The first train arrived at the terminus on 8 June 1888. The Orange Belt had
taken a left turn and left Disston City in the dust.\(^6\)

Nearly all histories of St. Petersburg and Pinellas County describe the arrival of
the Orange Belt. While space does not permit an extended discussion of the
historiographic differences between authors, narratives generally fall into two categories.
Earlier accounts—usually proffered by amateurs or non-academicians—often described
the city and railroad’s “founding fathers” in hagiographical terms and added dramatic
elements. For example, some chamber-of-commerce histories regurgitated false tales
about the naming of the city: By coin toss or drawing of the straws, Demens and
Williams allegedly decided who would name the city after their “hometown.”

Researchers who have examined Demens’s prolific writings never uncovered proof of
such a contest, of course, but the legend persisted. Some accounts, noting that Orange
Belt interests had constructed the Detroit Hotel, claimed that the hotel was named in
Williams’s honor simply because he had lost the contest to name the settlement. Such
exaggerated statements fit well with the early boosterism of the Sunshine City, an image-


\(^6\) Ibid., 53-57, 60; Parry, *Full Steam Ahead!*, 20.
conscious community that one 1926 narrative claimed should be known as “The City that Advertising Built.” Later narratives offered a more balanced, accurate, and scholarly approach. Albert Parry’s *Full Steam Ahead!*, a biography of Peter Demens that discussed his Orange Belt enterprises, and Raymond Arsenault’s *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream* offer excellent and thorough discussions of Demens, Williams, and the arrival of the Orange Belt.

**Reconstructing Early Accounts of the Orange Belt’s Arrival**

Newspapers throughout Florida paid great attention to the construction of railroads along the peninsula. Unfortunately, bound or microfilmed copies of these papers, if they do exist, provide only scattered and incomplete coverage. Some publications have completely disappeared. For example, the *Oakland Sun* documented the progress of the Orange Belt as it approached the Pinellas Peninsula. However, a thorough search of union catalogues revealed no existing copies of this newspaper in libraries or archives. In this situation, researchers must consult other sources that help to reconstruct the documents that no longer exist. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, before the rise of widespread newspaper syndication or the proliferation of electronic broadcast media, newspapers liberally excerpted stories from one another. The *Weekly Floridian*, a newspaper published in Tallahassee during this period, attempted to offer statewide coverage of events by including vignettes from a number of local newspapers.

A glance at the *Weekly Floridian* between the fall of 1887 and the late spring of 1888 illustrates the excitement that the construction of the Orange Belt brought to many communities. In 20 October 1887, an account in the *Oakland Sun* reprinted in the *Weekly Floridian* announced “the most encouraging aspect” of work on the railroad tracks as crews approached the Pinellas Peninsula. The contract called for the placement of all iron along the proposed route by 1 January 1888. To meet this tight—and certainly unrealistic—deadline, railroad officials procured five schooners loaded with a total cargo of nearly 2,000 tons of iron and other building materials for a sixty-six mile extension of

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7 Frank Parker Stockbridge and John Holliday Perry, *Florida in the Making* (New York: de Bower Publishing, 1926), 262. See also the early chapters of Rita Slaght Gould, *Pioneer St. Petersburg, Life In*
the rail lines through Pasco into Tarpon Springs. A reporter noted that settlements along
the railway route, “especially the coast towns,” expressed excitement “over the prospect
of having a means of rapid and reliable transportation in time for the coming season.” By
October, workers graded the road bed between Odessa and Tarpon, three camps of tie
cutters prepared and placed the bedding ties at an astonishing rate of nearly two miles per
day, and other crews finished the 470 foot-long bridge across Salt Lake, about 1½ miles
east of Tarpon. Before the end of the year, residents of Tarpon Springs celebrated the
arrival of the railroad.8

Movement south along the Pinellas Peninsula, generally following the present-day
Pinellas Trail, continued during 1888. The Weekly Floridian quoted stories appearing in
the Oakland Sun to note that track placement south of Tarpon “in the direction of St.
Petersburg,” not Disston City, continued at a quick pace by early February 1888. By early
March, writers for the Sun enthusiastically proclaimed that the Orange Belt would
“doubtlessly reach” St. Petersburg by the end of the month. A more realistic assessment
appeared in an April 5 edition of the Floridian when a Sun columnist wrote that laborers
had placed tracks to a point about ten miles south of Tarpon, about six miles from Clear
Water Harbor and twenty-two miles from the St. Petersburg settlement. This April
column stated that the crews had enough iron to get the tracks to Clear Water, but left the
reader assuming that the Orange Belt authorities needed additional supplies to meet their
contractual obligations to bring the railroad to St. Petersburg.9

The Orange Belt became an important conduit long before the rails or trains
reached St. Petersburg. Passenger service began at the Clear Water station to destinations
north and northeast by late April 1888. A drought hit parts of central Florida during the
spring of 1888. The Sun reported that farmers in and around Oakland expected to lose
nearly half of their crop due to the dry spell. Despite this situation, the correspondent saw
a glimmer of hope along the new iron rails: Farmers along open segments of the Orange
Belt (Clear Water to Sanford at that time) shipped “[v]ast quantities of vegetables,”
proving that the line was “already reaping a golden harvest.” Meanwhile, “train loads of
iron” passed through Oakland each day to allow workers to finish the tracks south of

8 Weekly Floridian, 20 October 1887.
9 and Around 1888 “Out Near the Back of Beyond” (St. Petersburg: Page Creations, 1987).
Clear Water. With fewer than ten miles separating the work crews from the isolated outpost at St. Petersburg, the reporter expressed his confidence that the trains would arrive there by May 1.\(^9\)

Just as newspapers celebrated the May 1869 completion of the transcontinental railroad at Promontory, Utah, nineteen years later the Orange Belt commemorated its arrival at the “promontory point” of St. Petersburg. The Cedar Key Gulf View, as quoted in the Weekly Floridian, announced to its readers the “completion of the Orange Belt line to St. Petersburg.” By this time, the Orange Belt had acquired the steamer *Mary Disston*, once used in and around Tarpon Springs, to bring goods from Manatee to the Pinellas Peninsula. Readers in the Cedar Keys region had a vested interest in following the railroad. With tracks completed between Sanford and St. Petersburg, fewer settlers to the Pinellas area would elect to transfer from train to boat in Cedar Keys when they could travel directly by iron horse.\(^11\) An excerpt from the Oakland Sun described the occasion by proclaiming:

> The last spike in the construction of the Orange Belt Railway was driven on Monday afternoon last, and the road is now completed to its Gulf terminus at St. Petersburg. All that remains to be done is to surface up the track for the sixteen miles between Clear Water and the end, and a regular schedule will be put in force.\(^12\)

To accommodate passengers, Orange Belt workers constructed a small but attractive depot near the intersection of Second Street and First Avenue South. Compared to Dunedin’s first depot—a railroad car parked on siding—the St. Petersburg structure seemed quite ornate.\(^13\) The unmistakable Russian architecture offered evidence of Demens’s legacy, as did the naming of St. Petersburg and of Odessa in Pasco County.

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\(^9\) Ibid., 9 February 1888, 8 March 1888, 5 April 1888.

\(^10\) Ibid., 26 April 1888.

\(^11\) Ibid., 10 May 1888.

\(^12\) Ibid.

\(^13\) Davidson, *Dunedin thru the Years*, 41.
Railroads and Regional Rivalries

The writer incorrectly noted that St. Petersburg became the rail’s Gulf terminus rather than its ending point at Tampa Bay. Nevertheless, in the excitement gripping settlements from Oakland to the Pinellas Peninsula in May 1888, the Orange Belt’s arrival along Tampa Bay certainly created an opportunity for St. Petersburg to play a large role in shipping crops and materials between central Florida and other ports along the Gulf of Mexico. Even before the first train arrived on 8 June 1888—in what may be the first recorded salvo of one-upmanship and braggadocio between Tampa and St. Petersburg—a *Tampa Tribune* article reprinted in the May 24 *Weekly Floridian* reported that:

prospects for the erection of that $250,000 hotel at St. Petersburg are said to be good, and we sincerely hope they are. We understand that the Armours are interested in the scheme(,) which assures ample capital.\(^\text{14}\)

As previously mentioned, Armour’s interests provided substantial loans to Demens and his partners. Arsenault noted that these loans had ballooned to nearly $900,000 by early 1889.\(^\text{15}\) While a palatial hotel of such magnitude did not occupy St. Petersburg’s shoreline until much later, one can certainly argue that the message of a potential competitor across Tampa Bay was not lost on Henry Plant or his interests. Plant’s Tampa Bay Hotel, built between 1888 and 1891 and now the main building on the campus of the University of Tampa, became the most palatial facility on the West Coast during the 1890s.

The lack of a direct rail connection around Old Tampa Bay between St. Petersburg and Tampa certainly added fuel to the rivalries that developed long before the boom era. The Orange Belt represented the longest narrow gauge rail line in the country, but poor construction and financial limitations hindered operations during the late 1880s and early 1890s. By 1889, Demens and his partners failed to meet interest payments to Armour and members of the Philadelphia syndicate. After Demens and his associates sold their interests, the Russian transplant left St. Petersburg for good. Armour’s investors hoped to increase passenger traffic, but soon realized that failing locomotives,

\(^\text{14}\) Ibid., 24 May 1888.
faulty rail construction, and freezing citrus made their position untenable. With trains rarely operating “on time,” the luxurious hotel mentioned by the Tribune never appeared. Trains traveled at a crawl, rarely faster than twelve miles per hour, to prevent them from jumping the tracks. Some residents of Dunedin conjectured that if the Orange Belt hit twenty miles per hour, passenger would probably fly from their seats and hit the ceiling. Jokes about the railway soon proliferated among Pinellas residents. For example, some pundits in Dunedin called the Orange Belt a tri-weekly train because “it goes up one week and tries to get back the next.” Terrible freezes during the 1894-1895 winter killed many citrus trees, as well as hopes for sustained profitability over the next few years. The syndicate soon lost interest in the project, and decided to lease the railroad to Henry B. Plant in 1895.16

Plant’s control of the Orange Belt led to swift changes along the rail line and exacerbated the regional rifts of bayside boosterism. Plant renamed the line the Sanford and St. Petersburg, and by 1897 his workers converted the tracks from narrow to standard gauge. With Demens and Disston out of the picture, Plant hoped to develop enterprises in Western Hillsborough under his tight controls. The 1889 railroad pier extending into Tampa Bay at Demens’s Landing had served as a popular recreation and gathering spot during the Orange Belt era. After 1895, however, Plant charged other boat operators docking fees to use the pier. Angered by locals who failed to sell him waterfront property on favorable terms, Plant sought to punish townsfolk in St. Petersburg by placing his swank hotel in Belleair. The admiration once given to General Williams and Peter Demens became animosity directed at Plant. While members of the Plant family—most notably his son, Morton F. Plant—continued to play an important role in the history of Pinellas, the battles between Henry Plant and early St. Petersburg leaders continued until Henry Plant’s death in 1899. Plant’s interests soon purchased the railroad outright, and the Plant System merged with the Atlantic Coast Line (ACL). His elegant Belleview Biltmore hotel in west central Pinellas offered spectacular accommodations that early St. Petersburg venues could not match. At one point, Tampa newspapers even discouraged tourists on the H. B. Plant steamship from getting off the boat while it docked at the

15 Arsenault, St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream, 60.
16 Ibid., 60-61, 80; Davidson, Dunedin thru the Years, 40-41.
small settlement of St. Petersburg. Tampa boosters thought such activities were a waste of time. Meanwhile, St. Petersburg critics wasted no time in criticizing the new ACL depot constructed in 1905 and 1906. Hampton Dunn reprinted an editorial appearing in the 11 February 1905 *St. Petersburg Times* about the depot in his photographic history, *Yesterday’s St. Petersburg*. The writer, probably *Times* publisher and civic booster William L. Straub, described the new depot as follows: “The building will be—just plain wood—with probably a tin roof—which will be a great disappointment to the people of St. Petersburg, and we think ourselves the company (ACL) should have treated us better.” If cries of “we deserve better than this” filled the streets of St. Petersburg when the new depot opened in 1906, at least they had regular service at their doorstep.\(^\text{17}\)

By comparison, the fortunes of Oakland, Cedar Keys, and other smaller communities declined as the developments along the West Coast bypassed them. A descendant of one pioneer family in Oakland noted that “the railroad was a major influence. They built almost everything in Oakland. The people from the railroad were the officials of the town.” The freeze of 1894-1895 had devastated crops around Oakland. After Plant assumed control of the line, the Orange Belt offices closed, as did many stores and shops. A fire in the late 1890s further damaged the local economy and any aspirations of a large city appearing on the south shores of Lake Apopka. Meanwhile, the Cedar Keys area also suffered decline, due in large measure to new southern rail routes, a decision to snub a business proposal by Henry Plant, and natural resource depletion. While David Levy Yulee’s Florida Railroad—in operation by 1859—provided an important east-west route for agricultural commodities across Florida’s peninsula during the mid-1800s, this line could not compete with the larger Plant and Flagler networks that connected peninsular cities like Tampa and Miami to northern markets. Lacking the deep-water port found at Tampa, leaders sealed the community’s fate when they denied Henry Plant railhead facilities in Cedar Key. Clear-cutting of cedars, pines, cypress, and other trees denuded the landscape, while over-harvesting of shellfish, fish, turtles, and sponges drained nearby waters of their economic harvests by the end of the 1800s. Soon,

newcomers to Pinellas and Plant’s locomotives bypassed the Cedar Keys area on their way to southern destinations.18

**The Tampa and Gulf Railroad Connects Sulphur Springs with Pinellas**

Although the Orange Belt Railway opened the Pinellas Peninsula to settlement, residents soon clamored for more reliable service. A September 1890 issue of the *Tampa Tribune* reprinted a blurb from the *Tarpon Springs Truth* claiming that “the people of the West Coast are as anxious as Tampa to build the rail road from Tampa to the West Coast. If the people of both sections go to work they can build the road this winter. Let them delay no longer, but build it. Talk does not count, but work will.” By the early 1900s, after the appearance of standard gauges on the former Orange Belt, regular rail service to distant cities was supplemented with shorter runs, such as the twice-daily “Toonerville Trolley” train that ran from St. Petersburg to Trilby (in Pasco County) and later as far as Tarpon Springs. An early version of a “commuter rail,” the slow-moving Toonerville often stopped along the rail lines, away from terminals, where passengers flagged it down. Railroad officials reduced service during the summer months, however, making it difficult for Tampa residents to get to Tarpon Springs. Even as late as 1908, many Tampans took the steamer to St. Petersburg and boarded the train in the Sunshine City for Tarpon Springs. A lack of regularly scheduled service angered members of the Tampa Chamber of Commerce. In May 1908, ACL officials acknowledged that their economic measures delayed the mails and passenger traffic between Tampa and Tarpon. As a result, by May 18 the rail line offered a coach car that left the St. Petersburg wharf at 9:35 a.m. and returned from Tarpon by 5:20 p.m., allowing Tampa residents sufficient time to catch the afternoon boat ride back to Tampa. Given the rush hour traffic that clogs bridges and roads between Pinellas and Hillsborough today, this compromise showed the difficulties commuters faced nearly a century ago. Before the end of 1908, residents of Tampa and Western Hillsborough celebrated plans to construct a line known as the

Tampa and Gulf Coast Railway with a connecting point at Gulf Coast Junction, also known as Sulphur Springs.19

Construction on the railroad continued during 1909, with service between Tampa and Tarpon beginning in March 1910. Originally organized as a line to haul logs and lumber, the Tampa and Gulf Coast Railway offered its inaugural service on 22 March 1910. A delegation that included members of the Tampa Board of Trade traveled north then west to meet fellow Board of Trade members in Tarpon Springs. Sulphur Springs became a junction between the Tampa and Gulf Coast heading towards the Pinellas Peninsula and the Tampa Northern rail line that operated between Tampa and Hernando County. Work on the Tampa-Sulphur Springs route had started by the spring of 1908 after officials received a right-of-way franchise from council members for a route along Nineteenth Street between Second and Eighth Avenues. Manager L. Brill predicted that passengers would enjoy “first class car accommodations” by the end of 1908. A postcard printed by 1912 colorfully depicts the railroad bridge across the Hillsborough River in Sulphur Springs, just a short distance from the Gulf Junction. While a depot existed at this site by the spring of 1910, the structure at Heritage Village represented a later structure; it is unknown whether the Sulphur Springs Depot includes materials saved from the smaller, original building, or if it was an expansion of the original facility.20

The Sulphur Springs Depot served the booming community north of Tampa. By the summer of 1921, the legislature had approved the charter of Sulphur Springs and permitted its incorporation as a municipality. Meanwhile, construction crews designed the station at Sulphur Springs as a copy of a depot designed in 1915 and built the following year at Yulee, a Nassau County town a short distance from Fernandina Beach. Similar to other Florida depots of the period, the stations at Yulee and Sulphur Springs emphasized functionality rather than finesse. The building followed the No. 3 company design, with hardwood construction, found in many contemporaneous terminals built by

19 Tampa Tribune, 4 September 1890; Davidson, Dunedin thru the Years, 41; St. Petersburg Times, 20 May 1908. Excitement occurred again when rumors swirled around St. Petersburg that the Seaboard Air Line planned to bring its operations into Pinellas County. See: St. Petersburg Times, 8 October 1912.
the Seaboard Coast Line during the early twentieth century. Piers and wooden pilings support the depot’s offices, passenger areas, and freight platforms. The stationmaster’s office, telegraph/telephone relay area, and waiting rooms presently resemble their appearance during the height of passenger rail travel through Sulphur Springs from the 1920s into the early 1930s. Following Jim Crow laws of the time, the station had separate white and “colored” waiting rooms and ticket windows to prevent the racial integration of passengers. The station manager’s office behind the ticket counter currently includes a telegraph, telephone, paper work, a scale locomotive, and luggage and trunks from the period. A photograph from the impressive Burgert Brothers archive shows improvements along the tracks between the station and the bridge across the Hillsborough River. Other railroad depots in the region also emphasized simplicity and often lacked amenities. For example, ACL authorities did not add electric lights until the spring of 1914 or dispatch plumbers to install restrooms until early 1917 at the Largo station.21

The Tampa and Gulf Coast reached St. Petersburg by September 1914. The line introduced regular passenger service to Clearwater, the “Sunset City,” in mid-April. The first train to arrive in Clearwater, beautifully decorated and full of riders from Tampa, enjoyed an ensemble of musicians from Clearwater, Pinellas Park, and St. Petersburg. The ceremonies included a telephone call between railroad general manager Charles H. Lutz and President Charles H. Brown, then in Tampa recovering from an illness, as well as refreshments including sandwiches, hot fish, pickles, and steaming coffee. According to an article in the 23 April 1914 Largo Sentinel, “after the white people had been served till all were satisfied, the tables were then turned over to the negroes (sic), colored help taking charge and serving their people in the same manner and with the same kind of picnic that the whites had enjoyed.” The Tampa and Gulf Coast service extended to Largo in mid-June. Three months later, the fifty-four mile line came to an end in St. Petersburg, where carloads of boosters came by rail from Pinellas Park, Seminole, Tampa, and other communities to celebrate. G. E. Noblit and S. S. Coachman participated in the ceremonies at the Ninth Street terminus. Led by loud and proud bands from Clearwater and Pinellas Park, nearly 1,500 people then walked from the railroad

terminus to Williams Park to enjoy a barbeque coordinated by Noel A. Mitchell. An afternoon baseball game and evening carnival along Central Avenue rounded out the events of the day. By May 1915, the Tampa and Gulf Coast line planned construction of a railroad spur between Anona and Indian Rocks Beach to facilitate travel for Tampa residents who had built summer homes along the waterfront.22

**Good Roads and Railroads**

Just as poor roadways along the Pinellas Peninsula hindered early settlers, poor transportation funding by Hillsborough County administrators in Tampa fueled demands for the creation of a new county. When commissioners balked at road improvements in Western Hillsborough, including the construction of a bridge at Long Bayou, residents of the Pinellas Peninsula demanded answers. An article in the 6 May 1910 *St. Petersburg Times* supporting the construction of a “Tampa Short Route” roadway proclaimed that “St. Petersburg could not possibly make a better investment than to build that road. St. Petersburg people have some $40,000 or $50,000 invested in automobiles, and spend large amounts in their upkeep, and all are large tax payers.” The article proposed two routes. The first, “a hard surfaced road of the best kind,” would connect St. Petersburg to Johns Pass by crossing Long Bayou near Seminole, then continue to Largo, Clearwater, Dunedin, Sutherland, and Tarpon Springs partially on a route that corresponds with present-day Alt. U.S. Highway 19. This route, built piecemeal, included many obstacles along the way. A second rock road would bridge Clearwater, Green Springs (now Safety Harbor), and Tampa, with cheaper pine straw roads offering other routes. The newspaper noted that Pinellas residents had already raised nearly $2,600 to support the construction of the Long Bayou bridge. Another article referring to gaps along the Clearwater-Largo rock road in the 28 March 1910 *Times* claimed to look forward to the day “when Pinellas County shall be permitted to run her own business and spend her own money in her own way.” Even after Pinellas County gained its independence in 1912, a Taxpayers’ Good Roads Association met during the early 1920s to discuss road improvement projects, such as improvements to Haines Road and the construction of a roadway near the Gandy Collection, State Archives of Florida; *Largo Leader*, 23 April 1914, 18 January 1917.

