

Selling St. Petersburg: John Lodwick and the Promotion of a Florida Paradise

by

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ABSTRACT

For over a century Florida's Tampa Bay area has been extolled for its abundant seashores and moderate climate. The success of early twentieth-century St. Petersburg as a tourist destination was due to a consistent method of self-promotion highlighting the natural and physical features of peninsular Pinellas County.

Warmed by balmy Tampa Bay breezes, St. Petersburg had been dubbed the “Health City.” This tiny 1890 coastal town of less than three hundred inhabitants, now blessed with a slogan, new train tracks, and a railway pier, was an ideal setting for tourism. By 1902, boosters declared St. Petersburg a city second to none. Over the next half-century – from the Building Boom to the Baby Boom – St. Petersburg exploded. Ranked twenty-seventh nationally in 1940, prewar Sunshine State was the South's least-populated state, but boosters like John Lodwick, “Tin-Canners,” and World War II brought many changes, few of which escaped St. Petersburg.

This thesis examines elements of St. Petersburg that almost every historian has emphasized, but few have seriously analyzed: boosterism and tourism. More than almost any other Florida city, St. Petersburg relied upon an endlessly repeated message in postcards, newspapers editorials, print advertisements, and radio/television commercials. The city marketed itself as the nation's playground, a southern garden of perpetual well-

being. That St. Petersburg was the first American city to hire a public relations director and the first to initiate a successful advertising budget speaks to the magnitude of this message.

In the late 1940s, while northern newspaper subscribers were teased with wintertime ads sending "Warm Wishes from Sunny St. Pete," a series of city-funded films were released. These quasi-documentaries, shown in countless lodges and auditoriums, portrayed the "Sunshine City" as the city of fun and sun. Without reserve, the films marketed St. Petersburg as *the* ideal destination for the nation's soon-to-be senior citizens.

Through analysis of news media coupled with interviews, personal memoirs, and interdisciplinary studies, this thesis explores a recurring marketing theme and more importantly, places it within the context of Florida's tourism history and the city's goal of *Selling St. Petersburg*.

Introduction

It's hard to believe that the North, every winter, is full of people who hate Northern winters, and of folks who don't know what to do with themselves. If they don't know enough to become sun hunters, they deserve to suffer.

K.L Roberts, *Sun Hunting*¹

*I'm going down to Florida
gonna get some sand in my shoes....
Gonna ride that Orange Blossom Special
And lose these New York blues.*

Johnny Cash, *Orange Blossom Special*²

Florida. For many, just saying the name prompts the imagination to conjure thoughts of sand and surf, or palm trees and sunshine. For others, it may be dreams of mild winters or wild abandonment. Whatever one's fancy, however, Florida at one time or another probably promoted it. In fact, Florida's emergence from the territorial wilderness of the early nineteenth century to a Tourist Mecca nearly two hundred years later is indebted to decades of boosterism by homesteaders, hucksters, salesmen, and suckers – all competing to capture their “Florida Dream.”

Despite the importance of the tourist industry, historical and economic investigations into the field of tourism remain vastly unexplored. Complex calculations are often little more than an educated guess, at best, based on available computations and

¹ Kenneth L. Roberts, *Sun Hunting: adventures and observations among the native and migratory tribes of Florida, including the stoical time-killers of Palm Beach, the gentle and gregarious tin-canners of the remote interior, and the vivacious and semi-violent peoples of Miami and its purlieus* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1922), 122.

² Johnny Cash, “Orange Blossom Special” *Orange Blossom Special* (Columbia Records, 1965).

previously drawn conclusions. What is more, notes one economic specialist, “there is no identifiable, homogenous product... tourism doesn’t come in easily observable units: there are no quantities of output.” Even defining the term ‘tourist’ has become a source of contention for scholars. Categorically, the difficulties are rooted in several multifaceted issues. Aside from the complex range of emotions, desires, and objectives of visitors, Andrew Holden writes, “Stakeholders or groups with an interest in tourism are likely to have different aspirations of what they hope to archive.” Hence, the difficulties of achieving a common definition between the myriad of actors and authors involved. For our research purposes, however, the 1933 reckoning by F.W Ogilvie applies best. Ogilvie characterizes tourists as “all persons who satisfy two conditions – first, they are away from home for any period less than a year and second, while they are away, they spend in the place they visit, without earning there.”³

Locally, St. Petersburg’s tourism industry was born from the nearly ritualistic manner adopted by the medical and military men of the 1800s who, after spending time in a place, spoke and wrote of the area’s pleasant climate and natural abundance. Many of these characters packaged and promoted the environment in fanciful penmanship, praising the vigorous settings. Others, upon retirement or completion of their enlistment, simply moved to the peninsula and let their livelihoods and newfound longevity speak for nature’s therapeutic gifts. Regardless of their methods of success – and their failings – in these early days of St. Petersburg, the Pinellas peninsula was a secret no longer.

Utilizing Chamber of Commerce and Board of Trade statistics, along with prolific

³ Thomas Weiss, "Tourism in America before World War II," *Journal of Economic History* 64, no. 2 (2004): 291; R.N. Kaul, *Dynamics of Tourism* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishing, 1985), 2; Andrew Holden *Environment and Tourism* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 2-3; F. W. Ogilvie, *The Tourist Movement: An Economic Study* (London: PS King and Sons, 1933), 5-6.

newspaper articles and other publications touting the city of St. Petersburg's rapid trend in becoming one of Florida's premier locations for retirees, sightseers and pleasure seekers, the consequences of the city's continual boasting is unmistakable. Through decades of grand schemes and larger dreams, few resisted the chance to croon over St. Petersburg's charm and atmosphere. Exploits of the city's inhabitants, pitchmen, civic leaders, and a few forward thinking renegades who sang the loudest, and sometimes the loneliest, lie at the heart of this synopsis of St. Petersburg's most instrumental promotions.

The early wide-ranging overview of tourism often limits historical actors to the upper castes of society. For nearly a century since the flourishing United States set its sights on obtaining Florida from the Spanish in the early 1800s, tourism remained an exceptional activity for the exceedingly wealthy. With the gradual decrease in transportation expenditures coinciding with a rise in personal profits, traveling for pleasure increased, although it remained shrouded in fashionable fulsomeness. As this "extraordinary behavior" became more commonplace and less lavish "so many could afford to travel, and did so, that tourism became a product." Tourism in the early years of the twentieth century, notes Weiss, was an untapped consumable, advertised extensively, and created to a large degree by private-sector groups and growing tourist cultures.⁴

Spurred on by mail-order catalogues and print advertisements, as well as self-expression and social status, citizens of the burgeoning twentieth-century consumer and leisure class willfully responded to the national trend of "conspicuous consumption." The elite groups that could afford such obvious displays of material wealth did so in a

⁴ Ogilvie, *The Tourist Movement: An Economic Study*, 79-81; Weiss, "Tourism in America Before World War II," 291.

conscious effort to increase higher social power, whether it was real or perceived. What better way to influence the influential than by *telling* them what they should want through advertisements, concluded many.⁵

The advent of advertising was a late nineteenth century breakthrough for magazine publishers. With thousands of pamphlets, periodicals, and church house publications spreading the gospel, producers of “patent” medicine and tonics had found the perfect promotional tool. Attempting to heal the soul and the self, the public penchant for snake oil and exotic elixirs was insatiable. Tonic sales and circulations soared. That publications could, and still do, generate more revenue through selling display or copy space (featuring art, photos, or text) than through subscription sales highlights the influence and power of promotion over the consuming public.⁶

From day-trippers seeking exploration and recreation, to overnight travelers longing for recuperative and leisure activities, what classifies a tourist remains an unresolved variable in early tourism-based accounts. “Whatever we call them,” concludes one authority, “there could not have been many tourists in the earliest decades of the nation’s history, even among the elite.” Whether prevented through the high cost associated with travel or puritanical and evangelical norms, customs, and values, settlers likely spent more energy on sustenance and subsistence than partaking in something as trivial as a vacation.⁷

⁵ Social historian Gary Mormino, in *Land of Sunshine State of Dreams: A Social History of Modern Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), contributes more insight to “conspicuous consumption” in his chapter “Tourist Empires and the Invention of Florida.” In *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), Veblen coined the term *conspicuous consumption* in an attempt to define the privileged class’s fondness for ostentatious spending and living.

