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*Starting with the Calusas and ending with familiar people, locations, and organizations this historical perspective of Fort Myers Beach provides interesting reading. Photographs which are included in the book have not been reproduced but there location is noted. This book has been reproduced with permission.*

**A Short History  
of  
FORT MYERS BEACH**

**Estero and San Carlos Islands  
Florida**

**by  
Barrett & M. Adelaide Brown  
1965**

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**DEDICATION**

**DEDICATED TO THE EARLY  
SETTLERS WHO WENT THROUGH  
MANY HARDSHIPS TO MAKE THIS**

A PLEASANT PLACE IN WHICH  
TO LIVE.

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## Foreword

History should be written as it is made but it seldom is. So far as we know, no attempt has been made, heretofore, to record the happenings of FORT MYERS BEACH and its vicinity. Much of the earliest history has been lost completely, and much we think we "know" is, in reality, mere legend.

It is too much to hope that the STORY OF FORT MYERS BEACH will be entirely accurate. Memories are faulty, and oft times "authorities" disagree with each other. But before more of the old records are lost, and our pioneers are beyond questioning, we have made an attempt to gather what facts we could and, interweaving them with local lore, put them into print.

Estero Island and its sister island, San Carlos, make up the community of Fort Myers Beach. It is a tiny bit of an Island, seven miles long and in no place as much as a mile wide. From the north-west point to the south-east tip, a gleaming white sand beach fronts the Gulf of Mexico.

Shrieking gulls and terns ride the winds, sandpipers twinkle-toe after the receding wavelets seeking tiny bits of luscious sea foods; stately herons, roseate spoonbills and a dozen other shore and water birds abound in the mangroves of Estero Bay. Porpoises rise and dip and roll as they play off-shore. The mighty tarpon whips the water and flashes his silver sides as he rolls and tumbles until the very ocean "boils." On the ocean floor are sand dollars, star fish and prickly sea urchins. Palms, the trade-mark of the tropics, bougainvilleas, flaming royal poincianas, hibiscus and alamandas keep the island in bloom the year around. Sea grapes hang in great clusters among huge golden-green leaves, and the tree (or sea) hibiscus glows with blossoms opening in the early morning, changing during the day from golden yellow to orange, then to russet and red until late in the evening they drop their now maroon flowers ready to start another golden day tomorrow.

A quiet town of friendly citizens, artists, fishermen and winter residents, with a healthy quota of welcome tourists, make up the island population.

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## Earliest Days

Prior to the coming of the white man the southern tip of Florida was the hunting and fishing ground of the Caloosa Indians. Nothing is known of the origin of the Caloosas, but some authorities accept the theory that they came indirectly from Mexico and Central America, having been driven from their own land by the Aztec invasion.

That the Caloosas inhabited many of the Florida west coast islands is evidenced by the shell mounds left by them. These mounds are the kitchen middens or perhaps the ceremonial grounds of the natives whose main source of food was the sea. Conch, clam, scallop and oyster shells left from thousands and

thousands of seafood dinners rise high.

Of the three such mounds originally on Estero Island, only one remains today. This one on the Bay at the end of Connecticut Street, known, naturally enough, as "The Shell Mound," is the highest point on the Island. Little remains of one left on the Bay near Egret Street, as most of it was hauled away to make the first roads in the McPhie Park subdivision. The third one, farther down the Bay, almost opposite the Caribbean Motel, was used as foundation material for Estero Boulevard from Flamingo Street to the south end of the Island.

Several shell mounds still exist on Dog Key and on Mound Key. The latter key, now part of the Koreshan State Park, has the largest ones in this area.

No real exploration of the Gulf coast was made for many years after America was discovered, although a few Spanish vessels had been wrecked along the shores after being blown off course from Cuba and South America by storms and hurricanes. Survivors often were made captive by the Indians, and one of these, taken prisoner in 1545, later wrote the history of his seventeen years spent with the Caloosas. Although the exact spot of his captivity is not known, there is no doubt that much of the time was spent in this vicinity. The memoirs of this man, HERNANDO FONTANEDA, are considered one of the best accounts of the early days in this region.

As far as is known, JUAN PONCE de LEON and his men were the first to see Florida, and they gave it its name. They landed near St. Augustine on the east coast on April 2, 1513. On May 24, 1513, they made a landing on the west coast not far from here, perhaps at Punta Razza, where Ponce de Leon careened his ship to clean the bottom before returning to Puerto Rico. Eight years elapsed before he came to Florida again. Although it is not known just where he made his landing in 1521, still in search of the Fountain of Youth, it is believed to have been somewhere between Venice and Punta Rassa.

The Caloosas, fed up with Spaniards, bitterly resisted the landing and in the battle which followed, DeLeon was struck by an arrow and badly wounded. The Spaniards took to their ship and sailed for Cuba where their leader died.

Next to come into the area was DE NARVAEZ in 1528. Then came HERNANDO DE SOTO in 1539, both seeking gold. There is no accurate account of where these Spaniards landed, but since no gold was found, neither stayed long.

In 1566 a Spaniard named MENENDEZ arrived in these waters and immediately locked horns with CARLOS, the Chief of the Caloosas. Before the year was up, the newcomers treacherously killed Carlos and twenty of his leading men. It was from the Indian Chief in this event that we get the name Carlos, for which are named Carlos Bay, Carlos Pass. San Carlos Island, and others. Matanzas Pass undoubtedly derives its name from the Spanish word meaning "slaughter," commemorating the murder of Chief Carlos and his followers near this point.

These events happened some 400 years ago and accounts of that time were vague and badly kept, so it would hardly be right to say they happened on this island, but they did occur in this neighborhood and do fit in with our early history.

For many years it was thought that DeSoto landed somewhere around the Tampa Bay area, but recent translations of old Spanish and Portuguese manuscripts by Rolfe Schell, lead him to conclude that Estero Island or the immediate vicinity could well have been the location of the landing rather than further north.

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## Homesteaders and Settlers

"This land is free..." so the rumor ran. "Come to Florida, come to Estero Island. Live on this land five years; clear it; farm it; improve it---and it is yours."

As far as is known, the Sam Ellis family was the first white family to stay on Estero Island. Mr. and Mrs. Ellis and her son George Underhill lived on the Shell Mound on the Bay at Connecticut for several years during the middle seventies. However, instead of settling here, they went to Sanibel where they homesteaded a tract of land at the head of Tarpon Bay. This first George was the father of George Underhill who returned to the Beach as a young man and has lived and reared his family here. At the time the Ellises lived on Connecticut, there was one family each on Estero Island, Black Island, Mound Key and Dog Key.

The names of many old timers are remembered as "Homesteaders" but for one reason or another most of them failed to "prore up" on the land. Some became discouraged and left, some sold out their rights to the claim and several were "discouraged" when their property and buildings were repeatedly damaged or destroyed under mysterious circumstances. The United States Department of the Interior has provided the author with photostatic copies of the patents of those who actually acquired land on Estero Island through Homesteading.

The first homestead in the area was that of Frank M. Johnson and included all of Mound Key. The patent was issued by President Benjamin Harrison in November 1891. The first to file for homestead rights on Estero Island was Robert B. Gilbert who was granted his patent in May of 1898 during the presidency of William McKinley. The grant comprised 172 acres starting at a point near Bay Street and, on the Gulfside, ran to a point near Bayland Road. The area took in some very choice property in the central part of the Island and included "Shell Mound" which was the Gilbert homesite.

Dr. James M. Bratt of New York state filed for the second homestead, but before he proved his claim he died, and in August of 1899, patent for the land, about 150 acres, was granted to Ambrose M. McGregor for whom McGregor Boulevard was named. On this piece of land, Dr. Bratt attempted to raise tomatoes. He had prospects of a wonderful first crop but the night before harvesting was to begin a hard freeze ruined the field. Only a few bushels were salvaged and this ended commercial farming on Estero Island. In 1899 a freeze hit Florida which sent the thermometer down to two below zero at Tallahassee, killing the tender trees which previous freezes had missed. It was so cold in south Florida during the 1899 freeze that thousands of chilled migratory birds fell out of the sky and froze to death on the ground. This area, at present the most populated of any on the Island, extended from Crescent Street to a point just east of Tropical Shores Road and later became the T.P. Hill Subdivision.

The only homesteader whose name is still in use on the Island was granted the third patent. In November 1899, Hugh McPhie, a Scotsman proved up on an irregular shaped piece of land, about 112 acres, bounded roughly by Flamingo Street and Fairview Isles. The old McPhie homesite was situated on a beautiful coconut grove just south of Rancho DelMar. The old house and its flowing well remained until it was destroyed by the storm of 1947. The lovely site remained a favorite picnic spot for many years before it was closed off because of misuse by the public.

It was not until June 1906, that George R. McAuley was issued a patent on seventy-two acres just south and east of Dr. Bratt's, starting near Tropical Shores, it ran almost to the Beach fire station where it joined the Gilbert homestead. On this tract stand our school and public library. Theodore Roosevelt was

president when this patent was granted.

A year later, June 1907, Hugh McPhie proved up his second claim. Later this was made into a sub-division and called McPhie Park. The tract ran from the Gulf near Aberdeen Street to Avenida Pescadora, thence to the end of Seminole Way and back to the Gulf on Gulf Drive. Located in this section was our early school house, later converted into what is now our Community House. The patent for this sixty-five acre piece was the first issued by the government in which blank spaces for names and dates were filled in by typewriter. Patents prior to this one were filled in by hand writing.

Unclaimed by other homesteaders was a triangular piece of land with a wide stretch of gulffront starting about Aberdeen Street and running north to a point near the Commodore Hotel. This was proved up by Albert A. Austin in 1914 under President Woodrow Wilson. Dakota Street was about the center of the tract comprising a little over twenty-four acres. Leroy P. Lamoreaux, the last of the homesteaders, commented. "Al was an Indiana glassblower who came down here to join the Koreshan Unity, and judging by some of the things he told me, I think getting away from his wife was an incentive." Lamoreaux's brother later bought this claim from Austin.

Lamoreaux came to the Koreshans at Estero as a lad of fourteen in 1894. He filed claim to about 65 acres between the two McPhie tracts and proved it up in 1913. The Catholic Church of The Ascension is located on this land which was sold to them by Lamoreaux.

Hugh McPhie probably realized more from his properties than any of the others for, with the exception of Lamoreaux, he held onto them longer. It is said that during the boom of the 1920's he was offered half a million for his holdings but he turned it down. Late in life, when he subdivided McPhie Park, a good many lots were sold at a moderate price, and a few years before he died he sold some forty lots in the Park and nearly all his original homestead for forty thousand dollars.

