

“Sixty Years of Pirate Pride: A History of Boca Ciega High School, 1953-2013”

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Gulfport Historical Society
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by

James Anthony Schnur
*President, Pinellas County Historical Society
University Librarian, Poynter Library, USF St. Petersburg
BCHS Class of 1983*

This evening, we will celebrate an important institution in our community, a place that some of us attended and all of us have watched take shape: Boca Ciega High School. The story of “Bogie”—as most of us fondly refer to the school—is directly related to transformations in Gulfport, the lower Gulf Beaches, and western and southern St. Petersburg in the years following the Second World War. Bogie, the first high school built in Pinellas County in nearly a quarter century, since the end of the Florida Land Boom, became a necessity as new suburbs sprouted up along areas west of Thirty-Fourth Street, around Gulfport and South Pasadena, and along the beaches.

AERIAL IMAGES Before we look at yearbook pictures from Bogie, we should take a peek at some maps. This view shows the area from the bridge at Bay Pines and Long Bayou southeastward towards the present-day location of Tyrone Mall in 1951 reveals Tyrone Boulevard as a narrow two-lane road with very little alongside it between Park Street and Twenty-Second Avenue North. A handful of homes, few businesses, and no overpass existed where the railroad once crossed Tyrone (currently the Pinellas Trail) to serve as a western boundary for the future Tyrone Mall property. By 1957, four years after Boca Ciega opened, new homes began to populate the areas around Park Street, the Azalea neighborhood, and Tyrone Gardens, the first suburban shopping center in St. Petersburg constructed in the postwar era. A recent view reveals how developments covered this area since that time.¹

¹ Historical aerials used in this presentation are available through the Aerial Photography Florida collection digitized in the State University System’s Publication of Archival, Library, and Museum Materials (PALMM) website.

FLORIDA MEMORY IMAGES During the decades following World War II, western and southern areas of St. Petersburg became the sites of new subdivisions for families having children, not just retirees. Construction of schools had slowed as the Land Boom came to an end by 1928, and during the early 1930s enrollment numbers actually dropped in Pinellas County. This changed again by the 1950s, and boomer babies started to enter school in large numbers as more families moved to peninsular Florida. Families began to enjoy new shopping venues away from downtown, such as Tyrone Gardens and, as shown here in the mid-1950s, the newly opened Central Plaza. A view of the intersection of Central Avenue at the new segment of US 19, also known as Thirty-Fourth Street, reveals that the old Goose Pond had disappeared and developments sprouted along the roadway.

SCHOOL POLL Plans for the school began to take shape in 1951. Final plans for the facility, known provisionally as “Fifty-Eighth Street High School,” received approval in the spring of 1952. As Arnold Construction began to build the campus designed by Philip F. Kennard at a cost of just over \$1.5 million, newspaper straw polls allowed the community to pick the school’s colors while the county Board of Public Instruction solicited names for the school and its mascot. As of 1 June 1953, the preferred name was “Gulfport High School,” followed closely by “Sun City High School.” The name “Boca Ciega High School” was a distant third, and joined by a variety of other names, including Pasadena, Gulf Coast, Sunshine City, South Pinellas, Grant, Roosevelt, and even Dixie. In another premonition of things to come, “Rebels” had a decided lead on the name of the team mascot, with more than twice as many votes as the second-place “Pelicans.” “Pirates” ran fourth in this competition, behind the “Panthers.” The chosen colors of gold and white, representing the sun and sand, did lead in that pole, however. The names “Dixie High School,” “Southern High School,” and the popularity of having the “Rebels” serve as a mascot speaks to the larger cultural conversations taking place at that time.²

During the 1950s, racial segregation remained the prevailing practice throughout Florida and the rest of the South. Even Florida’s 1885 state constitution, in effect at the time, mandated separate educational facilities for white and non-white

² *St. Petersburg Times*, 1 July 1953. At this time middle schools were known as “junior high schools” and usually offered classes in grades seven through nine. During its early years and into the 1970s, Bogie was often referred to more properly as “Boca Ciega Senior High School.” For consistency, the word “senior” is not used in this narrative.

students. **CROWD SHOUTS DOWN** The demographic landscape looked much different than it does today, including residential patterns. Many neighborhoods that have African American majorities today, such as Childs Park, Fairmont Park, and Lakeview, had no black residents in the late 1940s. In fact, some properties in these areas even had covenants that prohibited non-whites and, sometimes, members of the Jewish faith, from owning real estate in these and other areas. Although courts later invalidated these covenants, during the late 1940s, white residents in Childs Park and other areas of southwestern St. Petersburg near the planned site of Bogie rallied in an effort to dissuade St. Petersburg's city officials from approving the creation of a new, so-called "Negro section" in their backyard.³

This became important for two reasons. One is that St. Petersburg's African American community resided almost exclusively east of US 19 and north of Fifteenth Avenue South, in places like the Gas Plant District and Peppertown, now Tropicana Field, as well as Jamestown and Jordan Park. Few if any blacks lived in areas that are part of Childs Park, so no concern existed about school integration since Gibbs High School, opened in 1927, already served as the high school for the non-white population. The other reason this is important is that Pinellas County operated a dual system of schools, segregated by race, so selecting a name such as "Dixie High School" and making its mascot a "Rebel" was a statement of opinion that satisfied many of those whites who lived in southern and southwestern St. Petersburg, the target population for the new school, since most of them wanted segregation to persist. More on this topic in a few minutes.

