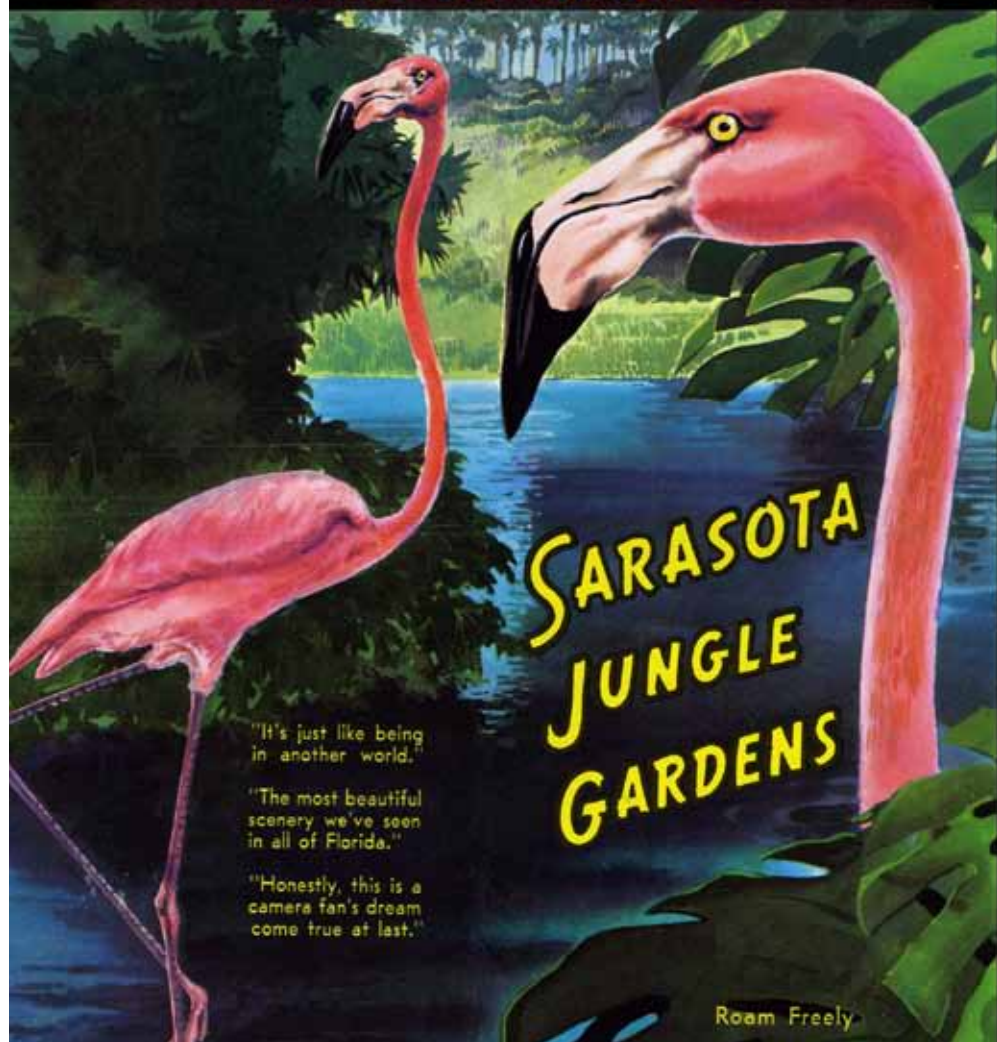


FUN IN THE SUNSHINE CITY  
TOUR 1 • APRIL 10, 2014



# ST. PETERSBURG TO SARASOTA FLORIDA

THE AIR CONDITIONED CITY  
ON THE GULF OF MEXICO



SARASOTA  
JUNGLE  
GARDENS

"It's just like being  
in another world."

"The most beautiful  
scenery we've seen  
in all of Florida."

"Honestly, this is a  
camera fan's dream  
come true at last."

Room Freely



## THE BEGINNING PORTION OF THIS TOUR

follows Central Avenue from downtown through western St. Petersburg and Pasadena to the barrier island communities of Treasure Island and St. Pete Beach. From St. Pete Beach, we will cross the Sunshine Skyway Bridge to Bradenton and the ultimate destination for the trip, Sarasota.

### *St. Petersburg to Sarasota*

**TOUR 1 • APRIL 10, 2014 • 9 AM – 6 PM**

Presented by the Society for Commercial Archeology with generous support from the Historic Preservation Division of the City of St. Petersburg, Kilby Creative, and Archaeological Consultants, Inc

### *St. Petersburg*

We will start this tour in downtown St. Petersburg at the **PENNSYLVANIA HOTEL**, now a Courtyard Marriott Hotel which is serving as the conference hotel. Situated on the corner of 4th Street North and 3rd Avenue, the Pennsylvania was built by Harry C. Case in 1925. In the next few blocks, we will pass the **MIRROR LAKE CARNEGIE LIBRARY**, completed in 1915 and situated on **MIRROR LAKE**, the source of the City's early water supply and St. Petersburg's WPA funded 1937 **CITY HALL**, the location for the paper sessions for the conference. As we reach the corner of 4th Street and 2nd Avenue North, we will face **WILLIAMS PARK**, named in honor of Detroit native and City founder, John C. Williams. Dedicated as park on the city plat, Williams Park originally held a gazebo before a series of bandshells replaced it.

The current **BANDSHELL**, designed by architect William "Bill" Harvard in 1952, won an Award for Excellence in Architecture from the national American Institute of Architects. He later designed the inverted pyramid pier. In the early years, shuffleboard, roque, chess, and dominoes attracted tourists to the park. When clubs formed and attempted to limit the park's use to their members, the heirs of John Williams sued as it was dedicated as a public park for all citizens. This led to the creation of the Mirror Lake Recreation Complex.





The arrival of John Williams in 1875 and the Orange Belt Railroad in 1888 served as the major impetus to the formation of St. Petersburg. Hamilton Disston, who owned and developed thousands of acres in Florida during the 1880s, financed the construction of the Orange Belt Railroad to the sparsely settled Pinellas Peninsula under the assumption that the railroad would terminate in his newest development, Disston City (now Gulfport). Instead, Orange Belt owner, Peter Demens, built the narrow gauge railroad to land situated northeast of Disston City owned by John C. Williams. Demens and Williams collaborated in their plans to build a new community around the terminus of the railroad complete with a depot, hotel, and city park. In exchange for naming the city after Demens' birthplace, St. Petersburg, Demens named the hotel after Williams' hometown, Detroit. The lots surrounding the new depot, the Detroit Hotel, and the city park quickly filled with new construction. Three of the main city churches fronted the park including St. Peter's Episcopal Cathedral, First United Methodist Church, and the First Baptist Church, of which only the front façade remains.

In an effort to boost profits, the Railway started offering seaside excursions to St. Petersburg in 1889. Promotional

literature cited the 1885 annual convention of the American Medical Association where Dr. Van Bibber endorsed the Pinellas peninsula as the perfect location for a "Health City". These excursions were one of the first concentrated efforts by the community and the development company to attract tourists. Although the Orange Belt's advertising efforts failed to save the company, Frank Davis, a prominent publisher from Philadelphia who arrived in Florida to alleviate his own health problems, utilized Dr. Van Bibber's endorsement to heavily promote the benefits of St. Petersburg. Davis, along with other new residents including *St. Petersburg Times* editor William Straub and *St. Petersburg Evening Independent* editor Lew Brown, tirelessly promoted the community during the late 1800s and early 1900s. The creation of St. Petersburg's waterfront park system and the construction of the Electric Pier drew additional tourists and new residents to the area.

Largely through the efforts of city boosters to attract businesses and residents, developers such as Frank A. Davis, H. Walter Fuller, Noel Mitchell, Charles Hall, Charles Roser, and C. Perry Snell triggered the city's first real estate land boom from 1909 to the start of World War I. Promotional efforts by the Atlantic Coast Line railroad (formerly

the Orange Belt Railroad and Henry Plant's South Florida Railroad) brought organized tourist trains from New York in 1909 and from the Midwest in 1913. Many of these tourists continued to winter or permanently moved to St. Petersburg. With approximately 83 real estate companies operating in the city in 1914, the focus turned increasingly to winter residents with the local population doubled during the season. These winter residents even formed tourist societies organized by state or region of origin which acted as booster clubs in their native states.

St. Petersburg quickly rebounded following World War I with the winter season of 1918-1919 more profitable than before the war. Thanks in part to the efforts of John Lodwick, publicity agent for the Chamber of Commerce, the hotels and boarding houses were filled to capacity during the season. The construction of a national, state, and local road system opened St. Petersburg to an increasing number of middle-class vacationers and "tin-can tourists." The city's shortage of hotel rooms led to the 1920 creation of Tent City, a municipal campground for the "tin-can tourists".

The lack of hotel space and the booming economy during the late 1910s and early 1920s led to the conversion of a number of private residences into boarding houses or small hotels. Developers remedied the lack of hotel rooms with the construction of eleven large hotels within or near the city limits between 1922 and 1926, eight of which were in the downtown area. Among these, the **PRINCESS MARTHA HOTEL** and the **HOTEL DENNIS** front Williams Park. Across from the Princess Martha Hotel, the Mediterranean Revival **OPEN AIR POST OFFICE** was constructed in 1916. Celebrating the temperate climate, the post office remained open air with outside counters until 1969. South of the post office, the **SNELL ARCADE**, developed by C. Perry Snell, remains one of the landmark Mediterranean Revival style buildings in St. Petersburg. Snell, who came to St. Petersburg in 1904, developed large portions of the city including most of the northeast quadrant prior to building his namesake building in 1928. It was designed by architect Richard Kiehnel of Miami and retains its ground floor arcade.

A relatively healthy tourist trade kept

the local economy afloat following the downturn of the real estate market in 1926 and the devastating hurricanes which damaged south Florida in 1926 and 1928. With the crash of the stock market in 1929, St. Petersburg suffered an economic loss due to the lack of



Downtown, St. Petersburg, Fla.  
"The Sunshine City"





tourist traffic during the ensuing national depression. A dismal tourist season during the winter of 1929-1930 led to business failures, mortgage foreclosures, and unemployment in the city. Snell lost his arcade in the bust. Every bank in the city failed and closed by April 1931, including the Central National Bank, located across Central Avenue from the Snell Arcade.

