



Pinellas Park Historical Society

Florida's Finest "Little" Museum

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History of Pinellas Park

The following is the text of "An Historical Sketch of Pinellas Park, Florida" written by Donald E. Everett in 1994 for the PINELLAS NEWS:

Frontiersmen stand tall in American history, but little mention is made in folklore of these stouthearted men and women who moved South or West for medical reasons. Health seekers can usually be named among the founders of cities in salubrious climates--and Pinellas Park is no exception.

Frank Allen Davis came to be known as the "Father of Pinellas Park," according to editor Judson Bailey in an earlier feature story on local history. Davis had attended a meeting of the American Medical Association at which he heard Dr. Washington Chew Van Bibber read a paper in which the physician "identified the Pinellas peninsula as the healthiest place in the world." Bailey recounted the miraculous recovery of the frail Philadelphian after Davis had spent the winter of 1888-1889 in Tarpon Springs.

A publisher of a well known medical encyclopedia, sundry books on various diseases, and numerous pamphlets addressed to the practitioners of the healing arts across the nation, Davis did not hesitate to proclaim his great find to a profession which had found the increase of railway lines an advantageous route for patients who might be chronically ill. Panaceas might involve dry air, salty air, or mountainous air--any one preferable to the patent medicines of the day.

Pinellas Park's time and place in history might have been different had it not been for one of the biggest giveaways in the life of the American people. A generous Florida legislature, in 1881, had sold speculator J. Hamilton Disston 4,000,000 acres of land for 25 cents per acre. Disston, who had been given a choice, had readily opted for the fertile lands of Pinellas and Manatee counties. Among those who purchased lands from the entrepreneur, F. A. Davis came to be one of the most enthusiastic. He established the St. Petersburg Electric and Utilities Company, which furnished that burgeoning village with electricity, a trolley, a telephone company, a freight ferry, and an "Electric Pier."

When the nationwide Panic of 1907 developed, Davis found himself in financial difficulty and was forced to sell his holdings in the "Sunshine City" to one of his more fortunate real estate competitors. Still convinced of the blessings to be found in this peninsula, two years later Davis convinced his physician son and a young building contractor, P. J. McDevitt, to organize the Florida Association. As the Florida Association, with the assistance of other Pennsylvania investors, these proponents of an idyllic life on a small model farm purchased 21 miles of the Disston estate between St. Petersburg and Largo.

Through his medical pamphlets addressed to an extensive list of physicians, Davis encouraged these professionals and any others who might hear the wondrous story to migrate to this Garden of Eden. Ten acres of land, so rich it would presumably support a family, could be purchased for twenty dollars per acre from the Florida Association which, in turn, would offer advice. Moreover, the ten-acre purchase entitled one to a town lot along Park Boulevard where one could enjoy the society of neighbors. Initial support for the town's capital investment came from hundreds of acres planted in sugar cane to be refined in the local syrup mill.

Boosterism in Pinellas Park did not await the founding of a Chamber of Commerce. Heading an undated promotion piece, possibly the antecedent of the PINELLAS NEWS, one read: "PINELLAS FARM, FLORIDA, On the Pinellas Peninsula, Hillsborough County."

Yes, the peninsula remained a part of Hillsborough County until 1913, but reference in testimonials referred to Pinellas Farms or the Pinellas Peninsula. Model Farm No. 1 (there would be two others) became the showplace for visitors or potential colonists. F. McFarland, "the First Settler on Pinellas Farms," wrote the Florida Association headquarters in Philadelphia on November 27, 1909: "After having lived on the farm for six weeks...(I have) found the climate about perfect...I will recommend this territory to anyone."

Elsewhere on the page one could read of "Large Profits in Citrus Groves," the bountiful produce of the vegetable gardens, the "splendid (one room!) school system," advice on land purchases, and the wondrous Gulf Stream. Seven photographs offered proof of the fertile land. Vegetables and syrup provided the primary money crops in the early years, while cattle and chickens later added to the livelihood of the growing town.