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## Early Subdivisions

The first subdivision on the Island was platted in 1911 by H. C. Case. It extended along the Beach about three quarters of a mile each way from Connecticut Avenue and was part of the Robert Gilbert homestead. On this plat, Estero Boulevard is shown as Eucallptus Avenue and on later plats as Eucalyptus. Perhaps the first surveyor was not a very good speller. This tract was re-subdivided in 1913. A fifty-foot road shown along the beach in front of the lots in the subdivision apparently was not developed at that time. Beach erosion has made it impossible to do so now.

It was not until 1916 that another subdivision was put on the market when T. P. Hill subdivided a large tract starting at Crescent Street, running south-east and ending just south of the present Gulf Echo Motel. Beachside lots were of normal size but those on the north side were extra large and ran to the Bay; many were "approximately nine acres or ten acres." Brush and palmettoes were so thick that no attempt was made at an accurate survey. In those days no engineer was about to tramp through the mangroves for the sake of an acre or two of "cheap" land.

After Hill subdivided, it was some three years before more lots were put on the market. E. E. Damkohler and C. S. Fickland established Seagrape Subdivision on Mango and Avocado Streets in 1919. Avocado was renamed Chapel Street in 1952.

In 1921 Tom Phillips put Eucalyptus Park, part of the original Case subdivision, on the market. With the exception of those along the highway, the plat consisted of twenty-foot lots. No one seems to know why

such narrow plots were designed except to be able to advertise a "lot" at a very low price--the same gimmick is still being used in this county. In April of 1921, Crescent Park Addition, bounded by Crescent Street and Primo Drive, also was platted by Tom Phillips. Here the First Canal, back of Crescent Street, was built by Phillips in 1924. In 1934 a large number of canal lots, each twenty-five feet wide, were sold for \$35 apiece.

In 1924 Donald Foley put in Highland Park and specified that no house should be built there for less than \$4000. He was too optimistic, for it was over thirty years before ANY house was built. Hercules Park was put on the market this same year but there is no record of the owner's name on the original subdivision plat--perhaps he wanted to remain anonymous.

The following year, 1925, was the year of the big boom and anything having a Florida tag on it could be sold whether the buyer saw it or not. It mattered not whether it was on top of the water or underneath. The old plat books still show a subdivision on an island across the Bay from the present water tower, which is under water at every spring tide and is completely covered with mangroves, yet some one paid big money, sight unseen, for these lots which were shown only on some "developer's" map.

In January of this year, W. W. Watson put his Watson's Subdivision (Delmar Road) on the market. Although he did not dignify the street with a name at that time and his lots were only twenty-five feet wide and eighty feet deep, he did put in a forty-foot road and provided a place at the Bay for a turn-around. This was more than the developer did on Miramar in May of the same year. He left only eighteen feet for a roadway and utilities, and there was no way to turn at the Bay. In those days no one cared whether you could get out if they could just get you in. Have times changed much?

In June, Gulf Heights, a long way down the Island, with the beach itself providing the only road, was established by "The Hendry Brothers." Four months later the Fort Myers Beach Development Company, whose members we could not ascertain, opened Venetian Gardens and named, not only their roads, but also their canals. On the plat the road is named Parlemo. Now it is known as Palermo and the question of which is right remains unsolved. The two canals, locally known as the Second and the Third canals, were called the Canal Grande for the shorter one and the Rio Del Lido for the longer. Grandiose, indeed.

It was in October of that year that a Mr. Spalding, whose first name has been lost to history, locally at least, established Gulf View Plaza with Coconut as his street. He must have taken his cue from the Mirimar plat, for he, too, failed to make provision for a way to turn around at the Bay.

The arch at the north end of the swing bridge was built by Tom Phillips when he promoted much of San Carlos Island as a subdivision in 1924. This was before the road now in use was built and cars still came down the Bunche Beach road and then along the beach. A wooden bridge with a fifty cent toll ran from the San Carlos Marina site to about where Snug Harbor is today, to take travelers on to Estero Island if they wished to go. This bridge went out in a hurricane and later the present swing bridge, almost at the same location, replaced it.

Sam Headly, who has lived at the Beach for many years had at that time a fleet of Model-T taxis which brought hundreds of land seekers down from Fort Myers for the weekly fish fries and to view the Phillips subdivision. A million dollar hotel was started on San Carlos Drive on the bay. The old foundations are still there but the hotel was never completed.

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A photograph of the arch built at the north end of the swing bridge appears at this point in the book (p.13).

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Things went along in fine shape during 1925 and early '26. Then, all at once, the customers were gone. The easy money had been spent and almost before anyone had a chance to comprehend what was happening, the thirties were on them., and for the next few years property moved with extreme sluggishness.

Only three additions were established in the next ten years. Winkler's First, in February 1930 started at Bay Street and ran west to the Gulf Echo Motel. (The present Beach School and our Public Library are on part of this ground.) Winkler's Second addition, subdivided in April of 1935, was just east of the first plot.

Things were beginning to move again when, in 1936, Hugh McPhie came along with McPhie Park, a part of the land he had homesteaded from the government years previously. In 1937 and 1940 he added to the subdivision.

Jack and Esther Power layed out Gulf Island Manor in 1941 and gave their lot owners more for their money than anyone else had ever done. They provided a lovely little park on the Bay, and on the Beach they kept an area for the use of the residents of their subdivision with an access road from the Manor. A sun shelter was built and maintenance for the little park provided. The Manor was the first in which the developer put in water and paved roads.

Gulf-Bay View was established in 1941 also, and the subdivision with its two streets (Ohio and Virginia), with the canal between, became one of our lovelier districts.

During the Second World War years, and for some time afterwards, the real estate business was in the doldrums, but with the war over, many of the young fellows who had spent the time at Buckingham and Page Fields began to remember what an unspoiled tropical country this was. They came back bringing their families and friends; others, like the authors, had found the place by accident and felt immediately, "this is it." By the early fifties, the area had "caught on" and we were beginning to burst at the seams.

Until 1951, when Howard Garl built the drug store, the whole north-west part of the Island from San Carlos Boulevard to Estero Pass at the tip, was owned by the Collier Interests and on it was the old lighthouse and the quarantine reservations, land set aside for governmental facilities in case the Island ever developed into a commercial port. What a shame all of this was not retained as a public park!

Island Shores at the north end of the island was platted in 1950, and Laguna Shores at the other end in 1951. Holiday Shores was also a 1951 addition. Sandpiper Village followed in '52 and Holiday Heights and Flamingo Park in 1953. Others, large and small followed in rapid succession. Most of them, of course, are resubdivisions of earlier ones. Some caught the public fancy and built up rapidly while others did not and it is hard to put a finger on the reason why.

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An aerial photograph of the north end of Estero Island appears at this point in the book (p.15).

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## Roads and Bridges



Originally San Carlos Island was part of the mainland but in an early day an attempt was made to drain an inland pond and a trench was cut from the pond to the Bay. Erosion and storms enlarged the trench through the Nigger Hole and a hurricane finished the job making it necessary to build a bridge--the bridge locally called the "Little Bridge" which connects San Carlos Island to the mainland.

The first road from Fort Myers to the Beach was devious. Travelers came out McGregor Boulevard from the city, continuing toward Punta Rassa to the road which leads to the present Bunche Beach. From that point one traveled along the shore line, across the Nigger Hole, over a small wooden bridge, and on to Matanzas Pass with the road coming in near the location of the present swing bridge.

The old road was replaced by the present route in 1926 and 1927, and the following year the concrete "swing bridge" was installed. This bridge, which was moved from an east coast location, was sufficient for the time being but has been a source of irritation for at least fifteen years.

The only concrete road at Fort Myers Beach was built at that time. This bit of paving, starting just north of the Arch and running to the county pier, is now thirty-five years old and in just as good condition as when first constructed. It makes one pause and wonder if the "economy" of constructing our usual black-top roads is far outweighed by the expense of repairing and rebuilding them.

Prior to the coming of the shrimp fleet the turn bridge was hand operated, one man opening it by a sweep in the center--a hard, slow process. With the influx of boats, necessitating opening the bridge a dozen times a day, the procedure was too laborious so two men were put on the sweep. In 1950 the bridge was reconstructed to open and close by electricity. Unsuitable for this kind of machinery, the worn cogs and other works of the bridge (a "second hand" bridge in the first place,) now old and temperamental, began to be a source of concern. What if the bridge failed to open during a storm period, a fire or a medical emergency? Agitation for a new bridge with adequate machinery and power became second only to the weather as a subject of conversation. "A new bridge for safety sake" became the slogan of the day.

Meetings of citizens with officials brought proposals and counter proposals. As early as 1960 these conferences were being held. Finally, feeling they were getting no where with county or state officials, the local committee said, "Give us a bridge, any bridge anywhere, but get us a second bridge!"

The County Commission finally decided that a bridge and causeway running from the south end of Estero Island to Bonita Beach was feasible, and the state made a survey and established the proposed roadway. This layout did not please some land owners so an alternate route was selected by surveyor Carl Johnson of Fort Myers. This was adopted by the county and Johnson became known as "the father" of the project. The Causeway and Bridges were begun in mid-July, 1963, and opened to the public on July 4, 1965. Traversing the four miles of water and island, this is sure to be a silver link in the chain of bridges which will some day connect all of the Gulf islands of the south west Florida coast.

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A early photograph of what is now Estero Boulevard appears at this point in the book (p.17).

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## Wells and Water

The earliest settlers used rain water for drinking as well as for washing, and probably were not upset about the few "wiggles" usually found in this source of supply. Later several shallow wells were put

down, most of which could be located from a "fur piece" away by the odor--the so-called sulphur smell really being gas from the millions of tiny critters lying for years in the layers of sand and rock.

The first of the wells that supplied more than one house was built by Harry Laycock not long after the Case Subdivision was started in 1911. It stood southeast of the present telephone building and had a small elevated tank which was filled by a windmill-powered pump. Eventually it furnished some twenty-five houses with water.

Hugh McPhie had a fine flowing well on his property in the Coconut Grove, and a good one was located next to the Gulf Shore Inn. Pipelines from this well supplied water to areas as far away as homes in Venetian Gardens and Palermo Circle. Other wells around the island were developed as the town built up.

Simmons Richardson, father of Mrs. Gene Washburn, was the first to recognize the fact that a growing community needs a satisfactory water system. He bought out the Laycock system in 1922, as well as several of the other small ones, hooked some together, put down new and better wells, erected three or four larger tanks on towers, and provided the island with very satisfactory service.