The former **CENTRAL NATIONAL BANK**, built in 1912, and the **PHEIL HOTEL AND THEATER**, built between 1916 and 1924 by former mayor A.C. Pheil, lie beneath the metal grille added by the First National Bank when it acquired the buildings in 1959. Intended to unify and modernize the appearance, “the cheese grater,” as it is affectionately known, has largely protected the highly decorative exteriors of the buildings. Internally, the Pheil Theater,

which occupied the 2nd and 3rd stories of the hotel building, was removed. The buildings remain vacant, embroiled in disagreements among the heirs of the Pheil family.

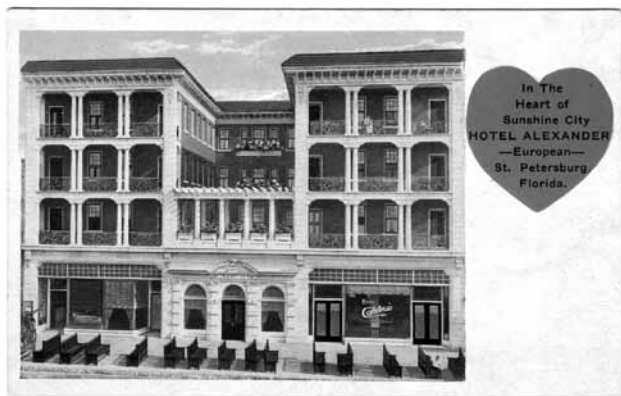
Although tourism had rebounded to some extent by 1940, the activation of the military, rationing, and travel restrictions during World War II severely curtailed St. Petersburg’s tourism based economy. Most of the city’s hotels and boarding houses remained empty during the winter of 1941-42, and new construction virtually halted. Realizing that the empty rooms could be an asset as military housing, city leaders successfully lobbied the War Department for a military base. The opening of a technical services training center for the Army Air Corps brought over ten thousand soldiers to the city during the summer of 1942. The military leased almost every major hotel and many of the smaller hotels in the city. Only the Suwannee Hotel and some of the smaller hotels and boarding houses were open to civilian use. By the time the training center closed in July 1943, over 100,000 soldiers had visited St. Petersburg. Although the training center closed, the United States Maritime Service Bayboro Harbor Base, which trained merchant seamen, continued to grow, and eventually leased four of the downtown hotels abandoned by the Army Air Corps. Other bases and support facilities throughout the area brought thousands of soldiers to central Florida and the St. Petersburg area.

The government also utilized the city’s cafeterias to feed the servicemen and women. One of these, the **TRAMOR CAFETERIA**, lies along 4th Street South in the next block. Built

in 1929 as Bob's Cafeteria by owner Robert Ely, it was soon renamed the Holsum Cafeteria in 1931 and became the Tramor Cafeteria in 1939. Although an excellent example of Mediterranean Revival style architecture on the exterior, the atmospheric interior created the illusion of dining in a Spanish square with a central fountain and balcony which wraps around three sides of the main room. Indirect lighting and the blue ceiling with white clouds gave the impression of dusk. Prior to World War II, hotels in St. Petersburg often provided breakfast and dinner. On their own for lunch, tourists flocked to the city's cafeterias which were considered an inexpensive lunch option at a cost of \$.35 in 1935. During the war, servicemen filled the cafeterias. Behind the Tramor, the city's original **YMCA** provided lodging and recreation for men following its construction in 1927. The Mediterranean Revival style building is now vacant but retains notable interior features such as the tiled courtyard, tiled pool in the basement, and lobby with pecky cypress ceilings. Two theaters, the Florida Theater and La Plaza Theater, were located in the adjacent blocks across from each other but were demolished in the 1950s and 1960s.

Back on Central Avenue, the **S.H. KRESS & CO.** Building, completed in 1928, dominates the corner of 5th Street and Central Avenue. As we

continue along Central Avenue, you'll see the painted ghost signs for the 1920s era businesses of **ERMATINGER'S MILLINERY, HAYWARD'S TOY SHOP, AND WISTERIA CONFECTIONARY**. Recently discovered when an adjacent building was demolished, the owner has now repainted the signs. The **ALEXANDER HOTEL** at 535 Central Avenue and the **STATE THEATER** at 685-87 Central Avenue were designed



by noted Atlanta architect Neel Reid. The hotel, completed in 1919, was one of the first modern hotels in the city, while the theater was originally built as a bank in 1924. Adjacent to the theater, the 1924 Mission Revival style **GREEN-RICHMAN ARCADE** is one of three arcades remaining in St. Petersburg.

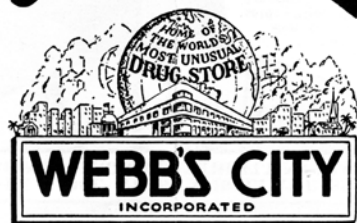
The city rapidly demilitarized following World War II, and many veterans returned to St. Petersburg. Depression and governmental restrictions during the war led to a housing shortage following World War II. Many hotels and boarding houses were again filled with tourists and new residents awaiting the construction of new homes. New houses filled the subdivisions platted during the 1920s

but left vacant by the real estate decline and depression. At 6th Street the six-story **ST. PETERSBURG FEDERAL SAVINGS & LOAN ASSOCIATION** was the first high-rise built after World War II and remains a fine example of modern architecture. Designed by architect Bill Harvard in 1953, with two additional stories added in 1958, the building was described in the local newspaper as “dignified, secure and hospitable” upon its completion.

South of Central Avenue in the vicinity of what was then 9th Street, James Earl “Doc” Webb came to St. Petersburg in 1925 to partner with an old friend in opening a small drugstore. With the collapse of the land boom, Webb bought out his partner and renamed the enterprise **WEBB’S CUT RATE DRUG COMPANY**. Webb established himself as the friend of the “little guy” by promising to undersell the competition by at least 10 percent on every item and accepting IOUs and scrip. In addition to great deals and giveaways, he created a carnival-like atmosphere in his store using vaudeville and circus acts, dancing chickens, talking mermaids, and bathing beauties to advertise and sell his goods. By the mid-1930s, his small drug store had expanded over several blocks to become “the World’s Most Unusual Drug Store” offering groceries, a bakery, a meat shop, a florist, a clothing emporium, a beauty shop, a travel agency, a hardware store, a cafeteria, and several soda fountains and coffee shops in addition to his drug store. By 1936, annual sales topped \$1 million and grew to almost \$4 million per year by 1941. Doc Webb sold his holdings in 1974, and the business closed in 1979 after

which the buildings were demolished. Webb’s lasting contribution to retail was the creation of the Express Check-out Lane for 10 items or less.

## Florida’s Greatest SHOWPLACE



### ST. PETERSBURG, FLA.

After passing several 1920s era former hotels, commercial buildings from the 1920s through the 1950s, and the modern St. Petersburg Police Department, our next stop is **WORLD LIQUORS**. Originally built as a 1920s service station and store and then serving as a used car lot, it was converted to the Ace Liquor Drive-In in 1953. In 1961, Anthony Misiewicz purchased the store, changed it to World Liquors, and built the 22 ft tall World Liquors sign utilizing a 1950s globe that was part of a sign outside of a downtown furniture store. The globe originally rotated on its own but stopped working in the 1970s, and the light inside the globe died in 2001. During the boom of the last decade, it was threatened with demolition when the current owner, Anthony’s nephew, Paul Misiewicz, planned a new 22,000 square foot building. At the time, he



received a quote of \$60,000 to repair it. Another local business owner was interested in acquiring the sign, but planned to remove the “World Liquors” and “drive-in” lettering to reflect her business. Continuing west along Central, we cross under I-275 and enter the Kenwood neighborhood.

As downtown prospered during the pre-World War I boom, residential developments slowly spread west of downtown along Central Avenue. Newcomer Charles Hall purchased 80 acres located at Central Avenue and 25th Street from the St. Petersburg Investment Company in 1912, advertising the sale of lots in full page newspaper ads within 48 hours of his purchase. Named Hall’s Subdivision No. 1, lots sold rapidly with prices ranging from \$100 to \$1,500 with a 50% discount which was scaled down as the sale progressed. The first subdivision was soon followed by Hall’s acquisition of additional land and Hall’s Subdivision Nos. 2, 3, 4, and 5, starting the Kenwood neighborhood, which is filled with 1910s and 1920s era bungalows. With a few scattered houses along Central Avenue,

commercial development filled the vacant lots and the business area became known as Grand Central.

Continuing west, we will pass the **PATIO THEATER**, which was built at 1850 Central Avenue by owner Anthony Shimko in 1925. One of three open air theaters in operation in the city at the time, Shimko decided to remodel the structure in 1928 to create an atmospheric theater, advertised as the first in St. Petersburg and the second in the state with Tampa Theater soon to open. With a stage to allow for live performances in addition to the motion pictures, the theater now featured a domed ceiling “perforated with myriads of tiny lights arranged to give the effect of the sky on a starry night,” with clouds moving slowly across the stars. The Patio Theater closed in 1931 and entered receivership like many other businesses during the Depression.

Just down the street, John and Mary Haslam opened **HASLAM’S**, a small used book and magazine store, in 1933. Their business grew into Florida’s largest new and used book store and has become a local institution. Now run by the third generation, the bookstore is located near the corner of 20th Street and Central Avenue. In addition to small “mom and pop” businesses, the Mari-Jean Hotel, a 1920s era mid-sized hotel, several historic gas stations, and one of the original Kenwood houses, a Craftsman bungalow which now houses the **CRAFTSMAN GALLERY** line Central Avenue in this business district.