While Davis and his son raised capital in Pennsylvania, contractor P. J. McDevitt moved to the wilderness settlement where he built the largest house, owned the only car and telephone, and became the paternal figure for those who came seeking health and wealth. Founder Davis also built the Colony House, at a point where 60th Street crosses Park Boulevard. This two-story structure housed affluent visitors who might wish to make investments, served meals, and offered space for social gatherings. From the Colony House windows one could view a model farm and rows of tents on Pittsburgh Avenue where people camped until their modest homes might be completed. Among the early galas at Colony House, the New Year's Eve masquerade ball in December 1910 would be long remembered.

Photographs of Colony House, the row of tents, the sawmill which provided 170,000 feet of lumber for the bridge which crossed the bayou south of the farms, a man picking "golden fruit" from a tree twice his height, and builder's plans for the model house--all appeared in the 6th edition of PINELLAS FARMS in October 1910. The spirit of progress was abroad in the land. A model of the more imposing twenty-three room Royal Palm Hotel (c. 1911) located on 60th Street just south of 78th Avenue, is to be found on the mantle of the Pinellas Park Historical Society. [2006 Update: this model is now located on the second floor of Park Station.] More recently it housed the Beaux Arts Gallery, proprietor Tom Reese being the nephew of the original owner. [2006 Update: Beaux Arts Gallery was razed in September 1994 after a fire destroyed much of the structure.]

Advice for newcomers continued, notably a full-length column for the "Woman and the Modern Farm." Rural life provided the natural domain for children, the argument ran, yet these small farms in proximity of neighbors provided a welcome social life which could not be found in most farming areas of the nation. Moreover, the anticipated consolidated school would offer learning opportunities not found in most rural areas. The Pinellas goodwife could also find consolation in the reminder that "a good farm protects a woman against poverty in the event of the death of her husband." Of course, the local reader would reach the bottom of the page before she realized that the entire column had been a direct quote from the CHICAGO TRIBUNE. In any event, the Pinellas Park school did open in February 1911.

Advice from the TAMPA WEEKLY TRIBUNE suggested that "horse sense" would be the most valuable asset for the newcomer wherever he purchased land and whether he sought profits from peanuts, Bermuda onions, tobacco, poultry, corn, pecans, tomatoes, grapes, or hogs. One could envy Daniel C. McMullen, whose small grove enabled him to pick 48 boxes of grapefruit from a single tree and 49 from another on an adjoining row. Other than the blessings of nature, the drainage system provided for Pinellas Farms by the Florida Association appears to have been a key factor in producing successful crops. A ditching machine purchased by the Florida Association early in 1911 facilitated the drainage system "planned on scientific lines and being constructed adequate to all requirements."

Land purchasers not yet prepared to bring their families to Florida were encouraged to plant a citrus grove immediately so that it would be productive upon their permanent settlement. An earlier return on their investment would be welcome. Information published in the PINELLAS FARM NEWS made it clear that much more than a \$25 per acre purchase would be required for a profit. "It's the man who wants a profit for a thousand dollars an acre without working his head and his hand for it that fails," according to one astute observer of the Pinellas scene.

By January 1911 the term "Park" appeared increasingly in print, as in the caption under a photograph, "The House and Store of Messrs. Cary Brothers, Pinellas Park, formerly of Philadelphia." Pittsburgh and its environs furnished even more settlers. The NEWS reported that "a large crowd is now en route to the Park from Pittsburgh, Pa." In the same column one reads that "Mr. McClarr from Clearfield, Pa. is also erecting a house for himself and family on the Park lot," while "the most pleasant bungalow being erected by Mr. (Matt) Savage, of Clearfield, Pa., is under roof and will be occupied by his wife and family soon."

Robert McClelland Winter noted that he was the "first Pittsburgher to set foot in Pinellas Park." He stated that the first fifty families, known as the "Pittsburgh Colony" left that city on September 20, 1910, and arrived at what was "then nothing but tall pines and palmetto, spread their tents in true pioneer fashion and began to hew their way into civilization." Within six months they had become the "Model Colony" with the basic amenities of civilization.

