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Palm Harbor by the Decades : The Early Years

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Good evening. I am honored to join you this evening, at the annual gathering of members for the Palm Harbor Historical Society. As I often remind my friends south of Ulmerton Road, northern Pinellas County has a rich history, one that this organization is dedicated to preserving and sharing so future generations will know that the big boot over at the Boot Ranch shopping center along Tampa Road wasn’t always surrounded by cattle of the human variety.

Between late 2011 and early 2012, I offered a monthly series of programs in the Pinellas Room at Heritage Village, just south of Largo, with the theme “Pinellas by the Decades.” These programs, now available on the county’s website and YouTube, took us for a walk through the historical landscape of the Pinellas peninsula, with a focus on events from the Armed Occupation Act of 1842 through the centennial of our independence from Hillsborough County last year (1912-2012). For tonight’s program, I will focus on some of the major milestones of human settlement in the Palm Harbor area, with an emphasis on events up to about 1950, our early history. We cannot cover everything, of course, but mention some of the major milestones along the way.

As we look at the history of the northern Pinellas peninsula, we must remember that the history of human settlement spans thousands of years. Although high tides have washed away traces of footprints before the twentieth century, we will bring some of them back to life this evening. [Overview of shaping of Florida peninsula since last ice age and Pre-Columbian settlements] SAFETY HARBOR MOUNDS

Although the Armed Occupation Act of 1842 brought some homesteaders to areas of the central and lower Pinellas peninsula, much of the Palm Harbor area remained unsettled. 3 MAPS This did not mean, however, that human footprints could not be found. Members of the McMullen, Booth, and the handful of other pioneer families during the antebellum period certainly allowed their cattle to graze on the lands south of Lake Tarpon, and no fences inhibited the travel of these animals as they roamed from the Curlew area over to Old Tampa Bay.
William Lawrence Thompson and his wife, Julia Holland Thompson, came to the area from Levy County and generally are considered the earliest permanent settlers of the Palm Harbor area. The settled into a log cabin with a dogtrot breezeway by the early 1860s, around or immediately after the Civil War. Their daughter married J. W. Alderman in November 1884. Alderman came to the area from Leesburg. Henry Tinney came to the area of Ozona during the same time period. Buggy on dirt road

William Frederick Nigels, an 1832 native of what is now Germany who came to South Carolina in 1855 and fought for the Confederacy, arrived sometime between 1865 and 1867, homesteading near present-day County Road 1, a place where he began to grow citrus. His son, David Arthur Nigels, homesteaded on land near his father. David was born in 1869. Caladesi image

By the late 1860s, a few families settled in the Ozona area and, over time, carved out an overland trail towards Tampa. Part of this early path became present-day Tampa Road from Ozona eastward through Palm Harbor and Oldsmar.

Curlew Pioneer Cemetery was established in late 1869 along the extension of Belcher Road just north of Curlew Road on land donated by John Alexander Sutton, the founder who had arrived a year earlier. Sutton also established the adjacent Curlew Methodist Church. The logs for the church were hauled by ox cart from this land to the waterfront and sent by raft to Turner's sawmill below Clear Water Harbor. According to a story related by one of Sutton's sons, William P. "Uncle Will" Sutton, John's only request was to name the church. Noticing the many pink curlews along the coast, he called the church Curlew Methodist.

Curlew postcard The name "Curlew" soon was used throughout the settlement. James Kilgore of Anona, the area along the intracoastal between present-day Largo and Indian Rocks Beach, served as the first minister on a part-time basis. According to the church history, Kilgore usually walked eighteen miles from Anona to Curlew on Saturday, preached his sermons, and walked back to Anona on Monday. William Frederick Nigels served as the first superintendent of the Sunday school. The original church burned to the ground in January 1882. Services were held outdoors until a new sanctuary took shape in 1883. The church was later rebuilt in the early 1900s.