1954 TREASURE CHEST IMAGES With the name still undetermined, heavy machinery began to work its way through the swampy area where the original 36.67 acres of the campus was designed. Located near a ranch, the lower elevation of the land led to incessant flooding, a problem that remained until the improvement of drainage infrastructure in the 1980s. Work crews designed the administration wing along Fifty-Eighth Street, the cafeteria, auditorium, and gymnasium, all on the northern end of the property, along with the five classroom wings ("A" through "E") that ran east/west with sloped roofs higher on the north side and large jalousie windows facing north, to maximize sun and light while attempting

³ *St. Petersburg Times*, 17 February 1948.

to combat heat in the years before schools had air conditioning. During winter months, warm water would gurgle through a series of pipes in a (somewhat futile) effort to heat the concrete block classrooms with their asbestos tile floors, tiny wooden closet nooks, and signature “BC” nameplates on the intercom speakers in the classrooms. Although the buildings would look dated and somewhat worn by the early 1970s, the open-air concrete block wings designed for Bogie were well-received and the architect and construction firm commissioned to build BCHS in 1952-1953 would use a nearly identical design in two other campuses, Northeast High School and the new campus of Clearwater High School, both opening a year later, in 1954.

Classes began on the campus in September 1953. With “Boca Ciega Senior High School” as the institution’s chosen name on a motion by Abe Pheil, a member of the school board, the new facility opened with five wings and more than forty classrooms to serve the charter student body of 1,033 students who came from nearby Disston Junior High School, Lealman Junior High, and from parts of lower Pinellas once zoned for St. Petersburg High School. Richard “Dick” Jones served as the first principal.⁴ Upperclassmen had the option of remaining Green Devils or becoming Pirates, and some did decide to stay at SPHS. As a result, an immediate and somewhat intense rivalry formed between SPHS and BCHS, though even those of you in the audience who may remember it will probably agree with me that it was not as intense as another rivalry of that time, the one between Largo and Clearwater high schools, one so contentious that those mid-county schools did not play varsity football against one another for many years because of the tension in the air. The BCHS/SPHS rivalry became less notable with the opening of other schools, such as Northeast High School (1954), Dixie Hollins Comprehensive High School (1959), and Lakewood High School (1967).

Academic excellence took place in the classrooms, and traditions took shape. Building on the “Pirate” theme, the yearbook became known as the “Treasure Chest” and the newspaper was dubbed “Hi-Tide,” named probably more for the flooding on campus after rainstorms than the open seas that pirates sailed upon in search of treasure. Although the boy’s basketball team had a tough first year, athletic programs soon gained prominence under coaches like Gerry Ramsberger,

⁴ See: *The Golden Anniversary of Pinellas Schools, Celebrating 50 Years of Educational Progress, Superintendent’s Semi-centennial Report, 1912-1962* (Clearwater: Pinellas Board of Public Instruction, 1962).

a Notre Dame graduate who battled as part of General George Patton's Third Army during World War II before teaching Bogie's football players how to battle on the gridiron. Soon, a much greater battle took shape, one that started in courtrooms across the United States and finally reached the Supreme Court.⁵

As Bogie's first graduating class signed their yearbooks and picked up their caps and gowns, nine Justices in the United States Supreme Court delivered a landmark verdict that reshaped pupil placement and classroom demographics throughout the nation. In a unanimous decision, the Supreme Court decided that the "separate but equal" provision of educational facilities that permitted racial segregation under the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision (and that was independently required under Florida law since the passage of the 1885 state constitution) violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. In their 9-0 decision of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* of 17 May 1954, Justices explicitly stated that "separate facilities are inherently unequal" and expected local districts to remedy this situation. Due to the broad sweeping nature of their verdict in schools throughout the nation (not just the Deep South), Justices allowed all parties involved, including state officials hoping to maintain some form of segregation, to file briefs and to outline concerns before finalizing the implementation decree.⁶

A second *Brown* decision in 1955 explained how districts and institutions had to comply by offering a timetable that left both segregationists and integrationists scratching their heads. Rather than given a specific schedule, the Supreme Court asked districts to abide by "prompt and reasonable compliance . . . with all deliberate speed." In a move that frustrated those wanting an accelerated path

⁵ *St. Petersburg Times*, 10 May 2013.

⁶ For more information, the reader should consult: James A. Schnur, "Desegregation of Public Schools in Pinellas County, Florida" *Tampa Bay History* 13(Spring/Summer 1991): 26-43. Available in full text: <http://dspace.nelson.usf.edu/xmlui/handle/10806/115> Other helpful sources include: Douglas L. Fleming, "Toward Integration: The Course of Race Relations in St. Petersburg, 1868 to 1963" (M.A. thesis, University of South Florida, 1973) and Joseph A. Tomberlin, "The Negro and Florida's System of Education: The Aftermath of the *Brown* Case" (Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State University, 1967). The broader significance of the *Brown* decision appears in: Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (New York: Vintage, 1975).

towards integration, Justices also placed the responsibility for oversight in lower courts, and most of them in the South had judges that wanted nothing to do with overturning *Plessy*. Obstructionists saw this as a golden opportunity to avoid compliance with the way and maintain segregated schools.

FLOYD CHRISTIAN How did school leaders in Pinellas County respond? Superintendent Floyd T. Christian and other school officials saw this as an opportunity to improve facilities at segregated schools and hopefully forestall the implementation of *Brown*. New campuses appeared in areas where past needs had been ignored. Since the school district operated St. Petersburg Junior College at the time, officials decided to create a separate Gibbs Junior College on the campus of Gibbs High School that opened in 1958 as a way to discourage blacks from wanting to integrate SPJC. The reason the former “main” campus of what is now St. Petersburg College on Fifth Avenue North is named the “Gibbs Campus” is to recognize the historic importance of a Jim Crow campus that the district had originally conceived to defy *Brown*. School leaders thought they had a great game plan, with Christian boasting that the schools were “separate but really equal” in September 1956.