PINELLAS PARK NEWS, with a new name change, remained a publication of the Florida Association in 1912, as several Pennsylvania businessmen purchased 1,300 acres from the Davis organization. The Pinellas Development Company, as the new operation was called, aspired to grow extensive acreages of sugar cane and enough corn fodder to feed their pure-bred Jersey dairy herd, which would supply the lower Pinellas peninsula. Velvet beans and some 6,000 Japanese canes had also been planted for both milk producing and fattening purposes.

All Pinellas colonists did not meet with success and apparently many returned home to spread their tale of woe as to life in the swampy wilderness. This to the chagrin of one T. Jefferson London, who had received so many inaccurate reports from friends back in Jefferson County, Pennsylvania. London addressed a public letter to Matt Savage, who had spent several winter months with his daughter and son-in-law in Pinellas Park. Savage published this detailed account in CLEARFIELD

PUBLIC SPIRIT as to what London had achieved with the \$80 which he had borrowed from W. J. Ammerman and George W. Thomas before he left Clearfield. According to their agreement, he cleared the Pinellas farms of his two Clearfield benefactors. In just over a year London had also paid for a team of three oxen, a wagon and plough. Moreover, he listed income from chickens, eggs, charcoal, lumber, hogs, and had erected a two-story home.

Completion of the Atlantic Coast Line depot in 1912 focused attention on the importance of transportation so that produce might reach more distant markets. While a Chamber of Commerce had not come into being, its initial predecessor, the Civic League, met weekly by March 1912. Issues discussed at its meeting included transportation, health, street maintenance and lighting, as well as crops. James K. Shoecraft, formerly of Toledo, Ohio served as chairman of the board, while R. Harris Mawhinney, a colonist from Clearfield, Pennsylvania became secretary. Incorporation as a city would later arouse strong expressions on the part of members. Both men and women who had paid dues voted on all of these public matters. Indeed, some single and widowed ladies were among the investors.

Education offerings usually became a foremost issue on the American frontier. Without schools, families could not be readily attracted. Florida state school funds provided for only a six-months term, but in less than ten minutes at one Civic League meeting, leaders raised sufficient funds to continue local education offerings for an additional month. Another social issue arose in 1912, one which would not disturb most Southerners for decades to come.

"Considerable investigation has been made in order to make the statement with some authority that Pinellas Park is the only town of its size or near its size in the State of Florida that has not one single colored person within its borders, and it is further remarkable that there is not a single colored person employed on any farm in the limits of Pinellas Farms. There is only one colored man on the lands of the Florida Association, and he is employed as a teamster on Model Farm No. 1." From the outset, Pinellas County appears to have had one of the lowest non-white populations in the South. Even so, colored Charles Riley became something of a beloved "Uncle Remus" as he told stories, sang songs, cut and peeled cane to bite size for local children.

Stores and churches had appeared by 1912. The Ladies Aid Society of the Presbyterian Church had a pie social at the school house. Reported a success, "financially and otherwise," the program included songs, recitations, and readings, as well as edibles. "A number of tourists were present, who bought of the good things quite lavishly."

A road of sorts between St. Petersburg and Pinellas Park had existed from the early settlement of the latter. On Sundays a number of St. Petersburg residents drove up to enjoy the fresh vegetables found on the Colony House dining tables. Pinellas Park also had a baseball team, but as late as April 1912 it had not been able to challenge St. Petersburg to a game. They did, however, defeat Largo by an 11 to 8 score in May.

By late spring a pattern which would continue for seemingly all time appeared. "Mrs. A. R. Sault and her daughter, Miss Jean Sault returned to their home Woodland, Clearfield County, Pa. after spending some months in their cottage on 32nd Street. They expect to return in the fall, when they will locate here permanently." By the following fall, alas, hardly a cottage which had not been reserved could be found to rent for the winter season.

Pinellas County boasted an auditorium which had been built by fifteen volunteer workers in five hours! One night later, J. J. Stine's Orchestra played "for folks dancing and putting away fifteen gallons of ice cream, twenty pounds of candy, cigars, and all the cake and lemonade they could drink." Within months, auditorium dances became weekly occasions, with Stine's orchestra if available. Otherwise, a piano or phonograph would be an acceptable substitute. These people required dances on three succeeding nights to celebrate one Halloween. Each dance had a theme and on the first occasion some 250 persons turned up in "automobile loads, hay loads, and buggy loads."

