

# SARASOTA

## Over My Shoulder



Janet Snyder Matthews



# SARASOTA OVER MY SHOULDER

by  
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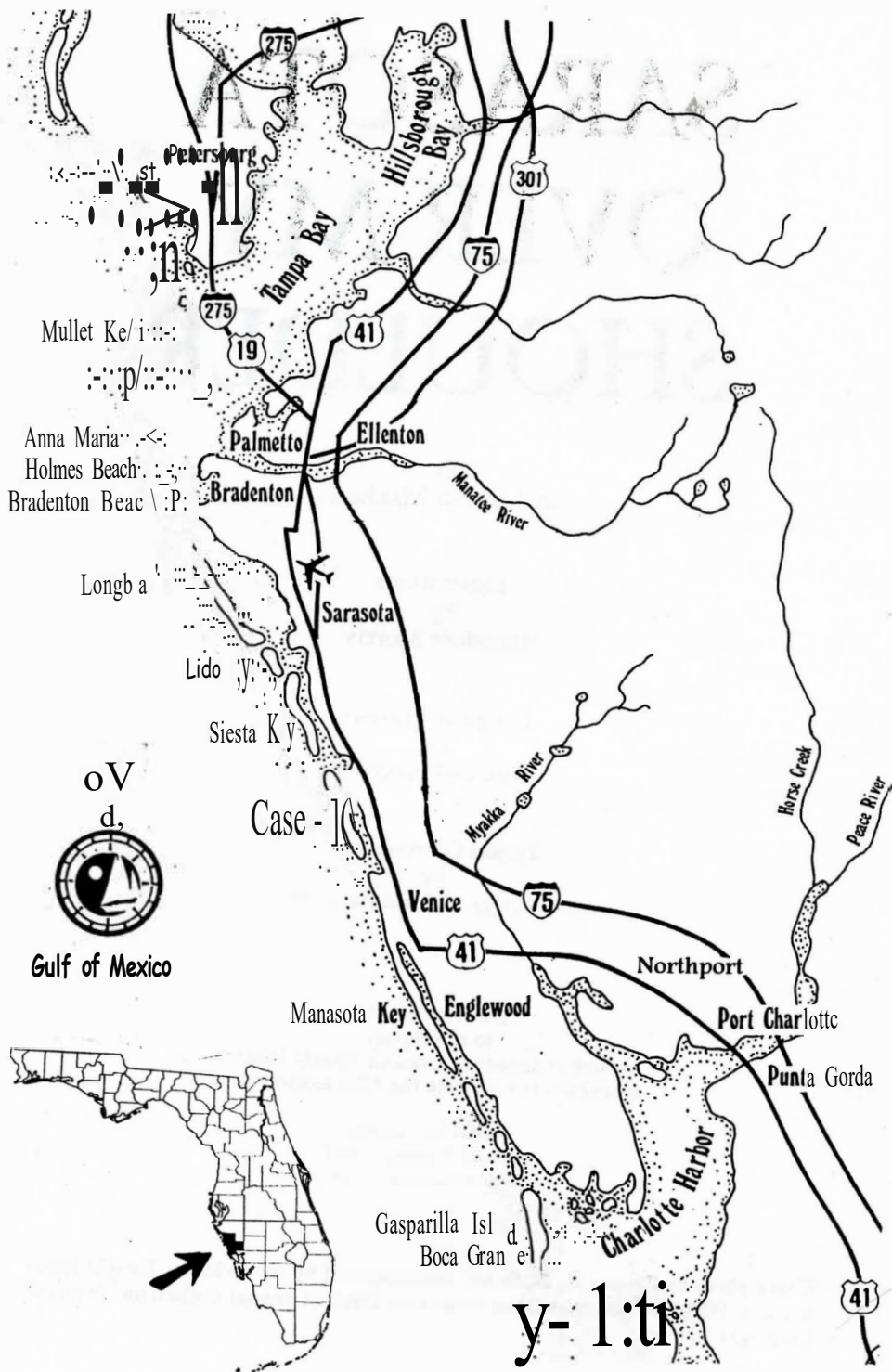
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# Sarasota County: Sarasota Over My Shoulder

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Looking over my shoulder at the County of Sarasota after more than twenty years of historical research and writing, I wonder what makes Sarasota's history worth telling and retelling, then repeating again for new residents and visitors?

Sarasotans have been writing their history since 1915. Though history doesn't change, the way we look at it does. As we approach a new century, advances in technology, informational services and individual rights have unshackled minds as well as wrists and ankles. Past inequities can be overlooked no longer. History belongs to everyone, dignifying the humble and proud. The antebellum Gamble Mansion plantation on the Manatee River draws us to the story of the slaves, the barrel makers, and the kitchen workers, as well as the landholding Gambles. The picture has become broader, not narrower.

## THE LAND

In 1921 Sarasota County was carved out of Manatee County. Longboat Key stretches north into Manatee County. Manasota Key juts south into Charlotte County. The headwaters of the Myakka River arise in Manatee County, but the dark waters flow south to fill the Myakka lakes and through a broad river valley to reach Charlotte Harbor.

