

FUN IN THE SUNSHINE CITY
TOUR 2 • APRIL 12, 2014



ST. PETERSBURG
TO
*Tarpon Springs,
Weeki Wachee,
& Ybor City*





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**TOUR 2 • APRIL 12, 2014
9 AM – 9 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

AFTER SEEING DOWNTOWN ST. PETERSBURG'S LANDMARKS, we will take 4th Street North to visit and observe the remaining roadside architecture along the original route to Tampa. From St. Petersburg, the next stop will involve a visit to the Kapok Tree, before journeying to Tarpon Springs to visit the sponge docks. Next up a visit to Weeki Wachee to see the famed mermaid show. From there, the route to Ybor City will involve passage through Brooksville and following US 41 through the earliest suburbs of Tampa. Following dinner in Ybor City, we will return by way of downtown Tampa, passing the Tampa Theater and the former Tampa Bay Hotel, and driving along Bayshore Blvd, before crossing the Gandy Bridge to St. Petersburg.

St. Petersburg

We will leave from the conference hotel, the Pennsylvania Hotel, and proceed to Central Avenue. As we head south on 5th Street, we will pass the 1924 **SUWANEE HOTEL** and the 1949 **CHRIST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**. On Central, the 1904 **PRESTON HOTEL**, which housed McCrory's 5 & 10 on the 1st floor, will be on the north side of the road. Continuing down Central Avenue, we will pass the oldest block in the City with the **LEWIS GROCERY**, the **JAMES**

HOTEL, the **ST. CHARLES HOTEL**, and the **DETROIT HOTEL**. On the sidewalk canopy over the Lewis building, one of the city's original famous green benches remains. In 1908, real estate agent and city booster Noel "the Sand Man" Mitchell installed the first benches in front of his real estate office at the corner of Central and 4th Street. The orange benches, labeled with his slogan, proved popular with residents and tourists alike prompting other businessmen to install their own benches. The cacophonous

mixing of colors and styles led the City administration to approve an ordinance in 1916 requiring the use of standardized benches and St. Petersburg became the “City of Green Benches.” By the 1950s, 7,000 of them were reported located throughout the downtown. When *Look* and *Life* Magazines ran a story about St. Petersburg and its elderly population, jokes surfaced about it being God’s waiting room or the largest above ground cemetery. Blood pressure machines were even located along the streets. In an age increasingly focused on youth, city leaders believed that the benches made the city look old and removed all of the benches. On a side note, while the benches meant hospitality to most, African Americans were not allowed to sit on the benches and they became a symbol of Jim Crow and segregation. The **DETROIT HOTEL**, located at 215 Central Avenue, was the original hotel constructed in conjunction with the arrival of the railroad. In exchange for naming the city after Demens’ birth-

place, St. Petersburg, Russia, Demens named the hotel after Williams’ hometown, Detroit, Michigan. The center portion remains the 1888 wood frame structure which had 40 rooms and a tower. Two large brick additions between 1911 and 1913 enlarged the facility to 190 rooms and a dining room which could accommodate 300 patrons.

Ahead, we will pass the **PONCE DE LEON HOTEL**, the first of the 1920s boom era hotels to be completed along the waterfront in 1922. The **ST. PETERSBURG YACHT CLUB**, originally built in 1917, is located on the north side of the street. Pioneer Park occupies the site where the Sunshine Tourist Club first organized to play shuffleboard, roque, and other games along the waterfront. Along Bayshore Drive, the city park on the east side of the road is **DE-MEN’S LANDING**, informally known as the South Mole. It is the site where the railroad extended into the bay on a pier. To encourage tourism, the Orange Belt Railway built a large bathing pavilion



with a toboggan slide adjacent to its pier. In the early years, residents and tourists fished and swam off of the railroad pier. After the construction of the pier at 2nd Avenue North, the railroad pier became the location where African Americans were allowed to swim during segregation. The rail lines remained in place until the demolition of the railroad depot in 1963. Further south along Bayshore Drive, the **DALI MUSEUM** opened in 2011 and displays the largest collection of the works of Salvador Dali outside of Europe. Straight ahead, **ALBERT WHITTEN AIRPORT** opened in 1929 and became the headquarters of National Airlines in 1934. Heading north on 1st Street South, we will pass the **WATERFRONT PARK APARTMENTS COOPERATIVE**, built in 1956 with 35 apartments. On the east side of the road, we will pass the **FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH** and Progress Energy Park,

originally known as and more frequently referred to as Al Lang Field.

Edwin Tomlinson, a winter resident starting in 1891, established some of the earliest tourist events and attractions. He funded the town's Washington's Birthday celebration (later becoming the Festival of States), built a 137 foot tower on his property to entice the inventor of the telegraph, Guglielmo Marconi, to experiment in St. Petersburg, designed the City's first open-air post office, and established St. Petersburg's Fountain of Youth, a sulfuric artesian well acclaimed to have healing powers. Adjacent to the well, Tomlinson built a pier with a cottage on the end named the Fountain of Youth Pier. After damage by the 1921 hurricane destroyed the pier, the attraction was placed on land, and, today, remains a place to rest and drink water from the water fountain.

Next door, Progress Energy Park,



STATE ARCHIVES OF FLORIDA



more commonly called **AL LANG FIELD**, was the site of the first spring training game in Florida. Al Lang arranged to bring the Philadelphia Phillies baseball team to the city for spring training in 1914. His efforts earned him election as Mayor in 1916. The City's administration started to formally encourage tourism with promotional campaigns following the election of Al Lang as mayor in 1916. The original 1922 park, named the St. Petersburg Athletic Park, was replaced with Al Lang Field in 1947. With the exception of a few years at which the country was at war, St. Petersburg hosted one, and sometimes two, major league teams, including the Boston Braves from 1922 to 1937 and the St. Louis Cardinals from 1937 through 1997, during spring training. Today, the field hosts international baseball and soccer games while the Tampa Bay Rays call Tropicana Field in St. Petersburg home.

Cutting over to Beach Drive, we will

drive along the **WATERFRONT PARKS** and pass by the **ST. PETERSBURG PIER**. In 1905, Beach Drive extended along the edge of Tampa Bay but the electric plant, ice plant, and warehouses along the railroad line threatened to consume the waterfront. A group of visionary businessmen led by William Straub, who was the owner and editor of the St. Petersburg Times, and developer C. Perry Snell proposed to create a public waterfront park. They were proponents of the City Beautiful Movement, which strove to create livable cities through the inclusion of public parks. As editor, Straub encouraged his readers to envision a beautiful waterfront where tourists and residents could stroll and see the water, while business concerns could be moved to a more appropriate location south to Bayboro Harbor, which had recently been dredged. Straub and Snell advocated for public ownership of the waterfront, but that was a costly proposition to a fledgling town which had incorporated

within the last ten years. Straub, Snell, and the other City Beautiful supporters ended up buying large tracts along the waterfront and holding them in trust for the City. When Council was reluctant to act, Straub organized local businessmen to form the St. Petersburg Waterfront Company, which was reportedly interested in “developing the waterfront.” The reported threat of massive commercial development stirred public indignation and prompted City leaders to act. Finally, in 1910, the waterfront officially became a City park, and one of the parks in the system is named in honor of Straub. Dredging and the construction of seawalls further enlarged the park system so that by 1916, St. Petersburg had one of the largest public waterfronts in the US. It remains the third largest in North America, behind only Vancouver and Chicago.

When railroad magnate Henry Plant took over the operation of the Orange Belt Railway and started charging for the railroad pier’s use, local boat builder

D.F.S. Brantley constructed another pier in the vicinity of 2nd Avenue North with a 34 room bathing pavilion offshore. In 1905, Frank Davis purchased the Brantley pier and replaced it with the 3,000-foot long Electric Pier which was illuminated by hundreds of incandescent bulbs and supported the extension of the trolley line onto the pier, which Davis also owned. With that structure deteriorating and the public ownership of the waterfront now completed, the first municipal pier was built in 1913 adjacent to the Electric Pier. Along the new pier, a waterfront spa (the city’s first modern bathhouse) opened. Although the Municipal Pier was repaired after being badly damaged in the 1921 hurricane, the need for a stronger, more substantial pier was evident. With the completion of the Million Dollar Pier in 1926, this Mediterranean Revival style structure became the city’s most recognizable landmark and most popular recreation spot. A solarium, a swimming area known as Spa Beach, a bait



Municipal Recreation Pier, St. Petersburg, Florida



house, and the St. Petersburg Memorial Historical Society Museum lined the pier and its approach. A two-lane roadway and a streetcar line provided access to the Mediterranean Revival style casino on the pier, which boasted a ballroom, observation deck, and a radio studio. It became the social center of the community and a tourist destination. When the Casino started deteriorating, it was demolished in 1967 and replaced with the existing inverted pyramid designed by Bill Harvard. Harvard had settled in St. Petersburg in 1938 and had designed the 1952 bandshell in Williams Park to critical acclaim, but his design for the pier was not as well received by local residents who protested the demolition of the casino on the Million Dollar Pier. As the inverted pyramid was built on caissons while the original 1920s era approach remained in place, the condition of the support structure for the approach

is now in bad condition and the City and her residents are struggling to determine how to address it.

