

Venice Area Journal

July 2010

Association News

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(Local Historical Organizations)
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Association News



Dot Fuhrmeister

Long time Board member Dot Fuhrmeister will be moving to Georgia in August to live with her daughter. Dot portrayed Mrs. Bertha Honoré Palmer at our November 2009 Annual meeting. Always willing to help out with any project, including serving as Association Secretary for several years, she will be missed.



Erin Mahaney

Joining the Association Board at the May meeting was newly elected member Erin Mahaney. Erin is currently archivist at Mote Marine Laboratory. She was a volunteer at the Venice Archives following completion of graduate work in public history and archival studies at North Carolina State University. Her undergraduate degree in history is from New College in Sarasota.

Association Update



Dorothy Korwek, Jack and Judie Bauer

Lord-Higel House Donation

At the March 19, 2010, Board of Directors meeting, the Board unanimously voted to donate \$2,500 to the restoration of the historic Lord-Higel House. The donation matches one from the Venice Area Historical Society and is designated for the replacement of the roof.

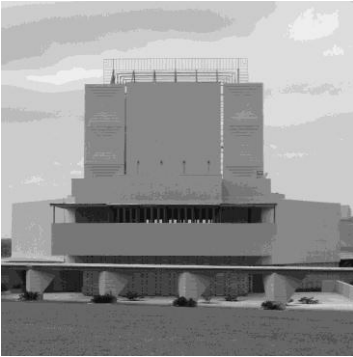
Visit the Friends of the Lord-Higel House website at www.Lord-HigelHouse.com for more information about the house and its restoration.

Insiders Tour of Lakeland

On Friday, April 9, 2010, the Association sponsored a trip to Lakeland, Florida to visit Florida Southern College. Florida Southern has the largest collection of Frank Lloyd Wright designed and constructed buildings in the U.S.



Tour participants in the second floor research area of the McKay Archives Center



Annie Pfeiffer Chapel

The college has initiated a major restoration of the Wright-designed campus buildings, including the iconic Annie Pfeiffer Chapel built with student labor from 1939 to 1941. The building's tower is affectionately referred to as "the bicycle rack in the sky" and "the bowtie" because of the wrought iron work atop and the exterior concrete design respectively.

The Water Dome completed in 1948 was fully restored in 2007. It is a perfect circle, 160 feet across, with high-pressure water nozzles installed around the perimeter. Controlled by a computerized fountain system, water is propelled 45 feet into the air creating the dome.

In addition to the restoration of the Wright buildings, the college has constructed new dormitories and classrooms in a compatible modern style. There are also plans for a new Wright visitor center and gift shop.

TIA Board Member and Florida Southern Alumna Julia Cousins Laning arranged for the campus tour, the tour of the recently constructed McKay Archives Center, and lunch in the lobby of a pre-Wright era dormitory building. The trip also included a stop at the 20th Century modern home of Julia's friend Irma King before returning to Venice.

Legacy Award

The Association received a Legacy Award from the city's Historic Preservation Board on Tuesday, May 25, 2010. Mayor Ed Martin presented the award to Association President Dorothy Korwek. Present at the ceremony were TIA Board members Judie Bauer and Debbie Stewart; TIA members Mary Charles, Betty Intagliata and Carolyn Shrauger; and Archives worker Josephine Grund.

Venice Legacy Awards are given to individuals or organizations in recognition of their contributions to historical preservation or significant historical impact in the Venice area.

Archives Update

Grant Award

The Archives has received a grant from the Gulf Coast Community Foundation of Venice to hire a full-time assistant for Director James Hagler for one year. The assistant will prepare an application for accreditation from the American Association of State and Local History for the Venice Archives.



Bill Gallagher

Retirement luncheon

A retirement luncheon for Archives volunteer Bill Gallagher was held at the Triangle Inn building on Wednesday, May 19, 2010. Bill has volunteered at the Archives for 10 years and has been responsible for the updating and maintenance of the Vertical File Collection (newspaper articles about local events and people). Thanks for a job well done!

2010 All Class High School Reunion

Graduates of the Venice-Nokomis and Venice High Schools attended an All Class Reunion on June 24, 25, and 26 in Venice. The Archives and the Association sponsored an Open House at the Triangle Inn on Friday, June 25 from 1-4 p.m. and on Saturday, June 26 from 1-7 p.m. School yearbooks and memorabilia were on display. Surplus copies of some pre-2010 yearbooks were available for purchase at \$20 each. Proceeds from the yearbook sales were split between the Archives and Venice High School.