Most white parents and students endorsed this plan to slow if not halt any attempt at school desegregation. A survey of white and black high school seniors in Florida during the mid 1950s indicated that two-thirds of white respondents believed the state should use legal means to prevent blacks from attending the University of Florida and Florida State University, the two white universities at the time. Some leaders in St. Petersburg’s black community were given an even stronger message, in the form of wooden replicas of rifles, some of which had notes attached that said “Death to all race mixers,” as feelings boiled over in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Local members of the Ku Klux Klan and the Pinellas branch of the White Citizens Council added fuel to the incendiary rhetoric and public officials even conducted a witch hunt to uncover private citizens and public employees who favored integration so they could be condemned as communists or subversives.⁷

⁷ See: Schnur, “Desegregation of Public Schools in Pinellas County, Florida” for a detailed discussion of this. Witch hunts throughout Florida included interrogations of students and teachers in Pinellas County schools, including Boca Ciega. See also: James Anthony Schnur, “Cold Warriors in the Hot Sunshine: The Johns Committee’s Assault on Civil Liberties in Florida, 1956-1965.” M.A. thesis, University of South Florida, 1995.

While Pinellas public schools remained segregated into the early 1960s, other changes did occur. Black families began to buy property in areas south of Tangerine (Eighteenth) Avenue South in St. Petersburg, as well as west of US 19 in Childs Park. These residents and their children would become part of the push to integrate BCHS a decade later after some of them attended formerly all-white schools like Childs Park Elementary, Fairmont Park Elementary and Lakeview Elementary that had transitioned to majority or all-black status by the late 1960s.

LATE 1950s/EARLY 1960s IMAGES AND AERIALS During the mid-1950s, these battles seemed far from the mind of the faculty and students at Bogie. A growth in enrollment led to the creation of a modern “F/G” wing south of “E” wing during the late 1950s. This new wing, with a brick exterior, offered an interior hallway with classrooms on either side. Neighborhoods in southern and western St. Petersburg, around Gulfport and South Pasadena, and the lower Gulf Beaches continued to grow. Students from Pinellas Point and Pass-a-Grille rode buses to Boca Ciega, joining their classmates who lived in Gulfport and the Tyrone area. New feeder schools, including Tyrone Junior High School and Madeira Beach Junior High School, assured classrooms full of students. A new and improved football field later sat along the southeast corner of the campus near the lake and new homes sprouted up along Fifty-Eighth Street near Bogie. By 1962, the school’s fifty-one classroom areas accommodated 1,953 students, nearly double the original enrollment.

CONTINUE IMAGES UNTIL TRACK TEAM Christine Baker’s choir performed at the World’s Fair in New York in 1964. By the mid-1960s, members of the “Golden Band” of BCHS won honors for their performances. They also claimed a gilded name a few years before Largo’s band was rechristened as the “Band of Gold.” An expanding curriculum allowed for a great mix of vocational and college preparatory classes. Growing pains were relieved a bit with the opening of Dixie Hollins in Kenneth City and Lakewood in southern St. Petersburg as natives and transplants sent their baby boomer children to high school in the mid-1960s. Things seemed to be moving along quite well at Boca Ciega, but new challenges appeared on the horizon.

The difficulties Boca Ciega faced during the late 1960s and early 1970s had their roots in the persistence of racial segregation that defined life in Florida during

most of the twentieth century. The resistance of public officials, parents, and students to changes in the law that were long overdue brought people of different racial and socioeconomic statuses together in a hastily arranged union rather than a slower, easier-to-accept transition that should have continued uninterrupted since Reconstruction nearly a century earlier. When public officials throughout Florida, including educational leaders in Pinellas County, chose the path of avoiding integration rather than moving forward, even at a slow pace, one cannot be surprised when adults—including many parents—harbored strong prejudices and instilled them in their children.

The legal challenge to end racially segregated schools in Pinellas County began in May 1964, a decade after *Brown*. Although minimal integration had occurred in a handful of schools, most schools remained segregated. Clearwater police Officer Leon W. Bradley Sr. and a few other parents worked with Attorney James Sanderlin and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund to file a federal case to desegregate Pinellas County schools under the provisions stipulated by *Brown* and thus bring to an end the dual system of schools. The school system responded by devising a number of options, including “clustering plans” that brought some schools together while trying to preserve the notion of “neighborhood schools.” The district claimed some level of success, noting that during the 1964-1965 academic year, 739 African Americans attended desegregated schools, and about 6,700 did two years later. However, these numbers were misleading since most integration was minimal at best, and schools throughout the county remained heavily segregated.⁸

African-American students began to attend Boca Ciega in the late 1960s and the enrollment of black students grew notably during the early 1970s. In 1967-1968, two black students matriculated at BCHS. The following year, BCHS accepted eighty-five black students from Lakewood on a supposed “temporary basis.” Enrollment continued to remain high, with BCHS having nearly 2,000 students as it began its fifteenth year of operation in 1968 and Jones retired as the founding principal. **RUMORED RIOT** As Gordon Young Sr. took the helm in late 1968, he immediately had to confront escalating tensions caused largely by whites

⁸ See: Schnur, “Desegregation of Public Schools in Pinellas County, Florida” and the historical overview and Boca Ciega sections of Patricia Perez Constrini, ed., *A Tradition of Excellence, Pinellas County Schools: 1912-1987* (Clearwater: Pinellas County School Board, 1987) for a detailed discussion of this.

unhappy with the arrival of the black students, including dropouts and others who did not attend BCHS but came to campus wanting to cause trouble. In late December 1968, riot police came to the school and adjacent areas as rumors of a racial disturbance were in the air. Although things generally remained calm, new tensions appeared in the spring of 1969.⁹