After the death of Mr. Richardson in 1950 the system was operated by the family for a couple of years, then a new company formed by Gene Washburn, John Waltman and George Allen took over. In 1953 they developed an entirely new system with new wells, an efficient treatment plant and new pipelines and tower.

This in turn was sold in 1965 to Florida Cities Water Company which also bought the small system which supplied the Laguna Shores Area.

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## The Hurricanes

Fort Myers Beach and Lee County have had their share of bad storms. Probably the one causing the greatest loss of life around here was September 18, 1926 -- the storm that took so many lives at Moore Haven and other parts around Lake Okeechobee. A Cuban fishing boat, wrecked off Estero Island, lost six men, only the captain and a young boy were saved. Two women were drowned by high waves at Punta Rassa. In news stories of that date, little mention was made of the Beach but since there was a great deal of damage all over the County, there was no doubt plenty here.

Prior to this, in 1910, a bad storm raked the southwest Florida coast and created havoc from Key West north. Few people today remember that hurricane but George Underhill of the Beach, relates that one of his earliest recollections was of his father nailing boards over the windows even as the water was coming in all around the building.

In 1944 and in 1947 bad blows struck here putting water over the islands, tearing out docks and piers, setting houses askew and doing a great deal of damaging to trees and shrubs. Many Australian pines were blown down all over the county by both these storms. These shallow rooted trees topple so easily and are so dangerous in high winds that many cities have passed an ordinance against planting them.

In 1960, Hurricane Donna hit the Beach with winds estimated at 140 miles an hour. Many houses, built in the 50's by northern residents or builders who did not realize what a hurricane can do, took a bad beating. Donna was probably one of the worst, dollar wise, that Florida has ever seen.

People who have never been through a hurricane sometimes express the desire to ride one out -- to see what it's like. Don't do it! It would scare the hell out of you and you would stand a good chance of getting in b-a-a-d trouble.

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## Livelihoods

**FISHING:** Commercial fishing was the major inducement for the first settlers coming here, the chief crop being mullet. However, Gulf and Bay waters teemed with trout, reds, grouper, snook and a multitude of others. Snook, incidentally, was not considered an edible fish until the last few years. "Old timers" still pass it up in favor of almost any other.

In the Bay at the south end of the Island near Big Carlos Pass, piling on which houses had been built can still be seen. Fishermen lived in these and in one near Black Island. Children from these homes attended school on Mound Key where at that time thrived a settlement of sixty or seventy people. Supplies were brought in and fish and vegetables taken off by "run boats" from the Punta Gorda Fish Company which had collection points all throughout this part of the west coast.

Black Island was the home of fishermen, also, and as a young man, the popular fishing guide, Buck Fernandez, and his brother lived there for a number of years. One of their houses was burned out by a competitor and another was swept away in a storm after which the brothers moved to safer ground.

The discovery of "pink gold" in the nearby Dry Tortugas in 1950 brought a great influx of fishing boats, people, and industry. Due to its accessibility by land and water, Fort Myers Beach became one of the largest shrimp ports in the world--perhaps the largest. After the beds at Tortugas became "fished out" and less profitable, the boats branched out to fish the Campeche area, and while many of the craft are away for weeks or even months at a time, some 300 trawlers make this home port and bring in over three and a half million pounds of shrimp each year.

A few years ago a rough but productive shrimp bed was discovered lying just off shore in the Gulf not far from the South end of Sanibel. Much of the fine shrimp eaten locally are taken from these beds and at night the lights of the trawlers may be seen bobbing about in the Gulf.

Many of the young-adults of today earned their first spending money building shipping boxes, icing, weighing, shucking or packing shrimp. Once two plants were on Estero Island; the Columbia Fish House, south of the bridge, was destroyed by fire and Hurricane Donna took McDowell Packing House in 1960. Due to zoning restrictions, neither could be rebuilt.

The tiny clam known as the Coquina is our most common shellfish, and from it sprang one of the Island's few pre-war industries. A Coquina broth factory was established by Luke Gates in a building at Connecticut and Estero originally erected as a service building for a proposed casino which did not materialize. Workers gathered the little shells on the beach, took them to the factory where they were processed and the broth canned. When World War II erupted and the packers were unable to obtain cans, the project was discontinued and never resumed. People who remember the delicate oyster-like broth say it was a fine product, and Gates, the owner, claims it was the best thing ever invented for a pick-me-up after a rough night.

Sports fishing has been one of the primary attractions for tourists with shelling on the beach and

swimming close seconds. The snook in Estero Bay are as big and sassy as you can find anywhere. Sporty reds, trout, ladyfish and jacks are 'most any place you want to wet a hook. In the Gulf, mackerel abound. Kingfish, bonito, grouper and tarpon are here in season. The canny local fisherman knows where to go for precious pompano. At any time of the year some kind of fish are here for the catching.

Local marinas have boats and motors for rent and sale. Headboats carrying up to fifty people are available for a day's fishing on the Gulf at reasonable prices. Charter boats are more expensive, though the cost is not prohibitive, and the fisherman may return with a better catch. We believe that our Estero Bay, with its maze of islands and water, is the most beautiful part of Florida.

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## Sawmill

**THE SAWMILL:** About the year 1894, the Koreshan Unity established a saw mill on the south end of Estero Island near the spot where the restaurant and marina now stand, and where the Bonita causeway takes off. Logs were brought to the mill from the island as well as from the wooded areas around the Bay. The lumber produced was used by the Koreshans for their early buildings and some was sold to the early settlers. A short distance northeast of the sawmill was a boat yard and marine ways where boats of all kinds, used by the Koreshans and other fishermen of the time, were built. A number of houses and ways for the use of the workmen and their families were erected near the mill and it was here that mail was first delivered to Fort Myers Beach. It was brought in by schooner from Punta Gorda, which was the end of the railroad at that time. Fort Myers did not get the railroad until 1904.

There is some discrepancy in the recollections of two of the old timers as to who was the first postmaster at the Beach. Allen Andrews in his book, "A Yankee Pioneer in Florida" says that he was the postmaster. Leroy Lamoreaux mentions in his reminiscences that the first postmistress "whose name I cannot recall, married the first mail carrier to bring the mail from Fort Myers to the mill by boat." Both Andrews and Lamoreaux came from Chicago to join the Koreshan Unity about the same time.

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A photograph of birds on the tidal flats appears at this point in the book (p.22).

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## Tourism

Tourists were slow to discover the Beach--it was the end of the road, no bright lights and not many places to stay. However, when we first arrived, quite by accident in 1943, there were four hotels, the Gulf Shore Inn, Beach Hotel, The Pelican and the Commodore. These are still in operation and have expanded and refurbished keeping up with all modern comforts yet retaining their original informal charm.

There were no motels but several cottage courts flourished. Doc Wilson's San Carlos Lodge (now Adenours) was on San Carlos Island while Silver Sands, Side O'Sea and the Beachcomber were on

Estero. There may have been another one or two but not many.

Incidentally, accommodations owners were caught in the rent freeze of 1942 and summer rates were in effect all year around. Although this was a hardship during the winter months, it was offset somewhat by the fact that there were no vacancies in the off season. With the military installations nearby, priority was given to service personnel and their families and travelers were very fortunate if they could find a place to stay in housekeeping units.

In those war years people owning trailers were unable to get gas enough to come this far south so the hotels and courts took care of the few visitors who came. The people who did find our islands were so charmed by the place that they returned and brought friends and relatives with them.

Many of these decided to stay and make their homes here. This has made for a slow but steady growth both in homes and accommodations. Now our Islands have hotels,, motels, cottage courts and rental cottages, ranging from the picturesque to the lavish, which can take care of some three thousand visitors. Mid-winter finds us "bustin' at the seams" and every year more people are discovering that, with our almost total airconditioning, Florida summer vacations can be very pleasant, too.

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## Early Buildings

It is difficult to pin point the location of early buildings for comparative newcomers because landmarks keep changing. Old timers still talk about "Nettie's Place," the "old barber shop," and Denman's store, all of which have been gone for a number of years.

Nettie's was the first restaurant on the Beach and it stood directly on the Gulf at about the end of Palermo Drive. Shellers, bathers and beachcombers in general stopped barefooted and bathing-suited for a bit of Italian food and a cold beer at Nettie's. The site of the building was on a tract of land owned by the "five Pavese brothers" each of whom had a small cottage in a cluster of buildings. Rocco Pavese operated a barber shop in Fort Myers but each Sunday he came down to the Beach and, in a tiny wooden structure, cut hair for the early residents who, even then, believed in the slogan, "save a trip to town." This shop and a similar one next to it served as the starting point for several businesses, one of which originally housed Harriet's Treasure Chest. When the Hurricane of 1947 damaged Nettie's Place, and the small tropical storm of '52 demolished it, Nettie's daughter Rose and her husband Eddie Pacelli built the Surf Club on the same property, but they erected it safely on the Boulevard.

At First and Crescent Streets Frank Green, father of Charlie and Dave, built a small grocery store. The 1926 hurricane put Frank out of merchandising but the store was rebuilt by the Denmans who operated it for many years. Because of age and ill health, the Denmans gave up the store and sold it, along with the adjoining properties, to D.W. Ireland who erected the modern grocery store near the old store site, and put up the gas station on the corner. Now a very modern motel also graces the plot.

Another of the older structures is the Pelican Building. C. L. Yent, in '33, built a wooden store on the site and operated a small grocery for a few years. Yent traded the property to Harry Steel in 1938, and Steel built the present stone building and installed a very up-to-date grocery and market. Subsequently it has housed a photo shop and a bakery as well as serving as post office for several years. The Cotton Shop now occupies the building.

In the trade for the store, Yent was given Pearl Street (both sides from Boulevard to Bay), and the wood from the old building. From this developed the earliest cottages of the Beachcomber Court.

The first hotel on the Island was built in 1912 by Dr. and Mrs. William Winkler and was called the Winkler Hotel until it was sold to H. A. (Bert) Waite in 1930 and the name changed to The Beach Hotel. Dr. Winkler realized long before most people that the warmth and the salt air was definitely curative, so his original idea was to promote a health resort on his seventy-one acre tract which reached from Gulf to Bay. Later this acreage was subdivided into the Winkler Addition.

As there was neither road nor bridge to the Beach at the time, all materials for the hotel came in by boat and barge. In fact, most of the supplies for the whole Island were delivered by a Koreshan boat which made regular trips from Fort Myers to Estero. The Hotel guests were brought in from Punta Rassa by boat by Joe Williams who maintained this service for the Doctor. At the time the Hotel was constructed, very few people lived on the Island--Hugh McPhie, the Sanders family at the boat yard, and the H. C. Case family on Shell Mound, perhaps were all.