One of the most avid Pinellas Park missionaries, Matt Savage of the CLEARFIELD PUBLIC SPIRIT and Mrs. Savage, led a party from Clearfield County, Pennsylvania, which arrived by train on January 14, 1913. Visitors included Dr. T. H. Litz, Dr. F. G. Gallagher, Hon. Thos. H. Murray and wife, Mrs. H. E. Dickinson, L. C. Barrett, J. Mignot, John Moore, B. F. Wise, Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Gill and H. H. Kennedy, among others. "These people came to Florida for various reasons, some coming in search of milder climate, some on business, and others with the intention of buying land."

Visions of a more sophisticated life could be found early in 1913 when the Civic League changed its name to a more urban terminology, The Pinellas Park Board of Trade. By the end of the year the snide remarks of why Pinellas "Park" where no "park" existed lost their punch. The Florida Association set about building a beautiful park in the middle of Park Boulevard and in the square behind the depot. By the spring of 1914 everyone anticipated a lawn, blooming flowers, shrubs, and shade trees. More important than those who sought a "modern" image, a charter issued to the Pinellas Park Public Service Company meant that residents could put away their kerosene lamps as their homes now had electricity and running water. Still more important, what other community could boast that there was not one single outhouse in the town?

Boosters of Pinellas Park by the end of 1914 looked with pride on the hard road which had been built to St.

Petersburg and awaited a new branch of the Seaboard Airline railway which would soon reach the Park. Previously, the "Short" provided the only rail transportation between St. Petersburg and Tarpon Springs. A narrow gauge rail line traversed the sugar cane fields until it reached the extraction plant between 60th and 61st streets, on the Atlantic Coast Line right-of-way. Improvements in the "old reliable" Atlantic Coastline would include improved road beds and an additional Pullman car daily.

Political progress had brought about the incorporation of Pinellas Park on October 15, 1914. Perhaps the ordinance prohibiting ranging cattle and hogs in Pinellas Park represented as important a symbol of progress. A pound was built to hold the runaway animals until their owners paid a fine. Local boys who owned horses or mules delighted in the opportunity of earning money by rounding up the stray cattle and hogs before turning them into the pound.

Not surprisingly, P.J. McDevitt, Southern representative of the Florida Association and an early home seeker, became the first mayor of Pinellas Park. Initial members of the Board of Aldermen included A. J. Cooley, William H. Robson, James R. Shoecraft, J. B. Williams, and D. D. Stine. T. J. DeHaas became town clerk and George W. Williams, Sr., town marshal.

The Pinellas Board of Trade had a membership of some 600, and could boast an attendance of 400 at a meeting in late 1914. The new mayor had reported to Florida Association officials in Philadelphia that the town might get along without a bank for another year, but the founding of a Building and Loan Association was imperative that winter.

Pinellas Park farmers, meanwhile, experimented in growing Natal grass, an inexpensive forage and a likely residential lawn cover. This potential profit maker would supplement the success of the new "Sunlight" syrup mill, which employed one hundred men, and the DuPont powder and dynamite business.

One Andy Leonard, a native of Clearfield, Pennsylvania who had sought his fortune in Washington state at the turn of the century only to migrate to Pinellas Park fifteen years later, described his new home to be a "wonder city" in a letter to the CLEARFIELD PUBLIC SPIRIT. "We are all enjoying Florida immensely. So are all the rest of the Clearfield people. Everybody is employed, whether at good wages or in the more profitable business of working for himself."

No. 1, Vol. 1 of the PINELLAS PARK ENTERPRISE appeared on March 11, 1915, and editors-publishers A. R. Nason and H. H. Hamlin began publishing articles of national and international interest. War in Europe, in particular the sinking of the "Lusitania," began to compete for column inches with a boost for establishing the long awaited Building and Loan Association. More important in terms of profit, display ads covered more than one of the four-page issues. At the same time the ENTERPRISE published its first racial story (fictional) in June.

