

SARASOTA ORIGINS



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Wall

Lillian G. Burne

VOLUME 1

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SARASOTA ORIGINS

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The Historical Society of Sarasota County

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The Society is interested in receiving original articles relating to the history of Sarasota County and of Florida for publication in future issues of **Sarasota Origins**, or in other publications of the Society. Persons interested in submitting articles for consideration are urged to write to the Historical Society of Sarasota County, P.O. Box 1632, Sarasota, FL 34230 for information on the format, style, footnote form and source references for manuscripts.

The Publication Committee attempts to assure the historical accuracy of the articles published. However, authors are solely responsible for statements and opinions expressed. The Society assumes no responsibility for these. Comments or elaborations regarding articles are welcomed.

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All persons interested in supporting the purposes of the Society and learning about the history of the Sarasota region and of Florida are invited to become members of the Society. Our programs are open to the public.

The Society also publishes a Newsletter announcing its monthly programs, events and items of interest to persons interested in preserving the historical heritage of Sarasota, and brief articles on historical topics.

THANKS!

The Historical Society expresses thanks and appreciation to **John McCarthy**, Sarasota County Historian, for his generous and knowledgeable advice and assistance in research at the Sarasota County Archives.

CREDITS

Unless otherwise indicated, all photographs and maps used in this publication were provided by the Sarasota County Historical Archives. The Society thanks all who shared their materials for use in this publication.

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The Historical Society of Sarasota County

Founded 1960

Re-incorporated in 1981, as a non-profit corporation.

The purposes of the Society are to create a public awareness of the rich historical heritage of Sarasota County and the State of Florida, to encourage inquiry and research into this history, to encourage the preservation and collection of artifacts, photographs and printed materials and other memorabilia pertaining to this area, to develop an appreciation of its historical communities, and to protect its historic sites and structures. To do this, the Society undertakes to make this history available to a broad audience by sponsoring lectures, exhibits, publications, tours and other activities.

Contributions to the Society are gratefully received and are tax-free to the full extent provided by law.

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ABOUT THE COVER

The Hover Arcade was built in 1913 at the foot of Main Street by Dr. Walter Hover, a winter visitor from Lima, Ohio, and his brothers J.O. and Frank. Through the archway, on the bay side, was the principal pier of the community. In 1917 the Arcade was purchased by the City of Sarasota. It became the center of City and, later, County government offices. In addition, a movie theatre, the City's fire department, Dave Broadway's restaurant and ice cream parlor and offices of many kinds were located there. It was an important landmark in Sarasota until it was demolished in 1967 when the Tamiami Trail, highway 41, was re-routed along the bayfront.

The Historical Society adopted the Arcade as its logo in recognition of its importance in the early life of Sarasota.

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Myrtle Lane began historical research and writing in Vermont. Since coming to Sarasota in 1976 she has concentrated on the history of Sarasota and Florida. She has also served as a docent at the Ringling Museums since 1977.

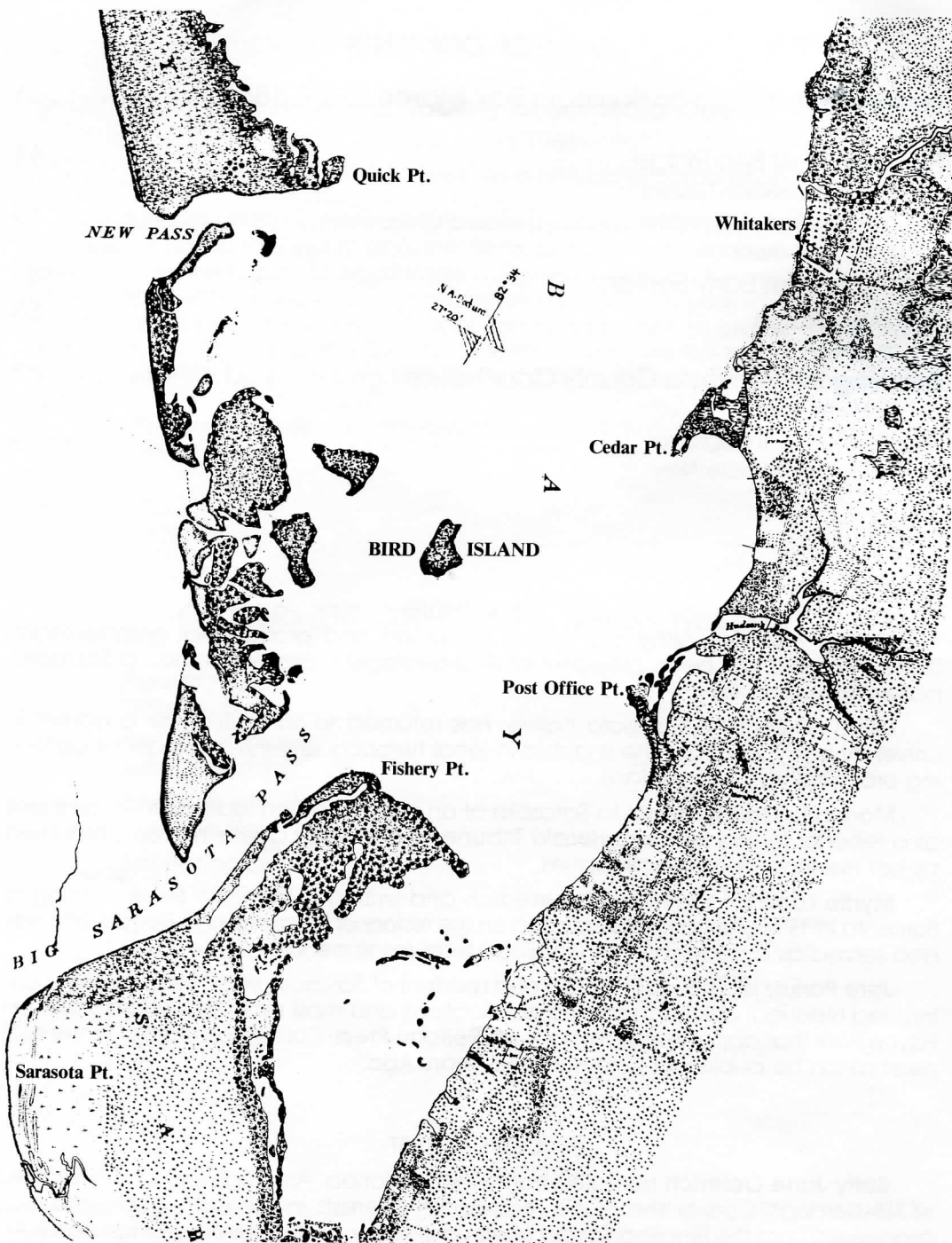
Jere Parker is a native Floridian and resident of Sarasota since 1952. He has contributed historical articles to several publications and most recently wrote a series on Payne Park that appeared in **Siesta Key's Pelican Press**. During Sarasota's Centennial celebration he published **One Hundred Years Ago**.

COVER ARTIST

Betty Jane Oelerich migrated from Ohio to Florida. Although she was a resident of Hillsborough County she found most of her interests in Sarasota where she was graduated from the Ringling School of Art and Design. Her watercolor of the Hover Arcade was one of her last paintings and was an expression of her love for Sarasota and the friends she found here. She died in May 1985.

LOGO DESIGN

D.A. Gordon (Deborah) Dart is a free lance artist whose work has appeared in **The New Yorker**, **Bon Appetit** and **Yankee Magazine**. She also heads the Rosemary Cemetery Committee of the Sarasota Alliance for Preservation and led the campaign for the rehabilitation of that historic cemetery.



PORTION OF
 U.S. COAST AND GEODETIC SURVEY
 Sec. VI
 SARASOTA BAY
 FLORIDA
 1883

Federal Naval Raid on Sarasota Bay

March 23-27, 1864

By Jere Parker

As the War Between the States progressed, the Federal naval blockade along Florida's gulf coast became increasingly tight as more ships were gradually assigned to the area. By the Spring of 1864, the East Gulf Blockading Squadron, which was responsible for blockading the coast from St. Andrews Bay around to Cape Canaveral, Cuba and the Bahamas included, was comprised of 34 vessels;¹ this in comparison to, say, January, 1862 when the same coastal areas were blockaded by only six ships, counting the two in port in Key West.²

In fact, at the beginning of the war, the Yankees felt that, "The west coast of Florida, from Cape Sable to Cedar Keys ... is one of the most sparsely settled sections of the coast of the United States," and therefore, "one or more gunboats plying up and down the coast ... would amply suffice to maintain a blockade."³

But as the war moved along the Union forces found that, indeed, this coast would bear closer scrutiny. Middle-Florida cotton and turpentine had a way of getting itself to the coast from Bayport south to the Peace River; exported from there, these products turned over a handsome profit for the Confederates. The blockade runners were returning from Havana and Nassau with their ships loaded with the imports so badly needed by the people of the South. Armaments, gunpowder, salt, liquor, coffee, shoes and, incredibly, spun cotton cloth were the main cargoes coming in.

By the spring of 1864, the blockade of Florida's west coast between Cedar Keys and Cape Sable was set up like this: one steamer with five guns,⁴ the *Sagamore*, at Cedar Keys; a one-gun schooner, the *Two Sisters*, plying between Cedar Keys and Tampa Bay; at Tampa Bay, two ships, the bark *James L. Davis* with four guns and the steam tug *Sunflower* with two guns; a one-gun schooner, the *Stonewall*, plying between Tampa Bay and Charlotte

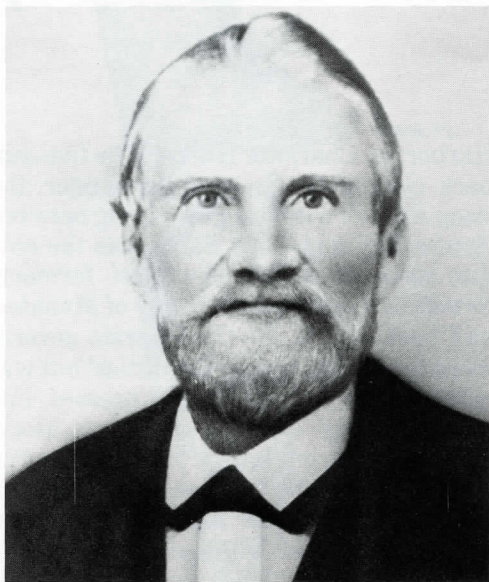
Harbor; at Charlotte Harbor, the five-gun bark *Gem of the Sea* and her tender, the sloop *Rosalie* with one gun; plying between Estero Bay and Cape Sable was the one-gun schooner *Ariel*.⁵ The *Ariel*, formerly owned by Captain John Curry of Manatee, had been sold to the Confederate government for blockade running duties⁶ but was subsequently captured and pressed into service by the Federal navy as a blockader⁷; and last but hardly least, the six-gun steamer *Hendrick Hudson* out in the open Gulf, cruising back and forth between longitudes 84 and 86 degrees West, on a line at latitude 27 degrees North.⁸ Nine vessels altogether.

To evade this cordon, the Confederates developed what was called the "inside route." What follows is a description of this route used by, in particular, Captain Frederick Tresca of Manatee, a native of France,⁹ and brother-in-law to William Henry Whitaker of Sarasota:

...Sailing only by night except when some inland bay or passage of shallow depth allowed them to proceed behind the shelter of some well wooded line of islands. If there was a break in these inland waterways and they had to go outside into the Gulf or across some large body of water, he stopped in some secluded creek or bayou near a pass until night made it safe. Then without lights, keeping close to shore where a large boat could not venture...

...occasionally getting water from wells among the islands where fishermen had formerly had fishing ranches and ekeing out their food supply with fish...

When they reached the Pass of Big Marco they were comparatively safe for a time and proceeded with little trouble, for all along to the south there were many and devious passages known as the Ten Thousand Islands. So well did the...guides know these waters they could travel mostly by day, safely hidden from all Federal boats, for even if seen it is dangerous for a stranger to venture into the winding, crossing, blind and shallow



Capt. Frederick Tresca. Courtesy of Virginia Tresca Johnson.

waterways.

...they rounded Cape Sable, crossed the bays...to the outside chain of keys which face the waters of the Florida Strait, leaving the Federal naval base at Key West many miles to the west. Along this stretch they were still safe for the inland bays still extended behind the palm covered islands. Along here also were a few settlements of spongers and wreckers who might help but they were afraid to ask often, not knowing friend from foe.

When well up to where Miami now stands and about opposite the Bahamas...across the open Atlantic to the shelter of the English Harbors of the West Indies."¹⁰

The above is taken from a description of Captain Tresca's voyage to aid the Secretary of State of the Confederacy, Judah P. Benjamin, in his escape from the country during June-July, 1865; however, it is estimated that Captain Tresca successfully ran the blockade by this very route at least ten, and perhaps as many as thirty, times during the course of the war. He was never captured. He was just one of many blockade runners who used this route.

In what is now Sarasota County, the inside route ran down Sarasota Bay. Shallow draft blockade runners coming

from points north could enter the bay via Palma Sola Pass which, since its channel was as yet undredged, was useless to the Federal blockading vessels of deeper draft. The route continued past Whitaker Bayou, where, actually, many of these voyages originated. Dr. Furman C. Whitaker later recalled, "...boats landed in the bayou during the war, running the Federal blockade, bringing goods in from the Bahamas. One ten or fifteen ton schooner had been burned in the bayou by a Federal navy party..."¹¹

The inside route continued on from Whitaker Bayou out Big Pass. Sailing south through Roberts Bay was impossible because the area around the mouth of Phillipi Creek was thickly choked with mangroves and mudflats and was simply not navigable by any craft. Then, depending on time and tide, the route probably entered in Little Sarasota Pass which ran from the south side of Point O' Rocks through what is now called Heron Lagoon into Little Sarasota Bay. Next down Little Sarasota and Blackburn Bays and back out into the Gulf at Casey's Pass, now called Venice Inlet. The whole of the route was easily navigable by a boat drawing three feet or less,¹² if guided by a knowledgeable pilot.

Then, until Charlotte County was reached, the route continued in the open waters of the Gulf. This last leg would, of course, be run at night.

On the return voyage, the route was, obviously enough, reversed: in Casey's Pass, up Blackburn and Little Sarasota Bays, out Little Sarasota Pass, in Big Pass and then finishing, perhaps, at Whitaker Bayou or continuing up the bay and out Palma Sola Pass. Use of Little Sarasota Bay, Roberts Bay, Hudson Bayou and the Myakka River as blockade running terminals are distinct possibilities, undocumented.

The Yankee sailors of the blockading vessels not only watched the coast, but often came ashore to plunder the settlements and annoy the local population:

... the Federal gunboats blockading the Florida coast occasionally

entered Sarasota Bay for provisions and water ... The shore parties camped on land and always offered to buy what was needed — principally meat, vegetables, oranges and water. The offer was, of course, refused. In fact, when the ships were sighted all the stock was driven into the woods out of reach but the shore parties requisitioned what they could find.

... in season, the citrus trees were stripped and any chickens confiscated which could be caught ...

In another visit, late in 1863, the landing party threatened to burn the home of the Whitaker family. Bill Whitaker was away at the time. Mary Whitaker is reputed to have handed the Union soldier a block of matches, saying, 'Sir, I want to look into the eyes of a man who can stoop so low as to burn the home of a helpless woman and her family.' The house was not burned....

During the later stages of the Civil War, when the coasts were heavily blockaded, it became necessary to develop local sources for some of the common necessities. Meat was no problem. Although most of the cattle had been driven north to the Confederate army, wild turkey, deer and razorbacks abounded. Patches of corn supplied corn meal for grits, hoe cakes and corn bread. Parched, it also served as a coffee substitute. Salt was obtained from the low flats at Hog Creek [what is left of Hog Creek is crossed by U.S. 41 between 10th and 12th Streets.] Here, evaporation of bay water had left a concentration of salt in the sandy bottom. This sand was removed, the salt was dissolved in fresh water and this water boiled off to leave a residue of salt in the boil kettle. This was scraped out and stored. Every scrap of string was saved; every crooked nail was straightened and saved for reuse."¹³

Many of the raids which took place in Manatee, Hillsborough and what is now Pinellas Counties were much more destructive than those described above. Consider this description of what remained of Abel Miranda's homestead on Point Pinellas after a Union raid: "... there was nothing left of it but charcoal and ashes. All the fences and outhouses and everything that had wood enough



Captain John Curry. Courtesy of Col. Wm. C. Harlee, author of "Kinsfolk."

on or about it to take fire, was burned.

"The smallest piece of petty meanness perpetrated by them was the slashing of the skirts of an old worn out saddle!

"The well was full of charcoal from the burning of the curb.

"And these were not all of the pitiful sights to be seen."¹⁴

The orange grove had been burned and the chickens and shoats had been either carried away or left dead or maimed. This raid apparently left a great impression on Miranda, for, among other indications of his rage and dismay, after the war he moved inland, saying: "If I built there again and it came another war, the damned Yankees would've come in there with their gunboats and shelled and burned me out as they done before. Now I am where they can't get their gunboats through the woods to do it!"¹⁵

Also, consider that: "Lookouts were maintained by the inhabitants to watch for these landing and raiding parties. When sighted the alarm was spread and men and

sometimes women and children took to the woods and carried with them everything removable to prevent it from being destroyed or carried away. The people lived in a state of readiness for hiding property or removing it out of reach of the invaders. Even the chicken coops were portable so they could be carried to safety when the 'Yankee' boats were sighted.

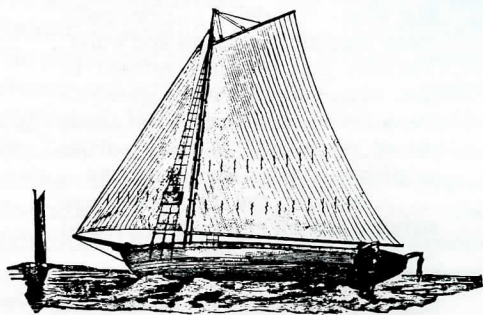
"Boats were destroyed to prevent their being used for running the blockade. My grandfather had his small boats hauled into the woods and hidden."¹⁶

Notice that during these raids, the men fled first. This was because military-age men captured by the Unionists were given the choice of taking an oath of allegiance to the United States or, refusing to do that, being taken to Fort Jefferson in the Dry Tortugas as a prisoner for the duration of the war.¹⁷ Many men were kidnapped in this manner.

For various reasons, many of these raids never made their way into the official records of the U.S. Navy. The one documented raid and capture of a blockade runner at Sarasota occurred in March, 1864.

As in so many of these cases, the impetus for the mission came from information passed on to the Union navy by scalawag spies,¹⁸ a breed that by 1864 fairly infested Florida south of Tampa Bay. The lawless wilderness of south Florida provided a safe haven for these draft-evaders, skulkers and deserters from the Confederate armies. A few of them were legitimate Union men, but the great majority were simply vagabonds and criminals, or at least behaved exactly like criminals, at which point the distinction blurs. The local Confederates hunted these scalawags down with a grim tenacity and many were hanged or shot.

On March 23, with information obtained from the scalawags that the Confederate sloop *Josephine*¹⁹ would be departing from Tampa bound for Havana²⁰ via Sarasota Bay, acting Master Edward Van Sice, commander of the *Sunflower*, dispatched an expedition to Sarasota, "consisting of the schooner *Stonewall*,



Sloop

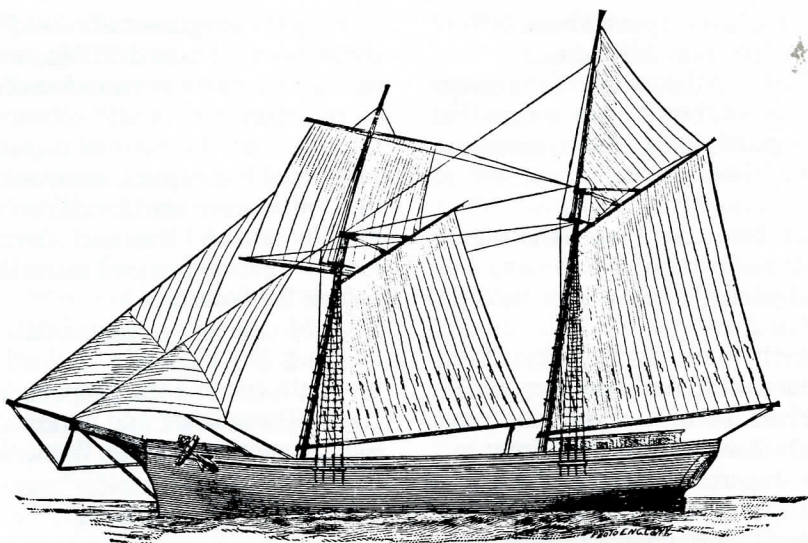
acting Master H.B. Carter, the armed cutter of this vessel, the *Sunflower*, and the armed launch of the bark *J.L. Davis*."²¹

The plan was for the schooner, the main vessel involved, to run in the Gulf past Anna Maria Island, Longboat Key and the mangroves that are now Lido Key, while the two smaller boats came down the inside route in the bay, "both to meet at Sarasota."²² In this way they could cover the area completely in search of the *Josephine*.

A second objective of the mission was, "to make a reconnaissance for saltworks,"²³ at Sarasota Bay. Destroying saltworks was a favored preoccupation of the often long-idle Federal blockading forces. Salt manufacturing was the single important industry the Confederates had developed in the immediate coastal areas of Florida.²⁴

The expedition got underway at 10:00 A.M. March 23, the schooner standing out the Southwest Channel from Egmont Key (the local Federal Headquarters), and coming down the coast outside of Anna Maria Island; the boats going inside. At Longboat Inlet, the Federal craft sighted each other through the pass, but because, "of the heavy sea on the bar, could not communicate ..."²⁵

They continued on south, the schooner plying down past Longboat Key, the boats coming into Sarasota Bay. Nothing of consequence was sighted. At 4:30 that afternoon, they met up, "outside the bar at Sarasota Inlet ... The launch and cutter came out New Cut and stood for the schooner



Schooner

...²⁶ [Sarasota Inlet is known as Big Pass, New Cut is known as New Pass].

Master Carter, commander of the schooner "Communicated with Acting Ensign G.C. Campbell [commander of the boats that had come down inside the keys]; gave him orders to go inside and camp; through the night fresh breezes from east."²⁷

Master Carter's manner of reporting is unusual in the degree of importance he attaches to describing the changing weather patterns. In few other reports or correspondence in the Official Records of the Navy does one see such detailed attention to this aspect of things. But follow his reporting, if you will, and you will find the classic sweep of the changing wind directions, with the corresponding rain pattern, that indicates the passage of a well-defined cold front.

Early the next morning, March 24, the vessels all met again outside the sandbar at the mouth of Big Pass. Then they came in the pass together and, "anchored abreast the fish houses."²⁸

These fish houses were probably located along the north-facing shores of today's Siesta Key and Bay Island — near the north end of Higel Avenue and along Norsota Way. Some old, and not so old,

maps of Sarasota refer to the north end of Siesta Key as Fishery Point.²⁹

After the vessels were anchored off the fish houses, Master Carter, Ensign Campbell and the pilot made a quick reconnaissance in a small boat, looking for and finding fresh water. They then "Went back to the schooner and got underway. Gave orders to Acting Ensign G.C. Campbell in the launch to go ashore at the fish houses to camp — would set signal when wanted launch. When abreast of Whitaker's house, owing to the tide falling, schooner grounded. Blowing fresh from S.E., but no sea on."³⁰

A few notes on this last paragraph. First, notice how familiar the Federals are with the Whitaker homestead. No explanations or descriptions; Carter apparently felt that Van Sice would know exactly who Whitaker was and where his place was located.

Second, one has to be astounded by how many times during the naval war in southwest Florida the Union navy managed to get their boats jammed on sandbars. The Confederates, intimately familiar with the local waterways, usually went around the shallow spots, but the Yankee pilots, without this familiarity, tended to try to go through these flats. The Union sailors

blockading the area spent about 90% of their time fending off idleness and boredom. That was the nature of the blockading assignment, but it often seems that they spent a goodly part of the remaining 10% of their time getting on or off of sandbars.

Third, see how they blame the falling tide for their misfortune, as if some savage current had sucked their vessel onto the mudflat.

And fourth, note the velocity of the wind and the shift to the southeast, which, especially given the time of year, indicates the approach of a powerful cold front.

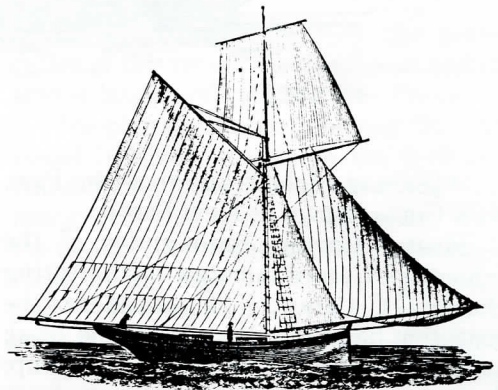
Carter's report continues: "At 12:30 P.M. lookout reported a sloop standing down the bay."³¹ This was the ill-fated Confederate sloop *Josephine*, bound to Havana with seven bales of cotton. Six of these bales were of Sea Island cotton,³² the exquisite high grade. Carter, "At once started two boats in chase, in charge of Acting Master's Mate John A Fleming, of this vessel. At 1:15 P.M. made signal for the launch. At 2 P.M. launch got alongside; sent her in chase of the sloop."³³

By the time the launch arrived on the scene, the cutter, under Master's Mate Fleming, had already made the capture.³⁴ All indications considered — the location of the grounded schooner upon sighting the sloop, the direction of the chase, the distances covered indicated by the time frame involved, the Confederate crew having, "escaped by jumping overboard,"³⁵ and the assumed reluctance, for obvious reasons, of the Confederates to make this escape on the shores of Longboat Key, the only alternative to the mainland make it safe to say that this capture probably took place north of the present day Sarasota-Manatee county line. It was most likely in the vicinity of the mouth of Bowlee's Creek, or at least somewhere along the shore between present day Bayshore Gardens and Whitfield Estates, an area that until 1921, when the present county lines were drawn, was considered to be in Sarasota.

"Before the boats got to [the sloop] the captain and pilot got ashore and escaped;"³⁶

"taking the spyglass and rebel flag, leaving three men on board."³⁷ Master Van Sice noted: "The three persons found on board ... were interested in the cotton and acted very well at the time of capture, having prevented the captain from setting fire to her, although the kindling wood was already laid and they had plenty of time to have set her on fire and made their escape before the boats got to her."³⁸

Odd, because any boat captured running the blockade, and all its cargo, instantly became the property of the U.S. Navy. These boats and cargoes were then sold at auction, at Key West, the revenue



Cutter

from these sales being divided up between the crews of every ship within signal distance at the time the prize was taken. In this particular instance, it was duly reported to Key West by Van Sice that all three Federal vessels were, "in signal distance at the time of capture."³⁹ So the three men on the sloop had, it would seem, little to gain from their actions.

The best explanation is that the three were scalawags, perhaps even the spies, or somehow connected to the spies, that originally informed on the sloop, and that they wanted, thereby, to further ingratiate themselves with the Federal navy. If so, they appeared to have succeeded.

By late that afternoon after the capture the prize sloop was anchored next to the *Stonewall*, which was still hard aground off Whitaker's house. At 2:30 the next

morning, March 25, the rising tide allowed the schooner to float, at which point the Yankee sailors ran out a kedge and pulled the *Stonewall*, "into two fathoms of water."⁴⁰ As dawn broke, the weather looked threatening. Then, "At 9 A.M. wind shifted to W.S.W., with heavy rain. At 11:30 A.M. weather clearing; Acting Ensign G.C. Campbell in the launch and . . . [Master Carter] in the cutter, proceeded to land. At 11:45 A.M. landed under the cover of howitzer, threw out pickets, and reconnoitered about two miles in the rear of Whitaker's house. Seeing nothing suspicious, returned to the boats and proceeded to the schooner."⁴¹ Note the southwest wind and the intermittent squalls; the front is closing in.