APRIL 1969 ARTICLES The first major disturbances hit Boca Ciega's campus during the last week of April 1969. Tensions escalated as students, non-students, and others roamed around campus. Small and isolated incidents between two or three students, often with racial overtones, exploded into larger confrontations as more than twenty percent of the student population stayed home and local papers described the campus as the "scene of [a] ruckus." After administrators suspended nearly forty students, many parents of African American students decided to boycott the school, fearing that their children frequently became the targets, with administrators seemingly unwilling to intervene. In one article, reporters described a meeting by some parents in Jordan Park in which they complained that their children had become "guinea pigs for some semblance of integration" and they crafted a list of demands to submit to Young.¹⁰

During the 1969-1970 school year, tensions waned and no major incidents relating to school integration occurred. In October 1969, an overnight arson incident damaged one of the art classrooms. **BURGLARS** However, during the weekend of May 2-3, 1970, a much more serious incident caused substantial damage throughout the campus. A group of burglars covertly hit many buildings at BCHS, starting at the athletic field house and working their way into the main classroom buildings. After trashing the cafeteria and pelting the kitchen with eggs, the vandals did more serious damage in the new shop building before smashing their way into the second floor offices of the administration wing and breaking into the safe in Gordon Young's offices with crowbars taken from the shop classrooms. Doors were kicked open and windows broken throughout the campus.¹¹

⁹ *Evening Independent*, 20 December 1968.

¹⁰ For more information about the April 1969 disturbances, see: *Evening Independent*, 23 April 1969, 24 April 1969, 25 April 1969; and *St. Petersburg Times*, 24 April 1969, 25 April 1969, 26 April 1969, 27 April 1969, 30 April 1969.

¹¹ *Evening Independent*, 23 October 1969, 5 May 1970; *St. Petersburg Times*, 24 October 1969, 7 May 1970.

As staff cleaned up this mess, the legal challenge to dual schools in Pinellas County continued to work its way through the federal court system. **FEB 1971** In July 1970, the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit rendered a decision stating that Pinellas County continued to maintain a dual system, and thus was in violation of *Brown*. While county officials attempted to comply with this ruling, a Supreme Court decision regarding school integration in North Carolina would soon change the course of action in Pinellas. Argued before the court in October 1970, Justices rendered their decision in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* in April 1971. This decision opened the door for federal courts overseeing desegregation plans and for school districts out of compliance to use cross-district busing as a way to address disproportionate enrollments based upon race. Since Pinellas County, like all Florida counties, had a single school district contiguous with the county lines, the district prepared a plan that was adopted on June 2, 1971 to use buses to assist with school desegregation efforts.

1970 AERIAL AND YEARBOOK

Many white parents expressed their outrage at court-ordered busing. Their anger rested in a belief that students should attend the closest school, or their “neighborhood” school. While, on surface, that argument seemed to make sense, it also denied the reality that school districts throughout the United States—even in states outside of the South—had regularly used buses in the past to transport students beyond the closest school as a means of perpetuating racial segregation. During the 1950s and 1960s, white students in Childs Park who lived closer to all-black Gibbs High School rode buses to St. Petersburg High or Boca Ciega High instead. Black students in northern Pinellas often experienced long bus rides to Union Academy in Tarpon Springs or Pinellas High School in Clearwater as a way of keeping them out of the all-white schools they passed along the way. Under the 1971 court order in Pinellas County, schools would be divided into two broad attendance zones, with a line crossing Ulmerton Road towards the Walsingham reservoir, southward to Seminole, and between North Redington Beach/Redington Shores. Students south of that line could be bused to other south county schools for desegregation purposes, and students north of that line could be sent to other north county schools. Students could be bused across that line to attend a nearby school (as I was for my freshman and sophomore years living in Redington Beach and attending Seminole High), but when students were needed elsewhere to maintain racial proportions, students could be reassigned

on their side of that line (as I was for my junior and senior years at Boca Ciega High). **1971 YEARBOOK**

As attendance zone maps appeared in local newspapers, white parents mounted resistance through legal and extralegal channels. A group known as the United Residents of Pinellas attempted to use litigation to halt court-ordered busing. Meanwhile, Parents Against Forced Busing (PAFB) focused its efforts more on confrontation, defiance, and obstruction. Tensions between these groups made it difficult if not impossible for them to merge, even though they generally had the same goals. **GORDON YOUNG** Soon, as students arrived for the 1971-1972 school year, Gordon Young would face new challenges as the school's principal that made the boycotts of February 1971—protests by black students over a student's suspension and calling for the creation of a black history and culture course—seem tame and peaceful by comparison.¹²

PAFB AND FALL 1971 SLIDES Busses cross-crossed the county as classes began in the fall 1971 semester. Tensions seemed high in south county schools, and officials feared that one incident may spark a much larger problem. That incident did not occur at Boca Ciega, but instead at Dixie Hollins High School. When twenty Dixie students on a biracial committee made the case that the Confederate flag should no longer represent Dixie Hollins High as an unofficial symbol of the school in mid-September, Principal Kenneth Watson concurred and banned the flag from public display. Watson tried to walk a tightrope by stating that the flag was not officially sanctioned and should not be displayed, while dispelling rumors that the school would have to be called "Hollins High School" (without the "Dixie") and that the use of "Rebels" as a mascot would end. PAFB immediately responded by picketing the campus and some members demanded that the nearly 160 new black students at Dixie should be forced to leave the campus. Within a few days, PAFB members—almost all of them adults—began shouting, taunting, and singing "Dixie" in a loud voice from the edge of the campus to disrupt the educational process, leaving school officials no choice but to contact police to maintain peace. As one Dixie student said to a reporter at the time, "Until all the parents were stomping around with signs about busing . . . I don't think the average student was concerned." Before the end of September, sometimes more than fifty cars