Veiled implications that all residents had not enjoyed economic prosperity appeared at a meeting which filled nearly every seat in the auditorium. Chief speaker Frank Butler of the Florida Association congratulated his listeners on their achievements, but suggested that more could be done to welcome newcomers, diversify their plantings, and beautify their town lots. William McGeorge "spoke of the responsibility of each individual in making success for the whole people." Florida Association would offer prizes for the most improved properties and winners of the annual egg laying contest. Residents, on their part, repeated their need for a trolley line to St. Petersburg and raised questions as to the purported \$500,000 bond election for road improvement which the county had just canceled.

More positive signs came with the announcement that the Presbyterians would move into their new church by May, while the Ladies Aid continued their fund raising with a "silver offering" social. Local children would no longer attend the one-room school, but in a new and larger brick building. Methodists and Catholics held services in Pinellas Park on the second and fourth Sundays of each month. A pool hall, free reading room, fire department (volunteer), boarding house, two grocery stores, a drug store and ice cream parlor could be listed among the local amenities in 1915.

A rainfall of more than thirteen inches in August 1915 disrupted activities which depended upon rail beds, roads, and bridges. Perhaps this setback encouraged "Progressive Pinellas" citizens to vote for a \$715,000 bond issue to build brick roads throughout the county. Thirty Pinellas Park voters, among a total of 808, turned out for the bond election with only six localities in opposition. Pinellas Park found less satisfaction with the increase of passenger and freight rates at a time when Largo and Clearwater could enjoy a rate reduction. Park residents called a mass meeting to protest to the Interstate Commerce Commission.

By the summer months, the hotel had closed its dining room for lack of business, display advertisements continued in the ENTERPRISE, but less than a column of local news appeared in many issues. Manufacturing plants, in a way associated with war materiel, attracted farm workers nationwide with high wages and often less laborious work assignments.

Pittsburgh had been the departure point for many colonists headed for Pinellas Park, and the high paying job opportunities in that western Pennsylvania metropolis once World War I

began in Europe would be their point of return. Northern capitalists no longer ventured investments in the Pinellas peninsula and founding patron F. A. Davis died in 1917. The United States Census of 1920 listed only 134 persons within the corporation limits of Pinellas Park. The great hurricane of 1921 demolished the abandoned syrup mill; discouraged, all but some sixty persons departed.

James R. Shoecraft's plantings provided some of the most eye appealing sights in Pinellas Park. Notes in the Connie Lovelace papers indicated that "Gladioli, sweet peas, delphinium, statice, and calendulas were grown by the thousands in his nursery was a breath-taking sight to see when all" were abloom during the growing season. Nurseries, especially those raising statice (straw flowers) for the northern markets survived the war years, while the sugar industry never revived.

Attempts at raising castor beans, a product used in making airplane oil during World War I, never really succeeded because high freight rates brought about continuous financial losses. One product in the cross bayou section, turpentine, dated from early settlement and continued into the post-war years. It met with success only because it depended almost entirely on convict labor midst forests of pine trees.

Cherry Villegas recorded the childhood recollections of pioneer Marie McDevitt Swager which are preserved by the Pinellas Park Historical Society. One story, which seems incredible in light of society's attitudes today, involved turpentine--a teardrop of the dried oil, called pitch, substituted for chewing gum. More surprising, once a month Pinellas Park folk were invited to the prison camp north of town to hear colored convicts, who furnished turpentine for M. W. Ulmerton's stills, sing spirituals.

P. J. McDevitt led the troop of children on a half-hour walk before they reached the train platform beside the track. Daughter Marie and her friends sat with their legs dangling off the side, while her father and other men from the Park stood behind the youngsters. Six convicts, some in striped uniforms, gathered before their audience, while non-performing prisoners stood along the rails. Those wearing heavy balls and chains sat on the rails, with security guards nearby.