After the shore reconnaissance, the Federal sailors headed their vessels south toward Siesta Key, towing the prize sloop along, and again, "came to anchor abreast the fish houses ... sent the launch ashore to camp: through the night fresh breezes from the west."⁴²

The expedition stayed in Sarasota Bay overnight, probably because the wind and seas were against them should they have wanted to go out Big Pass at that time. But perhaps something else was astir. There's a blank spot in the Master's report, so it's possible that they were up to some unrecorded devilment. What we do know is that they spent the night at the corner of the pass, with half their contingent camping on shore.

At about four the next morning on March 26th, the cold front finally came blasting through and the "wind shifted to N.W., blowing strong."⁴³ And the Yankees spent the whole day still in Sarasota, though they did move out into the pass a little. The mouth of the pass would have undoubtedly been covered with the high seas that accompany strong cold fronts, and this probably explains the Unionists' delay, but it's quite possible, as was just mentioned, that they were up to something else, something that didn't come off.

Realize, if you will, that there were three Federal vessels, with a captured sloop, sitting deep in Confederate territory

and vulnerable to an attack by Confederate guerillas, an event that was almost likely, given the nature of the war in this area. Small Federal expeditions didn't like spending a lot of time out in the bays and backwoods of southwest Florida unless there was a specific reason for it; the longer they stayed, the greater were their chances of being ambushed.⁴⁴ They had already been inside the pass three days, a sufficient amount of time for the Confederates to have spread the alarm.

After a "strong breeze from north," all night, finally, on March 27, "At daylight [the wind] moderating; sent word to Acting Ensign G.C. Campbell to have all ready to start up the bay when the cutter returned; got underway, sent cutter ahead to sound, got halfway across the bar, when schooner grounded; ran out a kedge and hauled the schooner off; a sail in sight standing down the coast."⁴⁵

The sail turned out to be the *Sunflower*, Master Van Sice on board. Carter joined Van Sice on board the steamer and made his report. They were, by now, all in the Gulf, apparently after the *Stonewall* had come out Big Pass; but as to where the cutter had been off to, and whether or not the launch went back up Sarasota Bay, that is too obscure for verification.

While this particular raid was closely documented, many others occurred at Sarasota that went unrecorded, officially at least. They were a constant threat to the security and well-being of the area's pioneers. "These things were inflicted upon the people and their homeland because they loved their homeland and were too honorable and upright to subscribe an oath of allegiance to its invaders which they did not intend to observe. They were a Christian, Godly, pious, and peacefully inclined people but they went to war for the defense of their homeland and declined to take oaths to be renegade to their Confederate States in order to save their property from destruction."⁴⁶

By the close of the war the destruction of the settlements along this coast was near complete, and the suffering of the people was accordingly severe. Of his father, John

W. Curry, Arvid Curry wrote: "When father returned from his last campaign, I did not know him. Haggard, hollow-eyed, ragged and sick he tumbled from his jaded horse and staggered to the door. Days passed before I saw him again, but he was then on to the road to recovery ... long hours of exposure to sun, lack of food and clothing, were the main causes of his deplorable condition. Many were the harrowing tales of privation and hardship he had to tell, although he never left the state nor had he been within sound of the enemy's guns."⁴⁷ As for himself, John W. Curry, "stated that he bore no malice towards those who had brought suffering, during the Confederate War, to him and his people and that he hoped our Heavenly Father would forgive them their sins."⁴⁸

This desolate and thinly settled section

was so totally devastated and so militarily insignificant that, at the close of hostilities, the Yankees never bothered to occupy the area, but simply packed up and sailed their ships away. They left the Confederates to fall back on their own resources to begin to rebuild their lives. Left alone this way, the local people, such as William Henry Whitaker, were able to assist the Secretary of State of the Confederacy, Judah P. Benjamin, as he passed through this section in his escape from the Federal forces, following the collapse of the Richmond government.

By doing so, and by ignoring the \$50,000 reward the Federal government had placed on Benjamin's head, Whitaker and the others displayed the respect that they still held for themselves and their lost cause. ■

NOTES

1. "Stations of Vessels Composing the East Gulf Blockading Squadron," Apr. 1, 1864, *Official Records Navies*, Ser. 1, Vol. XVII, p. 675.
2. "Stations of Vessels Composing the Gulf Blockading Squadron," Jan. 23, 1862, *Official Records Navies*, Ser. 1, Vol. XVII, p. 71. The Gulf Blockading Squadron was divided on Feb. 22, 1862 into two squadrons, the East Gulf Blockading Squadron and the West Gulf Blockading Squadron. For the initial blockading stations of the East Gulf Blockading Squadron, see: "Stations of Vessels Composing the East Gulf Blockading Squadron," Mar. 12, 1862, *Official Records Navies*, Ser. 1, Vol. XVII, pp. 188-189.
3. Cptn. S.F. Du Pont, U.S.N., Supt. A.D. Bache, U.S.C.G., Maj. J.G. Barnard, U.S. Eng. and Com. C.H. Davis, U.S.N. to Gideon Welles, Sec. Navy, "Second Report of Conference for the Consideration of Measures for Effectually Blockading the Coast Bordering on the Gulf of Mexico," Sept. 3, 1861, *Official Records Navies*, Ser. 1, Vol. XVI, pp. 651-655.
4. For information regarding number of guns carried by each particular blockading vessel, see: "Stations of Vessels Composing the East Gulf Blockading Squadron," post-Oct. 15, 1864 (inclusive), *Official Records Navies*, Ser. 1, Vol. XVII, starting on p. 766.
5. "Stations of Vessels Composing the East Gulf Blockading Squadron," Apr. 1, 1864, *Official Records Navies*, Ser. 1, Vol. XVII, p. 675.
6. William Curry Harlee, *Kinfolks, A Genealogical and Biographical Record of Harlee, Fulmore, Curry, Kemp, Bethea, Robertson, Dickey Families*. 3 vols. New Orleans: Searcy and Pfaff. 1934-37. v.2, 1719; Also Lillie B. McDuffie, *The Lures of Manatee* (2nd ed.) Bradenton, Florida: A. K. Whitaker and Manatee County Historical Society, 1961. p. 131.
7. Act. Vol. Lt. Wm. C. Rogers to Gideon Welles, Sec. Navy, Nov. 15, 1862, *Official Records Navies*, Ser. 1, Vol. XVII, p. 327. McDuffie, *Op. cit.*, p. 131, erroneously gives the date of the capture of the *Ariel* as Mar. 14, 1862. Also of interest is: Act. Rear-Adm. Theodorus Bailey to Gideon Welles, Sec. Navy, Dec. 15, 1862, *Official Records Navies*, Ser. 1, Vol. XVII, p. 333.
8. "Stations of Vessels Composing the East Gulf Blockading Squadron," Apr. 1, 1864, *Official Records Navies*, Ser. 1, Vol. XVII, p. 675.
9. McDuffie, *Op. cit.*, p. 23.
10. Furman C. Whitaker, "Reminiscences" in "One Man's Family," Part 2. A. K. Whitaker, Comp. Sarasota County Historical Archives, Sarasota, FL.
11. *Ibid.*
12. J.E. Hilgard, Survey of Sarasota Bay, Fla., 1883, U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, Wash., D.C., #1517 A.
13. A. K. Whitaker, "One Man's Family," Parts 1 and 2. MSS. Sarasota County Historical Archives, Sarasota, FL.
14. John A. Bethell, *History of Point Pinellas*, (1914 Reprint ed., St. Petersburg, Florida: Great Outdoors Press, 1962), pp. 18-21.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
16. Harlee, *Op. cit.*, pp. 1726-1727.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 1728.
18. Act. Master Edward Van Sice to Act. Rear-Adm. Theodorus Bailey, Mar. 28, 1864, *Official Records Navies*, Ser. 1, Vol. XVII, p. 673. From exactly what source the information was obtained is left unstated. Besides scalawag informants, who instigated raids on the southwest Florida coast on a regular basis, the only other reasonably likely source was runaway slaves. Instances of the U.S. Navy in this area receiving information from blacks were relatively rare.
19. The *Josephine* (formerly the *Kate Dale* according to Van Sice) might have had an interesting history as a blockade runner. See: Act. Rear-Adm. Theodorus Bailey to Gideon Welles, Sec. Navy, Oct. 24, 1863, *Official Records Navies*, Ser. 1, Vol. XVII, pp. 570-572, and: Cptn. John Westcott to Lt. J.R. Finegan, Oct. 18, 1863, *Official Records Armies*, Ser. 1, Vol. XXVIII, Pt. I, p. 735, concerning a Federal raid on the Hillsborough River and the possible quasi-destruction of this vessel. Van Sice makes the connection in: *Official Records Navies*, Ser. 1, Vol. XVII, p. 673.
20. Act. Master Edward Van Sice to Act. Rear-Adm. Theodorus Bailey, Mar. 28, 1864, *Official Records Navies*, Ser. 1, Vol. XVII, p. 673.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*
24. Ella Lonn, "The Extent and Importance of Federal Naval Raids on Salt-making in Florida, 1862 - 1865," *The Florida Historical Society Quarterly*, V. 5, No. 4, (April 1932).
25. Act. Master H.B. Carter to Act. Master Edward Van Sice, Mar. 28, 1864, *Official Records Navies*, Ser. 1, Vol. XVII, p. 673.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.* Master Carter's meticulous attention to the weather was probably due to the Federal expedition being kept inside Sarasota Bay by rough seas on the bar at the mouth of Big Pass (probably the only possible egress for the schooner *Stonewall*) and therefore late in its return to Egmont Key. Note below that the *Stonewall* did run aground on its exit from the bay during a probable period of relatively mild seas; and also note below the appearance of the *Sunflower* outside Sarasota Bay on Mar. 27, probably in search of the overdue expedition, as the steamer would be unlikely to leave its blockading station for a lesser reason. Accordingly, Master Carter would have wanted to present an explanation.

NOTES (Continued)

28. *Ibid.*
29. Hilgard, *Op. cit.*; Cptn. W.M. Black, Map and Hydrographic Survey of Sarasota Bay, Fla., 1889, Corp. of Eng., U.S.A.; Map World, Inc., Street Map of Sarasota, Fla., 1983. See also: F.M. Follet, Map of Country in the Vicinity of Manatee, 1857 in Janet Snyder Matthews, *Edge of Wilderness* (Tulsa, OK: Caprine Press, 1983) p. 212. The particulars of the military action on Mar. 24, 1864 give virtual certainty to the speculation that the fish houses referred to by Carter were located on Siesta Key/Bay Island.
30. Act. Master H.B. Carter to Act. Master Edward Van Sice, Mar. 28, 1864, *Official Records Navies*, Ser. 1, Vol. XVII, pp. 673-674.
31. *Ibid.*
32. Act. Master Edward Van Sice to Act. Rear-Adm. Theodorus Bailey, Mar. 28, 1864, *Official Records Navies*, Ser. 1, Vol. XVII, p. 673.
33. Act. Master H.B. Carter to Act. Master Edward Van Sice, Mar. 28, 1864, *Official Records Navies*, Ser. 1, Vol. XVII, pp. 673-674.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*
36. Act. Master Edward Van Sice to Act. Rear-Adm. Theodorus Bailey, Mar. 28, 1864, *Official Records Navies*, Ser. 1, Vol. XVII, p. 673.
37. Act. Master H.B. Carter to Act. Master Edward Van Sice, Mar. 28, 1864, *Official Records Navies*, Ser. 1, Vol. XVII, pp. 673-674.
38. Act. Master Edward Van Sice to Act. Rear-Adm. Theodorus Bailey, Mar. 28, 1864, *Official Records Navies*, Ser. 1, Vol. XVII, p. 673.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Act. Master H.B. Carter to Act. Master Edward Van Sice, Mar. 28, 1864, *Official Records Navies*, Ser. 1, Vol. XVII, pp. 673-674.
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Ibid.*
44. See: Act. Vol. Lt. I.B. Baxter to Act. Rear-Adm. Theodorus Bailey, Jan. 2, 1864; Act. Ensign J.H. Jenks to Act. Vol. Lt. I.B. Baxter, Dec. 31, 1863; Act. Master Peter F. Coffin to Act. Vol. Lt. I.B. Baxter, Dec. 31, 1863; Act. Rear-Adm. Theodorus Bailey to Act. Vol. Lt. Charles H. Rockwell, Jan. 18, 1864, *Official Records Navies*, Ser. 1, Vol. XVII, pp. 610-615 for (regardless of the self-serving tone of the reports, particularly the latter) the description of what happened to a Federal expedition that made the mistake of spending a period of five days camped alongside the Myakka River in present day Charlotte County, even under the protection of a blockading sloop and its artillery.
45. Act. Master H.B. Carter to Act. Master Edward Van Sice, Mar. 28, 1864, *Official Records Navies*, Ser. 1, Vol. XVII, pp. 673-674.
46. Harlee, *Op. cit.*, p. 1727.
47. p. 1745.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 1751.

Line drawings from *Twenty-first Annual List of Merchant Vessels of the United States*. U.S. Government Printing Office 1889.



DESTRUCTION OF REBEL SCHOONERS OFF HOMOSASSA RIVER, FLORIDA.

Dramatic drawings such as this appeared in northern magazines during the war. Print courtesy of Florida State Archives.



EARLY SETTLERS OF FRUITVILLE

Frank and Eunice Coker Tucker holding their daughters Mattie and Ethel, respectively with their sons Oscar at left and Jesse H. at right. It was taken about 1891 in Sarasota by photographer Frank Pinard.

Frank Tucker moved to today's Fruitville area with his parents in 1880 as a young boy. His father, Jesse Tucker, after service in the Confederate Army had been elected sheriff of Manatee County in 1871 when the County seat was at Pine Level. He was appointed census taker for the 1880 U.S. census and while visiting all sections of the County to enumerate its residents he decided that the Sarasota region was the most desirable in which to live. He traded his acreage near Pine Level for 80 acres near Sarasota and promptly moved his family. The area later was named Fruitville. Photo courtesy of Eula Tucker Lastinger.

Pioneering in Bee Ridge

By Marian Hobson Gruters

The pioneering lifestyle may seem a normal matter to those born into it, but consider the difficulties faced by many of those who attempted to settle Florida when it was considered an “uncivilized” area of the southeastern United States. It had just been accepted into statehood in 1845.

These settlers needed strength, courage, tenacity, endurance, and multiple skills. For the majority, the first task was to clear acreage on which to build a family home and then set out a garden to feed the family. Farming, ranching or citrus-growing might provide the livelihood once the elements of food and shelter were provided — meaning more land-clearing. Unlike the New England farmers who dealt with rocks that could at least build a wall, the Florida newcomers struggled against the resistant palmetto, heavy undergrowth, and poorly drained land or swampland. Wild animals which roved the land could be hunted for food, but they could also menace. The Indian threat lessened when the Third Seminole War ended in 1857, when those Indians not killed had been deported or had faded into the Everglades. While the pioneers couldn’t feel completely safe from raids by the survivors, a more present and unrelenting enemy was the mosquito, whose troops were inexhaustible and beyond counting, with the power to make life utterly miserable. Add to these factors, tropical heat (but sometimes crop-killing cold spells), loneliness and, sometimes, memories of an easier life “back home.” But many of these hardy, determined pioneers persevered to build new lives and new communities such as Bee Ridge.

Most were farmers who, with their families, learned to live a nearly self-sufficient life. Charlton Tebeau in *A History of Florida* describes some of the elements of pioneer homes:

They were likely to live in a double pen

log cabin with a passage through the middle and with sheds attached. Huge chimneys and fireplaces sometimes made of sticks were common. Heavy shutters closed the window openings. When increasing prosperity made possible a frame house, it was likely to be modeled somewhat after the log cabin with a hallway in the middle, rooms on each side, and with porches on as many as three sides. Anyone with nostalgia for the rural Florida of a hundred years ago or so can find many such buildings and furnishings surviving in Florida today.

Those furnishings included a water pail and gourd, tin basin and roller towel, he reports, and the furniture was apt to be homemade and quite rustic. The wives and daughters made the family clothing from their own cotton and wool. Spanish moss might provide the filling for mattresses for split pine bedsteads, though cotton and sometimes wool might be available.

Another writer, Joe G. Warner, author of *Biscuits and 'Taters*, a history of cattle ranching in Manatee, describes how rancher Morgan Johnson and one helper cleared land in order to establish his farm: “...grubbed out by hand forty acres of rich hammock land. This was no easy task as the huge palmettos, undergrowth, cabbage palms, and oak trees grew rampant in the...hammocks.”

The women, in most cases, probably escaped this drudgery but knew their own. The laundry was done outside; a large pot of water would be boiling over an open fire, and the soil in the fabric would be rubbed out on the scrub board. Families were usually large, meaning large washloads, sometimes for as many as a dozen children, many of whom would not reach adulthood or even survive infancy. Yet despite the primitive conditions, hospitality was extended to those who came by, whether friend or stranger; this was a matter of pride to the family and husband, Warner says.

He describes getting dinner for a guest who had been asked to "light" and have a meal. The wife might have to catch and clean a chicken and to cook it immediately, for lack of refrigeration. Brown gravy would be spooned on grits or rice, and soda biscuits or cornbread would accompany. If a vegetable was served, it could be cowpeas, okra or collards. The beverage was probably water from the well in the yard. But a tasty dessert might end the meal if milk was available — a pan of clabber sweetened with sugar and topped with nutmeg.

Hog-killing time was a special event, according to Warner:

Even the head of the hog was cleaned and boiled to make hogs-head cheese ... Since there was no way to keep meat any length of time... it was divided up among friends and neighbors. This was reciprocated with each one as their family killed a hog or beef. Cane syrup was the sweetening used to eat with biscuits. The old saying was, "You can have all the syrup you can soak up with one biscuit!"

The cattle, too, had to be hardy. They were descended from English Longhorns and Shorthorns, mingled with Andalusian stock, to produce "the multicolored foundation stock of the Florida pineywoods cow... of all colors imaginable... small wiry, bony creatures with the ability to survive under the worst conditions..."

By 1880 there were about 800 householders and their families in what was then Manatee County. Two of these early settlers were Isaac Alderman Redd and his wife, Eleanor Elizabeth Brown, whose pioneering experiences and those of their descendants, told by those still resident here, can bring us into the present day with a sympathetic understanding of the difficulties and triumphs of those who helped create Manatee County and the part of it we know today as Sarasota County, plus an informed appreciation of their contributions to the history of our county.

Indian fighter Isaac Alderman Redd had learned about the area as a soldier

during the Third Seminole War. When the War ended in 1857 and he was released from military service he became a cowhunter for William H. Whitaker, who is credited with being the first permanent settler in what is now Sarasota County. Whitaker and his half-brother, Hamlin V. Snell, had established a homestead at Yellow Bluffs on Sarasota Bay, near today's Twelfth Street. Whitaker's cattle herd had increased since 1847 when he began ranching. In a fenceless wilderness, it was necessary for him to have a reliable helper. Among other jobs, the cowhunter had to round up the wandering cattle for the annual branding.

By 1858 Isaac had married his Tallahassee sweetheart and they established a frontier home at the Fort Hamer crossing on the Manatee River, near a military outpost where they could take refuge in the event of new outbreaks of Indian attacks. The bride must have found living conditions in Manatee a great contrast to those she had enjoyed in Tallahassee which, since it had been chosen in 1824 to be the territorial capital, had quickly become the social, cultural and especially the political center of the Territory, and then of the State. According to Tebeau, visitors from many other states and even foreign lands found their way to the capital. The surrounding population included over 150 established planters with their families and complements of slaves to work their plantations. Other businesses were flourishing, too. Tallahassee must have seemed quite stimulating to a young lady in her twenties.

But Elizabeth adjusted, as did many other frontier wives. The year after her marriage her daughter, Laura Fedonia (Donie), was born, and then a son, Theodore W. (Bud). When the boy was only three weeks old, the family moved to the Myakka area, settling at what would later be referred to as "the old Rawls place." It was the first of many moves, the next one being back to Tallahassee for Elizabeth, who took her children to her parents' home when the Civil War made her husband a soldier again. The family reunited when the war ended, and this time set up housekeeping at



Isaac A. Redd



Eleanor Elizabeth Brown Redd

the Cason Cooper place near Arthur Gocio's property on North Lockwood Ridge Road. Isaac turned to cowhunting again, this time for Mr. Cooper.

There would be five more family moves for the Redds before they landed in the Bee Ridge area of Sarasota. Starting a new home was becoming routine for them. Each time they would try to select a pleasant wooded area where they could enjoy the shade of a large tree while they unloaded the ox-drawn wagon. A quickly-built lean-to would shelter them until they could erect a house. The next step would be to clear land for a garden, and perhaps to set out a grove.

As the children grew, a new concern entered their lives: schooling. There was only one school available to the children, and that was at the original Manatee settlement on the river. The Reverend Edward Gates, son of Manatee's first settler, Josiah Gates, was the teacher for about twenty-five children. Donie was sent to board at his home for the three months school was in session. Her parents traded the land on which they were living at Fruitville for a plot owned by "Grandpa" George Tatum on Guy Creek between Bartow and Tampa. This enabled Donie and Bud to attend school near Lakeland for two terms while they lived with an uncle there.

After four years the restless Redds moved again, to land that would later become the property of George Albritton. Donie was now fifteen years of age, old enough to marry. On June 12, 1874, she became the bride of Sebring (Sebe) Cott Rawls. Her parents sold the couple the family homestead at Myakka and once again the Redds moved on. They settled at a ridge location, in an area of many beehives, from which came the name of the community they founded, Bee Ridge. This was to become the focal point of activity for the Redd family and, in a short time, for Donie and Sebe Rawls' family as well. The young couple traded their home to Henry Lock for a yoke of oxen and set up house-keeping on Proctor Road in Bee Ridge. Their land is now included in the Albritton Groves property.

As his in-laws had done many times, Sebe Rawls cleared acreage, built a log house, and set out an orange grove. He and Donie would have five children: Hilton, George, Addie, Charles and Texas. Soon Sebe became the clerk of a newly established church called Friendship Baptist which met in a log structure situated about one-half mile south of the present Bee Ridge Baptist Church, on a hammock known today as Church Hollow (now part of the Palmer Ranch properties). Among the Bee Ridge settlers on the building crew



William Harve Tatum and Donie Redd Tatum

were Sebe, his father-in-law Isaac Redd, Donie's brother Bud, Jessie Clower, Mose Howell, Henry Surgenier, John Tippet, and John Tatum. This building was replaced in 1877 by a "plank" church on a site in Fruitville. The congregation earned the \$100.00 needed to buy the lumber by producing lime needed to fertilize an experimental farm owned by Colonel J. Hamilton Gillespie, manager for the Florida Mortgage and Investment Company at Sarasota. The lime came from oyster shells picked up and processed at an Osprey campsite over a period of several weeks.

But Sebe Rawls did not live to see the new church completed, nor to see the birth of his fifth child, his daughter Texas. He died on September 22, 1884, after a brief illness, aged only thirty-five.

Among the charter members of the Friendship Baptist Church were E. R. and Emmaline Foster, Rebecca Lowe, Mrs. L.

F. Rawls, Martha Reaves, Isaac A. and Eleanor Elizabeth Redd, John Tatum, Serene Tatum, and John Tippet. The first pastor was E. J. Hull, believed to be one of the first circuit-riding preachers of that time. He was succeeded by Captain Isaac Redd, who had become an ordained Baptist minister. Isaac served until 1891 and remained a strong and abiding force in the church and the community until his death in 1912 at the age of 77. His wife, Eleanor Elizabeth, known affectionately as "Grandma Redd," lived to the age of 103. She died in 1933.

Friendship Baptist Church endures and holds the distinction of being the oldest established church in Sarasota County. Its Centennial was celebrated in 1975 with publication of its history, *The First One Hundred Years in the Life of Friendship Baptist Church*, by Eula Tucker Lastinger.

On September 22, 1885 Donie Redd Rawls was married again, to William "Harve" Tatum, whose family had come to Bee Ridge from Georgia. The home Donie had shared with Sebe Rawls was sold to Tom Albritton, and once again she had a new home, built by her husband and his brother John of logs cut at one Will Stevens' sawmill, location now unknown. This home would later come to be known as "the old Tatum place." In this house, to which was later added a larger adjoining structure, Donie raised her second family, the Tatum children: Ida (Mrs. William Hard), Rebecca (Mrs. S. J. Hull), Ada (Mrs. R. L. Driggers), Agnes (Mrs. L. L. Lowe), Edna (Mrs. F. E. Platt), Clara (Mrs. J. W. Walsh), and sons Isaac A. and W. L. Tatum.

The main part of the homestead remains on property adjoining the YMCA's Camp Hamilton off Proctor Road. Two dates are carved on the jamb above one of the interior doors: 1889, when the building was started, and 1892, when it was finished. Hilton Rawls, Donie's eldest son, helped his stepfather, Harve Tatum, in the construction.

Hilton was the honoree at a family reunion on July 21, 1957, when he was 81. Betty Vance, a reporter for the *Sarasota*

News, interviewed him that day at the reunion. His earliest memories, he told her, were of "getting up, going out to the barn, grinding grits for breakfast." Sometime he would make "13 gallons of sugar syrup" before going to school, which was held in a barn on Henry Hawkins' ranch on Hawkins Road at State Road 72. His Aunt Addie Redd taught him spelling, Hilton said, and his first teacher for the other subjects was Carrie Rawls, another relative. He remembered some of the people living in the Bee Ridge area when he was a boy: the John Tatums, the Fletchers, the Tippets, the Bill Browns.

Back then, he recalled to the reporter, the Sarasota settlers needed to buy only salt, flour and matches; the land produced rich crops of rice, potatoes, oranges, vegetables, "a good stock of cattle," and wild turkey and deer were abundant. There were plenty of mosquitoes attacking people but not many bugs attacking plants, only a little cutworm. As for the weather, it had its own way, even as now. One winter, snow fell in Bee Ridge, water froze in buckets, and "I saw icicles hanging on a bank building right downtown in Sarasota."

He remembered the many, many orange and grapefruit trees that used to fill the land in Bee Ridge:

...fruit trees were our environment. We got 50 cents a box for oranges, but wait until I tell you about grapefruit. My mother made the best biscuits you ever put in your mouth and she used to use these grapefruit mainly for juice to put in these biscuits. Well, sir, when northerners began to eat grapefruit, demanding shipments increased, from my grandfather's two grapefruit trees, we got more money than from the whole grove of orange trees. Lady, we got ten dollars a box for those grapefruit and there were 20 to 30 boxes of grapefruit on those two trees!

One of Hilton's occupations as a young boy was "following the woods," which included hunting and fishing as well as skinning alligators with a couple of his uncles and neighbors:

We did this by hook-hunting with half inch steel hooks on a pole. We'd bring 'em in and pile 'em up on the bank

and go back next morning and skin 'em. Say, I've skinned as many as ten of a morning and you might well ask what I did with what was left. Well, buzzards took care of this in five minutes after we got done.

A four-foot gator skin could be sold for thirty cents, a six-footer for eighty. A seven-footer brought close to a dollar. But feathers, he admitted, were more profitable, for women in the late 1800's wanted them for hat trimmings. The "big whites" (herons) brought a dollar per feather; egrets were even more desired, and were sold for a dollar-and-a-half. Both skins and feathers could be collected within a ten to fifteen-mile radius of Bee Ridge, and could be sold to J. B. Turner and George Cason at their stores on Lower Main Street in Sarasota. Hilton Rawls ended his days in St. Petersburg, where he died at age 83 in 1959.

During her lifetime his mother, Aunt Donie, saw many changes in this region of Florida. In 1866 the county seat of Manatee County, which included Bee Ridge, Fruitville, Miakka, and the other communities she knew, was moved out east to Pine Level, a very small, sparsely populated settlement. County government was administered from a one-room log courthouse. Sometimes the County Clerk would mount his horse and transact business by calling at the homes of those citizens needing his services. Aunt Donie's home was a favorite stopping place for the "circuit riding county clerk."