⁶ Mary Cross, *A Century of American Icons: 100 Products and Slogans from the 20th Century Consumer Culture* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2002), 1.

⁷ Weiss, “Tourism in America before World War II,” 291-293; Kaul. *Dynamics of Tourism*, 2.

Although southerners had favored travel to northern climes, the growth of tourism into southeastern coastal resorts in the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida was primarily a “post-Civil War phenomenon.” Following the war, growing numbers of northerners sought southern destinations when the winter season arrived, prompting author Ledyard Bill to affirm in his 1869 work, *A Winter in Florida*, that Florida visitors were increasing by the thousands annually. “Florida has attracted considerable attention as a winter resort for invalids and pleasure-seekers,” persists Bill, “where the invalid can find equable and mild temperature through the greater portion of the year.” As for what our impromptu travel guide Bill calls “hints to the tourist, invalid, and sportsman,” Florida’s potential offerings are abundant, largely unexplored, and above all, set in a land of “unusual beauties.”⁸

By the turn of the twentieth century, as settlers came to inhabit the southern portion of Florida, railroads were king. Gilded Age princes Henry M. Flagler and Henry B. Plant shrewdly built enormous lavish hotels fit for royalty along their railways. Packed with cash crops like lumber, phosphate, and citrus from the south, railcars rolled north along these tracks, only to return with a different kind of cash crop – that of wealthy northern folk searching for a winter escape. Those that could not afford the hefty rail fees often dared the journey via horse and buggy along primitive trails. Once there, these elite vacationers sought respite from the blustery cold in rail-side opulent hotels. Most returned north enamored with the subtropical weather and sandy shores.

Prompted by the effective and enticing railroad schedules and hotel handbills, which lured thousands to visit Florida, the *Brooklyn Eagle* in 1898 boldly and

⁸ Ledyard Bill, *A Winter in Florida* (New York: Wood & Holbrook, 1869),7-8; Weiss, “Tourism in America Before World War II,” 305.

prophetically labeled Florida's west coast "the Mecca of health seekers." As for upstart St. Petersburg, "where there is a large winter colony to enjoy the small fishing which abounds," the *Eagle* announced, "probably no strip of shore in Florida offers so great a number of pleasant little resorts as does Point Pinellas, and surely no place can exceed it in the charm of its climate." Sunny tales and steel rails laid the foundation for tourism in early modern Florida. If the late 1800s were a time of nurturing and cultivating the tourism industry in Florida, then the early 1900s were decades of reaping the first harvest.⁹

The Progressive Era brought prosperity and population growth in the United States as upwards of five million automobiles competed with outdated agrarian modes of transportation. Thanks to Karl Benz and G.W. Daimler's achievements with the combustible engine and Ford's advancements in the automobile assembly process, Americans were speeding their way to being a nation on the move. Before long, advertisers, freshly admonished by the government for peddling miracle remedies and quick cures, focused on affluent amenities and necessities for the soaring numbers of automobile enthusiasts. While World War I engulfed the lives of Europeans abroad, Cadillac, Kodak, and cosmetics cajoled money-spenders in the United States. Although the country braced for war, luxury items began competing with governmental recruitment campaigns and bond drives for advertising space. Commercial products shamelessly evoked patriotism and pride through their promotions, while encouraging purchasers to "participate in the war effort."¹⁰

⁹ "The Mecca of Health Seekers," *Brooklyn Eagle*, April 17, 1898, 24.

¹⁰ Kenneth T. Jackson, "The Crabgrass Frontier: 150 Years of Suburban Growth in America," in *The Urban Experience: Themes in American History*, ed. Raymond A. Mohl and James F. Richardson (Belmont,

Commercial and governmental campaigns were not the only promotional programs competing for a national audience, however. For Florida cities that had recognized the significance of seasonal visitors, advertising in northern papers became the norm. In December 1918, publicity director John Lodwick and city officials in tourist dependent St. Petersburg sought a staggering sum to advertise the city during the current tourist season. “If spending \$20,000 to advertise St. Petersburg over the next 40 days brings here 5,000 people,” insisted the Board of Trade president, “\$2,250,000 will be put in circulation in the city.” Charles Carter’s pithy and profitable comments were enough to inspire the local Liberty Loan Organization to agree. Fund raising began the following Monday.¹¹

Geographically similar to the state of Florida, the landmass encompassing St. Petersburg is a peninsula. With the Gulf of Mexico and Boca Ciega lapping upon its western shores, and Tampa Bay surrounding the southern and eastern portions of the city, early travel options were limited. Less than ten miles, a straight shot eastward across the bay would find you on the western shores of Tampa, yet realistically a rowboat took more muscle than minutes, and sailboats relied on unpredictable winds. For water crossings, steamboats and ferries were the travelers’ choice. Landlubbers wishing to visit the “Cigar City” had few alternatives but to journey nearly fifty miles north from St. Petersburg, then overland to points east and south. A round trip excursion could take days. Prior to World War I, travel by rail remained the surest route into Florida, before then it was via boat, buggy, or on foot.

California: Wadsworth Pub. Co., 1973): 211-212; Cross, *A Century of American Icons*, 2.

¹¹ “Campaign Launched to Get \$20,000 Fund to Advertise the City,” *St. Petersburg Times*, Dec. 19, 1918.

America's love affair with the automobile fueled the growth for extensive highway development in the United States. By 1930, in Florida alone, several thousand miles of hard surface crisscrossed the state, connecting fishing hamlets on the coasts to inland merchants. In the 1920's however, one geographical obstacle loomed for the small coastal town of St. Petersburg: The city was isolated. Situated mostly on the southern portion of the Pinellas peninsula, halfway down Florida's west coast, the city of St. Petersburg was a point of destination for tourist and townsfolk; rarely would a traveler be 'just passing through' its remote local. This would soon change, dramatically.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, the shift in transportation from railroads and steamships to the automobile marked the decline of tourism as exclusively elitist and expensive. On their own dime, and more importantly on their own time, auto travelers could now explore and inspect the State, making as many side trips as their passengers and petrol would allow. Those that chose to remain, according to handbooks with tempting titles such as *Florida in the Making*, could set up a small farm trucking operation on the side of nearly any traveled tourist thoroughfare and sell Florida fruits and vegetables to the swelling ranks of visitors. "Seeing any part of America is a pleasant and profitable experience," reminded another solicitation; however, "seeing Florida gives the greatest possible returns for time and money spent." Publications did more than seek socialites, tradesmen, and tourist; they told of history and fantasy and dripped with opportunity for the willing.¹²