Once the rattle of chains ceased, the harmonizing sextet "broke into a soulful a capella of the 'Old Rugged Cross.'" Numbers of the children, Irish Catholics though many were, joined in the singing of familiar tunes. So did the convicts sitting on the rails, when not puffing on their cigars or rolling their cigarettes. Following the gospel harmony, McDevitt passed a hat for a free-will offering, while an additional collection provided for an ill child of one of the prisoners.

Pinellas Park shared modestly in the famed Florida land boom in the early 1920s. A new elementary school (later to become the City Hall), the Reese Hotel and the Disston Hotel (razed in 1963) gave the appearance of progress. A bond issue would permit the construction of a steel water tank, town mains, street lights, a new fire engine pumper, and an electric siren to summon firemen. By mid-decade three paved streets, a police chief, a town clerk, a fire chief, and a town maintenance man suggested that the Park's economic life had revived.

But this was not to be. A drainage district law enabled the Pinellas Park Drainage District supervisors to collect taxes. They held liens against the land, which could be sold by the entity if taxes remained unpaid. So much non-profitable land became the property of the Drainage District that one speculator in the early 1920s purchased 10,000 acres of land at \$11 an acre.

Unfortunately, higher wages could be found elsewhere in the state and nation, thus the population again found itself in further decline. Moreover, more affluent residents of St. Petersburg found it tempting to purchase vacant bungalows at modest prices and move them to nearby beaches to be used as week-end or summer homes. Speculators sometimes purchased an entire block and moved all of the houses to the beaches. As one resident complained, "You could roller skate all day on sidewalks laid out along empty streets."

As any resident of the State of Florida in the 1930s might recall, the same statement could be made of many communities following the great Florida "boom and bust" in real estate which preceded the national depression. Pinellas Park town council, alarmed that the entire community might disappear, passed an ordinance forbidding the removal of houses.

A more specific disaster occurred when a resident sought to burn brush in the environs of a residence and the fire got out of control. Volunteers arrived but not before the roof of the house had burned completely. This misfortune, for which the municipality of Pinellas Park had to make reparations, led to the cessation of protection by an organized volunteer department for several years. When the fire truck was restored in 1932, and another truck purchased for fire fighting, local men organized a volunteer fire department.

"Let's all BOOST for Pinellas Park, with a friendliness that will encourage others to locate among us. Let's go!" So trumpeted Weidler, editor of the mimeographed PINELLAS PARKER of November 1931. Spend your money with our local advertisers--George W. Bench, Realtor, David R. Grace, filling station manager, Ralph Chamberlain, The Pelican Restaurant, Smith's Home Laundry, and Park Photo Shop. One must not forget grocer Ditty's specials: 3 lb.

bananas, 10 cents; Octagon soap, 3 bars, 9 cents; Procter and Gamble, 7 bars, 25 cents; Irish potatoes, 10 lbs., 18 cents.

Postmaster George W. Beach asked for suggestions in an office where receipts and disbursements continued to increase. Principal Mattie L. Remington reported thirty-seven percent of junior high students on the Honor Roll. Pioneer nurseryman J. R. Shoecraft described the gladiolus as "the most popular flower of the day." President Elizabeth Bunn Faver reported on the many civic endeavors of the Sunshine Society, founded in 1916, which later provided the genesis of a town library. All this activity in a town of 600, which boasted nurseries with 3,000,000 gladiolus bulbs, thirty-one dairies, and twenty chicken farms, brought prophecies of progress from David R. Grace in the depths of the Great Depression.

Assets of the community include one depot, two hotels, a rabbity, 4-H Club, town hall, Boy Scouts, two churches, a Masonic club, a restaurant, three food stores, modern school, a lumber yard, an Express office, a riding academy, a public library and park, a Home Demonstration Club, six passenger and two special fruit trains daily, six miles of hard surface roads, telephone service, a saw mill and wood yard, a municipal water works, four filling stations, and shuffleboard courts.

A Federal Soldiers' Home to be built four miles away would bring unknown prosperity to this community which boasted 360 days of sunshine annually. "Pine and salt laden breezes plus ultra-violet rays of sunlight form an array of exhilarating qualities that bring health to all who are capable of being well."