By World War II, St. Petersburg had more than 300 miles of paved streets, 200 miles of concrete sidewalks, many of them hexagon shaped blocks, and 208

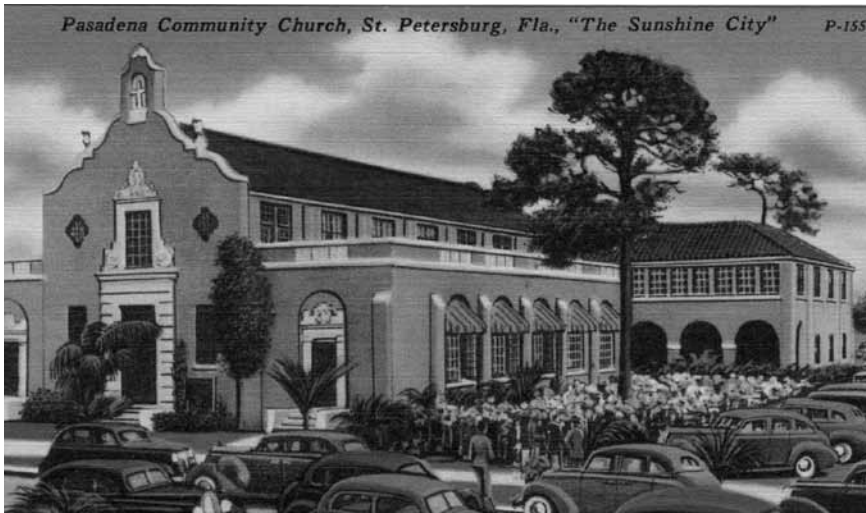


miles of street lighting. As we approach 34th Street, **GOOSE POND**, a marshy area between 30th and 35th Streets and 5th Avenue South and 5th Avenue North, was originally used as farm land by a group of Japanese Americans. The area would flood to cover Central Avenue during the rainy season, but catch fire during the dry season. As development spread west following World War II, the area was paved over in the 1950s. In 1952, **CENTRAL PLAZA**, the city's first strip shopping center, opened at 1st Avenue South and 34th Street. With parking for 2,500 cars, the plaza opened to record crowds of between 30,000 and 50,000 shoppers on the first day. Publix, McCrory's and a Belk-Lindsey Department Store anchored the center. Wolfies, a delicatessen style restaurant, drew diners. North of 1st Avenue, Montgomery Ward opened a department store, and the Post Office completed a new facility in 1956. The opening of the Sunshine Skyway Bridge in 1954 and the completion of US 19 in 1955 drew additional stores, restaurants, and motels to the 34th Street corridor.

Continuing west, much of the interior portion of the city was platted in the 1920s with a few houses built during the Florida land boom, but not built out until the post-World War II period. However, the west end of St. Petersburg developed much earlier. In 1902, Frank Davis had formed the St. Petersburg Investment Company, which served as the holding company for both the city's electric and streetcar companies. The first trolley line was completed in 1904 and extended to present-day Gulfport the following year. Taking advantage of the local real estate boom starting in 1909,

the St. Petersburg Investment Company, led by general manager H. Walter Fuller, purchased approximately 4,000 acres west of the city. The company, in conjunction with its subsidiary, the Johns Pass Realty Company, subdivided several large tracts in 1911 and 1912 backing a plan to extend Central Avenue west to Boca Ceiga Bay. The company opened the Davista subdivision at the west end of Central Avenue in 1912. The Jungle Subdivision, immediately north of Davista, was filed in 1915 with the city's first successful golf course and the St. Petersburg Country Club which opened in 1916. This high-end residential neighborhood was supported by the brick paving and the extension of the trolley line to the western end of Central Avenue in 1913 and 1914. Following the death of Frank Davis in 1917, Walter P. Fuller acquired the Davis properties and focused on expanding the Jungle development north of Davista. He sold most of the vacant land south of 5th Avenue North to developer Jack Taylor, who renamed Davista and opened new sections as Pasadena Estates. A number of Mediterranean Revival style residences were built in the neighborhood, and to the south, Taylor built the massive Roylat Hotel (which is Taylor spelled backwards). At the first decline in the real estate market in 1926, "Handsome Jack Taylor," as he was called, left in the middle of the night. The Roylat Hotel is now Stetson Law College.

As we turn south onto Pasadena Avenue, it is interesting to note that this area is known as Pasadena, but is still part of the city of St. Petersburg. Immediately south lies the City of South Pasadena. Before it was known as the municipality



of South Pasadena, the area was briefly known as "Coreytown" in 1948. The bridge that connected this area with St. Petersburg Beach was known as the Corey Causeway, and this mainland community was "rough-and-tumble," to put it mildly. The town was incorporated under older laws more appropriate for pioneer days, and, by one account, was made up of "four bars, three fruit stands, a novelty shop, a floral shop, a tourist park, and fewer than half a dozen residences." The town's purpose, of course, was so the bars could stay open later than in the county or St. Petersburg, creating a town that was nothing more than a saloon. A judge dissolved Coreytown in 1951 because they could not find 25 eligible voters within the town limits. Ironically, by the 1980s, South Pasadena had the oldest average age in Pinellas, hovering around 70 years of age.

As we reach Park Circle South, you will see two mid-century Modern church buildings. **TEMPLE BETH-EL** at 400 Pasadena Ave., a Jewish congregation formed in 1928, built a new

synagogue in 1961. The Temple was designed by well-known modern architect Morris Lapidus, who also designed the Fontainebleau Hotel in Miami Beach. **PASADENA COMMUNITY CHURCH**, established in 1925, built a Mission Revival style building in 1925. By 1937, the Sanctuary could not hold all of the parishioners for Sunday morning services and benches were placed outside of the church. In 1940, the church leased several vacant lots around the sanctuary to develop into a "Radio Garden." During World War II, an outside pulpit to serve the Radio Park used for the overflow congregation was located under one of the few large pine trees on the church grounds. It became the focal point of activities relating to the armed forces. In spite of several additions to the sanctuary, the congregation again found itself outgrowing its facilities after the war. In 1960, they hired architect Bill Harvard to design a new sanctuary. The new facility provided seating for 2,000 people and accommodated a drive-in church congregation with 18 acres.



Continuing through the Pasadena neighborhood, we will see a number of Mediterranean Revival style residences. Situated on the corner of Central Avenue and Park Street, the **SUNSET HOTEL** opened in 1916 as the first hotel built beyond walking distance of downtown. With 35 rooms, the building served as a promotional tool to house prospective buyers interested in purchasing lots in the Davista, Jungle, and, later, the Pasadena subdivisions. When constructed, many residents doubted it would succeed, but the proximity of the Jungle golf course and direct access from downtown via the trolley and a completed Central Avenue proved a boon to the hotel.

The construction of the **TREASURE ISLAND CAUSEWAY** in 1939 also benefited the hotel, at least initially, as an increasing number of visitors passed by on their way to the beaches. The causeway, built to connect Central Avenue to Treasure Island, was initially proposed when Central Avenue was built to Boca Ciega Bay in 1914. However, the idea was rejected when

the economy slowed following the onset of World War I. As a result, limited development occurred on the island from the 1910s through the 1930s. In the late 1930s, Treasure Island property owners incorporated the City of Treasure Island in order to build a bridge to the mainland. In exchange for the City of St. Petersburg allowing Central Avenue to be extended through Sunset Park and for infill of the bay, Treasure Island promised St. Petersburg a municipal beach on the island for her citizens. The causeway, designed by Kunde, Driver, Simpson, and Associates, was completed at a cost of over \$1 million. The 1.8 mile causeway consisting of three bridges formally opened on November 15, 1939.

After World War II, dredging along the barrier islands created finger islands in Boca Ciega Bay for residential development. Causeway Isles and Paradise Island developed along the causeway in the early 1950s. Churches, such as **LUTHERAN CHURCH OF THE HOLY COMFORTER** on Paradise Island at 10255 Paradise Blvd were built

to serve the needs of the new residents. Noted Sarasota School architect Victor Lundy, was inspired by the nautilus shell when he designed this structure in 1962. Lundy, who studied architecture at Harvard University under Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer, was part of the group of architects which became known as the Sarasota School of Architects, which will be discussed more in Sarasota. Lundy established his own architectural firm in Sarasota in 1954, where he continued to practice until 1962. Best known for his many church designs in the area, his signature element is his dramatic roofs and the interactions between his dynamic forms and the landscape. His other designs included the Sarasota Chamber of Commerce, which we will see later today, Galloway Furniture Store, Alta Vista Elementary School Addition, the Siesta Drive Post Office, and the Warm Mineral Springs Motel and Pavilion.

## *Treasure Island*

The Pinellas County beaches initially developed as small fishing communities in which tourists would stay for a few days for sport fishing or visit for an afternoon picnic, not a year round residence. At the south end of the string of beaches, Pass-a-Grille was the first settled largely by St. Petersburg residents arriving by boat and building small fishing cottages during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During the 1920s land boom, the Gulf beaches remained a quiet side trip, not a destination. The lone wooden toll bridge to the southern islands which was built in 1919 was heavily damaged in the 1921 hurricane. Although repaired, a permanent, concrete bridge was not built until 1928. The Don Cesar

Hotel along with a few Mediterranean Revival residences were completed just as the real estate market burst in Florida so the beaches remained somewhat isolated till the end of the Great Depression when the economy and tourism started to improve. Although the onset of World War II again limited construction and tourism, the thousands of servicemen and women who trained in the area returned after the war. Many moved to the area and acquired homes on the GI Bill, but many more used their newfound prosperity to take their families on vacation. With an improved road network due to the war, new roadside attractions making the trip fun, and the beach as a destination, the Gulf Beaches transformed from sleepy coastal communities to booming tourist destinations within 20 years.

The concept of the middle class family vacation changed the coastline of Florida. Motels with amenities such as air conditioning, drive-up parking, television, and swimming pools attracted families. They often wrapped around a sunny courtyard. Older rental properties modernized, adding amenities such as shuffleboard courts and beach umbrellas. Restaurants, commercial buildings, and family oriented roadside attractions soon followed. As the beach became the place to be, older cottages converted to house year round residents.

The first hotel on Treasure Island was the three-story Coney Island Hotel built in 1915 by Whitey Harrell with 25 guest rooms. Harrell provided boats to ferry guests to the mainland. The island was named after a 1918 promotional stunt propagated by William McAdoo, who held an option to buy a large tract



of land on Long Key to the south. With some assistance, he buried two “old treasure chests” during the night. The following day he enlisted two guests of the Coney Island Hotel to help him unearth some “treasure” he had found. News of the secret treasure spread like wildfire. Although the actual burial and recovery of the treasure chests happened on Long Key to the south, because the visitors at the Coney Island Hotel played a part, local residents started referring to the area of the hotel as “out at that Treasure Island.”

Treasure Island, which had only three families living within the limits at the time of its 1937 incorporation, became the center of beach development during the 1950s and 1960s. By the mid-1940s, small cottages and motor courts dotted the north end of the island, known as Sunshine Beach, and the south end of the island occupied by the communities of Boca Ciega and Sunset Beach. In 1950, a town hall along with a few cottages composed the community of

Treasure Island. These communities consolidated to form the City of Treasure Island in 1955.