To grasp fully the influence of travelogues and published works of the day, consider the following descriptive title: *A Guide to Florida : "The Land of Flowers,"*

¹² Florida, Bureau of Immigration, "Florida" (Tallahassee: The Bureau, 1930), 1.

containing an historical sketch, geographical, agricultural and climatic statistics, routes of travel by land and sea, and general information invaluable to the invalid, tourist or emigrant. Often financed by budding Florida industries, writers expressed absolute authority in their topics by inclusion of such subtitles. Another example illustrates this point: *Camping and Cruising in Florida: an account of two winters passed in cruising around the coasts of Florida as viewed from the standpoint of an angler, a sportsman, a yachtsman, a naturalist, and a physician*. Credentials worked; doctors turned authors judged “point Pinellas to be one of the most salubrious and healthful locations on the west coast,” and few anglers could pass up tales of fish so thick in the Tampa Bay waters “they impede the passage of boats.” The southbound sick received their share of counsel as well. “Surely – to the sensitive invalid, the over-taxed student, or the worn out weary businessman, seeking rest and recruitment – no place on earth can surpass,” noted Daniel Tyler in 1881. Switching roles from guide to general practitioner, Tyler instructs the ailing to observe eight imperatives, seven of which audaciously involve recouping in Florida. Dispensing advice to invalids and tourists throughout, Tyler’s *Where to go in Florida* concludes with advertisements for hotels and amenities along the route.¹³

Alterations in accommodations and advancement in the automobile led to an expansion in Florida’s tourist industry in several ways. New destinations and tourist traps

¹³ George Washington Olney, *A Guide to Florida: "The Land of Flowers," Containing an Historical Sketch, Geographical, Agricultural and Climatic Statistics, Routes of Travel by Land and Sea, and General Information Invaluable to the Invalid, Tourist or Emigrant* (New York: J.H. White, 1876); James A Henshall, *Camping and Cruising in Florida: an Account of Two Winters Passed in Cruising around the Coasts of Florida as Viewed from the Standpoint of an Angler, a Sportsman, a Yachtsman, a Naturalist, and a Physician* (Cincinnati : R. Clarke & Co., 1884); Daniel F. Tyler, *Where to go in Florida* (New York: Hopcraft, 1881), 7-8, 26-27.

sprouted alongside Florida's fledgling highway system, all of which began penetrating the state's vast wilderness. Unquestionably, the automobile unlatched the gate to a perpetual paradise for many, altering tourist destinations while encouraging exploration into the unknown. The Depression years radically restricted the distance one could travel and the funding tourists were willing to put forth. Nevertheless, Florida's proximity to the populated East Coast states and overall lower cost of living enticed more than a quarter million visitors in 1930 alone.¹⁴

Early accounts of tourism rely on anecdotes, travel accounts written by the privileged classes, and, in smaller portions, remembrances by civic boosters of a particular population. However, according to Weiss, "with tourism being small in scale and shaped enormously by local conditions, civic leaders may have been more important than individual entrepreneurs"; and even more compelling, "civic leaders seemed to know implicitly that tourism was a leading sector, an engine of growth." Many Florida cities discarded any notion of becoming a manufacturing – or industry-based community, preferring to capitalize on the tourist industry instead. St. Petersburg, Florida was one such community.¹⁵

Chapter one, entitled *Bridging the Gaps*, demonstrates how the development and promotion of railroads, bridges, and infrastructure transformed much of Florida, including the isolated city of St. Petersburg, a city of less than three hundred residents in 1900 that boomed to nearly 30,000 in just two decades. The 1920s building boom and its subsequent bust are discussed as well as the national economic depression's effect on advertising the city. From bridges spanning middle and upper Tampa Bay to the

¹⁴ Weiss, "Tourism in America Before World War II," 317.

¹⁵ *Ibid*; 319-321.

introduction of the Beeline Ferry transporting tourist and travelers southward, this chapter illustrates a turning point in the history of the Pinellas peninsula.

As the Great Depression continued nationally, chapter two displays the Sunshine City as “The City that Advertising built.” This chapter looks at the influence of civic leaders and the Chamber of Commerce, as well as the “sunshine offer” and advertisements used from Atlanta to Albany. The discussion involves the city's goal, since its incorporation, as one that promotes luxury and the good life on Florida's gulf coast. Several selected media formats such as postcards, newspapers, hotel handbills, and letters to northern editors adamantly reiterate this quest. An historical recounting of St. Petersburg and its dedication to tourism would be incomplete without extensive recognition of John Harris Lodwick, St. Petersburg's first publicity director. Lodwick's clever antics and inimitable style, along with samples of his promotional prowess and “techniques,” are featured prominently throughout.

From the installation of St. Petersburg's celebrated green benches to housing Goodyear blimps, civic leaders and city founders vied for national attention. Census figures indicate that a doubling had occurred from one decade to the next. This rapid growth was due in part to several factors, the automobile, post war prosperity, and transportation improvements. As we move on to the chapter three, we deal with *War and Beyond*.

With selling the federal government Bay Pines bayou, where the South's largest V.A. hospital rose from the mangroves, to soliciting military training sites to Tampa Bay, St. Petersburg changed dramatically with the arrival of World War II. Enormous military camps and remote mystery bases filled Florida's landscape with more than two million

armed forces trainees. St. Petersburg alone received in excess of one hundred thousand airmen, seaman, and soldiers.

On the home front, the promotional efforts during the war years enticed some to continue their patriotic duty of keeping fit for "the war effort," and what better place than St. Petersburg to get your vitamins A, D and V-for victory. Throughout the global conflict, brazen advertisements evoked patriotism and reminded readers of Florida's potential. Following World War II, the massive migration of soldiers and their sweethearts, along with Florida's booming retiree population, rapidly modernized this once sleepy fishing hamlet and greatly aided in *Selling St. Petersburg*.

Chapter One: Bridging the Gaps

“A pretty good place for a settlement,” English cartographer George Gauld noted on several manuscript charts of Tampa Bay in the eighteenth century. Gauld’s penned prophecy, written in the summer of 1765 while charting the navigability of Florida’s west coast, covered the southern tip of present-day Pinellas County. Florida, having come into the hands of the British two years prior, served as a distraction for many colonialists. By using the newly acquired lands of East and West Florida, Great Britain hoped to keep at bay those wanderlust souls who felt restricted by the Proclamation of 1763. Even though this proclamation outlawed travel west of the Appalachians, there was plenty of land to be had in the new fourteenth and fifteenth British colonies of Florida.¹

Trading the captured port capital of Havana for Florida, in 1763, Great Britain ruled over its new holdings for a mere twenty years. The British government, following two decades of lackluster attempts to populate the remote locale, “concluded suddenly that it was worthless to retain the province of Florida.” With the removal of British inhabitants, Sidney Lanier penned in 1875 that Florida returned to the wilds of which it was born. “A Spanish lethargy settled upon the land,” the poet turned guide wrote of the “mere borderland.” He further noted that Florida, “torn with Indian fights, and with irregular conflicts of adventuring parties and of ill-advised republican frontiersmen,” came into the nineteenth century with much bloodshed.

¹ John D. Ware, *George Gauld: Surveyor and Cartographer of the Gulf Coast* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1982), 51.