Bridge. The arrival of “tin can tourists” by the 1920s encouraged further road improvements and strengthened the resolve of George S. Gandy to build a bridge across Tampa Bay that opened in November 1924. Rail service remained important, however, as noted by J. N. Craig, ACL station agent at Tarpon Springs, during preparations for the 1921 Pinellas County Fair. Runs of the Pinellas Special allowed attendees from all parts of the county to travel by way of train. Indeed, railroad representatives from the Seaboard Air Line and Atlantic Coast Line regularly traveled along Pinellas routes before tourist season to assure the quality of railroad services and facilities before the influx of seasonal visitors.\(^{23}\)

**A Railroad Less Traveled**

New avenues of motor vehicle transportation altered railroad service in the years following World War II. Americans, hungry for consumer goods after the austerity measures of the Second World War, purchased automobiles in record numbers. Roadside attractions, motels, and small “mom-and-pop” establishments dotted state roads and U.S. highways 1, 19, 27, 41, 92, 301, and 441 throughout the Sunshine State. The throes of the Cold War led President Dwight D. Eisenhower and the United States Congress to approve a massive public works project that forever redefined transportation patterns: the creation of the Interstate highway system. As railroad traffic continued to decline, the new superhighways also threatened the economic livelihood of smaller attractions and communities “off the beaten path.” Specific incidents also threatened the railroad industry in the postwar years. For example, coal shortages and labor unrest in the mining industry led to a substantial reduction of rail service in January 1950. The Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) required the passenger rail service to reduce by one-third in early January. To comply with this edict, the Seaboard Air Line discontinued its Palmland route between downtown St. Petersburg, Clearwater, and Safety Harbor. With the Palmland only coming as far south as Tampa, Seaboard officials reassured ticket

\(^{23}\) *St. Petersburg Times*, 28 March 1910, 6 May 1910, 28 January 1923, 2 April 1923; Arsenault, *St Petersburg and the Florida Dream*, 196-197; *Tarpon Springs Leader*, 14 January 1921; *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 30 November 1926.
holders that busses between St. Petersburg, Clearwater, and Tampa would honor railroad tickets to cover the fare.  

Passenger rail service came to an end in downtown St. Petersburg in June 1963. By the early 1960s, the City of St. Petersburg hoped to rejuvenate its downtown with planned projects such as the new municipal marina and the Bayfront Center. However, the ACL station occupied valuable downtown real estate along First Avenue South and regular rail service caused congestion along a corridor that spanned from the Webb’s City shopping complex to the area just west of Al Lang Field. To accommodate downtown redevelopment and improve railroad service for south Pinellas residents, city officials acquired a twenty-three acre tract of land south of 38th Avenue North near 31st Street for $629,981. The city then oversaw construction of the $412,000 station. Approximately 300 city leaders, ACL executives, and members of the public attended dedication ceremonies at the new station in mid-June, where they heard ACL Railroad President W. Thomas Rice boast that the building represented “the most beautiful passenger station in the United States.” This cooperative effort may have fostered new life downtown, but it merely kept the railroad industry on life support as Pinellas County continued to embrace “car culture.”

The move of the station from downtown St. Petersburg coincided with other efforts to refine transportation, commercial, and residential patterns. Just as the opening of the Sunshine Skyway and the construction of the Thirty-Fourth Street corridor redirected many vehicles away from the city core, the construction of Central Plaza and other “suburban” shopping centers served residents in new developments. Soon, subdivisions sprouting up west of U. S. Highway 19, in the Lakewood area of southern Pinellas, and in areas adjacent to Lealman and Kenneth City signaled a demographic explosion in St. Petersburg. Local and federal officials constructed new facilities to meet the needs of this growing community. For example, the city’s public library along the eastern shore of Mirror Lake became a “branch” as the system opened its main building along Ninth Avenue North at Thirty-Seventh Street by 1964. Also, the 1916 United

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States “open air” Post Office became a quaint if beautiful branch of the larger postal facility constructed along First Avenue North and Thirty-First Street.

Railroad service witnessed declines in other communities, including Largo. Demolition of Largo’s Atlantic Coast Line Railroad station took place in July 1967. Shortly after municipal workers disconnected the water and sewer lines, a local contractor named Lyle R. Holland brought in a crew to raze the structure. Holland’s contract with the city allowed him to take all of the bricks from the structure and paid him $1,100; in this agreement, the city kept the timbers and lumber from the building. Before the end of July, the workers had nearly finished removing the roof, interior walls, and floors from the terminals. Photographs in the July 20 and July 27 editions of the Largo Sentinel clearly documented the workers’ progress. Holland planned to save as many of the bricks as possible so they could have a second life as decorative bricks in new homes under construction. Newspaper articles from the mid-1960s through the early 1980s often told a similar story: Funding shortages threatened railroad service, with some routes preserved and others reduced or eliminated.26

Direct Amtrak rail service came to an end in Pinellas County in early 1984. Similar to the suspension of the Palmland routes to St. Petersburg in January 1950, Amtrak officials pledged to implement an express bus system. In spite of outcries from local leaders and elected officials, the departure of Amtrak’s Silver Star marked the end of passenger service from St. Petersburg and other West Coast stations. To compensate for a deficit in operational funds, Amtrak replaced the Silver Star and Silver Meteor with express bus service beginning 1 February 1984 from St. Petersburg, Clearwater, and Sarasota/Bradenton. In an ironic attempt to promote the express bus service, Amtrak officials claimed that the bus routes shaved as much as seventy-five minutes from the travel time to Tampa when compared to the “slower” rail service.27

The Sulphur Springs Depot: Not at the End of Its Line

The glory days of Sulphur Springs—and its railroad station—had disappeared by the 1970s. No longer a separate political entity, Sulphur Springs joined West Tampa, Port

Tampa, and other formerly autonomous areas as another neighborhood within the City of Tampa. Demographic shifts and urban sprawl placed the depot in an undesirable area for passenger railroad service, as best illustrated by a July 1972 Florida Department of Commerce photograph showing the well-worn structure and tracks alongside unattractive buildings, a dirt parking area, and poor landscaping. Passenger service at the Sulphur Springs station had ended before the 1967 merger of the Seaboard Air Line and Atlantic Coast Line into the Seaboard Coast Line Railroad.28

After the opening of Heritage Village, Director Kendrick Ford sought either a former depot or funds to construct a replica to symbolize the importance of railroads to the Pinellas Peninsula. Other depots had moved to different locations and served new clientele as railroad service declined. For example, workers relocated the Tampa and Gulf Coast terminal in New Port Richey in 1944 so it could become a meeting hall for veterans of the Spanish-American War. The structure moved again in June 1963—the same month the ACL pulled out of downtown St. Petersburg—to a parcel on Pine Hill Road in Pasco so that its buyer could remodel the old depot into a private residence. By early 1978, he corresponded with representatives of the Tampa Bay chapter of the National Railway Historical Society about the Sulphur Springs building. In a letter to Ford, F. R. Schwartz of the NRHS claimed that after examining all of the remaining depots within a 100 mile area around Tampa, the Sulphur Springs depot offered “the last available station in central Florida” that did not require extensive repairs or expensive reconstruction. The Seaboard Coast Line had donated the station to the NRHS, on the condition that the structure would be moved from the railroad’s right-of-way. Lacking land for the structure, Schwartz and NRHS members offered to present the depot to Heritage Village. Fearing the demolition of this structure, Schwartz urged Ford to accept this building within the window of opportunity that existed: Officials with the Seaboard Coastline wanted the building removed by October 15 of that year. At a March 1978 meeting, the Pinellas County Historical Commission (PCHC) discussed this matter. PCHC member David Carr agreed that the station possessed historical value, but claimed the depot lacked an aesthetic appearance. Ford replied that most Florida depots focused on

28 See image C681147, Florida Photographic Collection, State Archives of Florida.
functionality rather than beauty. Chair Dorothy Edmunds recalled that original
discussions of a “pioneer village” motif included a train station at the park, and added
that children would enjoy such a structure, especially if “railroad trains may soon become
extinct.” Noting that a replica of a train station may cost upwards of $150,000 to build,
PCHC members considered a rough estimate of $10,000 to move an authentic depot a
much better bargain. The PCHC approved an agreement with the Seaboard Coast Line
and the NRHS to accept the building and fund its move to Heritage Village.  

The Sulphur Springs Train Depot arrived in October 1978. The NRHS assisted
with the restoration of the building and provided many of the items located in the station.
That organization helped to transform the shipping storage room into a railroad history
museum. Members of the Pinellas County Historical Society also “helped the staff
immensely” with work at the Sulphur Springs Train Depot, according to a September
1979 PCHC report. By November 1982, Ford told members of the Historical
Commission that the Seaboard Coast Line planned to discard over thirty cabooses. As a
non-profit agency, Heritage Village could acquire a caboose for free, but would have to
cover moving charges and construct a rail line adjacent to the station.  
The 1967 caboose
arrived shortly thereafter. In addition, outside the depot, a switch stand, three speed limit
notices, a wigwag (signal), and two floats enhance the historical replication of the depot.

29 Records of the Pinellas County Historical Commission, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo, 8
March 1978, 19 April 1978; F. R. Schwartz, National Director, National Railway Historical Society, to Ken
30 Records of the Pinellas County Historical Commission, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo,
Union Academy Schoolhouse: A Brief Introduction

History of Education in Tarpon Springs before Structure Arrived at U.A. Campus

- The 1885 constitution of Florida mandated segregated education.
- A simple wooden structure for white schoolchildren began operating in Tarpon Springs by the 1880s. A small “Negro school” served African American children in Tarpon Springs before Union Academy opened in 1919.
- Original Union Academy campus opened at a time of great racial hostility in Florida; within a few years, brutal attacks and lynchings took place in Ocoee, Perry, and Rosewood. Violence by the Ku Klux Klan increased during the 1920s.
- Despite the “separate but equal” provisions of case law and court decisions (including the 1896 judgment in Plessy v Ferguson by the U.S. Supreme Court), a wide racial disparity existed in school facilities, teacher salaries, general funding, and length of school terms for African American schools.
- Many white educators and public officials believed that any educational opportunities for black children should fall within the areas of training for agricultural and domestic service. They often cited Booker T. Washington’s emphasis on practical and manual skills as a proper path for black students.
- Schools for African American children stressed industrial education and welcomed philanthropy to compensate for inadequate funding.
- Despite laws requiring segregation, principals at Union Academy regularly invited “the white friends of the school” to events. White patrons often enjoyed reserved seating for events at Union Academy, an act that was not reciprocated by white schools for African American residents.

Construction Information

- Built circa 1915, possibly as a barracks or other government building. Moved to all-white Tarpon Springs Elementary as an early portable classroom by 1926. Similar structures were often considered “chicken coops” by students of the time.

History of Use

- Used at Tarpon Springs Elementary through the 1941-1942 school year.
- In August 1942, the school board authorized the relocation of two portables from Tarpon Springs Elementary to the Union Academy campus for $400. This building was one of the two moved near the corner of Oakwood (Wall) and Grosse.

Significant Events/Activities at the School

- Excellent source of school events and extracurricular activities gleaned from the “Negro” news pages and columns of the Tarpon Springs Leader (especially those written by U. A. teacher Ruth Lambright) and the St. Petersburg Times, as well as occasional columns in the Florida Sentinel(-Bulletin).
- Site of many academic and co-curricular events during over two decades of service as part of Union Academy.
- With the opening of Pinellas High School in Clearwater in 1954, school administrators planned to move upper grades (7th and 8th grades) from Union
Academy. Parents and others protested this move, which came at the same time the U.S. Supreme Court’s *Brown* decision had invalidated the notion of “separate but equal” education as way of segregating the races.

- By the mid-1960s, the structure moved to Grosse Avenue and Morgan Street and became home to the “Better Boys Club,” a club for children that used art, athletics, and other activities to provide a nurturing, supportive environment for young black men.
- By the late 1970s, the building served as a storage facility for a local physician, and later fell into disrepair. Left abandoned, it faced almost certain demolition.

**Moving of the Structure to Heritage Village**

- Concerned residents in Tarpon Springs, along with county officials and staff at Heritage Village, came together to rescue the structure and have it moved to Heritage Village.
- The building arrived in poor condition, with extensive termite damage and numerous alterations that made many of its original features (i.e., location of exact window outlines, etc.) difficult to detect.
The Union Academy schoolhouse, once part of a racially segregated campus for African Americans in Tarpon Springs, represents an early “portable classroom” for schoolchildren. This building, constructed circa 1915 and presently located at Heritage Village, possibly served as a barracks, office, or warehouse for the military during the First World War. Federal authorities sold many structures similar to this building as surplus property after World War I ended in November 1918. On more than one occasion, the Pinellas County Board of Public Instruction purchased such structures, derisively known as “chicken coops,” to use as portable classroom buildings.

This structure—and another identical building—became part of the campus of Tarpon Springs Elementary School, an all-white facility erected on Eagle Avenue (now Pinellas Avenue). The community’s original school for white children, located near that site, began in the late 1870s or early 1880s as a simple wooden structure. One pioneer resident remembers that in 1889 or 1890 archaeologists from the Smithsonian excavated an Indian mound near the campus. By 1911, Tarpon residents hoped to replace the outdated and inadequate first structure with a stone and brick building. As part of the debate over the division of Hillsborough County, authorities in Tampa promised to replace the wooden schoolhouse if citizens of western Hillsborough rejected the plan to create Pinellas County. When that measure passed, however, local residents and Pinellas leaders stepped up and allocated $11,598 to construct the Tarpon Springs Public School. Opened in 1912 with an entrance along Eagle Street, the campus occupied a city block, bordered by Cypress, Hybiscus, and Park streets. The main structure enrolled students through the sixth grade and included seven classrooms, a laboratory, a small library, and a second-floor auditorium. In 1915, the school district added a second building with four classrooms for the primary grades that occupied land to the east of the 1912 building. As early as 1919—and certainly before January 1926—Sanborn fire insurance maps indicate that officials had moved at least four portable buildings (including the Heritage Village building) to the white elementary school campus, along the northeast corner of the block near Park and Hybiscus. By the fall of 1942, the school system spent $400 to relocate two
of these portables, including the building located at Heritage Village, to the Union Academy (U. A.) campus.¹

For the next two decades, the building presently located at Heritage Village served the black students and teachers at Union Academy. By the mid-1960s, leaders in the African-American community purchased the building from the Pinellas County school district and had it moved to the corner of Grosse Avenue and Morgan Street. From this location, the building provided social and recreational opportunities for black children and teenagers as the site of the Better Boys Club. By the late 1970s, however, the structure fell into disrepair and became a neglected eyesore to many in the area unfamiliar with its past. Due to the creative labors of community leaders and government officials—including local residents, the Pinellas County Department of Community Development, the City of Tarpon Springs, and the Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society—the building won a reprieve from certain demolition as it moved to its present site in Heritage Village.

After renovations and rehabilitation, the Union Academy schoolhouse resembles its 1940s appearance. Considered by many to be the oldest existing portable classroom in the State of Florida, this structure and its proud history of service to the area’s African American community offer an important and permanent monument to the struggles and achievements of our county’s African American residents.

**Challenges to Researching the History of Union Academy**

Newspaper articles and other sources traditionally used by historians may paint an incomplete or inaccurate image of an African American community. Some larger newspapers in the South (including as the *St. Petersburg Times*) published so-called “Negro news pages” during the early and mid-twentieth century. However, most of these

periodicals limited the distribution of such pages to the African American subscribers. White readers only read about African Americans when crimes—real or perceived—had occurred. Well into the twentieth century, many white-owned newspapers in the South caricatured the quotations and dialogues of African Americans, emphasized criminal activities while denying accomplishments, and rarely included stories about the educational achievements of those who attended Jim Crow schools.