Situated toward the north end of the island at 11800 Gulf Blvd., the landmark construction of **THE SANDS OF TREASURE ISLAND MOTEL** in 1947-48 created a model for motel development along the beach. The motel offered 24 “ultra-modern apartments with hot water, heat, picture windows, Bendex washers, tile tub and shower, all electric kitchen, Simmons furniture, daily maid service, and shuffleboard at this year ‘round apartment hotel.” Herbert Dowling, of the Dowling Hotel Company of Washington, DC, built the motel. Within ten years, Gulf Boulevard was lined with modern streamlined motels lit with neon. The City of St. Petersburg opened its **MUNICIPAL BEACH** with a snack bar and comfort station at 11260 Gulf Blvd in 1951. Nearby, the **THUNDERBIRD**, built at the end of the Treasure Island Causeway in 1957, beacons vacationers to enjoy



this modern playground paradise known as the Holiday Isles. The construction of shopping centers and business buildings in the early 1950s had established the commercial center of Treasure Island around the intersection of Gulf Blvd and the Causeway, which was designated 107th Avenue on Treasure Island.

Many of these early motels remain, but it has been a struggle for owners to maintain these “mom and pop” establishments in the face of rising taxes (which are figured at “highest and best use”), newer hotel developments with more amenities, and condominium construction. In addition to The Sands, some of the best examples of beach motels which remain include the **ARVILLA MOTEL** built in 1950 at 11580 Gulf Blvd., the **ALGIERS MOTEL** built in 1956 at 11600 Gulf Blvd., the **SEA JAY MOTEL** built in 1958 at 11240 1st St E, the **TROPIC TERRACE MOTEL**, built in 1950 at 11730 Gulf Blvd, the **SEA CHEST MOTEL** started in 1949 at 11780 Gulf Blvd., the **BEACH HOUSE MOTEL**, built in 1956 at 12100 Gulf Blvd, the **BILMAR BEACH RESORT** built in 1966 at 10650 Gulf

Blvd., and the adjacent **PAGE TERRACE** built in 1958 at 10500 Gulf Blvd. A number of the early beach cottages also remain with some of the best on Treasure Island dating back to 1938 located along 124th Avenue and Sunshine Lane at the north end of the island. A number of these cottages were built after the 1928 construction of the **JOHN'S PASS** Bridge. John's Pass, created as a result of the 1848 hurricane, was a well-known fishing destination, but could only be reached by boat prior to the construction of the bridge. A prosperous sport fishing industry developed around the bridge. Toward the south end of the island, the **SEAHORSE COTTAGES**, built in 1938 at 10356 Gulf Blvd. are indicative of the small motor courts which dotted the island before the onslaught of motel construction. A few of the early commercial establishments such as the **FLORIDA SHELL SHOP**, which opened at 9901 Gulf Blvd in 1955, remain as landmarks along the beach communities.

Some of the losses on Treasure Island have included **THE SURF**, which was demolished in 2004 for a 30-unit condominium. Located just north of the Treasure Island Causeway at 11040 Gulf Blvd., the Surf was built by Herbert Dowling in 1956. The Surf became an anchor motel of “The Golden Mile.” It was among the first motels on the beach to have central air-conditioning. A promotional brochure advertised that it was “a new motel of spectacular beauty...[that] exemplifies the newest trends toward casual comfort and luxurious living...extreme convenience, completely adaptable to your every holiday need....A brilliant NEW flash



on the Southern Horizon!” When it was demolished in 2004, the St. Petersburg Times noted that “The Surf is coming down because it costs too much to upgrade the ailing building, whose space-age, 1950s furniture has never been replaced and whose mid-century look was featured in Architectural Digest. A 30-unit hotel-condo is planned to rise in its place. Each unit could cost near \$400,000, as opposed to The Surf’s rents of \$66 a night (April 19, 2004).” Other losses include the **BUCCANEER HOTEL**, demolished in 2005, the **JAMAICAN MOTEL**, the **EDWARD JAMES MOTEL**, demolished in 1982, and the **FLAMINGO**, demolished in 1983. Similarly, the roadside beach entertainment venues have suffered the same fate. **GULF GOLF**, a miniature golf attraction, was demolished in 2008 for the Crystal Palms Beach Resort Condominium.

## *St. Pete Beach*

South of Treasure Island, the communities of St. Petersburg Beach, Brightwater Beach, Bennett Beach, Punta Vista, Lido Beach, Belle Vista Beach, Don Cesar Place, and Pass-a-Grille Beach occupied the barrier island known as Long Key. As we head south, across the Blind Pass Bridge, the north end of Long Key was originally considered the industrial area and remained sparsely settled into the 1950s. In this area, the **GULF BEACHES ELEMENTARY SCHOOL** opened in 1950, **ST. ALBANS EPISCOPAL CHURCH** built a church in 1953, and **ST. JOHN’S CATHOLIC CHURCH AND SCHOOL** built new facilities in 1951. South of 75th Avenue and along the Bay was developed as primarily



residential, while the hotels, motels, and rental units were along the Gulf.

In 1919, William D. McAdoo acquired land on the northern end of Long Key and hired the International Realty Company to sell the land. He built a wooden toll bridge connecting the island to the mainland. A hotel bathing pavilion with a dance hall was built in 1923, and McAdoo built a bank building in 1925 (demolished in 1955). Although a few other buildings including a gas station, the Marion Apartments, and scattered cottages were built during the mid-1920s, the construction of the **COREY CAUSEWAY** by Pinellas County in 1928 prompted the International Realty Company along with the First National Bank of Tampa to purchase McAdoo’s land. They hired the Upham Company owned by William Upham as sales agents. At the same time, Pinellas County built the Blind Pass Bridge, John’s Pass Bridge, and the Welch Causeway, creating a circular route from the mainland through the beaches.

In 1936, the Upham Company envisioned creating a downtown St. Petersburg Beach around the scattered businesses that existed at the foot of the bridge and along **COREY AVENUE**. When the owners refused to finance the plan, the Upham Company purchased the lots along Corey Avenue, filled in

the mangrove swamp, and paved the street. They eventually created about one-fifth of the island through dredging. With the official dedication of Corey Avenue held on February 13, 1937, the timing of

their endeavor was ideal. As tourists returned during the late-1930s with the recovery of the economy, visitors found an attractive approach to the beaches and new businesses opened along Corey Avenue. Baynard's Funeral Chapel, now the Garden of Memories Funeral Home, was built in 1937 at 301 Corey Avenue. Next door, the **BEACH THEATER** at 315 Corey Ave opened in 1939. On the same side of the street, the 1937 McKinnon's Drug Store building was the first building constructed on Corey Avenue and housed a tavern and menswear shop. Across the street, the original Gulf Beach News building was also built in 1937. Other early buildings included the Indian Rocks Fruit Company and the Gables Building. Most of the remaining commercial buildings were constructed in the two decades following World War II. Interestingly, the former First Federal Savings and Loan Building at 401 Corey Avenue briefly served as **CRISWELL'S MONEY MUSEUM** in operation around 1965. Across the street, the 1963 bank replaced the Upham Real Estate Office at 400 Corey Avenue.

Crossing Gulf Blvd, we enter the



area originally devoted to small rental cottages and motels. Largely built out in the 1940s and 1950s, some of the early tourist accommodations included the 1946 **M&M APARTMENTS** at 526 Corey Avenue, the 1949 **TROPICAL SHORE APARTMENTS** at 635 Corey Avenue, and the 1948 **PATIO TOURIST HOME** at 645 Corey Avenue.

Decorative elements on the buildings included panels with palm trees, flowers, and birds. At the end of the street, along Sunset Way, one of the early waterfront bars remains at 7308 Sunset Way. Built in 1945, it was **VIC'S BAR AND BAIT HOUSE** in 1960 and had four cottages to the rear which were Vic's Tourist Apartments. Owner Victor Higgins lived in the first cottage. Nearby, the **SUNDIAL INN** remains much as it did when built in 1949. Before we turn onto 71st Avenue, you can see in the next block the **GULF WINDS APARTMENTS AND VILLAS**. The six buildings constructed in 1947 provided 326 units and housed the Imperial House Restaurant operated by Morrison's Cafeterias. On 71st Avenue, the 1948 **GULF HAVEN COTTAGES** at 635 71st Avenue and

the 1948 **LANTERN LANE APARTMENTS** at 521 71st Avenue remain as evidence of the post-World War II boom.

St. Petersburg Beach, which originally had limits of 68th and 78th Avenues, incorporated in 1943. In 1957, voters approved, by a five vote margin, a referendum to combine the municipalities of Pass-a-Grille, St. Petersburg Beach, Don CeSar Place, Belle Vista beach, and the unincorporated areas on Long Key into the City of St. Petersburg Beach, which later shortened its name to St. Pete Beach.

Back along Gulf Blvd., motels with names like the **BEACHCOMBER**, **SANDPIPER**, and the **ALDEN** filled the road to Pass-a-Grille during the 1950s and 1960s. **THE COLONIAL INN BEACH RESORT**, now the Post Card Motel at 6300 Gulf Blvd., was built in 1957, but grabbed attention as one of the few that recalled a more classical architecture. Most motels focused on space age modern designs. One of the most well-preserved is the **BON-AIRE** with its sweeping sign which was constructed in 1952 with an addition in 1964. Some of the small motels, like the 1956 **SEA PALMS MOTEL**, built their own roadside attractions to draw guests. The 18 hole miniature golf **POLYNESIAN PUTTER** course was built by owner John McConnell in front of the motel in 1966. The mini golf course with its giant Tiki head facing Gulf Blvd.

and collection of giant animal including a coiled snake still catch the eye of the passerby. Several of the concrete and steel structures were built by Frank Schmudde of Indian Rocks Beach, who also made Tiki statues for Tiki Gardens, which was largely demolished in 1989. Restaurants, like the 1939 Caldwell's Drive Inn at 6712 Gulf Blvd., were built to feed the tourists. The Gulf Wind U Drive-In Theater originally provided entertainment, but vanished with the change in times.

In addition to the sparkling modern new hotels, two popular tourist attractions opened on St. Pete Beach. **THE AQUATARIUM**, located on the Gulf at 67th Avenue, opened in 1964 with aquariums and dolphin shows under a giant geodesic dome. The **LONDON WAX MUSEUM**, associated with the popular Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum in London, opened at 5505 Gulf Blvd. With only \$1.50 admission for adults and \$.50 for kids, the attraction remained popular through the 1960s. Unable to compete with larger theme parks in the 1970s, both attractions closed and were demolished.