¹² *Evening Independent*, 12 February 1971, 15 February 1971; *St. Petersburg Times*, 12 February 1971, 13 February 1971, 16 February 1971, 17 February 1971.

with parents and occasionally their children began lining up almost daily outside the Dixie Hollins campus for frequent parades to display the Confederate flag. Indeed, the foolishness of adults associated with PAFB served as an unfortunate spark that heated tensions at south Pinellas schools throughout the fall.¹³

The situation deteriorated at Bogie and Dixie during the fall. In October 1971, a group calling itself Parents and Students for Dixie received support from PAFB and demanded the removal of so-called black “interlopers” from the Dixie campus. Meanwhile, in mid-October, a busload of black students at Boca Ciega became disruptive when they arrived at school and new arson incidents brought more uncertainty as someone tried to set the BCHS auditorium on fire by burning the stage curtains. Days of disturbances punctuated late November and early December as some students brought Confederate flags to Boca Ciega while other students openly attacked their peers and guards with chains and other weapons. After some black students were removed from campus on a school bus, students on the bus smashed windows, held a knife to the throat of the bus driver, and threw rocks at security officers. Meanwhile, some white students began to roam the campus with chants of “white power” coming from their mouths. Fights broke out in classrooms, hallways, restrooms, and the library as the situation deteriorated. As police and deputies tried to restore order, many students stopped attending class. At one point in the first week of December, only 644 of the 2,376 students enrolled at Boca Ciega even bothered to go to school.¹⁴

APRIL 1972 Tensions boiled over again in the spring of 1972. Occasional disturbances, boycotts, and intense moments brought deputies and human relations counselors to campus. Principal Young approved a petition drafted by some white and black students that called for students to come together and end the rioting that had disrupted classes throughout the year. In an ironic and sad twist of fate, a local judge and school officials even toyed with the idea of retrofitting a Pinellas County school bus with steel mesh on its windows so it

¹³ *Evening Independent*, 16 September 1971, 25 September 1971, 2 October 1971.

¹⁴ *Evening Independent*, 2 December 1971, 3 December 1971, 4 December 1971, 6 December 1971, 7 December 1971, 8 December 1971, 10 December 1971, 17 December 1971; *St. Petersburg Times*, 2 December 1971, 3 December 1971, 4 December 1971, 7 December 1971, 8 December 1971, 9 December 1971, 10 December 1971.

could be used to transport arrested students directly to the juvenile detention facility.¹⁵

NOVEMBER 1972/FEBRUARY 1973 New rounds of violence came a year later, in the spring of 1973. A stabbing took place on February 1, followed by a fight the following day in the cafeteria. Students were told they could leave campus if they did not want to stay in their classes. A couple of days later, a race riot characterized by newspapers as nothing short of “mob violence” occurred as between 400 and 500 students confronted each other in the hallways with fists, sticks, clubs, rocks, and chains shortly after school began. After a group of black students rushed into a classroom near the cafeteria and began beating white students, groups tended to congregate along racial lines. Some white students, after witnessing a girl carried out in a stretcher, joined together until nearly 200 of them roamed as a group. Only a small contingent of security and police officers stood between them and hundreds of black students. They then attacked a vehicle with a black driver, breaking every window of the car. By 9:00 a.m., less than ninety minutes after the fights began, only 480 students of the 2,200 enrolled remained on campus to attend class; the rest had left. Gus Sakkis, the acting superintendent of schools, had come to Bogie that morning to meet with students and parents involved in an incident the previous week and ended up having a front row seat to witness much of the discord. **APRIL 1973** More tensions occurred after spring break as the boycotts and rioting hit the BCHS campus in mid-April. Once again, many classrooms became places of refuge for those who stayed on campus, while more than fifty percent of the student body either chose to stay home or were forced to leave campus by the large contingent of security officers and police.¹⁶

An incident at the end of April, as things had started to calm down once again on campus, serves as a final example of the tension that defined the atmosphere at Boca Ciega during this period. Albert Stauch, the dean of boys, had often worked closely with Gordon Young, police and security officers, parents, and students of

¹⁵ *Evening Independent*, 11 April 1972, 13 April 1972, 14 April 1972; *St. Petersburg Times*, 11 April 1972, 12 April 1972.

¹⁶ *Evening Independent*, 2 February 1973, 5 February 1973, 8 February 1973, 11 April 1973, 12 April 1973; *St. Petersburg Times*, 2 February 1973, 3 February 1973, 6 February 1973, 7 February 1973, 9 February 1973, 12 April 1973, 13 April 1973, 14 April 1973, 17 April 1973.

all races to diffuse tense moments. On the morning of April 27, two white men forced their way into Stauch's office, referred to him as a "n----r lover," and pummeled him with their fists. Stauch, like other school administrators and teachers, had endured threatening telephone calls during this time.¹⁷

EARLY 1970s Between the spring of 1969 and the spring of 1973, the campus community at Boca Ciega High School had endured sporadic and spontaneous fights, disturbances, and riots. One could easily condemn the students and school officials for not doing enough to curb the violence during this period of tension. As Gordon Young left the school at the end of the 1972-1973 school year, however, it would be wrong to blame him or his leadership style for the problems that took place during his time as principal. Indeed, many of these tough moments—like those that had occurred at Dixie Hollins after the banning of the Confederate flag, were instead the result of a handful of adults and students who listened to the authority figures in their lives, such as their own parents, telling them to fight and hate rather than compromise and accept. **HIGH-Q TV SHOW** Although I have devoted a lot of discussion to the negative moments that punctuated these years, a quick glance of the *Treasure Chest* yearbooks of the early 1970s also reveals notable student accomplishments in the classroom, on the field, and in student organizations. **3 YEARBOOK SLIDES** The moments I have described cannot be denied and indeed must be remembered, but in looking at the race riots that hit our beloved campus more than forty years ago, we must remember that they were the unfortunate exception rather than the rule, and that Bogie continued to move forward due to the students who valued their education, the teachers who chose to stay here rather than teach elsewhere, and an administration that tried to build and maintain trust during a time of great adversity.