Newspapers in smaller municipalities, such as the *Largo Sentinel* and *Tarpon Springs Leader* in Pinellas County, occasionally included stories about events at African American churches and schools, but these stories often reinforced racial stereotypes. For example, a 1916 article in the *Leader* with the title “Colored Folks Make Merry” described a gathering by noting that “dancing was the main feature of the evening and the colored folks always enjoy a dance.” Nevertheless, by the 1950s the *Leader* included a “Negro news column” that all readers received. This column provided a wealth of information about students and faculty at Union Academy. Tampa’s *Florida Sentinel-Bulletin*, an African-American newspaper first published in December 1945, also includes occasional articles about black residents of northern Pinellas County.2

### Early Educational Opportunities for African Americans on the Pinellas Peninsula

The end of Reconstruction in 1877, subsequent legislation, and court decisions extinguished any hope of equal educational opportunity. For many white Southerners, the compromise over the electoral dispute between Samuel Tilden and Rutherford B. Hayes in the 1876 Presidential election offered an opportunity for Southern leaders to entice Northern capital while disenfranchising the African Americans. Soon Bourbon Democrats opened the Florida frontier to railroad speculators such as Henry Flagler and developers including Hamilton Disston. In Article XII, Section 12 of Florida’s 1885 constitution, Bourbon Democrats enacted a provision proclaiming that “white and colored children shall not be taught in the same school, but impartial provision shall be made for both.” By 1895, Tallahassee lawmakers enacted legislation prohibiting schools from boarding or teaching blacks and whites in the same facility. State Superintendent

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2 *Tarpon Springs Leader*, 1 November 1916. The University of South Florida Tampa library has a fairly complete microfilm collection of the *Florida Sentinel* (later *Florida Sentinel-Bulletin*).
William N. Sheats, in a report to the legislature, claimed that any attempt to integrate schools would harm public funding and philanthropy for black students. The United States Supreme Court’s landmark *Plessy v Ferguson* decision in 1896 adjudged that “separate but equal” facilities did not violate the provision for equal protection under the laws mandated by the Fourteenth Amendment.\(^3\) A 1914 editorial expressed the beliefs of many white Floridians when it discussed “Negro disenfranchisement”:

> As long as one can round up four of five hundred negroes (sic) in one city and vote them as he would direct, the negro (sic) is incompetent to vote and is not entitled to the franchise. . . . In Florida, the negro (sic) is well provided for—not by his vote—but by the work of white people. His condition will constantly improve in all matters, but it would be a blessing to the race and a help to the entire state were he eliminated from participating in elections.\(^4\)

Schools along the Pinellas peninsula faced many obstacles long before the creation of Pinellas County. African-American schools struggled for limited resources at a time when education in general ranked as a low priority. Appeals to the larger community often failed to compensate for funding shortages. For example, in early 1902 R. P. Jones—the principal of St. Petersburg’s small “colored” school—learned that Hillsborough County authorities would not provide additional funds to keep his school open beyond a shortened five-month term. In a letter published in the *St. Petersburg Times*, Jones courageously offered this plea:

> We believe that if any race needs an education it is the (N)egro. We will say that we do not look for anyone to assist us, but we do look for justice to us. . . . (W)e have no power at all over the schools of this state, nor the length of term. . . . We ask you to give us a chance. How can a teacher live with five months (sic) term and loaf seven? . . . We ask you not to look down on us because our faces are


\(^4\) *Largo Sentinel*, 8 October 1914.
black, but just think that we have souls, and minds, and are in a progressive state, too. . . . We hope that our white friends will look into the matter.\textsuperscript{5}

Before the opening of Union Academy in 1919, many African American children in northern Pinellas County attended a small “Negro school” in Tarpon Springs. This and other Jim Crow schools in the county emphasized Booker T. Washington’s model of industrial education with its focus on practical and manual skills rather than intellectual pursuits. An editorial printed in a January 1915 edition of the \textit{Largo Sentinel} captured both the prejudices of many readers and the spirit of Washington’s accommodationism:

\begin{quote}
[S]ome persons who believe they have the good of the negro (sic) race at heart approve of giving advanced education to negro (sic) boys and girls generally, taking years of the children’s time in a way that could be used with far greater profit in teaching them to use tools and implements of the farm, the shop and the kitchen. . . . Not one in a hundred thousand of them is ever going to have any use for algebra, geometry, Latin, Greek, and similarly advanced studies.\textsuperscript{6}
\end{quote}

The writer claimed that teaching black children anything beyond use of farm tools, domestic science, and similar pursuits wasted time and money, and would “sow the seeds of future discontent.”\textsuperscript{7}

By the mid-1910s, schools for African Americans throughout Pinellas County stressed industrial education and welcomed philanthropy. During the 1914-1915 academic year, seventeen teachers earning a combined salary of $4,498.75 served an enrollment of 892 black pupils in Pinellas public schools. By comparison, the twenty-five white schools in the county employed 112 teachers who collectively earned $67,243.25 while teaching 3,333 students.\textsuperscript{8} Pinellas schools for black children certainly received less per capita funding than their white counterparts, though they did benefit from the philanthropy of outside groups, such as the Jeanes Fund. Established by Anna Jeanes, this fund provided monies for industrial education for African Americans. In December

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{5} \textit{St. Petersburg Times}, 1 February 1902.  \\
\textsuperscript{6} \textit{Largo Sentinel}, 21 January 1915.  \\
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.  \\
\textsuperscript{8} \textit{Largo Sentinel}, 16 September 1915.
\end{flushleft}
1915, Superintendent Dixie M. Hollins toured schools with B. C. Caldwell, an agent for the Jeanes Fund. They visited a new industrial building at the Clearwater school (constructed and equipped at a cost of about $800), an $1800 addition to the Dunedin school funded by a winter visitor from Cleveland, and the improved facilities at schools in St. Petersburg and Tarpon Springs. A newspaper claimed that these resources provided an opportunity for girls to learn how “to cook and sew, do laundry work and housekeeping.” Hollins boasted that the county had received donations of approximately $5,000 in funds and supplies for African American schools. Some of these funds came from the black community as well as white “friends.”

Separate and unequal conditions persisted as school officials planned for the expansion of the “Negro school” in Tarpon Springs. While Dixie Hollins recruited many talented black teachers from the Hampton and Tuskegee institutes, these instructors faced formidable curricular and financial challenges. In March 1917, parents and principals at black schools in Dunedin, Clearwater, and St. Petersburg petitioned for an extension of the school term. Despite their pleas, the Board of Public Instruction granted only Dunedin an extra month of classes, yet even Dunedin continued to offer a shorter term than the nine-month term of white schools. By the fall of 1917, the Tarpon Springs facility had enrolled seventy-three students, much higher than the matriculation at schools in Dunedin (seventeen) and Safety Harbor (nineteen). On 16 February 1918, the Tarpon Springs sub-school district approved $4,000 in bonds for the construction of a new building for African American children. The board purchased a site including lots twelve and thirteen at the southeast intersection of Oakwood (Wall) Street and Grosse Avenue on 11 February 1919. The board provided the building materials to C. A. Gause, who won the bid to construct Union Academy (U. A.) on 10 June 1919 at a cost of $1,468.

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9 *Largo Sentinel*, 30 December 1915.
10 *Largo Sentinel*, 15 March 1917, 1 November 1917, 21 February 1918; *Golden Anniversary of Pinellas Schools*, 48; Costrini, *Tradition of Excellence*, 17-20; *Report of the Board of Public Instruction of Pinellas County, Florida* (n.p., 1920), 70-71; *Fire Insurance Maps*, February 1930 map, microfilm reel 16. Note that the February 1945 corrections to the 1930 map incorrectly claim that the original Union Academy structure was built in 1928.
The Early Years of Union Academy, 1919-1942

Union Academy opened its doors in the 1919-1920 academic term, during a period of growing racial hostility throughout the Sunshine State. Florida’s governor at the time, Sidney J. Catts, had assumed office in 1917 as an avowed white supremacist who fought against any educational resources for blacks that went beyond manual and agricultural training. Less than two weeks after Catts’s term ended in January 1921, the Tarpon Springs Leader reported that “a very creditable number of men of the highest type and standing” had organized a Ku Klux Klan chapter in Tarpon Springs. Lynchings, attacks, and violence rocked many areas of Florida during the early 1920s, including the communities of Ocoee, Perry, and Rosewood. By early 1923, reports out of Tallahassee claimed that Catts planned to start a vigilante organization known as the “Rangers,” where members who paid $10 annual dues could participate in a group that saw itself as an “unmasked Ku Klux Klan.”

Local newspapers, most notably the Tarpon Springs Leader, documented events at Union Academy. J. Tapley Marks served as the school’s first principal, and at least six others held that office before the end of the 1920s. Capt. George M. Lynch, the county school superintendent from 1929 to 1935, brought President A. B. Cooper of Edward Waters College in Jacksonville for a visit to the Union Academy campus in March 1930. That same month, many Academy teachers attended a “better health” workshop in Tampa. Students in the seventh through ninth grades received prizes ranging from fifty

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11 Wayne Flint, Cracker Messiah: Governor Sidney J. Catts of Florida (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 46; Tarpon Springs Leader, 17 January 1921; St. Petersburg Times, 4 February 1923; See also Maxine D. Jones’s chapter in James J. Horgan and Lewis N. Wynne, eds. Florida Decades: A Sesquicentennial History (St. Leo: St. Leo College Press, 1995). As Klan chapters gained many new members during the 1910s and 1920s, local Klan organizations touted themselves as important social and cultural institutions in their communities. For example, an article in a 1926 Arcadia newspaper celebrates the arrival of a Klan-sponsored circus to DeSoto County. For a day, many Klan members put aside their robes and donned clown costumes to the delight of white children in Arcadia. The newspaper proclaimed: “The local (K)lansmen are in full charge of the big show and they are to be congratulated . . . for underwriting an entertainment of this size, requires no small amount of cooperation and endeavor on the part of the local sponsors. It is safe to predict that the Klan circus will be a big success.” This circus also played in other Florida cities, including St. Petersburg, Sarasota, Lakeland, and Orlando. The Arcadian, 23 February 1926.

12 The Board of Public Instruction’s Golden Anniversary of Pinellas Schools includes a list of principals for each school from its earliest years through 1962. Articles appearing in March 1930 issues of the Tarpon Springs Leader mention a J. C. Peel as principal, though Peel does not appear on the list in Golden Anniversary and may have served as a supervising “principal” of black schools.
cents to one dollar during the spring term for achievement awards. Pupils and teachers participated in “Rosenwald School Day” activities during the spring of 1930, including a basketball game with 34th Street High School (now Gibbs High School). Though Gilbbs defeated Union Academy in that game, the 1935 Academy boys’ basketball team coached by Principal Richard V. Moore compiled a 14-0 record, while the girls’ team went 13-1. The students played their home games on a new court recently funded by the county. Mrs. D. P. Boyer, chair of the school’s board of trustees, often attended such events to recognize the students’ accomplishments. By 1932, the school had replaced the small, informal commencement exercises with graduation cerebrations spread over an entire week. Ceremonies for this event included a baccalaureate sermon at Mt. Vernon Baptist Church, an operetta with school children, a gymnastics program sponsored by the physical education department, student oratories, and a play entitled “Graduation Day at Wood Hill School.”

Co-curricular and extracurricular activities at Union Academy increased along with student enrollment during the 1930s. During the spring of 1932, the school also waged a campaign against illiteracy with special evening courses three-nights-a-week for a six-week term. In that spring Alma Myrick—head of the English department—launched a series of student programs open to the general public on Monday evenings. February 1932 events included an oratorical contest, choral singing, a rendition of the “Jolly Juvenile Minstrels,” and the performance of a satirical “Chocolate Wedding.” In May 1935, the thirty-five members of the girls’ glee club offered folk songs, solos, duets, and spirituals before an audience of over one-hundred, “including many white friends.” A few of the white guests spoke briefly after the performance, praising the students for their music, displays, and exhibits. Thus, ironically, in Pinellas’ segregated school system, many programs at Union Academy played before integrated audiences. In Leader news...

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articles, principals such as Levy Gregg and Richard Moore made it a point to invite “the white friends of the school” to many events, from minstrel performances to graduation ceremonies. Interestingly, a minstrel show in January 1935 had also attracted large crowds to all-white Tarpon Springs High School’s auditorium (now City Hall). In that performance, however, patrons paid a quarter admission to see many leaders of the white community perform songs and skits in black face to raise money for local charities. Blacks could not attend. As classes began in September 1935 for the new school year, Union Academy’s enrollment had climbed to 155 while the number of students registered in the city’s white schools actually declined during that same term.  

After Richard Moore left Union Academy in the summer of 1937, Eugene H. McLin and Julie B. Bragg, Jr., served as principals into the early 1940s. McLin, a alumnus of Clark University in Atlanta, also did graduate coursework at Columbia University. He came to Union Academy in the fall of 1937 after serving as a teacher and coach in three of Florida’s largest African American high schools (Booker Washington High, Tampa, 1927-1930; Gibbs High, St. Petersburg, 1931-1933; Booker Washington High, Miami, 1934-1936). By October 1939, the campus consisted of the original four-room brick structure from 1919 and a two-room frame building (not the structure at Heritage Village). At that time, McLin kept all student academic records in a cabinet in his office. The library had a collection of recently purchased books valued at more than $100, the school had just enclosed its lighted basketball court at a cost of $300, and officials had purchased a scale so “students may keep accurate records of their weight.” Teachers in the 1940-1941 and 1941-1942 terms included: Julius Bradley, Lucile James, J. L. Jones, Ruth Lambright, Annie Mae McLin, and Freddie Sands.  

The Union Academy Campus Expands as the New Building Arrives

In an August 1942 meeting, the school board authorized the relocation of two portables from Tarpon Springs Elementary to Union Academy. At a cost of $400, the two structures closest to the intersection of Park and Hybiscus made their way to lots

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15 St. Petersburg Times, 29 October 1939; Tarpon Springs Leader, 3 May 1940, 13 June 1941.
eleven and twelve near the corner of Oakwood (Wall) and Grosse. Sitting to the east of the 1919 Union Academy building, these structures served as a cafeteria, classrooms, and a home economics room to meet the needs of the 115 students enrolled in the 1942-1943 year. U. A. students occasionally offered variety programs at the city’s (white) Tourist Club by early 1943, and faculty from Florida Agricultural and Mechanical College (now University)—as well as other historically black colleges—frequently visited the campus during their travels to the area. The school held its 1943 commencement exercises at Mt. Moriah A.M.E. Church, where Professor Milton P. Rooks delivered an address to the graduates. One must note that outside visitors and philanthropy remained essential to the school’s success into the early 1950s: For example, members of the (white) Tarpon Springs Woman’s Club visited the Academy and pledged support for the school at a time when county allocations remained slim. Lois Lenski, a famous author and illustrator who lived in Tarpon Springs, frequently visited the school and supported its educational objectives. A member of a Pinellas pioneer family, cordially referred to as “Mrs. McMullen,” also visited on occasion by 1954 to offer Monday afternoon Bible classes.16

Like their white counterparts, some pupils at Union Academy traveled via chartered bus to Largo to participate in the Pinellas County Fair. In 1948, U. A. students took first prize in competitions against their St. Petersburg counterparts. Indeed, so many African American children attended the fair by the early 1950s that principals at black schools requested a “Negro school day” so that their pupils could enjoy the midway rides. Superintendent Floyd T. Christian asserted that the board approved this plan for the 1953 fair not as a way to promote segregation, but instead to stagger the number of children at the fair. The following year, two busloads of students, teachers, and parental chaperones made an even larger showing at the fair.17

By 1953, Ruth Lambright—a member of the Union Academy faculty—penned a weekly “Negro news” column in the Tarpon Springs Leader. Her articles recorded the important events in Tarpon Springs’ African-American community. During the school year, Lambright’s column regularly included news about events at Union Academy.

These stories described field trips, programs, athletic competitions, student leadership activities, awards, and professional achievements by the faculty. For example, in March 1953, about seventy Academy students traveled to the newly-constructed Sixteenth Street Junior High School (now John Hopkins Middle School) and Gibbs High School. Frederick D. Burney, principal of Sixteenth Street, and his faculty led the U. A. students and teachers on a tour of the campus, followed by lunch in the cafetorium. Later that day, students in the junior high classes visited the Vocational Department at Gibbs. Fourth and fifth graders from Union Academy and Sixteenth Street also appeared in a May 1953 program on WSUN radio. In June 1953, U. A. Principal Ella Mary Holmes joined guests in a crowded auditorium for a student presentation of the two-act musical comedy, “The Belle of the West.” Later that month, members of the Gibbs High School band played and sang renditions at the Academy’s “Springs Cotillion.” Students had decorated the school’s auditorium with pink and green crepe paper, complemented by potted plants provided by Kikilis Florists. That same week, the senior class of Pinellas High School in Clearwater offered a dramatic performance of “This Thing Called Love” in the U. A. auditorium. In early 1954, the Academy hosted Gibbs students who spent time at the campus and visited the city’s Sponge Exchange. In April 1954, over 500 students participated in a countywide music festival directed by Dorothy Johnson, area music teacher for black schools. Students at Union Academy combined with three other north county schools—Curtis, Williams, and Chase Memorial—for their music performances.\footnote{Tarpon Springs Leader, 12 March 1953, 7 May 1953, 28 May 1953, 4 June 1953, 21 January 1954; St. Petersburg Times, 13 April 1954.}

At the annual Spring Recital and Open House on 14 April 1953, students filled the auditorium with duets, musical selections, and readings. Audience members applauded as boys and girls received their safety patrol badges. Programs often included Bible readings, “Negro” spirituals, or other religious elements. For example, during the chapel assemblies during 1954, students performed the 100th Psalm, the Lord’s Prayer, and renditions of “Onward Christian Soldiers.” On many occasions, teacher William G. Thompson played the piano while students assembled in the chapel for songs and musical performances. In many of her articles, Lambright praised Thompson for his “brilliant ideas” and “his talents in all phases of the school work.” Whether working with primary
grades or middle school children—such as his coordination of the seventh graders’ rendition of “The Three Little Pigs” in October 1952—Thompson served as a mentor to children at the Academy. Second and third-grade students under Lambright’s direction offered a February 1954 chapel with accordion solos, trombone solos, and readings. Pupils also celebrated Arbor Day with poems and readings and May Day with performances, a parade of the seasons, and the coronation of class kings and queens.19

During this era, segregation laws required that students at Union Academy could only participate in athletic competitions with pupils at other African-American schools. In addition to Gibbs and Sixteenth Street in Pinellas County, students competed against those in distant communities such as Dade City, Fort Meade, Lacochee, and St. Augustine. Coach William Thompson and other teachers chaperoned the students during the long trips to distant schools.20

The African-American community took a strong interest in the education, community service, and academic accomplishments of students at Union Academy. Pupils raised $22 for the March of Dimes in February 1953. Ruth Lambright, chair of the drive and second-grade teacher at U. A., saw her students raise $9.50 of that total, with seventh graders in William Thompson’s class coming in second place with $5.30 raised. An active Parent-Teachers Association that held chicken dinner socials, tag days, and fund drives to provide resources for the school.21 Lambright’s articles congratulated students who earned honor roll or other notable scholastic achievements. Commencement exercises offered kith and kin a chance to celebrate. During the 9 June 1953 ceremonies, for example, faculty conferred awards for scholastic achievement, perfect attendance, citizenship, athletics, music, homemaking, and art in the ceremonies held at the school’s auditorium.22