Travelling south along Gulf Blvd., the pink palace of the **DON CESAR** looms in the distance as one of the grand 1920s era Mediterranean Revival style hotels. It was built at the north end of the Pass-a-Grille community in 1928 by owner Thomas Rowe and designed by architect Henry Dupont. Completed at the end of the 1920s land boom, the Don Cesar survived the Great Depression as a destination for the rich and famous drawing such visitors as Franklin D. Roosevelt, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Al Capone. It also housed the New York Yankees during spring training for three years. After Rowe's death, the military purchased the hotel in 1942 to serve as a hospital, and, after the war, converted it to the regional office for the Veteran's Administration. After the facility closed in 1969, William Bowman acquired the building, restored it and reopened it as a hotel in 1973. By the time the Don Cesar was constructed in 1928, Pass-a-Grille, as the oldest Pinellas beach community, was largely built-out. Although the construction of the Bayway Bridge in front of the Don Cesar in 1962 opened St. Pete Beach to modern development, Pass-a-Grille, situated south of the

Don Cesar, retains the majority of its pre-World War II ambiance. Recently replaced, the 1962 Bayway Bridge now serves as an artificial reef offshore.

The completion of the Bayway Bridge system also opened Tierra Verde to development and prompted Pinellas County to open **FORT DESOTO PARK**. The Park, situated on Mullet Key, and nearby Egmont Key, which is accessible by boat, are home to a lighthouse and the remains of gun batteries and troop quarters built during the Spanish American War of 1898. Historically, Tampa Bay and the Manatee River were patrolled by Union gunboats stationed on Mullet and Egmont Keys during the Civil War, while Confederate blockade runners transported cattle to Cuba in exchange for items not readily available in the Florida wilderness. When war broke out with Spain, local residents and the Federal government feared invasion by the Spanish into Tampa Bay and established Fort Desoto on Mullet Key, which remained an active military post until 1910 and finally abandoned the fort in 1923. In 1938, Pinellas County bought Mullet Key for \$12,500, but the federal government acquired it



PORKFORK6

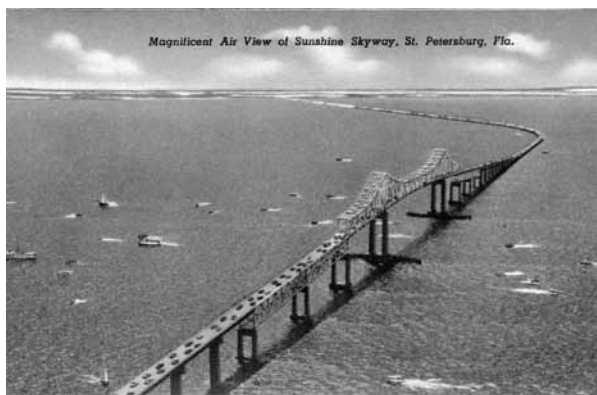


again during World War II. After the war, Pinellas County again purchased the key and eventually opened the park in 1962 in conjunction with the construction of the Bayway Bridge system. Now, the park is well-known as a public beach. In 2005, “Dr. Beach” named

Fort Desoto the nation’s #1 beach, and TripAdvisor named it America’s Top Beach in 2009.

Chartered as Florida Presbyterian College in 1958, present-day **ECKERD COLLEGE** is located at 4200 54th Ave S on our way to the Sunshine Skyway Bridge. When drug store magnet Jack M. Eckerd provided a substantial gift which provided the means to keep the college open, trustees renamed the college in his honor in 1972. With the central core of buildings completed in 1963, the campus remains a fine collection of mid-century designs executed by notable regional architects such as Harvard-Jolly, Sanford Goldman, and Connell, Pierce, Garland & Friedman of Miami.

As we enter the approach to the Sunshine Skyway, **MAXIMO PARK** and O’Neill’s Marina will be adjacent to the highway on the west. Maximo Park contains an aboriginal shell midden complex and was the presumed site of Antonio Maximo Hernandez’ mid-nineteenth century fishing rancho. Although his rancho was washed away in the 1848 hurricane, Hernandez is credited as the first white settler on the Pinellas peninsula. By the 1930s, it was



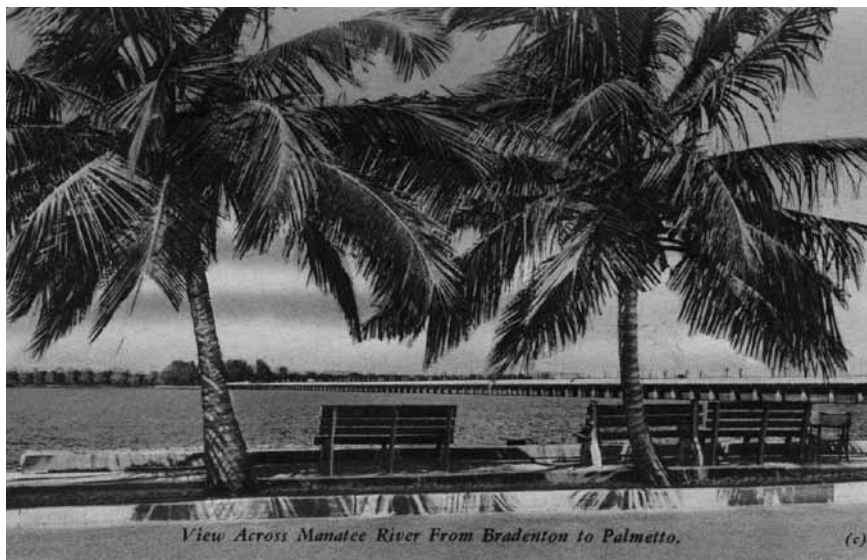
used as an informal African American beach during the days of segregation and officially became a city park in 1940.

This archaeological site was one of a complex of mounds and middens along the southern boundary of the Pinellas peninsula, most of which have been destroyed by commercial and residential development. This site was also threatened with the construction of I-275 by the planned development of entrance ramps, but the owners of O’Neill’s Marina fought to save the park. Originally known as **O’NEILL’S SKYWAY BOAT BASIN**, the marina was built in 1954 by Fred “Hap” O’Neill after the construction of the Sunshine Skyway. He had originally opened a fishing dock and concession stand in 1946 at the end of 4th Street South adjacent to the Bee Line Ferry, but the completion of the bridge caused the ferry to close and his business declined. After relocating to the Sunshine Skyway, he expanded to provide supplies to fishermen, boat storage, a small restaurant, and chartered tours of fishing hot spots in the region.

One of the most far-reaching mid-century projects was the construction of the **SUNSHINE SKYWAY BRIDGE**.

Completed in 1954, the bridge opened southern Pinellas County and the Gulf beaches by providing a major north-south route between Pinellas and Manatee and Sarasota Counties. Built at a cost of \$22 million, the 15 mile bridge cut the distance from St. Petersburg to Bradenton from 70 miles to less than 20 miles. Promotional brochures stated that “Touring the Sunshine Skyway is like going to sea in your automobile.”

have become icons of “Old Florida.” One of the old local citrus gift box packing companies grew into multi-million dollar citrus producing Tropicana Products, Inc., which offers “100% Pure Squeezed Florida Sunshine.” Opened as the Manatee River Packing Company in Palmetto in 1947, owner Anthony Rossi relocated to east Bradenton as his business grew into supplying jars of sectioned citrus to northern commercial businesses,



*View Across Manatee River From Bradenton to Palmetto.*

(c)

## ***Terra Ceia, Palmetto, Bradenton***

After crossing the Sunshine Skyway Bridge, we will take US 19 through the island farming community of Terra Ceia. **THE CITRUS PLACE** remains as evidence of the island’s agricultural tradition and as one of the few extant roadside citrus stands which offered fresh squeezed juice and tours of the associated orange grove in back. Both the Citrus Place and the nearby **CRAB TRAP** Restaurant opened in the mid-1970s as locally-owned roadside businesses which

such as the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City. Renaming the company Fruit Industries, and then Tropicana Products, Rossi produced frozen concentrate orange juice and developed flash pasteurization in 1954 before the company started shipping their juice products nationally and then internationally. Tropicana is now part of the Pepsico brand. US 19, which divided Terra Ceia island in the mid-1950s merges with US 41 just north of Palmetto. US 41, also known as the **TAMIAMI TRAIL**, will then separate and we will follow

Business 41 through downtown Palmetto crossing over the Manatee River into Bradenton on our way to Sarasota.

In 1915, a group of businessmen met to discuss the feasibility of a cross-state highway from Tampa to Miami by way of Sarasota and Fort Myers. A portion of this route, which stretched from the Hillsborough County line to Sarasota, was constructed by Manatee County with the passage of a bond issue in 1911. In 1914, through the efforts of the Sarasota Good Road Boosters and the creation of the Sarasota-Venice Road and Bridge District, the portion of the road from Sarasota to Venice was financed. This road, named the Tamiami Trail, after the origin and destination cities, was designated US 41. Even though the portions through Bradenton and Sarasota were completed early, the section of the Trail through the Everglades was not completed until 1928.

We have entered Manatee County, named for the gentle aquatic mammal, the “sea cow.” Although several burial, midden, and temple mounds provide evidence of the Native American occupation, the first white pioneers settled the land along the Manatee River following the Armed Occupation Act of 1842, which gave white, male heads of households 160 acres if they cleared five acres, built a house, served in the militia, and lived on the land for five years. The influx of new residents prompted the creation of Manatee County in 1855, which included most of southwest Florida from the Gulf of Mexico to Lake Okeechobee. The Village of Manatee, now within the boundaries of Bradenton, was the county seat.



The outbreak of hostilities during the Civil War brought Federal and Confederate boats and soldiers to patrol and camp along the banks of the Manatee River. As the Confederacy crumbled, Secretary of State Judah P. Benjamin escaped federal capture while fleeing through Manatee County by staying at John Gamble's sugar plantation. Now open to the public as a State Historic Site in Ellenton, just east of Palmetto, Gamble Plantation is the only remaining Antebellum Plantation in southwest Florida. On the south shore of the Manatee River, Dr. Joseph Braden also established a sugar plantation in the 1840s and built a fortified residence built

Entrance to Bradenton, Florida



of tabby, a type of concrete that combines lime, water, sand and oyster shells. Another settler, Dr. Franklin Branch, planned to create a sanatorium around a mineral spring and built his home fortified with sable palm trunks for protection against the Seminoles. Local families sought refuge in both “Fort Branch” and “Fort Braden” during the Third Seminole War, but the houses were soon abandoned during the Civil War. The ruins of “Fort Braden,” which became known as “Braden Castle,” served as an early tourist attraction and still remain along the south shore of the Manatee River. It inspired Major William Iredell Turner to name the nearby community Braidentown when the post office was established in 1878. Renamed Bradentown in 1905 and then **BRADENTON** in 1924, the community eventually outgrew and incorporated the village of Manatee. During the same formative period, Samuel Sparks Lamb established **PALMETTO** on the north bank of the Manatee River, naming it after his home

state of South Carolina, the Palmetto State. On the south shore of the river, the Fogarty Brothers built Fogartyville and opened a shipbuilding business. With the influx of new settlers, Desoto County was carved from the eastern portion of Manatee County.