Continuing along Beach Drive, the former **LANTERN LANE APARTMENTS**, now the Birchwood Hotel, remains as one of the few original apartment buildings along the downtown waterfront. At the corner of 5th Avenue, the landmark 1925 Mediterranean Revival **VINOY PARK HOTEL** is situated on the northeast corner. Designed by Henry Taylor, it was built on fill across from the original owner's Beach Drive home, Aymer Vinoy Laughner. After being threatened with demolition, the Vinoy was purchased in 1990, rehabilitated, and returned to hotel use. On 5th Avenue North, the former First Church of Christ, Scientist, now the **PALLADIUM THEATER** which is part of St. Petersburg College, occupies a commanding presence at the intersection of 3rd Street North. The former church was designed by Chicago architect Howard Lovewell Cheney and built in 1925 by the George A. Fuller Construction Company, who built such notable national landmarks as the Flat Iron Building in New York City and the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC.

As you can tell by the mix of houses, former hotels, new high rises and churches, 5th Avenue North is the boundary between downtown and the upscale residential neighborhood of North Shore developed by C. Perry Snell. Soon after his arrival in 1904, Snell formed the Bay Shore Land Company with some partners to develop a subdivision north of 5th Avenue North, an area which was described as "rugged, blanketed with palmettos and inhabited by unfenced



cattle.” When lots were first offered for sale in the Bay Shore Subdivision in 1906, over twenty parcels sold in the first three days. Their success led to additional subdivisions, eventually covering the area now occupied by the North Shore, Round Lake, Uptown, Euclid/St. Paul, and Crescent Lake neighborhoods.

Further north, the opening of the **GANDY BRIDGE** to Tampa in 1924, which shortened the drive to Tampa from 43 to 19 miles, provided easier access to winter tourists and day-trippers alike and led to new construction along 4th Street North (US 92) as the primary approach to the bridge. Largely residential with scattered farms before the bridge opened, new commercial buildings opened along the corridor in the 1920s. After a brief hiatus during the decline of the real estate market in 1926 and the onset of the Great Depression, construction resumed in the late 1930s with new roadside attractions, restaurants, gas stations, and motor courts.

Following World War II, many veterans returned to St. Petersburg. Hotels and boarding houses were again filled with tourists and new residents awaiting the construction of new homes. Motels, motor courts, and trailer parks popped up seemingly overnight. Between 1947 and 1953, at least 21 motels and motor courts were built along 4th Street North. By 1956, 201 motels and motor



courts operated in the St. Petersburg area of which 73 were located along 4th Street North. With the new residents, gas stations, restaurants, car dealerships, dry cleaners, and other service oriented businesses filled the main thoroughfares leading to Tampa.

Along 4th Street North, we will pass two of the best neon signs in St. Petersburg: the **BANYAN TREE MOTEL** at 540 4th Street North and **CHINA CITY** at 1221 4th Street N. The original portion of the Foot-Fren Company Building, also known the **SHANGRI-LA** at 1001 4th Street North, was built in 1938 as a restaurant. In the distance, you can see the **CRESCENT LAKE WATER TOWER** which was built in 1926. It is located in a city park which was provided by C. Perry Snell. Within the park, **HUGGINS-STENGEL BASEBALL FIELD** was the longtime site of spring training practice for the New York

Yankees and later the New York Mets. There are even stories about an incident when Babe Ruth ran from alligators in the lake while playing outfield.

Further north, the Art Deco building located at 1535 4th Street North was built as the **BROWN-NASH MOTORS** car sales showroom specializing in Ramblers in 1939. Architects Hadley, Nordstrom & Atkinson designed the \$12,000 dealership building which operated into the 1980s. Across the street, the Art Moderne style **SUNSHINE MOTORS** at 1600 4th Street North, was built in 1947. With branches in Jacksonville, Orlando, and Tampa, the company was a distributor for Willy's Overland products and added the Kaiser-Frazier lines in 1950. The **MONTICELLO MOTEL** at 1700 4th Street N provided 18 rooms and a touch of *Gone with the Wind* when it was built in 1952. Next door, **STERLING CLEANERS** was built as the Pillsbury dry cleaning plant in 1936.

Our first stop of the day will be **SUNKEN GARDENS**. The front building was constructed in 1926 as the Sanitary Public Market, essentially an inside farmer's market, which soon failed in the real estate decline. Purchased by the American Legion, it was converted to the St. Petersburg Armory. After a new WPA funded Armory was built, the building was then purchased by the Coca-Cola Bottling Co. in 1940 and modernized by architect Bill Harvard. During this period, George Turner Sr. opened Sunken Gardens along 4th Street North in 1935. Turner, who had owned the site since at least 1903, had created a garden on his property, planting fruit trees and vegetables to sell in a roadside fruit stand. As he started to experiment with tropical



and exotic plants, he fenced in the garden and started charging admission. Trained as a plumber, Turner devised an elaborate drainage system with portions of the garden 15 feet below street level. Sunken Gardens eventually incorporated an alligator show, bird shows, and “the World’s Largest Gift Shop” in the former Coca-Cola Bottling facility, becoming one of Florida’s leading tourist attractions in the pre-Disney era. After the attraction closed, the City purchased the property in 1999. Although the animal shows are

gone, the site remains open as a park.

Back on the west side of 4th Street, a former 1920s era hotel, the Essex House, has been modified into a modern building with a Panera and Outback Steakhouse on the first floor. The **LANDMARK MOTEL**, however, retains all of its 1958 charm, including its original sign. Located at 1930 4th Street North, it provided 26 rooms and was constructed for \$45,000. Nearby, **ROGERS CLEANERS**, with its neon hanger, was founded in 1910 and claims



to be the oldest dry cleaning firm in Florida. A few blocks to the north at 2221 4th Street North, Earl Gresh built an English cottage designed by architect Archie Parish in which he opened the **EARL GRESH WOOD PARADE**, a museum focused on wood and art made from wood. He sold wooden purses, fishing lures, and wood mosaics at this popular roadside attraction which remained open from 1939 until 1959. Period advertisements encouraged tourists to “see the largest collection of woods of the world. Unusual and interesting wooden pocketbooks, belts, pins, and novelties. See the wood carvers at work.” The building is now occupied by the Melting Pot Restaurant. Just north, the former **EL ROYAL MOTEL** at 2301 4th Street North provided lodging, while the **HOWARD JOHNSONS RESTAURANT** accommodated diners.

The **HOLIDAY MOTEL**, located between 24th and 25th Avenues, was built as the Wilmarth Apartments in 1940. The individual entrances give each room a cottage feel, while garages are located behind each unit. Continuing north, we will see a number of small “mom and pop” motels, many of which have been converted to other purposes such as an assisted living facility or a strip shopping center with individual offices. Brochures, post cards, and advertisements promoted amenities such as the “Pulse-a Rhythm Mattresses” in addition to pools and air conditioning. Some, such as the **LEWIS PALM PARK MOTEL**, which advertised that they were “For Fastidious Folks,” lured visitors with their cleanliness. Some of the motels still function as motels. Several of the most intact include the **VILLA**



ROYAL MOTEL at 3540 4th St N, the **KENTUCKY MOTEL** at 4246 4th Street North, the **PALMS MOTEL** at 6730 4th Street North, the **EL PATIO MOTEL** at 6733 4th Street North, the **SIESTA MOTEL** at 7141 4th Street North, the **KING'S REST MOTEL** at 7330 4th Street North, and the **AZA-LEA COURT MOTEL** at 8210 4th Street North. Located at 4246 4th Street North, the Kentucky (Derby) Motel was built in 1947-48 for owner Charles Fearn based on the design by architect A.L. Pfau. In 1951, C. Spillman Jones bought the 10-unit motel. As a former employee of Churchill Downs, he renamed his motel the Kentucky Derby Motel and decorated each room with photos of winning horses. In 1987, when the racing venue threatened a lawsuit, he was forced to remove the “Derby” from the motel name. Unique eateries, such as the **ROUND TABLE RESTAURANT**, now

Wilson's Sports Bar at 3030 4th Street North, and **EL CAP** at 3500 4th Street North, played off of St. Petersburg's tropical climate and baseball connections.

Another major tourist attraction along 4th Street during the mid-twentieth century was the **FLORIDA WILD ANIMAL AND REPTILE RANCH** at 48th Avenue N. It opened in 1937 featuring a wide variety of animals and animal acts on tropically landscaped grounds. At the time that it closed in 1959, admission was \$1 and brochures advertised "herds of alligators and crocodiles. Rattlesnakes in action. Strange wild animals, beautiful birds, in a tropical setting."

Some of the small motor courts along 4th Street North turned into the earliest trailer parks in the city. The construction of a national, state, and local

road system after World War I opened St. Petersburg to an increasing number of middle-class vacationers and a new type of vacationer known as "tin-can tourists." This type of vacationer typically came by car and generally favored inexpensive campgrounds. The city's shortage of hotel rooms led to the 1920 creation of Tent City, a municipal campground for the "tin-can tourists." Although supported by the mayor, this new type of tourist threatened the city's established hotel industry and was not the class of visitor City Council was interested in attracting. They abolished Tent City in May 1921. In response, several privately owned tent cities opened and flourished, eventually giving rise to the motor court, trailer park, and motel. Advertised as "The Camp that Has Everything," Brothers Roy and Raymond Treasure opened the **TREASURE VILLAGE**



TOURIST CAMP, located along 4th Street North at 52nd Avenue North, in 1935. The property consisted of ten acres which incorporated 26 wood frame furnished cottages and 180 trailer sites to accommodate trailers. The Administration Building provided a store, filling station, lunch room, and a community lounging and card room. Shuffleboard and horseshoe pitching lanes provided entertainment. Several other historic trailer parks remain along our route including Hollywood Park at 70th Avenue North and Pinewood Village across from Derby Lane on Gandy Blvd.