KRIEVER Hugh "Max" Kriever became Boca Ciega's principal in the summer 1973. A former teacher, head football coach, and athletic director at Largo High School, Kriever came to Bogie after stints as an administrator at Northeast High School and Azalea Junior High School. During his three years at Boca Ciega, Kriever made it a top priority to restore "Pirate Pride" on the campus. Students and teachers joined him in this effort, as the number of fights and disturbances on campus

¹⁷ *Evening Independent*, 27 April 1973; *St. Petersburg Times*, 27 April 1973.

diminished. In a retrospective interview, he remembered that his first days were “terrible, just terrible.” A couple of hours before school opened on his first day, he confronted a student who had arrived at Bogie swinging a chain. Kriever took the chain and kept it in his desk drawer as a reminder of how volatile things could become on short notice. Often, Kriever roamed around campus, picking up trash and trying to instill a sense of dignity in a student body that had grown frustrated from years of tension. One of the custodians on staff spent each and every day doing nothing but removing the writing and graffiti from walls throughout campus. Just as things appeared to improve, he and his staff faced a test as police contacted him to say that someone had placed racial slurs on walls throughout the campus. Along with his cleaning crew and other staff members, Kriever spent the entire night wiping away the graffiti. He quickly showered in the gymnasium as the sun rose before getting dressed in time to meet the first school bus. By the summer of 1976, as he left Bogie to become the first principal of the new high school at Pinellas Park, Kriever claimed that “the faculty had pulled together [and] the students were getting along.” It is during this time that Angela Evelyn Bassett became a student leader on campus, later going on to Yale University before launching her successful career as an actress. Out of these bad moments came student success stories.¹⁸

JOHN C. DEMPS John C. Demps assumed the duties of principal in mid-1976. A teacher at Bogie for many years, Demps became principal at a time when Boca Ciega’s enrollment had reached nearly 2,800 students. The crowded campus had a student body that was more nearly a quarter African-American, and one of the first things Demps did was try to break down residual traditions of segregated parking lots and gathering places. Also known for his “open-door policy,” Demps continued Kriever’s tradition of roaming campus throughout the day and trying to learn the names of as many students as possible. As the baby boom wave started to pass by during the late 1970s, enrollment at Boca Ciega dropped from 2,828 students in 1974-1975 to 1,853 students five years later. **BLACK UHURU** The proportion of white to non-white students generally remained three-to-one, though new courses in black history and leadership opportunities in student groups primarily for African American students were created, including the Black Uhuru student organization and the Pirettes. Other clubs and organizations began

¹⁸ *Evening Independent*, 20 October 1984.

to integrate during this period. Generally speaking, fights and disturbances with strong racial overtones disappeared by the late 1970s. **FREE PAPER** On one of those days when the *Evening Independent* was free because the sun did not shine over St. Petersburg, papers did describe a small “ruckus” with racial overtones in February 1978. **RUCKUS** However, this was a rare exception rather than the rule and none of the disturbances during the late 1970s forward reached the level of those that had occurred during the early 1970s.¹⁹

STUDENTS STUDYING During the late 1970s, as the school passed the quarter century mark, the campus looked a bit worn and tired. Faded teal classroom walls, worn wooden desks, and asbestos floor tiles punctuated the older classrooms. The original large asbestos fire blanket sat in one of the chemistry classrooms, though students spent more time reading about experiments in the chemistry and physics labs rather than performing them due to a lack of supplies. The open-air architecture that made sense in the early 1950s became a liability as the layout of the buildings made it impossible to cool them with central air conditioning. In “A” through “E” wings, individual air conditioners were installed, a welcome relief after many of the large jalousie windows facing the north side of the campus had been sealed shut during the years when break-ins, fights, and other tensions made it problematic if not dangerous to keep them open. **VOZNE** While other schools, such as Seminole High School, received large appropriations that allowed them to renovate and expand their campuses, students and teachers at Boca Ciega trudged forward without much support from the school board. **FIRE** Like Young and Kriever before him, Demps also had his leadership tested, such as when the school’s art classroom was destroyed by an arsonist in February 1979, and when a small group of white students received suspensions after painting swastikas throughout the campus on Memorial Day weekend in 1981 as they boasted of belonging to a covert group that modeled itself after the Nazi Party.²⁰

MULTIPLE SLIDES THROUGH 1984 AERIAL PHOTO By the early 1980s, enrollment at Boca Ciega stood at about 1,700 students. Although the campus looked tired, the students

¹⁹ *Ibid.*; *Evening Independent*, 17 February 1978, 20 February 1978. A good source for statistical information about all Pinellas County Schools during the 1970s and 1980s is the annual *Profile* serial published by the school board.