Testimonials could certainly serve a seven and a half square mile town, just as well as a patent medicine: "Why are we here 19 years?-Good Fellowship."--Mr. and Mrs. I. H. Parkeson; "Pleasures of a small community with urban convenience."--A. C. Bonder; "Less cash drives, taxes, and places to spend money; more quiet and fresher air."--H. M. Reese; "An ideal spot for home and quietness, within easy reach of St. Petersburg."--Jos. J. Goulet; "Its progressive spirit and the way it always comes back after hard knocks."--Miss Lillian German; "Spirit of cooperation with a desire to go forward for the upbuilding of the team."--Miss Willie Folts; and, "Sunshine-flowers-sunsets-sunrises-public spirit-proximity to St. Petersburg."--G. E. Faber, D.D.

While the United States Census recorded 691 Pinellas Park residents in 1940, the Park's fortunes appeared to be on the upturn. Light industries did find the Park to be a desirable location. World War II did bring one major business into the community when the Palmatex Company began operation in 1942 at 6200 49th Street. Operating with a government contract, they manufactured gun wadding, cushion pads, wall-board, and insulation products. Palmatex ceased operation in 1952, but four years later Pan Laminates occupied the building. Robert Heals was associated with each organization. A few other light industries also found the Park to be a favorable location.

Vacant houses found occupants and new houses came under construction. While the World War II years did not bring large war plants and droves of people to the Park, salable produce of the land enabled the community once again to become a town which could support a police chief with three assistants, a town maintenance crew, and regular garbage collection. Some bragged that the twenty volunteers had developed the best fire department in the county. Trailer parks again welcomed an increasing number of winter visitors, such as Mr. and Mrs. George Chorest of Port Huron, Michigan, who returned for their twenty-fifth annual winter vacation at the Azalea Trailer Park.

By 1949 the PINELLAS PARKER, in its second year of publication, could announce regular meetings of the Town Commission, Chamber of Commerce, Firemen's Club, P.T.A., Women's Club, Home Demonstration Club, Police Department, Lions' Club, Girl Scouts, and Teen-Agers Club.

Teen-agers met every Saturday night at the Firemen's Hall on 60th Street. An old-fashioned Barn Dance planned for March 1949 would admit members who brought canned goods and the like for needy persons. Parents and other adults, welcomed just once a year, would pay twenty-five cents. Boys were expected to wear "farm clothes" and girls should arrive in gingham dresses and sun bonnets.

At the same time Pinellas County commissioners debated a "Wet Ordinance," which by a 3-2 vote permitted liquor stores to remain open on Sunday. Church representatives present indicated that their opposition would continue. The PARKER editor opined that the manner in which the businesses conducted themselves should determine the viability of the decision.

Another Sabbath problem manifested itself concurrently. Citizens had been able to purchase ice "on an honor" basis behind Adamek Builder's Supply Company on Sunday nights. Business boomed, but the owners were forced to dispense with this customer convenience because of the loss of two sets of tongs, "lots of ice," and a cash box stolen on two occasions.

By 1950, 2,924 citizens resided in the Park and during that decade more positive signs appeared what with the long awaited sewer lines, the purchase of trucks for the new fire hall, and a new elementary school. Park Boulevard became a four-lane highway, along which one could patronize the new Park Plaza Shopping Center with its business and professional services. Milton Roy Company, manufacturers of

instruments, was "typical of the new industry attracted by the hustling community." Much of this progress has been ascribed to the foresight of pioneer Kermit Hoffman, mayor from 1954 to 1958. Aply assisted by the "workhorse of the city," Bill Siebeen had a small sign on his office door which read, "Director of Work." This man of all works--construction, drainage, inspection, trouble shooter--"never went over his budget and managed to do what would appear impossible," according to Lester R. Kamp in his "First 50 Years in 7 Minutes."

For some years Pinellas Park had sought a bank, and the opening of the First Park Bank in August 1958 not only represented the culmination of the Hoffman administration, but became a symbol that the town's "lean days are behind them." Mayor Larry Hill, Hoffman's successor, cultivated "the seeds of progress previously planted" so that the 1960 census listed a population of 10,800. Although the street system remained "very bad," that would change.