At the turn to Gandy Blvd. under the 1970s era giant Derby Lane sign, you will pass the **CAMPBELL & MIXON CITRUS PACKING PLANT** at 10000 Gandy Blvd. N. The Mediterranean Revival style citrus packing plant built ca. 1925 failed soon after construction. Later it was occupied by Yardage Unlimited, a drapery fabric outlet store. The building at the corner of the bypass road, the **TRIANGLE FILLING STATION**, was built at 10056 Gandy Blvd N. in 1924, soon after the completion of the Gandy Bridge. Later, it became **WEBB'S OUTPOST**, meant to lure tourists to downtown St. Petersburg's Webbs City, "the World's Most Unusual Drug Store." 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. 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 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. After the company closed in 1979, the downtown buildings were demolished, but this small outpost of the company remains. It originally had an advertising sign on the roof that dwarfed the small building. Travelers across the Gandy Bridge could not miss it. Derby Lane is located at 10490 Gandy Blvd. Racing was introduced January 3, 1925 making **DERBY LANE** the oldest greyhound racing facility in the US. The track was named for the St. Petersburg Derby, the oldest blue ribbon classic in the greyhound racing sport. The concrete and steel grandstands were designed by architect Phillip Kennard in 1948, while



the six-story clubhouse was designed by Bill Harvard in 1965.

As we head north, we will pass the **SUNSHINE SPEEDWAY** at the intersection of Ulmerton Road and Roosevelt Blvd N. The speedway was built in 1960 by local farmer Leo Musgrave on his 250 acre property. Consisting of an oval race track and a drag strip, it was a popular destination for race fans throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The motor speedway was open from April to December and advertised the racing of late models, modified sportsman, and jalopies in addition to Sunday drag racing. From here we will pass by the St. Petersburg-Clearwater International Airport, which is on the site of an African American beach run by African American St. Petersburg businessman Elder Jordan and his family in the 1920s and take the Bayside Bridge to the **KAPOK TREE** at 923 N. McMullen Booth Rd.

The namesake Kapok Tree was planted with seedlings from India by citrus grower Robert Hoyt, who came

to the area in the late 19th century. By the 1940s, the tree had grown to such a size that it was already a popular local attraction. **THE KAPOK TREE INN RESTAURANT** was created by musician and restaurateur Richard Baumgardner in 1958. Postcards of the restaurant read “Country Dinners served beside Florida’s Famous Kapok Tree in the midst of exotic tropical gardens.” According to a website dedicated to preserving the memories of the restaurant, menu choices were “ham, fried chicken, fried shrimp or T-bone steak... all came with roasted potatoes, hush-puppies, green peas served family style and a lazy susan relish tray with creamy cole slaw and famous apple butter...”

The Kapok Tree Inns Corporation went public in 1970 and opened other Kapok Tree restaurants in Madiera Beach, Fort Lauderdale and Daytona Beach. In 1976, the same year it was named one of the top 100 restaurants in United States, founder Baumgardner passed away. After ownership changes



and litigation among family members for control of the restaurant chain in the 1980s, the restaurant closed for good in 1991. Today the property is owned and maintained by 3 separate businesses: the Sam Ash Music store, the Players School of Music, and the Kapok Special Events Company.

The neighborhoods and commercial development along Sunset Point Rd, US 19, and Klosterman Rd on our route to Tarpon Springs show the sprawling development of Florida from the 1970s to present day. As we turn onto Alternate 19, heading north, we will rejoin the historic route of US 19, now known as Alternate 19 or Pinellas Avenue in Tarpon Springs.

Tarpon Springs

Tarpon Springs, initially referred to as “The Venice of the South,” was first settled by pioneers in the 1870s and 1880s. Hamilton Disston, one of Florida’s most important nineteenth century developers, persuaded influential

friends to join his settlement following his arrival in 1882. To accommodate them, he built a hotel, which at the time, was the most fashionable resort on the west coast. As a result, thousands of wealthy Northerners arrived during winter to visit the mineral spring at the head of Spring Bayou. The “medicinal” waters were reported to soothe respiratory, nervous, and digestive problems. During this early period, Tarpon Springs gained renown as a health center and winter resort and incorporated as a city in 1887.

Although sponge beds had been discovered by turtle fishermen in 1873, the industry was in its infancy. The arrival of Greek sponge divers in 1905 marked a shift in the local economy and culture of the city. The sponge industry grew into not only the basis for the local economy, but also the state’s largest industry during the 1920s. An influx of year round residents, mostly Greek immigrants, replaced wealthy winter residents as the community’s largest

social group. Postcards and brochures encouraged tourists to visit “The Sponge Capital of the World.” When the sponge industry declined in the late 1940s, the city suffered, but the overall growth of Pinellas County during the post-World War II boom soon brought new housing complexes and sprawl along US 19.

At the south end of town across from the **TARPON SPRINGS GOLF COURSE**, we will pass the **GOLF VIEW MOTEL**, built in 1955 at 1475 S. Pinellas Ave. The Tarpon Springs Golf Club building was originally on the site of the motel. Driving north, we will pass **TARPON PLAZA**, one of the early strip shopping centers built in 1958. A former drive-in restaurant, built in 1966, remains at 600 S. Pinellas Avenue. A 1924 gas station remains at 440 S. Pinellas, and in the next block an old Publix grocery store is situated at 303 S. Pinellas Avenue. The Mediterranean Revival **SHAW ARCADE** is located on the west side of the road at 210 S.

Pinellas Avenue. The Arcade Hotel occupied the second floor, while various businesses as well as the post office and library were located on the first floor. It was the only major hotel constructed in downtown Tarpon Springs during the Florida land boom and was restored in 1986. In the next block, Tarpon Springs’ old **CITY HALL** now functions as the Tarpon Springs Cultural Center at 101 S. Pinellas Avenue. The Neoclassical Revival style building was constructed in 1915. Across from the old City Hall, the **WHITE LINE BUS STATION** Building was built in 1925 at 100-04 S. Pinellas Avenue, but had been converted to a bottling company by 1945. As we turn onto Court Street, you’ll notice the ca. 1935 Tudor Revival style gas station at 10 S. Pinellas Avenue. As we circle the block you’ll see early twentieth century residences surrounding **SPRING BAYOU**. The Bayou is the site of the Epiphany celebration held each January 6 to commemorate the baptism of Jesus



and descent of the Holy Spirit and the Recovery of the Cross under Constantine. Young men dive to retrieve the cross and be blessed by the Archbishop, who also blesses the sponge fleet. The Bayou is also a good site to spot manatees during the winter when they enter to enjoy its warmer waters.

At the corner of Tarpon Avenue is the **TARPON INN**, a motel built in 1958. It was built on the site of the original Tarpon Inn Hotel, which burned down in 1927. The Queen Anne style **OLD TARPON INN GUEST HOUSE** was built ca. 1905 and now serves as a bed and breakfast. Next door at 20 W. Tarpon Ave., the John K. Cheney House was built ca. 1890 as a guest cottage on the grounds of the Tarpon Springs Hotel which was destroyed by fire ca. 1900. Businessman John K. Cheney believed that the sponge industry was a way to diversify the city's economy and hired John Cocoris, who introduced diving as an effective method of harvesting sponges. In 1905, Cocoris brought the first group of Greek divers to Tarpon Springs from island of Aegena. By late summer of that year, approximately 500 Greek men, largely from the Dodecanese Islands of Greece as they had a reputation for experience and equipment in sponge diving, lived in the city.

As we cross Pinellas Avenue, we will enter the downtown business center of the city. Businesses such as Vinson's Dry Goods Store, Mearoy's Drug Store, the First National Bank, Faklis Department Store and Shoe Repair, Gourley's Hardware, and Hotel Meres provided goods and services to residents and tourists alike. At the corner of Safford Ave., the 1909 **TARPON SPRINGS TRAIN**



DEPOT has been restored to serve as the home of the Tarpon Springs Historical Society. The Orange Belt Railroad first arrived in Tarpon Springs in 1887. After the original wooden depot was destroyed by fire in 1908, this brick depot was constructed and functioned as the transportation center of the community until the mid-1980s. Now, the tracks have been converted to the Pinellas Trail. The trail from here to Clearwater follows the old Orange Belt Railroad line (later the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad). South of Clearwater and into St. Petersburg, the Pinellas Trail occupies the rail lines of the former Tampa and Gulf Coast Railroad (later the Seaboard Air Line Railroad). Across from the former rail tracks, the **OLD SALOON BUILDING** was also constructed in 1909. It served as a gathering spot for sponge fishermen and had shops geared toward recreation including several saloons, a coffee shop, a



pool room, and a cigar store.