In place of the dispossessed and destroyed native tribes of Spanish Florida, fleeing bands of Georgia and Carolina Creeks moved into the area. Saddled with what is the anglicized Spanish term *cimarrone*, meaning “breakaways” or “wild ones,” Florida’s new Indian inhabitants, the Seminole, were simply no match for the relentless and covetous efforts of the United States government to maintain possession and control Florida.²

Essentially spanning some 40 years with intermittent interludes of serenity, the U.S. fought three wars from 1817 to 1858 against the Florida Seminole Indians. United States policy that had once favored treaties and territorial purchasing gave way to the Andrew Jackson sanctioned Indian Removal Act. The 1830 bill authorized the exchange of approved lands west of the Mississippi to Indians currently residing in any of the states or territories, such as Florida. While the Indian Removal Act contained specific language issuing consent and compensation due to accommodating tribes, the reality of the situation was such that those who did not leave without incident often faced forced relocation, or worse yet, death. In conjunction with the Treaty of Moultrie Creek (which restricted Indian Territory to swampy, uncultivable lands in Central Florida), the Indian Removal Act delivered the needed catalyst for the perpetuation of the longest and most costly Indian war in U.S. history.³

The decades-long conflict was too costly to continue hunting for a few desperado tribes hidden in Florida scrub and swampland. The United States, after decades of warfare and millions of dollars, decided to unilaterally remove troops and allow the small

² Raymond Arsenault, *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream, 1888-1950* (Norfolk: Donning Co., 1988), 27; Michael Grunwald, *The Swamp: The Everglades, Florida, and the Politics of Paradise* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), 31, 53.

³ John Missall and Mary Lou Missall, *Seminole Wars: America’s Longest Indian Conflict* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004), 66, 79-81.

number of natives to remain. However, by war's end, the Seminole had been methodically eliminated, or emigrated, through years of want, warfare, and disease. In the Tampa Bay region, Florida's natives had all but vanished with the arrival of additional frontiersmen and women. In their place came the investors, curious souls, and infirm that eventually secured the Pinellas peninsula's mighty role in the tourist industry.

Flagler and Plant – The Builders

Several events stimulated the tourist trade in Florida during the closing of the nineteenth century. First, southern boosters viewed tourism as a crucial element in post-Reconstruction recovery, jumpstarting a depressed economy. The second and possibly greatest impact came throughout the final decades of the nineteenth century as luxurious hotels, both inland and on the coastal edges, sprouted up from the soil of the Sunshine State. In St. Augustine, Henry Flagler of Standard Oil fame, constructed the Ponce de Leon and the Alcazar hotels, while obtaining a third, which he christened the Cordova. Revitalizing the old fort city, he also built needed churches and hospitals while connecting the city with power, water, and sewer services.

Recognizing the lack of suitable transportation into St. Augustine—and *to* his investments—Henry Flagler bought and rebuilt a short-line railroad company to make his hotels more accessible. By 1885, now in the hotel and railroad business, Flagler connected and improved additional railroad lines northward to Jacksonville, and more importantly southward down the east coast of Florida. From Ormond Beach, then to Palm Beach in 1893, Flagler supported his system of rails and hotels through extensive improvements along each destination, constructing waterworks, utilities, city halls, and courthouses. Flagler, however, was not alone in improving and constructing the much-

needed steel tracks into remote Florida. His “keen-minded Connecticut Yankee” counterpart, Henry B. Plant, had his sights set on Florida’s west coast. Though operating on opposite coasts, both Plant and Flagler recognized “Americans’ love affair with the beach,” noted Florida historian Gary Mormino, “constructing ornate hotels along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, that defined seaside architecture.”⁴

Henry Plant, with entrepreneurial aspirations similar to Flagler’s, pushed his narrow-gauged rails south from Jacksonville to Sanford, following the picturesque St. Johns River. From Sanford, to Orlando, Plant’s rail line eventually ran southwest through Tampa. Emulating Flagler’s success in the east, Henry Plant constructed a destination unto itself. At the rail’s Tampa terminus, Plant erected the mammoth, Moorish-styled Tampa Bay Hotel. The hotel was considered by awe-struck viewers to be the crowning achievement of Florida’s Gulf Coast, where “nothing more spacious in the way of a hotel probably has ever been built anywhere in the world at any time.” Although the two railroad moguls maintained friendly business relations, their competitions for extravagance manifested in grand resorts and grounds.⁵

Constructed to rival anything in Flagler’s arsenal of amenities, the Tampa Bay Hotel featured over five hundred rooms and a grand hall that accommodated fifteen hundred merry makers. The elegance and extravagance of the hotel’s idyllic settings prompted Marjory Stoneman Douglas to describe “the greatest hotel in the world” as a grand structure with “endless piazzas shaded by wooden lace balconies and arches,” in

⁴ Mormino, *Land of Sunshine*, 304; Marjory S. Douglas, *Florida: The Long Frontier* (Harper & Row: New York, 1967), 239.

⁵ Frank P. Stockbridge and John H. Perry, *So This is Florida* (Jacksonville, Florida: John H. Perry Pub. Co. 1938), 168; Edward N. Akin, *Flagler: Rockefeller Partner and Florida Baron* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1988), 191-193.

which guests could relax and marvel at the luxurious grounds. A serene scene where countless numbers of “palms and flowering shrubs were set about the ancient live oaks as the tumult of construction, drays, wagons, locomotives, hammers, workmen, jammed the streets.” While hundreds of laborers and artisans began construction on the Tampa Bay Hotel in 1888, a Russian railroad mogul named Peter Demens ran his raggedy rail line across the bay into a sparsely populated village — St. Petersburg.⁶

Aside from the sprawling infrastructures created around each of their stately structures designed to appease the nearly insatiable appetites of affluent guests, Flagler and Plant shaped an exotic and alluring image of Florida. Their efforts and friendly rivalry tempted tourist and sanitarium seekers to visit the state, while encouraging entrepreneurs and other men of means to buy into the Florida fantasy, repackage it, and sell it to others at a profit. The development of tourism in Florida strengthened exponentially as the nineteenth century ended. While tourists’ fondness for Florida rose with each passing year, their mode of arrival evolved even faster.

Driving the Growth

Henry Ford’s 1908 introduction of the Model T sparked a new American Revolution. His affordable, mass-produced automobile offered the mobility and freedom that neither trains nor horse and buggy could. The middle classes enthusiastically embraced the automobile. Florida’s roads and thoroughfares were rapidly tested. In response, resort communities such as St. Petersburg, Florida, experienced a yearly invasion of these ‘average citizens’ descending upon the town in horseless carriages. Traversing hundreds of weather-beaten miles and intending to stave off the cold of the

⁶ Douglas, *Florida: The Long Frontier*, 244-245.

North with balmy winds from the Gulf of Mexico and Tampa Bay, these tourists often became seasonal or permanent inhabitants.