During the early 1900s, the river remained the main source of transportation in the agriculturally based economy. Cattle, commercial fishing, sugar cane, celery, tomatoes, and citrus were the largest crops, while associated support industries like shipbuilding and crate manufacturing developed along the shore. In 1902, the Seaboard Airline Railway Company built the first bridge across the Manatee River, roughly in the location of today’s US 41. In 1910, the first wooden automobile bridge, the Davis Toll Bridge, was constructed across the Manatee River by the Manatee Bridge Company for \$5,000. Promotional post cards from the period advertised sixty automobiles in town. The first non-toll bridge, completed in

1919, was named The Victory Bridge in honor of World War I. In 1927, the State Road Department opened the new \$1 million **E.P. GREEN BRIDGE** across the Manatee River. It came into Bradenton on 10th Street, one block west of present-day Business 41 and now serves as a fishing pier after the construction of a new bridge in 1986.

Like Pinellas County, the 1920s also brought a boom in development to Manatee County. Even though Sarasota County was formed from the southern portion of Manatee County in 1921, Manatee County's population still tripled between 1920 and 1925. During this period, the Manatee River was dredged to extend the waterfront in downtown Bradenton. Completed in 1927, the Mediterranean Revival style **BRADENTON MUNICIPAL PIER** has served as the Chamber of Commerce, a radio station, a community center, and as several different restaurants. Snooty, Manatee County's official mascot, originally lived in a tank at the pier when it served as the Chamber of Commerce. Born on July 21, 1948 at the Miami Tackle Company and Aquarium, Baby Snoots is the first

manatee born in captivity. Originally loaned to Manatee County when he was a year old, his owner Sam Stout soon donated Baby Snoots to Bradenton. In 1952, you could visit him and see Indian artifacts and exhibits for an admission fee of \$.50. In 1966, **SNOOTY**, as he became known, moved to a tank at the newly constructed **SOUTH FLORIDA MUSEUM**. He remains the oldest captive manatee and the oldest known living manatee. If you'd like to see Manatees in their native environment, the Tampa Electric Power Plant in Apollo Beach has a Manatee viewing facility as manatees gather in the warm waters around the plant during the winter months. Manatees also gather in Spring Bayou in Tarpon Springs, which we will visit on Saturday.

Next door to the museum, the 250-room concrete and steel **MANATEE RIVER HOTEL**, completed in 1925, offered a rooftop garden with a dance floor and waterfront view. Valued at \$2 million upon completion, a single room on opening night could be rented for \$2.50. It was restored and reopened last November as a Hampton Inn & Suites.





As we reach Manatee Ave. and turn right, you will see the city's first skyscraper, the **BRADENTON BANK AND TRUST**, at 1023 Manatee Avenue West. It opened in 1926 just east of the brick **MANATEE COUNTY COURTHOUSE**, which was built in 1912. When opened, the bank occupied the ground floor with approximately 90 commercial tenants located in the other six floors. By 1929, only 20 tenants remained, which was followed by the failure of the bank in 1933.

The intersection of Manatee Ave. and Main St. historically served as the center of town with a number of important businesses lining the surrounding streets. Robert Beall opened a dry goods store on Main Street in Bradenton in 1915. Although he lost everything in the Great Depression, he kept the bank owned store open and slowly rebuilt his business and purchased the store back piece by piece. Today, Beall's has grown to include 86 department stores in Florida and 473 outlet stores across the south capitalizing on the "Florida style." One of their most popular items, the

Tervis Tumbler, is produced locally and is specially insulated to keep cold drinks cold, hot drinks hot and your beverage from "sweating" in the humid Florida air. As we pass through downtown, some of the historic downtown buildings remain such as the Manatee River National Bank Building at 12th Street, the First Baptist Church, and the First Presbyterian Church.

When the Dixie Highway was completed between Montreal and Miami in 1915, automobile tourism increased dramatically. The Tin Can Tourists of the World organization was established in 1919 in a park immediately south of Ybor City. Locally, the Braden Castle Park Historic District, a tin can tourist camp, opened surrounding Braden Castle in 1924 and new tourist courts opened along the newly designated Tamiami Trail. Although the real estate market and tourism floundered in the late 1920s, Manatee County relied upon its agricultural foundation during the Great Depression. As tourists returned in the late 1930s, new tourist courts,



motels, gas stations, and restaurants started popping up along the Tamiami Trail on the route to Sarasota.

Driving south along the Tamiami Trail, the Shannon Funeral Home, built in 1926, stands out as one of the earliest businesses remaining along the street.

Driving south, we will pass the **BRADENTON TRAILER PARK**, which is now Bradenton Tropical Palms at 2310 14th St W. It was established by the Bradenton Kiwanis Club in 1936 and was advertised as the “World’s Largest Trailer Park.” By the 1940s, the park provided electric meters, water piped to each trailer, paved streets, and entertainment. By 1950, the park offered 1,190 lots for rent. Along the Tamiami Trail in this area, numerous gas stations, motels, and car dealerships were built in the 1940s and 1950s. Along this stretch, several motels retain their original appearance including the 1950 **KENTUCKY COLONEL MOTEL** at 1431 14th St W, the 1949 **ROYAL MOTEL** at 1526 14th St W, the 1947 **BLUE BOY MOTEL** at 1839 14th St W, the 1956 **BAXTER’S MOTEL** at 3225 14th St W, and the **MICHIANA MOTEL** at 3239 14th St W. A touch of Googie remains at the former **FORD DEALERSHIP** at 3400 14th St W. Built in 1966, the simple folded plate roof remains indicative of the period. Further south, the folded plate roof reappears at **BRADENTON DONUTS**, which was built at 4616 14th St W as a Mister Donut in 1967. A branch of **REASONER’S TROPICAL NURSERY** was next door at 4610 14th St W. Although this retail outlet is gone, Reasoner’s remains in business and is the oldest plant nursery in Florida. Founded in 1881 by brothers



Pliny and Egbert Reasoner, the main nursery is nearby in Oneco and is now known as Royal Palm Nurseries. Across the street from Bradenton Donuts, **CORTEZ SHOPPING PLAZA**, named after Cortez Road which we just crossed, remains as one of the oldest shopping centers in the area. The construction of the Cortez Bridge from the mainland to Anna Maria Island drew development south and west from downtown Bradenton.

As we drive further south, a number of historic trailer parks remain including the **VACATIONER MOTEL**, which is now Eagle Village, **K&K TRAILER PARK**, **LINCOLN ARMS TRAILER PARK**, **RITZ TRAILER PARK**, and **LUXOR TRAILER PARK**, among others. **BAYSHORE GARDENS**, a shopping center and subdivision development, started with a Publix supermarket constructed in 1957. The rest of the shopping center, which included the Aloha Straw Hut, Liggett Drugs, and a Wash-o-Mat, followed in 1959-60. The residential section of the professionally planned community offered Ranch style homes, which could be purchased for \$16,590, as well as apartments and condominiums. Before development spread south in the 1950s and 1960s, Tin’s famous Chinese vegetable farm shipped Chinese vegetables throughout the United States.

## *Sarasota*

Crossing into Sarasota County, **WHITFIELD ESTATES PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH** is located on the east side of the road at 7045 N. Tamiami Trail. As “America’s First Planned Drive-in Church,” the congregation offered 400 individual car speakers for outdoor worship when it was constructed. Continuing further south, we will pass the **PAMARO FURNITURE SHOP**, which has offered “Florida style” furniture for over 60 years, and the **KREISSLE FORGE ORNAMENTAL METALS**, established in 1947. Originally from Germany where he became a Master Metalsmith, George Kreissle, Sr. immigrated to the US in 1927, first establishing the Freeport Ornamental Iron Works in New York. He came to Sarasota to establish a “practical and artistic” iron works, a tradition which his family continues. Kreissle Forge is the oldest hand forge in continuous operation in Florida and one of the few remaining in the country. Note the large black anvil, which was originally gold, on the side of the circular drive.

**POINT WELCOME**, located at the corner of Bay Shore Rd. and the Tamiami Trail, held a welcome center operated by the American Legion and the City of Sarasota in which tourists from the north were welcomed with a handshake and a free glass of orange juice. Nearby, Midway Groves taught numerous local children on school trips how to pick an orange. In 1947, the Welcome Center became Zinn’s Restaurant, operated by ‘Mama’ and ‘Papa’ Zinn. Described as very “Sinatra-like,” the restaurant closed in the 1980s and was demolished. New College, which now

spans the Tamiami Trail, opened in 1963 on the grounds of the Charles Ringling Estate on Bay Shore Road.

Brothers Charles and John Ringling came to Sarasota during the 1910s as winter residents. Although a few scattered settlers acquired land in the 1860s and 1870s, the first organized settlement of Sarasota started with promotion in the 1880s by the Florida Mortgage and Investment Company Limited of Scotland. With a national depression and poor living conditions in Scotland in the 1880s, new residents and tourists arrived steadily throughout the first years. The Town of Sarasota was platted in 1885 with development focused along Main Street. The company heavily promoted Sarasota as a sportsmen’s paradise with warm weather, white beaches, plentiful fishing, and a golf course, which also drew tourists. Incorporated in 1902, company manager John Hamilton Gillespie, who introduced golf to Florida with his arrival in the 1880s, was elected the first mayor. Convincing railroad tycoon Henry Plant that golf would attract tourists, Gillespie went on to design several courses for Plant throughout the state.

In 1910, wealthy Chicagoan Bertha Potter Palmer visited Sarasota, loved it, and bought 213 acres and a house as her winter retreat. Other wealthy mid-westerners and northerners soon followed, and built cottages along Bay Shore Road on Shell Beach. John Ringling purchased one of these winter residences along the bay in 1911. His brother, Charles, came to visit John in 1912, purchased land immediately north of his brother’s property, and initiated construction of a residence. The two spent their winters in Sarasota, but spent the rest of the year following



S-18, Corner of Court of  
Ringling Art Museum, Sarasota, Fla.

and managing the family circuses in conjunction with their brothers. At the end of World War I, the remaining brothers combined the Ringling Bros. and the Barnum & Bailey Circuses. With a single crew of experienced managers, the brothers turned their attention to investment in Sarasota. John Ringling, in association with Owen Burns, initiated development of the barrier islands and built the Ringling Causeway from the mainland through his Ringling Isles Corporation. John and Mable Ringling hired New York architect Dwight James Baum to design their new home, **CAD'ZAN**, which was built on the site of their existing home. He built the Italian Renaissance Revival style **JOHN AND MABLE RINGLING MUSEUM OF ART**, which opened to the public in 1931, in honor of Mable, who had passed away. Charles Ringling founded the Ringling Bank and Trust Company, donated land for the construction of a courthouse to be designed by Dwight James Baum, and built the eleven-story

Sarasota Terrace Hotel. Charles Ringling died in 1926 after a short illness.