A post office began operation at Bay St. Joseph in 1878. This settlement later became the heart of old Palm Harbor. Steamer delivered the mail to the growing settlement three times per week by 1885, three years before rail service came to the Pinellas peninsula. Boggy bayou – 2 images

The 1880s marked an important transitional decade, a time when new settlements appeared along the path of the iron horse, and a time when areas bypassed by the railroad either became more remote or disappeared. Much of the excitement of this decade came as the result of speculation by Hamilton Disston. In order to settle its debts related to accrued interest on railroad bonds, the state's Internal Improvement Fund agreed to sell four million acres of land along peninsular Florida to Hamilton Disston, an entrepreneur from Philadelphia, in exchange for $1 million on February 28, 1881. Nearly 150,000 acres of this land fell within the present-day boundaries of Pinellas County.
ANCLOTE (2 IMAGES) By the following year, 1882, Captain John B. Walton, a surveyor, arrived along the upper Pinellas peninsula with Major Mathew Robinson Marks (a former Union officer who worked as an engineer and attorney), and other members of an advance party sent by Hamilton Disston to inspect lands he had purchased. Before the end of the year, Anson Peacely Killen (A.P.K.) Safford, third governor of the Arizona Territory, also reached the remote homestead of Joshua and Mary Boyer near Spring Bayou. Safford, a former Territorial Governor of Arizona, left for Florida by January 1882. In addition to surveying the future site of Tarpon Springs, Walton also platted the area that became known as "Yellow Bluff," now the unincorporated area of Ozona. Most sources use 1882 as the founding year of the Tarpon Springs settlement.

In December 1882, Hamilton Disston visited the area near Spring Bayou (4 IMAGES) and decided to develop the area into the settlement that later became Tarpon Springs. During this year, Disston also decided to place 9,500 acres around Lake Butler, now known as Lake Tarpon, into a development enterprise known as Lake Butler Villa Company.

SUTHERLAND The Disston Land Company and its companion, the Gulf Coast Land Company, had placed agents to sell lands along the upper frontier to investors in the Northeastern United States, as well as England, the Low Countries, and other areas of Europe, by 1883. Brochures encouraged prospective owners to take a coach ride to the area from Cedar Key, more than 100 miles away. It is during this period that Tarpon Springs takes shape along the area near Spring Bayou. Tarpon’s first official hotel opened at the present-day intersection of Pinellas and Tarpon avenues. Known as the Tropical Hotel, this simple two-story structure had originally been built as a place for the first wave of workers who came to the area to design the city. Meanwhile, to the south of Curlew, the settlement once known as Jonesboro, now Dunedin, also began to take shape along Edgewater Drive and Main Street.

Between Dunedin and Tarpon Springs, some construction did take place before the partnership between Hamilton Disston and Peter Demens brought the railroad to the Pinellas peninsula. Henry B. Plant, railroad developer in the Tampa Bay region that focused his efforts on the Tampa side, began constructing the San Marino Hotel. The original structure, built at Florida Avenue and Omaha Street, opened in 1885 but burned the following year. Rebuilt soon thereafter, it remained a hotel until 1902, when it became part of Florida Seminary at Sutherland. The nearby Gulf View Hotel was constructed about the same time.

By the mid-1880s, William Saunders and Mary Barnes sold tracts of land in their possession to a company known as the Sutherland Improvement Company that developed the settlement in the old section of Palm Harbor (along parts of present-day Alt. U.S. Hwy 19) that would become known as Sutherland. The small settlement of Yellow Bluff had its first postmaster, James C. Craver W. V. Futrell opened a general store, acquired forty acres, and subdivided this parcel into lots, during this time. 

MAIL CARRIER
In October 1886, Anson P. K. Safford donated land to sustain a church and provide a cemetery. Originally created as the First Baptist Church, the congregation renamed their house of worship as Midway Baptist Church of Christ. The Midway Cemetery took shape at the corner of Sixteenth Street and Missouri Avenue, just east of Palm Harbor University High School's campus. William Frederick Nigels served as a presiding officer when the church was originally organized on 15 September 1882. The congregation disbanded in September 1914, but services continued at this site until at least 1962. Since 1 November 1980, the site has remained under the control of the First Baptist Church of Ozona in Palm Harbor.