She saw a large part of Manatee County taken in 1887 to form a new county, DeSoto, with the Manatee seat of government going back to the Manatee River area, to a small town named Braidentown (as it was then spelled). And in 1921 DeSoto would divide into five counties: DeSoto, Highlands, Hardee, Glades and Charlotte. But more important to Donie Rawls Tatum and to other Bee Ridgers that year was the breakaway of the southern part of Manatee County to form Sarasota County, with the county seat, Sarasota, offering a much shorter trip from Bee Ridge than had Braidentown.

Aunt Donie had a favorite story to tell about a trip she once made out in the nearby woods to help her husband and brother-in-law butcher beef. Returning on horseback with a beef-quarter on the horn of her saddle, she felt something was following her but couldn't see what it was. The next day when her husband checked back on the trail, he discovered panther tracks and the remains of a half-devoured calf.



Rebecca Tatum Hull

As the mother of thirteen children and an active worker for the betterment of her community, Aunt Donie needed many skills. She took as much pleasure from the ownership of a cookstove and a "hundred dollar" sewing machine as in the ability to down any turkey or deer wandering within

shooting distance in the cleared area around her home. Two of her children survive: her daughters Rebecca Hull* and Clara Nash. Clara, who was 82 in 1985, is married to Joseph W. Nash. Rebecca married Solon J. Hull, who had been her teacher in the schoolhouse on the Hawkins farm. Solon took up a new teaching position in New Zion, where the Hulls' twin daughters were born. Those twins are Ola (Mrs. Eldon Messer) and Opal (Mrs. Miner Powell). The family believes that Rebecca, who celebrated her 93rd birthday in 1985, has inherited the title of oldest native-born Sarasotan from her cousin, Lizzie (Mrs. Jim) Merriweather, the daughter of Donie's brother, T. W. Redd (Uncle Bud) and his wife, Addie Garner of Arcadia. Like his sister, Uncle Bud lived out his life in Sarasota. His other children were Winton, Bell, and Frank, an attorney who practiced his profession in Sarasota.

Some vestiges of the pioneering era in Bee Ridge remain today, but most of this section is being given over to modern commercial and professional buildings and residential subdivisions. Bee Ridge Road, which has always served as the northern border to the whole Bee Ridge area, has been widened to six lanes as an access road to Interstate-75.

Descendants of the original settlers have always thought of Bee Ridge as encompassing a much, much larger area than the "Town of Bee Ridge" platted by Joseph H. Lord and Honore' Palmer in 1912. The Town was never chartered. The legal description recorded in Plat Book A, Page 39, Official Records of Manatee County, includes a stretch of railroad tracks and lots laid out over a quarter of a mile from First Street to Fourth Street. But the Bee Ridge envisioned by the original and succeeding residents roughly encompassed all the land from Beneva Road eastward to Cowpen Slough, with its northern boundary at Bee Ridge Road, and southern boundary Clark Road. ■

*Since this article was written Mrs. Hull has died. (June 9, 1987)

NOTES

Much of the information about pioneering in Bee Ridge was obtained from the personal manuscripts of the late Velma (Mrs. W. L.) Tatum, teacher and family historian, whose papers are now in the possession of her daughter, Evalena (Mrs. Charles) Vann. Mrs. Vann, who is continuing the Redd-Rawls-Tatum family research, generously loaned photographs and provided data from the Family Bible.

Other sources:

Eula Tucker Lastinger, *The First One Hundred Years in the Life of Friendship Baptist Church*

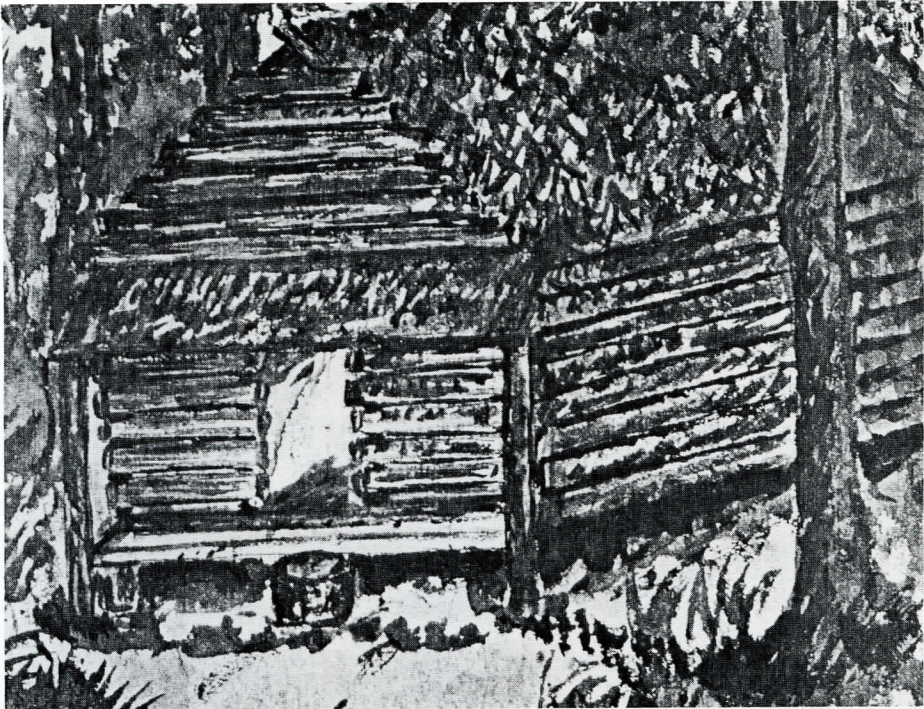
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Charlton A. Tebeau, *A History of Florida* (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1971)

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Betty Vance, Interview with Hilton Rawls, *The News*, Sarasota, Florida, July 21, 1957.

Newspapers and other records consulted at the Sarasota County Archives and Research Center.



Watercolor image of the Friendship Baptist Church painted by a visitor to the area in the 1870s. The Friendship Baptist Church was organized by John Hendry in 1875. The first pastor was E.J. Hull, followed by Isaac A. Redd. The church served until 1887, when a new church was built in Fruitville.

The caption on the original artwork reads: "Log church in the woods, the roof of dry palmetto leave. The mile posts read to 'The Church' so many miles, to Manatee, so many miles. Here . . . we sheltered, on two different occasions, from heavy thunderstorms. It is situated in the heart of a pine forest, trees of magnificent height and proportions . . ."



John Hamilton Gillespie in uniform of Royal Company of Archers, the Queen's Body Guard in Scotland.

John Hamilton Gillespie

By Lillian G. Burns

For forty years after the arrival of a Scottish colony of settlers in Sarasota in late December of 1885 no Sarasotan was unaware of John Hamilton Gillespie. In 1986, as Sarasota celebrated the centennial of that arrival, few people knew his name or the extent of his influence on the city's early development.

Born October 14, 1852, at Edinburgh, Scotland, John Hamilton Gillespie was the son of Sir John and Margaret Robertson Gillespie. The family was an old and respected one and Hamilton, as he was called, grew up with every advantage available to a boy of his position. He attended Hunter School and Edinburgh Academy and later took courses at Edinburgh University and St. Andrews University. At eighteen he became an apprentice Writer to Her Majesty's Signet, the prestigious legal body of Scotland of which his father was a member. In 1875 he was accepted as a member of the Writer to the Signet Society and began his professional law career. The same year he became a member of the Royal Company of Archers, the Queen's Body Guard in Scotland. His appearance in his official photograph was said to be so youthful that before his picture was presented to Queen Victoria it was altered to make him appear older. Family photographs of the time show him to be a handsome, slender young man. As was customary for one of his social position he joined a military unit. "Victoria, by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, Queen Defender of the Faith, etc." greeted "our Trusty and well beloved John Hamilton Gillespie, gentleman . . . [and] reposing special confidence in your Loyalty, Courage and good Conduct," appointed him a Lieutenant in her Volunteer Forces, the First Midlothian Artillery Corps on September 23, 1878.¹ In 1884 he became a captain. The same year he "entered the government service in Queens-

land, Australia...and a year later was appointed manager of the Florida Mortgage and Investment Company."²

The reasons for his leaving Edinburgh are not known but conjecture is that it was because he had married a woman unacceptable to his family. In the description of his life and accomplishments in *Makers of America* there is no reference to this marriage. Yet when he became a resident of Sarasota in 1886 he brought with him his pretty red-haired wife, Mary (Minnie) McIvor Gillespie.

His involvement with the Florida Mortgage and Investment Company came through his father, Sir John Gillespie, who was its President. The Company was one of many formed in Great Britain to invest in Florida land to which British and European emigres were being drawn by alluring descriptions of economic opportunities. Officers and investors in these land companies as well as the emigres were given glowing descriptions of the fortunes to be made, descriptions provided by American speculators in Florida frontier land and by the Florida Commissioner of Immigration. In 1881 Hamilton Disston of Philadelphia had negotiated with Florida Governor William D. Bloxham for the purchase of four million acres of land half of which he soon sold to a syndicate headed by his friend Sir Edward J. Reed of England. This group in turn sold land to other syndicates one of which was the Florida Mortgage and Investment Company. As far as can be determined none of the officers of this company had visited Florida but relied upon the reports provided them by people in Florida or agents interested in selling land there. One of these was Piers E. Warburton, of "Acton and Sarasota, Florida" who, on March 30, 1885, was appointed the Company's Manager and given Power of Attorney to conduct its business. That he had been involved in organizing the Company is in-

licated by its Articles of Association which provided that "immediately after the formation of said company" he would be appointed.³ Warburton earlier had been associated with Robert W. Hanbury, the Company's chairman, in buying land from Diston's Florida Land and Improvement Company and developing the town of Acton in Polk County. Many of those "induced to come to Acton were...younger sons of British families, who came out seeking fortune and adventure in a far land?"⁴ Warburton was the town manager and "During this settlement's brief existence it became in atmosphere, dress and custom a transplanted bit of England, with polo, fox hunting, and cricket as part of its daily life..."⁵

Acton's existence was indeed brief. "In a few years it became a deserted village, its buildings were wrecked, and the materials hauled off by any who wished to use them in construction elsewhere ..." ⁶ When John Hamilton Gillespie came to Florida he stayed at Acton. The Florida census taken in June, 1885 lists him (white male, age 36, married, occupation: accountant) as living there in a building with several people. One of them was Piers E. Warburton.⁷ Many years later in a speech before the Sarasota Tourist Club, Gillespie "told how, on his way to America, from Australia he talked with Americans about Florida and found they knew little more about the country than he did, and were under the impression that the entire state was a place of swamps and mosquitoes.

"Arriving at New York, Colonel Gillespie* said that he travelled to Savannah by steamer, by train to Jacksonville, by steamer to Sanford, by train over a narrow gauge railroad ... to Tampa. After reaching Tampa he inquired as to the location of Sarasota and no one could tell him; he finally asked as to the location of the Manatee River and arranged for passage on a steamer to Manatee . . .** Here he secured a horse and buggy and came to Sarasota where he found one homesteader's home ..." ⁸ Allowing for possible inaccuracies that *The Sarasota Times* reporter may have introduced in this



Gillespie as a young man in Edinburgh.

article one may still conclude that Gillespie had not been fully briefed regarding the enterprise that he thought he was coming to manage. There would seem to be little in his background and training or interests that had prepared him for the frontier life.

His trip on the narrow-gauge railroad had brought him close to Acton and he returned there to live while working with Warburton on the "Sara Sota" assignment. We have no way of knowing if he was then aware of the arrangements that were being made between the officers of the Florida Mortgage and Investment Company in Scotland and an Englishman, Selvin Tait, to sell land to members of a colony that Tait was organizing to settle in Florida. Forty acre "estates" chosen from among designated areas of Company land were to be offered for sale to the colonists. The Company on its part would develop a town which initially would have a fine hotel, a boarding house, rental houses, a dock and a store. Steamship service connecting with transportation to the

*An honorary, not a military, title by which he was universally called by later Sarasotans.

**Manatee was the largest settlement on the Manatee River. Sarasota was then part of Manatee County.

north was also promised. Colonists who chose could have rent-free for six months a house on a town site on the condition that they would buy the house and lot at the end of that period. The Company owned approximately 50,000 acres and was still acquiring other land.⁹ The town site of Sarasota, for which a plat was not filed at the Manatee County Court House until July 29, 1886, encompassed Section 19 and the west ½ of the west ½ of Section 20, Township 36 south, Range 18 east. The forty acre plots available to the colonists were outside the town, within a radius of five miles.

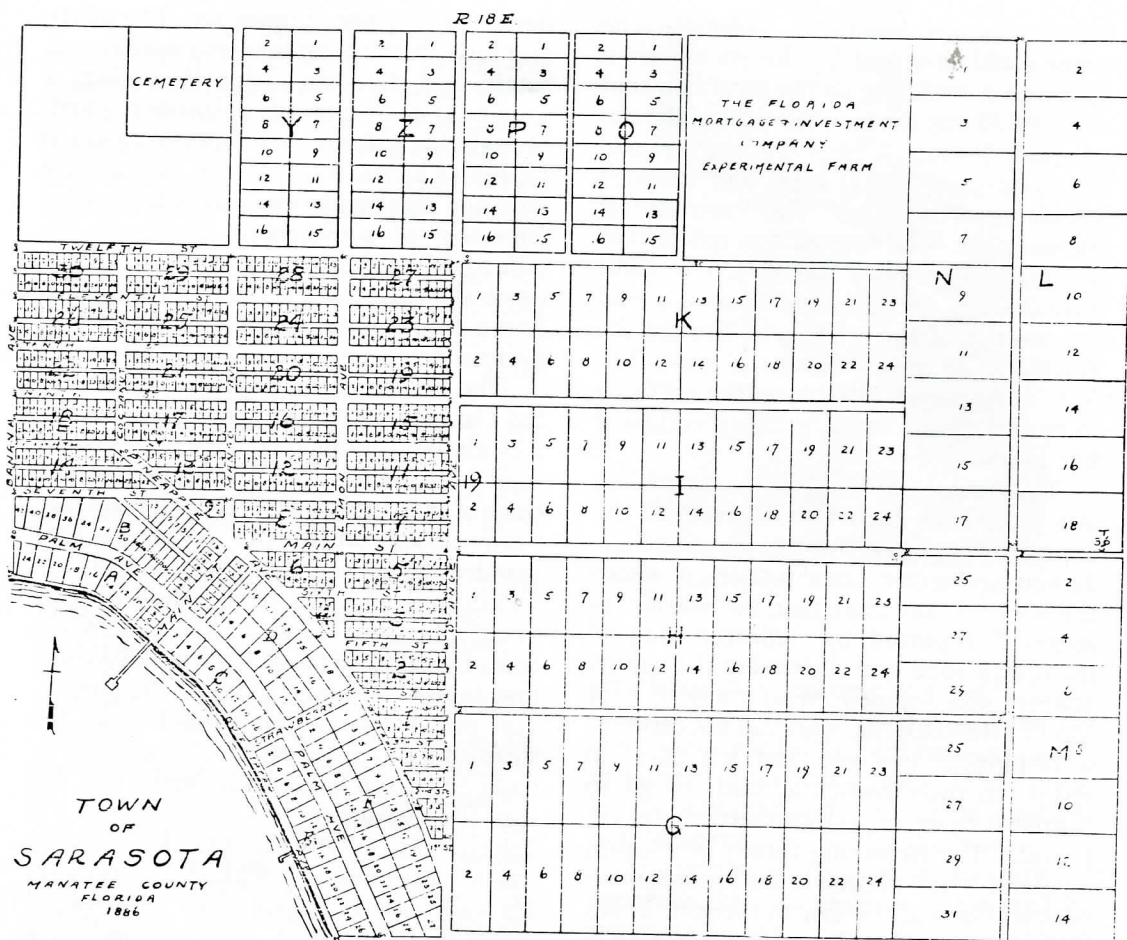
Tait's colony arrived in "Sara Sota" in late December 1885 to find none of the expected amenities. One can imagine their dismay and anger. Local settlers, of whom there were many more than the "one homesteader" reported by Gillespie, helped them with food and shelter but the colony concept was doomed. Within a short time most of the colonists, who had not expected to be pioneers in a wild land, left, either to return to their homes abroad, to go to northern cities, or to more settled areas in Florida. The Browning family of Paisley, Scotland who had been in the lumber business was one of the few to remain. Years later, in 1932, Alex Browning, who was 19 when he arrived with the colony, was to write his recollections of the early years of Sarasota for his family and descendants. The *Memoirs* are unique as the only extensive personal account of that period.¹⁰

What went wrong? Who was at fault? It would appear that neither the colonists nor the Florida Mortgage and Investment officials clearly understood the situation in Florida as presented to them by those eager to sell them land. The glowing descriptions published by the Company which attracted the colonists were mis-leading. The salubrious climate, the fertile soil, the ease with which the settler could grow a variety of crops, and the easy and quick access to populous northern markets — all certified by writers with impressive looking credentials — made colonization in Sarasota appear to be a wonderful opportunity for a hard working and capable

person. Risks were minimized. The publicity lured both young men and women and established families. John Browning, a joiner and owner of a lumber yard, brought his wife and five children aged 4 to 19; John Lawrie, 56, a farmer, brought his wife and eight children, aged 4 to 21; John Brereton, 48, a merchant, came with his wife and four children, aged 3 to 10.¹¹ Some came alone. But they all came expecting to find a functioning community in place as promised.

The Scottish and English investors in the Company also had been duped by the Florida land promoters. Few of them had ever been to Florida. They acted on the basis of the same glowing descriptions that were passed on to the colonists. One wonders as to the role Piers Warburton had in misleading the Company's officers about the true situation. He was in the area. By cable he could have advised them that things were not ready for the colony. Tait perhaps knew this when he met the steamship *Furnessia* on which the colonists had come from Glasgow to New York. He was the promoter and organizer of the colony. The colonists had made their contracts with him, not with the Company. He had undertaken to make all arrangements on their behalf. Browning indicates that they were not warned about problems until they reached Cedar Key.

Hamilton Gillespie, dutifully representing his father's good name and commitments came to Sarasota where he was destined to spend most of the rest of his life. But the Company's official manager, authorized to make any necessary decisions and with power of attorney, was Piers Warburton, the early promoter. Browning described him as "an officer of the English Navy, domineering in the extreme" and as representing the English stockholders. Gillespie, "an easy going gentleman,"¹² was seen as upholding the Scottish interests. Warburton was also maintaining his interest in Acton and later, when relieved as Manager in Sarasota, he would return there. Gillespie, serving as his assistant manager became busy carrying out the Company's promised projects: building the





The DeSoto Hotel, on Main Street at Gulf Stream Avenue, built in 1886 by the Florida Mortgage and Investment Company. In 1902 it became the Belle Haven Inn.



The village pier was one of the first structures built by the Florida Mortgage and Investment Company in 1886. Boats were the main means of communication with the outside world and small steamers and schooners brought and took away passengers and freight. The buildings on the end of the pier were a warehouse and office. The small building on the right was an oyster house.

represented a continual expenditure of Company capital. No sales of property within the platted town were recorded for 1886. Selvin Tait had quickly abandoned the colonists in the face of their rising anger.

The year 1887 was to be a turning point. The opening of the DeSoto Hotel on February 2nd was encouraging news to the Company's officers. The ball given in celebration of the event was enjoyed by the few remaining colonists and the people who had settled around Sarasota before the Florida Mortgage and Investment Company was organized. Most of the local people lived south of the town limits between Hudson Bayou and Phillippi Creek where land was available for homesteading or for purchase. On the north, William Whitaker, who had arrived in 1842 and was the first permanent white settler, had a large family centered near Whitaker Bayou. The John G. Webb family had a hotel on Spanish Point at Osprey. Jesse Knight's large family and the Blackburns, Higels, Lowes and others had settled south of them in the Venice area. Other pioneers had settled at Fruitville, Bee Ridge and Myakka. In December 1884, the year before the Colony arrived, all these local communities had been shaken by the murder of Charles Abbe, a leading citizen and Sarasota's postmaster since 1878, by a group of vigilantes composed of other residents of the area.* The killing and subsequent conviction of several prominent settlers for this and for an earlier murder had had a traumatic effect on the entire area. The hotel's opening celebration provided a welcome respite to everyone and the Gillespies were good hosts. The party lasted well through the night.¹⁵ Hamilton Gillespie was in his element.

His first year in the town had been a difficult one. He and Warburton were of different temperaments and they frequently clashed. Warburton was the manager but Gillespie felt he had a special

charge as Sir John's son. He also had committed himself to living in Sarasota and had built a large and impressive house, designed by Alex Browning and built by John Browning and Charlie Jones. On December 2, 1886, after the house was built, Gillespie bought the lots on which it stood from the Company for \$661.65. Alex Browning described the house as "the finest residence in the County. It had large rooms with high ceilings, detached kitchen with rain water cistern between, and verandas round three sides, all nicely painted and varnished ... When finished there was a great house warming with plenty to eat and drink. Mr. and Mrs. Gillespie were good entertainers."¹⁶

The Manatee River Advocate reported the house as being "near [the] DeSoto, in a splendid location overlooking the bay, in the midst of the spacious grounds in which are growing the orange and other fruit trees and about seventy five cocoanut trees which are in rigorous growth. A low portion of the grounds is fenced off for a kitchen garden."¹⁷

In this frontier town Gillespie tried to maintain the social amenities to which he was accustomed at home. He had carried with him in his travels his golf clubs and soon after his arrival, he cleared land for a two hole course behind his house. Later this was to be the basis of Sarasota's claim to having the first golf course in the United States. Golf was his life long passion. He imported his whisky from Scotland, a rarity to be savored in a town where alcoholic beverages were usually locally made or brought in rum kegs from Cuba. He had books which were later to be the nucleus of the Sarasota Library. He was active in organizing the Sarasota Yacht and Gun Club which the *Manatee River Advocate* reported had "over \$200 subscribed for a boat house."¹⁸ In Edinburgh he had lived as an upper class gentleman and here he tried to maintain that social status.

His managerial status changed on March 2, 1887, when he and Colonel Benjamin A. Coachman, a South Carolina man long active as a land finder and eval-

*See Janet Snyder Matthews, "He Carried His Life in His Hands," *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, July, 1979, for account of the vigilante episode.

uator in Florida, were appointed co-managers of the Florida Mortgage and Investment Company's interests in Florida, each with power of attorney. By the same action of the Company's directors, Gillespie's nemesis, Piers Warburton, was relieved of his authority.¹⁹ Although Coachman had been in the region for many years Gillespie was now the manager in residence and familiar with the community.

Fourteen months had passed since the colonists arrived. Despite the building boom of 1886 the Company had recorded no sales of land. The anticipated profits on investments had not materialized and Directors and stockholders were disturbed. The expected estate purchases from the colony members had not taken place. The first colonist of record to buy platted land in town was John Browning who on June 7, 1887 paid \$975.00 for four lots on the south side of Main Street east of Pineapple Avenue. Earlier, in February, William R. and Nellie Whitaker had bought a lot on the east side of lower Main Street for \$100.00. Three sales for a total of \$1586.00 had been made to men who gave addresses in London.²⁰

These were the total recorded town sales for the first half of 1887. Sarasota's building boom had collapsed. But Main Street had become established as the center of the community and the post office was moved there. John Browning built a house on his property and soon a school was opened nearby. Worried Directors in Edinburgh sent representatives to report on the problems and prospects for the future. Convinced that matters were out of hand, the Directors sought an interlocutory decree "placing the Voluntary Liquidation of the Florida Mortgage and Investment Company Limited, under the supervision of the Court."²¹ On November 27, 1887, Francis More, a chartered accountant in Edinburgh, was appointed Liquidator with committees to advise him. Mr. More was instructed that he should "not effect any compromise with any Contributory except with the special leave of the Court."²² Two days later John Hamilton Gillespie was appointed sole manager and

Colonel Coachman's authority was terminated. It was the beginning of a long and lonely period as Manager for Gillespie. It is interesting to note that although the voluntary liquidation decree was granted in Edinburgh in November, 1887 it was not recorded in Manatee County until September 11, 1891.



Gillespie's Confirmation Certificate of May 13, 1888.

Gillespie was in a difficult position. His salary was set by the Directors in Scotland and they were at odds with each other. Some of them may have questioned his competence. They had not received the income they had expected from their investments and there was no way of knowing how long the liquidation process would take. Some people in Sarasota were annoyed by his ways of conducting business and wrote an angry letter to the Company stockholders complaining about him and urging his removal as Manager.²³ Alex Browning, who was soon to leave Sarasota himself, wrote "Sarasota did not make much progress ... Gillespie became quite unpopular ... work gave out altogether. The Whitakers and Gillespie got to fussing. Rival stores. The post office changed hands ... neighbors chickens got in the gardens, fights resulted, and altogether Sarasota was not a good place to

live in."²⁴ The prospects for the future were very dim.

In addition to his business complications there were strains at home. Mary Gillespie's behavior was erratic. She often drank to excess. Whether this habit had afflicted her earlier and the isolation she felt in this frontier existence made it worse no one knows. But her actions in public were often an embarrassment to her husband. To many settlers here who were staunchly religious her behavior was shocking. Mary did not have many friends. Hamilton, who had strong family sentiments, keenly felt the separation from his Edinburgh family. Although born in a Scotch Presbyterian family, he was now drawn to the Episcopal church. Browning noted that he read the Episcopal service at the funeral of Tom Booth, one of the colonists from England, who died on March 17, 1887 and that he led Episcopal services held in one of the buildings on Main Street, built by Alfred Grable and used for a variety of community purposes.²⁵ However it was not until May 13th, 1888, the Sunday after Ascension, that he was "confirmed at Sara Sota, Manatee County, Florida by the Bishop of Florida, the Right Reverend E.G. Wood, D.D.S. JD."²⁶ He was later to be one of the founders of the Church of the Redeemer in Sarasota, and took an active part in church affairs until he died.

Many interesting anecdotes about Gillespie are recounted by Alex Browning in his *Memoirs*: of his tribulations as Justice of the Peace, of the tricks of the men who coveted his fine whiskey, of his actions as a novice town manager, of his problems with his first wife. They tell of a man who was both warm to his friends and implacable to those he disliked, enterprising, optimistic, quixotic, sociable, hard-headed, naive, loyal, generous and tight-fisted. He was six feet tall and well built. In his business dealings he tried to serve the interests of the Florida Mortgage and Investment Company and follow the dictates of those in charge in Scotland. Whenever a lot was sold the deed was signed in Edinburgh, at first by two Company Directors and the Secretary, and after liquidation pro-

ceedings began, by Francis More. Little was happening in Sarasota. Steamship service stopped. Residents had to be self sufficient, to raise their own vegetables, catch the fish which teemed in the bay or shoot the game which was abundant in the woods. There was no work to support a local economy. The hotel closed when Alfred and Annie Jones gave up their lease due, it was said, to conflicts with the Gillespies.²⁷

Gillespie's early hope of establishing an Episcopal Church in Sarasota may have been ruined when his tipsy wife collided with a hotel waiter at lunch spilling hot chowder over the Bishop who was his guest.²⁸ One wonders if this was on the occasion of his confirmation. But Mrs. Gillespie was not the only problem. His disappointment in his situation was reflected in his correspondence with the Edinburgh office. In "letter 17," January 20, 1891 he wrote:

Your letter of 27th ulto (no. 90) was duly rec'd. I have for the last week been very bad with an attack of the "grippe." I have struggled to the office every day but have felt in bad shape. My wife is worse than I am, and is in bed with a doctor in attendance. As help is not to be got, you may imagine that my position is not pleasant. A great many people are suffering from the disease, as we are having a very bitter winter. The wind is much colder than it ever is in Edinburgh. Altogether I must ask your indulgence for a few days until I fight the enemy off. He is still very overpowering.

I have little to report on the proposed sale. The parties have written for more samples to be sent them. I write them asking the new cause of delay.