Black educators in Pinellas County developed close bonds and provided mutual assistance at a time when many whites overlooked their efforts. James A. Bond, the county’s Supervisor of Negro Education, frequently visited Union Academy. Emmanuel

20 Tarpon Springs Leader, 4 March 1954.
22 Tarpon Springs Leader, 11 June 1953.
Stewart, U. A. principal during the 1948-1949 year, regularly met with the Ruth Lambright and other Tarpon Springs teachers after he went to Jordan Elementary School, where he would serve as principal from 1951 through 1957. Other notable African-American educators in Pinellas County who visited the school during the 1953-1954 term included: Alvin Benton, Frederick Burney, John Hopkins, Ralph James, and Dorothy Johnson. Academy teachers participated in meetings and workshops at other Pinellas schools including Williams Elementary (Clearwater) and in organizations such as the Pinellas County Progressive Teachers Association and the Florida State Teachers Association. The faculty congratulated and celebrated the achievements of instructors who retired or transferred to other schools. For example, when fourth and fifth-grade teacher Elouise Pierce planned to transfer to Davis Elementary School in St. Petersburg, her U. A. colleagues fêted her in a surprise party with games, delicious food, and two parting gifts: a monogrammed desk pen set and a necklace.23

The Spring Recital and Open House on 20 April 1954 marked a bittersweet occasion at Union Academy. During an assembly, students learned that county school authorities planned to abolish the seventh and eighth grades at Union Academy, and send those junior high students to distant Pinellas High School in Clearwater. Most members of the U. A. family regretted the plans to limit the school to elementary grades. In response to this difficult news, the administration renamed the annual May Day celebration “Play Day” and encouraged students to participate in a number of events during the week, including a talent show, square dancing, rumba, instrumental solos, and pantomime acts. Many dance routines were arranged by grade level, with “Hambone” first graders, second-grade girls known as “Molasses Steppers,” and third-grade girls known as the “Orange Colored Cappers” entertaining the audience. As the 1953-1954 school year came to an end, the upper grades enjoyed a formal cotillion that included

23 Tarpon Springs Leader, 12 March 1953, 23 April 1953, 11 June 1953, 21 January 1954, 11 February 1954; 18 February 1954, 18 March 1954, 25 March 1954, 1 April 1954, 26 August 1954. The Florida State Teachers Association (FSTA) represented the interests of African-American educators in Florida at a time when unions remained racially segregated. During the 1930s and 1940s, the FSTA focused its efforts on salary equalization lawsuits that demanded equal pay for black and white teachers. By the 1950s, this organization—established in 1890 with only thirteen members—watched its membership surge to over 6,000 as it battled to end separate and unequal Jim Crow schools throughout Florida. See: Gilbert L. Porter and Leedell W. Neyland, History of the Florida State Teachers Association (Washington: National Education Association, 1977).
music by a Little Zeke and his Flamingoes of Tampa, and a large crowd attended the commencement ceremonies. Former U. A. principal Emanuel Stewart—now leader of Jordan Elementary—offered remarks to the students that emphasized the motto of the promotional ceremonies: “Just Do Your Best.”

**A Supreme Court Decision and the County’s Response**

The plan to move seventh and eighth grade classes from Union Academy to the newly constructed Pinellas High School campus was, in part, a response to legal challenges against separate but unequal facilities throughout the South. By the early 1950s, a number of cases challenging the administration of Jim Crow schools created since the 1896 *Plessy* decision had reached the United States Supreme Court. On 17 May 1954, the Court rendered its decision in *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka*. Realizing that public education had become an important responsibility of state and local governments during the twentieth century, the Justices unanimously affirmed that dual school systems based upon race were inherently unequal, and thereby violated the Fourteenth Amendment. Blacks in Pinellas County heartily welcomed the decision, though often with a cautious “wait-and-see” attitude. James Bond, the county’s Negro education supervisor, believed that *Brown* would dismantle the caste system that existed in many Southern communities. Others feared a strong, violent response from the Klan and other militant segregationists who considered any attempt at integration as a salvo against the notion of white supremacy. Indeed, since this class action decision involved numerous areas with differing local conditions, the Court withheld its final verdict and implementation decree until states could file legal responses.

White school officials in Pinellas County anticipated and responded to *Brown* by constructing and improving a number of African American schools. Pinellas High School started as Clearwater Colored Junior High, a concrete block structure built on Madison Street in 1914 for $2,545. The school did not offer high school classes until the early 1930s, and the temporary structures added to the campus during 1940s lacked adequate

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lighting or ventilation. As challenges to segregation appeared on court dockets in the South, local school leaders planned to replace the obsolete and unsuitable buildings at this site with a new campus. The goal, of course, was to circumvent or to delay implementation of a decision such as *Brown* by improving facilities that authorities had neglected for years. Pinellas school officials, including Supt. Floyd Christian, believed courts would allow the county to maintain segregated schools if the district acted in good faith to upgrade facilities. To prove their sincerity, before the end of the decade school officials earmarked funds to renovate many black schools and to construct a number of new campuses. New and refurbished structures included the new Pinellas High campus, as well as Wildwood Elementary, Gibbs Junior College, Ridgecrest Elementary, George W. Perkins Elementary, and Lincoln Heights Elementary. Thus, the new Pinellas High campus, built at a cost of $540,986, opened in the fall of 1954 as officials planned to move seventh and eighth grade students from Union Academy and convert U. A. into an elementary school.\(^{26}\)

Parents and community members fought attempts to move classes from Union Academy. At an 11 August 1954 school board meeting, Supt. Christian argued that it made little sense to keep smaller seventh and eighth grade classes at Union Academy at the same time white children attended crowded classrooms in Tarpon Springs. Christian planned to offer bus service so the upper grades at Union Academy could merge with the junior and senior high classes at the new Pinellas High campus. When Rev. J. W. Murphy spoke out against the plan, board members questioned whether other blacks in Tarpon shared his “last ditch” fight to save the upper grades. Murphy persisted, telling board members that blacks had learned from “you white people” that “majority rules.” He claimed that at least two-thirds of the affected families wanted their children to remain at U. A., adding that this majority of parents included many poor families that would face economic hardship if their children traveled to the Clearwater school. Murphy posed an alternative: If the school district remained unwilling to provide

\(^{26}\) Costrini, *Tradition of Excellence*, 86-88; *Golden Anniversary of Pinellas County Schools*, 61-69.
separate and equal schools for blacks in Tarpon Springs, he encouraged the board to allow these children to attend nearby white schools.\textsuperscript{27}

By early September, many parents had refused to enroll their seventh and eighth grade students at Pinellas High. Seeing this transfer as a hardship, they contact Francisco A. Rodriguez, an attorney with the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Rodriguez took the position that his clients “be allowed to go to whatever local school available or keep Union Academy.” A newspaper article notes that the NAACP attorney had advised students not to register at the Clearwater school. He had also collected a petition of parents representing many of the children. In light of the \textit{Brown} decision and to forestall litigation, Supt. Christian agreed to hold a conference with Rodriguez to discuss this matter. Though he expressed disappointment that “parents don’t recognize the advantages of the other school,” Christian nevertheless agreed to a compromise that allowed U. A. to retain the upper grades. Due to low enrollment, however, he said he could not “justify putting two teachers back because there are too many overcrowded conditions in the county to warrant giving twenty-five children two teachers.” In an early attempt at “school choice,” Christian allowed the affected pupils to attend either Union Academy or Pinellas High, but not nearby white schools.\textsuperscript{28}

Although local blacks succeeded in their fight to preserve upper grades at Union Academy, the struggle to desegregate and improve facilities faced many obstacles during the 1954-1955 school term. In May 1955, the United States Supreme Court released its implementation decree in \textit{Brown}. Instead of establishing a fixed schedule for the end of segregated schools, the Justices mandated “prompt and deliberate compliance . . . with all deliberate speed.” By allowing local courts to consider conditions in their communities, this ambiguous decision failed to establish when desegregation measures should begin, how school systems should abide by the verdict, and when “unitary status” should become mandatory. As a result, the only “integration” in Pinellas County schools immediately after \textit{Brown} occurred when the 1955-1956 school system directory listed

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Tarpon Springs Leader}, 19 August 1954. For images of the new Pinellas High campus, see the “Negro news” page in the 8 September 1954 \textit{St. Petersburg Times}.

\textsuperscript{28} \textit{St. Petersburg Times}, 8 September 1954, 10 September 1954; \textit{Tarpon Springs Leader}, 16 September 1954.
faculty and staff in alphabetical order, rather than separating white and “Negro” schools. Boasting of recent construction, Christian hoped to prevent local court cases by claiming that recent improvements made Pinellas schools “separate but really equal.”

Despite the uncertainty of the times, members of the Union Academy family continued to persevere during the 1950s. Parents supported fundraising activities and March of Dimes drives (which totaled $71.91 in 1955). They also played in recreational basketball games with students and teachers. Teachers nurtured their students and prepared them for the responsibilities of adulthood at a time when Americans witnessed the beginnings of the civil rights movement. Students excelled in their displays at the County Fair, enjoyed field trips to the Sponge Exchange, participated in Negro History Week events, and performed in many dramatic and musical programs. Chapel assemblies and entertainment by the school’s United Children’s Chorus filled many afternoons and evenings on campus and in local churches. Some boys in the upper grades even expressed their happiness in staying at U. A. rather than attending Pinellas High by planting trees around the campus for Arbor Day as members of the faculty and younger children watched.

A Better Place for Boys and Subsequent Years of Decline

The educational landscape in Pinellas County changed dramatically during the 1960s. Ranch houses replaced citrus groves across the peninsula. Yet, for the most part, the Leader’s “Negro news” column indicated that little had changed at Union Academy. Students still attended chapel and talent shows, birthday parties for children remained community gatherings, and parents and teachers worked closely to guide and shape the

30 Tarpon Springs Leader, 27 January 1955, 3 February 1955, 10 February 1955, 24 February 1955, 3 March 1955, 10 March 1955, 28 April 1955, 12 May 1955, 16 June 1955, 30 June 1955. Many teachers believed that their commitment to students required them to participate in organizations that hoped to end previous injustices. For some, this certainly meant membership in their local NAACP chapter or the Pinellas County Progressive Teachers Association, an organization under the excellent leadership of Olive B. McLin. Before the end of the decade, some educators would face harassment and legal challenges to their membership in such organizations. See: James A. Schnur, “Cold Warriors in the Hot Sunshine: The Johns Committee’s Assault on Civil Liberties in Florida, 1956-1965” (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of South Florida, 1995).
next generation. Although boycotts and similar protests had led to the peaceful desegregation of lunch counters and other accommodations by early 1961, schools throughout the county remained segregated. One Union Academy student did, however, receive a prize in an “integrated” contest sponsored by the Tarpon Springs Woman’s Club. U. A. student Eddie Cole won honorable mention for his water color painting in a competition open to all Tarpon Springs students. Cole was the only Academy student to receive an award. Within the next year, token desegregation came to some south Pinellas schools. Longtime Tarpon resident R. F. Pent’s 1964 history of the community claimed that St. Petersburg’s Carlisle Construction Company had received a contract for $180,470 to improve Union Academy, then with an enrollment of 300 students.  

After two decades of service at Union Academy, the portable was no longer needed. By the time Leon W. Bradley and other plaintiffs launched a legal attack on Pinellas County’s segregated schools in May 1964, the old portable moved from Union Academy to its next location at the corner of South Grosse Avenue and Morgan Street. Purchased from the school board for approximately $350, the building became home to a group known as the “Better Boys Club.” This club, started by longtime residents Samuel and Elizabeth Archie, provided African-American boys and teenagers a social venue at a time when many organizations denied admission to blacks. The club used art, athletics, and other activities to motivate and to provide a nurturing, positive environment for the boys. By 1968—the same year the school board publicly debated closing the Union Academy or turning it into a special education center—the Better Boys Club boasted over eighty members from eight to eighteen years of age. With dues set at ten cents per week, the club’s policy never turned children away if they could not pay. Fish fries and other fundraisers kept the club afloat.

The Better Boys Club provided a foundation for future leaders of Tarpon’s black community. Members of prominent African-American families, including the Singletarys and Archies, sent their children to the club during the 1960s and early 1970s. Heeding the club’s motto—“Building Boys is Better than Mending Men”—many members applied the lessons learned in their youth to activities in their adult life. Harry Singletary,

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Secretary of the Florida Department of Corrections from 1991 through 1998, had fond memories of the club and the adults who emphasized that the young men should lead responsible and productive lives. In a 2000 interview he remarked that people “need symbols . . . And that is a symbol of a time when people cared.” Tarpon Springs City Commissioner David Archie, son of Samuel and Elizabeth Archie, also recalled the club as “an opportunity to come together . . . to really socialize.”

Preserving the Union

By the late 1970s, the Better Boys Club stopped holding meetings at the former Union Academy building. At some point, the site served as a storage area for x-ray and other medical equipment belonging to an African American physician who lived in Tarpon Springs. By the 1980s, however, the old building’s condition had steadily deteriorated. Soon, drug users and other derelicts squatted in this former classroom building. A May 2000 newspaper article noted that Elizabeth Archie, wife of Samuel Archie and mother of David Archie—a city commissioner in Tarpon Springs—had contacted the city police about retrieving materials from the long abandoned structure. As she entered the building with Officer Ed Hayden, she lamented the terrible condition of this building, an important part of Tarpon Springs’ history that had recently become a target for demolition.

Archie, members of the Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society, management at Heritage Village, and the city and county governments collaborated in a move to save the Union Academy structure. Archie had approached the board of the historical society at the same time that Heritage Village hoped to add a significant structure, such as a church or school, to represent African Americans in Pinellas County. In an interview, former director Kendrick Ford claimed that he had been in contact with some pastors and African American leaders about possible structures in the past, but that none of those efforts came to fruition. According to correspondence and meeting minutes, historical society board member Julie Keffalas contacted Ford about the structure. Sensing the value of the structure, Ford told a reporter in a May 2000 interview that he “jumped right in the van,” worked with city officials to stop the demolition order, and secured

approximately $8,500 to move the structure to Heritage Village. Meeting minutes from
the Pinellas County Historical Commission note that Ken received an $8,500 estimate
from Roesch Housemovers to bring the structure to Heritage Village. With permission
from county government administrators and consent from the Historical Commission,
Ford moved funds from personnel services into the operating budget to cover moving
expenses and secured necessary permits.34

The building arrived at Heritage Village in very poor condition. Ford noted that
extensive termite damage had weakened the structure, and numerous reconfigurations of
the walls and windows made it difficult to determine the original layout versus
subsequent renovations. Ford also stated that at one time, a door existed along the
present-day north wall and that workers had to demolish and restore much of the present-
day west wall, where the windows are located. George Unrue, a carpenter involved in the
restoration efforts, claimed that “everything was completely falling apart” when the
building arrived at Heritage Village. During the project, Unrue and others applied some
“tender loving care” by repairing and replacing floor joints, replacing most of the original
siding (except on the front of the building), and substantially rehabilitating the interior.
Floor boards are original to the structure, and the ceiling fixtures in the building remain
the same, though they were probably added to the building much later than its original
construction.35

Although the restoration of the Union Academy schoolhouse preserved an
important structure that documents Pinellas County’s African-American heritage, many
questions and uncertainties remain. Stephanie Ferrell, an architect with a background in
historic preservation, observed that earlier renovations and past neglect have obscured
many of the original elements and features of this largely reconstructed building. One can
only speculate on the size and location of doors and windows on the original structure.
Frame vernacular structures similar to the Union Academy schoolhouse provided an
inexpensive solution to school districts in the South with limited funds, or limited interest
in devoting funds to Jim Crow facilities. While modifications to this building during the

34 Ibid.; Judith B. LeGath, interim manager, Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society, to Ellen Babb, 5
August 2003; Interview of Ken Ford, former director of Heritage Village, by Stephanie Ferrell and Jim
Schnur, 3 May 2003, Heritage Village, Largo; Records of the Pinellas County Historical Commission,
Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo.
35 Ken Ford interview; St. Petersburg Times, 22 February 2002.
past eight decades have obscured architectural elements on this one-story, wood frame building, documentary sources from alumni, local African Americans, and microfilm newspapers can recapture this school’s value as a cultural and nurturing institution in the community.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{36} For more information about the architectural history of this structure, please consult Stephanie Ferrell’s overview of Union Academy included in the Heritage Village archives.
Walsingham House: A Brief Introduction

History of Site before House was Built

- Land held by McMullen family as early as 1868 when William McMullen secured a large tract along present-day Ridge Road. Also held by Charles W. Johnson and family. Like members of the Lowe family and Joshua Boyer, “Captain” Johnson had frequently sailed between Cedar Keys and Key West.
- The O’Quinn family, along with McMullens, held title and occupied land between the late 1870s and 1913.
- Marriages between McMullen, O’Quinn, Lowe, and Walsingham families connect these families and their land holdings in the Largo area. Mary Adona O’Quinn, William McMullen’s granddaughter, married Jesse Walsingham. Jesse’s brother married a member of the Lowe family.

Construction Information

- Jesse Walsingham purchased this land in 1913, and the two-story home was built in 1915.
- This was a notable structure along the frontier where most people were farmers and laborers in citrus fields.

History of Occupants

- A native of Taylor County, Jesse Ancil Walsingham came to the area in 1895 by way of Pasco County, where he perfected his skills as a strawberry farmer.
- During the early 1900s, while settled in the Largo area, Walsingham became a farmer, delivered ice, cultivated citrus, engaged in the “beef business,” constructed a barn and packing house, butchered hogs, and provided meat to residents of the Pinellas Peninsula in Largo and as far south as St. Petersburg.
- He lived in a house along Missouri Road during the early 1900s.
- Jesse served as a representative of the Gulf Fertilizer Company, became an early advocate for separation from Hillsborough County, joined the Largo Board of Trade, led the local association of truck farmers, and became well-known in the community. By 1921, he also operated a hardware company.
- While living in the home—a place where he conducted much of his farming business and held meetings with other civic leaders—he expanded his agricultural holdings to include lands along and within the bounds of the recently-drained Lake Largo.
- As a teenager, son Sumter Walsingham participated in a “Corn Club” competition and harvested nearly fifty bushels on an acre. During World War I, son Carl Walsingham left the home to fight overseas as a member of the 149th Aero Squadron.
- Jesse Walsingham served as a leader of the Pinellas County fair while living in this structure. The fair began as an event coordinated by the Woman’s Club of Largo, an organization that wife Mary Walsingham joined as a charter member.
- The Walsinghams won many awards for their agricultural crops.
- By August 1928, Jesse Walsingham became the first general manager of the Pinellas County Fair, receiving a $200/month salary.
The Walsinghams sold this house in 1929. They then lived in the Bellear community along Clearwater-Largo Road.
The Mayes family owned the residence until 1957, J. V. Childers until 1965, and Luther Walker until 1978. At times during these years, tenants or boarders lived in the structure. The Litz family acquired the house and held the property until 1983.
By 1949, the Walsinghams had moved once again to Ridge Road. They lived at 12271 Ridge Road, about one block from the 1915 home (located at 12152 Ridge Road).