On November 15, 1886, the Orange Belt Railway reached the small settlement of Oakland along southern Lake Apopka in central Florida. This small settlement became the headquarters for the railroad. Peter Demens, originally from an area near St. Petersburg in Russia, had wanted the community to be renamed "St. Petersburg," but local residents kept the name "Oakland" that had been used since the 1850s. In a move that reshaped the history of our area, five days later, on November 20, Demens and others revised the company charter to allow the Orange Belt to extend to the tip of the Pinellas peninsula.

Shortly after Peter Demens decided to extend the Orange Belt Railway, he is visited by Hamilton Disston. In December 1886, they agree upon a plan to bring the railway to Disston City, now known as Gulfport, in exchange for Demens's interests gaining control of 60,000 acres. Later that month, after the agreement between Disston and Demens was made, Demens believed that he would require an additional 50,000 acres for speculation in order to fund the railway. This led Demens to search for another terminal point on the peninsula for his railroad and ultimately turned the railroad in an eastern direction away from Disston’s holdings to those of John Constantine Williams and Sarah Williams along the shores of Tampa Bay, the site of present-day downtown St. Petersburg.

As railroad remapping took place south of here, a royal presence came to the Pinellas peninsula in 1887 when George Sutherland-Leveson-Gower, a cousin of Queen Victoria, came to Florida’s west coast in the mid-1880s. According to one early account, Anson Safford had first met the Duke of Sutherland and Lady Mary Caroline Blair when they docked their yacht San Peur along the Anclote River in search of supplies, perhaps in 1885. Witnesses at the time mentioned moonlight negotiations Safford had with the Duke of Sutherland along the beach during their visit. In 1887, the Duke built a small home along the north end of Lake Tarpon on a thirty-acre parcel he had purchased along a bluff that overlooked Lake Butler (now Lake Tarpon) 1920 LAKE BUTLER ROAD. Known as the Duke of Sutherland, he was the third successive Duke to hold that title and the eldest son of the second Duke. He had spent time sailing San Peur along the Gulf coast. Sutherland, the original name given to the settlement at Palm Harbor, was selected to honor the Duke’s presence.

For the next couple of years, the Duke remained in the area established successful agricultural operations around Tampa and the Palm Harbor area. March 4, 1889, was an important day in the history
of the area. On that date, workers completed the **Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd**, an Episcopalian church, along the corner of Edgewater Drive and Albert Street.

Also on this date, the first two weddings at the church took place. At 10:00 a.m., the church's leader, *Rev. W. A. Noyle* exchanged vows with *Amy Florence Thompson*. An hour later, *George Sutherland-Leveson-Gower*, the *Third Duke of Sutherland*, married *Mary Caroline Blair*. Thus, we had the closest thing ever to a “royal wedding” in Pinellas not even nine months after the Orange Belt reached St. Petersburg! This marriage made Blair the **Duchess of Sutherland**.

**BLUFFS** For awhile, they stayed at *Sutherland Manor*, a structure built in or about 1887 that was described by a magazine from Guernsey in the United Kingdom as "the first house of any pretension built in the wild country on Lake Butler, and it is a few hours' journey only inland from Clearwater Harbour, where the Duke and the Duchess spent their honeymoon, and a dozen miles off Dunedin."

**WALL SPRINGS** There was much controversy about the Duke's marriage back in England. His first wife, *Anne Sutherland-Leveson-Gower*, had passed away on 25 November 1888, just a few months earlier. The Duke was living with Lady Blair before their marriage, and the ceremony took place very soon after Anne's death and in such a distant location from England. Some speculated that the Duke would remain in Florida, though he and the new Duchess did return to England. Long before the Royal scandals of recent years, a wedding in the Dunedin/Palm Harbor area caused commotion in England in the 1880s.

In 1888, much happened on the upper Pinellas peninsula. The Orange Belt Railway, already in operation in the area and along points northward, reached its terminal point in June 1888 at a settlement that would become St. Petersburg. On January 30, a post office opened at *Sutherland*, and platting of lands in our agricultural community took place. A terrible **yellow fever** outbreak in Tampa during 1887-1888 even led to the changing of a settlement’s name, although only two residents of the Pinellas peninsula were known to have succumbed to the outbreak. In 1888, residents of Yellow Bluff decided to change the community's name to Ozona with hopes that the new name would paint an impression of a community with healthy, clean air.