²⁰ *Evening Independent*, 5 February 1979, 9 June 1981; *St. Petersburg Times*, 5 June 1981, 6 June 1981, 10 June 1981.

remained vibrant. School rivalries with Lakewood and St. Petersburg high schools remained strong and student organizations flourished. The Spanish club, *Los Piratas de Boca Ciega*, had more than a hundred members, and car washes and other events raised funds for field trips and community service projects. The school that had opened in a sparsely populated zone three decades earlier now was surrounded by homes and developments. **1984 ATTENDANCE** Students living as far away as North Redington Beach, and parts of St. Petersburg south of Tyrone Boulevard and 22nd Avenue North, road buses to Gulfport every morning. Students who attended Bogie during this time lived in some of the wealthiest as well as the most economically distressed areas of southern Pinellas. **3 SLIDES** By the summer of 1983, half-way through Bogie's history from its beginnings to today, the school served its diverse student body well. Much of the credit goes to those teachers, many of whom arrived during the difficult years of the late 1960s and early 1970s but decided to stay, for their efforts to promote educational excellence despite the malfunctioning air conditioners and persistent plumbing problems that often kept a third of the restrooms closed in a campus begging for a facelift, or at least a fresh coat of yellow or white paint on the outside walls.

By the fall of 1983, some schools in southern Pinellas began to exceed the thirty percent upper-limit of non-white students that was outlined in the implementation decree of the *Bradley* decision. This percentage, arbitrarily decided more than a decade earlier, was based on the notion of a "tipping factor," namely, a belief that if more than thirty percent of the students in a school are non-white, there was a fear that white-flight from the school would occur. Since busing for purposes of school desegregation was generally not supposed to include routes across the county at Ulmerton Road, officials sought solutions that would allow students to select new academic programs that would maintain the demographic balance while moving the entire district towards unitary status.

The Pinellas County School Board decided that it would establish two magnet programs in south county schools and allow students throughout the county to apply for these programs. One would be hosted at Gibbs High School, a school that exceeded the thirty percent upper-limit at the time. Gibbs would receive the "Artistically Talented Program" that has since transformed into the Pinellas County Center for the Arts. Although student enrollment trends made Boca Ciega, Dixie Hollins, or Lakewood logical choices for the "Program for Academically

Talented,” St. Petersburg’s old guard raised its voice so that this magnet program—the one that later became the first International Baccalaureate program in Pinellas County’s public schools, instead went to St. Petersburg High School, a school that had always received preferential treatment compared to its south county peers. Lakewood later did get to establish itself as a magnet program with the Center for Advanced Technologies. While other magnet programs appeared at Boca Ciega, the first such programs that came to Bogie and Dixie were GOALS, Graduation Options: Alternatives to Leaving School. Thus while St. Petersburg High enjoyed an academic renaissance and enhanced funding at its campus, its longtime rival—Boca Ciega—became a school of last resort and continued to see its funding decline during the mid-1980s.

EVE IND 20 OCT The decline of support at the district level for Boca Ciega High did not go unnoticed by the press. On 20 October 1984, a front-page profile of Bogie in St. Petersburg’s onetime afternoon newspaper, the *Evening Independent*, attracted a lot of attention. Marilyn Brown, a writer for the paper, had started a series of articles about the high schools of Pinellas County. The second article in this series focused on Boca Ciega, and carried with it a tantalizing headline that read, in part, “It is a school still on the edge.” Brown cited the statistics compiled by the same school district that had diverted dollars from Bogie to give to other schools: In the fall of 1984, BCHS had the highest dropout rate of the fourteen public high schools in Pinellas at the time, and was second-to-last in attendance rate. The article painted the picture of a dirty campus in physical disrepair and with student and faculty morale in decline. The tone struck a sore nerve with many Boca Ciega graduates who knew that the campus needed an overhaul and had personally witnessed flooding that was as bad as during the 1960s. While a casual reader unfamiliar with our school’s history might easily fault the students, faculty, and staff for these conditions as participants in a self-fulfilling prophecy, to those of us who attended Boca Ciega during the 1970s or early 1980s, there was a belief that much of the blame rested with the school district headquarters in Clearwater. Yes, it is true that outside walls had not received a fresh coat of paint in years and the institutional green on the classroom interiors was faded and full of dirt marks, but unlike St. Petersburg High that received sufficient funds to maintain its historic “million-dollar high school” building from the 1920s, the first paint project at Bogie in years was to be done not by a professional or licensed contractor, but

instead by inexperienced workers as part of the federal Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) program. The message from on high was clear: Bogie did not matter.²¹

EVE IND 29 OCT This October 20 article sparked outrage among many alumni from Bogie, those tired of hearing about how their school was an embarrassment to the county rather than an institution to be celebrated. Letters to the editor filled the *Evening Independent* on October 29, and renewed calls to “Beautify Bogie” became more than bumper stickers and a new storm sewer system finally ended the flooding that had plagued the campus after nearly every rainstorm during the past thirty years. In some ways, this newspaper article was actually helpful in rallying support for the school and reminding members of the school board that long overdue repairs needed to occur. **PIRATE PRIDE** As the GOALS program began in January 1986, Bogie moved towards offering a more fundamental curriculum that required greater parental involvement. A couple of months later, in March, the boy’s basketball team celebrated its first state title, a point of pride.

In January 1987, Barbara Paonessa started her tenure as Bogie’s principal. The fifth administrator of Bogie, Paonessa served as principal until 2003. Before the end of her first year, in November 1987, the memory of a BCHS student who suffered an unexpected and tragic death more than twenty years earlier was honored when the football field was named in honor of Charles C. Beauchamp, a BCHS player who died because of injuries he suffered while playing baseball in April 1967; his death a couple of days after flipping during a collision at second base marked the first known athletic fatality in the history of Pinellas County schools. In 1988, the school’s enrollment stabilized with 1,671 students and some students participated in the new JROTC program at Bogie. **CENTER FOR WELLNESS** During this time, the Center for Wellness and Medical Professions became a magnet on the campus, established in the 1990s.²²

²¹ *Evening Independent*, 20 October 1984.