## THE PEOPLE

Sarasota County shares ancestral heroes with its neighbors. Prehistoric men, women and children swam and fished, hunted and planted. Their monuments--middens and mounds, hugged

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the cedar-forested coasts and the inland waterways. Without a written language, these became their lasting record. They warred with one another and made the history books after they enslaved shipwreck victims who *could* read and write. These native Americans left no names, but the first Europeans to "discover" La



*Florida* found them living on their mounded village sites and gave the chiefs a name or two, as well as micro-parasites and diseases which quickly devastated the natives.

Highland County Legacy by Theodore Morris.  
Collection of Archaeological Consultants, Inc

The first European visitors did not target Sarasota. Prominent Gulf passes--Charlotte Harbor to the south, Tampa Bay to the north--were the sheltering bays the captains of the big Spanish caravels and transport fleets sought. In 1513 Ponce de Leon landed somewhere near Charlotte Harbor. In 1528 Panfilo Narvaez was blown ashore in a storm near the mouth of Tampa Bay. In 1539 the biggest, most expensive DeSoto expedition entered Tampa Bay through the Southwest Passage at the north end of Sarasota Bay.

Though documentary evidence of prior contact is scant, these were not the first encounters for the native Americans. Undoubtedly the Indian memories of those were not happy. The Charlotte Harbor residents greeted Ponce de Leon with a few words in Spanish and attacked. Narvaez, a Cuban, and his band of 400 hungry men found hostile reactions to their demands for maize and gold. As DeSoto's men sailed and rowed



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from the Gulf across the north end of Sarasota Bay and into the Manatee River, they saw smoke signals, a warning from village to village. The smoke was much faster than the Spaniards, and the villages were completely empty when the conquering army arrived on horseback and afoot.

Only in European publications were the Indians glad and elated. Records indicate that for decades after Columbus's "discovery," the great ships and their longboats came ashore with predictable results. From Hispaniola to the West Indies, from Cuba and Honduras to Peru and Mexico-- the machinery for plantations and mines ran on the manual

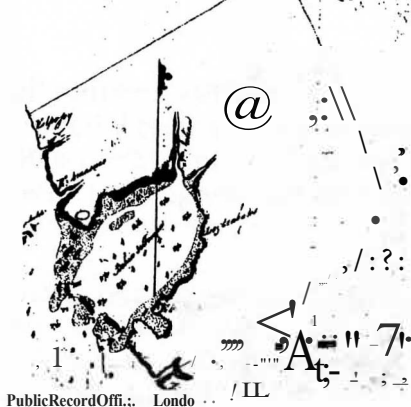
labor of native Americans. The illness and the death, or wish to die, of the native Americans and the alarmingly rapid decline of their numbers brought slave hunters time and time again. Increasingly, the slave supply was also met at trading posts along the African coast, where European ships passed en route to the colonies. The warriors greeted

Ponce, Panfilo and Hernando with immense bows drawn with cane arrows tipped in fishbone and stone, while hurling insults. They aimed for genitals and promised to quarter the visitors and hang their body parts from trees!



## THE NAMES

Unwelcome as they were, the Spanish entrepreneurs charted courses, measured marches, calculated latitudes and longitudes. They reached their destinations time and time again. Among provisions and supplies they included penpoints, ink and paper or skins. Thus armed, they named bodies of water and points of land. Columbus misnamed the people "Indians," originally thinking he had found a new route to India. Ponce named the land "La Florida" for *Pascua florida*, the Feast of Flowers. Spanish terms, or derivatives, became permanent names--Tampa, Pinellas and Sarasota. Spaniards named Charlotte Harbor and the Caloosahatchee River by impressing the native chief, Sequene, with stories of their powerful King Charles V. Sequene renamed himself Carlos. Today's river and harbor are named for him and his people, the Calusas.



Sometime before the mid-1700s the word "Zarazote" appeared on a sheepskin map later used in a lawsuit in London. Its meaning is mysterious, except to creative writers who occasionally invent a fable or myth. A second word is broken off the edge of the map, and

probably the mystery will one day be solved by a careful reading of the handwritten records in London. The Myakka River may be named for the *Mayacas*, people whose dwindling numbers were mentioned in 1735 by Franciscan clerics reporting to the Spanish crown. As Florida passed from Spain to England, England to Spain, Spain to the United States, the traditional use of Spanish place-names took on a life that was to far outlive the Spaniards. They were devastated by the unfriendly lands they searched for non-existent treasure.

## THE WILD ONES AND THE ARMY

Century followed century. The abandoned Indian village sites attracted native Americans fleeing the southern edges of the Thirteen Colonies. From today's Alabama and Georgia came the *Muscogulge*, or *Muscogeese*, "people of the swampy ground." The unwritten language, the names and terms, were recorded by the Europeans, who were rapidly becoming American settlers. Pens scratched across paper as mapmakers, clerks, traders, and government agents moved among the Creek speakers. The scribes listened and wrote words as they seemed to sound. By the late 1700s these people were called "Seminoles," another misspelling of another Spanish term. This one was *Cimarrones* for "wild" or "untamed" ones.