Returning to Pinellas Ave. via Orange Street, we will pass the **ST. NICHOLAS GREEK ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL**. This grand Byzantine Revival style cathedral was built in 1943 to replace an earlier, smaller 1910 church building. This church was built as a replica of the famed St. Sophia in Constantinople. Fifteen tons of Greek marble which were on exhibit at the New York World's Fair were shipped to Tarpon Springs for its construction. It remains the site of the largest and most elaborate Epiphany celebration in the Western Hemisphere.

As we continue north on Pinellas Avenue, we will pass historic houses from the 1910s, several historic gas stations, and a few churches. The **ST. NICHOLAS GREEK ORTHODOX SCHOOL**, which was built in 1926 at 301 N. Pinellas Ave., still functions as the Greek school. We will also pass one of the historic sponge warehouses on

the north side of W. Park St behind the corner building. The **N. G. ARFARAS SPONGE PACKING PLANT** is a basic one-story wood frame warehouse built in the late 1920s to process sponges. Across the street at 23 Park Street, the **A.S. TEFANIDI SPONGE PACKING HOUSE**, which was also built in the 1920s, remains on site. The building located at 739 Pinellas Ave. originally served as a sponge exchange and cigar factory, before it was converted to a builders supply warehouse and an auto sales and repair shop.

Historically, the African American neighborhood occupied the area east of Pinellas Avenue, while the Greek residential areas developed to the west of the avenue north of downtown. Pinellas Ave., originally called Eagle St., did not continue north to the Anclote River, which was the site of shipbuilding and sawmill works including the Sarris Bros., Anclote Ship Building, and the Boyette Speed Boat and Engine Works.

Instead, the main route to the sponge docks was Athens St. Support businesses for the neighborhood and the docks, including bakeries and restaurants, were evident along Athens St. as early as 1909. Present-day Dodecanese Ave. was originally Riverside Drive, but was subsequently changed to Ellene and then Anclote Blvd., before finally becoming Dodecanese Ave. By the 1930s, about 75% of the approximately 5,000 residents of Tarpon Springs were of Greek descent. In 1937, the Tarpon Springs Fleet was comprised of over 125 boats manned by about 500 men of which 150 were divers. Several of the historic vessels remain along the docks. The boats went out for 20 to 30 days at a time with a crew of six to 12 men, two to eight of which were divers. Each diver wore a suit weighing around 110 lbs. The boats went from 10 to 100 miles into the Gulf to work a 500 mile area from Appalachicola to Key West. Sponge sales were held at the Sponge Exchange each Tuesday and Friday to sell the six varieties of sponges: wire, wool silk, finger, grass (Vase) and yellow. Along the docks, the **ATHENS**



GIFT SHOP, located at 703 Dodecanese Blvd, was built as a ship supply store between 1909 and 1913. Following the decline in the sponge industry in the late 1940s, tourism became the city's primary industry and gift shops replaced the purely functional businesses along the docks. Capitalizing on tourism, the **SPONGEORAMA**, located at 510 Dodecanese Blvd., has operated since 1968. Don't miss the Greek warrior (or the baklava) atop Hellas Restaurant and Bakery!

From Tarpon Springs we will head north along US 19 to Weeki Wachee. Along the way we will pass a bright pink **DINOSAUR** at 3273 Commercial Way (US 19) in Spring Hill and Harold's Auto Center, a former **SINCLAIR GAS STATION**. The 22 ft. high pink dinosaur was built in 1962 by taxidermist Jacob Foxbowler and his brother to promote his wildlife museum, which closed in 1998. A few miles north, Harold's Auto Center still functions out of a former Sinclair gas station which was built in 1964. The 47 ft. tall dinosaur was inspired by the company's mascot which had appeared in promotional items since 1930. We can't stay as mermaids beacon us to Weeki Wachee!

Weeki Wachee

As a member of the Florida Attraction Association, **WEEKI WACHEE** advertised the world's only underwater mermaid show as well as jungle excursions in side-wheel paddle boats with bathing and picnicking facilities to lure tourists. This Hernando County spring became an attraction in the late 1940s when Newt Perry teamed with Walton Hall Smith and leased the property surrounding an obscure spring from the City of St. Petersburg, which used it as a source of water. "Weekiwachee" is said to be a Seminole Indian word, meaning "little spring" or "winding river."

Before opening Weeki Wachee, Perry invented ballet-like underwater theatrics first at Silver Springs and later at Wakulla Springs near Tallahassee. He trained young women in acrobatic swimming routines, and they learned to breathe air from a submerged hose. His first mermaids included local teenagers and synchronized swimmers from St.

Petersburg. He was a brilliant promoter and created attention-getting stunts for the mermaids such as eating bananas underwater and the famed adagio pose, in which one mermaid lifted another over her head.

In 1948, Hollywood came to the spring using the clear waters to film the movie *Mr. Peabody and the Mermaid*. The mermaid tail worn by the film's female star, Ann Blyth, was the inspiration for today's standard costume for the spring's underwater performers. The water was so transparent in the early days of the attraction that it was said that audiences had trouble believing the mermaids were actually underwater. In 1959, the attraction was sold to ABC-Paramount, resulting in increased celebrity appearances and more elaborate plots for the mermaid shows and a new, larger underwater theater was constructed. Since 2008, Weeki Wachee has been a state park, and the mermaids are employees of the state of Florida.



STATE ARCHIVES OF FLORIDA

Brooksville

Turning onto SR 50 from Weeki Wachee, traveling just a few miles east, we come to the **SAND HILLS SCOUT RESERVATION**. This is a large Boy Scout camp on 1,200 acres, owned by the West Central Florida and Gulf Ridge Councils. Each January the Reservation hosts the **BROOKSVILLE RAID**, the largest Civil War reenactment in Florida, with over 1,500 re-enactors, a couple dozen cannons, and 60 or so horses. The Brooksville Raid takes place over a weekend, and is a very popular local event. Ostensibly, the Brooksville Raid is based on the events of July 1864, when Union soldiers left Fort Myers by boat, heading north with the ultimate goal of Brooksville, which is where we are heading next ourselves. If we had turned left on **STATE ROAD 50** instead of right when we left Weeki Wachee, and driven 20 minutes or so west, we would have come to Bayport, an island where the highway meets the sawgrass tidal marsh of the Gulf of Mexico. In the nineteenth century, this was just a small port on the west coast of Florida. There were a few stagecoach lines through the interior, but the major transportation routes in Florida before the late nineteenth or early twentieth century were rivers, and the ocean. Bayport was never a large town, and today has much fewer than 100 residents and is predominately a pleasant public park.

But back to the Raid. The year was 1864, and Florida was part of the Confederacy. Florida had been an actual state for less than 20 years when the call came to secede from the Union, and it found itself being both the least



populated and the most southern of the Confederate States. There were pluses and minuses to this situation. On the minus side, Florida had relatively less to offer to the war effort – in particular, few men. Florida's major contributions were beef, salt, and blockade runners. The Union Navy blocked southern ports to keep them from receiving supplies and reinforcements. Florida has an extremely long coastline with thousands of little bays and inlets – great for pirates, blockade runners, and later, rum runners. The Confederate forces put a small battery at Bayport. The Gulf coast was also important to the South for another reason – the marshes hid lots of small salt works where sea water was evaporated, leaving behind precious salt. On the plus side of being small and isolated, Florida avoided most of the major battles of the Civil War. The only two in Florida, the Battle of Olustee and the Battle of Natural Bridge, were up to the north, closer to Tallahassee. In southern Florida, smaller

raids or skirmishes were more typical, more likely to be related to ports and the blockade. As the ship sails, south Florida is not far from Cuba. So the Union troops traveled north from Ft Myers past Anclote Key (near Tarpon Springs) and on toward Hernando County. Arriving at Bayport, the troops turned toward Brooksville. Along the way they did as you might expect, burned some houses, took some food, and confiscated some slaves. Confederate soldiers in the area, primarily tasked with protecting cattle herds as they moved north to supply the South, met the Union soldiers at Brooksville, and a series of skirmishes ensued. The Union troops were apparently more interested in getting supplies, and a full-on battle never developed before they returned south to Fort Myers. Overall, the original Brooksville Raid involved at most a few hundred men, and certainly they were not dragging 20 plus cannons through the piney woods. Today's raid has 1,500 participants, but the population of the entire county was only about 1,200 in 1860. Nonetheless, the modern version is likely to persist, as this year was the 34th renewal of the event.

We are driving east on SR 50, which was built in the early 1950s from US 19 in Hernando County all the way across the state, through Orlando, to US 1 on the east coast. It was called the Central Florida Cross-State Highway. The first cars to arrive in Hernando County were in about 1910. At that time, roads were sand or clay. The first paved road was around the courthouse square in Brooksville, and was brick. The county had many new roads and developments in the 1920s. Hernando County benefited from improved transportation, but it also profited directly from road construction, which used raw materials from local limestone quarries. In the 1920s, Hernando County's first state highway was SR 5 from Tampa to Brooksville, and later extending further north. Eventually it became part of US 41, which goes from south Florida to Canada. In a bit, when we leave Brooksville heading south for Tampa, we'll be on US 41.