While the Florida legislature designated the town of Pinellas Park a "city" in 1959, the opprobrium might more appropriately date from a few years later with the establishment of the commissioner-manager form of government. City manager C. William Norman recommended the hiring of planning consultants, the services of Milo Smith and Associates of Tampa in July 1964, at which time Kamp declared, "the wheels started to turn."

Three years later, during the term of Dr. Mel Dinsmore as mayor, an impossible civic dream came true. Pinellas Park was acclaimed upon the receipt of the coveted "All American City" award.

"What is Pinellas Park?" Dick Rothwell of the ST. PETERSBURG TIMES had asked that question in a Sunday feature story in February 1959. "It's E. W. Corn saying, 'This is a shirt sleeve and first-name town.' It's sprightly little Mrs. Jim Shoecraft telling how convicts walked through the Piney Woods around her house at dawn, tapping for turpentine, almost a half century ago. Pinellas Park is a modest little straw flower called stattice besides a fancy purple-throated orchid (Did he mean St. Petersburg?); sidewalks in the wilderness, cowboys, cattle, sugar-cane, and hard times."

Rothwell was no doubt expressing the stereotype which his city reader's had of their country neighbors. But the journalist's article was called, "...A Dream Coming True," a perception which he received after extensive conversations with some of the Park's determined leaders.

Success stories in the founding and development of American communities seldom reflect the singular efforts of a government entity, nor of private capital. Sir Walter Raleigh's failure at Roanoke Island demonstrated that such a venture required the cooperation of private and public efforts. This pattern proved to be the case of Pinellas Park as among other American towns. Within a town's history, the development of an institution may have a similar parallel. In Pinellas Park, it may well be the library.

Beginning in the 1920s, and for some two decades until its dissolution, the Sunshine Society provided the small community with a lending library. Several years after the Society's demise, a group of civic leaders founded the Pinellas Park Public Library Association on December 6, 1948. Mr. and Mrs. Kermit Hoffman, Richard Swindell, and Mesdames Charles Haslem, Eileen Neal, John Trimble, Stanley Moore, and Russell Smith provided the impetus for a library to be located in the city water department's old pump house which stood on today's Triangle.

Fourteen books were checked out the first day! A decade later, for a brief time, the library's books found a haven in a room on 59th Street in a building which previously housed the City Hall and, earlier, the Pinellas Park Elementary School.

Spring of 1959 found the book collection in a later City Hall/Fire Department structure on Park Boulevard, currently the home of the Pinellas Park Art Society. [2006 Update: the Art Society is now in Park Station.] Library workers continued to be an all-volunteer staff. Not until later that year did the City Council appoint a library board to assist the first salaried librarian, Margaret Franklin, and several perennial volunteers. By 1963, some 2,600 library members checked books out at the rate of 200 per day from a collection of approximately 10,000 volumes.

Growth of the city led to demands for more space and the employment of Mrs. Margaret Harrop, a professional librarian, enabled the board to obtain a federal grant to construct a new library containing 6,500 square feet. It opened in March 1969 with 3,800 members (out of the town's 18,000 population) and 22,000 volumes. Five years later, with more than 3,000 new members and an additional 5,000 volumes, 350 books were borrowed daily.

Today (1994) twelve full-time and thirteen part-time librarians serve 23,597 registered borrowers who availed themselves of 257,994 loans in 1992/1993. Total holdings have increased to more than 65,000 hardback volumes and some 7,000 paperbacks. Subscriptions include 263 periodical titles and twenty newspapers. Audio and visual cassettes available number more than 2,000.

Americans often think of the public library as a provider of books for leisurely reading

pleasure. That is only a part of the service of a reputable institution. Your library has a reference department which provides service to more than 111,000 persons annually. Business and professional persons, as well as students, avail themselves of statistical material which fulfill their needs, and indirectly, those of Pinellas Park. [2006 Update: the library building is now over 30,000 square feet and houses a collection of more than 130,000 items.]