Archives Announcements

Mark your calendars for Tuesday, September 21, 2010. The Archives is planning a gala event to raise money for the permanent Dr. Albee exhibit. The event will include a guest speaker. Invitations will be sent to local doctors and dentists.

Venice Area Historical Society Update

Venice Documentary Premier

On Wednesday, May 12, 2010, the Society and PBS Station WEDU premiered the 30 minute WEDU produced documentary *Venice, Florida: Moving Forward by Looking Back*. Funding for the documentary was provided by the Florida Humanities Council. A reception before the premier was sponsored by The Gulf Coast Community Foundation of Venice.

The Venice documentary has been shown on various Florida PBS stations, including WEDU, WUSF, and WGCU. Consult local listings for repeat showings during the summer.

Venice Area Historical Society Announcements

May was the last regularly scheduled meeting for the season. Watch for announcements of the date and subject of the Society's next meeting in October.

Friends of the Lord-Higel House Announcements

Dining Out for a Cause

On the following **Wednesdays**, 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!

July 7, 2010 — August 11, 2010

September 15, 2010 — October 3, 2010

Local History Articles

Since 2010 is the Centennial Celebration of Bertha Honoré Palmer's arrival in Sarasota County, this year's local history articles will feature information about Mrs. Palmer. This issue of the Journal describes Mrs. Palmer's involvement with the development of her properties in the Venice area.

The first article describes her involvement in the development of Eagle Point Camp. The second article subtitled, "The Fabulous Potter Palmers," was compiled by Philip G. Smashey for his book *History of the Smasheys*.

Eagle Point

by Dorothy Korwek

With the completion of the Seaboard Air Line Railroad to Venice in 1911, access to the area was dramatically improved. Prior to its completion, marginal trails and schooners plying the bays provided the only access to the scattered homesteads in the area. At the end of the rail line several structures including a station were built, as well as a turn-around Y for the trains. Mrs. Potter Palmer had purchased large tracts of land in southern Sarasota County and was anxious to develop them. It was through her efforts that the tracks were extended to Venice. In partnership with her sons and several others, the Sarasota-Venice Company was formed, and one of its projects was the development of a winter hunting and fishing resort along Roberts Bay to attract potential investors and host prominent guests. The First World War kept Americans at home and stimulated the development of winter resorts throughout the Sunbelt.

In 1916, M.T.L. Evans was hired by Mrs. Palmer to build and manage the "close to nature" resort known as Eagle Point Camp, with the railroad tracks forming the eastern boundary of the thirty

acre camp. Evans and his family lived in Virginia, wintered in Florida, and summered in Wyoming. The first guests to arrive in January 1917 were Mr. H. W. MacKintosh, the general manager of the Sarasota-Venice Company, and his wife. They were joined by Harvey Woodward of New York as personal house guests of Evans. Also invited for dinner on the first evening, were Mr. and Mrs. V. A. Saunders, local residents and real estate agents in Osprey. Evans would arrive in December to prepare the resort for the winter guests who would arrive in January and stay for several months. George Hamilton of Big Horn and Sheridan, Wyoming was one of the original guests who wrote to local resident George "Nemo" Higel requesting that oranges and grapefruit be sent to Wyoming.

In spring 1918, the resort was sold to Evans. Later that year, the first paved highway from Sarasota to Venice was constructed through Eagle Point between the cabins and the bay. It was only nine feet wide, and if two cars approached from opposite directions both were required to leave the road. In 1921, F. Kingsbury Curtis, a prominent wealthy patent attorney from New York, came to Eagle Point as a guest of Evans. Curtis resided at Eagle Point with his wife and children during the winter months. He was active in various real estate developments in the Venice area. In 1923, Evans was forced to sell the camp to Curtis, but stayed on to manage the resort for Curtis until 1926. After purchasing the camp, Curtis added two residences, one for his family and one for his mother-in-law, Mrs. McLanahan. In 1926, the Tamiami Trail was rerouted east of the camp to afford the guests maximum privacy. Access to the property was strictly controlled.

Each cabin had either wood-burning heaters or fireplaces and no phones or cooking facilities. The guests were served all their meals in the Clubhouse dining room. Lunch was served at 1 p.m. and dinner at 7 p.m. A bell from the Manasota logging camp rang to announce each meal. Evening dress was not required, but guests did dress for dinner. According to a circa 1930 brochure, the cuisine was "wholesome . . . delicious native oysters, fish of manifold varieties caught the same day, occasional game dishes,

fresh fruits and vegetables locally grown.” Guests were served cocktails in their cabins before adjourning to the clubhouse for the evening meal.