At a loss following the sudden death of his brother, John Ringling gained his reputation as the savior of Sarasota after he relocated the circus winter quarters to the city in 1927. Already suffering from the decline of the real estate market, the arrival of the circus meant new jobs to construct and work at the winter quarters and increased tourism from winter visitors to the site. Located along Fruitville Road east of downtown, the winter quarters were open to the public from early September to late March offering zoo and training acts with occasional complete performances. As a result, Sarasota became synonymous with the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus as well as the whole circus sub-culture. During the Great Depression, Ringling largely managed to disguise his financial troubles by constantly moving money from investment to investment. After John Ringling's death in 1936, his will revealed that he had donated most

of his assets to the State of Florida in an effort to save his beloved art collection from creditors. At the time, it was the second largest art museum in the US. Embroiled in court challenges for over ten years, Ca'd'Zan and the Ringling Museum of Art were finally conveyed to the State of Florida in 1948. In 1956, the Circus Hall of Fame opened nearby along the Tamiami Trail with over 5,000 attendees. When it closed, most of the items in the museum collection transferred to the Ringling Museums in Sarasota and Baraboo, Wisconsin, the original home of the Ringling family. The Ringling Museum of the Circus was built on the Ringling Museum Grounds to house the collection.

On our way to **SARASOTA JUNGLE GARDENS**, we will pass by two diminutive Tudor Revival style houses at 4237 and 4215 Rus-en-Urbe Circle. Although rumored to have been built for circus people, there is no evidence to support the theory. They were constructed by contractor Paul Bergmann around 1936.

In the early 1930s, David Lindsay purchased 10 acres along Sarasota Bay with plans to develop a botanical garden and horticultural experiment station. Preston Conrad, who operated a nursery adjacent to Lindsay's property, assisted in the creation of a tropical garden. In 1936, Lindsay started charging admission to view the gardens, and in 1940, opened Sarasota Jungle Gardens as a tourist attraction. As a member of Florida Attractions Association, the gardens eventually grew to include bird shows and advertised "the most beautiful flock of flamingoes in the USA."

As we leave Sarasota Jungle Gardens, we will return to the Tamiami Trail and head south toward downtown passing by several mid-century motels and commercial buildings including the 1950 Monterey Village Motel, the former South Aire Motor Court (now the Royal Palm Lodge), and the former Twin Motel (now the Sunshine Inn & Suites). Closer to downtown along the west side of the road, the Art Deco **SARASOTA MUNICIPAL AUDITORIUM** was







designed by Thomas Reed Martin and built utilizing WPA monies in 1938 as the first structure in the public recreation and cultural area. Shuffleboard courts, tennis courts, and lawn bowling courts were constructed north of the auditorium. To the south, the **CHIDSEY LIBRARY** was built in 1941, the former **SARASOTA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE BUILDING** designed by Victor Lundy was constructed in 1956, and the **SARASOTA GARDEN CLUB** was built in 1960 to complete the municipal complex.

As we approach downtown, we will turn to head to Lido Key at the site of the former **EL VERNONA HOTEL**, one of the great preservation losses in Sarasota. At the onset of the Florida Land Boom, John Ringling formed a business relationship with Owen Burns, who had settled in Sarasota in 1910. After purchasing all of the remaining holdings of John Hamilton Gillespie and the Florida Mortgage and Investment Company Limited of Scotland, which

comprised approximately 75% of the land in Sarasota, Burns formed construction, dredging, and realty companies to sell the land. Ringling and Burns formed a company in which Ringling would become the “front man” with financing and ideas, while Burns was the one who could bring the ideas to fruition. Although local businessmen hoped the two would build a resort on the mainland, Ringling intended to develop the keys. Under the Ringling Isles Corporation, his plans included a causeway from the mainland, a great hotel, and shops on St. Armands, Lido, and Longboat Keys. During the land boom of the 1920s, Burns dredged to form land for development along the bay and throughout the keys, handled all of the island development, and built the Ringling Causeway from the mainland to St. Armands and Lido Keys under the charter of their company, the John Ringling Estates, Inc. Through his construction company, Burns also built numerous buildings including his own El Vernona



Apartments, an enclave of bungalows he created as Burns Court, and the new Ringling home, Ca'd'Zan. Burns then hired architect Dwight James Baum to design a new realty office and a hotel he wanted to build on the mainland. The office and hotel were constructed along Broadway Avenue approximately three blocks from downtown, which shifted the concentration of construction from the commercial buildings on Main Street to the Sarasota bayfront.

The Mediterranean Revival style El Vernona Hotel, completed in 1926, stood at the entrance to downtown along the Tamiami Trail and became a popular gathering spot for Sarasota's elite. Simultaneously, John Ringling worked to finance and construct his Ritz Carlton Hotel on Longboat Key. Scheduled to open on December 1, 1925, investors panicked by the decline of the Florida Land Boom withdrew their financing. In spite of this loss, Ringling initiated construction of the hotel, and Burns agreed that their corporation would finance

completion of the hotel. As construction continued, Burns grew increasingly uncomfortable with the transfer of funds from the solvent Ringling Isles Corporation to the hotel. Ringling then loaned money to the corporation, thereby mortgaging to himself all of the real property of the corporation. Burns viewed this as an attempt by Ringling to take possession of all of the corporation's assets, including Burn's 25 percent. Meanwhile, Burns, who was heavily invested in land, started liquidating his assets in an effort to keep his El Vernona Hotel open at the onset of the Great Depression. His efforts to save the El Vernona failed and the hotel sold at auction in 1930. The ultimate purchaser was John Ringling and a long period of court battles ensued. The hotel reopened as the John Ringling Hotel. Although Ringling's Ritz had failed and was never completed, he now had a completed hotel at a fraction of the cost.

Although largely hidden by his juggling act, Ringling's financial woes

caught up to him by 1932, when he had to sign away most of his assets, which was followed by the first of several strokes. The City of Sarasota filed tax liens against the art museum and collection in part to protect against foreclosure of the museum and disbursement of the collection. In his final years, Ringling lived on the verge of bankruptcy, not because he had lost his wealth, but because his wealth was tied up in assets and his assets were pledged as collateral. After Ringling's death, his nephew and executor of his estate, John Ringling North, modernized and reopened the John Ringling Hotel in 1937. As general manager of the circus, North introduced the circus to the hotel to draw tourists. Clown Emmitt Kelly, aerialist Penito Del Oro, and Captain William Heyer with his horse Starless Night performed in the main dining room. North opened a nightclub, the M<sup>o</sup>Toto Room, in the hotel in 1944. In 1951, Cecil B. DeMille filmed the movie "The Greatest Show on Earth" in Sarasota. He and the stars

of the movie, which starred Charlton Heston, stayed at the hotel. With numerous famous visitors and as lodging for the Boston Red Sox during spring training in the late 1940s, the hotel flourished during the 1940s and early 1950s.

After final disposition of Ringling's estate in 1948, John Ringling North received the circus and the John Ringling Hotel, which closed in 1957. In the same year, the Tamiami Trail was widened, and, in 1961, a new Bayfront Drive was constructed to connect the northern and southern portions of the Trail sweeping along the bayfront, and bypassing downtown Sarasota. With increased traffic, small rooms, out-of-date systems, no beachfront access, or air conditioning, the hotel languished. The sparkling, modern motels along the beaches beacons newcomers. In 1959, the Arvida Corporation, founded by millionaire developer Arthur Vining Davis, purchased the hotel and the other land along the beaches owned by Ringling. The corporation initiated demolition of



the abandoned Ritz Carlton in 1963, and sold the John Ringling Hotel, while retaining the right to use the name for their own future hotel. This, combined with the relocation of the Circuses winter quarters to Venice in 1960, spelled the end of an era for Sarasota. The hotel was demolished in 1998, followed by the former realty office within a few years.

After we cross the **JOHN RINGLING CAUSEWAY**, we will circle around **ST. ARMAND'S CIRCLE**. This area was platted and originally developed by Ringling and Owen Burns during the 1920s. Although a few Mediterranean Revival style homes and commercial buildings were constructed in the development during the 1920s, full build-out of the keys waited until the post-World War II boom. Servicemen and women who were stationed at the Sarasota-Bradenton Air Field and the Venice Air Base for training during the war returned to the community following the end of hostilities. From 1945 through 1954, construction in Sarasota increased at an average of approximately 35% annually. With this flurry of building activity, Sarasota attracted many young architects eager to experiment with the then-popular Modern Movement adapted to the climate of coastal southwest Florida. The Modern movement had originated in early twentieth century Europe with the International style and the Bauhaus School of modern design, but was slow to gain acceptance in the United States. As Nazis gained control of Germany during the 1930s, well-known German architects, such as Walter Gropius and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, immigrated to the United States and led to the rapid acceptance of these design principals. Not only did

these architects start practicing here, but they entered teaching positions in major architectural schools such as Harvard University and the Illinois Institute of Technology, influencing young architects in training such as those who settled in Sarasota after World War II. In addition to Paul Rudolph, the Sarasota architects included Victor Lundy, Gene Leedy, Ralph and Bill Zimmerman, Jack West, and designer/builder Philip Hiss. Some of these young designers, such as Rudolph, began their careers by working in the architectural office of Ralph Twitchell. Twitchell had worked on Mediterranean Revival style designs during the 1920s, including Ca'd'Zan, the John and Mable Ringling Residence, but had segued into a more modern course during the 1930s and following his service in World War II. Soon after his arrival, Rudolph joined Twitchell as a partner in his architectural firm.

Between the mid-1940s and the mid-1960s, these Sarasota architects showed a strong commitment to modern architecture and design and their work attracted international attention. Influenced not only by the International style, but also by the modern work of Frank Lloyd Wright, they adapted their designs to the Florida climate and geography while integrating new materials and methods of construction. These architects produced creative and unique design solutions and were later referred to as the "Sarasota School of Architecture." The designs of many of their homes, schools, churches, and public buildings were published nationally and internationally in numerous architectural journals. Their work was recognized as highly original, and they received credit for



their experimentation with materials and design. Although a few of the architects remained in Sarasota, many left the region by the mid-1960s. One of the most well-known, Rudolph later went on to achieve international fame as the Chairman of the School of Architecture at Yale University.