One of the oldest buildings on the Beach is the Pelican Hotel which was originally a honeymoon houseboat owned by Mrs. Anna Turner. "Ma" Turner moved the boat on to the land at the present site in 1933 and since then, many additions and improvements have been made. Mrs. Gene Bartholomew bought it from Mrs. Turner and operated it until the summer of 1955 at which time Don Zimmer and Garrett Reasoner purchased the building and "Attic" and Esther Reasoner assumed management.

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## Beach School

The first Beach school was started in 1937 when a group of mothers, feeling the need of more formal schooling than the hit and miss instruction their offspring were getting, set about to obtain some kind of a school. After searching for suitable facilities, examining the financial need and the sources of potential help, these women learned that the County School Board would pay a teacher and furnish her with a desk--the rest they must do on their own. And they did!

Free-will offerings were taken to pay the rent on a building, the Mayhew Page cottage on the Gulf side of Estero Boulevard on what is now Cottage Street, a block south of the Chapel by the Sea. Miss Lois Alexander (now Mrs. James Congdon) was hired as the teacher for \$80 a month, and eleven first grade children, five second graders and seven third graders enrolled.

The mothers of the pupils saw to it that the children got to school on time and regularly, that they had hot lunches on cold days and that there was not too much monkey business. They had worked too hard for the school to allow for much beyond an education.

Within the year, the student body had outgrown the cottage and parents went out and raised money for a new school. Two and one half acres of land were given by a Mr. Pence, Fort Myers people donated much material, and labor was provided by the W.P.A. The County School Board contributed the furnishings but the mothers painted the building and bought a piano. Miss Ardys Klenzing was hired as a second teacher.

In 1942 Mrs. Alvin Bassett, who is "Mrs. Beach Public School," came as a teacher, and Mrs. Rodger Shawcross was added to the staff. Later Mrs. Bassett was assigned to other schools in the county but in 1955 she returned here as principal where she remained until her retirement in 1964.

In 1949, when the present school was built, the School Board gave the original building to become a community hall. The Fort Myers Beach

Woman's Club assumed the upkeep and administration of the hall. In 1963 the Board sold the two and a half acres donated by Mr. Pence, to the Beach Woman's Club and the Mosquito Control Board for \$12,000. Not a bad land deal!

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Photographs of the Winkler Hotel and the lush vegetation on the Island bridge appear at this point in the book (p.27).

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## **The Churches**

As early as 1932 religious gatherings were held in a pavilion on the Beach known as "Red Coconut," and later in various homes and the school house.

### **Chapel By The Sea**

In April 1936 Dr. William G. Kennedy, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Fort Myers, succeeded in having the religious work on the Beach made a missionary project of the Presbyterian Church. At that time a lot was donated by Miss Ella Neems and another by Ulrich Eberhardt along with a generous donation toward a building. Through these and other substantial gifts by business firms and individuals, the Chapel was built, and the first service was held on Palm Sunday, April 10, 1938. Two years later an addition was made which included two class rooms, a kitchen and a pastor's study. The Rev. Mr. Linn, who fathered the church from the beginning, remained pastor until 1940. In December of 1940 a manse was completed and the Rev. D. Jenkins Williams became the first resident minister, serving the church until May, 1941.

Until the time the Episcopal Church was organized, the Chapel by the Sea was the only church on the Beach and many residents of various denominations cooperated with the Presbyterians by attending services and giving financial support. This led many people who were not versed in the early history of the church to form an erroneous opinion that the church was organized as a community church. As other churches began to take their places in the community it was felt that the time had come to exercise more Presbyterian direction.

After Rev. Williams' retirement, the Rev. William Hunter, who had occupied the pulpit during the summer of 1940 as a student in Princeton Theological Seminary, was ordained and took up his pastorate at the Beach. It was during Rev. Hunter's ministry that the original pews, the gift of Mr. and Mrs. Fred S. Fletcher, were dedicated on Palm Sunday, 1942, and two additional lots adjoining the manse were given by Mr. and Mrs. Ulrich Eberhardt. After Rev. Hunter's resignation in May 1944, the church was served for several years by a number of able ministers.

The Rev. T. J. Simpson of Hammond, Indiana, was installed as pastor in December, 1948. He was an outstanding organizer who in his five years here, put the church on a strong financial basis, and in 1950 an addition, consisting of an assembly hall, a ladies' parlor, a pastor's study, a kitchen and storage rooms, was built.

In January, 1955, after acting as Stated Supply Minister for a year, Dr. George Bauer became regular pastor. Much beloved by the congregation, he was, upon his retirement, elected Pastor Emeritus of the Church. Rev. C. Melvin Elliott replaced Dr. Bauer and it was deeply regretted when he accepted a call to Largo in 1963.

Dr. John Williams and his wife Delia came to the church that fall. After living in the old manse for a few months, they moved into the new one just completed on Tropical Shores, the newest addition to the church property.

### **St. Raphael's Church**

During Lent in 1949 Father Richard Brown came from Fort Myers and conducted services and evening prayer in the community hall. This was the first Episcopal services to be held at Fort Myers Beach. He conducted the same services again in 1950 and 1951. In March '51, Father Brown suggested that a mission could be started here and expressed his willingness to petition the Bishop. By March 11, 1951, twenty hopeful parishioners had signed the petition and selected the name, St. Raphael. Upon presentation of the petition, Bishop Loutitt of the South Florida Diocese gave permission to form an unorganized mission which, if successful, would be recognized as an organized mission at the end of a year. The first Senior Warden was Cyril Shawcross; Junior Warden, Frank M. Hitner; Secretary-Treasurer, Rodger Shawcross; and Board Members Cyril Harby, James A. Gwin and Kimball Davison.

Father Brown continued conducting evening prayers until December 1951, at which time the arrival of the first Vicar, Father R. P. Closson, and regular services began. The community hall and later the Estero Manufacturing building were used until the church was built. Through gifts and purchase, lots were acquired in Holiday Heights and the building was begun in 1953. The first services were held in the new structure on December 20, 1953, and the dedication with Rt. Rev. Bishop Brame officiating was held January 3, 1954.

Father John D. Hull came to the church October 5, 1952, and his inspiration can not even be estimated. His death in 1954 was a sad event for his devoted parishioners. The Auxiliary was formed in 1952, the Altar Guild in 1953.

Father Edmund Sills filled the pulpit from 1954 to 1957 and during his administration the vicarage was built and furnished. The parish house was planned and built during the ministry of Father Ralph R. Johnson who was Vicar from July '57 to the spring of '61. Father Richard H. L. Vanaman served from March '61 to April '62 to be followed by the present priest, Father C. A. Comfort.

### **Beach Methodist Church**

In January 1953 a group of Methodists began meeting in local homes with the idea of forming a church when they felt their number warranted it. They soon outgrew the homes and changed the meeting place to the American Legion Hall, Rev. E. P. Hendry serving as their first minister. Plans for a new church building got underway and the foundation was laid that summer. From June to September 1954 services were held in the old Beach theater (now the San Carlos Marina boat storage.) and there was great rejoicing when the meters were turned on in the new building on October 11, 1954.

The Rev. Murray Carlton, Rev. Paul Buyers, Rev. E. J. Mayton all served the church within the next three years. In June, 1956, Rev. Otto Horsley came to the Beach and was very influential in building up



the church. The congregation regretted his move in 1960. During the four years of his ministry the parsonage was completed (1956) and the church dedicated (March 16, 1958). The second addition was completed a few days before Christmas, 1959. Rev. Hugh Foster followed Rev. Horsley and then Rev. Richard Pifer served for a year. In 1963 Rev. Clinton Logan, the present minister, came to the church.

Ground breaking for the new forty thousand dollar Sanctuary, just east of the present building at Bay and Oak Streets, was October 31, 1965.

### **First Baptist Church**

The FORT MYERS BEACH BAPTIST CHAPEL was started in June of 1953 by the Rev. Loren Williams, pastor of the sponsoring church, Riverside Baptist Church of Fort Myers. Rev. Williams served the Chapel as Preacher until October of 1954; then Mr. R. M. Lemly acted as supply pastor until the end of December 1954. The Rev. Robert Thurman was called at that time and served for a year as pastor of both the Russell Park Baptist Chapel and the Beach Baptist Chapel. Services were being held at the Beach Community Hall when Rev. Marvin Lynn came to the Chapel in November 1955 as full-time pastor, and immediate plans were laid to procure suitable property upon which to build a church.

In April of 1956 a tract of land on Connecticut Street was purchased. A "ground-breaking" for the first building was held on March 4, 1957, and the new building was dedicated and occupied on February 23, 1958.

Rev. Lynn stayed as pastor until December 1960, after which Rev. John T. James came in February '61. From 1961 to the present, the chapel has been self-supporting and membership has increased to approximately 150 members, with well over a hundred enrolled in the Sunday school. There is also an active training Union, WMS, G. A.'s and Youth Choir.

### **Church of the Ascension**

Late in 1953, a few of the Catholic families here, deciding that the drive into Fort Myers every Sunday was too long, organized a Catholic Mission on the Island. It was designated as St. Francis Xavier Mission, headed by St. Francis Xavier Church of Fort Myers. Its first Mass at Fort Myers Beach was celebrated on Sunday, December 20, 1953, in the dining room at San Carlos Inn (later the Driftwood Inn). In September 1954 services were moved to the Beach school.

Meanwhile twenty-one acres of land had been purchased from Leroy Lamoreaux on Estero Boulevard, plans for a long-range program drawn up and a church begun. The first Mass in the new building was celebrated on Sunday, March 6, 1955. Although the structure was yet without windows, the weather was beautiful and the congregation was elated to be in their own building. Father Genovar of Fort Myers conducted the Mass and the Archbishop was there for the service. Father Haley came in the fall of 1957 as the first priest to live at the Beach, the pulpit having been supplied from Fort Myers prior to that time. The rectory on land donated by Leonard Santini was started and when Father Bernardo Martinez came in the spring of 1958 it was finished and became home to the priest. At the time Father Miguel Goni, the current priest, succeeded Father Bernardo in June 1961, the mission became a parish.

Another big step in fulfillment of the original church plan was the building of the beautiful new church,

completed in 1964 and the conversion of the original structure into a parish hall.

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Photographs taken in 1937 of the Third Grade classes at the Beach School (Leonard Santini, Ralph Kingston, David Yeomans, Blanche Santini, Ellen MacDuff, Page Twiss, and Oscar McClenithan), and some of the mothers who made the school possible appear at this point in the book (p.33).