**ANDERSON PARK** Fires have also played an important role in changing the history of this area. For example, on January 3, 1889, the *Hotel Sutherland* opened for business as a new destination along the **Orange Belt Railway** south of Tarpon Springs. In early February, a large party from Omaha occupied many of the rooms. On February 7, the $40,000 wooden structure burned to the ground, forcing all of the guests from Omaha to find temporary shelter in the bushes and scrub nearby. According to one news account, many of the women who suffered burns might have endured a more deadly fate if not "for the bravery of colored men, who made three daring rescues." We will talk about another fire later in our lecture.

**GROVES** By the end of the 1880s, the *Rogers & Wills Grove Packing House* had started operations in the northern area of the Pinellas Peninsula. Members of pioneer families, such as the *Whitehurst* and
Thompson families of Palm Harbor, assisted one another with harvesting and packing activities in their groves and at this place.

The original railroad depot in Sutherland opened in 1890 at the northwest corner of Florida Avenue near Alternate US Route 19. Similar to other early depots in the Orange Belt Railway system, this building had Russian architectural features. A larger depot to handle the area’s growing agriculture commodities opened in 1903. A third depot appeared to the southwest at Virginia Avenue and Dempsey Road in 1917 that served the area until passenger service along this segment ended in 1984. This last depot was demolished in 1990.

Grapefruit Card The establishment of the railroad encouraged the diversification of crops and the widespread expansion of citrus cultivation. Few large groves existed before the late 1880s, because there was no easy way to get the harvests to the market. 1892: Arthur Lewis Duncan moved from Wisconsin to settle in the Dunedin area by the 1870s. By 1892, he introduced the first named variety of grapefruit grown in the United States, Duncan grapefruit. Duncan took samples from the pomelos at Philippe’s former St. Helena site, used his expertise at budding and grafting the citrus plants, harvested them in Dunedin, and developed a type of grapefruit for commercial distribution. He worked in partnership with fellow Wisconsinite L. B. (Lee Bronson) Skinner. They established the Milwaukee Groves in lands near Dunedin. Wagon load If Philippe receives credit for introducing grapefruit to the area, Arthur L. Duncan deserves recognition for transforming grapefruits into a profitable commodity just as the railroad played an important role in the region’s commerce.

But even these great plans endured moments of tragedy. A terrible freeze on December 29, 1894 dipped temperatures to 19 degrees Fahrenheit or lower across much of Pinellas, doing substantial damage to the citrus groves and other agricultural crops. Then, the temperatures became much warmer than usual. 1895 FREEZE Those trees that had miraculously survived the first freeze had just started to recover when, on February 13, 1895, temperatures once again dipped into the mid-20s in Pinellas, wiping out many of the surviving citrus trees. Another freeze of this magnitude did not hit Pinellas groves until 1962.

These freezes also had a chilling effect on the railroad industry, as the syndicate that took possession of the Orange Belt Railway from Peter Demens decided to lease the railroad to Henry Plant since the widespread destruction of citrus groves wiped out the prospects of hauling citrus from the groves along the railroad for years. Plant renamed the line the Sanford & St. Petersburg Railway and made it part of the Plant System of railroads. Plant later built the Hotel Belleview, our beloved Belleview-Biltmore, and his son, Morton, helped establish early medical facilities in Clearwater.

By the early 1890s, women in the small settlements of Pinellas took active roles in leadership. The Women’s Town Improvement Associations in St. Petersburg and Tarpon Springs, for example, offered women opportunities for leadership at a time when laws and customs restricted their role in the public sphere. At about the same time that the WTIA in St. Petersburg led efforts to clear City Park—now Williams Park—and build the first wooden bandstand in that venue, in 1895, Dr. Susan K. Whitford,
formerly of Elgin, Illinois, became the president of the newly formed **Ozona Ladies Improvement Society**. By 1900, she and other members raised funds to allow for the construction of a town hall for the settlement, even though it lacked formal incorporation as a municipality.

