

Journal and Newsletter of the
Triangle Inn Association

Venice Area Journal

April 2010

Association News

Archives News and Features

Activities and Announcements

(Local Historical Organizations)

Venice Area History Articles

Insiders Tour of Lakeland

On Friday, April 9, 2010 the Association is sponsoring a bus trip to Lakeland, Florida to visit Florida Southern College. TIA Board Member and Florida Southern Alumna Julia Cousins Laning has made the arrangements with the college for a campus tour, a tour of the McKay Archives Center (NEW facility), and lunch in the original Frank Lloyd Wright designed library, which is now a visitor center. The trip will also include a stop at the 20th Century modern home of Ms. Cousins' friend Irma King. See included brochure for more details.

Association Update

Trolley Tours of Historic Venice

Once again the Association's trolley tours of historic Venice were a great success. Only 2 tickets out of 300 went unsold. Special thanks to TIA board member Judie Bauer for organizing the fundraiser, recruiting docents, and publicizing the tours. Thank you to trolley tour docents Judie Bauer, Carol Bailey, Jim

Middleton, Susan Horton, Dean Calamaras, June Gurley, Debbie Stewart, and Sue Chapman. Also, thank you to Bob Briner for taken on the navigation duties, and Betty Walker and Carol Bailey for preparing the “gift” bags given to tour participants.

Tea at Eagle Point

On Sunday, February 14, 2010 the TIA cooperated with other local history and preservation groups to sponsor a fundraising “Tea at Eagle Point” to benefit the restoration of the Lord-Higel House. Co-chairs of the event were Judie Bauer, TIA board member; Sue Chapman, President of the VAHS; Betty Intagliata, Chair of the Sarasota County Historical Commission; and Dorothy Korwek, President of the TIA. (All four are also board members of the Friends of the Lord-Higel House.) Thank you to TIA board members Bob Briner for loaning dishes and waiting tables at the “Tea” and Dot Fuhrmeister for helping with prep and cleanup work in the kitchen. The event netted over \$1,000.

Archives Update

Archives Book Release Open House

The Archives Open House on January 28, 2010 for the third edition of the book listing National Register properties in the Venice Area was well attended. Special recognition was given to Archives’ volunteers Rhonda Rogers, Debbie Stewart, and Chuck Ford for assisting COV Director of Historical Resources James Hagler in preparing this full color version of the book. The TIA provided funding to publish the book which is already in its second printing of 100 copies. The book is available at the Archives for \$30 which includes sale tax. TIA members receive a 10% discount on the list price.

Venice Army Air Base Open House

About 50 people attended an Open House on February 23, 2010 for the Archives’ new exhibit on the Venice Army Air Base during

World War II. The exhibit can be viewed through the end of April 2010. TIA provided funding for the refreshments.



From left, Archives' volunteers Phyllis Curry, June Gurley, Bob Briner, Barbara Dein, Carol Bailey, Debbie Stewart, Chuck Ford (partially hidden), and Mary Charles greet and serve refreshments to visitors who attended the Venice Army Air Base open house

Archives Announcements

Venice Documentary Film

Coming soon (April or May) to PBS station WEDU, a film by Spencer Briggs titled *Venice, Florida: Moving Forward by Looking Back*. This film was funded by the Florida Humanities Council and looks to the past in anticipation of the future. In 1925, renowned city planner John Nolen designed Venice, Florida, a masterful work of art based on the Renaissance skills Nolen learned at Harvard. Nolen designed Venice as a model for what he hoped would become a state of planned cities. Although this initiative failed, Venice took form, mixing nature and urbanism in sustainable form. Nolen and Venice have inspired the New Urbanism, a town planning movement utilizing Renaissance

techniques of balance, form, and natural law to offer a sustainable alternative to suburban sprawl.

Venice Area Historical Society Announcements

You are invited to attend the last two general meetings of the Society for the season. Both programs are about the World War II experience. All programs are FREE and OPEN TO THE PUBLIC. No reservations required.

Date: Tuesday, **April 27, 2010**, at 7 p.m.

Program: **The Flying Sergeant**

Speaker: Denny Matheny presents military memorabilia and the story of World War II Army Air Force pilot Ervin A. Lewis who flew P38s in the Mediterranean Theater.

Date: Tuesday, **May 25, 2010**, at 7 p.m.

Program: **The End of WW II: Effect Upon U.S. and Venice**

Speakers: Claire Suter and Betty Intagliata discuss the country's reaction to the end of the war, and present the 35 minute documentary, *Hallowed Grounds*.

Where: Village on the Isle, Mark Manor building,
Renaissance Room #1.

Directions: Turn west onto Plaza Mayor from Tamiami Trail; then left into the Lutheran Church parking lot; and then follow the signs to the building entrance.

Friends of the Lord-Higel House Announcements

Dining Out for a Cause

On the following **Thursdays**, the Friends will receive 10% of all customer receipts between 5 and 8 p.m. at the East Venice Avenue Dairy Queen. No flyers needed!