The temporary wartime economic lull in tourism brought on by the First World War gave way to the early 1920s boom felt in many Florida cities. The postwar influx of permanent residents in St. Petersburg – retirees and returning Doughboys coupled with the wishful schemer and the seasonal invasion of parsimonious Tin Can Tourists – led to intense land acquisitions and real estate dealings. What started out as fields of tents, shanties, and lean-tos, packed with money conscious visitors, soon blossomed into residential housing and storefronts. Fervent land speculation fattened wallets as well as city coffers. Subdivisions sprang up and new citizens had homes constructed. Building permits in 1923 alone topped seven million dollars, while banking deposits soared from just over two million in 1916 to over twenty million by the spring of 1924.⁷

St. Petersburg flourished, growing more in a few years than many other Florida towns would in several decades. Amid the instrumental increase in tourism and an average of twelve new citizens a day, 1920s St. Petersburg witnessed agrarian transportation making way for the advanced technology of streetcars and the automobile. The development and implementation of modernized transportation, however, did not arrive without costs or consequences. Soon there was a demand for more suitable roads reaching farther into landlocked Pinellas. The need to span Tampa Bay eastbound towards Hillsborough County and southward to Manatee County increased with each passing year. New state roads, one from Manatee to Palm Beach, and another linking Tampa to Miami, provided more opportunities for tourism and city boosters. In a

⁷ “Florida: The Playground of the Nation,” *Florida Gazetteer* (R. L. Polk and Co. 1925), 229-230.

grasping attempt not to lose tourist dollars, boosters of St. Petersburg pushed for bridging Tampa Bay in order to connect Pinellas and these new multi-lane highways.⁸

Following the Dotted Line

Hailed across the country as the greatest event in progress and development, the November 1924 opening of Tampa Bay's Gandy Bridge was an instant success. Locally, as nearly thirty thousand people eagerly turned out for the official opening, newspaper headlines boldly proclaimed "ST. PETERSBURG AND TAMPA UNITED." Amid the "vortex of humanity that crushed together within the structures narrow confines," described one reporter, "a chapter was inscribed Thursday in the book of bridgedom as Gandy Bridge – monarch of spans – was formally dedicated." The highly anticipated and much celebrated toll bridge, nearly six miles in length, joined the booming tourist town of St. Petersburg with Tampa, the industrial and commercial-driven city across the bay. Although the bridge took just two years to construct, George Gandy's vision was two decades in the making and nearly as old as the upstart city of St. Petersburg itself.⁹

Since its summer inception in June 1888, with the arrival of Peter Demens's Orange Belt Railroad, St. Petersburg has been an aspiring community in the advancing state of Florida. Nineteenth-century Florida lacked much infrastructure though. Just a few decades prior to its entrance into the union as the twenty-seventh state, in 1845, primarily swamps, scrublands, and Seminoles dominated the Florida scene. As a result, previous attempts to inhabit Florida, seen by many as an absurd adventure into a malarial infested terrain, proved difficult if not nearly impossible. The strength and steam to settle

⁸ Arsenault, *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream, 1880-1950*, 145- 149, 188-191.

⁹ "St. Petersburg and Tampa United," *St. Petersburg Times*, Nov. 20, 1924, 1A ; "Great Throng Bids Welcome to Governors," *St. Petersburg Times*, Nov. 21, 1924, 1A.

North America's southernmost landmass came about through legislation and locomotions.

In 1842, in accordance with the newly passed Federal Armed Occupation Act, homestead opportunities were available to pioneering people willing to cultivate and physically protect their personal Florida frontier. In addition to the destruction and fear brought about through the 1848 hurricane and then the Civil War, the state's remoteness, swampy sections, and general lack of transportation guaranteed Florida's sluggish and selective development during the nineteenth century. The few pioneering men and women who managed the passage to southern Pinellas totaled less than fifty when Peter Demens' Orange Belt Railway huffed to a stop. Thus was the founding of St. Petersburg. While their numbers were few and their reasons to relocate to this remote and feral neck of land varied, pioneering families of St. Petersburg "reflected the restless temperament and enterprising spirit that dominated late nineteenth-century America." The same pioneering spirit and determination that drove earlier homesteaders to break new ground on isolated point Pinellas fueled the actions and accomplishments of St. Petersburg's early twentieth-century boosters and businessmen like George Gandy.¹⁰

Bespectacled and bearded, George Gandy was an impeccably dressed "Victorian looking character," who had arrived in St. Petersburg in 1903. Sensing the potential of the attractive and rapidly growing city, the Gandys: George, wife Clara and their five children soon became devoted residents and boosters. Within a decade of his arrival, George Gandy had applied his years of business preparation under the tutelage of a prominent Philadelphia saw manufacturer, Henry Disston, to construct La Plaza Theatre,

¹⁰ Arsenault, *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream*, 41.

a magnificent entertainment edifice in the heart of St. Petersburg. Featuring live performances and movies such as *Birth of a Nation*, Gandy's La Plaza Theatre rapidly became "one of the most beautiful and successful buildings in the history of St. Petersburg, just as its builder envisioned." Almost immediately following the theatre's 1913 opening, and unable to live up to his claims of retirement, George Gandy hired engineers and surveyors to evaluate his next feat of bridging Tampa Bay.¹¹

Purportedly prompted by a city promotional map with a dotted line running across the waters of Tampa Bay, George Gandy and local entrepreneur H. Walter Fuller – father to Walter P. Fuller, conspired to turn the wishful mark into reality. Although World War I and economic hardships temporarily halted the Gandy and Fuller fantasy, the dream would not rest. War restrictions on building material and goods, followed by increased supply costs levied after the Armistice, often sent investors running or created victims of receivership. H. Walter Fuller, who in his lifetime would earn and lose several fortunes, fell into the latter category. Within a few years of the war's end, George Gandy acquired Fuller's share in the project and began anew. Certainly aware that assistance in raising construction capital was required for such a massive undertaking, Gandy enlisted a silver-tongued Northerner to do just that.¹²

Silver Tongues and Satisfied Customers

In the early months of 1922, Eugene Elliot slid into town from New York prepared to pull every trick out of his promoter's hat in order to sell St. Petersburg a bridge. Described by resident writer Walter Fuller as "the most colorful, tempestuous,

¹¹ Rhyder McClure, "The Men Who Bridged the Bay," *St. Petersburg Times*, July 14, 1980, 1D, 8D.

¹² Walter P. Fuller, *This Was Florida's Boom* (St. Petersburg, Florida: Times Publishing Company, 1954), 48-50.

super-energized man to ever grace the St. Petersburg stage,” Elliot was just the man for the job. Intense negotiations, wild speculation, and impressive skills in oration were nothing new to 1920s Florida. Neither Carl Fisher’s sultry Miami Beach nor George Merrick’s exclusive Coral Gables would have come into being without this winning trifecta. It was no different in St. Petersburg. Within four months of his arrival, the promoter and an army of smooth talking salesmen had peddled over \$2-million worth of bridge stocks and bonds. Construction began by September 1922 – the same year that Frank Fortune Pulver tossed his proverbial hat into the political arena for mayor, hoping to “send every Tourist back to his home an advertising booster for St. Petersburg.”¹³

Living by his campaign creed that “the best advertisement in the world was a satisfied customer,” Frank Pulver, a contented client himself, was one of the city’s most colorful politicians and promoters. New to the bureaucratic business of running a city, Pulver relied on his youthful days of marketing and selling chewing gum – which in those years had stiff competition from wads of smokeless tobacco. Pulver cultivated his creative antics and showmanship skills on big city boulevards. Unable to turn his two hundred dollar investment in a spearmint formula profitable, Pulver gave the gum away on the streets of New York. With the clever reporting of a local newspaper, headlines proclaiming “Gum King Gives Sticks to Orphans” sent sales skyrocketing. Several years later, in 1913, after perfecting the Pulver Vending Machine - which dispensed the sticks of gum at a penny apiece, Pulver reputedly sold his candy kingdom to William Wrigley

¹³ Walter P. Fuller, *St. Petersburg and Its People* (St. Petersburg, Florida: Great Outdoors Publishing, 1972), 162; Frank Pulver, “My Announcement for Mayor,” *Campaign Flyer* (St. Petersburg, Florida: Tourist Press, 1921).