Moving of the House to Heritage Village
First discussions about moving the house occurred during the summer of 1983.
During early deliberations, Pinellas County Historical Commission members referred to the structure as the “Walker House” for the Luther Walker family.
The house arrived at Heritage Village in June 1984. It sat vacant for many years, until funds for renovations and an air conditioning system were raised. The Pinellas County Medical Association assisted with fundraising efforts.
Walsingham House

Overview

Jesse Ancil, wife Mary Adona Walsingham, and their children lived at the Walsingham House for nearly fifteen years.\(^1\) Constructed along Ridge Road south of Largo in 1915, this residence became a center for the family’s agricultural, commercial, and civic enterprises. A native of Taylor County, Jesse Ancil Walsingham moved to the Pinellas Peninsula after becoming a successful farmer in Pasco County. He married Mary Adona O’Quinn, a granddaughter of William McMullen. Jesse’s brother, John Randolph Walsingham, also married into a pioneer family when he exchanged vows with Lillie Ruth Meares. While living at this home, Jesse Walsingham took leadership of the Largo Truck Growers’ Association, the Pinellas County Fair, and a number of commercial and agricultural enterprises. He operated a Largo hardware store and, along with McMullens and other truck farmers, cultivated crops on the reclaimed lands formerly occupied by Lake Largo. The Walsingham House arrived at Heritage Village in June 1994.

Other Pioneer Footprints on the Land

Long before the construction of the Walsingham house, the land it occupied had become part of the pioneer McMullen family’s extensive holdings. In 1868 William McMullen, the oldest of the seven brothers, acquired the southeast quarter of Section Nine, Township Thirty, Range Fifteen East. This tract, with its higher elevation along the ridge, provided an excellent area for grazing, crop cultivation, and other agricultural pursuits. By the 1870s, members of William McMullen’s family had subdivided the parcel and sold some pieces to others. One owner of the land was Charles Wharton Johnson who, along with wife Catherine Kurtz Johnson, purchased and sold the land back to the McMullen family. Charles W. Johnson and his family also played an important role in the settlement and development of Largo. Like members of the Lowe family, “Captain” Johnson sailed along the coast between Cedar Keys and Key West. After suffering a shipwreck in the early 1870s along nearby waters, Johnson decided to move his family from Cedar Key to the Largo area. A 28 May 1878 indenture between Charles

\(^1\) Various written and genealogical records refer to Mr. Walsingham as either “Jesse” or “Jessie.”
W. Johnson and John Daniel McMullen (the fifth child and youngest son of William) transferred title to approximately forty acres of land that fell within the northeast quarter of the original land purchase in exchange for $52.39 in cash. In addition to the McMullens, members of the O’Quinn family held title to and occupied the land. During the late 1800s, John D. McMullen constructed a small house or cottage on the site and cultivated crops on a portion of the land. Between the late 1870s and 1913, Andrew Martin O’Quinn and John D. McMullen owned the land.²

The O’Quinn family provides an important and direct link between the McMullens and the Walsinghams, one that predates the arrival of these families to the Pinellas Peninsula. According to genealogical records, Mary Ann McMullen—second child and eldest daughter of William and Susannah Elizabeth [Henderson] McMullen—exchanged vows with Andrew Martin O’Quinn on 3 November 1859 in Perry, Florida. While living in and around Taylor County, Florida, Andrew and Mary Ann started a family. Their children included: William Allen (1860-1948, later known as “Uncle Billy”), Andrew Edward, Hiram Randolph (c. 1867-1928), Elizabeth Wineyford, Mary Adona (1877-1956), and David Henderson O’Quinn. Mary Adona O’Quinn—fourth child of Andrew and Mary Ann McMullen O’Quinn and granddaughter of William McMullen—married Jesse Ancil Walsingham. Thus William McMullen’s granddaughter married Jesse Walsingham, and the O’Quinns connected these families through this union.³

William A. “Uncle Billy” O’Quinn vividly described the area where the Walsingham House and Ridge Road were later built. Similar to the McMullen family, the O’Quinns settled along the frontier near present-day Largo shortly after the Civil War. Indeed, three of his closest neighbors were John, Thomas, and James P. McMullen.

² Genealogical research on the William McMullen family and a summary transcription of the May 1878 deed transferring the land between Charles Johnson and the McMullen family appear in the archival files created during this research project. Consult the Walsingham House files, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo. Charles and Catherine Johnson originally homesteaded on the site of the Belleview Biltmore property, and later constructed Largo’s first three-story home on land near East Bay Drive that later served as the site of the Taylor Packing House. One of their granddaughters, Edna Catherine, married Alonzo B. McMullen in that house. See: Largo, Florida, Then Til . . . (Largo: Largo Bicentennial Committee, 1979), 15.

³ Ibid. According to the 1900 census, Jesse and Mary Walsingham were married for four years as of 1900, making their wedding date either in mid/late 1895 or early 1896. They may have married in Taylor County
According to a 1986 letter from a descendant of O’Quinn, Andrew’s father—Allen O’Quinn—also came to the Pinellas Peninsula and may have been buried on his homestead, the former site of Thurston Groves. This family member believed that the original Thurston homestead—once located near the present intersection of Ridge Road, 102nd Avenue North, and the Pinellas Trail—may have served as O’Quinn’s first homestead. William’s parents (Andrew and Mary Ann) arrived in the area on 12 January 1868. Aside from a handful of organized groves, most of them run by McMullens, few settlers occupied land in this area. “Uncle Billy” remembered a childhood along the central Pinellas ridge that included an abundance of deer, geese, wild turkeys, hogs, bears, and an occasional panther. A hunter for many years, he recalled driving deer from the family’s sweet potato and pea fields, and claimed he “could not begin to tell you of [all] the different wild game and little animals that were in this county at that time.” He often wore heavy tin leggings made by a blacksmith when trapping small animals such as snakes and alligators. Educated in a simple log school, William remembered gaps in the walls so large that a person “could throw a rabbit through the cracks.” Uncle Billy truly matured while tilling the fields and exploring the largely unsettled frontier. At an early age, he learned how to farm and to hitch up the oxen for the long, monthly trip around Old Tampa Bay to the nearest trading post, Tampa Town. When traveling far from home or visiting a distant neighbor, he marked the trees with an axe so that he could remember how to return home. Products from the family’s farm made a trip to Lowe’s Landing in Anona and often went to distant locations on Captain John T. Lowe’s schooner. The family also sent crops on boats launched from John White’s Landing at Bay Pines. As a young teenager, Billy ventured on long fishing trips to then-unoccupied land in present-day St. Petersburg, carrying only a frying pan, his fishing pole, and a gun. During this time, he also earned money clearing lands owned by “General” John Constantine Williams north of the area from Central Avenue and Ninth (Dr. Martin Luther King) Street towards Tampa Bay. According to Uncle Billy, Williams paid him $25 an acre to clear the land and quickly sold it to investors. By 1888, William O’Quinn worked on the grading of rail lines between Largo and St. Petersburg.

Soon after the railroad arrived, he married a woman from Alabama, settled in the Lealman area, and opened a laundry. Before passing away in 1948, he lived at 420-25th Avenue North. Spending his later years cast-net fishing, Uncle Billy once told a reporter that he felt sorry for the younger generation (the children of the 1930s and 1940s) because “they got too much education . . . takes more than that to really live.” William O’Quinn, who lived on the Pinellas Peninsula from 1868 until 1948, represents a rare individual who saw the wild frontier, helped clear the land, and worked on the railroad. Yet, Jesse Walsingham’s brother-in-law later lamented the changes he saw and helped to foster by noting that “the peace and the happiness left the country with the horses and oxen—then the paper bag living came along and did away with the farming.”

**Early Agricultural and Commercial Activities of the Walsingham Family**

Jesse Ancil Walsingham moved to the Pinellas peninsula from Taylor County, Florida, in 1895. Before settling in the Largo area, he lived in neighboring Pasco County for awhile. Born on 24 October 1873 in the community of Lake Bird (approximately ten miles north-northwest of Perry), Jesse had two younger brothers (William A. and John Randolph) and one younger sister (Alice). Genealogical research indicates that Jesse and wife Mary first lived with her brother, Hiram O’Quinn, when they arrived on the Pinellas peninsula. The Walsinghams had five children, all sons: Sumter Loy (1898-1956), Carl Brian (1900-1975), “Baby” Brian (1901-1904), Eldon Ancil (1902-1904), and Roy Blackburn (1905-1980). At some point before the spring of 1895, Walsingham began growing strawberries in Pasco County. On 24 January 1900, Mary gave birth to her second son, Carl, at their home on Hiram O’Quinn’s grove, the same home where Mary herself entered the world on 5 January 1877.

By the summer of 1901, Walsingham and Martin McMullen delivered ice to people in the Seminole area, while Jesse’s father-in-law, A. M. O’Quinn, finished the construction of his home and planted orange trees on a parcel near Largo that was probably the site later purchased by Walsingham. In addition to delivering ice, McMullen and Walsingham also engaged in the “beef business” during the summer of 1901. In

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4 Mary Reid B. Rice to Sadie Johnson, 2 February 1986, copy located in Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; *St. Petersburg Times*, undated 1948 clipping; *Largo, Then Til . . .*, 173; *Largo Sentinel*, 3
September 1901, Jesse constructed a new barn and packing house on the Seminole/Largo frontier. By October, Walsingham “quit” that bovine enterprise and focused on the cultivation and shipping of oranges and a large field of eggplants. At the end of this busy year, the Walsingham family moved back to its “beautiful home” on Missouri Avenue, then a narrow dirt road. By February 1902, Jesse Walsingham butchered hogs and provided pork for the St. Petersburg market.5

As children, Sumter and Carl Walsingham walked to school from their father’s grove near Ridge Road to the schoolhouse in Largo. “Doctor” G. C. Kingsbury used to arrive at school in his loud Model T Ford. Carl remembers watching his grandfather, Andrew M. O’Quinn, fetch a great price for grapefruit at the market. In a 1975 interview with Sadie Johnson, Carl believed one box brought $5.75.6

Members of the Walsingham family continued their involvement in commercial, civic, and agricultural activities as the movement to create an independent county grew along the Pinellas peninsula. John Randolph Walsingham, Jesse’s youngest brother, came to the area after spending time in Taylor County, Florida, and the Thomasville, Georgia, area. He arrived in either 1897 or 1899. Shortly after his arrival, he married Lillie Ruth Meares—daughter of Anona pioneer William Fletcher Meares—on 29 March 1899. During the early 1900s, John worked as a laborer, cleared land for citrus groves, and worked in a mill. John R. and Lillie Ruth Walsingham later acquired land, started their own grove, and established a home for their four children at the corner of Ridge Road and Taylor Avenue (8th Avenue SW). Meanwhile, Jesse continued his business ventures, raised crops (and children), joined the Largo Board of Trade, and advocated for the creation of a new county along the peninsula. By early 1910, Jesse regularly traveled along the West Coast of Florida as a representative of Gulf Fertilizer Company. During his journeys along the Pinellas frontier, he personally visited with many farmers to discuss the merits of separation from Hillsborough County. As an advocate of division, he also traveled to Tallahassee in 1911 to express his sympathies as a private citizen. In

January 1946.
5 St. Petersburg Times, 27 July 1901, 21 September 1901, 26 October 1901, 12 October 1901, 28 December 1901, 8 February 1902, 11 March 1961; Largo Sentinel, 21 March 1912; Largo, Then Til . . ., 167.
6 Largo, Then Til . . ., 167.
between his many journeys, he tended to his diverse crops in the Largo area, including the three acres he set aside in order to grow strawberries during the early 1910s.\(^7\)

**A New County, A New House, and New Agribusiness Opportunities**

The creation of Pinellas County in 1912 did not settle all political matters along the peninsula. After obtaining independence from Hillsborough County, community leaders needed to select a county seat. As residents celebrated their independence from Hillsborough and the Tampa power structure, they began arguing with one another over the proper location for the county courthouse and seat of government. While Clearwater ultimately won the struggle, in January 1912—before the dust had settled—Walsingham and other members of the Largo Board of Trade supported St. Petersburg as the best site for the county seat. On 6 January 1912, the *St. Petersburg Times* reprinted a letter signed by Walsingham, John S. Taylor, Marion Wheeler Ulmer, and other Largo Board of Trade members to their colleagues at the St. Petersburg Board. Originally sent on January 3, the letter reminded those in St. Petersburg that citizens “in the northern and eastern part of the county have in various ways shown a disposition to be unfair to St. Petersburg, Largo, and in fact the entire southern part of the county.” The Largo delegation hoped to meet with the St. Petersburg Board of Trade so they could consider strategies to challenge those who planned to place the county seat in Clearwater. Noel A. Mitchell, acting president of the St. Petersburg Board, viewed this “the most important matter now before the citizens and taxpayers” of southern Pinellas. The *Times* gave its support for the Largo-St. Petersburg meeting by adding that these communities needed to “stand together” to prevent “trickery [by] the small end of the county.” Walsingham’s longstanding business connections with St. Petersburg and his frequent travels through Seminole into the southern part of the county probably played a role in his decision to support the “Sunshine City” as the county seat. The boards of trade lost their battle, however, and Clearwater became the de facto county seat.\(^8\)

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\(^7\) John Walsingham’s 26 December 1937 obituary mentions that he arrived in the area as a twenty-one year old man in 1899; however, the 6 August 1959 obituary of his wife, Lillie Ruth [Meares] Walsingham, claims that he came to the Largo area in 1897. *St. Petersburg Times*, 21 January 1910, 26 December 1937, 6 August 1959, 11 March 1961; *Largo Sentinel*, 21 March 1912.

\(^8\) *Tampa Daily Times*, 6 January 1912.
In 1913, Jesse and Mary Walsingham purchased the property along Ridge Road where they would build their home. Two years later, in 1915, they moved into their new home that sat at the present location of 12152 Ridge Road. This two-story house, a notable structure along the sparsely settled frontier, combined ornamental, rusticated concrete blocks on the lower level with wood-framed second floor. Such ornamental concrete construction—though unique among the structures presently located in Heritage Village—followed a pattern popular in American suburban homes during the early 1900s. Though the main building suffered little damage during the 1921 hurricane, original outbuildings, including a windmill, did not survive that storm.9

During this period, Walsingham maintained his involvement in business, civic, and fraternal activities. At a January 1914 meeting of the Largo Board of Trade, Walsingham—by then also a member of the board of governors for the County Board of Trade—reported on a recent visit with representatives from the Atlantic Coast Line Railway in Tarpon Springs. Boosters and leaders of Largo—fondly known as “Citrus City”—often came to the monthly meetings of the Minnehaha Club. This informal group included seasonal visitors as well as local residents who gathered to socialize and enjoy picnics.10 On 30 March 1917, the Minnehaha Club met at the Walsingham’s home. According to the Largo Sentinel:

The gathering . . . was in every way a very pleasant affair. The tables were set out in the beautiful oak grove surrounding the house, so that when the forty-two sat down to partake of the many and toothsome viands, they could feast the eye while feeding the body and improving the more noble occupation of getting acquainted with their neighbors. After dinner this was most emphatically the case, when all gathered on the commodious porch and visited.11

Those in attendance at the Minnehaha gathering included Hiram O’Quinn, Dr. Wiley of Baltimore (company chemist for Gulf Fertilizer), and L. R. Woods of Tampa (from Gulf Fertilizer’s Tampa office). Walsingham and brother-in-law D. H. O’Quinn also became

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9 Consult Stephanie Ferrell’s research note for more information on the architectural composition of this structure. A copy is available in the Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo.
10 Largo Sentinel, 21 January 1914.
11 Largo Sentinel, 12 April 1917.
managers in the recently formed Largo lodge of the Woodmen of the World (WOW). This non-profit fraternal benefit society began in 1890 as an organization that provided members with insurance services and supported community projects. With ceremonies officiated by C. H. Dame, WOW state organizer, members celebrated the installation of Walsingham, O’Quinn, and others under the leadership of M. J. McMullen, counsel commander.12

As Largo transformed from a farm settlement into a city, Jesse Walsingham maintained his close connections to the land and agricultural interests. Throughout the mid- and late 1910s, columns in the *Largo Sentinel* newspaper celebrated Walsingham’s harvests and crop transactions. For example, in April 1915 Chicagoans received one of their earliest springtime shipments of beans from the Walsingham. A telegraph report from Walsingham’s consignee in Chicago noted that his beans sold for the handsome sum of $4.65 per crate. The *Sentinel* praised Walsingham as “among the very best farmers in all Pinellas County” in June 1917 when he brought a dozen Irish potatoes to the newspaper’s office that weighed nearly ten pounds altogether. During that season, he told the paper that he hoped to cultivate 225 bushels of potatoes, 300 pounds of navy beans, as well as corn and other provisions. By the summer of 1917, Walsingham and members of the Geiselman family obtained nearly ten acres of land along Lake Largo (near present-day Starkey Road and East Bay Drive). They immediately erected a fence around the land, cleared part of the site, and planted peppers on half of the tract. A believer in crop diversification, Walsingham soon took a leadership role among farmers in the region.13

Walsingham and other central Pinellas truck farmers, those who grew crops for market, decided to strengthen their organizational resolve by the summer of 1917. Similar to those who participated in the Grange and Farmers’ Alliance movements of the late nineteenth century, local farmers hoped to realize the advantages of cooperative shipping, marketing, and selling of their crops. On September 1, local farmers established the Largo Truck Growers’ Association during “a very enthusiastic and profitable meeting” at

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the Largo Town Hall. Jesse Walsingham served as the group’s president. Those in attendance heard J. W. Booth of the Tampa & Gulf Coast Railroad Company (T&GC) discuss marketing strategies for farmers. Unlike many Gilded Age agrarian cooperatives that viewed rate-setting railroad employees as the enemy, Largo truck growers regularly met with agents from T&GC, the Seaboard Air Line, and the Atlantic Coast Line (ACL) who supported the farmers’ cause. Indeed, as early as April 1915, representatives from the Seaboard Air Line had investigated the handling of local vegetable and melon crops at the insistence of buyers interested in the market. By August 1917, local railway agents had strongly urged the creation of a farmers’ association as a way of increasing agribusiness and they worked closely with Walsingham and M. J. McMullen as planning for the organization began. At a November meeting, railway representatives not only participated in the meeting, they also joined as members of the association. In the days before the land boom exploded with full force along the Pinellas Peninsula, shipments of agricultural products provided an important source of revenue for the railroads. For example, members of the Truck Growers’ Association predicted that they would harvest enough cabbage and lettuce alone to fill fifty railcars during the 1917-1918 season.\footnote{Largo Sentinel, 15 April 1915, 23 August 1917, 30 August 1917, 20 September 1917, 8 November 1917.}

Young Sumter Walsingham proudly followed in his father’s footsteps. A student at the Largo Agricultural School, Sumter became a “Corn Club” boy. For his Corn Club project, Sumter tried to get a high yield of corn on an acre of land. At the end of his project, he reported to L. R. Highfill, the county agricultural agent, that he had produced nearly fifty bushels of corn on his acre. On the date of his report, a Largo market sold shelled corn for approximately $2.15 per bushel. With an initial outlay of approximately $30.00, Sumter would have netted a profit of over $70.00 after expenses for his acre, an amazing return on his investment.\footnote{Largo Sentinel, 6 September 1917.}

Agricultural endeavors transformed original land and water patterns in the Largo area. While the effects of urban and suburban sprawl became obvious to Pinellas County residents after the land boom of the 1920s, the earlier transition as widespread crop

\footnote{Largo Sentinel, 15 April 1915, 7 June 1917, 26 July 1917, 8 November 1917. Brother-in-law Hiram O’Quinn also received attention from the Largo Sentinel when he brought over samples from his bumper crop of sweet potatoes.}
cultivation replaced a handful of isolated pioneer settlements also left an indelible mark on the landscape. The drainage of Lake Largo offers a notable example of how farmers—not real estate developers hoping to build homes—redefined the terrain. While the *Largo Sentinel* predicted a record crop during the 1917-1918 season, it also celebrated “the drainage of Lake Largo and other bodies of water between Largo and St. Petersburg [that] has opened thousands of acres of rich muck land to cultivation, adding to the zest of agricultural endeavor.” The 28 March 1918 issue of the *Sentinel* carried the following headline story: “Old Lake Largo[,] Once Filled With Water[,] Begins to Look Like a Big Plantation.” In the former lake bed, Walsingham and other farmers grew rice, cabbage, Irish potatoes, navy beans, corn, and other crops. At a time not far removed from Governor Napoleon Bonaparte Broward’s plan to drain the Everglades, the paper celebrated the draining of Lake Largo as a progressive measure:

> While it was a pleasing picture before the drainage work . . . to look out over the large body of water forming the lake, it is now a much more pleasing picture when one looks out over the many acres of rich muck and hammock land now in cultivation . . . illustrating the possibilities of what these lands will produce when they are fully reclaimed . . . This large tract of reclaimed land shows what drainage is worth to that section of the county, which has always been considered practically worthless, and many of the old settlers are now being convinced of the possibilities in store for these lands . . .

