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Nelson Poynter Memorial Library. Special Collections and University Archives.

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# **Emil August Nordstrom Scrapbook**

A Collection Guide by

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**30 June 2014**

## Introduction to the Collection

Emil August Nordstrom served as an engineer for the City of St. Petersburg, later as a partner in an architectural and engineering firm in St. Petersburg, and also as executive director of the Housing Authority of St. Petersburg. Born in 1883 or 1884, Nordstrom passed away in St. Petersburg on August 26, 1973, and was survived by his daughter, Dorothy King. This small scrapbook contains clippings and information about Nordstrom's engineering work and structures he was involved with in the City of St. Petersburg between 1926 and 1937. Although none of the clippings appear to be about Nordstrom in the narrowest biographical sense, most describe construction projects and engineering work in St. Petersburg during a decade between the mid-1920s and mid-1930s in some way. The early part of this period marked the end of the Florida Land Boom, a time of frenzied growth in the city that included the expansion of municipal infrastructure to serve growing residential populations and business enterprises.

Jen Runyon, formerly a student at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg, donated this scrapbook and another one related to a person who used the name Billy Dean in spring 2013 after acquiring them from a source in the community. There are no access restrictions on this item.

## Preservation Note

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## Provenance of the Emil August Nordstrom Scrapbook

This collection falls under the Local and Regional History provenance of the Special Collections and University Archives department, Nelson Poynter Memorial Library, USF St. Petersburg.

## Scope and Contents

The contents occupy a single scrapbook (0.10 linear ft.).

## Biographical Note

Emil August Nordstrom (born 1883/84, died Aug. 26, 1973) was a former structural engineer for the City of St. Petersburg, and was instrumental in the planning and construction of many well-known city landmarks. He earned a degree in civil engineering in 1915 from the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art in New York. In 1925, a severe bout of arthritis forced him to leave a job at B.F. Goodrich in Akron, Ohio, in order to accept a structural engineer position in St. Petersburg and enjoy the better climate in the Sunshine City.

During his three years<sup>1</sup> with the city, Nordstrom oversaw work on all bridges being built in St. Petersburg, including the so-called "Thrill Hill" bridge at Third Street (which he designed), Booker Bridge and the reconstructed bridge at Smack's Bayou. He also designed a new sewage treatment plant that was slated for Seventh Street South, and oversaw design on a 20-story Florida Mutual building (at First Avenue North, between Fifth and Sixth Streets) that was to be St. Petersburg's tallest building at the time.

By 1928, Nordstrom left his job with the city in order to join forces with Elliott Hadley, a well-known St. Petersburg architect. Together, they formed Hadley & Nordstrom (later Hadley, Nordstrom & Atkinson), a firm that put architects and engineers under one roof. Among their more prominent contributions to the St. Petersburg include the Snell Isle Bridge and the Snell Isle Country Club. Other projects include the Temple Beth-El and the designing of a new municipal pier. Nordstrom left the firm in 1939.<sup>2</sup>

Nordstrom was elected by the city council to become the engineering member of the general contractors examining board in 1933, and served as the first president of the Southwestern Florida Association of Engineers, an organization designed to protect the people of the west coast of Florida against illegal practices by unqualified engineers and surveyors. He was later appointed executive director of the Housing Authority of St. Petersburg. He retired at age 80.

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<sup>1</sup> He left his position somewhere between 1927 and 1928. The clippings in this collection do not specify exactly when he left, but most likely this occurred during the first half of 1928.

<sup>2</sup> His departure from the firm is not covered in the scrapbook (which ends in 1937). This information came as the result of reviewing the obituary of Carl Atkinson, which does not give a reason as to why Nordstrom left the firm.

## Contents of Scrapbook—Selected Annotations

Earliest dated clip – April 20, 1926

Last dated clip – May 26, 1937

**Most of the clips in the book contain his name somewhere within the article, but none appear to actually be *about* him; rather, the articles are all related to building and engineering in St. Petersburg in some way. Many of the projects being discussed were designed and/or overseen by Nordstrom. Some articles feature Nordstrom commenting on the status of a given project, but do not actually say what role he played in its design or construction.**

In the chronology of this scrapbook, we first meet Emil Nordstrom as special engineer with the building inspection bureau in the municipal department of public works for the City of St. Petersburg. An undated clipping (probably around March 1927) says that he moved to Florida from Akron due to ill health. Another undated clipping says he moved from Akron in 1925 to be a structural engineer for St. Pete. He was a graduate of the Cooper Union Institute of New York, and was awarded his C.E. degree in 1915.

An obituary and brief biography of Nordstrom appeared in the August 27, 1973 issue of the *St. Petersburg Times*:

<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=888&dat=19730827&id=KZ0mAAAAIBAJ&sjid=93IDAAAIBAJ&pg=6489,1935062>

“Emil August Nordstrom, 89, structural engineer and retired executive director of the Housing Authority of St. Petersburg, died Sunday (Aug. 26, 1973). He retired at the age of 80.

“When he first came to visit St. Petersburg in 1924, Mr. Nordstrom—confined to a wheelchair with arthritis—was employed by B.F. Goodrich in Akron, Ohio. He returned to his job there but came back to St. Petersburg a few months later to accept a position as structural engineer for the City of St. Petersburg.

“While with the city he supervised the construction of the former ‘Million Dollar Pier’ and designed the pelican chairs that were there. He also designed and built a number of seawalls and bridges in this area—including the “thrill hill” bridge on Third Street S.

“He and his partner, Elliott Hadley, an architect, were instrumental in designing the Snell Isle Bridge and Snell Isle Country Club.

“Mr. Nordstrom, who lived at 106 17<sup>th</sup> St. SE, was a native of New York City.

“He was a member of the Rotary, Lions Club, Kiwanis Club and life member of BPOE and the National Association of Housing.

“He is survived by a daughter, Mrs. Dorothy King of St. Petersburg, and grandson and several nieces and nephews.

“John S. Rhodes, East Chapel, is in charge of the arrangements.”

The first clips discuss the city commission ordering all bridges in St. Pete to be weight-tested, following an accident at Smack’s Bayou (April 20, 1926). This was overseen by Nordstrom, who also oversaw the weight-bearing of a balcony at First Methodist Church.

He oversaw the steel work on the foundation for Bayboro Terrace, Third Avenue and Second Street South.

Nordstrom prepared blue prints for a joint meeting of the planning board and the building advisory board, in regard to proposed zoning laws.

He designed the Third Street/Salt Creek archway bridge, aka "Thrill Hill Bridge," a short distance south of the campus of the University of South Florida St. Petersburg. At this time (August 13, 1926), Nordstrom oversaw all bridges being built in St. Petersburg. The Third Street/Salt Creek Bridge was slated for opening on Oct. 20, 1926, with the new bridge at Smack's Bayou slated for a November 8 opening.

He oversaw over \$4 million worth of construction in St. Petersburg in 1925-26, as well as additional \$1 million in new buildings slated for construction (according to a clipping from July 31, 1926). Nordstrom supervised the designing of a new sewage plant, slated for the foot of Seventh Avenue South.

Looked over plans for a 20-story Florida Mutual building at First Avenue North, between Fifth and Sixth Streets. This was to be St. Pete's tallest building at the time (Oct. 11, 1926).

Commented on work being done on the seawall along the waterfront (Oct 11, 1926).

In sum, the clipping capture moments of growth and development during the latter part of the Land Boom.