²² *St. Petersburg Times*, 6 April 1967, 19 May 2004. The story of Charles Beauchamp’s death in early 1967 was painful for those at Boca Ciega. Seventeen years old and an athlete with a great future and a member of the school’s National Honor Society, Beauchamp had received a letter from Mercer University in Georgia offering him an academic scholarship on the day he played his last baseball game. After the collision on the field, he was transported to Mound Park Hospital, now Bayfront Medical Center, for a tracheotomy and brain surgery but never recovered.

HOME COMING During the 1980s and 1990s, the student population at Bogie as well as throughout Pinellas County became more diverse. **CLUBS IN YEARBOOK** The percentage of Hispanic and Asian American students at BCHS grew, along with the percentage of African American students. As Pinellas County schools continued to move towards unitary status, the 1971 federal court order and its emphasis on racial percentages no longer seemed to offer the best measure of success. Despite two decades of school desegregation through attendance zones and busing to promote racial balance, achievement gaps remained and certain schools, including Boca Ciega, had a larger number of students enrolled in remedial classes who required greater levels of support and intervention. **1990s**

IMAGES By the early 1990s, the remedy was no longer to focus solely on busing as a means of maintaining racial integration, but instead to explore ways of improving the academic performance of students that face greater challenges and need additional support.

IN FRONT OF SIGN As Boca Ciega entered the 1990s, the physical plant finally received some badly needed upgrades. Between 1990 and 1993, the school added a new music building named in honor of Christine Baker, saw extensive renovations to the administrative offices and gymnasium, modifications to the library and long overdue repairs to the auditorium, as well as the refurbishing of many of the classrooms by replacing the tiles with carpeting. Improvements to the buildings prolonged their life, but years of neglect during the 1970s and 1980s made many of the fixes more cosmetic than permanent.²³

John Leanes became principal in 2003-2004, as Boca Ciega passed its fiftieth anniversary. Approximately 25,000 students had graduated from Bogie during its first half century. Leanes's three years were followed by three with Paula-Gene Nelson serving as principal, between 2007 and 2010. During this period, plans moved forward for the demolition of most of the original campus and the creation of a new Boca Ciega High School. Construction took place while students

²³ *St. Petersburg Times*, 19 May 2004.

continued to attend classes at this location, so the project required extra logistical preparation. **LITTLE LEAGUE BLVD** The school district acquired the Little League baseball facilities north of the campus and moved some offices to those buildings as demolition began. Portable buildings arrived on campus as well. **DEMO AERIAL** Soon a new classroom structure appeared on the footprint of most of the northern parking lot. **FORMER LITTLE LEAGUE** Once that building was ready for occupancy, crews demolished F/G wing and later wings A through E, along with the old cafeteria and many of the other structures. **NEW CAMPUS TAKES SHAPE**

MODERN VIEWS As the new campus neared completion, a new principal took the helm. Michael Vigue came in 2010 as the renovations that cost more than sixty-million dollars were almost finished. For students who attend Boca Ciega High School today, their experience on the campus differs greatly from that of earlier generations. Water fountains work, as does the central air conditioning system. Flooding is not quite the issue it was until the 1980s. **HI-TIDE WEBSITE** Technology plays a larger role in the academic enterprise, as instructors have their own webpages with academic resources and the school newspaper no longer requires paper and a printing press to share news throughout the campus.

Bogie is a different school today. In addition to its magnet programs and JROTC, it offers a fundamental curriculum as well as a traditional one. According to the most recent data available from the school's "Data Dashboard," BCHS has an enrollment under 1,100. The school no longer has the overcrowding problems that it faced in the 1970s, nor the fights and riots that flared across campus more than forty years ago. Indeed, the student body that Boca Ciega High School serves today differs greatly from its early years. Today, more than sixty-two percent of the student population is classified as "minority enrollment." Despite these differences, the core mission of Boca Ciega remains the same: to nurture and to educate the students who pass through its doors.

MEMORABILIA As we wrap up this lecture, I thought I would leave you with a list of some notable and wonderful educators that devoted their careers to the students

at Bogie. This list, like any list someone compiles, is highly subjective. I have focused on teachers who were members of the faculty at Boca Ciega primarily from the late 1960s into the mid 1980s, though a few—like Christine Baker and Coach Ramsberger—arrived much earlier and others—including Mary Drayton, Diane Topping, and Bill Dooley—continued to teach at Bogie into the new millennium. So, in alphabetical order, I share this list of educators and ask you to mention any that I have failed to include:

Marilyn Akerson, Frances Arthur, Christine Baker (and her Baker's Dozen), Joseph Boyer, Sidney Burrows, Robert Campbell, Olga-Rita Davison, Melvin Dean (whose "Golden Band" played long before Largo rebranded its band the "Band of Gold" in the late 1960s), Mary Drayton, Bill Dooley, Robert Eliason, Edward Finch, Joseph Gagne, David Haile, William Harmer, Ruth Harrison, Fred Hoffman, Marion Hubert, Donald Huffman, Eva Knapp, Herbert Miller, Betsy Moran, Barbara Newell, Angela Nicholson, Isabella Osmani, Gerry Ramsberger, Jack Strott, Robert Swanson, Diane Topping, Mary Turner, Richard Vozne, Wellington Whittlesey, Daniel Wickline, Frank T. Williams III, and Evelyn Woodward.

CLOSING SLIDE Thanks for coming today. I am very appreciative of having this opportunity to share this brief history of Boca Ciega High School with members of the Gulfport Historical Society. One cannot do justice to a school's sixty-year history in fifty minutes, so I know that I have a few big gaps in my presentation. I know that some of you in the room may have other stories to share about your Bogie experiences as well, and I would love to hear them. Before adjourning, I do have time for questions.

Thank you.