Truck farmers required a better transportation infrastructure to get crops to market before they spoiled. Thus, by 1915 the board of county commissioners approved a contract with Leon Campbell to use approximately 5,000 yards of oyster shell as pavement for Missouri Avenue (the portion now known as Seminole Boulevard), to make this dirt trail passable. At about the same time, workers graded and resurfaced “the road between Largo and Clearwater” (probably Clearwater-Largo Road) while widening it to forty feet.

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16 *Largo Sentinel*, 30 August 1917, 28 March 1918.
17 *Largo Sentinel*, 28 March 1918.
18 *Largo Sentinel*, 15 April 1915.
At a time when future profits in agriculture seemed certain for the truck growers in the Largo area, distant battles cast an uncertain shadow on world events. By 1917 calls for enlistees and preparations for America’s possible entry into the Great War occupied the headlines. While Sumter Walsingham and other Largo High School students enjoyed games, music, dances, and a picnic lunch of sandwiches, pickles, cake, and candy during a visit to Indian Rocks in April 1917, soon many members of their generation would leave home to prepare for war. Sumter’s younger brother, Carl, was among those who answered the call.  

During the summer of 1917, seventeen year-old Carl Walsingham departed for Tybee Island in Georgia to enlist in the military. On 23 August 1917, he entered service at Fort Screven, located on the island near the mouth of the Savannah River. Similar to Fort DeSoto in Pinellas County, Fort Screven (previously known as Camp Graham) provided protection of coasts and harbors around the Savannah area during the Spanish American War; facilities at Fort Screven remained in operation during both World Wars as well. While training at Ft. Screven, Carl noted in a letter that he “was well pleased with things as he found them” there, except for waking from bed at five o’clock every morning, an act that “went against the grain.” After completing his training, Carl reported to Wilbur Wright Aviation Field in Dayton, Ohio, where he trained with the 327th Aero Squadron through 29 January 1918. On his way to Dayton, he visited with fellow Largo residents (William) Stansel Belcher and John Thomas Gordon for a day in New York City. After suffering a brief bout with the measles in January 1918, on the 30th of the month Carl transferred to the 149th Aero Squadron for the duration of his service. The 7 February 1918 Largo Sentinel noted that Carl had written a letter to his parents to tell them of his squadron’s impending departure for New York City and that he would soon join those in the hostilities “over there.” Carl did indeed serve overseas from 26 February 1918 through 7 March 1919, and formally left military service on 20 March 1919. In later life, Carl Walsingham became the first post commander of the Heisler-Johnson Post 119 of the American Legion in Largo, an institution that received its charter from the national

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19 Largo Sentinel, 26 April 1917.
headquarters of the American Legion in March 1940 and was named in honor of two World War I veterans from Largo who had perished in France.  

**Walsingham and the Pinellas County Fair**

Jesse Ancil Walsingham’s agricultural acumen and leadership among central Pinellas truck farmers served him well during his many years associated with the Pinellas County Fair. Although the *Clearwater Sun* credited Walsingham as “County Fair Founder” in his obituary, in reality the women of Largo provided the impetus for launching the fair. Marcia H. Tritt and other members of the Woman’s Club of Largo proposed holding a fair in 1916, at a time when many men in the community seemed indifferent to the idea. Mary Walsingham, as a charter member of the Woman’s Club, supported the fair. According to one account, when many men (with Walsingham and Dr. Bob McMullen being notable exceptions) failed to support a proposal by the Woman’s Club at a mass meeting, Tritt supposedly told those in attendance: “We called this meeting to ask for your help. If you can’t, we’ll do it ourselves. We’re going to put on a fair.” As Dr. Bob McMullen met with various constituencies to drum up support, the women planned the event. The Woman’s Club held two very successful fairs. In the 1917 fair, Walsingham won prizes for boxed oranges and boxed grapefruits. By September 1917, an editorial by W. L. Straub in the *St. Petersburg Times* (also reprinted in the *Largo Leader*) celebrated the commercial and agricultural potential of a county fair for “Peerless Pinellas” and encouraged readers to support the Pinellas County Fair Association’s plans for an annual gathering in Largo. At a 26 October 1917 meeting in Largo, the Pinellas County Fair Association assembled for the first time. Elected members included four representatives from the Largo Woman’s Club and twenty-one men. Walsingham took charge of the fair’s horticulture department, while M. W. Ulmer obtained office space for the association on Railroad Avenue, near the ACL Railway. By the end of November, the Fair Association had purchased 11.26 acres of land for a

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20 *Largo Sentinel*, 6 September 1917, 17 January 1918, 7 February 1918; “Walsingham, Carl B.,” “Gordon, John Thomas,” and “Belcher, William Stansel.” Available from *World War I Service Cards online at the Florida State Archives*, <http://www.floridamemory.com/Collections/WWI/index.cfm> (1 October 2003); *Largo, Then Til . . . ,* 204. Similar to many young men who patriotically entered military service during the Great War, it appears that Carl Walsingham may have misrepresented his age on his enlistment papers.
permanent fairgrounds site from Charles W. Johnson for $1127. Johnson, of course, had once owned the land where the Walsingham House was built.21

In January 1918, the awards given at the first annual Pinellas County Fair covered the front page of the *Largo Sentinel*. As vice president of the Fair Association, Jesse Walsingham could claim his share of credit for “record-breaking attendance from all parts of the county” during the four day event. He also garnered attention as superintendent of the horticulture department that celebrated a bumper crop of entries, including some of his own that won prizes. While he received a loving cup for his efforts, the *Sentinel* also praised his wife, Mary, and Dr. Bob Mullen’s wife as “true and loyal helpers in fair work and without them their husbands would not have come off with the excellent prizes that came their way.”22

Walsingham continued his involvement with the Pinellas County Fair. On 1 August 1928, he became the fair’s first general manager as county commissioners replaced the Fair Association as the primary supporter of the event. This move came at a time when the day-to-day necessities of planning and organizing the fair required more effort than an ad hoc committee could offer. Walsingham received a monthly salary of $200 for his duties as fair manager and reported directly to the county commission. Soon after taking on these new responsibilities, Walsingham pledged that the next fair would be “bigger and better than ever” and encouraged representatives for all cities and areas of the county to participate. To back his promise, Walsingham apparently contacted

Though he was seventeen years, eight months of age when he enlisted at Fort Screven, his World War I card indicates his age as eighteen years, eight months.

21 *Largo, Then Til . . .*, 124-126; *Largo Sentinel*, 1 February 1917, 23 August 1917, 20 September 1917, 8 November 1917, 11 January 1951; *Clearwater Sun*, 10 March 1961; *St. Petersburg Times*, 8 November 1958. The role of Marcia H. Tritt and other members of the Largo Woman’s Club cannot be underestimated. Even as the Fair Association held meetings in November 1917, many members feared that Tarpon Springs or other distant communities might refuse to participate. Aside from John Cheyney, few members of the Tarpon business community had pledged monetary support through the purchase of shares in the Fair Association. In the late summer of 1917, many in northern Pinellas viewed the fair as a city-sponsored activity in Largo, rather than as an event of countywide significance. Tritt and Sarah Colton Smith visited Tarpon Springs in early November and encouraged many members of the business community to show their support. They also secured the promise that Tarponites would participate in the fair through exhibits by spongers and Greek merchants. One may speculate that not all members of the community were encouraged to attend: A 1951 retrospective story about the fair’s early years mentions that when African American handwork was brought to the first fair, neither the Clearwater nor the Largo groups wanted to be associated with their display. After bouncing back and forth many times, the black artisans received a small corner for their “really creditable exposition.”

22 *Largo Sentinel*, 31 January 1918.
Clearwater and St. Petersburg radio stations with a plan to broadcast from the 1929 fair for an hour or more each day. A manager at the Clearwater radio station agreed to connect a “necessary electrical apparatus” between his station, the telephone wires, and a microphone at the fairgrounds. The 1929 fair proved to be a resounding success, as standing-room only crowds and nearly 3,000 automobiles crowded Largo during the week of the fair. Pain tempered Walsingham’s jubilation, however: Shortly after taking on his managerial duties, Walsingham and his family mourned the loss of Hiram O’Quinn, brother-in-law and longtime citrus grower, who passed away on 14 August 1928 at his nearby home on Ridge Road, probably near the Thurston Groves.  

Jesse Walsingham maintained other enterprises while working for the Fair Association and as fair manager. He operated the J.A. Walsingham Hardware Company in Largo, and—according to 1920 census records—son Carl worked as a hardware salesman after returning from World War I. Older brother Sumter worked as a farm laborer during this period. The family suffered a financial setback on the morning of 21 February 1921, when a fire of unknown origin “completely gutted” the one-story brick building that housed the Walsingham Hardware Company. Responding to the fire at about 3:30 a.m., the Largo volunteer fire brigade could not quench the flames; a call to the Clearwater firefighters brought them in five minutes’ time, too late to save Walsingham’s store but soon enough to prevent the spread of the fire to other buildings. With only $5,000 in insurance on the structure and contents, Walsingham probably suffered a loss of nearly $11,000 from the blaze. Undeterred by this setback, the Walsinghams continued to explore new business and agricultural opportunities. 

The Walsingham family also had an important connection with the nearby Baskin-Dansville community. This African-American settlement appeared in the early twentieth century around the present-day intersection of 119th Street and Ulmerton Road, an area north-northwest of Walsingham’s property. Black farm workers originally came to the region, often following the railroad lines, in search of opportunities in the booming

23 Largo Sentinel, 2 August 1917, 26 July 1928, 16 August 1928, 13 December 1928, 24 January 1929. According to Largo, Then Til . . . (p. 127), Walsingham received an annual compensation of $1800 for his duties to professionalize the County Fair. By 1917, Andrew M. O’Quinn—Hiram’s father and Jesse’s father-in-law—had moved to a home near Dade City. The Walsinghams frequently visited the elder O’Quinn during the 1910s. He passed away in 1922 and, like most members of the Walsingham family, is buried at Lone Pilgrim Cemetery.
citrus industry. Brothers Dan and Lloyd Henry moved to the Baskin region from Dawson, Georgia, in the early 1920s. After working on the railroad, Dan lived on a grove alongside the Seaboard Air Line tracks (now the Pinellas Trail) in a log cabin provided by his employer, Jesse Ancil Walsingham. Dan Henry worked for Walsingham until Jesse passed away in 1961. Research of property records and titles by Sue Goldman indicated that Dan and Lloyd Henry acquired much of the land for the Dansville settlement by purchasing small parcels during the Great Depression and paying back taxes on the lands.  

The Later Years and the Moving of the House

By the fall of 1929, the Walsinghams decided to sell their home on Ridge Road. Perhaps the two-story structure seemed too large for their needs. The 1930 census places the Walsinghams in the Belleair community at a home along Clearwater Road. Between 1930 and 1957, the Mayes family lived at the residence, followed by the J. V. Childers family from 1957 through 1965, and the Luther Walker family until 1978. At different times, these families used the homes themselves but also rented out sections to boarders. The stairs to the rear of the building may have provided an entrance for the tenants who stayed at the house.

Jesse continued his public service through the 1930s, and engaged in citrus grove development and real estate activities in his later years. He managed the Pinellas County Fair through the 1934-1935 year. By the time he left this position, many residents called this annual event the “Pinellas Free Fair,” a connotation given because of the efforts by Walsingham and Frank A. Bradbury, former secretary of the Fair Association, to remove the admission fees beginning in 1924. Appointed commissioner of the Pinellas County home on 1 August 1933, he claimed that during his twenty-three months managing this shelter he saved over $3,000 in operating expenses, a sizeable sum during the lean years of the Great Depression. In March 1936 and again in March 1938, he entered the race for the District Three seat on the Pinellas County Commission. During this period, Jesse’s wife gained a reputation as a lady who drove in the slow lane. Nearly every morning,

24 Tarpon Springs Leader, 21 February 1921.
Mary Walsingham climbed into her 1936 Ford, with its V-8 engine, and drove approximately three miles from home into town. According to son Carl, she often arrived at the post office around seven o’clock and complained that the stores did not open early enough. Despite its powerful engine, she rarely drove her vehicle more than twenty miles per hour!  

Tragedy struck the Walsingham family on 25 December 1937. John Randolph Walsingham, Jesse’s brother, suffered fatal injuries that Christmas morning while riding on the back of a truck driven by his son, James Lucian Walsingham. As the truck traveled near the Largo town hall, John lost his balance while sitting with the lumber in the truck’s rear. Unknown to Lucian, his father had fallen from the truck and struck the pavement headfirst. A pedestrian summoned Lucian to stop, and though John was quickly taken to Morton Plant Hospital in Clearwater, he died later that afternoon due to multiple skull fractures. Members of the McMullen, Wilcox, and Meares families served as pallbearers at his funeral. John’s wife, Lillie Ruth, died at a Largo rest home on 4 August 1959.

By 1949, Jesse and Mary Walsingham moved back to a home along Ridge Road. This structure, at 12271 Ridge Road, sat approximately one block north of their 1915 home (12152 Ridge Road). On 7 November 1958, Mary Walsingham passed away at the age of eighty-one. Jesse, at eighty-eight years of age, died on the evening of 9 March 1961 while at the Sun Coast Osteopathic Hospital. Longtime members of Lone Pilgrim Primitive Baptist Church, Jesse and Mary were buried at the Lone Pilgrim Cemetery, close to many other family members.

The first discussions about moving the Walsingham House to Heritage Village took place during the summer of 1983. During a September 21 board meeting of the Pinellas County Historical Commission, Director Kendrick Ford mentioned that Jim and Delores Litz—then owners of the Walsingham House—offered to donate the structure and moving costs so the building could relocate to the park. Dorothy Edmunds, a


26 Largo Sentinel, 11 January 1934; St. Petersburg Times, 15 March 1936, 13 March 1938; Largo, Then Til . . ., 167.

27 St. Petersburg Times, 26 December 1937, 5 August 1959, 6 August 1959.

28 Largo Sentinel, 10 November 1949; St. Petersburg Times, 8 November 1958, 11 March 1961; Clearwater Sun, 10 March 1961. Nota bene: Many genealogical records incorrectly give Mary A. Walsingham’s date of death as 16 November 1956, the same date given for her son, Sumter.
commission member and former president of the Pinellas County Historical Society, wondered if the structure might be suitable for use as a children’s museum. Later discussions also mentioned the possibility of using this large structure as a caretaker’s home, a site for extra storage, and a doctor’s office. Ford told commissioners that they needed to make a decision within the next three weeks. He then began researching the property records associated with the structure.