Mortgages — I am doing my utmost . . . but I can't feel sanguine . . .²⁹

Along with the land fever that brought the land speculators to Florida there was a railroad boom. Both the state of Florida and land syndicates gave generous quantities of land to those who would build railroads. The trains not only brought people in, they also carried out the products the settlers wanted to sell in northern markets. Communities served by railroads were more successful than those that were not.

The future of Piers Warburton's town of Acton was blighted when nearby Lakeland was chosen as a station by the Railroad.³⁰ Henry Plant had completed the Jacksonville, Tampa and Key West Railroad into Tampa in 1885 and in February, 1891, opened the Tampa Bay Hotel, a spectacular edifice with minarets and domes adorning its roof.³¹ Alex Browning worked as an assistant to the supervisor of construction, his family having moved to Tampa from defunct Sarasota.³² On the east coast of Florida Henry Flagler was extending his railroad lines southward toward Palm Beach. His Ponce de Leon and Alcazar Hotels in St. Augustine as well as Plant's Tampa Bay Hotel were filled with rich and fashionable people. Gillespie thought a railroad would solve Sarasota's problems. His optimism was contagious and he was able to persuade three men to join with him in financing the Manatee and Sarasota Railway and Drainage Company. The Florida Mortgage and Investment Company and the Florida Land and Mortgage company, the company Piers Warburton represented in Acton and elsewhere, agreed to provide the land and the project was started. The original financing was not sufficient and more money could not be obtained. Construction stopped. The Arcadia, Gulf Coast and Lakeland Railroad Company was approached and given the land to complete the railroad. It finished the work in 1892 and Sarasota had a primitive railroad connecting it to Braidentown, which was a calling port for steamers.³³ Travellers could again reach Sarasota without hiring a horse and buggy or taking passage on small sailing vessels. The railroad was given the nickname "Slow and Wobbly" which described its spasmodic service. It did not last long. Gillespie's hopes were dashed.

The access of Sarasota to Tampa's railroad and ice plants by boat was improved when the U.S. Engineers dredged channels through the shallow waters of upper Sarasota Bay. With this inside passage boats again began to call at Sarasota. While they came primarily to buy fish from local fishermen the boats also brought passengers

and freight. Starting late in 1895 steamers began a regular schedule. The boats were owned by John Savarese of Tampa, head of a large wholesale fish business. Harry L. Higel, son of an early settler in the Venice region, who had moved to Sarasota, was his agent. Higel was an energetic, ambitious and farsighted man who became engrossed in Sarasota's affairs and future. He was not hampered by the policies of a distant company in the throes of liquidation. He was to become a leading figure in Sarasota's rise from its doldrums.

During the depressed years of the 1890's Gillespie, while working hard at promoting Sarasota, found it did not occupy all of his time. He traveled frequently, meeting the financiers who were successful in other cities. His family background had better prepared him for the social life of their fashionable circles than for many of the daily chores associated with the salvaging of his father's ill-advised investment. Everywhere he went he pursued his ardent interest in golf which was becoming better known in the United States and was an increasingly popular sport. Henry Plant became interested in building a small golf course next to his Tampa Bay Hotel and Gillespie designed it.³⁴ He also designed courses at Belleair, Jacksonville and Kissimmee in Florida and one at Havana, Cuba.³⁵

In Jacksonville, particularly, he found congenial friends who shared his enthusiasm for golf. He became a member of the Seminole Club and the Florida Country Club³⁶, which built a golf course. Articles in the *Florida Times-Union and Citizen* noted that he played on the club's team and described him as "one of the leading amateurs of the state at golf, and his word has long been considered law on the subject." It also reported that he had won "the amateur championship of the West Coast of Florida which he has held against all comers for many seasons."³⁷ A friendship formed at that time with Bion Barnett, the banker, was to be an enduring one.

In 1896 three events of great personal meaning to Gillespie occurred. On April 16

he appeared before Judge Barron Phillips in Braidentown and on testimony that he had been a resident the requisite number of years he became a naturalized citizen of the United States.³⁸ The same year, on St. Peter's Day, William Crane Gray, Bishop, Missionary Jurisdiction, Southern Florida announced "To the Church people living on Manatee River and those in the Sarasota District" that J. Hamilton Gillespie was appointed a Lay Reader. The appointment certificate stated it was "for one year only."³⁹ These were very gratifying events for Gillespie who as a citizen was now able to join the American Bar Association as well as the Florida State Bar Association. On August 29th he became a "qualified elector" in District 7 of Manatee County. His occupation was given as "Manager."⁴⁰ Later he was to serve as President of the Manatee County Bar Association.⁴¹ His appointment as Lay Reader gave him expanded opportunities to engage in church activities.

To maintain his business activities during his absences from Sarasota, Gillespie had joined with Hamlin Whitaker, one of William Whitaker's sons and a County Commissioner, to form the Sarasota Real Estate Agency. They advertised in an 1897 County Directory that they had all kinds of lands for sale, that they performed services for non-residents, examined land titles and reports and gave "Special Terms for Colonies." This Directory gives a brief description of Sarasota and lists its residents (presumably a list of those who got their mail at the post office, for some lived at some distance from town). Gillespie is listed as "Attorney, real estate." Hugh Browning, the brother of Alex, is the only colonist on the list. The population is given as "some two hundred inhabitants." Also reported is that "There are two commercial wharves, with three general merchandise, blacksmith shop and livery stable, all doing an extensive business . . . Quite a number of handsome cottages have been lately built in the vicinity of Sara Sota by men of means from the South and West"⁴²

The growth was truly in the vicinity. The "men of means" were not building in town. North of Sarasota the Indian Beach subdivision had been started in 1891 and attracted northern winter residents. In 1897 C.N. Thompson platted Shell Beach, today's Ringling Museums area. South along the bay visitors at Webb's Winter Resort⁴³ had been buying land and building cottages. Sportsmen came to the area to enjoy the fishing and hunting. In the winter adventurous tourists, undaunted by the lack of comforts and services and the uncertainty of travel, came to enjoy the climate, the beaches, and the quiet beauty of the bay and woods. Many turned from being tourists to become winter residents. Among these were the "men of means." The growth was gradual. The area was still not well known.

While these developments were going on several outside events had benefitted Sarasota. The devastating freeze of 1895 in the northern part of the state destroyed citrus groves and caused many growers to move southward. Some settled in the Sarasota region. The Spanish American War, which started in 1898, made the nation aware of Florida. Tampa became the center of military preparations for the war in Cuba. Henry Plant's luxurious Tampa Bay Hotel was headquarters for the generals, officers, businessmen and others dealing with the Army. Newspapers all over the country sent correspondents to Tampa and Americans read daily about activities there.⁴⁴ By the end of the Cuban campaign Florida's West Coast was no longer a remote and unknown place.

In 1899 John Savarese of Tampa, whose steamers had brought visitors to Sarasota and taken away its fish, joined with some associates in Tampa to buy and refurbish the DeSoto Hotel which had been closed for several years.⁴⁵ The sale was a welcome one to the Florida Mortgage and Investment Company, then in the twelfth year of liquidation. The re-opening was enjoyed and celebrated by local residents and guests from Tampa. C.V.S. Wilson brought his *Manatee River Advocate* to town and renamed it *Sarasota Times*. "The popula-

tion was small, not over sixty and the families would scarcely number fifteen,"⁴⁶ he was to report years later. But things began to happen. Gradually new merchants like Joseph Turner, S. H. Highsmith and George Prime came to open stores.

There is no mention of Mrs. Gillespie's activities during this period. Grismer reports that "Early in the nineties, Mrs. Gillespie vanished from the Sarasota scene" and that "she and her husband lived in Bradenton a while and then they went to Scotland."⁴⁷ This does not appear to be the case. The daughter of Eddie Coleman Reid, a young black girl the Gillespies took into their home when she was a child, says that Mrs. Gillespie lived in Sarasota until the time she left for Scotland. She was remembered as a kind and generous mistress but without friends.⁴⁸ Neal Chapline, whose family was later to be related to Hamilton Gillespie by marriage, wrote that "When Sir John Gillespie died in 1904 [he died January 2, 1901]. The colonel and his wife went back to Scotland."⁴⁹ Her signature on a deed which was witnessed in Edinburgh in May, 1902, indicates she was there at that time. Neither Blanche nor Louise McDaniel who came to Sarasota in 1902,



Mary McIvor Gillespie

and were neighbors to Gillespie, knew her.⁵⁰ Mary, like her goings and comings, was little noticed in Sarasota.

More families intending to make Sarasota their home, not their vacation resort, began to come. They were willing to devote their energies and talents to making it a better place to live in. Those already here, who long had struggled for change, welcomed them. The new-comers enlivened the community. Old discouragements gave way to new hopes and plans. On October 14, 1902, the men of Sarasota met and voted enthusiastically to incorporate formally as a town. They immediately elected a mayor and town council. These actions were to create a new spirit and energy for now citizens would have more authority. Gillespie was elected mayor. The five Council members included Harry Higel, Joseph Turner and George Blackburn, some of whose descendants still live in Sarasota.⁵¹ The first meeting of the Council was held on October 20, 1902 in Gillespie's house. He was now not only mayor but also remained manager for the Florida Mortgage and Investment Company. In its fifteenth year of liquidation it still owned most of the property including the roads, streets and alleys of the town. The Council established new town limits, expanding those platted in 1886 and adopted a town seal with the motto "May Sarasota Prosper."⁵² Law and order was a matter of urgent concern. The town had no jail — and no money. Gillespie offered to lend \$200 to build the calaboose and the Councilmen guaranteed the loan by their joint personal note at 8 percent interest.⁵³ At the December meeting Gillespie was asked to draft "an ordinance on taxation."⁵⁴ Manatee County had long levied land taxes but the benefits reaching the Sarasota area were minimal. The draft which Gillespie presented was unanimously accepted by the Council in January.⁵⁵ It covered occupation taxes only. Gillespie was in a tough position. As a resident of Sarasota he could see the town's need for money to operate. As the Company's manager he could see that the liquidator and his committees in Edinburgh would not



Seal of Sarasota adopted in 1902.

favor property taxes. Gillespie was not yet independent of the Company's policy.

Incorporation of the Town generated several important events in 1902. Perhaps most important was an intangible change: one of attitude. People inside and outside the town began to see it as a place of opportunity. Gillespie, who had long argued that a railroad was necessary to Sarasota's future, persuaded the Florida Mortgage and Investment Company to give the United States and West Indies Railroad and Steamship Company land for a railroad into Sarasota.⁵⁶ Next the Southern Investment Company, a Delaware corporation, bought the DeSoto Hotel and opened it under a new name, Belle Haven Inn, and new management.⁵⁷ The hotel had a series of new residents as managers over the years — men who came to Sarasota with their families and lived in the hotel while seeking permanent quarters. One of the early ones was Richard P. McDaniel who came in 1902.⁵⁸ Formerly a large land owner in Ellenton and a County Judge, he had been appointed U.S. Consul to Bahia, Brazil by President Cleveland and returned to Manatee County after President McKinley was elected. Others who managed the hotel were Dr. Jack Halton and Hamden Smith.⁵⁹ All of these men were prominent in the early life of Sarasota.

The Council continued to organize itself and deal with town problems as best it could without any funds. In December it received the request of the newly formed Sarasota Ice, Fish and Power Company to

build a plant for making ice, storing fish and providing electric lights — a welcome proposal which cost nothing to approve.⁶⁰ At the February 11th meeting in 1903 it gave permission for a telephone exchange to be built and specified that it should be completed by September first. At the same meeting the Council passed a "vote of thanks to Col. J. H. Gillespie for the gift to the town of the Rosemary Cemetery."⁶¹ The deed for this, which was accepted by the Council on April 14, shows that it was the gift of Hamilton and Mary, his wife, who certified her agreement to the deed on June 10 in Edinburgh.⁶² In May the Council ordered property owners on lower Main Street to install or repair the wooden sidewalks.

On March 22 the first train that connected Sarasota with northern cities steamed into Sarasota. In the first six months since its incorporation the town had an ice and power plant, a cemetery, sidewalks on Main Street, a railroad, and a telephone exchange in prospect. On August 5, the town became owner of its roads and streets, the deed for which was delivered by Gillespie from the Company.⁶³ Three street lights had already been ordered in anticipation. All this amounted to more progress than ever seen before in Sarasota.

Men served on the Council and as officials and held the positions of authority. But the women also had power to influence events. A small group soon joined by many others formed the Town Improvement Society which constantly prodded the men on improvements to the town. They had insisted on the sidewalks and the lights and on better sanitation.⁶⁴

In the spring the Sarasota House, which had been the domain of the Vincents since 1886, changed hands. Joseph H. Lord, who had been active in buying land in the County for over ten years and was to become a large landowner in town, bought it as his first town investment and immediately set about repairing and enlarging it. He named it the DeSoto Hotel. He asked the Council for approval for a connection to the town's artesian wells and for a sewer to be built from the Hotel to the Bay be-



The boarding house built at Five Points in 1887. Long known as the Sarasota House, it was briefly named the DeSoto Hotel when bought in 1903 by J.H. Lord.

cause of complaints about the condition of its cesspools.⁶⁵ Gillespie vigilantly warned the Council that Lord's building was encroaching on the Town's alley and that the new owners of the Belle Haven were removing soil from Gulf Stream Avenue in front of the hotel. His proprietary attitude annoyed some and in later years was to bring him into a bitter conflict. But in general there was a spirit of harmony in working for the town. The Manatee County School Board was persuaded to build a new school and the Company donated a lot on Main Street east of Orange Avenue as a site.⁶⁶ This was a fine addition to the town. Judge McDaniel, retiring from his term as President in October, 1904, thanked the Council members for "their unanimity of action and good feeling" and the Mayor "for the great interest and assistance he had shown." He also noted that the town would not have the new school had it not been for Gillespie's efforts. The Council, in turn, thanked the Mayor and President for "the most excellent manner in which they have performed the duties of their offices."⁶⁷ Everyone

seemed happy with the way things were going. Gillespie was re-elected Mayor and Harry Higel as Councilman for their third terms. The Mayor urged the new Council to work on getting hard-surfaced streets in the town and on the roads leading into the country.

Mary Gillespie, attended by her sister Joanna McIvor, died in Edinburgh on November 23, 1904, intestate. "Uremia cirrhosis of kidneys" was given as the cause of death. She was 50 years old. Her husband was sole heir and was appointed administrator of her estate which was appraised as worth \$3,660. Her household furniture and personal effects were \$250, her livestock \$150 and she had \$100 in banks in Scotland. The remainder was in notes and interest due.⁶⁸ Her trials were over and so were his with her. The marriage had long been recognized as an unhappy one. Eddie Coleman Reid, her helper and confidant, was possibly the only Sarasotan to miss her.

During his years in Florida Hamilton Gillespie apparently lived increasingly



Newly completed chapel for the Episcopal mission at Sarasota. It was built by J. Hamilton Gillespie on the Pineapple Avenue side of his home property.

well. His salary, set by the Company, is not known but he acquired considerable property over the years. Land values fell after the early speculation period and many people forfeited their land when they could not, or chose not to, pay the property taxes. At a tax sale in 1899 Gillespie bought for the Company 190 acres of platted land in Sarasota for \$5.31.⁶⁹ He had a large house, fine horses and carriages, traveled to pursue his golf interests, and enjoyed the society of his golfing associates. He was enjoying, too, the society of the newcomers to Sarasota among whom he found ardent Episcopalians. The McDaniel family, the Stackhouses, the Morrills, the Liddells, the Jeffcotts and the Rardins from Indian Beach began to meet at his house for worship.⁷⁰ Gillespie's appointment as a Lay Reader was "extended indefinitely"⁷¹ by Bishop Gray on January 19, 1903. A year later, January 24, 1904, the Bishop authorized an Organized Mission in Sarasota.⁷² Leonard Reid, Gillespie's house man, told his family that on an occasion when the Bishop was expected at a service, Gillespie wanted an altar so they built one from wooden whisky cases which they covered heavily with sheets.⁷³ In early 1905 Gillespie built a

small chapel on the Pineapple Avenue side of his yard.⁷⁴ His hopes for a church were finally realized.

Announcements in *The Sarasota Times* of March 30, 1905, show that Sarasota had three white congregations, the Methodist, Baptist and Episcopal churches, as well as congregations at Fruitville, Bee Ridge and Phillippi Creek. The Bethlehem Baptist Church served the black community. Part of this congregation was soon to form an African Methodist Episcopal church. In 1907 the Florida Mortgage and Investment Company at Gillespie's urging conveyed to this church, in which Leonard Reid was active, a lot on the northwest corner of Mango Avenue and 11th Street. In 1905 the Company had conveyed five acres of land for a cemetery to John Mays, Willis G.P. Washington, Lewis Colson, Campbell Mitchell, and J.P. Carter as "Trustees of the Colored Cemetery." The land was east of Orange Avenue just outside the town plat. In each instance the land price was "\$1.00 and other considerations."⁷⁵ Gillespie was very sympathetic to the interests of the "colored" people.

The new church was not the only cause for joy in Gillespie's life. The other was

Blanche McDaniel, a daughter of his friends and neighbors, Richard and Martha McDaniel, whose house was on Gulf Stream Avenue and Strawberry Avenue. Blanche was a talented and cultivated young lady educated at Mt. Vernon Seminary in Washington and in her early thirties. She and Hamilton shared many interests. He was building a new golf course with nine holes east of his earlier two hole course and he taught Blanche to play. She learned quickly and became a good player. Hamilton had fallen in love with her and asked her to marry him. She was hesitant. He gave her a brooch asking her to consider his proposal and if she would accept him to wear it when she came to church service next day. When she appeared she was wearing the brooch.⁷⁶

On March 1, 1905, Gillespie sold to her for "\$1.00 and other valuable considerations" two lots and a house on Morrill Street, which was to be their future home, three lots on Main Street, including the site of the new artificial stone two story bank and post office building on the corner of Pineapple Avenue, three lots on Gulf Stream Avenue where he planned to build a sanitarium, a lot on east Main Street adjoining his new golf course, and other property.⁷⁷ A short time later he sold to the Southern Investment Company his home on Palm Avenue.⁷⁸ After marrying Blanche, he would leave the house which held for him many unhappy associations.

It was not only a happy time for them but also for other Sarasotans. The town was prospering. A two column article in the March 30 issue of *The Sarasota Times* gave the enthusiastic comments of two "New Citizens of the Town" who reported that there were 700 to 800 people in the town, "two hotels among the best-kept in the State," three churches, and that "A dozen stores supply the wants of the citizens and all the business men appear to be prospering."⁷⁹ Gillespie could feel that his difficult days were behind him. The Florida Mortgage and Investment Company continued its lingering liquidation and Francis More's health was failing. The "sole surviving members" of the Com-

mittees of Advise [sic] of the shareholders and the debenture holders petitioned for the appointment of his son, Francis More, Jr. to serve with him with equal powers to each or the survivor. Francis More, senior, died later that year.⁸⁰

On May 23, 1905, Hamilton and Blanche were married in the little Episcopal chapel. The marriage license records that they were married in the Church of the Redeemer by Henry B. Jefferson who was minister of Christ Church in Bradentown.⁸¹ After a gala reception they left for New York on a private railroad car arranged for them by her brother-in-law, Colonel L.S. Brown of Washington, D.C. After several days in New York they sailed for Scotland on the S.S. Caledonia.⁸² Hamilton was jubilant bringing home to his family a beautiful and cultivated wife whom he was sure his family would welcome.

The Gillespies returned to Sarasota and were greeted by a "Welcome Home" reception given by the citizens of Sarasota at the Belle Haven Inn on July 29th.⁸³ While they had been away their new home on Morrill Street, "Roseburn," had been remodeled and a conservatory added for Mrs. Gillespie's plants and flowers. Hamilton settled in to his life as Mayor, golfer and happy husband. Blanche organized the household and renewed her social and community activities. She had a handsome two horse carriage with Leonard Reid in livery to drive her about the town. The geniality of the Town Council continued and Gillespie was thanked "for his generosity to the public work of the town."⁸⁴ He had persuaded the railroad company to provide three carloads of marl for the town streets and had given the use of his wagon for hauling it. That fall he was again elected Mayor.

The changes in Gillespie's life corresponded with those of the town. His personal life had taken a happier and expanded aspect. The town had attracted energetic and civic minded people who took an active interest in the welfare of the town as well as of themselves. They were pleased with the progress and the prospects. In the first five



Blanche McDaniel at the time of her marriage to John Hamilton Gillespie, 1905.



"Roseburn," the house on Morrill Street in which Hamilton and Blanche Gillespie lived after their marriage. Many years later it became the home of the Prew School.

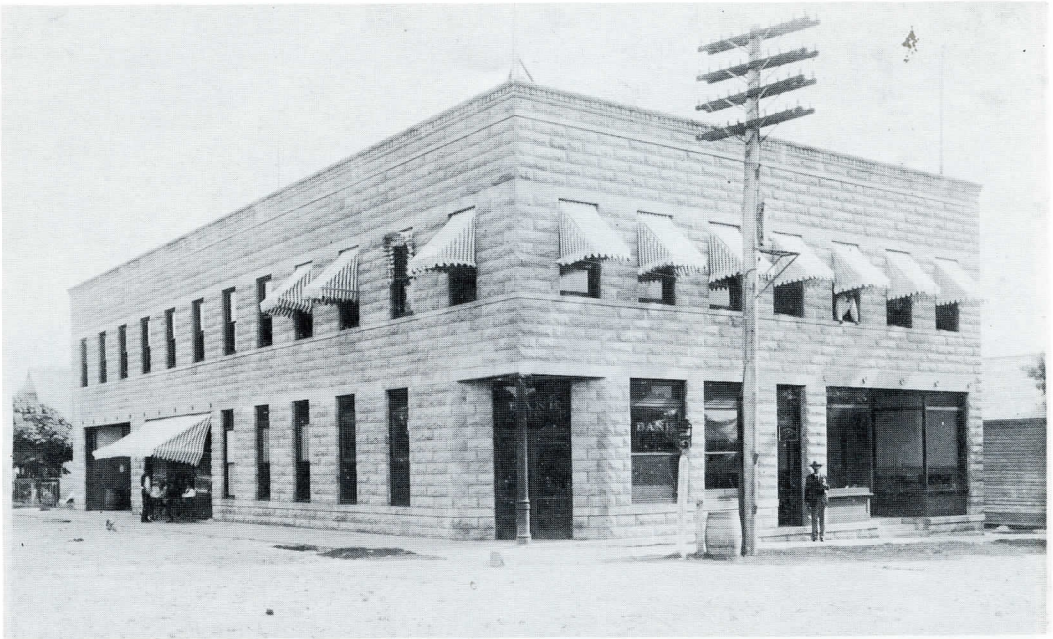
years after incorporation Gillespie was elected each year as Mayor and Harry Higel as a Councilman. The other four Council posts had been shared among twelve men: Joseph B. Turner, W.J. Hill, George W. Blackburn, Dr. J. O. Brown, S.D. McKean, Richard P. McDaniel, T.L. Ellerbee, K.M. Hebb, William Jeffcott, J. A. Clark, George W. Franklin, and Dr. Jack Halton. In 1907 Jacob B. Chapline was elected Mayor and in 1908, George W. Franklin. During these two administrations Gillespie served as a Councilman.⁸⁵ However, Sarasota again had some slow years and growth slackened.

Gillespie had finished his golf course and built a club house. The game became a popular sport in Sarasota and friends as well as guests at the hotels joined him on the links. The new stone "Gillespie Building" at Five Points was a success. Using the same material he built a large three story sanitarium on north Gulf Stream Avenue which opened under the direction of Dr. Jack Halton. As he had sold his property on which the Episcopal church stood, it had been necessary to move the building to a new site on the northeast corner of Palm

and Strawberry Avenues. Here it flourished although services were often interrupted by the noise of train engines backing the freight cars for loading at the fish houses on the railroad dock.⁸⁶ The Town Improvement Society organized a library for which Gillespie donated space in his building and gave hundreds of books from his personal library. In the summers he and Blanche traveled to Scotland to visit his family and renew old associations and play golf.

When he left office as Mayor in 1907 he addressed the Council: "We began 'keeping house' in a very small way and, to me, it is surprising to see how we have prospered. The Town has steadily improved in the face of many difficulties, the main one being want of cash."⁸⁷ Within a month of stepping down as Mayor, Gillespie was elected to fill a vacancy on the Council. Here, as he had as Mayor, he pressed for physical improvements to the town. Earlier that year the Council had adopted the charter which he had drafted and the Governor signed it into law.⁸⁸

During this period Gillespie had been



This concrete block building at Main Street and Pineapple Avenue, built by Gillespie in 1905 housed Sarasota's first bank, a drug store, restaurant, the post office, telephone exchange, library, city council chamber and other offices. It became known as the Badger Pharmacy Building for its long term tenant.

negotiating with the Florida Mortgage and Investment Company which was now in its last years of dissolution. On April 25, 1908, the Company conveyed 59 lots in Sarasota to Blanche Gillespie.⁸⁹ A deed of March 30, 1909 refers to a deed of March 19 in which the Company "being desirous of disposing of the remainder of their property in Florida, so that the affairs of the said Company might be finally wound up, did convey certain lots and lands in Manatee County, Florida to . . . J. Hamilton Gillespie believing them to be all the unsold lands, and lots, belonging to them in Florida."⁹⁰ Gillespie found omissions, particularly in reference to the waterfront land between Gulf Stream Avenue and the Bay and to riparian rights in the earlier deed. The March 30th deed included these omissions and "any and all other lands, lots, riparian rights and other property, that the [Florida Mortgage and Investment Company] owns or have any right or interest therein . . . it being the intention of this instrument to convey all right, title or interest [of the Company] in any and all lands, lots, tenements and hereditaments

which they may still own or which may have been conveyed to them by any person whomsoever in the County and Town . . ."⁹¹ That was the end of the Company's Florida land venture. "The final dissolution notice for the Company was given to the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies in Edinburgh on April 25, 1910."⁹²

The Council meeting of October 13, 1908 had been a momentous one. Higel was again on the Council. Gillespie offered a resolution that publicly showed his changed relationship with the Florida Mortgage and Investment Company. The resolution stated "while regretting that the state of the law is such that it enables an alien and wealthy corporation to do business within the town limits without contributing to the income of the town anything in the way of license as all other law abiding resident businesses and industries do . . . Resolved that the Town Council express their deep dissatisfaction at the conduct of the non-contributing company . . ."⁹³ The resolution directed the town not buy anything from such a corporation and urged the citizens not to do so. It

passed unanimously. A property tax of 5½ mills on the dollar was set and a budget for the year was adopted. The largest line item was for lights — \$1,200. An ordinance authorizing H.P. Porter to build an electric light and power company was adopted. An election was set for December first on a bond issue “for the purpose of constructing and maintaining a system of sewerage” and for “paving the streets.”⁹⁴ The sewer system was not approved but the street paving was. (In August of 1909 Council ordered bonds issued for \$25,000 in units of \$1,000 at 6% interest.⁹⁵) The Town Treasurer, William R. Keener, reported for the year ending October 31, 1908 there were receipts of \$4836, disbursements of \$4620 and that outstanding scrip, which the town issued when it had no money to pay its creditors, was \$1185.⁹⁶ The figures show clearly the continuing “want of cash.” With the taxing of real estate and the issuance of bonds, however, the town was moving into a different financial climate. Cullen Wilson, Joseph Turner and William Jeffcott were appointed as Trustees for the bond account.