Jr. for one million dollars.¹⁴

Armed with an appreciation for advertising, and a bankroll to boost, Frank Pulver relocated to St. Petersburg and purchased The Detroit, one of the largest hotels in town. The “millionaire bachelor” soon became one of the city’s “invaluable men of visions,” wrote *St. Petersburg Times* columnist Dick Bothwell, “anxious to put the power of advertising behind the town’s bandwagon.” Spreading the message in full-page ads, Pulver spent thousands upon thousands of dollars highlighting St. Petersburg in Northern newspapers. His most ambitious plan to put St. Petersburg “on the map,” involved the city’s clever publicity director, John Lodwick.¹⁵

A Deal They Couldn’t Refuse

The first major attempt at advertising the city, five years prior to Lodwick’s arrival in 1918, cost the St. Petersburg Board of Trade four thousand dollars for fifty thousand copies of an enticing sixteen-page illustrated folder. Early and less elaborate efforts had come in postcard form. One illustrated postcard produced after the successful 1905-06 tourist season featured sightseers and fishing visitors enjoying the ample aquatic life on the city’s extensive waterfront. The reverse side beamed over the ten thousand visiting tourist during the season prior, a four hundred percent gain in bank deposits, and a “population doubling every two years.” Unquestionably, the solicitation tempted the tourist to discover Pinellas Point: “For the Best Winter and Summer Climate on Earth Come to St. Petersburg By-the-Gulf-Stream. The Tourist Paradise. The Homeseeker’s

¹⁴ Pulver, “My Announcement for Mayor,”; Scott Taylor Hartzell, “Mayor Thrived on Stunts, Infighting,” *St. Petersburg Times*, Nov. 2, 1999.

¹⁵ Dick Bothwell, “79 Today, Ex-Mayor Pulver has Career like Horatio Alger Novel,” *St. Petersburg Times*, Nov. 12, 1949.

Refuge. The Land of Now and the Country of Splendid Realities.”¹⁶

In 1920, St. Petersburg’s Board of Trade formally changed its name to the Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber was so instrumental to St. Petersburg’s success wrote Karl Grismer, “To relate the activities of the Chamber since 1920 would be like repeating the history of the city.” Since the group’s origination in 1899, the Board/Chamber brought about “countless ways to make St. Petersburg a finer place to live.” In addition to advocating successfully for public improvements, the Chamber of Commerce organized local civic clubs and social groups for visiting vacationers, promoting the city continuously and countrywide.¹⁷

A few months before Board of Trade president Charles Carter obtained an unprecedented twenty thousand dollars to advertise St. Petersburg during the 1918-1919 tourist season, the city came into the services of John Lodwick, without charge. “I’ll do the job,” the fast talking newcomer from Ohio informed Board secretary L.A Whitney, “and at the end of the season you pay me what you think it has been worth.” Lodwick’s cut-rate price and lofty goals for putting St. Petersburg in the lexicon of southbound tourist sealed the deal. Publicity and promotions were nothing new to John Lodwick. Born on Dec 16, 1890 to Welsh immigrants John and Bessie Lodwick, Lodwick began as a messenger boy for the *Associated Press* in Cleveland at the age of 13. Joining the *Cleveland Press* in 1905, Lodwick left in 1910 to serve as sports director for the city of Cleveland. Following his two-year stint with the city, Lodwick relocated to Akron, Ohio to serve as sports editor for the *Akron Times-Press*. Lodwick had impressive credentials.

¹⁶ Karl Grismer, *The Story of St. Petersburg* (St. Petersburg, Florida: P.K Smith and Co., 1948), 260; Wayne Ayers, *St. Petersburg: The Sunshine City* (Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Publishing 2001), 22.

¹⁷ Grismer, *The Story of St. Petersburg*, 260; Ayers, *St. Petersburg: The Sunshine City*, 22

Whitney hired Lodwick as the St. Petersburg's first publicity director on the spot.¹⁸

John Lodwick, who had come to Florida from Cleveland, worked for several years promoting sporting events in his home state. With a penchant for writing and a need for the healing rays of Tampa Bay, Lodwick soon settled in to a freelance reporting gig with the *St. Petersburg Times*. It was through Walter Fuller, a staff writer for the newspaper at the time, that Lodwick happened upon L.A Whitney. His grand scheme, Lodwick informed Whitney and Fuller over lunch, was to turn St. Petersburg into a sporting capital, hosting a multitude of "world championships" throughout the year. The publicity, he insisted, would reach national audiences free of charge to the city. The ultimate goal in this plan was to create headlines and datelines displaying *St. Petersburg, Florida* in publications across the nation featuring Tampa Bay's natural beauty and ideal climate as a backdrop for every story. While battling the chilly winds of yet another northern blizzard, Lodwick first conceived of working in Pinellas's propaganda department several years prior and knew of the Sunshine State's siren call. For Lodwick, "Florida's sun beckoned," reminisced a local journalist in 1938. John Lodwick's showmanship and writing skills creating sensational situations made his first season in St. Petersburg a huge success. Coupled with the Board of Trade's "extensive advertising campaign throughout Florida," John Lodwick's skill sealed the city's success for the following tourist season as well.¹⁹

"Naturally, the best manner of selling St. Petersburg's sunshine was through the medium of the pretty girl," disclosed columnist Jane Graham on the topic of bathing

¹⁸ Fuller, *St. Petersburg and its People*, 165; Manuscript Census Returns, *Thirteen Census of the United States*, 1910, Cuyahoga County, Ohio, Ward 17 Population (State Library of Ohio, Genealogy Dept.).

¹⁹ "Sunshine City is Advertising," *Tampa Daily Times*, March 15, 1919; Jane Graham, "City Publicity Bureau Had its Inception in Blizzard in the North," *Evening Independent*, Nov. 7, 1938.

beauties, and John Lodwick became master of the medium. Although Miami Beach's Carl Fisher gave birth to the Bathing Beauties, which soon became that city's trademark, St. Petersburg boosters took the scantily clad sea-nymph theme in a new direction. Through a mix of practical jokes and pure sensationalism, propaganda guru John Lodwick and Mayor Pulver devised the St. Petersburg Purity League. Members of the spurious organization reportedly felt it was their duty to extend the League's puritanical values to St. Petersburg's shores. Supposedly outraged at the nearly nude nubile woman parading on the sandy playgrounds in their newfangled one-piece suits, Purity "members" insisted on moral enforcements and inspections. The mayor was very happy to oblige, and as planned, word of the swimsuit shakedown made national news.²⁰

In a classic example of feeding the press, boosters must have snickered as they sent the wire northward:

FLORIDA PURITY LEAGUE MOVES "TO PROTECT THE MARRIED MEN."

ST. PETERSBURG, FLA., Jan 25 – Mayor Frank Pulver had a request today from the St. Petersburg Purity League that he appoint a bathing suit inspector, a formal communications from the organization stating that "the league intends to protect the married men from the wiles of the sea vamp." The Mayor said he would personally visit the beach and look 'em over.²¹

Aside from such publicity pranks while in office, Pulver performed his greatest act of boosterism after his stint as mayor had ended. In January 1924, amidst frantic growth, a new city charter, and much opinionated mud-slinging, Pulver was recalled from his post as mayor. Ironically, like his predecessor and fellow civic booster Noel Mitchell,

²⁰ Graham, "City Publicity Bureau Had its Inception in Blizzard in the North," "Wives Ask Mayor to Shield Their Husbands from Wiles of Sea Vamps," *Fort Wayne Journal Gazette*, Feb. 9, 1922: 16; "Wives ask Mayor to Shield Hubbies from Sea Vamps," *Danville Bee*, Feb. 17, 1922: 8; "Help! Sea Vamps Capture St. Pete's Bachelor Mayor," *Racine Journal News*, March 7, 1922: 4.