In 1824, three years after the United States acquired the Territory of Florida, the Army established Fort Brooke at today's Tampa to monitor and supply a new Indian reservation. Along Sarasota and Tampa bays and Charlotte Harbor, a handful of American citizens and Cuban Americans built *ranchos*, fish camps, they operated each Fall to Spring. The *ranchos* exported salted fish and live turtles to Havana. For their own food, their sailing vessels



returned with pasta, wine, seeds, and oils from Cuba, and they raised cattle.

Five years before Florida became a state, the Army established Fort Armistead at a Sarasota Bay *rancho* belonging to a Cuban American. The *rancho* once had been operated for its owner by

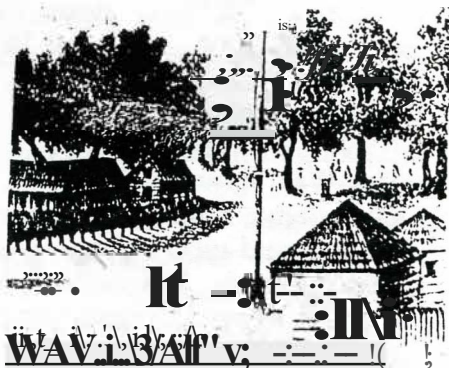


Art by Ken Hughs. J. net Matthews

a skilled, literate slave, Louis Pacheco, who was also deported with Seminoles after he survived the Dade Massacre. In 1840 the Army shipped boatloads of horses and lumber, harnesses and tents, nails and food staples to Fort Armistead. Military detachments scouted Indian country on old trails leading from the *rancho* to Peas Creek, today's Peace River, and to the Manatee River. Army vessels sailed and steamed back and forth between Tampa and Charlotte Harbor. Just before Fort Armistead was evacuated because of epidemic fevers and dysentery, chiefs came to talk about going to Oklahoma Territory.

## THE SEMINOLES AND THE SETTLERS

In 1842, a federal treaty pushed the Seminoles even farther south into today's Big Cypress Swamp, eventually monitored by a new Army post, Fort Myers. For the first time, lands at Sarasota Bay opened to private ownership when Congress passed the Armed Occupation Act. Unlike the American and Cuban fishermen before them, incoming settlers were invited to acquire federal



land. The Seminoles were precluded from rights of citizenship and from land ownership. The Act brought American settlers--men, women and children, with their furniture, books and Bibles, seeds, sugar cane, needles, china, cattle and horses. They legally owned black slaves whom, by law, the owners could not teach to read or write. The Seminoles, also legitimate owners of black slaves, were

University of South Florida

increasingly feared by the white settlers as a haven for runaway slaves. Slaves, often bilingual, enjoyed elevated status among the Seminoles and acted as translators and advisors in the increasingly sticky negotiations between the Army agents and the Creek-speaking chiefs. »



Art by Theodore Morris

1855 brought the final conflict among the settlers and the Seminoles. People who had built homes and clearings along Sarasota Bay engaged in a backyard war. For most Seminoles, it ended their tenuous lives as Floridians. While settlers' wives and children fled to other settlements, the Seminole women and children were forced to stay on the run. Time and time again, soldiers and citizen militia attacked hidden Seminole villages by following formerly secret trails. By 1858, one of the last steamers departed the docks at Fort Myers and Egmont Key transporting Seminoles to the West. The unwritten feelings of the Seminoles might best be expressed by a suicide at the docks at Fort Myers. Old Chief Tiger Tail swallowed ground glass and died there rather than board the waiting steamer *Grey Cloud*, headed for a land and a fate he had shunned all his life.

## WAR AND DEVELOPERS

The War Between the States enlisted local men, most joining Confederate ranks. Left behind, older men and little boys joined women and girls to cope with four bleak years under a Union naval blockade. The usual export of sugar cane syrup, sugar, and livestock stopped. Vessels were confiscated. People had no flour, no fabrics, no labor force, no income. Cattle from the Myakka and Peace river valleys were driven out to feed the Confederate forces fighting as far north as Tennessee.

Immediately after the war, U.S. Army Brigadier General Edward McCook announced in Tallahassee that slaves residing in Florida were free men, women, and children. For the first time they were afforded the right to hold office, to acquire private title to land,

and to take advantage of education provided through the Freedmen's Bureau. With the best intentions, the Freedmen's Bureau established segregated schools, a tradition begun in Massachusetts and which was to polarize educational institutions in some states for a century.

Art by Theodore Morris,



Photo by Ted Pinard

Among the people of Sarasota Bay, black and white, one of the prime commercial endeavors remained the raising of cattle in the Myakka, Manatee, and Peace river valleys for the Havana market. So prevalent was the trade the local economy at times was based on the exchange of goods for Spanish doubloons. Men marked and branded herds on unfenced ranges and shipped mature animals from Charlotte Harbor, Punta Rassa, Tampa and the Manatee River. At home,



Art by Theodore Morris

women raised large families, tended crops, wove fabric and sewed, cooked and baked. They also watched helplessly when children suffered and died from simple diseases like diarrhea, pink eye, measles and fever. Broken bones, childbirth, heart attacks and minor accidents resulted in fatalities throughout the population, regardless of social status or class. But the greatest disabler of families on homesteads was the isolation and ignorance. Letters to families "back home" speak of loneliness, depression and a yearning for the day when Sarasota Bay would be more populous.