In October, 1909 Gillespie was again elected mayor and Higel to the Council. J.P. Chapline, Jr. was elected Clerk and Treasurer. At the new Council’s first meeting Higel moved that the Treasurer make an accounting each month of all receipts and disbursements and that these be published in *The Sarasota Times* along with the proceedings of Council meetings. The Council agreed. Gillespie submitted a typed message to his colleagues urging upon them the importance of a good road system and electric lights if the town were to prosper. He also urged them to see that the town’s money was “economically and judiciously expended.”⁹⁷ When the minutes of the November 2nd meeting were presented for approval Higel moved that the minutes not be approved because of inconsistencies in the financial reports, specifically in regard to the town’s scrip. Gillespie had signed the reports “as examined and found correct.”⁹⁸ This marked the

end of harmony on the Council. A bitter conflict erupted between Higel and Gillespie and continued during the following months and in which Council members and town residents took sides. Charges and counter charges were made. *The Sarasota Times* reported “the sensational moves on both sides”: Forty-nine tax payers petitioned the Council for an audit of the accounts but the Council took no action; the Clerk, with Higel’s support, removed the books and records from the Council chambers to the bank “for safe keeping;” an auditor from Tampa was hired and he took the records to Bradentown to work on.⁹⁹ The Mayor ordered the books returned and the Clerk to be present at the next meeting. He wasn’t and the Mayor suspended him “for malfeasance.”¹⁰⁰ Higel advised them that the Clerk had obtained an injunction restraining the Mayor from such an action or interfering with the audit. The *Times* reported that “some exchanges of personalities occurred at this point.”¹⁰¹ Matters deteriorated rapidly. Other Council members supported Gillespie’s proposed ordinances relating to the Clerk’s duties and at the next meeting in January they delayed action on paying for the audit. Later it was referred to the finance committee. The Mayor complained that the newspaper was not being given the proper reports and his messages were omitted. Higel countered that the messages were self-serving and should not be published. Back and forth the accusations went.¹⁰² The Mayor had appealed the injunction obtained by the Clerk and did not attend meetings while the appeal was in the courts. On June 20th he advised them that “the Supreme Court of Florida has unanimously reversed Judge Wall’s restraining order so that the Council is now at liberty to proceed with my suspension report.”¹⁰³ At the July 5, 1910 meeting the Council, with Higel opposing, voted to uphold the Mayor’s suspension of the Clerk.¹⁰⁴

This entire episode was upsetting to the townspeople as well as to the principals. Friends and supporters took sides and

vituperative accusations were exchanged. A two page attack on Gillespie by his opponents carried the heading: "The Paramount Issue — Gillespie — Shall Sarasota be ruled by Gillespie in the Future as in the Past."¹⁰⁵ Gillespie and his supporters thought he had been maliciously attacked by people who themselves wanted to rule. In the small community the dispute separated former friends and the wounded feelings were slow in mending. Although Gillespie did not attend Council meetings he sent messages pointing out "crying needs" requiring attention. He was a proud man who felt he had been maligned, as did his supporters in the quarrel. But "very respectfully," as he ended his message, he would continue to prod the Council on civic improvements.

A three and a half page biographical sketch published about this time in the Florida Edition of *Makers of America*, which is obviously based on information given by Gillespie, gives insight into his perspective on many things. He thought the standard literature of Great Britain and America most helpful, and "news-

paper reading most pernicious." He opposed state prohibition laws "believing that local option is all that any sensible men can demand." He was "a Democrat of the Grover Cleveland school." He believed "the country would know greater prosperity if there were less distrust of railroads . . .", thought "universal suffrage should be done away with" and only men owning a minimum of \$1,000 in property should vote. He advocated developing canals and railroads, deepening harbors, "and above all the building of a complete system of good public roads." He said, "the grafter and the demagogue should be eliminated," and that "in the real estate business . . . there is a crying need for reform, as many dealers are quite without scruples." "Be not too zealous to get rich, nor too easily tired of work, and follow a careful observance of the Golden Rule," he advised. The article describes him as "very fond of outdoor sports, . . . equal to his thirty miles a day at walking, a capital dancer, a good boxer, and a great golfer."¹⁰⁶

It also noted that he wrote for *New York Golf* and *The Golfer's Magazine* under the pen name of 'The Colonel.' It was by this



Built in 1907 by Gillespie, this building was briefly a sanitarium directed by Dr. John Halton and then a hotel until bought by Owen Burns for his home for many years.

chosen title that he was known in Sarasota. There is no doubt that he was a prominent figure in the development of golf in the United States because of his constant advocacy of the game, his early designs for golf courses and his writings. He personally maintained his course and a club house in Sarasota and friends and tourists were welcome to play on it. In Scotland he was a member of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews and in the happy years of his marriage to Blanche he went every summer to play on the links he had known as a young man.¹⁰⁷

While the Council dispute was going on and when he was not active in Council affairs he and Mrs. Gillespie must have given thought to their future and to taking more time for doing the things they enjoyed together. Whatever the motivation, on May 13th, 1910 he signed a letter of agreement to sell to Owen Burns, who had come to Sarasota from Chicago that spring, all of his holdings in Sarasota and vicinity. A price of \$35,000 was set and was "to include all my real estate in Manatee County, Florida."¹⁰⁸ The deed was signed on June 1, 1910. For the first time since his first purchase in 1886 Gillespie owned no land in Sarasota. Owen Burns was now the largest land owner in town.

Hamilton and Blanche had many friends as well as her parents, Judge and Mrs. McDaniel, and her younger sisters, Louise and Kathleen, living in town. Gillespie was still the Mayor and they had no intention of moving from Sarasota. That summer they went on their usual visit to Scotland. In the fall at the end of his term, Gillespie retired from public office but remained active in community life. They made plans to build a new house on property Mrs. Gillespie owned on east Main and Links Street adjoining the golf club and course which continued to operate under Owen Burns' ownership. Gillespie was now 59 years old and ready to enjoy a life of golfing with his wife and friends.

In the fall of 1910 Gillespie was succeeded as Mayor by Hamden S. Smith who had come to Sarasota in 1903 as agent for the new railroad. He was followed in office



Owen Burns when he first came to Sarasota.

by Harry Higel. Both of these men were dedicated to Sarasota and continued to work for the town's improvement: sidewalks were laid, a bond issue for a sewer system was passed, sea walls were built along the bay front and electric lights became available. While this was going on, Mrs. Potter Palmer had begun her vast land purchases in the County and her uncle and aunt, Benjamin and Laura Honore', built a home, "The Acacias," on the bay front north of town. The presence and property investments of the Palmers and Honore's stimulated the town. The business and social life picked up. The Sarasota Yacht and Gun Club reorganized as the Sarasota Yacht and Automobile Club and soon built a splendid clubhouse on Gulf Stream Avenue. It opened with a gala celebration in January, 1913.¹⁰⁹ Sarasota women, many of whom had long been active in the Town Improvement Society, organized The Woman's Club in April, 1913.¹¹⁰ With all this growth, Sarasota was ready to become a city. In May, it got a charter for city government and on January 1, 1914, became a City.¹¹¹ Elected in the fall, A.B. Edwards was sworn in at the first Council meeting on January 6 to serve as first full-term Mayor of the City.

Free from the demands of his active political life, the Gillespies had more leisure time for their many interests and community activities. In May, 1911, they sailed to be in Edinburgh when King George V presented the colors to Hamilton's old regiment, The Society of Archers. Due to Queen Victoria's death, this was now The King's Own Bodyguard for Scotland. Gillespie marched with the regiment when the King and Queen Mary went to lay the foundation stone for the Usher Hall. In a family photograph album, alongside many pictures of the regiment marching in full regalia, is an unmarked and undated newspaper clipping which, in humor, says it is the ideal military unit for while it has officers and men all members are known as officers at Court. It further pointed out that every prominent family in Scotland was represented in its ranks. "John Hamilton Gillespie, Esq. W.S. [Writer to the Signet], Royal Company of Archers" also received a medal "which His Majesty has been graciously pleased to confer" commemorating the coronation of King George V and Queen Mary.¹¹² Gillespie was proud of these associations which were in the tradition of his family. It is not clear how he kept his military association as an American citizen.

Sarasota's new-comers as well as the old residents were aware of the continuing schism which the bitter Council quarrel had created in the community. Many thought it was unnecessary and harmful for the strain to continue. The officers of the newly opened Yacht Club of which Owen Burns was Commodore planned a banquet to restore harmony. *The Sarasota Sun*, Sarasota's second and short-lived newspaper, devoted a third of the front page to a fulsome description of it, calling it a testimonial banquet to John Hamilton Gillespie "which proved to be one of the best get-together meetings ever held in Sarasota." After giving the menu in detail it continued: "An extended toast list developed some splendid oratory, not only commendatory of the pioneering leadership of Col. Gillespie and his public spirited generous contributions to the general wel-

fare, but developed sentiments of devotion to the upbuilding of Sarasota and the determination to eliminate factional disputes and misunderstandings so that a kindly spirit of good fellowship would be a noticeable characteristic of the city."¹¹³ The list of speakers and topics shows the effort toward reconciliation. All three principals in the quarrel, Harry Higel, Gillespie and J.B. Chapline, Jr., were among the eleven speakers. Gillespie's souvenir menu, which has a picture of him on the cover, carries the autographs of many of Sarasota's most active businessmen: Rube Allyn, I. R. Burns, Owen Burns, John F. Burket, B. Dudley, A.B. Edwards, Cary B. Fish, G. W. Franklin, F.H. Guenther, Jack Halton, Joseph Halton, Harry L. Higel, J. Louis Houle, E.A. Kartack, F. H. Johnson, P.D. Lacey, John J. Merrill, J. Elwood Moore, C.O. Teate, Charles Thompson and Paul Thompson. Many others were present. *The Sun* further noted that Gillespie "with becoming modesty and quaint humor acknowledged the appreciation he felt for the honor and also took the occasion to stir up some sentiment in favor of his favorite pastime golf." The public rift was healed but the hurt feelings persisted.

When World War I began in August, 1914, Gillespie's native loyalties were aroused. Word from Scotland that his regiment was being called for active duty stirred him. Soon he and Mrs. Gillespie were on their way to Edinburgh. He was disappointed that because of his age he could not get an assignment to the fighting forces and would have to be content with the Home Guard. But he persisted in his efforts to get an army assignment and received appointment to the Volunteer Force with the temporary rank of Captain. He was assigned to command the 1st Battalion of the Dumfriesshire Volunteer Regiment.¹¹⁴ Pictures show that this was composed mostly of very young men. They were being trained for military duty and many were called up as replacements for battle casualties.

The Gillespies settled at Hamilton Place in Moffat, a town about fifty miles south of Edinburgh where they rented a



Captain Gillespie, center, with the volunteer forces in Moffat, Scotland, 1918.

house. There was a greenhouse on the property where Blanche could cultivate her flowers in a climate coldly different from Sarasota. Hamilton could enjoy his golf and was chosen Captain of the Moffat Golf Team for 1915-16.¹¹⁵ Letters and pictures kept Mrs. Gillespie in close touch with her family during the war. They were saddened when her older sister, Maud Brown, died during the flu epidemic of 1918 in Washington.

In the spring of 1919, after the war was over, Gillespie resigned his army commission, giving ill health as his reason. The regiment gave a banquet in his honor and presented him with a sterling cigar box engraved with the regimental coat of arms.¹¹⁶ He and Blanche looked forward to reunion with her family and friends and planned to return to Sarasota. Having given up his American citizenship to bear arms for King and country he now had to apply at the American Consulate for a visa to return. He reported that they would sail from London on S.S. Saxonia around May 5. As one of his personal references he gave his old golfing friend, Bion Barnett of Jacksonville who was now Presi-

dent of the National Bank. The picture on the visa application shows him in his Army field uniform.¹¹⁷

After the Gillespies arrived in Sarasota it did not take him long to get back on the golf links, nor for him to send a message to



Hamilton and Blanche Gillespie at Moffat, Scotland, 1918.

the townspeople. He was distressed to find few people playing golf. He wrote the editor of *The Sarasota Times*, Mrs. C.V.S. Wilson, who ran his letter in a long column on the front page under the heading "Asks Sarasota to Wake Up, Now." He pointed out that in other flourishing towns in Florida all their leading citizens played golf and have found "to their surprise and satisfaction, that their businesses, instead of falling off, have increased by leaps and bounds." Tourists particularly would be attracted to a golfing town. He urged "that every one of you able-bodied citizens of Sarasota to insure the success of the town . . . learn to play." He hoped to get a team of resident golfers to play visiting teams and a match with Bradentown which had had a golf course "for only two years."¹¹⁸

The letter, aside from its exhortations to Sarasotans is interesting for the retrospective impressions that it gives of his efforts to promote golf. He said people were not always receptive to golf, giving excuses such as he was hearing in Sarasota of no time to play. "Some openly jeered and said 'he hath a devil,' advising me that Florida would never take to such a fool game . . ." His article repeated a refrain he had written about long before in *Golfers Magazine*: "I'm tired of playing alone."¹¹⁹ The Clubhouse he had built in 1905 had burned down in 1915. The course owner, Owen Burns, had formed the Sarasota Golf Holding Company which built a new club house and kept up the course. Gillespie's new house was next door to the club and across Links Street from the course. Although he said in his letter "that there is only one golfer, at present, in the town, and he is broken down and done!" he was always available for a game. Mrs. Gillespie and visitors at the town's hotels were his most frequent companions on the links. With local people and visitors alike he was eager to share his knowledge of the game and its history.

His heart was too much in Sarasota's affairs for him to remain idle. He did not return to political life but became active in community organizations. In November, 1920, when the Sarasota Chamber of Com-

merce was organized to succeed the Board of Trade, Gillespie was elected a member of its Governing Board. Two years later he helped organize the Kiwanis Club, becoming a charter member and serving on its first Board of Directors.¹²⁰

The Church of the Redeemer, which had been moved in 1910 to the corner of Orange Avenue and Morrill Street, again drew his devotion and energy. He resumed his work as a Lay Reader and assisted the Reverend Francis B. Nash, a retired minister living on Siesta Key, in the services and work of the Church. Perhaps one of the most soul satisfying rewards of his life came on December 3, 1922, when he was ordained a Deacon in the Episcopal Church by Bishop Cameron Mann, assisted by the Reverend Dr. Nash.¹²¹ This was a great event for him and for the Church. He was surrounded by friends. Dr. Jack Halton, Dr. Joe Halton and Mrs. Jessie Swain, old friends, sang in the choir. Mrs. Jack Halton played the organ. In addition to the pomp and ceremony of the Church there was the patriotic color and flourish provided by the Sarasota Bay Post No. 30 of the American Legion, the members of which attended in a body.¹²²

Sarasota was proud that when the United States entered World War I it had a state naval militia unit, trained by Captain Warren Purdy, ready for service. Many young men entered the other military forces. The city was intensely patriotic and *The Sarasota Times* kept its readers posted on news about its men in the service. After the American Legion post had been organized Captain Gillespie was elected as its first honorary member "in consideration of his distinguished service in the Great War,"¹²³ and was asked to serve as post chaplain. Earlier that year he had been notified that the British Army Council had granted him "the Honorary Rank of Captain, with the right to wear the uniform on special occasions of a military nature . . ."¹²⁴ On Armistice Day, November 11, 1919 Sarasota joined "in celebrating the Safe return of Men who Went From This District to Serve in World War."¹²⁵ A great

parade was held in which Captain Gillespie in his authorized British army uniform marched with the American Legion. In the afternoon, he, Mayor G.W. Franklin, A.L. Joiner, Chairman for the celebration, and A.B. Edwards spoke "to the colored people," who had held a separate celebration.

By now, Sarasota was entering a new era. Business was increasing and people were optimistic about its future. The city had made many improvements and its population was growing. Even the golf course had become popular. Gillespie had found a congenial golfing spirit in the person of Calvin N. Payne, a wealthy and generous winter resident who was an enthusiastic golfer. Together they planned improvements for the course and Payne bought land for its expansion. But that was not to be.

Hamilton Gillespie died at his home, "Golf Hall," September 7, 1923. He had collapsed from a heart attack while on the links in front of the house. The community was shocked and grieved. Some



Hamilton Gillespie at first tee of golf course across Links Street from his house, 1921.

townspeople had been here when he arrived, young and brash in 1885. Others had struggled with him through the early painful years of Sarasota. Still others knew him only in his later years. They had worked together and against each other, had exchanged proud and bitter words as well as warm and admiring ones, but through all the struggles and disappointments and triumphs and rejoicing they had endured in their faith in Sarasota. A day of mourning was declared. The little church he loved overflowed with his friends. As the funeral cortege approached Rosemary Cemetery the "colored people" lined Central Avenue. They liked him. He had been their friend. He was buried in the cemetery he had given to the town. Rosemary, for remembrance.

The *Sarasota Times* in a page one article about his funeral reported that "Citizens Will Erect Statue of Gillespie" and noted that "... a life mask was taken of the Colonel with full length plaster cast for the reproduction of the stalwart figure of this notable man in bronze ..." The article concluded, "The Colonel was a great man. His passing leaves us lonely, mournful, filled with grief ... his memory is imperishable. Good bye ... ye were a bonnie laddie and your heart was young."¹²⁶ ■



Captain Jack Halton, Captain Warren Purdy and Captain Hamilton Gillespie in uniform for Sarasota's Armistice Day parade, 1919.

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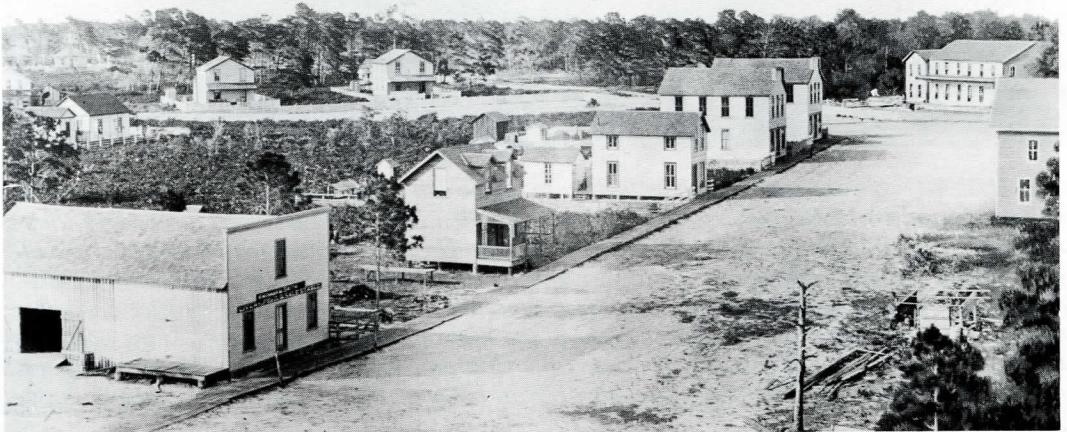
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Pictures on pages 18, 20, 25, 32, 34, 35, 36 and 41 are from Gillespie family collection. Loaned by courtesy of Charles V. Swain.



Sarasota's Main Street as it looked in 1887-88 from the top of the DeSoto Hotel.

PROGRESS OF EARLY MAIN STREET



Early 1905 — Main Street looking toward the bay from the porch of the boarding house. The trees planted by the Florida Mortgage and Development Company have matured and a watering trough for horses and cattle built at Five Points. Cars have not yet arrived. Telephone poles carry wires from the small post office and telephone exchange on the corner of Pineapple Avenue. Beyond it are Turner's, Highsmith's, and Prime's stores. The Grable buildings of 1887 remain on the west side and the Inn has been built at the corner of Palm Avenue. Photo courtesy of DeForest Cole.



1921-22 — From the same porch as the photo above can be seen, on the left, John Hamilton Gillespie's cement block building which housed the First National Bank and the Badger Pharmacy on the ground floor and the telephone exchange, Dr. L.M. Noble's office and lawyer's offices above. Turner's Dry Goods, Hardware and furniture and other stores complete the block. On the west side are Phillip Levy's New York Store and Dr. Joseph Halton's office and other stores. At Palm Avenue the columns in front of the Watrous Hotel can be seen. At the bay front is the Hover Arcade building which housed the City and County offices. The flag pole was dedicated June 23, 1917 honoring veterans of World War I. Photo courtesy of Dorothy Kahle McDaniels.

Thoughts from Early Settlers

The settlers who came to Sarasota as members of John Selwin Tait's Ormiston Colony in 1885 were immediately disillusioned. Tait's "exaggerated statements" had led them to believe they could quickly begin to establish homes and make a substantial livelihood. They found instead an isolated frontier settlement with none of the amenities they expected. The disappointed colonists chose committees to explore opportunities for settlement in other parts of the state.

Most of the members of these committees were identified as farmers in the passenger manifest filed by the master of the S.S. Furnessia that had brought them from Scotland to New York. Two were merchants. D.D. MacDonald, the secretary for the committees, was a cashier. All were single except for John Brereton who came with his wife and four children. A.H. Blackburn was not included on the ship's passenger list.

"Middle Florida" refers to that part of today's northern Florida that lay essentially between the Apalachicola River on the west and the Suwanee River on the east. Jacksonville and St. Augustine were in "East Florida." These terms originated before the peninsular part of the state was opened for settlement.

These letters were brought to our attention through the research of J. Whitcomb Rylee. They were published in *The Weekly Floridian*, Tallahassee, Florida February 25, 1886.

25 Feb. 1886 *The Weekly Floridian*
(Tallahassee, Florida)

From our Sarasota Visitors.

Colony of Ormiston
Sarasota Bay, South Florida,
February 19th, 1886

To the Editors of the Floridian:

Dear Sirs: I should feel obliged by your kindly inserting in your next issue the following communication from the committee, which by appointment of the Col-

onists of Sarasota, visited Middle Florida last week as the guests of the Florida Railway and Navigation Company.

I am, yours, etc.,

D.D. MacDonald, Secretary.

To the Editors of the Floridian:

Sirs: No doubt you will have heard of the Sarasota Colony, and how a party of considerably over a hundred were brought from the comfort and picturesque surroundings of their homes in the "old country," to be located on a flat and uninteresting stretch of sterile sand, without the prospect of gaining a livelihood and amidst discomfort of every description.

Some of our fellow-colonists, we regret to say, have left Florida for other States, while others have returned to their homes.

We were led to believe that Sarasota possessed a fertile soil, and that there was daily communication by steamer with the shipping ports in the Gulf. These statements were found to be entirely fallacious. During our visit to Middle Florida this week, we learned that a communication had been sent to the ex-President of the Colony some time ago, asking him to pay a visit to your section of the State, and to draw the attention of the colonists to it. This invitation, we regret to say, we never heard of until during our recent visit, we met Mr. Bailey, of Monticello, who laid before us his correspondence with that gentleman.

We desire to express our admiration for the great natural beauties of Middle Florida, the fertility of the soil, and the geniality of its citizens.

As the outcome of our visit, we are glad to be able to state that a number of our fellow-colonists have already decided to settle amongst you. We have no doubt that the merits of your country only require to be better known to induce a considerable amount of immigration from "home."

In conclusion, we beg to tender our sincere thanks to all the gentlemen whom we met during our visit, for their kindness

and courtesy, and to express a wish for the future prosperity of your portion of the "Land of Flowers?"

J.R. Watson,
John Brereton,
John Hawkridge,
Cecil W. Scott,
D.D. MacDonald, Secretary.

A Card

Jacksonville, Florida, Feb. 19, 1886
To the Hon. C.C. Pearce, Mayor of Tallahassee, Florida:

Dear Sir: The members of the committee appointed by the Sarasota Colonists, beg through you, to tender their thanks to the gentlemen of Tallahassee for the great kindness and courtesy shown to them on their recent visit to your city, and to state how much they were delighted with the natural beauty of the country and the fertility of the soil. They have no doubt that the result of their visit will be the settlement of a large number of the fellow colonists in some part of Middle Florida.

Again thanking you and the gentlemen of Tallahassee, we beg to subscribe ourselves,

Your faithfully,

J.R. Watson,
Cecil W. Scott,
W.H. Watson,
A.H. Blackburn,
John Hawkridge,
John Brereton
R.W. Laing,
C.H. Pollard,
Isaac Brereton,
D.D. MacDonald, Secretary.

(From the Jacksonville Morning News)

SCOTCH COLONISTS.

**Pleased with the Soil of the Counties they
Have Inspected in Middle and East Florida
— Only a Few Left in the State.**

Colony of Ormiston, Sarasota Bay,
South Florida, February 19, 1886.

To the Editor of the Jacksonville Morning News:

I should feel obliged by your inserting in your next issue the following communica-

tion from the committee which was appointed by the colonists of Sarasota to visit Middle Florida.

I am yours, etc.

D.D. MacDonald, Secretary.

Much has been written concerning the condition of the Sarasota colonists, but until the present time no expression of opinion by that body has been made to the press. It is not proposed to enter here into the debatable question of how much they were deceived by the exaggerated statements of the promoter of the colony. Coming from a country of great natural beauty, landing in mid-winter upon a flat and sandy stretch of soil, where no proper provision had been made to receive such a large body of people, dissatisfaction could only be the natural outcome; more especially when it was found that no adequate means of communication existed with other parts of the State, and that the chances of making a future home were largely discounted by the poor character of the land.

Notwithstanding this state of affairs only a few of the colonists have left Florida, some for other States and some for their homes in the "old country."

So far every member of the colony is delighted with the climate, and as those who remain are determined to make a home in this great continent, the question of their future locality has been one of much consideration. Whilst some have already settled in South and East Florida, we are glad to say, after a personal inspection by this committee of the beautiful counties of Madison, Jefferson, Leon and Gadsden, a majority have decided to settle in Middle Florida, its soil being a fertile one; the general character of the same presents features more in common with those of their native land than South Florida; and where the inducements of building homesteads are greatly enhanced by the good railway communication existing with all parts of the State, and the crops cultivated are in many respects of a similar character to those of their own country. There are many other features of an interesting kind, which need not be gone

into here, but which will add much to the value of the homes which it is their intention of rearing in this beautiful land.

We feel quite sure that our anticipations would have been more than realized if we had been located in such an attractive country as Middle Florida, where no cause for dissatisfaction could have been found, instead of on the shores of Sarasota Bay, where the conditions are wholly unsuited to the habits and modes of life of the colonists.

J.R. Watson,
John Brereton,
John Hawkrigde,
Cecil W. Scott
D.D. MacDonald, Secretary.

Dan McKinlay's Diary



To the Beautiful Manatee.

Dan McKinlay was one of the Scottish colonists who came to Sarasota in 1885. The passenger list of the S.S. Furnessia which docked at New York City on December 10 indicates that McKinlay, 22 years old, was a farmer from Paisley, Scotland who traveled Saloon (First) Class with two pieces of baggage.

The diary excerpts cover the period just after the colony arrived in Sarasota in late December, 1885.

The provenance of the diary is not known. Karl H. Grismer mentions it in his Story of Sarasota. Charlotte Townsend, a reporter for the Sarasota News Advertiser, gave this copy to Marion Hobson Gruters.

Tuesday, December 29. We were occupying a log hut on Dr. [Robert] Wallace's plot . . . completely furnished, stove and two beds. Mr. [Isaac] Redd and son, old settlers located next to us, drop in. Evening, the boys are playing cards. I am writing this. Picture us alone in the woods in our little log hut. It's a queer experience and I can't describe it. I am going to light my pipe for I feel very sad.

December 31. Weather very cool, not at all like sunny Florida.

January 1, 1886. New Year's Day. Last New Year's was spent at Glasgow—so happy. Tom and Bob McAnsh go to Sarasota this afternoon to a concert.

January 11. The night was awfully cold. We kept a large fire on in the hut all night but could not keep out the cold. Morning-temperature nine degrees below freezing point and today snow fell for the first time in 30 years. I am startled by a man riding up to the hut door. His name is Riggins, sent up to examine our land, it having been hinted to him by someone that it is underlaid with hardpan. In an hour's time he came back and alas, our worst fears are realized. Our land is useless.

I am visited by the parson [Isaac Redd] and a Mr. Brown. Brown having come for the purpose of removing our beds. The finest specimen of a cracker I have ever seen yet. Tall thin face, two legs sadly in the way of each other. Arms and hands in concord, a large white straw hat and trousers got up regardless of expense. He speaks in a whisper, having lost his voice. His team is quiet in keeping with himself. After taking away our beds, he blandly smiles a good morning, whips up his oxen and away they go at the rate of a mile an hour.