March 18, 2010 - April 22, 2010 - May 20, 2010 - June 3, 2010

Local History Articles

This issue of the Journal presents biographical information about Bertha Honoré Palmer researched and compiled by VAHS President Sue Chapman. Ms. Chapman, as well as Dot Fuhrmeister, Betty Intagliata, and Claire Suter portray Bertha Honoré Palmer, and present programs about her for local groups.



Bertha Honoré Palmer

Mrs. Bertha Honoré Palmer: Biographical Information

Research and compilation by Sue Chapman

Bertha Honoré Palmer was born in Louisville, Kentucky on May 22, 1849 to Hamilton and Eliza Honoré. Her father was of French descent and was a real estate developer in Louisville. In 1855 he moved the family to Chicago.

In 1867, at age 18, Bertha Honoré graduated from the Convent of the Visitation in Georgetown, near Washington D.C. She was a skilled musician, playing the piano and harp, as well as a vocalist, a proficient linguist, and writer. From her husband Potter Palmer she learned to be a skilled politician and a fine administrator.

Bertha Honoré met her husband when she was 13 years old. It is said that Potter Palmer fell in love with her at their first meeting—admiring her large dark eyes, heavy wavy hair, and magnetic smile. He waited until she reached her 21st birthday before they married on July 29, 1870. He was 23 years her senior. They were a well-matched couple—strong-willed, and armed with economic power and social position.

Potter Palmer was born in New York in 1826 and came to Chicago in 1852 to open a dry goods store. He soon built the business into the largest mercantile business in the mid-west. He was successful because he allowed almost anything to be returned, and extended a generous credit policy. He was one of the first merchants to “give the little lady what she wants.” In addition, he stocked just about everything anyone needed under one roof—in essence, the first modern department store. He sold his business to Levi Leiter and Marshall Field, in order to pursue real estate development.

Potter Palmer built the Palmer House Hotel, 8 stories tall with 225 rooms, as a wedding present for Bertha. The hotel opened on

September 26, 1871. Two weeks later the hotel was destroyed in the “Great Chicago Fire” of October 10th. With Bertha’s encouragement and support, Potter invested in rebuilding Chicago after the fire. He rebuilt the Palmer House Hotel and developed “State Street” as Chicago’s new business district.

During the 1870s the Palmers lived in the second Palmer House Hotel. Their first son Honoré was born in 1874 and their second son Potter, Jr. was born in 1875. In 1882 the Palmers’ began to build their mansion on North Lake Shore Drive. Known as “The Castle,” the house was completed in 1883, but it took two more years to finish the interior decoration. The estimated cost of \$90,000 ran over budget to more than one million dollars. The house had a spiral staircase that rose eighty feet, unsupported into one of the towers. There were also two elevators. It was the largest private residence in Chicago.

There were no doorknobs or locks on the outside of the doors. Servants answered the door and guests presented their calling cards. Mrs. Palmer required that everyone write for an appointment to meet with her. Although she entertained lavishly, she valued her privacy.

Mrs. Palmer was a noted art collector, admiring the works of the Impressionist School painters. To accommodate her ever-growing art collection, a 90 foot long ballroom and picture gallery was added to the house in 1893. Her art was hung in tiers against a red velvet background.

Mrs. Palmer socialized with European royalty, captains of industry, and other social leaders. Her sister, Ida, married the oldest son of President U. S. Grant giving her access to the White House. She treated her niece Julia Grant, who was born in the White House, as a daughter. President McKinley appointed her as the only female representative to the National Commission of the

1900 Paris Exposition. She was also only the third woman to receive the French Legion D'Honneur.

Bertha Honoré Palmer was elected the President of the Lady Board of Managers for the 1893 World Columbian Exposition which was held in Chicago. The exposition celebrated the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' first voyage to the new world. The Board oversaw the design and activities of the massive Woman's Building, as well as ancillary buildings which included the Children's Building and a Women's Dormitory where you could rent a room for 40 cents a night. She insisted that a women architect be chosen to design the Woman's Building. Sophia Hayden was the architect chosen and she brought the building in on time and under budget, in spite of numerous changes to the original design. She never designed another building.

Mrs. Palmer was one of the first Exposition officials to ride the giant Ferris Wheel. She marveled at new inventions like the zipper, cash registers, and giant locomotives. She found the "Little Egypt" section of the Midway common and revolting. She welcomed her royal highness, the Infanta of Spain, who was chosen as an appropriate international personage to open the Exposition, with lavish entertainment and deluxe accommodations at the Palmer House Hotel. When Mrs. Palmer invited the Infanta to dine at "The Castile," the Infanta replied "I don't dine with the innkeeper's wife." Years later the two became friends.

After the Exposition, Mrs. Palmer continued to champion the working woman, was a supporter of Jane Addams, and worked tirelessly for just causes. She led crusades for social reform and temperance. She was an early member of Chicago's Woman's Club which met to discuss social problems and develop solutions. The Club supported kindergartens, eventually convincing the city to make them part of the school system, campaigned for

inexpensive milk for impoverished children, and many other causes for the needy.