It was not until the 1880s that broadscale settlement hit Sarasota Bay. It came about because of pre-war indebtedness made permanent by the wartime defeat. To cure the debt, Governor William Bloxham crafted an 1881 agreement with Philadelphian Hamilton Disston, a former Union officer. Disston invested his immense corporate wealth to drain the center of Florida--the Kissimmee River valley south to Lake Okeechobee and the

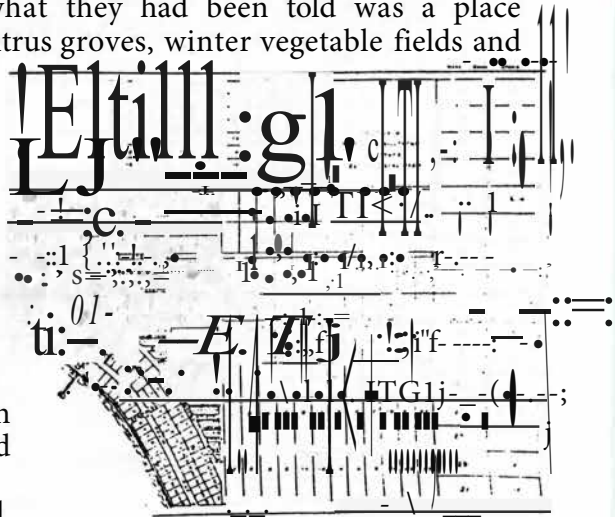
Caloosahatchee. In exchange for creating millions of acres of fertile soils for cattle grazing, crop production and development, Disston was to receive half the acreage. He ultimately paid \$1 million for 4 million acres.

Disston and his partners sold half their interest to Sir Edward J. Reed, M.P., an Englishman well known for international development. Florida towns with English and Scottish names began to spring up. In 1885 the town of Sarasota was surveyed, advertised and sold within a few months by the Florida Mortgage and Investment Company Limited. Soon in Glasgow, Scottish families boarded a steamer and the first wave of the "Ormiston Colony" departed for what they had been told was a place abounding in profitable citrus groves, winter vegetable fields and graced by a brand new

beheld a crudely hand-cleared stump-filled Main Street reached by wading ashore from the boat. No town housing as promised, no town dock, no town! Within a few weeks, snow fell in Sarasota. Many dismayed colonists left, but not all. Some stayed and worked while the developers' plans

took shape. They described "the busy place, with the ring of axes and the crash of falling pinetrees, accompanied by the songs of Negroes, and burning brush." Homes, stores, and a dock went up. Roads were cleared and graded. Avenues were named for fruits exciting to the 1880s European--Mango, Lime, Lemon, Strawberry, Pineapple, Orange, Coconut and Banana. Numbered streets intersected the avenues.

The influence of the Scotsmen and Scotswomen permanently defined Sarasota. The colonists described themselves as "middle class" but the directors of the company and the longtime manager were aristocrats. The manager was John Hamilton Gillespie, son of Sir John Hamilton Gillespie. Both Gillespies were lawyers and



1886 Plat. Town of Sarasota. City of Sarasota Records



members of the Royal Company of Archers, Queen's Bodyguard for Scotland. Today's Riverview High School band wears authentic kilted garb, includes females called The Highland Dancers, and features bagpipers piping mournful Scottish tunes.



Department of Historical Resources

Gillespie, a golfer, built a nine-hole course near today's Links, Golf and Gillespie avenues. He built an upscale hotel, the DeSoto Hotel, at the foot of Main Street to accommodate tourists and prospective investors. In 1902, he was elected Sarasota's first mayor. Gillespie suffered a heart attack on his course in 1923, by which time his stamp on Sarasota permanently affected the tone and aura of the town, which had re-incorporated as a city in 1914.

## SARASOTA COUNTY, PALMERS AND RINGLINGS

Sarasota County was established in 1921, carved by the State Legislature with Highlands, Glades, Hardee and Charlotte, from Manatee and DeSoto.

That period of unprecedented growth is still called the Great Florida Land Boom. With the Boom came two leaders who permanently changed Sarasota's face. John Ringling and Bertha Honore Palmer both arrived in the 1910s and invested heavily in land they expected to appreciate in value. Though their



Art by Theodore Morris



Art by Theodore Morris



impact was similar, they were very different people. She, the daughter of a refined Kentucky family, was educated in a convent. He arose from the dusty, gaudy raucous circus circuit. Nevertheless, they made amazingly similar contributions to Sarasota.