On foldout pages 34 & 39 of this book is a photograph of the certificate of a land grant made to homesteader Albert Austin in 1914.

Maps of Estero Island showing the lands granted to early homesteaders and the locations of the various organizations and buildings appear in this book on foldout pages 35-38 .

Photographs taken in 1937 of the First Grade classes at the Beach School (Buster Blakley, Betty Jane Canady, Nell Santini, Jimmie Reece, Lynn Barbra, Josephine Canady, Robley Geddes, Laverne Yeomans, Frances Santini, Buster Fine) and of the Second Grade class (Betty Reese, Dolores Santini, Mina Geddes, Truda Barbra) appear at this point in the book (p.40).

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## The Library

No other project has ever received the same whole-hearted support as has the Fort Myers Beach Free Public Library.

In the spring of 1955, when the Woman's Club was considering a choice of projects for the coming year, Mrs. J. C. Healy presented a letter to the club outlining the feasibility of a library for the Beach. The suggestion was adopted and a committee comprised of Mrs. Healy, Mrs. Roland Hyatt, Jr., Mrs. John Taylor, Mrs. William Guess and Mrs. Harry Quig was formed to explore the situation and report back to the club. Mrs. Healy was appointed chairman of ways and means, and later became the first president of the board. Many hours of travel and research were put in by library boosters before it was deemed feasible to go ahead.

By August 1955, the name "The Beach Public Library" had been adopted, the former McGee Real Estate office selected as the Library's first home, and the library committee was made the first board of directors. Each organization on the Beach was invited to name one of its members to serve on the board and Mrs. Harry Quig, who had a background of library experience, was appointed librarian. She served until January of the following year at which time Mrs. James Miller took her place. From the beginning, the library was set up according to state library requirements as well as those of the American Library Association.

On September 25, the Library held open house and began circulating books. In November, request was made for Incorporation and in December incorporation papers were received. In June 1956 the original membership charge was dropped and the Fort Myers Beach Public Library became the first free public library in Lee County.

For the next few years life for the friends of the library was a swirl of benefits: bake sales, card parties, Bulletin subscription bonuses, luncheons, lectures and book reviews, all so imbued with enthusiasm that the public considered it a privilege to attend and leave their money.

What a tremendous job it was, however, for those who did the work -- but they, too, loved it. In the summer of 1958 the idea of holding a benefit auction was born and the labor pains accompanying it were terrific, but on March 21, 1959, the elephants -- big ones, little ones, white ones and ancient ones, were trotted out from where they had been gathering all winter in the old Beach Theater, now San Carlos Marina storage building, and with Alfred Nutgrass to cry the sale, Aida Bee's library auction went over with a literal bang. A whole chapter could be written about this auction and the ones which have followed each year, and about the bone-tired happy people who make it successful, even the school children who tugged and carried heavy objects and ran errands all day long knowing that the Library was geared especially toward helping them. When the nickels, dimes and dollars were counted, they totaled \$1357.24.

A few weeks later, four lots were purchased on Bay Street and the board was off again! Plans were being made for a new library building.

For the next two years newspaper headings read, "Rotary Club gives toward new Library," "Building Fund Benefits from Lions Barbecue," "B.I.A. Donates \$100 to Building Fund," "Millikin Shell Collection given to Library," "Lions Club Pledges Money for Airconditioning," and "School Children Contribute to Library Fund." There were many others which reflected the whole-hearted support of every facet of the Beach. Then on May 31 the headline read, "Ground Is Broken for the New Beach Library Designed by Charles Morton." Individuals contributed many, many hours of hard manual labor and business firms, both here and from Fort Myers, gave materials at cost or entirely without charge. It was truly a community effort. On July 28, 1961, the dream had come true -- and the Library held its informal opening.

Under the guidance of Mrs. James Miller, Librarian, and her efficient board, the library showed a healthy growth plant-wise and public-wise, never wealthy but having adequate funds to operate. In the spring of 1965 a move got underway to combine all efforts in the area and form a county-wide library system. It had a familiar ring to those of us who remembered the fight in 1957 to "include us out" of the county-wide mosquito district. We had a library and, as one newspaper editorial pointed out, "We had a book," and the promises of state and county assistance were too nebulous for our library board to wax enthusiastic. In fact, local voices, raised clear and loud resulted in the formation of a Library Tax District similar to that of our Fire and Mosquito Control districts, and provided a one-half mill levy. When the measure came up for voting, with a total of 979 freeholders in the district, 710 of them came out to vote, with 678 of them in favor of the separate tax district and only 32 opposed.

It was with regret that the Library Board accepted the resignation of Lou Miller in May 1965 after almost ten years as volunteer head librarian. Without doubt she has contributed more hours to the library than any one person, and the hours of her husband, Treasurer James Miller, would not total many less. Too many people have had big shares in creating this library to dare to mention any of them, even Aida (Mrs. Olen) Bee.

Upon the resignation of Mrs. Miller, and with the prospect of financial assistance from the new tax district, it was possible to hire a full-time librarian and in June Miss Emily Spencer, a professional librarian with thirty years experience, was chosen. At this time our library contains more than 10,500 well-screened books, a wide variety of periodicals, special reading rooms for children and is, perhaps, the finest young peoples' reference library in this area.

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A photograph of Mrs. Olen Bee and Mrs. James Miller in the Library appears at this point in the book

(p.43).

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## **Incorporation Efforts and Zoning**

Five attempts have been made to incorporate Fort Myers Beach. The first one, in the mid '40's, failed by just six or seven votes. A second try later in the '40's lost by a larger number, but not overwhelmingly so. Then an attempt in November, 1953 was so poorly handled that the proponents literally turned tail and ran even before the referendum date.

An entirely new charter was drawn up in 1957 which stipulated that not more than two mills could be assessed without special referendum, and incorporation came up for another vote. Again it was defeated, this time by a margin of 88 votes. The same charter was used in the winter of 1960 and lost by 50 votes. Feeling ran strong, naturally, and the voting was heavy. Those who worked for incorporation were tired of government by remote control and felt we were ready for home rule. They thought a two mill levy would not be a burden to anyone. The opposition feared that once enacted, incorporation would mean a continual raise in taxes. Now, whenever county officials over-rule the local majority, the incorporation rumble begins again.

Before the referendum in 1953, the county started, for the first time, a zoning program in unincorporated areas, and the Beach was the first to form a district. Two local men, Arthur Snodgrass and Barrett Brown, were the first to represent the Beach on the county zoning board. An over-all plan was laid out at this time, areas were zoned sensibly and to the satisfaction of most residents. After several years, this set-up was changed and zoning is now under more direct county rule and is administered from Fort Myers. There is still a local committee to advise the county board on Beach matters.

Over the years, zoning has been adhered to willingly by most Beach people. Most of the friction has been caused by absentee property owners who want zone changes that may be good for themselves but not for the islands as a whole. Perhaps the manner of handling zoning is due for a change, soon.

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## **Conservation**

Until a few years ago there was little thought given to conservation of our natural resources. The water and islands changed but little, the fish were always there and the birds were undisturbed.

However, late in 1960, the application for a bulkhead line in Estero Bay, involving an immense amount of fill from outside that line, aroused the people as never before. Fearing that seawalling the north side of the bay, dredging the bay bottom and dumping fill on some of the small islands, would destroy the fish and bird breeding areas and ruin local fishing, sportsmen acted promptly.

To protest this destruction, a hastily formed Conservation Association quickly enrolled nearly four thousand members from all over Lee County. Petitions of this group were presented to the County Commission who responded by setting the bulkhead line at one foot from the shore line in accordance with the wishes of the association. Ace Lee of Fort Myers Beach was president the first year; since then the association has been ably directed by Bill Mellor of Fort Myers, who has spent unlimited time and money to promote conservation interests. Mellor, formerly of the Beach, has had a great deal of help from Roland and Libby Roberts, as well as from many other people.

The controversy over the bulkhead line was the catalyst, perhaps, that gave us the Koreshan State Park. Some ten or twelve years ago, Miss Hedwig Michel, president of the Koreshan Unity, hoping to save the old landmarks and records of the Koreshans for future generations, offered much of the Unity's holdings to the state. At that time the park board director showed no interest in the offer and nothing was done about It.

This was not known by the people of Fort Myers Beach and, during the agitation to preserve our natural resources, the Bulletin came out with the idea of turning all of the Estero Bay waters and islands into a state park. This proposition received favorable reception from park officials as it seemed to entail merely transfer of state owned property from one department to another, but no action was taken at that time. It did, however, revive the interest of the park board in this area and in the earlier offer of Miss Michel, and negotiations late in 1961 resulted in the state accepting a gift of 290 acres from the Koreshan Unity. This included 100 acres in Estero, the site of the old Koreshan hall and museum and art buildings which will be the park headquarters, seventy acres on both sides of the mouth of the Estero River and 120 acres of Mound Key.

The State recently announced that Estero Bay would become a fish and wildlife management area as a pilot program which could be duplicated in other parts of the state. It is said that under this plan there will be more flexibility for public use than if the area were administered solely as a part of the Koreshan State Park.

Mound Key is, without question, the most interesting of all the islands in this area being covered with shell mounds, believed to have been erected by the Caloosa Indian tribe, and used for their ceremonial rites. Rolfe Schell, local author, has gone into the story of this Island quite thoroughly in his booklet, "1000 years on Mound Key."

The founder of the Koreshan Unity was Dr. Cyrus Teed who established the headquarters in Estero and largely colonized Mound Key, Estero and Black Islands, starting in 1894. Dr. Teed died in 1908 and was buried on Estero Island in a concrete tomb near the west end of the Big Carlos Pass bridge. In 1921 a hurricane destroyed the tomb and changed the shape of that end of the Island.

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## Mosquito Control

At this time, Fort Myers Beach probably has the best mosquito control in southwest Florida, although there are still times when anyone, unfamiliar with the situation earlier than 1949, would hardly believe it.

In the summer of 1949 the two islands were formed into a mosquito control district -- the vote was 155 to 7-- and Bill Tooley, Jewell Ursoleo and Travis Cowart were elected directors. There had been some attempt at control before this using funds raised by subscription but now the money needed would be produced from taxes and effective plans could be made. The two mill tax brought in about \$4,500 the first year. This board spent many hours consulting with experts, selecting equipment and materials and fighting criticism of the program. Now, with a higher millage, we have a budget of well over \$60,000 per year and the majority of islanders believe it is money well spent. The board still has to spend hours and days studying new chemicals and new methods--and fighting criticism of the program.