January 21. Started off to find Brown's

place. I try to find the proper trail, but must have taken the wrong one. The more I search the more confused I get . . . tramping through thick undergrowth, now through high palmetto, my thoughts rigidly fixed on the formidable rattlesnake . . . through sawgrass higher than myself . . . at last arrive at Whitaker's ford on Phillipe Creek [in the vicinity of Bee Ridge Road] . . . after two hours' walk I arrive at log hut and am pleased to find it is the place I am in search of . . . make arrangements for team to be round at our hut in the morning to remove us to our new plot.

January 22. We arrive at our new quarters about 2:30 p.m. get tent up and all baggage under cover . . . I go to town to order lumber for our house and get provisions.

January 23. When about giving up and seriously thinking of spending a night in the woods . . . I chance to spy a house away to the right . . . so making a bee line for it I come up to the house and find it to be Whitaker's, one and one half miles from Sarasota . . . When I tell Mr. Whitaker of my dilemma he advises me not to proceed in search of our tent . . . and advises me strongly to go back to town, which I do.

January 25. I make things snug and prepare to start off for town . . . the talk is all about going somewhere else.

January 26. The colony is breaking up very fast. Mr. Galloway, Beerton [Brereton] and Watson being away looking at another place in Orange county.

January 27. It is really very lonely . . . the eerie sound of the owl . . . the night is pitch dark . . . queer sounds . . . am going to turn in . . . have a big washing to do in the morning.

Sun., Feb. 1. Thinking seriously of going to Jacksonville . . . no church here . . . weary to get to one.

Feb. 3. Prairie on fire all around us . . . grand sight . . . fires miles in extent burning up everything in their way.

Feb. 4. Prospects here are so bad . . . in fact as far as we can see it means starvation if we stop . . . again see prairie fires some distance from us . . . high wind blowing and some rain . . . the colony seems to

have completely broken up.

Feb. 7. Growing more and more of opinion that we can't make a living here. Evening—prairie again on fire and close to us . . . creeps close upon us . . . almost as soon as it is done the wind shifts and threatens to burn us out . . . in order to save our tent and all have to fire a line straight across our front, have hard work to keep it under . . . but it passes us . . . clears a space around our camp. In middle of burning prairie stands a little tent and one solitary being with a spade in hand watching progress of fire . . . almost black drops of perspiration running from me like rain . . . whistle for Tom . . . looking for a place to cross fire and see him running right through fire, gun in one hand and thank goodness, our dinner in the other . . . fire gradually recedes . . . a prairie fire is a grand sight . . . flames leaping up in sheets, and the crackling of palmettoes make the scene awful . . . night is dark beyond circle of fire as the fire reaches the bay head it ends with a roar like thunder . . . the dry wood burns like powder, and flames leap higher than the trees . . . all night the fire burns around us . . . in the morning prairie for miles around is one black mass of ashes.

Feb. 15. Start today for Tampa on board the *Bubby*, schooner of five tons . . . provision ourselves for one day . . . awfully hot . . . we squat down on deck and pass time as best we can . . . sail between the island, a really beautiful sail . . . in evening wind blows so hard we have to turn for shelter . . . we get behind a sand bank and anchor . . . wind rattles through the rigging and whistles in fine style . . . The crew consists of captain and man.

Feb. 16. We beat against the wind . . . make exceedingly little progress . . . dine on board and grow sick after each meal . . . such stuff we get . . . it would kill an alligator.

Feb. 17. Not over well pleased with Tampa . . . and any place is better than desolate Sarasota.

Feb. 18. Go and get the Margreet [Margaret of the Plant Steamship Line which ran between Tampa and Braden-

town] for Bradentown . . . on way up river pass Palmasola, Palmetto and several small places . . . as we land at Bradentown a wagon is waiting from the hotel . . . we turn in early and find sheets quite damp.

Saturday. Start for Sarasota in a buggy . . . drive of 14 miles through woods . . . arrive at Sarasota about 12:20.

Feb. 19 to March 9 — no entries. Ill.

March 11. About noon we hear the [boat] whistle and get on board . . . All Sarasota is turned out to see us off, Mr. and Mrs. Gillespie, too . . .

Letters of an Early Settler



The Anton Kleinoscheg home at the foot of Cunliff Lane on Sarasota Bay. Note the Austrian flag which occasionally flew above it.

Anton Kleinoscheg, Jr., a young Austrian, was one of those who responded to newspaper advertisements in England about a colony to be established in Sara Sota, Florida. He did not come with the group that sailed from Glasgow on November 20, 1885, but came alone to New York and thence to Sara Sota via Jacksonville, Sanford, and by Henry Plant's cross-state railroad to Tampa. This route has been traced through sketches he made and dated during his travels in Florida.

Arriving in Sara Sota in November 1885, in advance of the colony organized by John Selwin Tait, he was befriended by the

family of Charles E. Abbe, the postmaster. Abbe, who was also a prominent landowner, had been murdered in December 1884. Anton later became engaged to one of Abbe's daughters, Caroline (Cary, as he calls her), whom he married on December 31, 1886. Her sister, Nellie, was married to Furman C. Whitaker, a son of Sarasota's first permanent settler, William H. Whitaker. It is to Nellie's and Furman's son, Anton Kleinoscheg Whitaker of Bradenton, that we are indebted for the preservation of Anton Kleinoscheg's letters and many other historical documents and materials. In One Man's Family, a manuscript history, Whitaker wrote about the house the Kleinoschegs built:*

Their home on Sarasota Bay at the foot of present Cunliff Lane was built on property of Charles Abbe and was finished during the summer of 1887. As photographs show, it was a comfortable house, built in the local style, two story with high ceilings and wide verandas for coolness. Atop the house was a captain's walk and flagpole which, on occasion, flew the Austrian flag... Anton continued the farming adventure without success due to heat, freezes and floods. Sometime prior to 1895, Anton developed an incurable arterial condition which influenced a decision to return to Austria. They left Sarasota August 7, 1895. Anton died five years later.

Two of Kleinoscheg's letters to a friend in Europe add to the picture of life in Sarasota in the mid 1880's:

My dear old Sob,

...And now to me. We are at the peak of the rainy season; rain, rain, and rain. If it rained on schedule a few hours each day, I should not object to this phenomenon; but one week ago we had rain keeping on for 36 hours, and today a repetition of this spectacle seems to take place. Under such circumstances I can't work and the enormous quantities of water streaming into my low clearing destroy or damage the

*A. K. Whitaker, *One Man's Family*, Part 3, The Kleinoscheg Story, pp. 11-15. Sarasota County Archives.

small achievements that have been completed so far. Sometimes I am rather depressed and even discouraged, but then I think of my Cary (oh yes, you don't know that I am in love and an aspirant for marriage; well, we will return to this point) and hope and courage come back to me even if it rains for 36 hours.

I settled on the estate of my future mother-in-law... in June when I worked in hot weather in the ditches I fell seriously ill with fever and malaria. Mrs. Abbe insisted on my transfer to her house where I soon recovered under the sacrificing care by mother and daughter. This illness was the occasion on which we fell in love with each other and since that time my work has a purpose different from just killing a couple of years, namely to care for a home. Miss A. is well off but still I think it necessary that the nest should be built by the man, and we are both ready to wait for it.

The family of my fiancée, only mother (a widow, her husband was treacherously shot dead one and one half years ago) and a married sister are living about 3 miles from me where they hold the post office; Mrs. A. has gone to the North for the summer and Cary is alone in the house. On the two mail days (Tuesdays and Fridays) I go there for the afternoon and on Sundays for the whole day, so I am excellently cared for in the social sector.

I have cleared about 3 acres (5000 sq. yards each) and will begin with the clearing for an orange grove this winter; since my means are very very small after the London events, I must be extremely saving and do most of the work for myself, and so I get on very slowly. Until now, the land which is still sour has not yielded anything of course. But this fall I will start with vegetable gardening (truck farming) and strawberry plantings; so I hope to maintain myself and to gain the means for a quicker execution of my plans.

As a matter of fact, I want to lay out vineyards. As this is completely new here I can't make use of my experience and the experiments I have made on a small scale (with 1 vine) have only shown me which sorts do *not* thrive. This negative result was

less than encouraging, but now I will try on 1 acre to graft choice (improved) vine on native Virginia creeper roots and perhaps thus obtain better results. According to my program, the wine should be my future staple product, and olive and other fruit trees should come in second line; my tobacco plants have unfortunately been destroyed by the water, otherwise I would have tried them too.

My health is completely restored and also my moral constitution is better than ever and I can say I would be very happy if I were not so bad off with my finances. But who knows what it is good for. You see, the old frivolity has not left me, and as a strict follower of the theory of predestination, I always hope for the best from Kismet.

A man having a few thousand, say 5,000 dollars, could really obtain brilliant results in Florida; as the means available to me are only about this amount of hundreds, the results of course are not so striking, but patience and perseverance as well as do-it-yourself policy have to replace the missing zero, and headway is still made slowly.

The climate in winter (though we had a cold never experienced before last winter) is very pleasant and wholesome; but the summer! — 100 degrees F. when it is not raining, and the terrible plague of the mosquitos. Enough to drive us mad! Well, "you don't walk unpunished under the palm trees" says, I think, some great Nicco poet, and the painting with petroleum, in which condition I must necessarily write these lines (the only manner), is less than pleasant. You can imagine that I look with rather unfriendly eyes at the clouded sky which constantly sends down the water masses that stand in ponds and depressions and generate millions of these beasts. They have in fact killed two of my young dogs (a horrible end).

I sleep under a mosquito bar of course, otherwise sleep would be impossible, but in the miserable hut in which I am living (it belongs to Abbe's) I have no screen; therefore, it is impossible to burn a light; I go to bed at half past seven as soon as it grows dark, then I light the lamp and read behind the bar. But on the clearing at work I fall a victim of their bloodthirstiness, and I think

no girl can await her sweetheart with so much longing as I am awaiting the end of the rainy season — still two months. Only then will I be a man again.

Well, now it is supper time and Mr. Kleinoscheg is going to prepare it; porridge and canned beef. The river is swollen so much that fishing has been impossible for 14 days....

Tony Kleinoscheg
Address: A. K., P. O. Sara-Sota, Fla.
U.S.A.

Sara Sota July 28th, 1886

Sara Sota, April 24th, 1887

My dear Sob,

...As you will have seen from my wedding notice, I have been married since the last New Year's eve, and I can say that I am very happy in this condition... So far, we have been living in the house of my mother-in-law (who is with relatives in the North); I hope, however, to have our house (which is charmingly situated on the Bay) ready for occupancy before the beginning of the rainy and mosquito season, so we will have finally settled by July.

... Last winter we had quite a number of frosts which did enormous damage. I had a good number of fine tomato plants from which I expected a good crop in March, but frost in January destroyed them, also

eggplant and okra; watermelons were planted 4 times in some places and each time damaged by the frost, and at last it was so dry that they did not come up. But the hardest blow was dealt to me by the late frost on the first day of March which damaged not only all later plantings of vegetables but also my vines; all young shoots which were sometimes 1.5' high became frozen. Many of the vines bring shoots from the roots but a great number show no new start at all. In any case, the vintage is put off for two years, for the vines will take such a long time to recover.

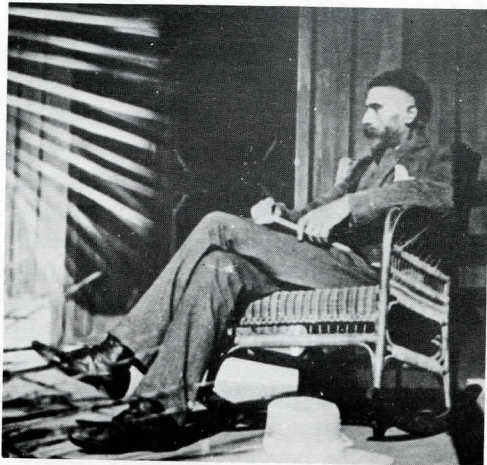
My last plantings — potatoes, corn — all failed more or less (the potatoes completely) as my land is still too new and sour, so my farm looks rather dreary and I cannot expect any income for this year; but the hope that it must come better and the fault of the new land will be diminished next season (for my land is in fact very good) as well as the courage of my wife hold me upright, and I am plowing heavily in the hope that the next season will make up for everything.

But I have not only failures to report: peaches seem to get on all right and there is no doubt that figs will have a great future; with olives I have not yet had any success. Next winter we will probably get a railroad and thus a possibility of forwarding our crops; this year I was forced to see my cabbage rot in the field for want of markets....

Your old Tony



Carrie Abbe Kleinoscheg



Anton Kleinoscheg

The Bay Bridge

By Jere Parker

BY 1914, Sarasota was no longer just a fishing and farming community. The area was attracting significant attention, and wealthy northerners were beginning to invest heavily. To nurture this growth, the City of Sarasota initiated a program of public improvements — a waterworks, some brick-paved streets, and a municipal pier, among other things.

It was in that year, at a mass meeting held at the Municipal Building in downtown Sarasota, that 150 taxpayers “unanimously” approved the movement to create a special Sarasota-Venice Roads and Bridges District. The Manatee County Commission had been laggard in building roads, and had failed to maintain the primitive blacktops they did have.

At the meeting, Mayor A.B. Edwards assured everyone that the price estimates for the planned roads and bridges would be firm — no hidden costs. It was also noted that, as the Palmer family owned more than half the acreage within the proposed District, they would also pay more than half the taxes. Edwards pinpointed on a large map put up in front of the audience the locations of the desired new roads and bridges. It was at this time that the building of a bridge to link the mainland with Sarasota Key (as Siesta Key was then called) was first formally proposed.¹ It was a dramatic step. No longer would the city be isolated from the Gulf beaches; the advantages of having the bridge were evident.

“In connection with the fast-coming Dixie Highway [U.S. 41] our Bay Bridge can be one of Sarasota’s strongest attractions,” wrote R.W. Grinton, a local real estate agent. Except for Pinellas County, he pointed out, “there is no other place on the peninsula Gulf Coast where the outer beach is on the road. Not even the famous Daytona-Ormond Beach has the beauty of Crescent Beach, swinging ... four miles

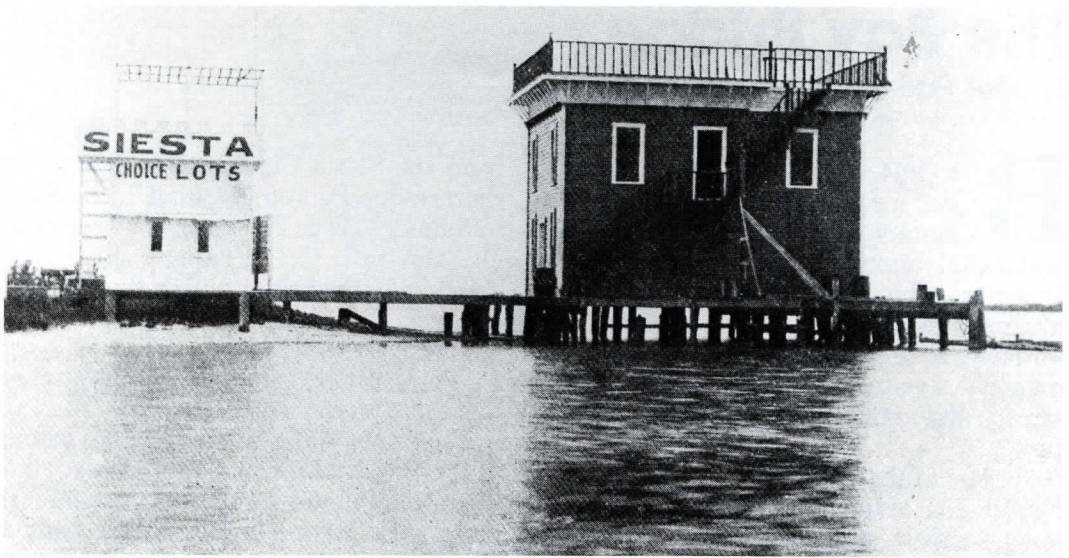
from the Siesta Cape on Big Pass to the Picturesque Point o’ Rocks at Little Sarasota Pass.”² Or as *The Sarasota Times* succinctly put it, “From a practical standpoint, the bridge will be the means of developing the key lands to a wonderful extent.”³

Very little development had taken place on the Key up to that time. The vast majority of residents lived on Bay Island, at the Bay Island Hotel, and almost all of them were winter residents from northern cities. The Key’s summer-winter population shift was much more pronounced than it is today.



Harry L. Higel

Just west of Bay Island, across Hanson Bayou, lay the “Town of Siesta,” owned, platted and managed by Harry L. Higel in partnership with E.M. Arbogast and Louis Roberts.⁴ Starting out in 1907 with a “yacht club,” the development was at the northwest corner of the Key where Big Pass meets the Bay. What is now the corner of Siesta Drive and Higel Avenue was in those days the approximate center of the town.⁵ The “Town of Siesta” took off very slowly, but Higel moved ahead, dredging canals, putting up bathhouses on the



Harry Higel's real estate office and post office at Siesta

pass beach, and building a grand looking hotel, the Higelhurst. The hotel with its colonial style portico could be seen across the Bay from Sarasota, and was quite a landmark.⁶

Higel, who served three times as Sarasota's mayor, applied for and was granted a U.S. post office for Siesta. He put it on the end of his pier, which served as the town dock. His real estate office was built at the foot of the pier.⁷ The "Town" had few residents so the post office basically served the Bay Island people. One year-round resident of the Key was Charles Meyer, proprietor of the Sanitary Bath House.

Living nearby was Rube Allyn, publisher-editor of the newspaper *The Sarasota Sun*, who years later (1921) would be accused but not convicted of murdering Harry Higel. Over on Roberts Point was the Louis Roberts family with their seasonal hotel guests. A few fishermen squatters living in shacks near the water constituted most of the population of the rest of the Key.⁸ Wildcats roamed the beaches, alligators lounged on the bayside.

Early in 1915 plans for the bridge were finalized at another public meeting.⁹ The Manatee County Commission set March 16 for a bonds election. So sure were the Sara-

sota city fathers of victory that a "day of public rejoicing" was announced a week ahead of the election.¹⁰ The bonds passed easily (three to one in favor),¹¹ and the next day a celebration party was held at the foot of Main Street, with a shore dinner of clam chowder, oysters and fish. Boats ran people out to the keys and the Gulf. Main Street was lit up after dark, and there was band music.

The Sarasota Times credited A.B. Edwards, John Burket and Harry Higel as the driving forces behind the building project and the success of the bonds issue,¹² adding, "No public event in local history is comparable in importance."¹³ The paper also noted that the Bradenton voters had turned down their bonds issue, and would forever lag behind Sarasota. Venice, which had all of eight voters at the time, voted against the bonds, but was overruled by its District partner.¹⁴

The start of construction of the bridge turned out to be more than a year in the future — the price estimates had not, after all, been reliable and the amount voted did not provide enough money for all the planned improvements. They included, in addition to the Bay Bridge, several smaller bridges (over Phillippi Creek, North

Creek, Shakett Creek and others), and nine-foot-wide asphalt highways to Venice, Bee Ridge and Fruitville. Another election was called; again the bonds passed easily.

The final appropriation for the roads and bridges was \$250,000. Out of that, \$40,000 was allotted for the building of seven bridges. The construction companies were required to bid on all of the bridges, in one lump sum.¹⁶ The Luten Bridge Company of York, Pennsylvania outbid the other six companies who participated, coming in at \$39,500.¹⁷ The exact cost of the Bay Bridge itself is unknown.

In July of 1916, a month after the contract was given, the real work of building the bridge began. First, the approaches on either side were dredged in.¹⁸ This gave the Bay a "narrows" effect at this point that it hadn't had before. Two dredges were used, the *Sandpecker* and the *Mudhen*.¹⁹ Then, two long wooden "piers," supported by thick concrete pilings, were begun. They were started on opposite sides of the Bay and progressed to meet at the center. All through the winter the lengthening bridge made its way across the water, despite the fact that the contract had clearly stipulated a November 1 completion date. As excuses for the delay, the Luten Company cited a lack of lumber²⁰ and a shortage of railroad cars to bring it in.²¹ The weather, too, was blamed. In February there was a two-day delay when, during a howling northwest wind, the superintendent "was afraid some of the men would be blown into the bay." The sub-freezing temperatures²² might have absorbed some of the blame for the delays.

All along, *The Sarasota Times* tried to keep everyone's spirits up by running articles extolling the advantages of the bridge: "The opening of the bridge will make it possible for the owners of autos to make one of the most beautiful drives along a scenic view that is semi-tropical"²³ and "it is confidently predicted that many winter residences will be built [on the key] this season." Those without autos were assured that, "When the road is completed, the trip will be but a pleasant walk."²⁴

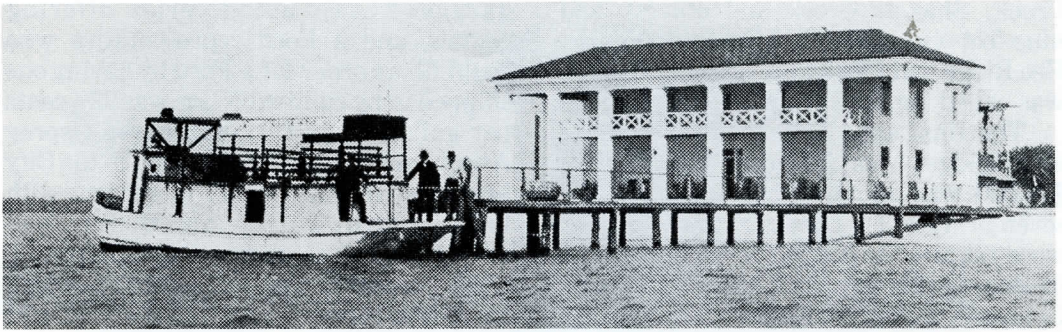
In Sarasota at this time there were two

garages²⁵, two auto-liveries offering rentals, and a Ford representative who could fill an order for a Ford by having one shipped in by railroad.²⁶ Gas was 22½ cents per gallon.²⁷ The City had paved Osprey Avenue south from Main Street to the City limits at Hudson Bayou, to connect with the new highway (now also Osprey Avenue) that led to the bridge approach,²⁸ which came to be called Siesta Road.²⁹ Generally hard-surfaced roads and streets were still a novelty associated with tourism and development.

As the work progressed, and the bridge began to assume reality, Mayor Higel began running a continuing ad in *The Sarasota Times*. "Siesta on the Key booming," it declared, and Higel's copy continued, "In 1907... I predicted Siesta was destined to be the best, high class location in Florida for winter and summer homes." He went on to cite the town's advantages: waterfront, protected harbors, canals, shellfish, high land, pretty scenery, tropic growth, cedars, palms and (lastly) white sand bathing beaches. With the bridge soon to be opened, Higel maintained that "the building of this bridge has increased the value of Siesta property fifty per cent" and — slightly threatening — "On March 1st, 1917, I shall advance the price. Twelve years ago waterfront lots in Sarasota sold for \$20 to \$250 each. Today the same lots have a value of from \$5,000 to \$7,000. Lots at Siesta now worth \$500 will be worth \$5,000 in three years. Buy during February while you can buy at the old price."³⁰

The bridge neared completion late in February 1917. The span was an imposing sight. In its center, instead of a lift-up draw, it had a "twin pony truss" — a steel section which rotated around a center piling to open up two boat channels, each thirty feet wide.³¹ The truss was supplied by the Roanoke Iron Works of Roanoke, Virginia, which sent a special crew to install it. The vertical clearance at the center of the bridge when closed was only eight feet at low tide,³² but the roadway was an impressive sixteen feet wide.³³ The bridge was the pride of the Sarasota Bay area.

As the opening day neared, a dedication



The Higelhurst Hotel, located on Big Sarasota Pass, was built in 1914 and destroyed by fire in 1917.

was planned for March 1, within the week of the Sara de Soto Pageant festivities ("One whole week of merry carnival"). A Merchants' Parade would precede the dedication; Mayor Higel was scheduled to give the dedicatory address, and the Mayor of Tampa was invited to be present.³⁴

Although the Pageant events took place, the bridge dedication had to be called off for two reasons: 1) Mayor Higel was called to Tampa on important legal business, and 2) the Luten Company hadn't yet officially turned the bridge over to the county. But ceremony or no ceremony, the bridge was opened for use that day. Even though Mayor Higel was out of town, the first car over the bridge was his, driven by his daughter Genevieve with the rest of the family as passengers. In a bit of opening celebration they drove out to the Bay Island Hotel and had dinner with friends.³⁵ Other festive parties also drove as far as Bay Island. Siesta Key itself was still inaccessible because the "humpback" bridge over Hanson Bayou hadn't yet been completed,³⁶ though undoubtedly the mayor had somebody working on it.

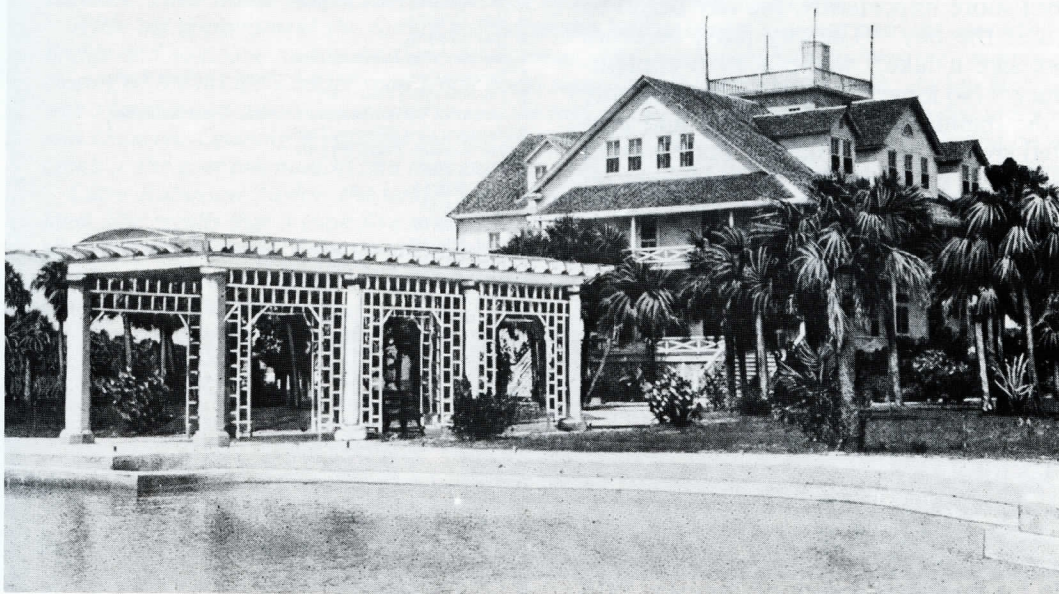
In a front-page interview in *The Times* Mayor Higel held forth expansively on Sarasota, Siesta, their collective future, and his role in it all. He proposed to put Siesta on the map, as he had Sarasota, and made it clear that he intended to build and otherwise develop the "Town of Siesta." Sarasota had dropped its swaddling clothes, was now a city, and another town must be built at Siesta. "The more variety of surroundings Sarasota has," Higel explained, "the

better the development will be to make it the commercial center." He had spent the best half of his life building up Sarasota, the mayor stated, under conditions not nearly so favorable as now existed for Siesta. "Improvements are to be made, and the wants of the tourists will be complied with. And what it takes to satisfy and please them, Siesta will be there with the goods."³⁷

But less than a month after the completion of the eagerly awaited Bay Bridge, "FLAMES LIGHT UP THE SKY!" shouted the headlines in *The Times*. The Higelhurst Hotel burned to the ground, a total loss. Fortunately, the hotel was empty at the time — the caretaker was spending the night in Sarasota — so there were no injuries. The fire, presumably started by faulty kitchen equipment, quickly consumed the wood frame structure. The flames were a spectacular sight easily viewed from Sarasota, especially from Gulf Stream Avenue, where Mayor Higel had his waterfront home. The hotel was only partially insured and it was said the owners lost \$20,000.