But for now, we're still on SR 50, and this section is also called Cortez Road. **"CORTEZ ROAD"** and **"HERNANDO COUNTY"** as place names recognize the centuries-old connection



of the Florida west coast with Spanish explorers. Hernando de Soto had quite the career as a Spanish conquistador in Central and South America before coming to Florida in 1538. He probably landed at Tampa Bay, but possibly further south, at Charlotte Harbor. Either way, he and his men traveled north through the interior of the state, with bloody encounters with Native Americans along the way. De Soto did not leave detailed maps of his route, and it has been a matter of study for historians and archaeologists for decades. While we don't know the exact route, we do know that he came through this part of Florida. He traveled extensively throughout the Southeast before dying in 1542 and being thrown into the Mississippi River for burial. West-central Florida was not intensely explored or settled by the Spanish, whose missions were more focused on agricultural lands in north Florida; the major Spanish city in Florida was St. Augustine on the east coast. Still, Spanish explorers and missionaries did decimate the existing Native American population, upending the thriving cultures of Precolumbian Florida.

From 1844 to 1850, the county was named Benton County, after Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, who supported Indian Removal and federal legislation that promoted settlement of Florida (the painter Thomas Hart Benton was his grand-nephew). Florida was a frontier state, very much like the Wild West. Florida has a different history than other eastern states since it was held by Spain for 300 years, not becoming a US territory until 1822. As the United States grew, Indians and escaped slaves found refuge here. Once Florida became part of

the US, pressure on the federal government increased to force the Indians out, to send the Seminoles to Oklahoma. This part of Florida was particularly involved in the Second Seminole War, beginning in 1835 and ending in 1842, the same year that Congress passed the Armed Occupation Act at the urging of Senator Benton. The Armed Occupation Act allowed settlers to claim a Florida homestead of 160 acres, if they met certain terms, including some related to the armed defense of the territory. By 1850, Senator Benton was an outspoken opponent of slavery, particularly expansion of slavery into new territories or states. This was an unpopular stance among the slaveholders of Benton County, and the county reverted back to its original name of Hernando.

BROOKSVILLE was founded in the 1850s, and incorporated in the 1880s. Major means of transportation at the time were wagons and stagecoaches. The railroad didn't come to Brooksville until 1885. The Florida Southern later became part of the Plant System of railroads. In the late nineteenth century, the local citrus industry grew, also lumber (pine), and turpentine. Citrus growers in central Florida perpetually struggle with freezes, since this is a winter crop. We can go years with mild weather and great citrus harvests, then bam! If the farmer is lucky, they just lose that year's fruit, but sometimes it's so cold that it kills the tree. Brooksville is far enough north to get freezes each year while Tampa and St. Petersburg do not.

Speaking of place names, Brooksville was originally named Melendez. In 1856, Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, while speaking against

the proposed expansion of slavery into Kansas, made personal attacks against South Carolina Senator Andrew Butler, and maligned the state in general. This greatly angered many South Carolinians, including Butler's relative, US Representative Preston Brooks. Days later, in defense of his state, Congressman Brooks approached Senator Sumner at his desk on the Senate floor, and beat him with a cane until Sumner collapsed. The beating was so severe that it took Senator Sumner three years to return to his seat. The Congress failed to vote to remove Representative Brooks, but he resigned. Brooks' constituents in South Carolina voted to return him to Congress, and he became a Southern hero, even to the extent that the town Melendez was renamed Brooksville. One hundred fifty years later, periodically there are unsuccessful petitions to rename the city.

Continuing along SR 50, we will pass **FRONTIER CAMPGROUND**. The architecture of the main building is a dead giveaway that this was originally a KOA campground. KOA stands for Kampgrounds of America. Founded in 1962 in Montana, KOA grew to 900 franchises across North America by the end of the 1970s. Its success came

from some of the same strategies that served Holiday Inn well – easy access on highways, consistency and predictability, and offering a national network. Not all KOAs stay open as part of the chain, but the building is distinctive. This particular campground opened in 1971, and today caters to the 55+ crowd.

Further east, we will pass a closed gas station which was once the **BROOKSVILLE GREYHOUND STATION** and cross a **1936 BRIDGE** over what was the Seaboard Air Line Railroad. **BROAD STREET**, originally a hard road highway called Highway 5, was rebuilt as a concrete highway in 1941. Now, it is part of US 41, and is one of the main east-west streets through downtown Brooksville. The **BROOKSVILLE RAID MURAL** is located at 11 S Broad Street. In 1920s, This building was Simpsons Motors, a combination of a Chevrolet dealership and a Pure gas station. Later, it was the Quality Shop clothing store, then a flower shop, and now is Priscilla's dress shop. A mural on the west side of the building depicts a Civil War-era battle, purportedly the Brooksville Raid. The **HERNANDO COUNTY COURT HOUSE** is located at 20 N Main Street. This hilltop location was chosen in 1856



DAVID

for the Hernando County seat. The first courthouse burned in 1877. The second courthouse was demolished to make way for this 1913 Neoclassical Revival structure. Nearby, the **CONFEDERATE MEMORIAL** was dedicated in June 1916. The **FIRST NATIONAL BANK BUILDING**, located at 1 N. Main St., was built in 1902 as the First National Bank, and, during the 1930s, housed the Hernando State Bank. The building at 7 – 15 N Main Street, was built in 1954 as a **MCCRORY'S**, part of a national chain of 5 & 10 stores. The **SINCLAIR AUTO FOUNTAIN**, located at 36 N. Broad St., operated as a gas station until 1970s, after which it housed a variety of businesses, most recently a pawn shop. In 2013, the building was renovated and is available for you to move your business right on in.

ROGER'S CHRISTMAS HOUSE VILLAGE at 103 Saxon Avenue was a regional attraction from 1972 until recent years. The main house was built around 1905, and in the 1930s was the Book Shop of Tamiami Trail. Nearby, the **MAY-SPRINGER HOUSE** at 601 Museum Court, is home today to the Heritage Museum and sits on land once part of a 160-acre parcel deeded to Richard Wiggins in 1843 under the Armed Occupation Act. It was built by John May after he purchased the property from Wiggins in 1855 and was later sold to Dr. Sheldon Stringer. The first four rooms of this now 4-story Victorian house were built in 1856. Dr. Stringer added on to the house, which was bought by the Hernando County Historical Museum in 1981 and restored to its 1885 appearance. The twelve-room Queen Anne style house is a seven-gable

structure with gingerbread trim, and was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1997.



The Queen Anne style **SAXON HOUSE**, located at 200 Saxon Ave, was built by Frank Elmore Saxon in 1874. Born in 1841, Saxon's family moved to Florida prior to the Civil War, initially settling in Tallahassee. During the war, Saxon was a member of the Hernando Wild Cats, (part of the Florida Third Regiment) and was wounded near Jacksonville in 1862. After the war, Saxon served as county Tax Assessor from 1874 through 1876, as Brooksville's Postmaster and Chief of Police from 1880 to 1883, and Clerk of the Court from 1887 to 1888 and again from 1893 to 1909. He also served as a State Representative from 1887 to 1889. The Frank Saxon House was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1998. Rehabilitated, it now serves as an event venue named Saxon Manor, which is particularly popular for weddings.

Darrell and Gertrude Todd opened the **CONEY ISLAND DRIVE INN** in an old boat manufacturing building in 1960. Located at 1112 E Jefferson Street, legend has it that Elvis Presley ventured down to "Brooksvegas for one of the Famous Footlongs" while he was in nearby Inverness filming *Follow*

That Dream in 1961. Subsequently, the movie *Night Stalker* filmed scenes at the establishment in 1972 which were the highlight of the movie. The Coney Island tradition continues today.

Brooksville was a hub for several regional railroad lines. The Brooksville Railroad Association and the Brooksville Telegraph Company organized in 1885 and raised \$20,000 to induce the Florida Southern Railroad company to build into Brooksville. The **BROOKSVILLE RAILROAD STATION** at 70 Russell Street served the Florida Southern Railway. Built in 1885, this extension of the Florida Southern Railroad connected Brooksville with the main line 10 miles east at Pemberton's Ferry. Before this was built, getting goods to market required a 30-mile wagon or stagecoach ride. Other lines included the Orange Belt Route, which was founded in March 1879 as the Gainesville, Ocala and Charlotte Harbor Railroad. It covered 300 miles from Charlotte Harbor in southwest Florida to Palatka on the St. Johns River in

northeast Florida. In 1895, it operated as a part of the Plant System of Railroads, Steamships and Hotels on the west coast of Florida. Another railroad Line into Brooksville was the Tampa Northern, built in 1906-07, from Tampa to timber lands in central Pasco County, a distance of 30 miles. The Brooksville and Hudson Railroad, which was actually an incorporated logging railroad built in 1902, had 33.5 miles of track and was owned by the Aripeka Sawmills Inc., to ship out their milled lumber. The Brooksville and Hudson railroad was bought by the Tampa Northern in 1907. In 1910, the Tampa Northern's Capitol Stock owned by the Aripeka Sawmill Company was sold to the Seaboard Air Line Railroad. The Seaboard leased the Tampa Northern for a fee. In 1930, the combined companies petitioned the Interstate Commerce Commission to abandon the 12-mile line from the Tooke Lake Junction to Tooke Lake, ending the Tampa Northern Railroad. Later the Seaboard Air Line merged with the Atlantic Coast





Line and became the Seaboard Coast Line, which in turn became the present-day CSX Railroad. The Museum Board bought the vacant depot building from CSX and restored it.