When the state matching funds became available, to be used for permanent improvements, a dragline was purchased to be used for ditching and thoroughly draining the low spots around the islands.

In the spring of 1957 a county-wide mosquito control act was drawn up to be presented to the State Legislature proposing that all monies and equipment within the county be placed under county control for use all over the county. Since Fort Myers Beach already had the money and paid-for equipment to do a good job locally, our residents were loath to take a chance on having that equipment thrown into a county pool and used in far away areas, and having additional taxes, besides, to pay for necessary county equipment. We asked to be "included out" of the act. While our voices were hardly heard county-wide, they did reach Key West and Senator Bill Neblett flew up to the Beach where he was persuaded that our stand was right and just, and he insisted that the bill be introduced excluding the Beach from the county-wide system.

It proved to have been a wise decision. A few years later our district was enlarged to take in a small area on the mainland which includes Siesta Isles and Tip Top Isles.

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## Fire and Rescue

Until the late '40's our attempts at fire fighting had been more or less of the old bucket brigade type, but in 1949 a Volunteer Fire Department was formed. Earl Howie, first fire chief; Travis Cowart, 1st Captain; Al Lea, 2nd Captain, Frank Galla, 3rd Captain and Bob Smith, Secretary-Treasurer formed the core of the crew. The only equipment available at that time was a Jeep with a pump and a small amount of hose.

From this modest beginning has evolved our present fine fire department. Its two large pumper trucks have large tanks, plenty of hose, ladders and other necessary equipment and there is also a tanker truck that specializes in grass fires.

The Rescue Squad was started as a volunteer unit by the Fire Department in 1962 and made a part of the tax district in 1963. A specially designed panel truck is used. splendidly equipped for first aid in case of accidents or illness.

The Squad has made an unexcelled record for quick response to any local emergency whether it be on the water, on the streets or in the homes. The fast action of the men, on duty around the clock seven days a week, has prevented many serious accidents from becoming more serious.

A radio station hook-up with the Sheriff's office and the deputies' cars, and with other fire stations over the county, makes for quick cooperation in any direction.

The Fire Station is also designated as a United States weather station. with official rain gauge, thermometers, wind velocity and direction indicators.

All of this is financed by a two mill tax upon the Fire District which includes the two islands and a small amount of mainland territory laying near.

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## Disposal Service

In the earlier days garbage was no particular problem; you just dug a pit, tossed it in and the coons and birds took pretty good care of it. Then as more people came it did present a problem and a negro man and his family started a collection service of a sort.

However, in 1950 a "reformed executive" from Ohio, Glen Carver, saw the possibilities and the need and bought out the former operator. He installed modern equipment and used modern methods and gave the Beach a disposal system any community could take pride in. Where many towns are happy to get one collection a week, we have always had two -- and not from a littered front curb but from the rear of our property.

Perhaps one of the greatest benefits from this service was the clean-up of our "front yard." Prior to the new system, many people took their own garbage to a roadside dump on the Beach Road, supposedly back in the woods. However, people being as they are, many pitched their bundles from their cars on the highway making a most unsightly spot near the entrance to the islands. Through the efforts of Mr. Carver and the B.I.A., this was cleaned up in the early '50's and even the scars are now gone.

At the present time, Travis Cowart, one of our real "old timers" is head of the Beach Disposal Service.

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A photograph of the early fire station appears at this point in the book (p.49).

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## Organizations

Most of the good things which have happened to the islands are the results of the concerted efforts of some organization or a combination of clubs. Having had no "political body" to turn to for help, public-minded citizens have banded together, sometimes under one name, sometimes under another, to promote the interests of the community.

The first civic organization was the FORT MYERS BEACH PROPERTY OWNERS' ASSOCIATION started in 1930 "to advance the needs of a growing community and to help beautify public and private grounds." One of the primary undertakings was the planting of six hundred coconut palms. These were put along Estero Boulevard from San Carlos Boulevard south to Connecticut Avenue which was as far as the road went at that time.

The Lee County Bank had a nursery then, and offered to supply the trees for 75¢ each, but the Association shopped around and bought them from another source for 25¢, plus another five cents for the planting. Two years later E.E. Damkohler sold the Association a large number of six-foot palms for 75¢ and agreed to deliver and plant them for that price. Many property owners took advantage of these offers and fine specimens, planted at that time, still beautify our roadways and home grounds.

The minutes of the Property Owners' Association, of which Bert Waite was the first president, show that in 1931 there were sixty improved properties on Estero Island. Things were moving right along in the

early '30's and the Association was boosting all the way.

Through their efforts, the first voting precinct was established in 1932. That same year, a good deal of favorable publicity came this way when Santa arrived at the Beach in whiskers and bathing suit, via the Gulf by boat. It was the first of the much-publicized Christmas parties which have become one of our traditional events. Another important event of 1932 was the establishment of a non-sectarian Sunday School.

The Association sparked the move to get the first electricity brought in from Fort Myers in 1932. Prior to this the Beach Hotel and a few other places had their own light plants run by gasoline engines. Telegraph service was established in 1933.

It was that same year that the Property Owners cited the need for a garbage disposal system and for mosquito control, and in 1935 there was agreement within the Association that the Island should incorporate to take care of sanitation, insect control, and to promote roads. Also, they stated, incorporation would insure an orderly growth to the community. This matter did not come up for voting, however, until 1945 at which time 67 voted for incorporation and 75 against it. Since that time the question of incorporation has been brought to vote four more times and each time has lost by a very narrow margin. Old timers who have sweated out these campaigns are inclined to take a dim view of some newcomers when they ask, "Why hasn't anything ever been done about incorporating the Beach so we can control our own affairs."

Lee County was created in 1887 and Fort Myers was incorporated in 1885 with only 45 freeholders turning out to vote. An odd fact is that in 1965, the Beach is ten times larger than Fort Myers was at that time, and has not yet been able to incorporate.

The year 1940 marked the first time Fort Myers Beach was classified separately in the United States census. That year there were 473 people listed as living here. A gain of 175 more residents were shown five years later. The 1950 census showed only 711 permanent residents, but there were more living quarters than that. A fact which showed that the community was growing in popularity as a resort. In 1960 the census showed a population of 2,500, a gain of 250%, in ten years--400%, in twenty!

### **B. I. A.**

Strange as it may seem, data on the strongest organization on the Beach has been the hardest to pin down. The BEACH IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION is the outgrowth of the old Beach Property Owners' Association. At just what point the B.I.A. assumed that name and began to operate under it could not be determined with certainty. The early minutes and records are apparently lost and there is such a diversity of opinion among those who were here at the time -- dates ranging from the late thirties to the late forties -- that we cannot set a positive date. The best information points to 1946 with Art Hamel, Sr., as president and Mrs. Madge (Tiny) Roberts, secretary.

From the very first, an intense interest in community affairs was taken by the membership and every project to improve the islands was entered into with enthusiasm. The members were the leaders and the pushers. Help and money has been given toward all things which made for better living here; such projects as the channel marking in the Bay, beach and road clean up campaigns, Christmas and Fourth of July festivities and almost any community effort one could name.

Originally the B.I.A. had a dues-paying membership but after the Association was incorporated in 1949,



every resident, permanent or temporary, automatically became a member and the organization was supported by contributions. In 1965 when the B.I.A. was reorganized, this was changed back to the original method and now members pay \$2 per family to belong.

### **Woman's Club**

On October 9, 1950. forty women with a long range program for civic planning formed the FORT MYERS BEACH WOMAN'S CLUB and elected Mrs. J.B. Kavanaugh president. Other officers elected at that first meeting were Mrs. W.C. McGee, Mrs. R.D. Newton, Mrs. E.L. Stansbury and Mrs. Rodger Shawcross. Lucy McGee, Eleanore Stansbury and Helen Van Brunt were probably the spark-plugs of the group, although every member there deserves much credit. Their aim was to work for cultural improvement and to aid the B.I.A. in civic betterment. Such a vast amount of territory those two aims have encompassed The Woman's Club has worked right along with the B.I.A. and other organizations to get mail delivery, street signs and street paving. They have sponsored or assisted in the 4th of July celebrations, the County Park Christmas parties (Santa and the tree and goodies), the fashion fiestas, youth club dances and roller skating, teen club activities and other community entertainment. They have provided book reviews, hobby workshops, card parties and lectures; cooperated with garden clubs, beautification groups, and made their influence felt generally. They have made this a pleasant place for winter people to come back to.

Two prime projects, the birthing of the Beach Free Public Library and acquiring the Community Hall (now officially named the Beach Woman's Club) have entailed endless work and planning. A number of years ago, the B.I.A. had acquired the former school building which was financed through donations of the Islanders and built with W.P.A. labor. The land which still belonged to the county school board, was leased to the B.I.A. for twenty years. The building was used as the community hall and the Woman's Club aided in its maintenance. After the disastrous fire following hurricane Donna in 1960, the Club gave \$1000.00 toward rebuilding the hall and adding a complete kitchen. In 1963 the B.I.A. gave the building to the Woman's Club which then incorporated and bought the land from the school board. Projects to raise the money to do this ranged from A to Z but working together has brought a fine sense of fellowship. Regular groups within the club include book review, ceramics, arts and crafts, bridge, music appreciation, home and garden. and a beautification committee.

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Photographs of the early school building which now is home to the Woman's Club and of the shell collection appear at this point in the book (p.54).

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### **Legion and Auxiliary**

The MELVIN COWART POST 247 AMERICAN LEGION seems to have been like "Topsy" at first--it just grewed. It was active and doing a great deal of good locally prior to its official organization on April 16, 1951. The Post took the name of a local man who fell in defense of his country, Melvin Cowart, the son of Mrs. Ollie Cowart and a brother of Travis.

Melvin Cowart Post 274 has taken a leading role in many phases of community life; it concerns itself with veteran affairs, advises and helps. Yearly it sponsors Boys' State, the American Legion School Awards, Little League, Memorial Day services, presentation of flags and the promotion of all phases of patriotism.

The Post has always taken a prominent part in Civil Defense and consistently cooperates with other civic groups for community good. By its very nature, it also has performed certain less known but important community functions such as entertainment of the Blue Angels, acquiring erosion funds, formulating hurricane plans etc. These activities are greatly facilitated by the Post owning its own home where all veterans are welcome.

**AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY:** Sometime after the American Legion Post organized, construction was begun on their Home on Crescent Street, its present location. The previous site of the converted barracks building was approximately where Don Adt's Insurance Company stands. The Saturday and Sunday work parties became the meeting place of family and friends. If the wives wanted to see their husbands during the week-end, they joined the group, bringing food and drink, and boosting the morale of the hard working crew. Many long hours of work and fellowship went into that Home.