Before 1900, a resident of New York City, **Dr. St. George Fechtig** came to the area near present-day **Lake St. George** and purchased land along the lake. Originally known as **Lake Daniel**, this body of water was also known as **Lake Fechtig**. His first home was a tent, but he later built a home and even a schoolhouse for nearby children. After regaining his health, he returned to New York to practice osteopathy and became rich. He soon acquired 5,400 acres in Pinellas, including 500 acres around the lake, a place where he built a sanitarium. During the height of the land boom, his St. Georges Alexandrine Company held 132,000 acres in Florida, though this acreage declined substantially by the time of his death in October 1932. Today, homes and subdivisions cover the site of former groves on this gently sloping landscape between Oldsmar and Dunedin.

In 1902, an institution of higher learning came to the Palm Harbor area. This school—with primary, secondary, and college courses—had started under the auspices of the Florida Methodist Conference in 1883 as the Wesleyan Institute. First located in Orlando, this school moved to Leesburg in 1886 to Leesburg as the Florida Conference College, before arriving in **Sutherland** in 1902 as the **Florida Seminary**. At the time of its arrival, **W. Walker** served as the president. The school’s name changed to **Southern College** in 1906.

Meanwhile, by 1906, construction of a basic road made of graded shell took place between Ozona and Tampa that replaced earlier trails and followed the general path of **Tampa Road**. A nine-foot wide roadway made of brick replaced the shell road from Ozona to the county line at Oldsmar in 1917. Until the opening of the Gandy Bridge in the 1920s, this was the “quickest” way to Tampa for those without a boat. Though a more direct rail corridor soon followed: In 1911, **Charles H. Lutz**, a builder who also engaged in the lumber trade along the Pinellas peninsula, developed plans to bring a second railroad to the area. Construction on the **Tampa and Gulf Coast** created a direct route between Tampa and Pinellas via Tampa Shores (now Oldsmar), Safety Harbor, Clearwater, and the Seminole/Largo area. It finally reached St. Petersburg in September 1914 with the support of a local committee that assisted in securing rights-of-way. Members included St. Petersburg leaders **A.C. Pheil, Noel A. Mitchell, and Roy S. Hanna**.

**VOTE** While the new railroad shortened the traveling distance between here and Tampa, on some matters we remained miles apart. [Brief discussion of creation of Pinellas in 1911 and vote to secede on January 1, 1912.]

In 1914, residents of the Ozona area even **approved the incorporation of Ozona** as a town. Three years later, in 1917, settlers voted to abolish the town. To the east, in 1917, **Ransom E. Olds**, an automobile manufacturer who lived in Lansing, Michigan, at the time, took possession of approximately 37,500 acres in both Pinellas and Hillsborough counties along Old Tampa Bay. He started the settlement at Oldsmar and established the **Olds Farm Tractor Factory**, attracting more than 1,000 other residents
from Lansing to the new development at the eastern boundary of Pinellas County. Harry E. Prettyman became the public face of the development during the 1920s, a time when some boosters promoted Oldsmar as “The Wonder Town of Pinellas.”

The settlement fell upon hard times, the factory closed, and other investors took possession of the site by 1925 when it became Tampa Shores.

In August 1917, Samuel Boyette, a resident of Tarpon, sold his cattle to the Tampa-based Lykes Brothers. At that time, Boyette had 12,000 head of cattle under his control, offering proof of the importance of livestock along the unpopulated areas near Lake Tarpon. He sold the cows for about $11/head. Indeed, much of the southern shore of Lake Tarpon was cow country during this time.