²¹ "Asks Bathing Suit Censor," *New York Times*, Jan. 26, 1922: 36; "Bathing Suit Inspector Requested in Florida," *Reno Evening Gazette*, Jan. 25, 1922.

Pulver had performed great services to the city's image and infrastructure only to be a victim of fair-weather citizens' whims and worries.

Shortly thereafter, Pulver, who now had plenty of free time to go with his fortune, left St. Petersburg on a four-month whirlwind world promotional tour. Dressed in his usual snowy white suit and white-brimmed hat, Pulver traveled nearly twenty thousand-miles extolling the ecstasies of St. Petersburg. His journey eventually took him to Buckingham Palace where he met King George and the Queen. Always the pitchman, Pulver claimed to have cornered the Prince of Wales in the lovely ten-acre Royal Gardens. Upon shaking the Prince's hand, Pulver suggested that on the Prince's next visit to America, he tour St. Petersburg. The prince smiled and replied, "I think it would be rather warm there at this season of the year. I would like to visit Florida in the winter time." Pulver's publicity junket had worked. Newspapers nationwide ran stories of the "Man in White," his brazen boasts of the Sunshine State, and Pulver's invitation for all to visit Florida's west-coast wonderland, St. Petersburg. Frank Pulver returned to his beloved city in the summer of 1924.²²

During Pulver's absence, Lodwick and the Chamber of Commerce were busy securing the city's future. "In fact," an April announcement agreed, "several of the most important projects so far as the future growth of greater St. Petersburg is concerned were launched." Civic matters ranged from railroad improvements and relocating water traffic to the Bayboro harbor, to a toll-free beach causeway proposal and plans for a new downtown recreational pier. In addition to purchasing a Pullman railcar and printing two

²² Frank Pulver, Editorial, *St. Petersburg Time*, Sept. 28, 1924; Chamber of Commerce, "Chamber of Commerce Bulletin for May, 1924," St. Petersburg Museum of History Archives, Chamber of Commerce Collection.

hundred thousand small booklets to advertise the city and the Royal Scotch Highlanders Band – a beloved group that drew thousands to Williams Park – the Chamber ran display advertisements in various publications. The high demand brochures, reported the *Chamber of Commerce Bulletin for May 1924*, “containing much more attractive matter than any previous city booklet,” would be one of the final promotional pieces featuring a bridgeless bay.²³

In November 1924, at a cost of three million dollars and just over two years of construction, the Gandy Bridge was completed. Had Frank Fortune Pulver waited a few more months to return from his goodwill mission selling St. Petersburg, the former mayor might have been among the first to hand over seventy-five cents and cross Tampa Bay by automobile on Gandy’s grand bridge. Governors and public officials from twenty-five states partook in the dedication. It truly was a marvel to behold. The fifteen hundred construction workers, using dredges and mules, among other tools of the day, constructed three miles of sand-filled causeways. In between the land bridges, two and one-half miles of reinforced concrete stretched over Tampa Bay.

Shaving the commuter time from forty-three minutes to nineteen, Gandy’s “world’s longest toll-road and bridge” put St. Petersburg on the map, and literally connected the city to the rest of Florida. “More than any other single development,” notes historian Raymond Arsenault, “the opening of the Gandy Bridge was responsible for raising the (land) boom to its dizzying apogee of 1925.” Land between downtown St. Petersburg and Gandy’s span, once deemed “unpromising property,” sold at skyrocketing prices. Subdivisions and storefronts soon sprouted along the major corridors connecting

²³ “Chamber of Commerce Bulletin for April, 1924,” St. Petersburg Museum of History Archives: Chamber of Commerce Collection; Chamber of Commerce “Chamber of Commerce Bulletin for May, 1924.”

the city center to the highly anticipated overpass.²⁴

The bridging of Tampa Bay, publicized in movies, magazines, and monthly periodicals around the globe, answered the prayers of many. The faster and more direct route into St. Petersburg and its benefits to the traveler were obvious; but for city boosters, who for years had “preached a civic religion that proclaimed the wonders of Florida – and their hometown specifically,” St. Petersburg was their version of the Promised Land. “All they needed to make their heaven last,” wrote Professor Bruce Stephenson in his probing work *Visions of Eden: Environmentalism, Urban Planning, and City Building in St. Petersburg, Florida*, “was to lead others there.” Gandy became the Messiah of this message. By December 1925, local Chamber of Commerce display advertisements sent to newspapers nationally featured the Gandy Bridge while reminding readers that St. Petersburg, “on sunny Pinellas Peninsula between the broad Gulf of Mexico and Tampa Bay,” offered a “wonderful winter playground where every desire for outdoor sports and recreation can be fulfilled.” St. Petersburg could not have devised a better public relation success story or a better route to usher in tourists.²⁵

A Mother’s Breakfast

While the connection of two great cities, Tampa and St. Petersburg, permeated national newspapers in late 1924, their separation a few years prior had made countless more headlines, at least in Florida. Neither sensational advertisements nor strategically-placed editorials held up to the praise heaped upon St. Petersburg as did the writings and

²⁴ Grismer, *The Story of St. Petersburg*, 142; Arsenault, *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream: 1888-1950*, 197; Betty Jean Miller, “‘Pop’ Gandy Had Vision of a Bridge,” *St. Petersburg Times*, Nov. 23, 1987: W3.

²⁵ R. Bruce Stephenson, *Visions of Eden: Environmentalism, Urban Planning, and City Building in St. Petersburg, Florida, 1900-1995* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1997), 82-83; “A Wonderful Winter Playground Between the Gulf and Tampa Bay,” *New York Times*, Dec. 13, 1925, x20.

ranting of William Lincoln Straub.

Part owner and editor of the *St. Petersburg Times*, William Straub had a perfect pulpit. During his nearly four-decade tenure, 1901-1939, save for a brief hiatus as postmaster; Straub rarely overlooked the opportunity to push for St. Petersburg's prosperity. "I came here to die," William Straub proclaimed in a *Times* editorial; instead he "found health in St. Petersburg." Statements such as these were common; however, few said it to so many - and fewer said it so often.²⁶

William Straub came to Florida a wearied man battling recurring bronchitis as the twentieth century rapidly approached. Unwilling to leave North Dakota for a return to his native state of Michigan to recuperate and attempting to avoid doctor's orders to operate, Straub headed to the Sunshine State. Within weeks of reading, resting, and walking in St. Petersburg's therapeutic sunrays, he found that his bronchitis had all but disappeared. From that day forward, Straub was a vocal citizen of the tiny fishing hamlet's offerings. However, St. Petersburg was not his first stop in the bay area; Tampa was.

Unfortunately, for the city of Tampa, Straub's first impressions of the "Cigar Capital of the World" were not happy ones. "It was a disappointment," he said of the former base of operations for the Spanish-American War, "no paving, no cleanliness, no nothing." Crossing Tampa Bay on a suggestion, William Straub found in St. Petersburg all that postwar Tampa lacked: pristine beaches, clean water, and even "breakfast like mother made." In short time he secured part ownership of the *St. Petersburg Times*, beginning a lifelong crusade.²⁷

²⁶ William L. Straub, Editorial, *St. Petersburg Times*, Nov. 6, 1932.