A few miles south of Brooksville on US 41, the **LEWIS PLANTATION** roadside attraction brought the Old South to life. In 1935, a declining demand for turpentine spirits production led local businessman Pearce Lewis to convert his homestead into an attraction for those traveling this section of the famous Dixie Highway. He re-created a Southern plantation, including a large cast of African American performers. The actors, many of whom really had no other options for work or housing here at that time, portrayed slaves including the roles of Mammy and a “real ex-slave.” The attraction also included a restaurant and provided overnight lodging with “no tile floors, but comfortable.” Lewis himself drove the offered mule and wagon

ride through the attraction at a cost of \$.15 a ride. Understandably, this tourist attraction closed as the Civil Rights Movement gained strength in Florida in the early 1960s.

From here we will cross into Pasco County, which was created from Hernando County in 1887. Central Pasco County is well known for its nudist colonies, starting with Lake Como in 1947. Some people claim that Pasco County is the nudist capital of the country. Caliente, located on US 41, is one of the more recent major nudist resorts to open in this area, in 2004. That same year, Caliente hosted Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie as they filmed episodes of MTV’s reality show “The Simple Life.”

As we reach the Ehren Cut-Off Road, we will see remnants of **DUPREE GARDENS**. J. William Dupree, a Tampa attorney, owned approximately 900 acres of land in central Pasco County. After he was injured in an automobile

accident, Dupree was unable to work for a period of time and, instead, created a garden on his Pasco County estate. In the early 1940s, he opened part of his estate as Dupree Gardens, which he advertised as the “Blossom center of Florida.” The gardens took up only a small part of his land, which he had purchased to create a weekend retreat for himself where he could accommodate his hobby of growing exotic plants. At its peak popularity, Dupree Gardens had 30,000 visitors each year. Promotional literature described the beauty of this roadside attraction: “The soft music of the Old Master – Liszt, Schubert, Brahms, Bach and other great composers – follows you through gardenia-scented pathways. Quiet pools reflect the splendor of tropical foliage. Rustic bridges cross wandering waterways and glorious rose gardens.”

Dupree Gardens included a lodge with a gift shop and restaurant and electric boats on a lake fronting the lodge. A March 1942 article in the Florida Times-Union described the gardens in glowing terms:

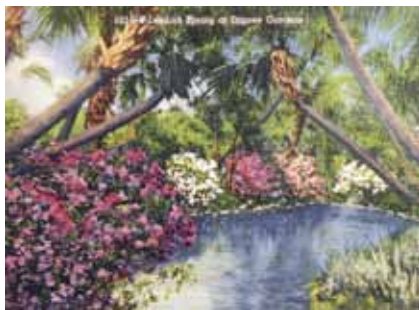
“Snapdragons, poppies, pansies and iris, violets, sweet [alyssum] and candytuft; calendulas, delphinium and narcissus – great medallions of them on the evergreen carpets of grass – all these are there with their yearly vindication of

the sweet promise of new life and new hope.

In richer bloom, too, are the thousands of azaleas. Their colors range from the soft tones to the flamboyant. Great magnolias, orchid trees, redbud and dogwood have put on their fanciest garbs in obeisance to Spring. Bold flame vines make dramatic splashes of color as they climb skyward to the topmost branches of towering palms. Chaste Easter lilies and callas march along the borders of paths, and waxy camellias top, it would seem, every stem of giant bouquet-like bushes.”

Dupree Gardens was open seasonally from 1940 until the early 1950s. During the war, Dupree tried to organize bus tours from Tampa, but did not get enough business. Although the gardens were located on a popular tourist highway, gas and tire rationing limited automotive tourism. In 1943, wartime restrictions forced him to close the kitchen and gift shop, and stop the electric boat rides. Eventually, Dupree did close the gardens until the war ended. On October 3, 1944, National Airlines began daily direct service between Tampa and New York City. Camilla blooms from Dupree Gardens were part of the inaugural flight’s cargo, with the flowers being auctioned in New York to raise money for the war effort.

The Dupree Gardens Tearoom burned in 1995, and two residential developments have incorporated portions of the former tourist attraction, including The Island Group, a nudist colony on three acres to the north of Lake Dupree. The Dupree Gardens development, built about ten years ago, incorporated the former ticket booth and a previously





installed historic marker. The native rock ticket booth remains are what we will see, and the bus will turn around at the entrance to the Dupree Gardens subdivision. The log-construction lodge was turned into a private residence, and remains on the northeast side of Lake Dupree.

Located on the Orange Belt Railway which continued to St. Petersburg, **EHREN** was one of the largest communities in central Pasco County in the late nineteenth century. Later, this railroad became part of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad. The turpentine and lumber industries were active in central Pasco County, exploiting the pine and cypress trees in the area. Ehren was named after a city in Germany by Frederick Muller, the owner of the Ehren Pine Company sawmill. Muller built a tram road, workers' housing, and a commissary as part of a company town associated with the sawmill. Although the mill closed in the early 1920s, the community persisted, with a post office, schools, cemeteries, and several churches. Ehren Cut-Off Road (CR 583) was built during the Depression by WPA workers. The road was nicknamed "Ten Cent Road" because the workers were paid 10 cents an hour. This

road was used during World War II to train Army personnel in night driving.

On our way to Tampa we will enter Hillsborough County and pass through the community of **LUTZ** (pronounced "Lootz," although it is spelled the same as the figure skating jump pronounced "Luts"). There had been an earlier town called Stemper in the vicinity in the late 1800s, but it was pretty much unsuccessful. In 1905, a group of investors from Chicago formed the North Tampa Land Company, and bought 32,000 acres of land in northern Hillsborough County. In 1910, the investors decided that they would build a new town called North Tampa along the Tampa Northern Railroad, which had been built through the property in 1907. The land was advertised for sale in Northern and Midwestern newspapers. The railroad built a depot, and one of the train engineers, William Lutz, named it Lutz Station, after himself. In 1909, his brother Charles built another railroad line from his sawmill to the west, calling it the Tampa and Gulf Coast Railroad. That railroad followed a very circuitous route and was nicknamed the Peavine. Where the two railroads met was then called Lutz Junction. Lutz today is an unincorporated community in northern Hillsborough County, with some of its older buildings remaining. The original **LUTZ DEPOT** did not survive, but about ten years ago a group of local residents organized to raise money and build a reproduction of the building. This building can be seen from US 41 across the railroad tracks in front of the Lutz library. In addition to the library, the community has a post office, churches, an elementary school, and a few stores. Tampa is creeping ever closer!

Tampa

As we enter into the greater Tampa area, US 41 will branch into Business 41, which is Florida Ave., and the main line, which is Nebraska Ave. Florida Avenue leads to downtown Tampa. Tampa developed around Fort Brooke, which was established in 1824 in response to Seminole uprisings. Although a small village grew around Fort Brooke, the community really grew following the arrival of the railroad in 1884, the establishment of the cigar industry in 1896, and after serving as the point of embarkation for soldiers during the 1898 Spanish-American War. Nebraska Ave. borders the west end of Ybor City.

We will start with the main line of US 41 on Nebraska Ave. At this north end, you'll notice general sprawl development with a few remaining historic treasures. One of those treasures is **CAMP NEBRASKA** at 10314 N. Nebraska Ave. Camp Nebraska with its drive-thru entry opened in 1921. In

1919, the Tin Can Tourists of the World formed in Tampa's DeSoto Park south of Ybor City. The organization of this group brought recognition to a growing group of vacationers, and tourist camps were built throughout the region. The completion of the Dixie Highway in 1915 from Montreal to Miami, opening of the Tamiami Trail in 1928, and the Good Roads movement encouraged an increasing number of auto tourists. Located along US 41, Camp Nebraska proved an ideal location. By 1935, it was owned and operated by William and Margaret Tusz. In 1939, when between 300 to 400 tourist park operators met for the second annual meeting of the Florida Cottage and Trailer Park Association in Tampa, William Tusz organized the three-day meeting. By 1957, the camp included a 30 unit motel and spaces for 50 trailers as well as a recreation room.

We're coming up on a part of Tampa called **SULPHUR SPRINGS**, named after a natural mineral spring on the





Hillsborough River. The first development around the spring occurred in the 1890s. Josiah Richardson bought some property, including the spring, in 1898, and in 1920, turned it into a tourist resort. Since 1908, the springs had been accessible from Tampa by streetcar, allowing people to enjoy swimming in the healing mineral waters and fishing along the banks of the river. A little community built up around the springs. Richardson built bathhouses, a diving platform, and a toboggan slide at the springs. Like so many other Florida developments, the Great Depression led to financial losses, and Richardson abandoned his project although he lived in Tampa until his death at the age of 83 in the 1950s.

One of the historic recreation clubs is the Sulphur Springs Dog Track at 8300 N. Nebraska Ave., which had its first meet in 1933; now it is known as the Tampa Greyhound Track and consists of a card room with simulcast racing. We will pass **SULPHUR SPRINGS**

PARK, which historically was the site of the Sulphur Springs Pool. The spring closed to swimming in 1986 due to man-made pollution entering surrounding groundwater. Paths parallel the spring run, and a bridge allows for views of the Hillsborough River. The two-story **GAZEBO** built by Josiah Richardson was restored last year at a cost of \$288,000.

