Recognizing the importance of a deep-water harbor for commerce and tourism, city leaders lobbied the United States Congress for funds to create a port. The development of Bayboro Harbor, located along our campus, came about many years later.

St. Petersburg and other Florida communities often touted their “healthy” climate in an attempt to attract newcomers and tourists. This “mortality record” lists the number of deaths in St. Petersburg in 1902. Note that during this period of racial segregation, the newspaper listed these statistics by race.

Boosters of St. Petersburg, such as the Avery Real Estate Company, proudly listed the amenities found in the growing city as a way to entice newcomers. The only thing missing was a “partridge in a pear tree!”

This represented the entire “telephone directory” for St. Petersburg in November 1903. The ‘white’ and ‘yellow’ pages fit on one page of the newspaper!
The Hotel Detroit, still located along Central Avenue, represented one of the early accommodations in the city.

Originally known as the Sixth Avenue House (when Central Avenue was called Sixth Avenue), the Belmont Hotel was purchased by William Tippetts in 1903. Note that even in the days before bottled water became popular, the Belmont offered guests a supply of “Capt. Chase’s Distilled Water.”

Even 100 years ago, strong rivalries existed between Tampa and St. Petersburg. This article criticized Henry B. Plant’s steamships for not giving their Tampa passengers an opportunity to spend any time touring St. Petersburg. Plant was owner of the Tampa Bay Hotel (now the University of Tampa), developer of the Plant railroad system (then with its terminus at Tampa), and namesake of Plant City.

Before the advent of commercial aviation and the mass production of automobiles, steamships and railroads served as the primary modes of transportation. Steamboats regularly operated between St. Petersburg and Tampa, and the Seaboard Air Line connected with other railroads throughout the United States.
John Constantine Williams, Jr., son of “General” John C. Williams, became a successful entrepreneur during the 1890s and early 1900s. His companies regularly purchased advertisements in the newspaper and he also entered into partnerships with businesses based in Tampa. The elder Williams’s house was moved to USF St. Petersburg in the mid-1990s, and currently sits across the street from the Campus Activities Center and adjacent to the Perry Snell house.

Early developments along Pass-a-Grille emphasized the beauty of the southern Gulf beaches, as well as plans for street cars and regular steamships that would provide convenient transportation to this resort community.

Images of houses from a century ago.