According to a newspaper article, “Local guides were hired for all day horseback hunting trips to the country and fishing excursions to the bay and gulf.” W. K. Higel was hired by Evans as a chief launch man and electrician for the camp. Saddle bag lunches were provided for the day-long hunting excursions. Photos show picnic lunches at the beach. Quail and snipe hunting were popular on the private preserve reserved for Eagle Point guests. Beside hunting and fishing, guests could play tennis on courts constructed by Curtis. Golf was available at the Venice Golf Club, a “nine-hole course with grass fairways and greens,” and in Sarasota on an 18-hole championship course. The evenings were filled with bridge games and other amusements.

During the 1920s and 1930s, Eagle Point welcomed Carl Gilbert, chief executive officer of Gillette Safety Razor Co.; Paul Cabot of New York and Boston; J. W. Wilson, a cattle rancher from Big Horn, Wyoming; and Frederick Law Olmstead, noted landscape architect who was making plans for Mountain Lake near present Lake Wales. The resort had a restricted clientele, and guests only invited their closest friends to join them for the winter months at Eagle Point. Presidents of corporations, governors, Wall Street financiers, and socially prominent families from New England and Pennsylvania were guests at Eagle Point. Railroad moguls, DuPont executives, and those who socialized with the Rockefellers and Cabot Lodges of Boston also frequented the camp. Since most came to get away from it all and remained secluded at Eagle Point, there was little interaction between the guests and the residents of Venice. A few individuals were remembered because of their famous names or because of the number of years they returned to enjoy the surroundings of the camp.

Mrs. C. C. (Margaret) Walbridge, a prominent Philadelphia sportswoman, arrived at Eagle Point in 1937 and returned each winter for 32 years until her death in the 1970s. She stayed for at

least three months each winter and occupied the same cabin eventually customizing it to her needs. She installed shoe racks in the closets, hung framed coastal charts on the walls, maintained the camp fish log, owned her own boat, and fished every day. In the early years she arrived by the Seaboard Air Line Railroad with her maid and trunks in tow wearing a fur coat and tennis shoes.

Another frequent visitor was James Bond. He was a noted ornithologist and curator of the Museum of Natural History in Philadelphia. While staying in the Caribbean he met Ian Fleming, the author of the 007 adventures. Fleming noted the name, James Bond, on the guest register at the hotel and immediately sought permission to use the name for the 007 character in his books. The rest is history.

During the late 1920s, James Fenimore Cooper, the grandson of the famous author of the “Leatherstocking Tales,” stayed at Eagle Point as a guest of the Curtis family. According to letters attached to a first edition copy of his book, *The Legends and Traditions of a Northern County*, Cooper and Mrs. McLanahan (Mrs. Curtis’s mother) spent many a pleasant evening together on the porch of the “white house” with the ghosts at “Camp Eagle Point.” It is unclear whether they discussed the ghosts of Eagle Point or the ghosts Cooper recorded in his book. It is difficult to believe that such a secluded and peaceful place as Eagle Point would have its own restless spirits. Staff has noted unusual happenings in the clubhouse from time to time, doors that shut by themselves and a newly made bed that shows someone had recently sat on the corner.

Eagle Point Camp, when it closed its doors to guests in 1988, was the oldest continually operated business in Sarasota County. Today, Eagle Point is a private residential community. The property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Even with the traffic along U.S. 41, it is still a secluded retreat from the pressures of modern life.

The Fabulous Potter Palmers
In *History of the Smasheys*
compiled by Philip G. Smashey

J. H. Lord, a real estate man in Chicago, whose father had moved to Florida in 1889 and had purchased 100,000 acres of land at 75¢ to \$4.00 an acre, interested Bertha Palmer in his description of the great possibilities in real estate in Florida, and especially on the west coast in the area of Sarasota around Little Sarasota Bay.

Bertha Palmer was 61 years of age when she first came to Sarasota, Florida, in 1910. She got in touch with A. B. Edwards, a Sarasota realtor, who had been recommended to her by J. H. Lord. Edwards took her on a cruise of Little Sarasota Bay, pointing out everything of historical interest and those properties that were for sale. She liked the shoreline of the Bay in the Osprey area, and there is where she purchased Bay front property, that later became the site of her Florida home, “The Oaks,” in Osprey.