Anchor Construction Company, the firm working with the Litz family, called Ford in early November 1983 to get the commission’s final decision. During their deliberations at the November 16 meeting, commissioners expressed concern about how Proposition One—an initiative to modify the county’s taxation structure—might affect the historical museum. At a time when Ford worried about losing staff and actively sought to acquire either a store or a school for the park, the possibility of moving the Walsingham House generated a great amount of discussion. The construction company had already contacted Roesch Housemovers and agreed to cover the $12,000 bid to move the house from its location north of Walsingham on Old Ridge Road. But the structure would require substantial wiring, plumbing, and other maintenance after its arrival. Space was not a problem: plenty of room existed on the north ten acres of the park site (a line running parallel from Heritage Mercantile, past the Lowe House and Barn, and beyond Union Academy). Upon learning that the house faced imminent demolition if not relocated, the commission approved the proposed move. In tight budgetary times, the ultimate fate of the building remained uncertain. They moved and “stockpiled” the structure, with Commissioner Don Williams even mentioning the possibility of demolishing it in the future if the park needed surplus lumber.29

Fortunately, Proposition One failed and the park’s budget remained relatively intact. By 16 May 1984, Ford reported to the Pinellas County Historical Commission that the “Walker House” would move to Heritage Village in mid-June. During many of the early discussions about the structure, Ford and commissioners referred to it as the “Walker House” because Luther Walker had lived there from 1965 until 1978. Much of the house remained similar to its original form, except for a modernized kitchen and

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bathrooms. After the electric company temporarily disconnected low-lying power lines, Roesch Housemovers transported the house along Walsingham Road to Heritage Village in the early morning hours of 15 June 1984.\textsuperscript{30}

Park administrators met with representatives of the Pinellas County Medical Association about establishing interpretive exhibits on the lower floor of the Walsingham House. Ford mentioned on the association’s fundraising efforts to the Historical Commission. In his 17 November 1988 report to the Historical Commission, Ford noted that the doctors had started to raise money to purchase an air conditioning system for the Walsingham House. By early 1990, the Medical Association had raised approximately $3,500 for an air conditioner. After a full restoration of the structure was completed, the home opened to visitors on 22 October 1994 during the annual Country Jubilee festivities. The house resembled a 1928 pioneer physician’s office and residence fully equipped with lab, pharmacy and waiting room.\textsuperscript{31}

\textbf{A Final Walsingham Story}

Soon after the house arrived at Heritage Village by way of Walsingham Road, a controversy over the possible renaming of part of Walsingham Road made the headlines. During the early years of Pinellas County’s history, Jesse Ancil Walsingham had lobbied for an east-west route that connected the citrus country between Seminole and Largo with the beaches of Indian Rocks. Walsingham Road, running from Seminole Boulevard west to Gulf Boulevard in Indian Rocks Beach, was named in his honor, as was a nearby Walsingham Station that once existed along the railroad line. With the use of Ulmerton Road as a major cross-county artery, the highway department constructed an extension of Ulmerton that curved from the Ridgecrest area south-southwest into Walsingham Road near Vonn Road (131\textsuperscript{st} Street). Once this segment opened, most travelers heading east along Walsingham from Indian Rocks and Anona followed the Ulmerton “curve” rather than continuing east along Walsingham.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 16 May 1984, 20 June 1984.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 18 May 1988, 17 November 1988, 21 February 1990.
\textsuperscript{32} As suburbs appeared along Starkey Road north of Bryan Dairy Road, a short, disconnected stretch of Walsingham Road appeared on the eastern side of Lake Seminole, directly across the lake from the original road. The Pinellas County School Board commemorated the family’s contributions in the Largo area.
Largo’s city planners worried that the divided highway’s transition from Walsingham Road to Ulmerton Road might confuse travelers. They believed that changes in traffic patterns made it necessary to rename the portion of Walsingham Road from its intersection with Ulmerton west towards Gulf Boulevard as Ulmerton. Ophelia Gates Walsingham, Carl’s wife (and Jesse’s daughter-in-law), led the opposition to this plan. A longtime schoolteacher and resident of Largo since 1925, she appealed to city commissioners to preserve the road’s name as a way of respecting Jesse’s contributions to the Largo community. Commissioners in attendance unanimously rejected the renaming proposal at their 19 March 1991 meeting, and the road kept its Walsingham moniker.\textsuperscript{33}

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Williams Park Bandstand Replica: A Brief Introduction

History of Site before Actual Structure was Built

- Early visitors to the area (those who lived in the area before the arrival of the Orange Belt Railway) remember the site of Williams Park as an area where many animals, especially wild deer, could be found. This site was named in honor of “General” John Constantine Williams, Sr., an early landowner in the region who worked with Peter Demens to secure the arrival of the railroad in 1888.
- The square block occupied by Williams Park appeared as parkland on the town’s original plat in August 1888.

Construction Information for Original Structure

- Though the park appeared on the original town plat, it remained largely untouched during the first few years. Work on improving the park began in 1893.
- Constructed in mid-1890s by Park Improvement Association.
- The Woman’s Town Improvement Association (WTIA) hoped to improve on the progress made by the Park Improvement Association. The WTIA lobbied and raised funds for enhancements in and around Williams Park.
- A substantial shipment of rock for use in park walkways arrived in 1902
- By 1904, the WTIA had an asphalt sidewalk constructed around the park for $563.

Significant Events/Activities at the Structure and in the Surrounding Community

- The creation of the bandstand and improvements to Williams Park during the city’s early years serve as a credit to the creative labors of local women.
- Site of many ice cream socials, public lectures, musical events, and other community activities. The number of programs offered at Williams Park increased during the period when seasonal residents visited the area.
- Lawn parties with Japanese lanterns; “megaphone” men giving oratory or making announcements; and the sales of fudge, cake, and other treats brought many to the park.
- Political gatherings also occurred at the original bandstand, such as when Governor Napoleon Bonaparte Broward spoke there during a September 1906 political rally. Two years later, proponents of independence from Hillsborough County held a meeting of the “Pinellas County Club” at this site.
- The WTIA turned over the operation and maintenance duties of Williams Park to the city by 1910.
- The city’s Board of Trade sponsored regular Sunday band concerts by 1913. As more visitors came to the area during the winter months, tourist societies (and state societies) held meetings or special events at Williams Park. Regular meetings of the “Sunshine Pleasure Club” and other organizations led to many afternoons filled with games of chess, checkers, croquet, horseshoes, etc.
- In the years immediately following World War I, the city experienced a new and frenzied land boom. As the city passed from adolescence to adulthood, the 1895 bandstand seemed quaint and out-of-place. By August 1920, the city’s Park Board moved forward with plans to construct a new bandstand and move the older
pavilion to a waterfront park near Bayboro Harbor. This structure was most likely destroyed in the 1921 hurricane.

- By late 1923 the city planned to add 400 new benches to the 1000 already at Williams Park, an important sign of the city’s growth and the expansion of programs and concerts at the Park.

Creation of the Replica at Heritage Village

- Construction of the bandstand replica began in mid-1980 with the assistance of the Seabees, a large naval reserve construction unit. Work on the bandstand continued into 1981.
- The replica at Heritage Village offers a popular gathering spot for performances and ceremonies.
- Differences between the original structure and replica due in part to budgetary constraints, donated labor, and the lack of “old-fashioned” designs.
Williams Park Bandstand

Overview

Williams Park, located in the heart of St. Petersburg, became the first organized and platted park on the Pinellas Peninsula. Although the site appeared on the original August 1888 town plat of St. Petersburg, improvements to “City Park” did not occur until leading women of the community established the Park Improvement Association in 1893. Within two years, Association members had secured funds to construct a bandstand in the northern portion of the park. For the next twenty-five years, this structure offered a community meeting place and the first place where musicians entertained residents of the town.

The establishment of the Woman’s Town Improvement Association in 1901 brought many improvements to Williams Park. For the next nine years, the women of this organization conducted a variety of fundraisers to improve the park and sustain programs for those in need. By 1910, the Association turned over its duties to maintain Williams Park to the city. Municipal authorities created a Park Board, expanded the 1895 bandstand, and prepared the venue for bigger concerts and a larger array of public events. By the summer of 1920, officials decided to replace rather than remodel the original bandstand. As workers constructed a new bandstand at the northern edge of Williams Park, a contractor moved the 1895 pavilion to Waterfront Park along Tampa Bay. Violent winds and waves from the October 1921 hurricane destroyed the original structure.

Heritage Village re-created the 1895 pavilion, similar to its original form, as a gathering place at this open-air museum. Members of the U. S. Navy Seabees Reserves assembled this replica in 1980-1981 with Victorian decorative friezes around the roofline that attempted to recapture the woodwork of the original structure. Frequently used for weddings and performances at Heritage Village, the structure was officially dedicated during the Pinellas County Historical Society’s annual Country Jubilee in October 1981.

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1 For a general overview of the history of parks in Pinellas County, see: Trudi Wood, “Guardians of Paradise: The History of the Pinellas County Park System” (Unpublished seminar paper, University of South Florida, c. 1992).
A “General” History of the Park’s Namesake

A native of Detroit born in 1817, John Constantine Williams arrived in Florida in 1875. His father, John R. Williams, had served as Detroit’s first mayor in 1824 and had a hand in establishing the Detroit Free Press. Before his death in 1854, the elder Williams also speculated in business ventures on the lower peninsula of Michigan and served as a general in the Black Hawk War of 1832. The younger Williams, often referred to with the complimentary title of “Colonel Williams” or “General Williams,” hoped to follow in his father’s successful footsteps. He considered the Florida frontier a suitable venue for speculation, visiting numerous small towns before happening upon the Pinellas Peninsula in 1875. By early 1876, he had acquired approximately 1,600 acres of land from the State of Florida and from W. F. Spurlin, an agricultural investor who had purchased land around Big Bayou and Bayboro in 1873 but failed to harvest successful cash crops. Williams returned to Detroit for awhile before reappearing on the peninsula by early 1879. Tampa’s Sunland Tribune announced his return to the region in early February: “He had brought out quite a variety of agricultural implements new to this country. . . . He has also sent down quite a lot of the finest kind of poultry.” Williams came to Tampa with stocks and wagons overland from Gainesville, while some of his personal effects arrived by steamship. He brought along a “Sulky Cultivator,” a sophisticated plow excellent for preparing the land for crops. Reinforcing racial stereotypes of the time, the Tribune article noted that “a darkie who was standing on the outskirts of the crowd” allegedly made this contemptuous remark: “The white people never thought of making a plow for the plowmen to ride on until after the niggers were freed.” The Tribune claimed that Williams visited Tampa in late February for a few days of rest before heading to “Point Pinellas” where he planned “to enclose a considerable quantity of land with a wire fence.” He had acquired “several tons” of wire for cordoning off his acreage. Similar to Spurlin, “General” Williams initially had little success with crop cultivation in this remote region. In June, “Col. J. C. Williams” visited Tampa to purchase sheep for his lands along the Pinellas Peninsula. By the late summer of 1879, the Sunland Tribune announced that “Col. J. C. Williams and daughter, Miss Emma, of Point Pinellas left Tuesday for . . . Detroit, their former home.” Although he retained his Florida land
holdings, Williams decided to return to Detroit once again by 1881 and divorced his wife by the end of that year.²

Hamilton Disston’s purchase of four million acres of Florida land for $1,000,000 excited speculators and fueled an early land boom. Disston had appeared on the horizon at a time when the State of Florida teetered on financial insolvency. Although his deal with the state’s Internal Improvement Fund supposedly covered only marginal swampland, in reality he also acquired numerous excellent and elevated tracts throughout Florida. Historian Raymond Arsenault notes that his purchase included in excess of 150,000 acres along the Pinellas Peninsula. Disston and others soon established a settlement at Tarpon Springs. By 1884, this entrepreneur had formalized plans to create a substantial community—later known as Disston City—along the shores of Boca Ciega Bay in the area of present-day Gulfport. Over the next two years, Disston worked with Russian immigrant Pyotr Dementyev (Peter Demens) to bring the Orange Belt Railway to the Pinellas Peninsula.³

Disston’s presence in lower Pinellas encouraged Williams to return to the area and capitalize on his extensive land holdings. He brought along his new wife, a Canadian widow named Sarah Craven Judge. Her heritage proved helpful in negotiations with Demens and his Canadian partner and project treasurer, Henry Sweetapple, after Demens’s original agreement with Disston had soured. John and Sarah Williams brokered a deal that turned the Orange Belt Railway away from Disston’s planned megalopolis and towards their substantial holdings in present-day downtown St. Petersburg. By early 1886, “General” Williams learned that some of the acreage he had acquired from Spurlin included encumbrances that he had to settle. Although “General” John C. Williams passed away in April 1892, his widow remained active in community affairs for many years. She married Bartow transplant Capt. James A. Armistead on 10


September 1894 and certainly took a strong interest in community affairs during his tenure as mayor from 1896 through 1898 and again in 1900.4

Building the Infrastructure and Planning for a Beautiful City Park

Even after the arrival of the Orange Belt in 1888, St. Petersburg remained—according to Karl H. Grismer—a “primitive place” into the early 1890s. Grismer notes that the first documented public improvement in the small village occurred when women joined together and raised funds for the construction of a wooden sidewalk along Central Avenue (originally platted as “Sixth Avenue”). Tired of negotiating sand hills and mud puddles along this walkway, town women held picnics and socials, while selling ice cream, lemonade, and other treats to raise funds for the sidewalk. This effort allowed for the extension of a sidewalk originally started at Ninth (Dr. Martin Luther King) Street in 1889 and later abandoned. By 1891, residents could walk the wooden plank between Ninth Street and the Detroit Hotel. Similar in form to shoreline boardwalks in many present-day parks (such as Boca Ciega ‘Millennium’, John Chesnut Sr., and Sawgrass Lake parks), this early wooden sidewalk provided an elevated bridge over a deep swale between Second and Third streets and other obstacles. As advocates of an early City Beautiful movement, the women also planted shrubs and grass around the settlement; unfortunately, the persistent appetites of cows, hogs, and other wildlife complicated efforts to beautify the city until officials banned the free-range roaming of such animals.5

Despite its service on a regular railroad schedule, the town of St. Petersburg in the early 1890s resembled the remote Florida frontier of the 1820s with its lack of internal improvements. Formalized rules governing the construction of roads in Florida appeared in one of the earliest acts passed by the Territorial Legislative Council during its 1822 session in Pensacola. In the sparsely settled Florida of the 1820s, the local Justice of the Peace could select most free white males and able-bodied slaves under the age of forty-five for compulsory service to build and maintain roads. Through such oversight and obligations a network of roads connected towns, farms, plantations, and other settlements across Florida by statehood in 1845. Nearly forty-six years later—in 1891—impassible

dirt streets and ruts caused by horses and wagons prompted A. C. Pheil to scatter dust from his mill on St. Petersburg’s streets to create the “saw dust trail.” By 13 September 1892, the town council enacted a provision requiring “all able-bodied males” between twenty-one and forty-five (except clergy and town officials) to perform occasional work to improve public streets. While Grismer claims that town officials probably did not enforce this provision, the ordinance shows how difficult transportation remained even after train service brought passengers to town. By 1894, Chancey W. Springstead—later a vice-president of the city’s First National Bank—agreed to use shells from nearby Indian mounds to provide a base pavement along the city’s busiest intersections. More extensive road improvements, such as the paving of Central Avenue with a pebble and phosphate mixture, did not occur until the summer of 1897.6

With work on sidewalks and infrastructure underway, women leaders focused their efforts on improving City Park by 1893. These women created the St. Petersburg Park Improvement Association (PIA) in that year and solicited funds for wooden sidewalks and a bandstand at City Park. In late 1893, Mayor David Murray issued a proclamation for “Park Day.” While some women served beverages, cake, and ice cream, others in the audience commemorated this event by clearing the palmetto scrub and establishing walkways in the park. Women had to carry the burden of much of the work in 1893 and subsequent years because men lost interest in the project as Park Day faded into memory. By 1894, the Park Improvement Association sponsored the construction of a fence in an attempt to keep stray animals—especially hogs and cows—out of the park. Nina Hill Blocker helped to plant the first grass in Williams Park in 1894, a year after she had moved to the area as a young bride of John C. Blocker, an engineer on the Orange Belt Railway. The following year, the women of PIA raised sufficient funds to begin construction of the bandstand. During much of this time, women leaders in the PIA often met the Orange Belt as it arrived to direct visitors to the Hotel Detroit, then the village’s

5 Grismer, The Story of St. Petersburg, 84-86.
only hotel. W. L. Straub noted that in time, however, the Park Association “dropped out of existence” by the end of the decade.\(^7\)

The 1895 bandstand, a wooden structure with ornamental effects, sat along the northern boundary of City Park, equidistant between Third and Fourth streets and approximately fifty feet south of the park’s boundary with Second Avenue. The one-story structure included an octagonal elevated platform on the west with a rectangular extension that projected east towards Third Street. An April 1904 Sanborn insurance map of St. Petersburg shows improved pathways crisscrossing the four corners of Williams Park, a cleared area in the center of the park where the fountain would later reside, and a bowed walkway between the northeast and northwest corners of the park that passed just to the south of the bandstand. Aside from the bandstand itself, all of the improvements appearing on the 1904 Sanborn map occurred after the turn of the century.\(^8\)

**The Women’s Town Improvement Association and Williams Park**

Laws and customs excluded American women from most political and many civic activities during the late 1800s and early 1900s. As the first women’s organization in St. Petersburg, the Park Improvement Association offered an opportunity for women to take a leadership role in community projects. During this period, women also engaged in public discourse through organizations such as the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU, founded in 1874), the national General Federation of Women’s Clubs (established in April 1890), and its Florida Federation of Women’s Clubs affiliate established in Green Cove Springs in February 1895. Throughout the Progressive Era, these organizations and similar groups encouraged reform in areas such as child labor, temperance, literacy, and improved living and working conditions. Women in these organizations often advocated “quality-of-life” improvements such as parks and other recreational areas.

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The Women’s Town Improvement Association (WTIA) formally came together on 7 May 1901. Twenty-eight women met at the Detroit Hotel to organize the community service organization. Isabelle Weller, the WTIA’s first president, was married to Arthur P. Weller, manager of the city’s electric light plant and cousin to entrepreneur Frank A. Davis. Other early members included Sarah W. Armistead—the widow of “General” Williams—and Katherine Bell Tippetts, a passionate conservationist who arrived by 1902. Armistead, also a leader of the local WCTU chapter, maintained her active involvement in the WTIA until her death on 15 December 1917. Sarah’s involvement continued ever after the death of Captain Armistead in August 1907; reflecting the civic boosterism of the time, the *Tampa Weekly Tribune* credited Armistead as “contributing his best talent to the upbuilding of that little city” of St. Petersburg. Many WTIA members—such as Sarah Moore Straub, the organization’s original first vice-president and president after Isabelle Weller—had husbands or relatives involved in business or real estate interests in the growing city. While census figures from 1900 showed that few women in the community listed an outside occupation, the domestic connections of prominent women offered them lobbying opportunities in the days before they could legally visit the ballot box. Seasonal visitors, as well as permanent residents, participated in the Association’s events. In addition to their work to improve City Park, many WTIA initiatives also supported William L. Straub’s vision of an extended waterfront park along the downtown shores of Tampa Bay. During their first year, WTIA members met at the Detroit Hotel and occasionally at the home of Isabelle Weller.9

Although the bandstand offered a public gathering place, Williams Park remained—in the words of W. L. Straub—“an untrimmed jungle [and] convenient hiding place for truant boys and cows” in the years after 1900. One account of park’s condition shortly after the turn of the century came from Mattie Lou Boswell Cherbonneaux, who remembered traveling to the park with her father on his horse-drawn carriage. Her father hitched his horses to one of the trees near Williams Park, and she saw “woods full of

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scrub oaks, patches of palmettos, pine trees, wax myrtle, and other trees and bushes. There were cows grazing here and there.” Despite the park’s rustic condition, Straub—who certainly witnessed the efforts of wife Sarah on the WTIA’s behalf—credited the Association’s members for transforming the site into a true park “mostly with their own hands.” Articles about the WTIA’s meetings, events, and social activities frequently appeared in issues of the St. Petersburg Times, a newspaper that Straub had purchased in 1901 and edited until his death in 1939.10

Isabelle Weller, Sarah Straub, Sarah Armistead, and other WTIA members devoted their energies to improving facilities at City Park. In early meetings, the Association membership established a Park Commission (a WTIA subcommittee) that monitored plans to improve the park. On July 4, less than two months after its members had first assembled, the Association sponsored a cake and ice cream fundraising event. Other programs in 1901 included a series of lectures and a day-long steamboat trip. Before the end of 1901, the WTIA had agreed to preserve the pine and oak trees of the park, plant grass to replace the plentiful sandspurs, paint the park benches, and survey and enhance the walkways in the park and around the bandstand. A November 1901 “Arbor Day in the Park” brought additional funds and support, as well as an anonymous donor who pledged 5,000 rosebushes for the park. The wooden bandstand along the northern edge of the park served as the focal point for many of these events.11

The WTIA funded substantial improvements at Williams Park during the first decade of the twentieth century. By April 1902, members had acquired shells and rocks to spread around the walkways of the park. With fences keeping large livestock out of the park, the WTIA membership gathered by 1903 to establish a committee that would lobby the city council to enact an ordinance preventing chickens from “running at large.” At this same meeting, the treasurer reported net proceeds of $204.50 for winter entertainment programs and a balance of $214.95 in the treasury. Throughout 1903, the women removed weeds and undergrowth. On 8 August 1903, a six-foot wide asphalt sidewalk around three sides of the park opened for pedestrian traffic. The WTIA had...