Ringling was show biz, the advance man with his four partner-brother owners of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. Palmer chaired the Board of Lady Managers for the 1893 Chicago World's Fair and was the widow of the famous Potter Palmer, developer of Chicago's Lake Shore Drive area and creator of world-famous Palmer House Hotel. Both John Ringling and Bertha Palmer were charismatic and tall, wore exclusively designed clothes and enviable jewelry, and dominated their social and business circles. Both had immense pre-income-taxed capital to invest. Both made the press around the world. Both came to Sarasota before roads for automobiles and reached their winter estates by boat. Both laid out roads and platted subdivisions. Ringling built the first bridge from Sarasota

to St. Armands Key, which he developed as a commercial



Photo by Joseph Steinmetz

and

residential center. Across Palmer lands from Oneco to Venice the tracks of the Seaboard Air Line Rail Way were laid, bringing viable commercial rail transportation for the first time from Sarasota to Venice. Cars carried out barreled turpentine produced on Palmer-leased lands at communities like Laurel. She dredged a channel, the precursor of the federally-funded Intracoastal Waterway. She introduced improved grasses to pasture lands along with fencing and cattle dipping. And she named major County thoroughfares--Honore for her family, Tuttle for her surveyor, Webber for her partner's wife's family; MacKintosh for a corporation vice-president.

Today's Myakka River State Park was Palmer's high tech 30,000-acre ranch, Meadowsweet Pastures. Part of the 67,000-acre John and Charles Ringling tract, once the site of an oil drilling venture, became today's county-owned Carlton Reserve. Palmer built extensive gardens and grounds around her winter estate, Osprey Point, today's Historic Spanish Point. The Ringlings created their

Venetian palace, an art school and museum, the museum a specific gift to the people of Florida. On one-time Palmer lands rose up the City of Venice, built by the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers. Palmer's two sons drained the 8,000-acre mucklands near Fruitville to create Palmer Farms and Palmer Farms Growers Association, a co-op celery-packing and shipping organization. Like Gillespie, Ringling and Palmer defined the County by their aura, their massive investments, and the people they attracted by their personas and their business dealings. But while Ringling was to leave his name on his gifts to the public, Palmer did not..

## THE BOOM, THE TRAIL, AND THE CIRCUS

The 1920s Boom in Sarasota was made possible in part by another phenomenal force--the Tamiami Trail. From the beginning, west coast citizens pressed for a road across the state. A party of Sarasota and Tampa businessmen, to prove it feasible, set out in a caravan across the Everglades, guided by Seminole Indians. John Martin in 1925 campaigned for office, promising among other things to complete the Tamiami Trail. But not until 1928 did little flags flutter before the fenders of a parade led by Governor Martin down the completed road. Florida's Boom had already collapsed, leaving behind a tangle of defaulted mortgages and stalled subdivisions. Sandspurs soon covered expensive concrete curbing along paved streets flanked by empty lots.

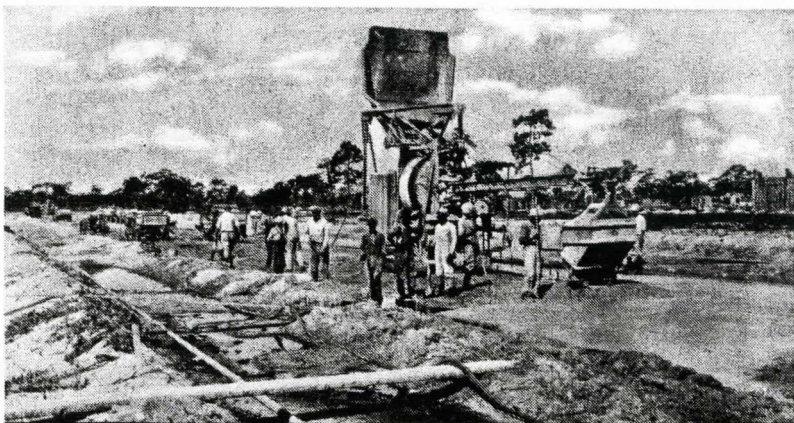
The 1920s Boom and the Trail created Sarasota's modern face. High rise "skyscrapers" dotted Sarasota's Main Street. An upscale City of

Venice stood where only a few bayfront homes and an orange grove had been. Longboat Key boasted the skeleton of Ringling's never-finished Ritz Carlton Hotel. Schools for white students went up along the new Trail --Sarasota High School,



1926 Photo by Burgert Bros. Department of Historical Resources Collection

Bay Haven, South Side, Osprey and Laurel. Several dozen magnificent winter estates and commercial buildings, structures of steel and concrete, rose up. Joseph Lord's arcade was built at Five Points. Down Main, stood the Sarasota Hotel. The American National Bank Building was built on the site of the old DeSoto Hotel, razed for the project. Road and bridge construction connected everyone, not just in Sarasota County but across Florida.



Building Venice freeways. 1920s. Stony Grey Collection, Department of Historical Resources.

In just a few years, competition for labor and materials became fierce. Across Georgia and the Carolinas, construction company reps traveled, soliciting black men to sign on to work crews at competitive wages. Some lived in Venice's "Tent City." Others relocated to the 1914-established Newtown subdivision. The labor force increased the size of the still-segregated communities skirting the borders of each and every booming Florida town and city.