Three months later, in November 1917, County commissioners received a report on a vote to close the open range in the county. People raising cattle already had struggled with challenges during the mid-1910s: The presence of the Texas fever ticks prompted leaders in Pinellas to become the first Florida county to try to make cattle dipping mandatory. According to the results presented to them from the October 29 referendum, 501 voted against the new law to close the range, while 983 supported it. Before the Pinellas measure was passed, branded cattle sometimes roamed upwards of eighty miles (often beyond county boundaries) in search of grasses they sought; with the range closed in Pinellas (it remained open in much of Florida until the fence law passed in the 1949 legislature) farmers had to bring food and water to the cattle pens rather than letting their cattle freely roam.

As governance in Pinellas took shape, tensions continued to exist. As evidence of regionalism between northern and southern Pinellas County and eastern and western Pasco County, business interests in and around Tarpon Springs proposed the creation of a new county named in honor of President Woodrow Wilson. The bill submitted to the 1919 legislature did not gain approval, but demonstrated growing tensions. The outline of “Wilson County” would have included lands north of Dunedin and lands in western Pasco, including the communities of Sutherland, Wall Springs, Crystal Beach, Ozona, Odessa, Tarpon Springs (the proposed county seat), New Port Richey, Elfers, Hudson, Seven Springs, and Anclote.

Another fire needs to be mentioned. After the completion of the first, rickety causeway to Clearwater Beach in 1917, the Clearwater Beach Hotel was constructed on the largely uninhabited island. As more visitors came to the island for leisure, another group came out of necessity. On January 29, 1921, a fire at the Florida Seminary in Sutherland destroyed buildings at the school. The fire rapidly spread from building to building. Although fire brigades from Clearwater and Tarpon Springs rushed to the area, they could do little to save the structures because of a lack of running water. With the campus in ruins, school leaders received a pledge from E. T. Roux that the seminary could use his hotel along Clearwater Beach, the Clearwater Beach Hotel, as a meeting place for awhile. Classrooms and barracks for the students sat alongside the hotel. Classes resumed along the beachfront for students at this provisional campus on February 8, 1922. Later, the campus moved to Lakeland and became Florida Southern College.
The Tampa Bay area, along with Miami and Palm Beach, experienced the Florida land boom of the 1920s, a time of phenomenal growth and real estate speculation. While St. Petersburg and Tampa, and—to a lesser extent places such as Tarpon Springs and Safety Harbor—experienced the boom, agricultural commodities remained the primary focus of the Palm Harbor area. Tom Noxtine and his family settled along Tampa Road sometime around 1920, and their groves started to take shape by the middle of the decade. They operated the Noxtine Fruit Stand from their family home for many years.

The land boom did come close to Palm Harbor, however . . .

To the east, in October 1925, investors from Boston, New York, Miami, and St. Petersburg—in a partnership known as the Tampa Shores Corporation—purchased some of the interests in Oldsmar encompassing 4,000 lots in the original community site, 1,000 acres nearby, and all existing utilities and manufacturing facilities from Charles P. Bland, Harry E. Prettyman, and their Oldsmar Land and Development Company. The Tampa Shores Corporation paid approximately $7,000,000. After this sale, the development became known as Tampa Shores (sometimes written as a single word, Tampashores) and they hoped to develop the settlement as a "great recreational center." A few days after the sale, offices opened in Tampa, St. Petersburg, and New York City, with plans to market the settlement aggressively.

To the south and west, in November 1925, Detroiter Ephraim S. Frischkorn, a longtime winter resident of Florida, embarked upon a large-scale marketing campaign to promote his Dunedin Isles development north of the Dunedin city limits. He established the Frischkorn Florida Company with Robert S. Grant as his agent in Dunedin, as well as other offices in Tampa, St. Petersburg, Clearwater, Tarpon Springs, and Safety Harbor, and "branch" offices in communities throughout Florida, from Auburndale to Haines City.

Recognizing the popularity of Dunedin's artesian wells throughout the region, he proclaimed that "Dunedin boasts the best water in Florida." On this date, the Dunedin Times announced plans for a $10-million development known as the Edgewater Beaches. A week later, Frischkorn's advertisement predicted a $50-million development that would add 24,000 new residents. Soon he replaced "Edgewater Beaches" with "Dunedin Isles" in the marketing literature.