Across Nebraska Ave., the **SPRINGS THEATRE**, an Art Deco style movie theater, was built in 1938 as part of the Sulphur Springs recreation complex. Nearby, the **SULPHUR SPRINGS TOURIST CLUB**, also called the Harbor Club, was part of the entertainment facilities at Sulphur Springs, offering dinner, dancing, and shuffleboard.

Crossing from Nebraska to Florida Ave. on Bird St., the Tower Drive-In movie theater, which opened in 1952, was located on the south side of the road. It is now part of the City of Tampa's River Tower Park. And the reason for the



name of the park, the Sulphur Springs Water Tower, is a 200+ ft. Gothic Revival concrete tower built in 1927 by Josiah Richardson, and architect Grover Poole. It originally served the Sulphur Springs Hotel and included an observation platform. You'll notice as we turn onto Florida Ave., that the McDonald's on the corner has a small tower mimicking the water tower.

Crossing the Hillsborough River on Florida Ave., the oldest parts of the **JOHN N. HOLMES BRIDGE** date to 1926 and 1927. At the nice bump, you can catch a glimpse of the Hillsborough River. The river is still navigable by motor boat at this point, although at idle speeds, as manatees come up the river, attracted by the springs.

After we cross the bridge, you will see **BOND AUTO SALES**, located at 7901 N. Florida Ave., which should receive a prize for Tampa's largest neon sign.

The sign states that they have sold over 8,000 cars. **PIONEER CLEANERS**, located at 7204 N. Florida Ave., was the second location for this company which was founded by I.G. Fonte in 1915 and incorporated by his sons in 1954. This Florida Avenue location with its covered wagon sign opened in 1958. The company is Tampa's oldest dry cleaning company. Further south, **ABC AUTO** at 6112 N. Florida Ave. advertises their business with a twinkling star and a neon outlined auto with neon rotating wheels and smoke rising from the engine. Nearby, **ERIC'S AUTO SALES** also advertises with a car on a stick.

Along the way south, the former Schuler's Sinclair Service station at 5016 N. Florida Ave. has been converted to a restaurant, **THE INDEPENDENT**, specializing in craft beer and sandwiches. The railcar style diner located at 4603 N Florida Avenue opened in 1951 as **AYRES DINER**. The ownership changed and the diner reopened in 1980 as Nicko's. The most popular seat in the house is the Elvis Booth, where he sat to eat after a concert in 1956. Elvis toured Florida in August 1956, including a concert at Tampa's Homer Hesterly Armory, just a few weeks before he appeared on the Ed Sullivan Show. Elvis had a local connection through his manager Col. Tom Parker, who not too many years earlier had been a dog catcher for the Tampa Humane Society.

As we head to Ybor City, we will return to Nebraska Avenue. To the west is Tampa Heights, Tampa's oldest suburb, dating to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. To the east is a mostly residential section of Ybor City. Ybor City started as a factory town, with cigar

factories and worker housing in the 1880s. As more factories were built, and more immigrants brought their families over or started new families, more houses were needed. The houses became larger, and in this part, which was built up in the 1910s and 1920s, Craftsman style bungalows were very popular. Locally, the smaller houses are called “casitas.”

YBOR CITY was founded in the 1886 by Vicente Martinez de Ybor. He had owned a cigar factory in Cuba, but faced labor and political problems because of the growing revolution against Spain. He moved his factory to Key West, but it was still not far enough away from the distractions of Havana. Although not terribly far from Key West or Cuba by boat, Tampa was far enough. In the 1870s, Tampa was basically a small fishing village, with the remnants of Fort Brooke built during the Seminole Wars. But in the 1880s, Henry Plant brought his railroad here, and created a port so that his steamboats could connect with

the Caribbean. He built the **TAMPA BAY HOTEL**, which we will drive by on our route home this evening. This large resort hotel on the Hillsborough River across from downtown Tampa, is part of the University of Tampa today. These new transportation connections to Tampa, along with the offer of a large chunk of land, drew Ybor to Tampa. He and his development company laid out a street grid, leased land to other cigar factory owners, and sold simple shotgun houses and casitas to workers. Immigrants came to Tampa to work in these factories, mostly coming through Havana although some came by way of New Orleans. Ybor City’s cigar factories were famous for hand-rolled Cuban cigars, and the factories were one of the major forces driving the local economy until the 1930s and 1940s. During the Great Depression, cigars were luxury items. While increased mechanization lowered the cost of cigars, it also meant fewer jobs in factories where originally



every step of making a cigar was done by hand. Cigarettes were even more affordable, and became very popular during World War II. Ybor's cigar industry was already in decline well before the Cuban embargo in the 1960s which halted imports of Cuban tobacco and more significantly stopped the free flow of people between Havana and Tampa.

Among the significant cultural and physical features of Ybor City are the mutual aid societies founded by the Cuban, Spanish, and Italian immigrants who created this community. We will pass by two of them along Nebraska Avenue: the **DEUTSCHER-AMERICANER (THE GERMAN-AMERICAN CLUB) AND EL CENTRO ASTURIANO DE TAMPA**. Members paid a monthly fee for health insurance, use of club facilities, and guaranteed burial in the club cemetery. Many of Ybor's Spanish immigrants were from northwestern Spain, in Asturias. Asturias has Celtic roots, which is still apparent in Asturian culture and music. Asturias is known for seafood and for a bean soup; Spanish bean soup is a popular menu item for Ybor City restaurants. In the nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution reached Asturias, with coal mines, and with men immigrating to the United States to make money. In the late 1880s Spanish men went from Spain to Cuba, and from Cuba to Tampa, looking for work. During the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s, Asturias as a region remained loyal to the Spanish republic against Francisco Franco. Spanish families in Tampa held clothing drives and fund raisers supporting the anti-fascist groups in Spain. El Centro Asturiano de Tampa is only one of Tampa's early Spanish

social clubs. Centro Espanol, which we will drive by later, is older, but political and cultural differences between the Asturian and Gallician members led the club to split in 1902.

The Centro Asturiano clubhouse was built in 1914, by the firm of Bonfoey and Elliott, the leading architects in Tampa in the early twentieth century. M. Leo Elliott was well known for his landmark buildings, and while he worked in different styles over the decades of his career, the buildings he is known for in the 1910s were, like this one, Classical Revival styles, particularly Italian Revival. He also designed the Cuban Club, and the Italian Club, which we will drive by in a bit. The Centro Asturiano building includes a gymnasium, a Cantina for cards, chess, and dominoes, a billiard room, and a three lane bowling alley. A marble onyx bar in the Cantina is reportedly the world's longest. The second floor had offices, a library and reading rooms, classrooms, smoking rooms, ladies' parlor and dressing room, an auditorium and stage. The third floor has a Grand Ballroom and the balcony of the theatre. The social clubs really illustrate how these immigrant groups set Tampa apart from other southern cities, being very Socialist organizations. The clubs also serve to preserve the Spanish, Cuban, and Sicilian cultures and languages of these immigrants, a function they continue to serve today.

Ybor City was deliberately built outside of Tampa, away from downtown. Subsequently, the area between the two became an African American part of town, with the nickname of "The Scrub," referring the type of natural vegetation there. Within The Scrub, the

Central Avenue District grew, which was the street with the black stores and theaters, as well as where the clubs and the middle-class professionals (doctors and lawyers) had their offices. A lot of the housing in the Scrub was substandard. The city hadn't invested in sewers and paved streets here, and in the 1950s a section of houses was torn down for construction of the Central Park Village housing project. After Tampa was desegregated in the 1960s, the Central Avenue businesses lost customers, who were now able to shop elsewhere. In the 1970s the neighborhood was targeted by Urban Renewal, with the result that today not many of the businesses, houses, and cultural institutions remain. In 2007, the Central Park Village Housing Project was demolished, making way for the Encore development you can see under construction to the west of Nebraska Avenue. This is a planned complex of apartments,

parks, and stores in an urban setting.

On the southeast corner of Cass St. and Nebraska Ave. is **TAMPA UNION STATION**. The 1910s, before World War I, were very prosperous years for Tampa, when it stopped being a frontier town and became a real city. This shift is reflected in the number of large civic buildings and infrastructure projects dating to this time. The Italian Revival style Tampa Union Station, designed by architect J.F. Leitner, opened in 1912. Its purpose was to combine the passenger operations for the Atlantic Coast Line, the Seaboard Air Line, and the Tampa Northern Railroad in one location. It was a bustling place until passenger train ridership declined in the 1950s as automobile travel increased. The station was in rough shape by the time it closed in 1984. For 14 years, Amtrak had a temporary ticket office and waiting room in a prefab building by one of the



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platforms. In 1988, a non-profit group formed to raise money for the preservation of this building, which was one of the first buildings to be landmarked under Tampa's historic preservation ordinance. Restoration was completed in 1998, and the station reopened to Amtrak passenger service. That same year, CSX donated the building to the City of Tampa. In 2002, the baggage building was rehabilitated, and in 2011 Amtrak renovated one of the platforms. The Friends of Tampa Union Station is an all-volunteer, non-profit organization that established an endowment to assist with maintenance and continuing restoration of the train station.