Steinmetz Collection

The Trail and the railroads ran right through the center of the City of Sarasota. Both the Atlantic Coast Line and the Seaboard continued east to Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus's new winter quarters. The Ringling brothers' 1927 decision to build on city land created a new world-wide identity for Sarasota. The Circus brought workers, performers, tourists and residents time and time again. Tourist automobiles followed the highway. Rail cars loaded with passengers and commodities followed the tracks. Cities bypassed by the rail and the Trail dwindled.



## THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND RECOVERY

Florida's Land Boom collapsed a few years before the Great Depression fell across the nation. As the unemployed masses reached epic proportions, families struggled on alarmingly meager earnings. President Franklin Roosevelt and Congress passed the Federal Economic Recovery Act. Offshoot federal agencies were to make jobs, provide art and history, and to build public schools and jails, colleges and hospitals, airplane hangars, drainage systems and the like. In Sarasota, WPA and PWA projects included the construction of Lido Casino, the Municipal Auditorium, bridges, an airport, and an improved sewer and water system in the Newtown and Overtown community. At Myakka River State Park, the Civilian Conservation Corps paid young black and white male Floridians several dollars a week to clear the land and build roads, cabins, and dams at the lakes. Thanks to U.S. Senator Royal S. Copeland of New York, the 1930s construction of steel and concrete jetties at Casey's Pass produced



Venice jetties. Photo by Stoney Grey

the only permanently-located pass other than Big Pass in Sarasota County history. Copeland, Chair of the powerful Senate Committee on Commerce, was a frequent visitor and a Venice property owner. And it was during the Depression that a high school for black students named for Emma E Booker, in 1935 graduated its first class, a class of four.

## WORLD WAR II

The war brought two Army airfields. Built at the north county line and south of the City of Venice, they were among more than forty built across Florida. Mild winters and flat terrain gave ideal conditions for the year-round training of personnel for history's first war that was to be largely won--or lost--on the basis of airborne support. Defense dollars also flowed into construction



George Horstman, Eddie Balinsici, and P-40. Hormnan Collection

for highways like U.S. 41, 301 and 19. Personnel stationed in Sarasota and Venice returned to make homes, start businesses and join the postwar construction craze. They built subdivision after subdivision, dredged canals and deposited the fill on mangrove swamp areas along fragile coastal ecosystems. New communities appeared, like Gulf Gate, South Gate, Bird Key, South Venice, Venice Gardens, and the municipality of North Port. Three major technological victories contributed immensely to Florida's postwar Boom-- DDT for mosquito control, orange juice concentrate, and air conditioning.

## FENCING AND DREDGING

Not until 1949 did the State of Florida require the fencing of cattle pastures. The traditional cattle drives and open ranges quickly became a thing of the past, even as drivers rejoiced at the absence of cows on the roads. Forward-thinking cattle men and women bought acreage, putting together large ranches to insure their commercial viability.

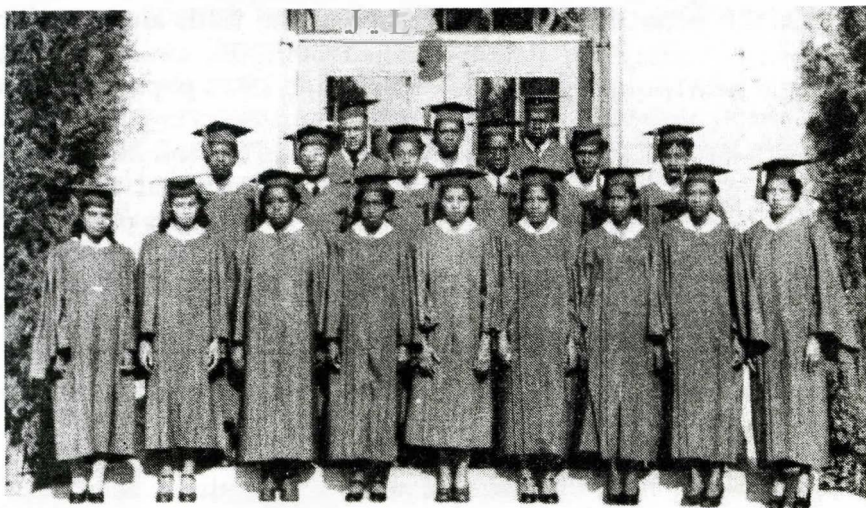
One federal construction project changed the face of Sarasota bays and barrier islands. The Intracoastal Waterway, planned from Tarpon Springs to Punta Rassa, was to guarantee navigation on an "inside" route. The shallow bays and shifting bottoms had perplexed boaters since De Soto. The West Coast Inland



Navigation District began condemning properties during the 1950s. Construction began in 1961 between Fort Myers and Tarpon Springs. Shorelines and buildable acreage changed overnight with the immense dredging of bay bottoms and depositing of spoil on low, mangrove habitats. Just east of the Trail in Venice, an inland route was dredged between Roberts and Lemon bays, creating "the island" of Venice.