And as day follows night it was only logical that the Legion members interested their wives in forming an Auxiliary to help further its aims and purposes. The charter, applied for in 1951, was granted in 1952 and was presented to the first president, Mrs. William (Pat) Mellor by Commander Rufus Yent at "a gala Sr. Patrick's Day party." Other officers were Secretary Isabella S. Jennings; Treasurer Mildred Yent; Historian Sue Davison; Chaplain Priscilla Wood.

In the first year of operation the Auxiliary sponsored a first aid class through the Red Cross, bought snake-bite kits for the community and sponsored a bed in the St. Petersburg Crippled Children's Hospital. During the ensuing years other projects and responsibilities of national and community nature have been carried on: child welfare, civil defense, promoting Americanism in our school, sponsoring Girls' State to name a few. The most important of these has been the Walking Blood Bank, established in 1961. A roster of available donors has been maintained and over 100 pints of blood have been given for Beach residents and visitors. This year, in cooperation with Lee Memorial Hospital, the blood bank has been changed wherein blood may be given at any time and the "bank" credited so that it is already available at times of emergency.

The Legion Home is a friendly place. "The American Legion Auxiliary is the largest organization of women in the world and, if you are eligible for membership, there is room for you."

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A photograph of Melvin Cowart after whom Post 247 of the American Legion is named appears at this point in the book (p.56).

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## Art Association

In 1951 THE BEACH ART ASSOCIATION was organized through the efforts of Mrs. Charles F. Green, with approximately a dozen people attending that first meeting at her home. Mrs. Green recalls that in the beginning it was difficult to get even three people together. She served as the first president of the group, Mrs. Frank Hitner, vice president; Mrs. Eleanor Stansbury, recording secretary; Mrs. M.W. Quave, corresponding secretary and Rolfe Schell, treasurer.

The opening of William Henry's Art School, and classes conducted by Morgan Dennis (probably best known for his famous Black and White scotties) and by Peter Kerr in 1951, whipped up added interest. Captain and Mrs. Hugh Branham, who established the Branham Shell Museum, were the organization's first honorary life members.

The Art Association aimed to promote the study and appreciation of, and interest in creative arts. Probably no one other organization has done as much to bring people to the Beach and to bring them back again. The eager amateur has been as warmly welcomed as the talented professional. Activities have included arts and crafts markets and any number of exhibitions, both local and imported. It has sponsored shows of the Sarasota Art Association, The Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Florida Federation of Art. Gulf Shore Inn has always been associated with art groups, having housed many traveling exhibits as well as being a "hanging" gallery for local artists.

When David V. Stahl was president in 1961, the Association was reorganized and incorporated under the name Fort Myers Beach Art Association, Inc. Mr. Stahl is once more president for the 1965-66 season with approximately 165 enrolled members.

The Art Association recently purchased property on Donora Street and plans are in the formative stage for a new building.

### **Yacht Club**

THE BEACH YACHT CLUB was the outgrowth of an inspiration of a handful of boating enthusiasts. Mr. and Mrs. Paul Fell, the Joe Ainsworths, the Hugh Whytes and Bobby Goetz, among others, were gathered together one evening back in 1950 and first thing anyone knew, here was a yacht club with Paul Fell elected commodore!

The Yacht Club has been one of the leading fun organizations of the Beach. Many overnight and week-end trips to Sanibel, Captiva, Boca Grande and other Island points of interest have been made. The regular monthly meetings have turned into cook-outs on near-by islands. At Dog Key extensive work was done clearing an area for picnic grounds and building a pier. This area was turned over to the Boy Scouts but when the shelter burned down the project was abandoned. The Yacht Club also built the picnic shelter at the County Park.

A major interest has been channel markers in Estero Bay. These now connect with markers at Bonita, providing an inside channel all the way.

### **Coast Guard Auxiliary**

When it was organized in late 1957, THE COAST GUARD AUXILIARY was a very welcome addition to this sea-going community. Up until that time there was no official body to call upon when there was trouble on the water. Many a worried wife or mother has lived through hours of suspense wondering why a long over-due boat had not come in. Prior to the coming of the U.S. Coast Guard in the summer of '63, the Auxillary's activities were mainly search and rescue. For several years this flotilla had the highest number of assists in the district. Since the establishment of the Coast Guard Station, the work has been largely educational with emphasis on water safety. Also, much of the local boat inspection has been in the hands of the Beach Flotilla.

### **Coast Guard**

Early in July 1963, a Coast Guard station house boat, said to have cost some \$50,000, completely airconditioned and comfortably furnished, was installed at the San Carlos Marina. D.G. Rash, Chief Bosun, with nine men under him, was in charge of operations. It was a red-letter day for the Beach.

On July 19, Rear Admiral I.J. Stephens commissioned the new U.S. Coast Guard Search and Rescue

Station, followed by open house and a demonstration of what could be expected of the equipment and personnel. Local Coast Guard Auxiliary members officially representing the Beach were C.K. Shogren , Division Captain, Jim Midgley, Beach Flotilla Commander and Don Decker, Beach Flotilla Vice Chairman.

At the time of commissioning, Admiral Stephens stated that this was to be a temporary station, that a permanent base was expected to be built later, probably on Sanibel. This plan was abandoned and a spot was selected here at the Beach. This site, although suitable and recommended, proved to be too expensive, so at the present time it looks as if the temporary station might become permanent.

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A 1963 photograph of the Coast Guard station house boat appears at this point in the book (p.59).

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### **Lions and Auxiliary**

THE FORT MYERS BEACH LIONS CLUB was presented its charter on January 15, 1953, at a party given at the Fort Myers Lions' Den by the Fort Myers Club for the Lions and their ladies. Rufus Yent was the first president,, supported by officers Ned Hills, Carl Kragh, John (Doc) Wilson, Leo Hunt, Art Hamel, Jr., Rodger Shawcross, and directors William Kunkle, Olen Bee, Rolfe Schell and Walter Thomas. The Lions have been sparkplugs in almost every Beach activity and have taken an important part in all community affairs. Our Annual Beach Day, one of their principal contributions, has always been a success. They have supported their own national projects, raised money for the blind, and can be cited as one of the outstanding clubs in the district.

In 1958, five years after the Lions Club organized, the local ladies formed the Lions AUXILIARY. Taking a cue from their spouses, these women have been outstanding in their contribution to the community. They have made donations annually to the Beach Public Library and the Beach Beautification Committee; they have assisted in various welfare drives and, since the opening of Edison Junior College, have maintained a \$200 scholarship which is awarded each year to a Beach student attending E.J.C.

### **Rotary**

THE FORT MYERS BEACH ROTARY CLUB was Chartered on April 12. 1955 with Rolfe Schell serving as president for the first two years. The local club has, at this time, thirty-five members, representing most of the businesses.

The Beach Club's International Committee is in the process of building a library for the school children of Islas Mujeres, a small island off the coast of Mexico.

The Beach Rotary Club sponsored the formation of the Cape Coral Rotary Club in June 1964 and is currently working on the formation of a club in Bonita Springs.

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### **Beautification**

The present BEACH BEAUTIFICATION COMMITTEE, organized September 14. 1959, at the home

of its first president, Charles Wyland, is the end result of many earlier efforts to preserve and enhance the beauty of our islands.

The first Beautification Committee was appointed in 1930 by the Beach Property Owners' Association, (the forerunner of the B.I.A.). Since then a series of beautification groups, some lasting one season and some several years, have been formed. All have left their mark on the community, but as the village grew, individual organizations could not begin to do an effective job, hard as they might work.

Postmaster Wyland, who, incidentally, established the first furniture store at the Beach, called together a number of individuals who were interested in beauty and proposed that a permanent organization, comprised of a representative of every civic group on the islands, be started. He stressed the fact that by working and consulting together, pooling their efforts and money, more interest would be generated and more effective work could be done.

True to his expectations, the Beautification Committee has become one of our healthiest Beach organizations. The charming garden at the Arch is a fitting memorial to the man whose spark welded these groups together.

Working hand in glove, almost literally, with the beautification committee. is the ESTERO ISLAND GARDEN CLUB. Mrs. Irene Paden sparked the group into action and November 11, 1959, they organized and elected Mrs. E. Carlisle Hunter their president. Mrs. Arthur Viets was the first secretary and Mrs. T.V. Nichols, treasurer. Soon after organization they affiliated with the National Federation of Garden Clubs.

Long range projects of the club and the horticulture group of the club have included the landscaping of the school grounds, the library and the Arch at the entrance of Estero Island. Once a year they sponsor the Litter Bug Clean-up campaign and in the fall they promote a plant sale at which time they urge people to beautify the islands by planting flowers, trees and shrubbery "everywhere." Bob and Ida Creech, who grow as a hobby many of the plants for this sale, are probably responsible for as much of the greenery on the Beach as anyone since Mr. Damkohler planted his first palms.

The Beach Library has a very fine collection of books on gardening and horticulture which were donated by members of the Garden Club.

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Photographs of the Wyland Memorial Garden and the Beach Free Public Library appear at this point in the book (p.62).

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## **Chamber of Commerce**

The BEACH BUSINESS ASSOCIATION was organized in 1951 by local merchants who eagerly backed Walter Thomas' slogan "Save a Trip to Town." This was the year the Beach Bulletin was established and through good publicity, local people began to realize that almost all kinds of merchandise and services were available right here at home. A few years later the Association was expanded to include accommodations owners. and the name was changed to the HOLIDAY CLUB. From this developed the Beach Chamber of Commerce whose charter, granted in April, 1959, showed 183 charter members, several of whom took duplicate memberships. Bob MacLeod was the first president and was assisted in

his duties by twelve board members. It is from these twelve that the Chamber officers are selected.

In 1960 the Fort Myers Beach Chamber of Commerce became a member of the United States Chamber and in 1961 joined the Florida State Chamber. There has always been close cooperation between the Beach Chamber and the Fort Myers-Lee County Chamber.

Joseph Taylor was hired in 1962 as the first manager and the following year was made manager-treasurer. Ms. Winnie Holland Aymar was the secretary and presided at the information booth that first year and after her resignation, the post was filled by Mrs. E. E. Marshall.