Mrs. Palmer was fond of pearl and diamond jewelry. Her husband, who called her "Cissie," bought her various pieces of jewelry including a collar comprised of 2,269 pearls, seven diamonds, and large pink pearl pendant. In his will Potter stipulated that his wife should inherit his entire estate of eight million dollars. When his lawyer suggested that she might marry again, Potter replied that "If she does, he'll need the money." It is interesting to note that her biography was titled "Silhouette in Diamonds."

The Palmers spent time in Newport and made many trips to the continent, where they socialized and added to their art collection.

In May of 1902, Potter, whose health was never the best, came down with a bad case of the grippe. Within three hour of the onset of the illness he died with his wife and sons at his side. Potter was 76 years old.

In 1903 while still in mourning, Mrs. Palmer went aboard to England for her son Honoré's wedding. Traveling to Paris she contracted typhoid fever and did not return to Chicago that winter, but convalesced at her home in Paris. For a woman who enjoyed robust good health it was a major set back. As her mourning cloths went from black to lavender and gray, there was always talk and gossip about whether she would remarry. She was not yet fifty years old and although she had many potential suitors, she never remarried. She was content with family and confident as a woman who could survive alone.

On a wintery day in Chicago in 1910 she read the following ad in the Chicago Tribune:

Grapefruit and orange groves

Beautiful winter home

Fruit and vegetable

In famous Sarasota Bay district

I am one of the largest growers and landowners in Manatee County and can furnish you with any kind or size of property desired. I also improve lands and raise groves for purchasers. Best location in the U.S., lowest prices, easy terms, call or write for free book and full information. J. H. Lord, Owner

Mrs. Palmer asked her father to arrange a meeting with Mr. Lord, and soon arrangements were made for her to travel south where Lord's business partner, Arthur B. Edwards, would be her guide. Traveling in her private railroad car she arrived in Sarasota on February 10. She was accompanied by her father, two sons, and her brother Adrian. She toured the country-side, by buggy, with Mr. Edwards who told her stories about the local folk, animals, and the vast variety of trees and plants. One afternoon Mr. Edwards took Mrs. Palmer and her father on a sight seeing tour by boat. Traveling south down Sarasota Bay they came to a beautiful location, on the water, in Osprey. Mrs. Palmer was told that property was for sale, but that the owner's asking price was high at \$11,000. Upon returning to Sarasota Mrs. Palmer meet with the owner and paid his asking price, thus saving the real estate commission. She named the property, along with 200 additional acres, "The Oaks." She would spend all her remaining winters there. The original house on the property was expanded to include 31 bedrooms and five porches; 12 bedrooms and 9 baths; a 40' by 35' living room; and a dining room; and a large hotel-style kitchen.

Eventually Mr. Lord and Mr. Edwards would sell Mrs. Palmer over 140,000 acres of land in present day Sarasota County. A land

development company called the Sarasota-Venice Company was created with her brother and sons as officers, and Mr. Lord as vice-president and manager of development and sales. In order to develop her property Mrs. Palmer convinced the Seaboard Railroad to run a spur line from Sarasota to Venice.

Mrs. Palmer's first profits came from her 1,300 acres of citrus groves. Workers picked grapefruit and shipped railroad cars of fruit to Chicago. The groves also produced orange-blossom honey. She was interested in experimenting with new ideas, and was on a Department of Agricultural list to receive new plants being introduced.

She purchased 3,000 head of cattle and 6,000 acres along the Myakka River that she thought the most beautiful spot in Florida and named it "Meadow Sweet Pastures." She taught the "locals" how to dip cattle to protect them from the debilitating tic, and introduced Brahma bulls to breed with the scrawny Florida range cattle. She fenced her pastures closing the old "open-range" way of ranching and shipped the first trainload of cattle to Texas.

Near Venice she built Eagle Point, a hunting and fishing camp, with a lodge and cottages for her sporting friends who came south for the winter. Visitors had access to hundreds of acres for hunting quail, turkey, wild boar, and other game, as well as deep water fishing. She had plans to develop a resort city at Venice, but the death of her father in 1916 at the age of 93 and the uncertain economic times during World War I caused her to shelve her plans for the Venice area. By now she had increased her 8 million dollar inheritance to 20 million dollars.

Following her father's death Mrs. Palmer discovered that she had breast cancer. She fought the cancer for two more years, but died at "The Oaks" on May 5, 1918, just a few days short of her 69th birthday. Her funeral was held in Chicago attended by masses of

people both rich and humble. Her butler, who had served her for many years, laid a wreath of orchids at the foot of her coffin, as a tribute from all her servants. Her coffin was covered with a blanket of orchids surrounded by the beautiful Bertha Honoré Palmer roses developed and named for her. Her final resting place is next to her beloved Potter, in the family mausoleum, at Graceland Cemetery in Chicago.

Her brother and sons carried on her legacy in Florida. Family names live on in street names like Lockwood Ridge Road, Honoré Avenue, and many others. The Palmer Ranch and the Oaks developments reflect her ownership of these properties. Meadow Sweet Pastures became Myakka State park. She donated her art collection to the Chicago Institute of Art and bequeathed more than \$500,000 to various charitable organizations. Her belief in the strength and talent of women was ahead of its time.