## SEPARATE AND NOT EQUAL

1970 brought an integration plan to Sarasota schools which required busing black students out of the segregated black communities. They were to be integrated into the white schools



Quessie Hall Collection. Department of Historical Resources

to achieve acceptable federally established percentages (sixteen for Sarasota). Booker High, Booker Elementary and Armaryllis Park Primary schools were all to be closed, while Laurel's black students were to supply integration quotas for Venice and Nokomis. Black citizens protested the closing of the Booker schools, especially the high school that had served as a source of pride and a focus for community identity. Thus began an evolving resolution of the inequities set in 1896 by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that "separate but equal" satisfied Constitutional rights guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. Not until 1954 with *Brown v. Board of Education* had the Court reversed itself, ruling that "separate educational

facilities, by creating feelings of inferiority, are inherently unequal." School plans across the nation and throughout counties like Sarasota slowly, but surely, conformed to the law. And thirty years later, the City of Sarasota elected its first black City Commissioner.

## SARASOTA COUNTY TURNS 75 IN 1996

Sarasota County was established in 1921 when the population was 4,439. Three-fourths lived in the City of Sarasota or nearby. The next largest population (678) resided in Englewood, where four out of six lived at a timbermill camp. Venice totalled 200, a tenth living at another mill camp. Myakka (354) had almost twice the population of Venice. On the 75th anniversary, Sarasota's county population reached 300,000, and Venice at 20,000 nearly quadrupled the countywide 1921 population.

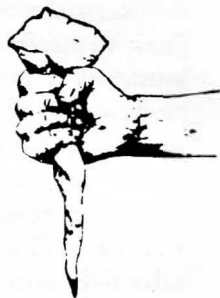
In 1949 a Floridian, Representative J. Hardin Peterson introduced the Congressional bill that established the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Seventeen years later, Congress passed the National Historic Preservation Act. It reflected concern for the wholesale loss of historic fabric in towns and cities through federal construction projects. The 1966 Act required a review of resources impacted by federal agencies (the "106 review") prior to construction. It established state historic preservation offices and the National Register of Historic Places



Art by Theodore Morris

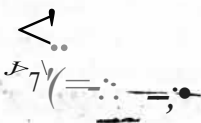
along with six historic districts and a fourth archaeological site.

Sarasota County's first three sites listed were prehistoric. Listed in 1975, 1977 and 1979, they are today's Historic Spanish Point (historic and archaeological) complex, Little Salt Springs and Warm Mineral Springs. Since 1980, a total of 52 county sites have been added,



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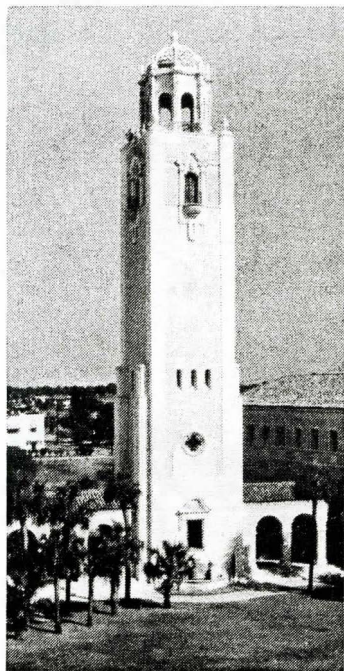
Art by Theodore Morris



Florida's historic preservation office created in 1983 a funding program to assist non-profits and government agencies with identification, planning, acquisition, restoration and education. Since 1983, twenty-six acquisition and development projects in Sarasota County received a total \$4 million. Ten projects for surveying and planning have been funded for a total of \$69,000, while four community education grants amounted to nearly \$9 thousand.

Sarasota in 1996 grows out of Sarasota of the 1920s, 1880s, 1840s and before. Throughout the history of Sarasota, each age has left behind indelible marks that can be found today. Indian mounds and middens dot the land, such as those preserved today at Historic Spanish Point. DeSoto's officially-designated landing place is today's DeSoto National Park at the Manatee River. The adoption of Hispanic place-names throughout four centuries is evident on every map. An antebellum sugar plantation house can be visited at Gamble Mansion on the Manatee River. Homesteader houses still stand, some in public sites such as Crowley Nature Center, others on back streets and ranch lands. The 1886 Town

of Sarasota remains in the inner city of today, as well as several big, square, two-story frame houses that are visible and distinctive.



Dwi\_ghlwne.s Baum Collection, Dept. of Special Collections, Syracuse University Library.

Certified local governments, such as the City of Sarasota, designate local sites through preservation boards. Venice established an historical commission. The Sarasota County Historical Commission recommended in the 1970s an historic marker program, adopted by the Board of County Commissioners, as was the ordinance creating a Department of Historical Resources.

The buildings of the 1920s Boom were constructed of permanent materials and appealing style. Many have been preserved and re-used to



the benefit of residents and tourists alike.

The Sarasota County Courthouse, the creation of architect Dwight Baum, stands next to Charles Ringling's hotel, which became the County Administration Building. The City of Sarasota boasts additional preservation success stories, including the Edwards Theater, restored as the Sarasota Opera House, Burns Court, the Orange Blossom Hotel. The home of William and Marie Selby thrives as cornerstone of the Marie Selby Botanical Gardens. The Ringling-Caples Historic District encompasses University of South Florida's Ralph and Ellen Caples Estate, Charles and Edith Ringling Estate and the Hestor Sanford house, as well as the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art and Ca' d' Zan.