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10 Straub, History of Pinellas County, 128; Rita Slaght Gould, Pioneer St. Petersburg: Life In and Around 1888 “Out Near the Back of Beyond” (St. Petersburg: Page Creations, 1987), 45.
arranged to pay for this $562.56 project over a two-year loan. By January 1904, less than six months later, Straub’s paper noted that “these remarkable lady financiers” had paid $390 of this loan, and owed only $112.56. Straub himself probably penned the paragraph celebrating the WTIA’s “perseverance and good management that would do highest credit to any organization or business concern in the county. St. Petersburg owes much to and should be immensely proud of the Woman’s Town Improvement Association.” Indeed, their creative labors benefited people as well as the park: At a 5 December 1903 business and social meeting, Association members voted to set aside five percent of their organization’s receipts “for the relief of the needy sick of St. Petersburg.”

Popular events at Williams Park often focused on widely recognized holidays, tourist activities, and political events. Easter egg hunts, celebrations commemorating George Washington’s birthday, and similar programs brought crowds to the park and its bandstand. While the women of WTIA operated the park and paid for its monthly maintenance, men often coordinated these events. For example, a February 1910 Lincoln Memorial Celebration included a full agenda of male dignitaries expounding on Abraham Lincoln’s virtues, and those in attendance learned that real estate booster Noel Mitchell took full credit for the grandstand decorations. Many clubs, associations, and state societies congregated on the lawns for picnics and concerts. A photograph of a Michigan Society picnic shows at least sixty members crowded along and around the bandstand. Arsenault notes that the city’s Board of Trade welcomed these state and regional societies and tourist clubs, the first of which appeared by January 1902. Speeches by public officials always attracted crowds. When Governor Napoleon Bonaparte Broward delivered a talk at the flag-draped pavilion on 14 September 1906, residents congregated along the rows of benches just to the south of the bandstand, as well as all other corners of the octagonal platform. An even larger gathering occurred on 28 April 1908, when “several hundred voters and their ladies” attended a rally sponsored by the Pinellas County Club to debate the possibility of separating from Hillsborough County. John S. Taylor, Don C. McMullen, and other notable leaders explained their position on division while standing on the bandstand’s platform. In the years before radio, television, and

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computers, locations such as the bandstand served as the “information commons” for the community.\textsuperscript{13}

The WTIA continued its oversight of Williams Park through the end of the decade. Monthly meeting minutes appearing in the 15 April 1908 \textit{St. Petersburg Times} provide insight into the Association’s fundraisers, expenditures, and activities. With a balance of $87.40 in the WTIA’s general account on February 4, the treasurer noted that dues, banquets, and refreshment and donation booths had netted over $420 by April 7. Expenditures during this period included a salary of $20 per month to J. W. Jackson for his work in maintaining the park. In addition, the Association paid $12.80 for fountain repairs and $9 for the services of a dance orchestra. The Association maintained a separate “sick poor” fund of nearly $110 to provide assistance to the ill and indigent. A WTIA “lawn fête” in mid-April included sweet music, sweeter fudge, assorted cakes and ice cream, “many twinkling Japanese lanterns,” and a “megaphone man” that announced the various attractions. Another party at the end of April offered snowbirds one last opportunity to enjoy cake and ice cream before returning home. As the tourist season came to an end, WTIA members gathered for their annual meeting on 5 May 1908. At the assembly, Sarah Armistead agreed to lead efforts to prevent park and bandstand visitors from using shortcuts through the grass rather than staying on the paved walkways. The women also discussed their purchase of two watering troughs for horses for $85.19, additional lights for the park, and the recent construction of a fountain in the center of Williams Park at a cost of $143.07. Aside from the fountain, the July 1908 Sanborn fire map shows no substantial changes had taken place to the pavilion or the park since April 1904.\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{A New Caretaker}

By the fall of 1910, members of the WTIA decided to turn over care and upkeep of Williams Park to the city. Alongside a front page article announcing the return of

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Tampa Morning Tribune}, 4 April 1902, 10 December 1903; \textit{St. Petersburg Times}, 30 January 1904, 16 May 1933; Grismer, \textit{Story of St. Petersburg}, 243.
\textsuperscript{13} Arsenault, \textit{St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream}, 146; \textit{St. Petersburg Times}, 29 April 1908, 8 February 1910. See images N027011 and N040129, Florida Photographic Collection, State Archives of Florida, Tallahassee.
\end{flushright}
Noel A. Mitchell—the debonair “Sandman”—the 11 October 1910 St. Petersburg Times announced that the ladies of the WTIA had voted to transfer maintenance duties to municipal officials. During the previous nine years, women in the organization had tended to the park, planted trees and shrubs, and funded general improvements. With the city assuming the day-to-day responsibilities of Williams Park, the Woman’s Town Improvement Association could direct its support towards other community causes and, by 1913, acquire a meeting hall directly across the street from Williams Park on First Avenue North.¹⁵

Municipal ownership brought changes to Williams Park. In the short term, Grismer noted that weeds and unattractive scrub replaced the well-tended lawns around much of the block. By 1911, the city council appointed its first park commissioner and provided funds to build numerous green benches and other improvements, including an expansion of the bandstand. Recreational groups, including horseshoe players and others known as the Sunshine Pleasures Club, arrived by 1912 and were soon followed by others engaged in all forms of competitive games, from chess and checkers to dominoes and croquet. A photograph from 1913 or later appearing on pages 156 and 157 of Arsenault’s monograph illustrates the changes to the park and bandstand after 1911. By 1913, visitors to the park noticed many additional rows of green benches between the fountain in the center of the park and the bandstand to the north. A panoramic view of crowds at a concert, probably taken from the bandstand and appearing in the 15 October 1913 Times, shows how swarms of thousands had replaced the smaller assemblies of yesteryear. These photographs and a September 1913 Sanborn map confirm modifications to the 1895 pavilion. Crews had elevated the original structure and poured a cement floor as a basement area under the rectangular walkway on the eastern end. The basement area included comfort stations, with the original floor serving as a roof for these facilities. Another extension and stairs jutted south from the octagonal section towards the benches.¹⁶

¹⁵ St. Petersburg Times, 11 October 1910.
¹⁶ Grismer, The Story of St. Petersburg, 244; Arsenault, St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream, 156-157; St. Petersburg Times, 15 October 1913, 2 October 1956; Sanborn Map Company, Fire Insurance Maps,
Additional improvements to the bandstand occurred during the mid-1910s. The July 1918 Sanborn map indicates a large band shell extending from the southeast, due south, and southeast portions of the original octagonal structure approximately thirty to forty feet towards the green benches. A new stage connected to the previous extension provided a platform suitable for large bands or performances. Washroom facilities remained under the 1895 rectangular walkway on the eastern end. A cross-shaped thatch structure provided shelter for the chess club, while croquet grounds and two smaller buildings occupied the southeast corner of the block. The arrival of the popular Royal Scotch Highlanders Band and other performers required a larger stage and brought in bigger audiences. As Americans rallied against the Axis in World War I, Williams Park and its expanded bandstand provided a venue for patriotic demonstrations and mass meetings, including a large gathering on the evening of 12 April 1917. On a similar note, a parade and “monster mass meeting” sponsored as part of the United War Work drive took place in early November 1918, about one week before Armistice Day.17

Setting Up a New Stage

As the real estate boom soared and the city grew, the quaint Williams Park bandstand—even with its recent additions—seemed out of place. The wooden pavilion harked back to a simpler era. By the mid-1910s, architects and developers started to replace smaller wood frame buildings in the downtown area with elaborate Mediterranean Revival structures (including the open-air post office) and multistory buildings (such as the Hotel Alexander, opened in 1919). Soaring real estate values, growing crowds of seasonal visitors, spring training baseball games, and other transformations of the “Sunshine City,” encouraged members of the Park Board to replace the wooden pavilion with a large and fancy bandstand suitable for a growing metropolis.

During the summer of 1920, members of the city’s Park Board approved plans to construct a new bandstand. The board originally had hoped to remove the old bandstand

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in mid-1919, but material shortages and escalated labor costs forced officials to postpone their plans for a year. By 3 August 1920, W. F. Smith—chair of the Park Board—and other members sought bids to build a new pavilion while keeping the price under the $10,000 in bond funds available. They expected the successful bidder to have the new bandstand available for use no later than 15 December 1920 so that it could accommodate concerts during the 1920-1921 tourist season. During the first week of August 1920, the Park Board reviewed at least three bids on the project: John S. Silas at $10,265; Beard & French at $13,097; and John C. Wright at $13,218. By August 8, Smith and contractor John S. Silas reached an agreement wherein the board decided to perform the excavation work for the new bandstand in exchange for Silas reducing his bid by $200. With John Silas’s bid near the $10,000 bond limit, W. F. Smith brought the matter before the city commission to request a small appropriation to cover the difference.  

With a contract approved for building the new structure, workers began to dismantle the 1895 bandstand by mid-August. Laborers first removed pipes and plumbing in the rear (northeast section) of the old band shell. Officials planned to save some lumber from later additions for use in the new 1920 structure. As demolition continued, Park Board members awarded a contract to George Burnett to move the core of the original 1895 pavilion in one piece from Williams Park to Waterfront Park. By the fall of 1920, laborers moved a Home Line storage shed from the Waterfront Park to the Bayboro Harbor area, and placed the intact pavilion at or near the original shed site. Once at its new home, city leaders planned to repair the 1895 pavilion’s roof.

Work progressed quickly on the new bandstand during the late summer and fall of 1920. Laborers built the new bandstand much closer to Second Avenue North, only about three feet from the sidewalk line, in an effort to provide more seats to the south of the stage. Mayor Noel Mitchell and J. G. Shoemaker, the city’s plumbing inspector, secured additional funds to reconfigure the comfort stations by the end of August. Meanwhile, pupils at the city’s Manual Training School built at least 200 benches in August and September. At one point, students set a school record by assembling a bench in eight minutes and thirty-five seconds. These benches included three standards rather than the

18 *St. Petersburg Times*, 3 August 1920, 8 August 1920, 17 August 1920.
19 *St. Petersburg Times*, 8 August 1920, 20 August 1920.
two used on earlier benches as a way of providing a stronger foundation and extra support. Although the construction project moved smoothly during this period, a brief controversy erupted when Silas and Shoemaker engaged in a punching match along Third Street and Central Avenue in late September. Soon wounds and egos healed, as all parties returned to the project and tried to meet the December deadline.\textsuperscript{20}

As officials dedicated the pavilion, the original 1895 bandstand stood at its new perch along the waterfront. However, this structure occupied its new home for only one year before meeting its demise. On 25 October 1921, a hurricane with wind gusts in excess of 100 miles per hour slammed into the Pinellas Peninsula. This storm, the strongest since the “great gale” of 1848, exacted substantial damage along the coastal areas. Bridges to Pass-a-Grille and Seminole disintegrated under the force of wind and waves, while boats and buildings along St. Petersburg’s waterfront also suffered the storm’s wrath. The last surviving portrait of the 1895 bandstand probably appears in a photograph taken along Waterfront Park in October or November 1921. This image, originally held by the St. Petersburg Historical Society and appearing on page 200 of Raymond Arsenault’s \textit{St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream}, clearly shows the roof of a pavilion identical to the original bandstand. Although the roof generally maintained its form, all of the supporting arches had collapsed or washed away. The once proud structure that graced Williams Park for a quarter of a century now sat as debris along the waterfront.\textsuperscript{21}

The 1920 bandstand served the maturing community from the boom years through the early 1950s. Roy Smith’s Royal Scotch Highlanders continued to play to large crowds between 1917 and 1927, with the exception of the 1920-1921 year, when Weber’s Cincinnati Band entertained at the park. Other musicians—including Joseph Lefter—brought their performances in subsequent years. In a thick 6 September 1954 edition of the \textit{St. Petersburg Times} that commemorated the dedication of the Sunshine Skyway bridge, longtime \textit{Times} and \textit{Evening Independent} writer Paul Davis wrote a retrospective article celebrating Williams Park as a “cool oasis” in a busy downtown. In this article, Davis claimed that a young Orson Welles (1915-1985) first spoke at the

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{St. Petersburg Times}, 20 August 1920, 26 August 1920, 29 August 1920, 26 September 1920.
\textsuperscript{21} For an image of the damaged pavilion, see: Arsenault, \textit{St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream}, 200.
bandstand as a childhood prodigy circa 1921. Later, becoming an actor, Welles returned to Williams Park to campaign for Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Other notable speakers and performers at the Park mentioned in Davis’s article included temperance advocate Carrie Nation and conductor John Phillip Sousa. To meet the growing regimen of programs, the Park Board ordered 400 new benches in late 1923 and issued a contract to Aero Spray Company to paint these new benches—along with 1000 older benches—the city’s trademark green hue. By December 1923, the Park Board had also funded renovations to the band shell, its basement toilets, and a new practice room for the Royal Scotch Highlanders.22

Indeed, the popularity of Williams Park fueled a heated controversy in the early 1920s. Plans to construct shuffleboard courts and expand other park activities overtaxed the park and angered members of the Williams family. The General’s heirs sought an injunction against the city in the spring of 1922 to prevent any group from exercising exclusive rights over any portion of the city block. Williams Park remained a public and popular gathering place. By 1952-1953, city leaders paid architect William Harvard to install a “modernistic bandstand” that replaced the 1920 structure.23

**Constructing a Replica at Heritage Village**

Members of the Pinellas County Historical Commission discussed plans for a band shell or grandstand soon after the opening of Heritage Village. By June 1977, Dorothy Edmunds mentioned that such a structure might allow for concerts, barbershop quartets, and similar programs that reflected the “Gay ‘90s” theme that park administrators then sought to create. At their meeting the following month, members expressed enthusiasm about using the original Williams Park bandstand as a model. Commissioner David R. Carr moved for approval a motion that the site should include a band shell. At one point during the summer of 1978, the Junior League of St. Petersburg expressed interest in the project, though it remained on the planning boards through the late 1970s. When officers of the Pinellas County Historical Society decided not to

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22 *St. Petersburg Times*, 15 December 1923, 19 December 1923, 6 September 1954, 2 October 1956. Rick Baker’s Mangroves to Major League includes a photo of Welles speaking into a microphone for WSUN radio. Although the exact location of the speech remains uncertain, it may have taken place at the 1920s-era bandstand. See: Baker, Mangroves to Major League, 154.
undertake this project, Director Kendrick Ford solicited members of the United States Seabees (construction battalions) for assistance in building the structure. Under this arrangement, Heritage Village agreed to provide construction materials estimated to cost $10,000 while the Seabees volunteered their labor. These funds had to come from the $25,000 appropriation set aside for the relocation of historic structures. The county’s Purchasing Department solicited bids for materials by June 1980. Lacking original blueprints or other documents that had the exact dimensions of the 1895 structure, Don Williams designed architectural plans for the replica after comparing three different photographic images of the original pavilion. In a retrospective interview, Ford asserted that differences between the original bandstand and the replica resulted largely from budgetary constraints, volunteer labor, and a lack of widely available “old-fashioned” designs and reproductions. Peter Brown Construction Company coordinated the project, while the Seabees offered sweat equity in exchange for fried chicken picnics and the gratitude of participating in a worthwhile project.\(^\text{24}\)

**They Built More than a Bandstand: They Set the Stage for a Growing Community**

John Constantine and Sarah Williams transformed a section of Point Pinellas into the city of St. Petersburg. An article in the 8 February 1879 *Sunland Tribune* succinctly summarized the importance “General” Williams’s presence in the region nearly a decade before the arrival of the Orange Belt Railway: “Mr. Williams is a gentleman with abundant means, and will, no doubt, induce quite a number to settle in this country. These are the kind of settlers wanted to develop the capacities of this country—men of means who came prepared to do something.” This encomium, however, ignores the important of early women leaders. When Williams returned to the region with his new wife, Sarah, he brought along more than a spouse: He had at his side a companion who not only changed the direction of a railroad, but also helped others in the WTIA transform one square block of wilderness into an important gathering place for the city.\(^\text{25}\)

\(^{23}\) *St. Petersburg Times*, 6 September 1954; Grismer, *The Story of St. Petersburg*, 244.
\(^{25}\) *Sunland Tribune*, 8 February 1879.
One cannot underestimate the importance of the WTIA on the shaping of Williams Park at a pivotal point in the city’s development. For example, Straub’s paper encouraged residents to support a March 1910 WTIA Tag Day fundraiser. Publicity for this event echoed other stories appearing in the *Times* that praised “this progressive band of women, who have bravely and untiringly worked for our beautiful city, overcoming almost insurmountable difficulties.” The article notes that few tourists who visit Williams Park “know that only a few years ago it was a dense palmetto patch into which rubbish was thrown, until this noble band of workers took charge.” Such praise continued long after the WTIA relinquished control of the park in the fall of 1910. In a 1 January 1922 *Times* article entitled “Williams Park is Memorial to Early Work of Few Women,” a reporter effusively credited the “little band of women . . . who visioned in the sand spurs and the scrub palmettos and sand and more sand, the loveliness of Williams (P)ark today.” The writer commends the women that “wasted little time with Robert’s Rules of Order, or other formalities” and instead focused on creating a City Beautiful, tending to the sick and poor, and raising funds for worthwhile causes. Historians and urban planners rightfully credit visionaries such as John Nolen for their efforts to improve the aesthetics of the Sunshine City. However, one must also acknowledge the many women of early St. Petersburg who physically cleared the grounds of City Park and literally laid the groundwork for a City Beautiful movement long before the settlement could even claim to be a city.\(^{26}\)

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