By early January 1926, a glowing article in the St. Petersburg Evening Independent called his proposed $63-million development a "Fairyland", noting that 200 laborers, a large group of engineers, and large dredging equipment had started the clear trees, improve land, plat roads, and improve navigation along the short and narrow Curlew and Cedar creeks. Donald Ross began to lay out the golf course at the country club. Before the end of the year, Frischkorn had chartered Pullman train cars bringing investors and prospective residents from Michigan. His company also maintained a fleet of twenty-three fancy "parlor" cars that offered tours of Dunedin Isles and the region. He created a large nursery to provide shrubs and ornamental plants. Frischkorn's dreams, along with Oldsmar's expansion, faded as the land boom came to an end by 1928 and the national economy tumbled in 1929. WALL SPRINGS
During the depression years, agricultural yields from the Palm Harbor area sustained the community. In the 1930s, H. L. (Lorimer) Stansell developed a fruit hauling business that transported harvests from local groves and fields to distant cities. The family’s businesses became an important part of Palm Harbor by the mid-twentieth century. Henry Sylvester “Pop” Stansell opened a gas station by the mid 1940s. The “Pop” Stansell Park, located at the end of Florida Avenue along Sutherland Bayou, was named in his honor.

Some of the infrastructure improvements of the 1930s were tied to the creation of a proposed farm-to-market road system. If you have ever traveled in Texas, you are familiar with the “FM” road signs, even if many of these roads are now urban thoroughfares. In August 1937, county officials planned to ask the State Road Department (later known as the Florida Department of Transportation) for funding to improve twelve roads as part of this system. These early pathways, often nothing more than dirt and sand trails, connected farming and agriculture areas with larger thoroughfares and the plan was to improve access so farmers could get items to the market more easily. “Improvements” to these early roads often meant placing straw on the muddy roads. One was Alderman Road toward Lake Tarpon. At this time and well into the 1950s, Alderman Road was a narrow path up the sandy hills in the Palm Harbor area.

TAKING FRUIT The transition of Palm Harbor, East Lake, and much of northern Pinellas from a rural setting to an urban area occurred after the Second World War. The Florida fence law that closed in the range by the end of the 1940s is an important part of the story. Cattle could no longer roam freely between Dunedin and the Pasco County line. The Boot Ranch in the Oldsmar area took shape as the result of the closing of the range. Citrus, of course, remained important. Charley and Winona Nigels Jones, newlyweds of 1944 and natives of the Palm Harbor area, opened a popular roadside fruit stand in the mid-1940s that they operated until 1960. By May 1949, A.W. Baylis of Tampa launched the development of Ozona Shores between Dunedin and Tarpon Springs just south of Ozona’s commercial fishing village area. Baylis began acquiring tracts of land in the area in the mid-1940s.

In the summer of 1949, to avoid confusion with the Lake Butler in Union County, the 1949 Florida legislature approved a bill that changed the name of Lake Butler to Lake Tarpon. Originally named in honor of the first surveyor general of Florida, Colonel Robert Butler, the name caused difficulties for many a local citrus grower who used “Lake Butler” as a return address and soon discovered that his return mail was sent to Union County by mistake.

Since 1950, growth has continued to reshape Palm Harbor. The Boot Ranch that was created to preserve cattle and agriculture has given way to shopping centers and planned communities. The remapping of U.S. Highway 19 from its earlier path along present-day Alt. 19 eastward to the backbone of the peninsula brought new developments to largely unoccupied areas. Developments like Innisbrook filled former citrus groves and farm acreage, blurring traditional municipal boundaries as developments bordered upon one another by the early 1980s.
To conclude, the Palm Harbor and East Lake areas of Pinellas County have a rich and important history. Today’s talk mentioned a few important moments, but there are many others out there. Through your support of the Palm Harbor Historical Society and North Pinellas History Museum, you help to assure that our heritage will never be forgotten. It has been a pleasure joining you this evening, and I do thank you for your interest. At this time, I would be happy to take any questions from the audience.

Research for this presentation came from sources compiled by the presenter as part of an ongoing chronology of Pinellas County history.

Please contact the author if you have specific questions.