The Boom created a treasure trove of Venice buildings. Venice Main Street City, designated in 1988, became the only one on Florida's Gulf coast and one of 41 statewide. Residences abound in the City plan of parks and streets; two hotels, the San Marco and Hotel Venice; and the Venice Railroad Depot.



Venice Archives and Area Historical Collection

Three historic woman's clubs survive: the Woman's Club in Englewood, the Bee Ridge Woman's Club, and the Sarasota Woman's Club, which is today's Florida Studio Theatre. A direct outgrowth of cultural history, the County supports extensive sports facilities as well as those for the performing arts and the visual arts. Sarasota's newly-restored 1930s Municipal Auditorium and Hazzard Fountain attract a continual parade of events and lawn bowlers. At Laurel, the 1915 Johnson Chapel is under restoration by the Laurel Civic Association. The centerpiece of County-owned Phillippi Estate Park is the restored 191 Os Edson Keith home.



Department of Historical Resources

Today's 24,000-acre Carlton Reserve is part of the former Ringling tract. Myakka River State Park represents much of Bertha Honore Palmer's Meadowsweet Pastures ranch. The County's newly-acquired water-retention area at Fruitville Road and I-75 represents a portion of the Palmer Farms acreage drained for cultivation in 1923. The County contemplates the Seaboard railbed to Venice as a potential rails-to-trails linear park, accessing the historic Venice Depot and beyond, within the right-of-way of the Intracoastal Waterway.



World War II airfields became Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport and the Venice Municipal Airport. The original Ringling Causeway has been replaced but the name remains. The Intracoastal Waterway and the highways and airports link Sarasota to the state and national transportation systems. We can drive to Miami in less time than the first automobile driver reached Punta Gorda or Plant City. We can safely navigate protected waters from Lemon Bay to the Manatee River.

There were losses to the historic archive as growth advanced. The Seaboard and Atlantic Coast Line stations on Sarasota's Main Street, the Gillespie home and the Lido Casino--architect Ralph Twitchell's whimsical monument to the Sarasota School of Architecture--all fell to the bulldozer.

Citizens, developers and planners still debate the influence of Sarasota's latest growth shaper--Interstate-75. In 1981 Governor Bob Graham opened the immense corridor, which not only links Sarasota directly to Canada, but which also has been regarded as a limit to growth into rural areas.

Looking over my shoulder at the changes wrought in only twenty years, it seems evident the *true* Land Boom has only begun. Pasture and grove have yielded to gated golf communities, shopping malls and megastores. The resultant urban sprawl, dependent upon the automobile and roads, bleeds vitality from historic municipal centers.

Yet, even as populations only dreamed of by its pioneers threaten Sarasota's integrity, its natural and historic resources are being fiercely guarded. Their perpetuation--as public parks and

historic treasures--depend on preserving the interest of those who, like our reader, want to know the past they share. One day, they too will look over their shoulders to marvel at Sarasota's

**Changes.**

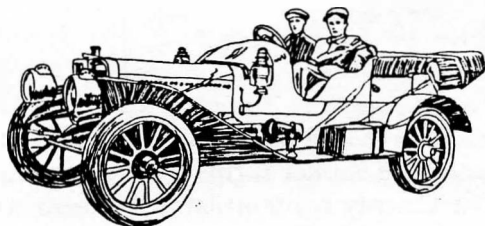


Photo of William G and Mane Selby foundation Collection Art by Theodore M Jrns



Florida Pilotographic Collection

*Not until 1928 did little flags flutter before the fenders of an official parade led by Governor Martin down the finally completed Tamiami Trail.*

**Thanks for generous editorial assistance to Allan Horton, Ann Shank, Maryan Matthews, and Marion Almy.**



# a Sarasota County

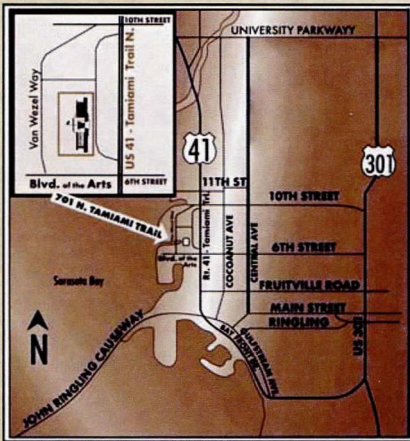
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The Sarasota County History Center published *Sarasota Over My Shoulder* 10 years ago to commemorate the 75th anniversary of Sarasota County. While much has changed since Janet Snyder Matthews wrote her concise and highly readable historical tribute, Sarasota County continues to offer a rich heritage and sense of community.

I hope you'll enjoy this publication as part of Sarasota County's effort to share its past with new generations of residents.

David R. Mills

2006 Chair  
Sarasota County Commission



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Monday - Thursday  
10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Saturday  
9 a.m. to 1 p.m.