In a quickly-given interview for *The Times*, Higel stated that he would rebuild immediately, only this time the hotel would be made of concrete block with an asbestos roof. Claiming he would put \$50,000 into Siesta and the new hotel, the mayor described the lavish town he was going to create — "electric lights in every house," "winding paths," "tennis courts," etc. — declaring that certain northern capital would give him carte blanche to rebuild.³⁸

Bay Island Hotel, Sarasota, Fla.



The Bay Island Hotel, built by J.H. Faubel and E.M. Arbogast, was opened in January of 1912. For decades the hotel was a favorite hostelry.

On May 1, 1917, after nine months of work, the Bay Bridge was formally turned over to the county. Headlines in the paper read: "Bay Bridge Opened Tuesday - It is now possible to cross at any time of the day or night - View Is Magnificent - One can see for miles in all directions - Road will be finished soon?"

A Captain from the U.S. Corps of Engineers came to Sarasota and, along with Mayor Higel and other local dignitaries, drove out to the bridge, inspected it, and pronounced it fit. The Luten Company gave up title and the act was accomplished; Sarasota was now connected to the Gulf. The mood was anticlimatic as the bridge had already been in use two months.

The *Times* ran an article instructing people how to use the new bridge, informing them that, "a bridge tender will be on the bridge at all times;" and should a boat wish to go through, "all that will be necessary is to let the tender know and the bridge will be opened." The article said that the view from the bridge, "makes one stop and ponder as to the inscrutable work of an All Powerful One . . ." ³⁹ The building of the Bay Bridge, the paper couldn't resist brag-

ging, "was a task that for many years was thought to not only be impossible, but not feasible."⁴⁰ Conspicuously absent from articles on the bridge opening ceremony was any mention of Manatee County officials being in attendance—after all, the whole thing had been, officially, at least, Manatee county business.

Three times that summer the bridge had to be closed for repairs or readjustments—an expert had to be brought in from Atlanta at one point—but after August, the bridge stayed open.⁴¹

Until February, 1926, when the Ringling Causeway was opened, the Bay Bridge, by then called the Siesta Bridge, was the only bridge leading to the keys. And since during that time Sarasota had had its most outstanding [so far] spurt of growth, the "boom," the bridge helped shape the direction the town would take. Although it's true that Siesta Key didn't experience the kind of explosive growth the city did—perhaps because Sarasota received five hurricanes during the 1920's—the bridge was a beginning step in the southward pull of the town's development. At the time of its construction, the bridge was described as being

2.9 miles south of Sarasota “by hard road.”⁴²

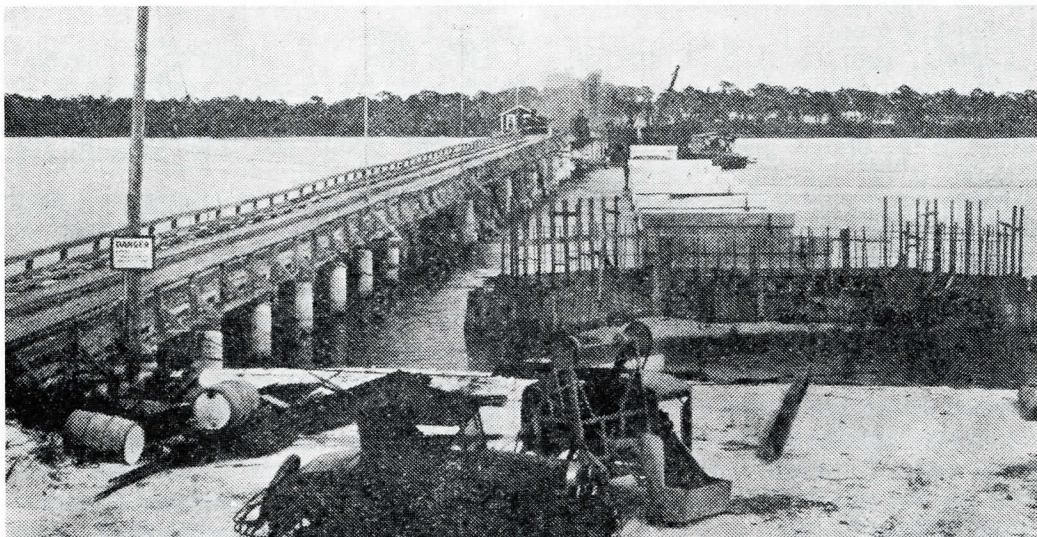
But more importantly, the city began to encircle the bay. “The city [bay] becomes more like a lake,” wrote a 1916 contemporary.⁴³ No longer would the town be only on the mainland, facing the bay and protected by the barrier islands, but Sarasota would now surround the bay and front on the open Gulf.

Also, because the bridge connected the town with the attraction of the Gulf beaches, it can be seen as an integral part of the area’s transition from a farming and fishing economy to one centered on northern tourism. Despite the failure of the “Town of Siesta” to materialize the name most closely connected to this aspect of the bridge would have to be Harry Higel. He, and others like him, set the pattern for modern Sarasota, a wealthy, tourist-oriented resort city.

In his inaugural speech of January, 1916 Mayor Higel said Sarasota’s “close proximity to the Gulf gives it an advantage no other town has. And we should pursue a policy of development along the lines of beauty and attractiveness that will attract the northern visitors . . . and you will see Sarasota prosper.”⁴⁴ ■

NOTES

1. *The Sarasota Times*, 12/3/14.
2. *Ibid.* 11/16/16.
3. *Ibid.* 10/26/16.
4. *Sarasota City Directory* 1916.
5. Sarasota County Historical Archives — a Siesta display.
6. *The Sarasota Times*, 4/5/17.
7. Sarasota County Historical Archives — Siesta display.
8. *Sarasota City Directory* 1916.
9. *The Sarasota Times*, 2/11/15.
10. *Ibid.* 3/4/15.
11. *Ibid.* 3/18/15.
12. *Ibid.* 3/4/15.
13. *Ibid.* 1/20/16.
14. *Ibid.* 3/18/15.
15. *Ibid.* 1/13/16.
16. Manatee County Commission minutes, 4/17/16.
17. *Ibid.* 6/10/16.
18. *The Sarasota Times*, 7/20/16.
19. *Ibid.* 7/10/16 and 8/31/16.
20. *Ibid.* 11/16/16.
21. *Ibid.* 3/1/17.
22. *Ibid.* 2/17/17.
23. *Ibid.* 3/1/17.
24. *Ibid.* 10/26/16.
25. *Sarasota City Directory* 1916.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *The Sarasota Times*, 9/7/16.
28. Sarasota City Council minutes, 6/28/16.
29. *The Sarasota Times*, 11/16/16.
30. *Ibid.* Feb. - Mar. 1917.
31. *Ibid.* 5/3/17.
32. *Ibid.* 3/1/17.
33. *Ibid.* 5/3/17.
34. *Ibid.* 3/1/17.
35. *Ibid.* 3/8/17.
36. *Ibid.* 3/15/17.
37. *Ibid.* 3/22/17.
38. *Ibid.* 4/15/17.
39. *Ibid.* 5/3/17.
40. *Ibid.* 3/1/17.
41. *Ibid.* 8/2/17; 8/9/17; 8/23/17.
42. *Ibid.* 3/1/17.
43. *Ibid.* 11/16/16.
44. *Ibid.* 1/6/16.



The original Bay Bridge, on the left, had wood planking and guard rails and cement pilings. Completed in 1917 it was Sarasota’s first roadway to Bay Island, Siesta and the Gulf beaches. This view is eastward toward the mainland. The early structure of the second bridge is to the right.

THE BRIDGE TENDERS

When the Bay Bridge opened in 1917 Charles M. Robinson was appointed bridge tender. He and his family lived on 200 acres of land he had purchased in 1900 in the area then known as Hayden. Their house was at the eastern end of today's Wisconsin Lane.

After his appointment the family moved to the bridge tender's house near the center of the bridge and someone had to be there at all times. The chief responsibility was the opening and closing of the bridge's center span when boats signalled for the bridge to open. As Mr. Robinson was a farmer and supervised a large grove, the task of opening the bridge generally fell to his wife and children. Opening it entailed putting chains across the bridge to stop cars, placing an iron crank in the gear mechanism and then pushing the crank until the 60 foot wide span was opened.

Clara Robinson Taylor, the tender's daughter, still lives today on part of the original family land. She recalls that it took five to ten minutes to crank the span open depending on how hard the wind was blowing. Occasionally the wind was strong enough to swing the span and force the crankers backwards. Kerosene lanterns were hung on the span each evening and removed and cleaned each morning.

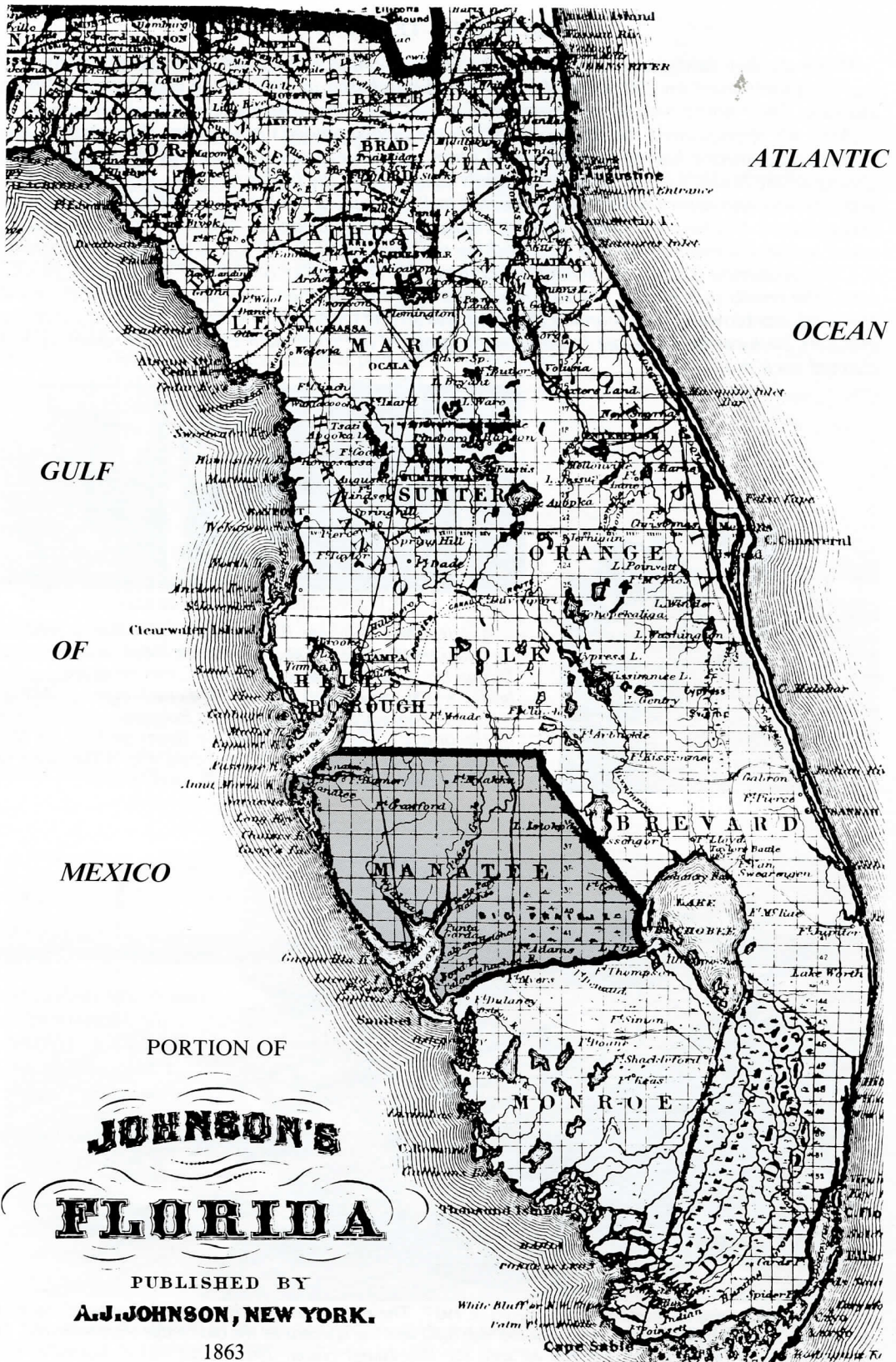


At left, Mary Yeomans Robinson with a bucket of feed for the chickens she kept at the eastern approach to the bridge. Behind her is the superstructure of the center swing span of the bridge which was opened by pushing a crank in the middle of the span. Above are Mary and Charles Robinson, on the porch of the bridge tender's house near the center span of the Bay Bridge. Persons crossing the bridge could stop at the house to buy "ice cold Coca Cola" as the sign says.



*This bridge dedicated to
the Memory of
HARRY L. HIGEL
A Beloved Citizen
of Sarasota County*

The second bridge to Siesta was completed in 1927. The railings and bridge tender's house of the first bridge can be seen on the north. A new house was built and the remains of the old bridge were removed. In the background between the cars can be seen the Bay Island Hotel. This bridge was dedicated to the memory of Harry L. Higel. Photos courtesy of Clara Robinson Taylor.



Tracking the Sarasota County Courthouse

By Myrtle Lane

THE SARASOTA region was part of Manatee County when most of its early pioneers arrived, but county history starts in 1821, when Territorial Governor Andrew Jackson divided all of Florida into two counties. All the land east of the Suwannee River ("the peninsula," as it's still identified today) was St. Johns; all west, Escambia County.

Four years later there were further divisions, and "we" were then in Alachua County, which stretched from the Georgia border to Lake Okeechobee, contiguous most of its length with the huge Mosquito County. Mosquito got the ocean coast, while Alachua had the Gulf.

In 1834 more county divisions put us into the new Hillsborough — a matter of no particular moment down here, since not until 1842 would permanent settlers arrive in what now constitutes Manatee and Sarasota Counties. Early that year Josiah Gates and family left Tampa to sail up the Manatee River to a pre-scouted location, planning to build the "Gates House" not only as residence but as "hotel" for those expected to follow. That same year they would acquire a neighbor 14 miles south, at Yellow Bluffs on Sarasota Bay. William Whitaker would look to Manatee, as the new settlement was called, for supplies, for company, and eventually, for a wife. He could not have anticipated that he would go into the history books as the first permanent settler in what became Sarasota County 79 years later.

The settlers were drawn by the Armed Occupation Act of 1842, which gave any head of family or single man aged at least 18 the prospect of claiming a quarter-section, 160 acres, within certain areas. The several criteria for claim included building a dwelling and living on, clearing and cultivating at least five acres for five years, plus a willingness to bear self-supplied arms against Indians if needed. Only two land offices in the state handled claim permits, St. Augustine and Newnansville. Sarasota-Manatee area

claims had to be filed in Newnansville, then also the county site (the term then used) of Alachua County — a long journey indeed, to a location somewhat northwest of present-day Gainesville.

By 1855 Whitaker, Gates and the other settlers would be in the newly created Manatee County. Not everyone considered this progress; with an estimated 60 to 80 voters in the whole county (not, of course, including women, slaves and Indians, who had no franchise), some thought the break-off an unwise move. A petition circulated for re-annexation to Hillsborough but the movement failed.

The counties were being divided and re-divided (there are now 67), but if it seems that Floridians were being squeezed into smaller and smaller areas, "squeezed" is hardly the word. Consider: Manatee County stretched from Tampa Bay to Charlotte Harbor, from Lake Okeechobee to the Gulf. Its 5535 square miles represented almost one-tenth of the entire state, and it was larger than the State of Connecticut. Its county site was that original settlement, Manatee, very close to the county's northern border, very far from its southern and eastern borders. With only trails between settlements, travel was by water when possible, but for those living inland reaching county government was arduous indeed, a trip of days under highly uncomfortable circumstances.

By 1866 those arguing for a more centrally located county government succeeded in getting it moved southeast to Pine Level — which was indeed more central in the immense county, but nonetheless convenient to almost no one, as much as 40 miles from major settlements and with a minuscule population of its own. In time that population reached about 200, a figure that swelled during the trial of the so-called "vigilante killers" of Sara Sota postmaster Charles Abbe, when reporters and observers came from all over the country.

CLASS OF SERVICE	SYMBOL
Telegram	
Day Letter	Blue
Night Message	Nite
Night Letter	N L

If none of these three symbols appears after the check (number of words) this is a telegram. Otherwise its character is indicated by the symbol appearing after the check.

WESTERN UNION TELEGRAM

NEWCOMB CARLTON, PRESIDENT

GEORGE W. E. ATKINS, FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT

CLASS OF SERVICE	SYMBOL
Telegram	
Day Letter	Blue
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SARASOTA TIMES

SARASOTA FLO

SARASOTA COUNTY WINS BILL JUST PASSED HOUSE BY UNANIMOUS VOTE

JOHN F. BURKETT

7PM

Despite its inconveniences, Pine Level was the county seat until 1887, when DeSoto County was carved (some say pushed) out of Manatee; DeSoto quickly seized the excuse of the arrival of the railroad in Arcadia to shift county government there. Dividing the assets with the new county, Manatee chose the courthouse safe but scorned the courthouse "said to be the worst courthouse in Florida."¹

Temporarily the county seat reverted to Manatee but there were other communities seeking it now. Manatee, Palmetto and Braidentown were contenders. Sarasota's offer to build a courthouse and jail at no cost to the county wasn't enough to secure the prize; when this became apparent, she threw her support to the dark horse Braidentown, which won the election. But the competition increased tensions between the new, growing settlements of the south part of the county and the longer-established towns along the Manatee River. The south countians, particularly those in Sarasota, believed they were not getting the services for which they were paying taxes to the county. Schools, roads and bridges — or the lack thereof — were the main areas of discontent.

As early as 1914, a delegation of Sarasotans traveled through central Florida to inspect roads and determine what constituted a "good" one; their aim was to establish a special road district and to float a bond issue. The Sarasota-Venice Road

and Bridge District came out of this effort and the bond issue, though it fell short of financing adequate roads, did buy a nine-foot wide asphalt road from Sarasota to Venice, including bridges, plus roads to Fruitville and Bee Ridge and a road and bridge to Bay Island. Finally, those without access to a boat could get to the beach!²

The idea of keeping tax money and decisions about its use closer to home grew in appeal. Though support was not unanimous in the south county, most community leaders came to feel the time was ripe and they were ready for their own county. A substantial County Division Committee was formed, headed by the Sarasota mayor, A.B. Edwards. Other members or supporters included city attorney John F. Burket, Frank A. Walpole (former publisher of the *Manatee Record*, later the first Chairman of the Sarasota County Commission), A.M. Wilson, J.H. Lord (a major landowner converted to the cause, who originally feared a new county would mean higher taxes), J.E. Battle, Owen Burns, A.L. Joiner, L.L. May, John Savarese, W.Y. Perry, George B. Prime, W.M. Tuttle, Frank Redd, Clarence Hitchings, A.C. Honore (whose sister, Bertha Honore Palmer, had been an early supporter, but she died three years before the efforts bore fruit), Frank Pearce, Dr. Joseph Halton, Dr. Jack Halton, E.O. Burns, F.H. Guenther, George L. Thacker, T.F.

Arnold, Otis F. Landers, I.G. Archibald, John A. Graham, The Palmer Trust, H.H. Richardson, A.S. Woodward, O.P. Collins, Claude Hebb, R.C. Bruce, George W. Franklin, Cary B. Fish (who would some years later give the dedicatory address for the cornerstone laying at the permanent courthouse site), Furman Helveston, T.J. Bryan, and E.J. Bacon.

Support was not limited to Sarasota; other south county communities were represented on the County Division Committee, by W.L. Dunn of Nokomis, W.E. Stephens of Venice, J.R. Mason of Manasota, P.E. Buchan of Englewood, Vic Saunders of Osprey, Bryant Taylor of Bee Ridge, Emmet Tucker of Fruitville, Will Hancock of Myakka, F.P. Dean of Indian Beach, and there was a Bradenton representative, John A. Graham.³ Meetings were held, trips to Tallahassee were taken, politicking was pursued.

The Sarasota Times' publisher, Mrs. C.V.S. Wilson, was ardent and indefatigable in support of division. The paper reported in great detail and multiple stories each week the activities of the Committee and the endorsements of division by various groups, such as the Woman's Club. The writers did not shrink from editorializing in their stories and were scornful of those without the vision to realize the great benefits county division would confer. Contrary opinion, which the newspaper did print, seemed to be in much shorter supply than wholehearted enthusiasm. By May 5, 1921 *The Times* was claiming "All Obstacles to Creation of Sarasota County Are Overcome." It was true. On May 14, 1921 an Act of the Legislature created Sarasota County; local voters affirmed this on June 15 by 518 to 154. Venice was the sole election district reporting a majority against. Of its 52 votes cast, 30 were No, 22 Yes.⁴

The day following the vote *The Sarasota Times* changed its masthead to read *The Sarasota County Times*.

Section 3 of the division Act provided:

The City of Sarasota shall be the temporary County site of said County, until otherwise changed in accord with the laws of this State.

The Governor was charged with appointing "all the officers to which said County may be entitled under the Constitution and Laws of the State of Florida" and the so-appointed Board of County Commissioners had the duty to hold its first meeting "on the first Tuesday in July, 1921, and at said meeting they shall make arrangements for temporarily carrying the County government." The Commissioners jumped the gun and had their initial meeting on June 23, but at the first official meeting on July 5 prudently affirmed "all former acts of the Board." That covered them on their June 23 actions to establish functioning offices, including the motion:

That the agreement between the City of Sarasota for the rent of necessary offices and conveniences for the temporary Court House to be used by the County, for the sum of One Hundred dollars (\$100.00) per month, the same being for an indefinite time, or until a Court House could be established, be accepted.

They had also at this meeting authorized Chairman Frank A. Walpole to contract with legal printers to furnish the necessary County books, and Clerk O.E. Roesch to buy machines for his office. Archibald Hardware Co. received the furniture and fixtures contract. Its bid proposed to deliver "15 or 20 items this afternoon if required and when steel cabinets and other equipment comes in allow the return of the wood [cabinets] as part payment." Archibald offered terms of "cost plus 10% and [are] prepared to carry the account till such time as the county has funds with which to pay for the equipment desired."

With offices secured, the Commissioners on July 5 could deal with roads, bridges and tax assessments.

The original County Commissioners Minutes Books, from Book 1, Page 1, are at the Sarasota County Historical Archives. It is from them we begin the tracking of the three courthouses which have served the County:

1. Rented quarters in the Hover (Municipal) Arcade, owned by the City and used as the City Hall;



The Hover Arcade, as it appeared in 1925.

2. A temporary courthouse on Oak Street;
3. The permanent courthouse at 2000 Main Street still serving today.

Read straight through for a number of years, the Minutes offer an instructive and fascinating insight into the business of setting up a new county, creating the structure for all the services it would be asked to provide, and hearing the concerns and petitions of the population. We learn of the hiring of Luther Legette as a "Motor Cycle Cop" whose services and salary would be shared with the City.⁵ We learn of the posting of a \$1000 reward "for the apprehension with evidence to convict the party or parties guilty of the killing of Harry L. Higel on the 7th day of January ... a most foul murder was committed ... the crime stands as a blot on the fair name of the Mother County [Manatee] as well as Sarasota County." This was an enormous commitment for a government not yet blessed with cash flow (and later Minutes will reveal agonized debate over minuscule amounts) but the \$1000 was never required to be paid out since there was never a conviction for the murder.⁶ We learn of the practice of renting the labor of county prisoners to other counties. Sarasota had work for its prisoners so refused offers for

their labor and later contracted with Pasco County for one-year use of Pasco's convicts at \$10 per month for males, \$6 for females.⁷ And we read many, many pages throughout the years concerned with pleas to lower property assessments — to which the County was sometimes sympathetic.

Three months after the County was officially in business, the question of locating a permanent county seat came up. The October 3, 1921 Minutes note:

Several Petitions being in the hands of and presented by the Chairman, asking the Board to call a special election for the purpose of Locating the permanent county site...the Board in Viewing the said Petition and finding the same required, do call for an Election for the purpose of Locating and establishing the Permanent County Site, as called for by said Petitions.

The election was set for November 8, 1921.

By October 18 the Board had reconsidered, having heard from a different segment of voters. Chairman Walpole offered a Resolution:

Because of the fact that a large number of citizens honestly believe that said election would not be called for, perhaps, five years,* and because of the probability of throwing the

*Relying on the statement of the Division Committee, published May 19, 1921 in *The Sarasota Times*.



The Mira Mar Hotel and the city's bayfront park in the 1920's.

county into the expense of an injunction suit to test the legality of the call for said election, that the Act of the Board on October 10, 1921,** in calling for said election to establish a permanent County Site to be rescinded, and that the notice calling for such election be stopped.

Walpole found no support and therefore "the Resolution was declared as lost." However, two days later the Commissioners resolved the problem by finding "the said Petition does not contain the names of one-third of the qualified electors of Sarasota County who are taxpayers" and their Resolution calling for the election "is therefore illegal and void ... rescinded and for naught." Having thus deferred the need to plan for a permanent courthouse, the County continued to rent quarters in the City Hall property. The space requirements were very modest, consisting chiefly of an office for the Board of Commissioners, space for the Clerk and a few other employees, and a courtroom.

The Fall Term of Circuit Court would start the third Tuesday in November, with Spring Term scheduled to start the third Tuesday of April 1922. Between the two terms the courtroom apparently had much free time and in December of 1921 the County Commissioners agreed "that the

[use of the] Court Room be extended to the Tourists in the City of a Reading and Rest Room, during their stay in the city."⁸ A few months later the Sarasota County Band was granted use of the room for rehearsals one or two nights a week.⁹

It was traditional to combine courthouse and jail, or at least to have them contiguous, but obviously prisoners could not be confined in the Arcade complex. Various jail arrangements were made over the next several years, including using the City jail and converting or building temporary structures. In December of 1922 the contract for placing and constructing jail cells in one of these buildings went to Manly Jail Works of Dalton, Georgia on their low bid of \$4900¹⁰ and on March 15 Manly reported the work completed. Only six months later the jail roof was "in very bad condition and is leaking so badly that is almost impossible for the prisoners to keep dry during the rain ... more or less caused by the defective roof which would render it impossible to place any kind of roofing thereon that would last for any definite period of time ..."¹¹ Leaking roofs were going to be a recurring complaint.

In 1923 the City signed an agreement and contract with Chicagoan Andrew McAnsh whereby he agreed to build a "\$350,000 Hotel and a \$50,000 recreational

**Election date set at the 10/3/21 meeting but the required formalities appear in the 10/10 Minutes.



Photo courtesy of Irene Bon Seigneur.

Charles Ruegling

Auditorium" and to have them completed by January 1, 1924. McAnsh had already constructed apartments and shops on Palm Avenue; the hotel would be sited behind this row. The City, in return, committed itself to provide "a park and sewerage sufficient to take care of the above anticipations." As a result of this commitment, Mayor E. J. Bacon and City Councilman I. G. Archibald appeared at the County Commission meeting of April 2 to explain that because of the anticipated expense, plus the need for repairs to the Municipal Building (City Hall) in which the County was a tenant, the City was asking the County to agree to a doubling of rent for its space — \$200 a month starting October 1923 "for the rent and use of the Municipal Building as a Court House, for so long a time [as] the County would use the same for said purpose, stating that the County would release [realize] approximately \$12,000 due to the above mentioned improvements to the Property in the City of Sarasota alone . . ." The County Commissioners deferred their answer until the afternoon session, then conceded that the City's request was "reasonable and just," and assented to the adjusted rent.