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## **Tarpon Hunters**

It is difficult to pinpoint just who first inspired the Beach Tarpon Hunters' Club, but thinking back, Frank Dellabella recalls Jack Cathcart and Dick Berguin as being the first to suggest it. Frank Dellabella and Bob Pelton, being at the Tarpon Tackle Shop at that time, kept the idea going, and on September 8, 1961, an organization meeting was called. Attending were six couples: the Frank Dellabellas, Bob Peltons, Charles Tuckers, Rennie Roots, Roland Roberts and Ken Lowells. They appointed a by-laws committee consisting of Jack Cathcart, Walter Thomas, Ace Lee, Frank Dellabella, Stan Ollis, Bea Root. On October 30, 1961, The Tarpon Hunters Club of Fort Myers Beach held its first open meeting at the Beach School Auditorium. Officers elected were: Frank Dellabella, president; Stan Ollis, vice-president; Vernon Kruse, treasurer; Libby Roberts, secretary. Board of Directors were: Walter Thomas, Ken Lowell and Bob Pelton.

The Club is dedicated to furthering the grand sport of Tarpon fishing, promoting good sportsmanship, and conservation.

The Club has received nationwide publicity from having the National Outdoor Writers attend a monthly hunt in 1963.

Among its civic projects are the floats entered each year in the Pageant of Light Parade and the Shrimp Festival Parade.

The Club has greatly helped promote summer tourist business on the Beach, besides having a whale of a time (beg pardon-a tarpon of a time) with its open-to-everyone tarpon hunts and its family activities.

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## **Realtors**

It has been said in Florida that when a coconut falls it's bound to drop on the head of a real estate salesman. Fort Myers Beach is not without its full share of vendors of property. In 1959 Edna Smith and Nancy MacLeod felt it was time to up-grade the public image of the profession. They and their husbands, Bob Smith and Bob MacLeod, were realtors, so it was decided that a BOARD OF REALTORS would be the means to this end. Nineteen local realtors made up the original board and their charter was granted December 12. Bob Smith was the first president, Nancy Nash MacLeod, vice president and Connie Brigham, (Mrs. Ralph Brigham) secretary-treasurer. Their prime objectives were to further the

professional standards of the real estate business and, through discussions, iron out different problems confronting brokers and properties.

In addition to activities pertaining to real estate, they have taken part as a group in civic affairs.

### **P. E. O.**

Chapter CO of the P.E.O. Sisterhood (the 93rd in the State of Florida) was granted a charter March 27, 1963. P.E.O. is an organization, international in scope whose purpose is to promote education among women. "Educate a man and you have educated a man. Educate a woman and you have educated a family." The sisterhood owns Cottey College, an outstanding women's junior college in Nevada, Missouri. It provides scholarships for gifted women of foreign countries who wish to come to the United States to study, and it operates a million dollar educational loan fund. First officers of CO were Adelaide Brown, Sue Campbell, Gertrude Crawford, Edith McIntosh, Bessie Rieck, Betsy Campbell and Ruth Workman.

### **A. A. R. P.**

The A.A.R.P. (American Association of Retired Persons) is the youngest organization on the Beach at this time, with, perhaps, the most mature members. Formed June 9, 1964, under the direction of the president of the North Fort Myers chapter, William Hull, it is a non-profit, non-political organization of persons over 55 years of age, aimed to stretch retirement insurance, medicine, and related services. It also points up the fact that older folk have much to offer the world in useful services, happy relationships and individual well-being. AARP is helping to provide the opportunities for such a realization. Mrs. Ralph Schrock was elected president. Her officers are Robert Dominice, Mrs. Celita Pike and Mrs. William Staggers.

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## **Traditions**

Almost every small community builds up traditions over the years and Fort Myers Beach is no exception. Most deeply rooted of ours, perhaps, are the Fourth of July celebration; our aquatic Santa Claus and the Community Christmas party, the Blessing of the Shrimp Fleet, the Fashion Fiesta and our newest one, the Tarpon Hunts. All of these have had national publicity at one time or another and are a source of pride to the islands.

For a number of years the Beach had the only major fireworks show in the county and plans were made and moneys contributed largely by business people, well in advance of the big day. An expert, licensed pyrotechnician, assisted by experienced local men, is in charge and from the pier where the action takes place, for a mile each way, throngs line the beach to watch the displays. Many take to the water and watch from boats in the Gulf. During the day the county park is jammed with picnickers, special events are scheduled for the daylight hours--boat races, water ski exhibitions. But the fireworks is always the grand finale.

The BIG FOURTH was started years ago when a number of local families pooled their individual fireworks to make a better display. The "shooting" was usually held at the Beach Hotel which was the central location and had the best facilities. The idea snowballed until the whole community became

involved and today a special "Fireworks committee" carries on from year to year.

## Christmas

As far as we have been able to learn, the Beach had the first Santa Claus to arrive by boat instead of by reindeer. Originating sometime in the '30's as a neighborhood affair held in various places, it eventually fell under the wing of the Beach Woman's Club, and became a community project. By 1950 it had grown to such proportions that the Woman's Club found it advisable to call for help from other organizations. In 1951 the party was held in what was called El Mercado Square --the first unit of Bigelow Center. The Woman's Club furnished and decorated the tree, the Legion bought the candy and the Auxiliary fixed the bags of toys and candies. The BIA, as usual, filled in wherever needed. Santa distributed the gifts and candies to all children present, the Junior choir of the Chapel by the Sea sang and the whole community joined in the Christmas carols.

The next year the festivities were moved to the County Park with all of the organizations helping. The Legion Auxiliary was in charge, the B.I.A. set up the tree, the Beach Business Association decorated it, the Legion and their ladies furnished candy, nuts and fruits. the Woman's Club provided the Santa Claus suit, found a well-built Santa and organized the young peoples choir to spark the carol singing and Joe Ainsworth of Snug Harbor arranged for Santa to get here by boat since reindeers are reported to prefer the snow in the north.

Since that time, except for one year, the party has been held the week end before Christmas. a lot of hard work but an event looked forward to by adults as well as children.

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A photograph of Santa arriving by boat appears at this point in the book (p.67).

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## The Blessing of the Fleet

"The Columbia Fish Company Dock was the center of attraction on Sunday, December 21. when the fleet of eleven shrimp boats was blessed by the Rt. Rev. H.T. Loutitt, the Bishop of the South Florida Episcopal Diocese. Crowds of people around the docks. on the bridge and in small craft, watch the forty-five minute ceremony.

"The shrimp boats, gaily bedecked with red, green, and blue pennants and American flags. formed in line and passed by the flagship, Columbian Star. There the Bishop conducted the traditional rites. After a song by the Beach School Glee Club, the Bishop delivered prayers for the crews and William R. Rumpf, master of ceremonies, lowered an anchor of white gladioli on the waters in memory of crewmen lost at sea.

"Miss Ann Reckwerdt and Buddy Mott were crowned Queen and King of the ceremonies.

"It is hoped that this impressive ceremony may become an annual event."

Thus read the Beach Bulletin story on the first blessing of the fleet in 1952.

This was the year Father John Hull came as vicar to St. Raphael's Church. He and Charlie Green, John Ferguson and John Pterudis organized the blessing. patterned somewhat on the much publicized blessing of the sponge fleet of Tarpon Springs. The ceremony was so impressive that each year the rites have been



repeated with, perhaps, a different locale and a different cast of characters, but always solemn, always impressive.

## **Shrimp Festival**

Our annual Shrimp Festival developed from a one-day celebration at the end of the Edison Pageant of Light Week which was designated as Beach Day. Various events were staged ranging from parades and bands through beauty contests and barbecues. After the first Blessing of the Shrimp Fleet, which occurred December 21, 1952, the ceremony became an important part of the February Beach Day. (There was no blessing in 1953, the first one being the last month of '52 and the second in February '54.)

As the activities increased and the number of events grew, one day was not deemed sufficient, so, largely through the efforts of the Lions Club aided by other civic minded people, Beach Day was dropped from Pageant week, rescheduled into March and became a week long festival.

The first Festival was held In March 1960. It has grown in size and scope until now thousands come to view the various events the water sports, the selection of the Shrimp Queen and Junior Royalty, the gopher races, shell and flower exhibits, fishing contests, parades and bands, all climaxed by the spectacular blessing of the shrimp fleet. The Lions put on a big barbecue for the public, the Legion a fish fry, and the Episcopal ladies provide their celebrated shrimp rolls.

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A photograph of a shrimp boat decorated for the Blessing of the Fleet appears at this point in the book (p.69).

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## **The Newspaper**

The first newspaper published on the islands "hit the stands" on December 6, 1951. It was the Beach Bulletin, a family project of the Barrett Browns. Barrett was salesman reporter and editor; Adelaide, assistant editor and typist. while young Duff took care of such odd jobs as stapling, folding and delivering the papers. A number of the young business men hereabout were once part of his delivery crew. That first paper consisted of six eight by eleven mimeographed sheets, hand stapled together and delivered door to door.

A second weekly made its appearance in the mid '50's but expired before many months. The community could not support two papers.

Over the years the Bulletin has grown into a second-class publication, unpretentious and friendly, using offset printings. At the peak of the season it carries up to thirty pages. Duff and his wife, Virginia. are the present editors and the senior Browns are gingerly stepping out of the business, but ink in the veins, like sand in one's shoes, can present problems.

## **The Professions**

The growing community was attracting many retirees and older people, but being fifteen miles from the

nearest doctor was creating a problem.

In 1952 the Beach Business Association started a search for a physician who would locate here, and several came for interviews. Dr. Maurice Borow, formerly of New Jersey, finally decided to come. Early in 1953 he received his state license and opened his office above Garl's Drug store. A few years later Dr. James Schutt moved here from Indiana and built the Schutt Building in which he opened his office.

Attorney L.T. Ahrenholz came from the East Coast and opened an office in Bigelow Center in 1953 later moving into the new Professional Building. When Attorney Kjell Pedersen first came to the Beach he was associated with Mr. Ahrenholz but In 1960 he opened his own office in the Foster Building.

Our first dentist set up a practice in Laguna Shores in 1955 but difficulties soon developed and the office was closed until 1959 when Dr. William Weit came to make his home here and took over the practice. The next year he moved his office into the Professional Building.

In 1960 Dr. Ronald Lea received his degree in optometry and established his office adjacent to that of Dr. Weit.

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A photograph of a sunset taken from Estero Island appears at this point in the book (p.71).

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## CREDITS

The problems involved in writing even a short history of an area such as this, where most of the material depended upon the memories of people who came here long before we did, and where even printed records often differ, are many.

The authors are fully aware that there may be variances in what two or more old timers believe to be authentic. Perhaps through our efforts more and better records will come to light. We wish to express our heartfelt appreciation to the many, many people who have visited with us about early days, and to those who have loaned us pictures to use in the book. The maps used in preparing our center pages were furnished by Garl's Drug Store.

Members of the churches and civic groups were most cooperative in providing us with the data about their organizations.

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