Eighty thousand of the 140,000 acres Bertha Palmer purchased in Florida were in the Sarasota area. She did not live to see great profits from her investments in Florida properties, but even her first \$11,000 investment in property in Osprey has increased greatly in value and mushroomed into a fabulous inheritance as part of the gigantic Palmer family inheritance of the Palmer Estate. The Palmer First National Bank and Trust Co., The Palmer Florida Corporation, and The Palmer Ranches were some of the products of Bertha (Honoré) Palmer’s shrewd business ability.

She loved gardens, flowers, plants and trees, and it was always her endeavor to preserve the natural growth that would harmonize with her plans for the development and landscaping of her home site for her Florida home, “The Oaks,” on Little Sarasota Bay in Osprey.

Bertha Palmer brought furnishings for “The Oaks” from Chicago, which included furniture, rugs, crystal, china, silver, tall bisque figurines, and her favorite paintings and art objects.

The ranch (now Myakka State Park) belonged to Garrett Murphy and contained 6,000 acres. A. B. Edwards told Bertha Palmer that the whole ranch could be purchased for \$75,000. She said, "Buy it for me." But when they contacted Murphy, he said. "I must first dispose of my cattle." She replied, "That's easy. I'll buy the cattle too." The deal was closed promptly, and she handed Murphy a check for \$93,000.

Bertha Palmer bought three ranches. The highest price she paid was \$400 an acre, and the lowest price was \$8.00 per acre.

The ranch she named "Meadow Sweet Pastures" was eighteen miles from "The Oaks," so Bertha built a camp at the end of Upper Myakka Lake, mostly for the benefit of her grandchildren.

Albert Blackburn managed Bertha Palmer's ranches. She liked to talk with Charles Webb (whose grandfather, John Webb named and founded Osprey). Bertha's conversations with Charles Webb were about pelicans, cranes, kingfish, herons, and the game that abounded in great numbers in the dense forest in the Osprey area. The woods were alive with deer, quail, pheasant, wild turkey, doves and hares. Hundreds of ospreys were in the area, and they made their nests in the high branches of the large trees.

John Webb, Charles' grandfather, named the town after these birds. Sometimes the natives called them fish hawks, because of their deadly accuracy in diving and catching fish.

In 1916 Bertha Palmer's father Henry Hamilton Honoré died in Chicago at the age of 93 years. Shortly before his death there had been a large gathering of the Honorés at Christmas time in Chicago. Funeral services were held at his home on Lincoln Parkway. His five children walked behind his coffin.

Bertha Palmer's health started to fail shortly after her father's death. She fought a losing battle with cancer. However, she never showed any signs of discomfort and directed her business operations within a few weeks of her death. One of her last callers before her death was Albert Blackburn. Bertha told him she was leaving the ranches to her brother, Adrian Honoré. She died May

15, 1918, within one day of the sixteenth anniversary of her husband's death. Bertha Palmer was 69 years of age when she passed away. Her sons, Honoré and Potter Palmer II, and their wives, her sister Ida, and her brother Adrian, and the Cantacuzènes [Ida's daughter, husband, and children] were with her when she passed away.

Sarasota went into mourning, and Mayor G. W. Franklin had the city flag lowered at half mast.

Bertha Palmer's body was shipped to Chicago and her funeral was held at her home on Lake Shore Drive. A blanket of orchids from her two sons, Honoré and Potter Palmer, covered her coffin. The English butler, Ernest Woods, placed a wreath of orchids at the foot of her coffin on behalf of the servants. All around were the Bertha Palmer roses, named after her. She was buried in a mausoleum at Graceland Cemetery in Chicago beside her husband Potter Palmer, and close to her parents and brothers. With her death an epoch in Chicago's history was closed.

Shortly before the death of Bertha Potter Palmer, *Hampton's* magazine summed up her place in the sun in an editorial entitled "The Social Leader of Chicago." "Furthermore she took an active part in many charitable and philanthropic movements and managed her large estate with all the acumen of a well-trained businessman." *Hampton's* attributed much of her success to a rare gift of diplomacy.

Bertha Palmer had strength and purpose, ambition and intelligence. She was described as "the most elegant American woman of her day." Her decisions and choices were apt to be soundly made. She struck out for the best wherever she saw it and moved unswervingly toward her goal. She was ardent in spirit and was a woman who never exhausted her energies on trivial things, but let the fires of her life burn deep. Thus Bertha Palmer was able to enjoy life in its fullness until her fatal illness set in.