As for the ability of the County to realize increased taxes on improved land, it did not take Mr. McAnsh long to appear before the Commission to ask for a reduced valuation on "the Mira Mar Hotel or Apartments" — which was granted.¹² The city had given McAnsh a ten-year tax moratorium, with free electricity and water for the same period. To meet his competition deadline, he installed lights at the site so the work could proceed 24 hours a day. To celebrate the accomplishment of deadline, the citizens rewarded McAnsh with a torchlight parade through the City, accompanied by a brass band.¹³

The new county was coming to public notice. An enterprising architect, S. J. Welch of Pensacola, wrote to ask if the County anticipated building a Court House and Jail "and he being an Architect, made application for the job as Architect and Superintendent of the Work, which was

considered, and the Clerk [was] instructed to write him explaining the situation, and to file his letter for future reference, assuring Mr. Welch that the Board would notify him in ample time when they could see the building of a Court House and Jail forthcoming."¹⁴ The record is silent as to whether, when they did see "the building . . . forthcoming," the Commissioners remembered, considered, or contacted Mr. Welch.

The County Commissioners Minutes Books have pre-numbered pages: the last-dated Minutes in Book 1 are those of January 24, 1924 on Page 406. The rest of the pages in Book 1 are blank except for a Notice of Change in Valuation on Tax Records for the year 1923, dated July 2, 1923, which appears on Pages 497 through 547. Many of the blank pages are hand-renumbered in erratic sequence. There are no minutes recorded from January 24, 1924 until January 5, 1925, when minutes of that date start Book 2. They are marked "pursuant to adjournment," so may be for a continuation of a meeting begun on an earlier date.

A quick assumption would be that the intervening minutes had fallen out of Book 1, or been removed for reason unknown and not returned, but the presence of the blank numbered (and re-numbered) pages, lacking only a few numbers, suggests that minutes of 1924 meetings, if taken, were kept elsewhere. Why? The reason for renumbering blank pages, not even in sequence, is left to a more gifted imagination.

A query made to the present Clerk of the Board of County Commissioners as to the whereabouts of the 1924 minutes revealed there are no records that old in her custody. Her search of the Courthouse and the County's storage facility drew a blank. The minutes could not be found, nor could other documents relating to Commission actions in that period. The Courthouse microfilm record of the original Minutes Books notes the blank pages in Book 1 and the absence of minutes between 1924 and 1925.

Missing documents are not a condition

unique unto this one period or this one government. There is always hope they're sequestered somewhere not yet investigated and that they may come to light later.

We know by actions recorded from January 1925 onward that some important decisions were made by the County Commission in 1924. A permanent county seat had to be designated before a permanent courthouse could be built. Sarasota was the natural choice, with the greatest population and commercial life in the county (though this is not always a determinant — witness the transfer in 1866 of the Manatee County seat to Pine Level). The natural choice was made; county government would remain in the City of Sarasota. On with the Courthouse!

Charles Ringling had just the site — and it was indeed a prime location. On it the Courthouse could be sited to face north on upper Main Street (Victory Avenue then, honoring the servicemen of World War I), with Ringling Boulevard as the south boundary. On the west side Washington Boulevard would provide another boundary. Directly across Ringling Boulevard, also on the corner of Washington, Charles Ringling was planning a ten-story hotel, the Sarasota Terrace.

Charles and Edith Ringling conveyed the land purchased by the County with a deed dated December 31, 1924, recorded in Deed Book 22, Pages 4 and 5. It included a restriction:

This deed is made and accepted with the understanding that the land above conveyed is to be used as a site for a county court house building said building to cost not less than One Hundred and Fifty thousand dollars, and that upon failure of the County of Sarasota to so use said property that it shall revert to the parties of the first part and all considerations paid thereon shall be retained by the first parties as rental or liquidated damages.

The site was included in the Courthouse Subdivision, for which Ringling filed the plat on March 17, 1925. The boundaries were those of the 1905 Gillespie nine-hole

golf course, purchased from the Sarasota Golf Holding Company; bounded on the western end by Links Avenue, on the north by Victory Avenue, on the eastern end by School Street (abutting the Atlantic Coast Line property), and on the south by Adams Lane, with Ringling Boulevard bisecting the plat.

County government (the "Courthouse") had started in 1921 at the very beginning of Main Street (actually on an extension built into the Bay). Now it would move almost to the opposite end. Some years later, when City and County officials would discuss consolidating offices at the Courthouse, the talks would come to naught — partly because it was considered "inconvenient to the public to move from downtown to the Courthouse." With traffic-clogged streets and inadequate parking, the same opinion might be offered today.

Charles Ringling opened the Sarasota Terrace Hotel on June 24, 1926. Other commercial structures were going up in the Subdivision, including the Crisp and Archibald buildings on Main Street, and the Charles Ringling Building (currently a night club) on Ringling Boulevard.¹⁵ Charles Ringling's personal vision would be lost to the city within a short time. He died on December 3, 1926, and was memorialized by the County Commissioners, who adjourned their December 6 meeting as a gesture of respect to a man whose "untimely death has cast a shadow over this community . . . Sarasota County's great citizen, friend and benefactor." His brother John, last of the seven circus brothers, would have another ten years to stamp his impress on his part-time city.

"Downtown" now was extending eastward and the new Courthouse was introduced into a growing commercial district. Sarasota was optimistic, enthusiastic, vigorous, full of civic pride, and was propelled forward by many leaders eager not only to build their own fortunes but to put the city on the map. The Atlantic Coast Line Railroad extended service to the city and built a large, handsome station at the

eastern end of Main Street at 1 School Street. Its first passengers arrived on December 3, 1924, but the \$125,000 depot was not formally opened until October 1, 1925. The ACL was a latecomer to Sarasota. The Seaboard Air Line's predecessor road, the United States and West Indies Railroad and Steamship Company, had come in 1903. The two railroads coexisted until 1967, when they merged. Seaboard's downtown tracks were taken up and its station on Lemon Avenue at Main was demolished.¹⁶ In 1986 the ACL Station, privately owned, also met the bulldozer.

The County Commissioners ordered preliminary surveys of the Courthouse site February 26, 1925, and at the same meeting not only authorized purchasing an additional lot to enlarge the site, but committed to an Architect. The Minutes record:

We hereby appoint Dwight James Baum of New York City and Sarasota as supervising architect for the new county Court buildings to be erected on Victory Avenue, City of Sarasota, State of Florida. It is understood and agreed that his commission is to be the usual commercial commission of six per centum (6%) of the total cost of construction and equipment designed and planned by him.

The contract with Baum was approved March 30 by signatures of the Commissioners and Architect.

Baum, who had received the Medal of the Architectural League of New York "for his achievements in designing country houses," had come on the Sarasota scene a little earlier, with commissions from contractor/developer Owen Burns (the Burns Realty office, El Vernona Hotel, El Vernona Apartments, among others) and John Ringling, who wanted a new residence. Thomas Reed Martin and Frank Martin had done the original architectural sketches to the Ringlings' own conception — they wanted a Venetian palace. When the Martins opted out, Ringling turned to Baum,¹⁷ who had built many homes for the wealthy. "A master of patrician elegance,"¹⁸ architectural writer James T. Maher calls him.



Dwight James Baum. Portrait by Joseph Cummings Chase.

Having failed to shift his clients to something Georgian, Baum undertook the Venetian confection to be called "Ca'd'Zan" (said to be Venetian dialect for "House of John"). His assistant, Earl Purdy, is quoted by Maher as remembering some strained relations with Mable Ringling, which at one time provoked her to observe to Purdy, "I'm paying for this house. Mr. Baum thinks *he's* building it, but it's my house. I know what I want and I'm the one who's paying for it."¹⁹ If the County Commissioners ever saw such willfulness in their architect, it is not reflected in their Minutes. They did seem to pine for a little more of Baum's presence, at one time requesting it for the reason that Commissioner Wread considered "the young man in charge under D. J. Baum was incompetent to select Court House fixtures."²⁰

Baum was probably here with some frequency, since his design talents were in demand and his office in the Burns Realty building employed six draftsmen who were supervised by architect Purdy.

After contracting for land and architect, the County Commission thought to pass a Resolution on May 4, 1925 to the effect that:

BE IT RESOLVED . . . that at the next regular meeting of this Board, after the publication of notice for thirty days in the Sarasota County Times, that the Board will act upon the question of erecting a Court House and a Jail.

Baum submitted preliminary draw-

ings on June 1 and they were accepted subject to such changes as the Board might later deem necessary or desirable. He was instructed to proceed with the final working plans and specifications.

On July 18 a Board resolution provided for the issuance of Court House Bonds (to include fixtures and paving) in the amount of \$450,000 "payable in gold coin of the United States of the present standard of weight and fineness." The bonds were to be paid off by levying and collecting "upon all taxable property in the County, a direct annual tax sufficient in amount to provide for the payment of interest on said bonds maturing in the following year and to provide for the payment of the principal of said bonds at maturity." By August 17 Baum was considered to have done enough work to be paid \$10,000 "as soon as the Courthouse Bonds are sold and the money therefor is received."

On September 23, 1925 the Commission passed a motion to award the contract "for the erection and building of a Court House and Jail . . . with the exception of Jail equipment, to Stevenson and Cameron, Inc. [of New York] for the sum of \$366,426.00, they being the lowest bid received." A few days later the County attorney was asked to draw a lease with the County Fair Association for certain grounds to be used as a County Prison Stockade, with plans and specifications to be given to Dwight James Baum.²¹ If the "master of patrician elegance" winced at such assignment, it is not recorded.

The Municipal Arcade had never been intended as more than temporary county offices. Karl H. Grismer in *The Story of Sarasota* noted that "the grand jury repeatedly pointed out that the county quarters in the arcade were inadequate and urged the commissioners to take immediate steps to protect the public records from fire hazards."²² To this pressure was added an increased county work load and employee force, a condition paralleled in City government. It was becoming increasingly difficult to wait for the completion of the new Courthouse. On



Sarasota's temporary Courthouse on Oak Street.

August 22, 1925 the Commission ordered its Chairman to "enquire and if necessary go into a contract with Mr. T. H. Crisp, for the rental of either the second and third or third and fourth story of [his] new building now under construction . . . on Main Street for the use of the county as a Court House until such time as the County Court House is ready for occupancy, such rental or lease not to exceed \$200.00 per month."

This proposal did not work out, so a temporary one-story flat-roofed building was put up in an otherwise residential neighborhood on Oak Street on a lot owned by Commissioner M. L. Wread. The nearest commercial structure was the *Sarasota Herald* office and plant on Orange Avenue (now the Woman's Exchange). The temporary facility would not seem to have offered a great advance over the Arcade, and its greater safety from fire seems dubious. Original insurance on the building was \$6000, but the Clerk was instructed to increase this to \$8000, plus \$500 for fixtures.²³

Removal of the County to Oak Street on February 6, 1926 permitted the growing City to remodel the Municipal Arcade, "in order," *The Times* indicated on February 12, "that the city offices will have adequate space to carry out their routines which since the formation of Greater Sarasota and the mapping out of the mammoth development and improvement plans for

the greater city has more than doubled." The City Hall would still contain a courtroom for police court, which had been held in the City Clerk's office but increased arrests called for a larger room. The Mayor presided over this court.

Each step toward realization of the County Courthouse was reported on and exclaimed over in civic booster fashion by *The Times*. On November 2, 1925 it noted the arrival "direct from Spain via Miami and Tampa" of Spanish tiles for the "magnificent courthouse to be constructed in the near future." The tiles were also intended for the First Presbyterian Church, a Baum design, and the residence of Mrs. Stanley Field — "three of the most beautiful edifices of old Spanish design ever to be erected in this city." By the time the church was built, there was not sufficient money to follow Baum's design and a simpler one was used.

The early and mid-twenties added a Florida road-building boom to the real estate frenzy, resulting in much importation of materials. The empty freight cars collected in rail yards around the state, lacking cargoes to deliver elsewhere. The railroads, to free them, finally imposed an embargo on shipments to the state starting in late 1925. This delayed materials needed for Courthouse construction. When the embargo was lifted the project proceeded apace and on April 27, 1926 Baum was requested to prepare a granite cornerstone, at a cost of \$64.00.

The ceremonial dedication and laying of the stone took place May 13 with full Masonic rites of the Sarasota Lodge No. 147, Free and Accepted Masons, whose members appeared in full regalia. Judge Cary B. Fish, Grand Master of all Masonic Lodges in the State of Florida, in his dedicatory address, "told of the great work accomplished by county officials in obtaining for as young a county as this a court house which surpasses any on the west coast of Florida in architectural beauty and magnificence." Documents containing the history of the County since its birth were placed within the cornerstone. All the county's public schools released classes for

the afternoon so the children might attend. They were invited to sing the opening hymn while "the men of this county, who have in the past worked so faithfully for the great project, removed their hats and lowered their eyes to the ground in thankfulness."²⁴ It was a day for civic pride.

Only the first-story walls were up, but Stevenson and Cameron were "bending every effort towards completing the structure," and by September 5 *The Times* reported completion of the center tower (lacking only a coat of stucco). The wings were up and the roof tiles had been laid. Some of the interior furnishings had arrived.

Ten weeks later, on December 15, 1926, the paper commented on the "lightening like celerity" with which work had progressed since the spring groundbreaking. Only finishing touches remained — "the application of the beauty which will make the court house the most distinctive public building in Florida," an escalation of the May 13 opinion that it surpassed any on the west coast of Florida.

Meanwhile, the County operated out of the temporary Oak Street offices, with a piecemeal transfer of functions as the permanent Courthouse neared readiness. On February 24, 1927 a committee composed of representatives of the Board of County Commissioners, the contractors, the architect, and of two outside contractors made the Final Inspection of the Courthouse for Acceptance. Since May 3, 1926 C. J. Knighton (later County Engineer) had been monitoring the work as inspector "in the interest of the county."

Few Commission meetings omit Courthouse details — issuance of warrants to pay Baum, Stevenson and Cameron and other contractors and furnishers; many steps in reference to the bond advertising, validation, bids, take down, etc.; adjustments of claims of contractors; bids asked and contracts let for benches, sidewalks, grounds beautification, courtroom painting. "A million dollar courthouse" was the figure mentioned in the *Sarasota Herald* on December 15, 1926, though the bond issue was half that and even in boom

time (now past-tense) it's doubtful the County had an extra half million lying around to allot to a courthouse. But hyperbole was the language of the time, especially when applied to a building "widely praised as one of the most artistic public buildings in the United States"²⁵ — Florida is too narrow a stage for Grismer's enthusiasm, though he may only have repeated what he read elsewhere. Another writer claimed only that the "pure Spanish style . . . will beyond question be the most beautiful public building south of Washington, D.C."²⁶ But let's not rain on their parade. Baum's Courthouse was a beautiful accomplishment, though he might weep to see the changes made to it over the years; perhaps we would, too, did our memories encompass the original.

The Commissioners, though, were still concerned with housekeeping details. They had to buy insurance: \$200,000 for fire, \$125,000 for tornado, and \$50.00 for the County records.²⁷ They had to deal with a roof problem that surfaced as early as June 1, barely into occupancy of the new building. The Minutes note that:

a portion of the Court House Roof is in a leaky condition and unless repaired at once great damage may be done to the walls and plastering of the Court House when the summer rains set in . . . and to advertise for bids will result in a delay of at least two weeks in starting the repair work . . .

Therefore, the Engineering Department was instructed to notify local roofers immediately and get competitive bids. A week later John Dalton's low bid had him on the job.

Venetian blinds were ordered "for the comfort of those working in various offices" and though it was hoped receipts of these offices would pay for the blinds, the County promised to stand the cost if necessary.²⁸ Not until late 1928 does the question of heating the Courthouse appear in the Minutes. "Mr. Green of the Gas Co." (James B. Green of Green's Fuel, who developed a new heating fuel from hydrocarbon gases) met on November 19 with the Commissioners and proposed gas steam radiation at a cost of \$1941, saying that more

radiators could be added if necessary. A Mr. Kicklighter proposed Coleman gasoline heaters. But H. S. Bonnell won the heating contract for \$1985,²⁹ no specifications given in the Minutes.

On February 2, 1929 the Commissioners decided that: Hereafter the County will pay the regular monthly charge for all telephones in offices with the exception of the telephone in the office of the Supt. of Public Instruction, but will not pay the toll charges against any of the above-mentioned telephones with the exception of the County Engineer's office.

The iron work was painted, the tower stairs were now specifically authorized, and Circuit Judge Paul C. Albritton appeared before the Commission with a representative of West Publishing Co. to plead that the County was badly in need of an expanded law library, having at present only half the necessary books. For \$244.75 C.O.D. downpayment plus \$50 a month West would complete the library. This was authorized.³⁰

By 1930 the County was struggling to pay its employees and its bills — the country, too, was in a depression. Some employees had to be let go, but the County tried to avoid this, preferring to cut salaries rather than employment. Clerk J. R. Peacock took the initiative insofar as his own salary was concerned and wrote to the Commissioners, the Minutes reported on July 30, requesting that his salary be reduced from \$250 to \$200 a month "in the interest of further economy."

The Federal government in the 1930's introduced a host of projects to provide employment and ameliorate economic distress. The Works Progress Administration funded a Federal Writers' Project which among other activities produced comprehensive state guides from information gathered by its writers. *The WPA Guide to Florida*, copyrighted 1939, was reissued with a new introduction in 1984. It gives us a description of Sarasota in the 1930's but does not include the Courthouse in its "Points of Interest." Helen S. Wells, still a Sarasota resident, who was the Local Supervisor of the Historical Records

Survey and State Archives Survey in 1936 assisted the project and wrote on the political aspects of county history (it does not appear in the *Guide*). Looking at the Courthouse, she rendered a less ecstatic verdict than did others. "More costly and beautiful than practical" was her judgment. She cited the lack of heating facilities, basement record storage with no ventilation, no vault in the Tax Collector's office, a too-small Sheriff's office, and a stairway to the jail "so narrow and steep the sheriff and his deputies can induce obstreperous prisoners to ascend only by first knocking them out." Except for her admission of "beautiful," she apparently considered the whole production a misadventure built on a "much too light foundation" that caused cracks and leakage.³¹

It is time to leave this month-by-month recounting of Courthouse/Jail/County government matters, but there is no last page. If we stayed longer, it would be more of the same. Recent attentions to the Courthouse have returned it more nearly to the original in exterior color, and the roof has been reroofed in the original style. True "restoration" would be beyond the possible, and the acceptance to the National Register of Historic Places on March 22, 1984 was an acceptance "as is." But county offices are constantly changing, adapting, expanding. No more can a county growing as rapidly as ours confine all its government operations to Main Street and Ringling Boulevard.

In 1972 the County purchased the Sarasota Terrace Hotel and had architect Jack West convert it to a County Administration Center. Its ten stories quickly filled, but more space was needed; annexes were added along Washington and Ringling Boulevards and Adams Lane. Whole departments have been transferred to the eastern county, in the Pinkney Avenue and Cattlemen Road Complexes. Various county offices formerly dispersed along upper Main Street now occupy a recently completed Justice complex adjoining the Courthouse. Venice has the South County Courthouse Annex, which is straining at the seams; clogged court calendars are creating



Charles Ringling's Sarasota Terrace Hotel.

pressure for expansion there.

Sarasota County voters have opted for charter government, which gives them various areas of "home rule" — e.g., the method for selecting five constitutional officers: Sheriff, Tax Collector, Property Appraiser, Supervisor of Elections and Clerk of the Circuit Court. Non-charter counties must elect these officials; a charter gives options such as appointment. An essay on Local Government by John Wesley White in *The Florida Handbook* points out:

The Legislature's power has been curtailed by the Constitution with regard to Charter Counties, in that special acts relating to a county operating under a county charter are not effective until approved by vote of the electors. This represents a significant constraint upon the power of a legislative delegation to control its local governments and is a constraint which is available only when a county has adopted a charter.³²

We've come a long way from the time when Commission Minutes could record

concerns such as two noted on April 2, 1923:

John D. Anderson, Plumber, appeared to report he has a slightly defective Bath Tub, same being slightly chipped in the rim thereof, and since a tub was badly in need at the Jail for the purpose of the inmates thereof to wash their clothes, etc., he would let the County have the same for \$25; also he would place a shower bath in the Jail Building for the prisoners. [The Board decided to let some of the other plumbers in the city have a chance to bid for installation of said tub.]

and on a personnel matter, specifically whether to replace or rehire the janitor jointly employed by the County and City, a

City representative appeared on behalf of the man and

reported that Mr. Walker had previously given perfect satisfaction, that he was obedient and never gave any back-talk or sauce, and was all ways at the command of the different officers of both the City and County at all times. [Walker was re-employed but his salary was cut from \$40 to the \$37.50 per month at which he had started the job.]

Commission Minutes now are tape-recorded. Anyone may purchase copies of the tapes to hear the verbal record from which the printed record is made. Or for a more direct impression, anyone may attend these public meetings. And perhaps should — but it is more fun to turn old pages. ■



Sarasota County's Courthouse as it appeared upon its completion, and before the addition of landscaping. In the background is the Sarasota Terrace Hotel. Photo courtesy of Rick Martin.

NOTES

The majority of references in this article relate to the County Commissioners Minutes Books 1, 2 and 3. To reduce the tedium of constant footnoting, the author omits notes when a meeting date is given in the text, and feels that a page reference can be dispensed within a source which follows chronological sequence. For a guide: Book 1 covers the meetings from 6/23/21 through 1/24/24. Book 2 covers 1/5/25 through 5/16/27. (As mentioned in the text, there are no minutes in these books for the period between 1/24/24 and 1/5/25.) Book 3 covers 5/23/27 through 10/24/30.

When a newspaper source is named and dated, no reference note is deemed necessary.

Statements repeated by a number of sources may be identified as to only one.

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A very useful general history is provided by Charlton W. Tebeau in *A History of Florida* (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, second printing 1980, revised).

Considerable map study and reading of Florida Statutes aids in fixing county boundaries.

The prodigious memory and knowledge of the Sarasota scene of County Historian/Archivist John McCarthy came to the author's aid many times.

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Sarasota's fire engine and band lead a parade up Main Street celebrating the creation of Sarasota County in 1921. The Hover Arcade in background was festooned with a large American flag and banner announcing "Sarasota County Court House."

The Earliest Sarasotans

By Marion Marable Almy

Hundreds of centuries before the written word, when much of North America was still thawing out from the last great ice age, Indians arrived in Sarasota County. Perhaps following large herds of grazing mammoth, mastodon, bison and horse into Florida, ice age families camped near fresh water sources and left bits and pieces of their lives on the landscape.

Man and animal alike congregated near sink holes and deep holes in drainage ways seeking limited fresh water in a Florida quite different from that of today. A drier, cooler environment existed — no palm trees waved their fronds in the warm tropic breezes; much of the Florida peninsula may have been dominated by scrub oak and sand dune vegetation. The drier and cooler climate was not the only thing that distinguished this ancient Florida from the one in which we were still locked in the great northern glaciers, and as a result, sea level was dramatically lower. Some 10,000 to 12,000 years ago, near the end of the last ice age, sea level was as much as 90 feet below that of today and Sarasota County was situated many miles from the west coast.

Highly specialized spear points, knives, scrapers and other tools discovered by archaeologists and collectors attest to the hunting prowess of early Floridians. The Paleo-Indians, as archaeologists call them, may have silently stalked the huge lumbering beasts trying to get close enough to thrust a spear into an unsuspecting animal. Ambush was probably the preferred technique; Indian camps were often set up on ridges or slopes overlooking watering spots thereby allowing the Indians to keep these places under constant surveillance. Another effective big game hunting technique was to stampede a herd of animals into a gully or hole where the animals could be killed easily by throwing-

spears tipped with bone or stone and launched with a hand-held wooden device, the atlatl. The atlatl or spear thrower gave early hunters added speed and force. It consisted of a handle, usually about three feet long, with a device in which the butt of a spear was fitted. The thrower laid the spear on the handle and used the leverage to hurl his weapon with enough force to penetrate huge beasts such as mastadons and cave bears. The non-returning boomerang, similar to some used by the Australian aborigines, was another effective killing weapon used by Sarasota County's earliest residents.

These hunters, like their ice age contemporaries elsewhere, were part of a naturally expanding population; a population descendant from people who had crossed from Asia many generations before. And like their forebears, they moved continuously between water sources, covering vast areas in pursuit of wild game, fish and plants. For the most part, there is little physical evidence of the small bands of Paleo-Indians who followed this ancient migratory life style in Florida. Remarkably though, Sarasota County is an exception. Some of the best preserved and most diverse evidence of the oldest inhabitants in eastern North America is found here.

Little Salt Spring, now a shallow, water filled basin above a deep, vertical underwater cavern was once a freshwater cenote about 12,000 years ago during a drier and cooler era. About 90 feet below today's water surface, archaeologists discovered the remains of an extinct giant land tortoise that is believed to have been killed by being impaled with a sharply pointed wood stake and probably cooked. Nearby on the ledge of the sinkhole was evidence of a young mammoth or mastodon, and extinct bison and sloth. Archaeologists speculate that slightly later, some 9,000 years ago,

Indians camped around the sinkhole, built fires on the slope of what is today the shallow basin, consumed white-tailed deer, panther, opossum, frog and raccoons. Here, near the now drowned fires, they left shell tools, an antler projectile point with the tip of a dart shaft still intact, part of a non-returning oak boomerang and a carved oak mortar, probably used for grinding seeds. Further down the basin at Little Salt Spring, around the opening to the deep cavern, numerous crudely pointed stakes were driven into the sediment. Archaeologists are not quite sure of the purpose of the stakes, but they are sure man put them there. It is tempting to speculate that the stakes may have been used as part of a hunting trap or a stationary point from which vines may have been suspended to give access to the deep cavern where water may have been available.

A few miles away at Warm Mineral Springs, what may be the oldest human remains in eastern North America were discovered some 45 feet below the present surface of the spring. Underwater archaeological excavations have discovered a male Indian, probably 25 to 35 years old, who had been buried on a ledge in the cavern about 10,200 years ago. With him was a mollusk shell artifact, polished to an iridescent luster which had been the spur or "trigger" portion of the atlatl. Amazingly, the artifact still bore traces of the dark adhesive or glue which was once attached with lashings to the handle of the atlatl. Several polished bone needles, a fossil shark's tooth intentionally sharpened along an edge, an antler shaft wrench and the bones of other adults and several children have been discovered. Presumably these individuals and the artifacts were left or buried on the ledges of the sink hole thousands of years ago, during the waning days of the last ice age when water did not fill the deep cavern.

Sometime after the young man was buried on the ledge at Warm Mineral Springs, ground water began to rise and the waters of the Spring gradually rose too in response to the melting of the northern glaciers. Throughout Florida springs, creeks, and rivers that had been dry began to flow. This change to a wetter environment could have provided Indians with a larger variety of plants and animals as well as a slightly easier life. However 8,000 to 9,000 years ago, many of the ice age animals began to disappear from Florida and elsewhere in the United States. Perhaps the Paleo-Indians themselves played a role in the demise of the great Pleistocene animals. There can be little doubt that the Indians were skilled hunters and their continuous, and perhaps rapid, population growth may have provided the extinction mechanism. A constantly increasing population of highly skilled hunters in continuous need of meat may have killed off large numbers of ice age mammals, eventually driving them out of existence. Then too, the changing environment may have taken its toll in the ice age animals. Archaeologists really do not know what happened; only the end result is clear. Within a brief span of time, several thousand years, the giant Pleistocene beasts disappeared from North America.

Slowly, in response to these changes, successive generations of Paleo-Indians altered their life styles to one which was less nomadic and which relied more on the collecting of wild plants, shellfish, fish and the hunting of white-tailed deer. This more sedentary existence came to characterize the next stage in the culture history of the state — the Archaic period. Thus, the nomadic life style of Sarasota's first residents which was geared to a more vast, cooler and drier Florida than that of the present, gradually evolved into an Archaic culture that took its place. ■

NOTE

The Editors regret that the Bibliography which accompanied "The Earliest Sarasotans" was by oversight omitted from this publication. Please refer to the Errata insert opposite page 80 for this Bibliography. Sincere apologies are extended to the author.

THANKS!

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in grateful memory of two long-time members
who served the Society in many capacities:
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ERRATA

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