Characteristics of the Sarasota School designs included an open plan, use of walls of glass, the merging of inside and outside spaces, low pitched or flat roofs, use of local materials and new construction techniques, concrete slab foundations, clarity of construction, clear geometry floating above the Florida landscape, honesty in details and in structural connections, cantilevered roofs, and post and beam construction. The Sarasota School offered a new architectural direction which resonated with the new social, economical, and political optimism of mid-century culture in the United States.

As Sarasota's growth extended to the islands, Phillip Hiss developed

Lido Shores as a collection of modern homes for a semi-tropical climate. Hiss, a well-educated man of independent means, came to Sarasota in 1948 and soon initiated work on Lido Shores. To draw attention to his development, he commissioned Paul Rudolph to design a speculative house, the **UMBRELLA HOUSE**, in 1953. Next door, he hired Edward J. Seibert to design a studio for himself. As an elevated glass box, **HISS STUDIO** was one of the first air conditioned spaces in Sarasota. In addition to Rudolph and Seibert, other mid-century houses in the development were designed by William Rupp, Ralph and William Zimmerman, and Hiss Associates. Seibert also designed the Colin Brown Building on St. Armands Circle. On the return to the mainland, Frank Folsom Smith and Louis F. Schneider designed the Plymouth Harbor Condominium in 1966, the tallest residential structure in Florida at the time of its construction. Continued development on Lido Key



in the 1960s led to the demolition of the landmark Lido Beach Casino, which was a WPA project opened in 1940 with giant sculpted seahorses.

Returning to the Tamiami Trail to head north to St. Petersburg, we will see some of the most intact motels and motor courts remaining along the Tamiami Trail including the **ALLAMANDA MOTEL** at 4014 N. Tamiami Trail, the **CADILLAC MOTEL** at 4021 N. Tamiami Trail, and the **SUN DIAL MOTEL** at 4108 N. Tamiami Trail. Although unremarkable from the outside, the Bahi Hut at 4675 N. Tamiami Trail retains its tiki interior and is well-known locally for its Mai Tais. Originally known as Horn's Cars of Yesterday, the **SARASOTA CLASSIC CAR MUSEUM**, located at 5500 N. Tamiami Trail, opened in 1953. Brothers Bob and Herb Horn built the museum to house their extensive car collection. When Walt Bellm wanted to buy their car "Tucker," the Horn brothers wouldn't sell it separately, so Bellm bought the entire collection and the attraction, renaming it Bellm's Cars and Music of Yesterday. In 1960, the facility advertised more than 70 antique cars, cycles, and music boxes could be viewed for the \$1.50 admission price.

As we continue north, we will pass the Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport, which started as a WPA funded project in 1939. When aviation facilities were completed in 1942, the field was leased to the Army Air Corps as a fighter pilot training base during World War II. The field transferred back to the Airport Authority in 1947 following the war. Federal programs during the Great Depression also led to the construction

of the Bradenton Post Office, which we will see on our trek north, and an armory at **MCKETCHNIE FIELD**, the spring training home of the Pittsburg Pirates.

Back in Bradenton, baseball started in the community as early as 1908. The Fats and Leans Team, named for the size of its players, operated between 1915 and 1917. McKechnie Field opened in 1923 and named after Bill McKechnie, a major league baseball great of the era. When constructed, the grandstand held 1,300 attendees, while the bleachers could accommodate 700, which included separate facilities for African Americans. The existing fairground buildings were converted into locker rooms. The field is now the oldest stadium used for spring training. In addition to the Pittsburgh Pirates, McKetchnie Field was home field the St. Louis Cardinals from 1930 to 1936, and to the Negro League Nine Devils team which thrived from 1937 to 1956. The team, originally called the Braidentown Aces, played between 70 and 75 games a year against white and black teams throughout the state.

## *St. Petersburg*

After crossing the Sunshine Skyway into St. Petersburg, we will take US 19, locally known as 34th Street. The 1954 completion of the Sunshine Skyway Bridge connecting St. Petersburg with Bradenton and Sarasota to the south led to a shift in commercial development from downtown and points east to a westward expansion. Suddenly, US 19, which originally followed what is now Alternate US 19 through the heart of Tarpon Springs, Dunedin, Clearwater, and Largo, bypassed these communities. Designated as the Gulf Coast Highway,

it served as the main route north and south through the county, and new shopping centers, motels, and restaurants quickly followed.

Among the old motels and eateries along 34th Street South, the former **HENRY'S DINER**, located at 1789 34th St S, stands as one of the few, possibly the only diner, remaining in the region. It was moved from MacDill Avenue in Tampa around 1956. Taking a brief detour a few blocks off of 34th Street South, we will visit the **BETHWOOD TERRACE** Subdivision. This collection of late 1940s and early 1950s Ranch style residences was developed by Eden Homes, Inc. in 1947 and 1948. By exhibiting tropical elements considered quintessentially Florida, developers intended to lure families and retirees to settle in the "Sunshine State." These elements include rounded fluted corners, curved wing walls, large picture windows, tile clad roofs, wavy elements reminiscent of the ocean, and decorative features with flowers and birds. It remains a fine example of post-

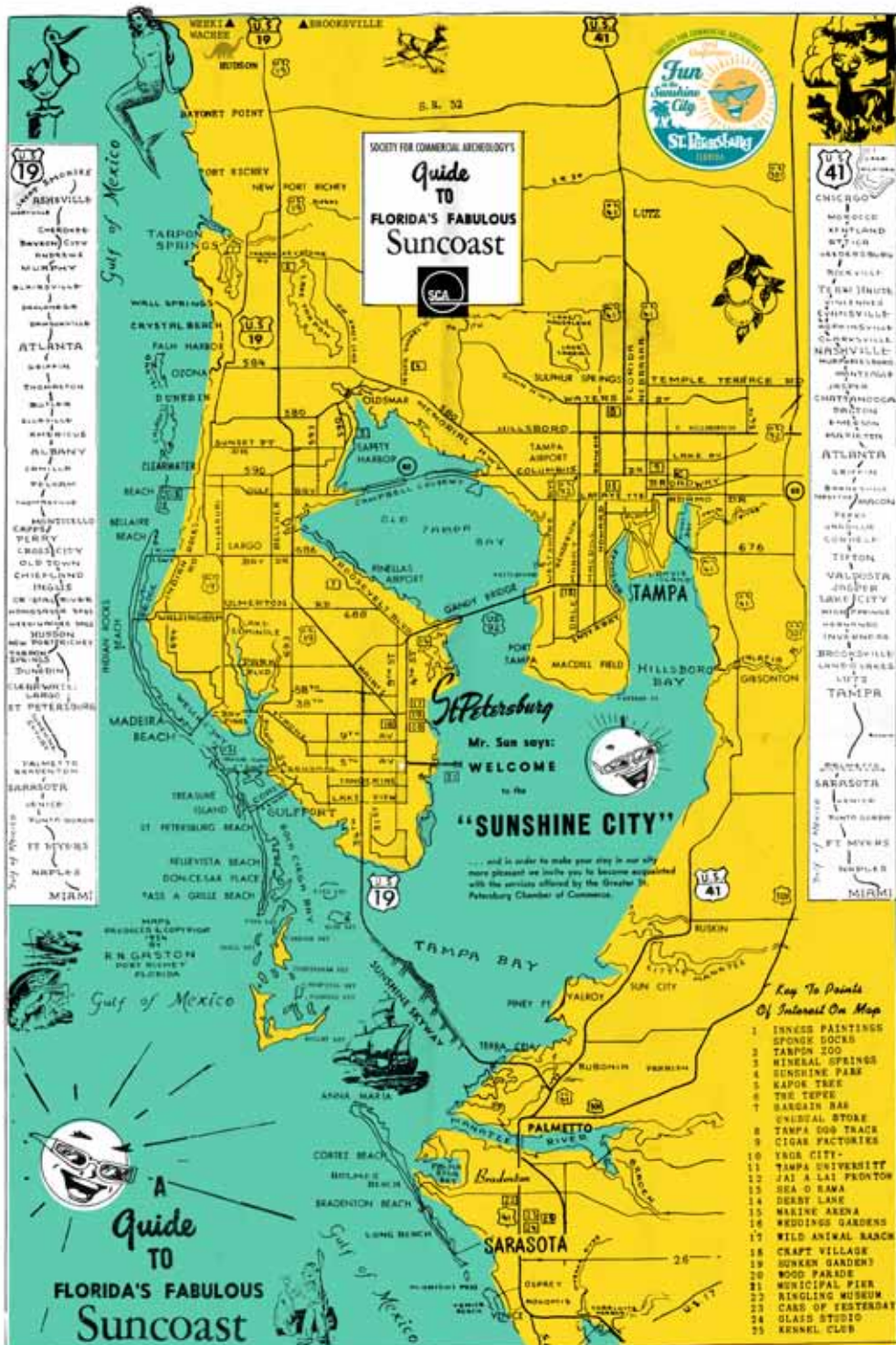
World War II housing developments.

Returning to US 19, the **SANDMAN MOTEL** at 570 34th Street North retains its original design and neon sign from 1956-1957. Across the street, the former Dobb's House Restaurant, now the Donut Connection, provides a remnant of Googie along the sprawling strip. As we head back to downtown and the Pennsylvania Hotel, we will see the mid-century 1962 Plaza 5th Apartments, the 1963 300 East Building, the 1946 **TRIPPLETT'S DRIVE-IN RESTAURANT**, and the 1954 rotosphere at the Star Deli Food Store. Closer to town, we will pass the **COLISEUM**, a 1924 Moorish Revival style ballroom at which big name entertainers like Louis Armstrong, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, and Dizzy Gillespie performed. In the next block, the Avalon Hotel and the Hollander Hotel provided nearby lodging for visitors before we turn right on 4th Street and return to the Pennsylvania Hotel.

*Text by Kimberly Hinder, Historic Preservation Planner  
Planning and Economic Development Department, City of St. Petersburg*



*Layout by Rick Kilby, Kilby Creative*



Established in 1977, the SCA is the oldest national organization devoted to the buildings, artifacts, structures, signs, and symbols of the 20th-century commercial landscape. The SCA offers publications, conferences, and tours to help preserve, document, and celebrate the structures and architecture of the 20th century. Visit [SCA-roadside.org](http://SCA-roadside.org) to learn more.