The parking lot on the corner across the street from Tampa Union Station was formerly the location of the **UNION DEPOT HOTEL**, catering to travelers. The building had been vacant for a few years before it was used in the filming of the movie *The Punisher* in 2004. It remained vacant afterwards, unfortunately became a victim of demolition by neglect, and was lost a few years ago.

The Union Depot Hotel was for white travelers only. If you were black, and found yourself visiting Tampa, one of your few options was the **JACKSON BOARDING HOUSE**, built in 1901 at 851 Zack St., and added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2007. This was originally a six-room house owned by Moses and Sarah Jackson; they made several additions until arriving at a total of 24 rooms. The Jackson family kept the house open until 1989, and it is currently owned by Moses and Sarah Jackson's grandson. This is the last freestanding residence in downtown Tampa, and is one of the very few remaining buildings of the Central Avenue District. Over the past year, the deteriorating conditions of the house have led the city to levy fines and threaten demolition of the house. It's at a point of political stalemate right now, having passed the city's last deadline of March 31, so the house's future is very uncertain.

We're now leaving downtown and heading back toward Ybor City, with a good view of the railroad platforms



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and tracks. Dinner isn't far away, which makes this a good time to tell you about the smells of Ybor City. Long-time residents often associate Ybor City with certain smells, like cigar smoke and roasting coffee. Sitting and socializing over a cup of coffee is an important part of business. Most popular is the café con leche, Cuban espresso with scaled milk, which was a traditional part of a mid-morning break for cigar factory workers. Particularly relevant for us tonight is the smell of baking bread. Family-owned bakeries made fresh loaves of Cuban bread, delivering it to homes each morning. Cuban bread, which like many other "Cuban" or "Spanish" foods in Tampa has a local twist; it is similar to French bread in appearance, being a long baguette, but is somewhat softer. Instead of using a knife to mark the bread before baking, a moist palm frond is laid along the top of the bread. Cuban bread is the essential base for a Cuban sandwich – in Tampa that means a hot-pressed sandwich of roast pork, ham and salami, with a bit of mustard, Swiss cheese,

and sliced dill pickles. For breakfast, buttered Cuban toast is cut into fingers and dunked in a cup of café con leche. I would expect to see baskets of Cuban bread on the dinner table tonight.

As we approach 7th Ave., on your right is the **FLORIDA BREWING COMPANY** building, built in 1896 on Government Spring as a source of fresh water. Once the largest brewery on Florida's west coast, a big part of its business was exporting beer to Cuba, and so the Cuban embargo and new Schlitz and Busch breweries in Tampa led to the company's closure in the 1960s. The building has since been renovated into offices.

At the corner of Nuccio and 7th Avenue is the current trolley barn for the TECO Streetcar. TECO stands for Tampa Electric Company, which ran streetcars back in the late 19th and early 20th century. The first streetcar in Tampa started in 1892, and they ran until 1946 following World War II. Now we have a line from the convention center in downtown to Ybor City.



In 2008, the American Planning Association recognized **SEVENTH AVENUE, OR LA SETIMA**, as one of America's greatest streets. This is Seventh Avenue, part of the original street grid for Ybor City, and historically Ybor City's major commercial avenue. Locally it is also called La Setima, although a huge argument broke out recently over whether the correct spelling is as it is pronounced here (Setima) or the usual spelling of 7th in Spanish (Septima). Characteristics of this street are the brick front stores, with display windows on the ground level and apartments above, also the iron balconies. This is where people came to see and be seen, to have dinner, see a movie, do a little shopping. Ybor City is a National Historic Landmark District, and Seventh Avenue is its heart. On our way to the Columbia Restaurant, some of the notable buildings we will

pass include the **RITZ THEATRE, CENTRO ESPANOL, AND THE ITALIAN CLUB.**

Our destination for dinner tonight is the **COLUMBIA RESTAURANT**, Florida's oldest restaurant, which occupies an entire block on Seventh Avenue. Founded in 1905 by Casimiro Hernandez, the Columbia Restaurant started as more of a bar, but switched to a café when Prohibition started. The original part of the restaurant is still in use, on the corner, with a lovely bar. Every decade and every generation has brought something new to the Columbia. In the 1930s, they fought back against the Depression by building Tampa's first air-conditioned dining room and installing a dance floor. In the 1950s, when Ybor City was in a steep decline, they brought in Spanish musicians and performers; the restaurant still features flamenco dancing

six nights a week. From the original 60-seat café, today the restaurant has 15 separate dining rooms and seating for up to 1,700 people. The restaurant has always been family owned and operated, today by Richard Gonzmart, the great-grandson of the Columbia's founder.

On our route home, we will pass the **TAMPA THEATER**. Across the Hillsborough River, we will pass the 1891 **TAMPA BAY HOTEL**, which is now the University of Tampa. The Moorish Revival style structure was built by Henry B. Plant as one of the grand hotels of Florida to provide lodging for tourists arriving on the railroad he brought to Tampa. From there, we will jog down to **BAYSHORE BLVD.** for a scenic drive down to south Tampa. The

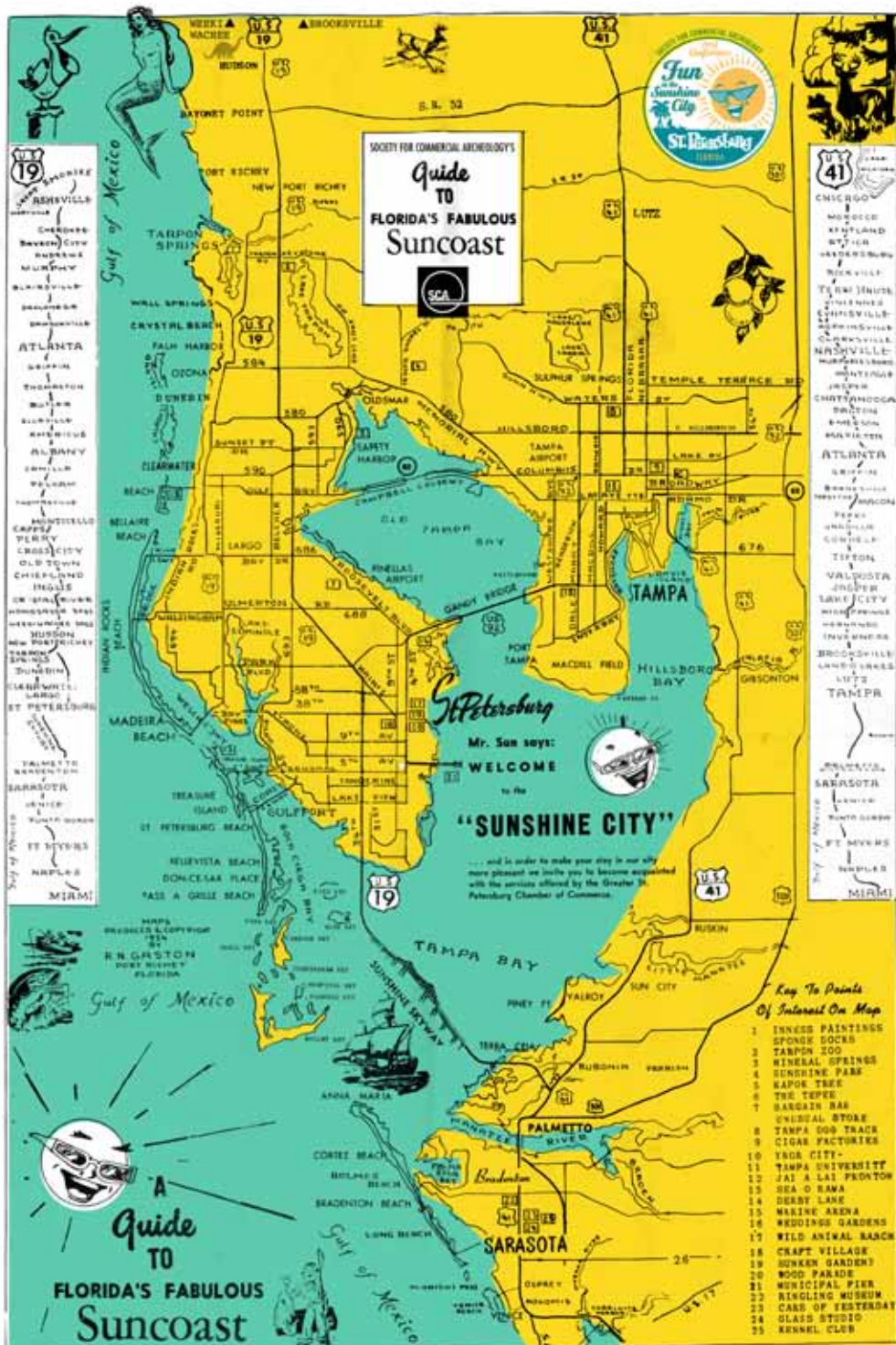
promenade along the waterfront was a WPA funded project built during the 1930s. We will then take Gandy Blvd. to Gandy Bridge on our route to downtown St. Petersburg.



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

*Brooksville-Tampa content from Lucy Jones,
Senior Architectural Historian,
CARDNO ENTRIX*

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 to learn more.