²⁷ Milton O. Polk, "W.L. Straub and the Birth of Pinellas County," *St. Petersburg Times*, Jan. 22, 1989.

From his home and downtown office, William Straub worked incessantly to advance his newly adopted city. Some say he introduced one of the first promotion pieces of advertising for the city in 1903. Rather artistic, Straub created a spectacular – and fictitious – painting of downtown St. Petersburg’s waterfront. Gone were the current worn out wharves and other derelict harbor-edged eyesores; in their place stood stately structures, and picturesque piers lined with luxurious steamboats. Straub had painted a panoramic view of what *could* be. The art piece, painted for Frank A. Davis, the owner of St. Petersburg’s power company, soon hung on a wall of the Pennsylvania Railroad Station. A more simple line drawing of the same scene became the *St. Petersburg Times* official masthead. Always the astute businessman, Davis, a former Philadelphian, shrewdly shared in Straub’s vision and desire to lure northern tourists and citizens to the Sunshine City.²⁸

William Straub’s painting showed a city void of beached boats, ramshackle warehouses dotting the shore, and smokestacks emitting their noxious fumes. “Leave that to Tampa and Key West,” it was said. A city of public parks bordering the bay, for all to enjoy, became Straub’s mantra. More politically, he envisioned a day when the Pinellas peninsula untied the “short apron strings of ‘Mother Hillsborough’” to become her own county. Straub rarely spared ink or column inches to spread his visions in the *St. Petersburg Times*.²⁹

The *Times*’ flair for promoting its namesake city, however, precedes William Straub and his editorials of “peerless Pinellas.” As early as 1899, *Times* headlines

²⁸ “William L. Straub, Florida Editor, 72,” Obituary, *New York Times*, April 11, 1939; Helen Huntley, “The Story Behind the Old Painting,” *St. Petersburg Times*, Jan 17, 1971.

²⁹ Milton O. Polk, “W.L. Straub and the Birth of Pinellas County,” *St. Petersburg Times*, Jan. 22, 1989, 4D.

pronounced St. Petersburg “The Ideal City by the Sea” where “broad avenues, fine driveways and bicycle paths,” ran alongside elegant hotels, and beautiful residences. No other place, the *Times* insisted, offered finer fishing, better boating and more congenial climates than St. Petersburg. Civic boosters and copy editors realized the power of the testimonial. “Tourists tell us,” the late nineteenth century commentary continues, “that for beauty of buildings and location, and as a health resort, there is not a rival in the State of Florida.”³⁰

God’s Resting Place and Buried Treasure

By 1907, William Straub’s energetic editorials and rapier wit was infused into caustic cartons, many of which demanded county division. Unbalanced taxation, poor county services, and even poorer school funding topped the reasons for West Hillsborough County to annex. That there was not even a paved road connecting the two cities of Tampa and St. Petersburg was enough for many pro-divisioners. Against legislative opposition and several failed attempts, the county division bill eventually passed in 1911. It was during that celebrated year that William Straub, needing an obvious break from the soapbox and the pressures of politics, and perhaps a silent reward to himself for his lengthy legislative success, began construction on a family beach hideaway and summer cottage.

Located on St. Petersburg’s gulf islands, Straub’s “Loafer Lodge” sat on the southern portion of Long Key. The lodge’s construction in the community of Pass-a-Grille superseded sidewalks and streets. “It was one of the first houses,” penned daughter Blanche some years after. “That was before there was any electricity or – well, there was

³⁰ J.W. Heard, “St. Petersburg, Fla., The Ideal City by the Sea,” *St. Petersburg Times*, Sept. 1899, A1.

no town at all.” Getting to the island required a lesson in logistics. Taking a streetcar to the southern portion of the peninsula, the family would hire a captain and boat across Boca Ciega Bay, eventually disembarking on the southern tip of the barrier island. What they did not (or could not) purchase at Captain Merry’s pier had to be brought from the mainland. “I don’t know how my mother ever managed,” Blanche confessed, “but she took groceries, bedding, everything, even ice. Of course, the ice didn’t last long.” Once there, however, visitors eagerly soaked up the sunshine, strung a fishing line from the pier, or simply enjoyed the serenity.³¹

Within a few years of Loafer Lodge’s debut, the new Pass-a-Grille ferry navigated Boca Ciega Bay, thereby eliminating or at least reducing some of the challenges of a beach outing. Although the shuttling service received fanfare for its convenience, the islands desperately needed an automobile bridge to bring about any serious development to Long Key. William Straub now had a new soapbox on which to perch.

Long Key’s “resort debut” preceded Loafer Lodge and Straub by some fifty years. At the closing of the Florida Seminole Wars in 1858 local soldiers and the adventurous, wishing to wash away the sins of war or more interested in the abundant fishing and wild game, sought out Long Key’s bounty. Soon, schooner pilot and legendary local Juan (John) Gomez shuttled picnickers and promoters to Long Key. Gomez, a self-declared pirate and an originator of Tampa Bay fiction, created and promoted rich tales to entertain his fare. He enjoyed expounding on Tampa Bay’s endowments, reportedly informing one of area’s first white settlers, Dr. Odet Phillipi, “If there is a God, surely

³¹ Blanche Straub Starkey. “Loafer Lodge” in *Pass-A-Grille: a Patchwork Collection of Memories*, ed. Margery Kennedy and Doris Waltz (Macon Graphics, 1981), 16-20.

this is His resting place.” Gomez enjoyed a good yarn as well. One of his most outlandish fables has him aboard the very boat of buccaneer and all around bad boy, José Gaspar. Pirates or not, Long Key had become a treasure in it own right. Long Key’s Pass-a-Grille is one of Florida’s, and certainly St. Petersburg’s, oldest island resort communities.³²

In the late nineteenth century, an enterprising soul could get forty acres in Florida for fifty dollars. For much less money, wrote Eunice Beecher in her 1879 *Letters from Florida*, sweat equity and fifteen dollars secured a quarter section of government land with the provisions that taxes would be waived for five years, “or long enough to bring the land into a state of cultivation.” However, one must be afraid to work very hard for very little, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s sister-in-law continues, for “they will find abundant need of all their energies in improving their own land.”³³

For the Pinellas vacationer, however, the United States Railroad Administration assured those coming to the lovely city in 1919, that not only were St. Petersburg’s gulf beaches accessible by a new automobile bridge, but, “the great number of bright, sunny days and its genial climate make it especially agreeable to those who seek rest and recuperation.” St. Petersburg, the guidebook championed, “is essentially a winter home resort, and is the center of a colony of northern people who have built beautiful cottages, and who have established here a charming social life under ideal conditions.”³⁴

The St. Petersburg Board of Trade, established in 1899 and rechristened as the

³² Frank T. Hurley Jr., *Surf, Sand and Postcard Sunsets: A History of Pass-A-Grille and the Gulf Beaches* (St. Petersburg, Florida: Great Outdoors Pub., 1977), 29-30; Grismer, *The Story of St. Petersburg*, 136; Hampton Dunn, “Ponce De Leon Slept Here: A History of Tourism in Florida,” *Hampton Dunn Collection*, University of South Florida: Special Collections; Jose Gaspar, said to have pirated and plundered local waters, became an icon in 1904. Tampa Bay citizens playfully celebrate the yearly Gasparilla invasion.

³³ Gene Burnett, *Florida's Past: Vol. 2.* (Sarasota, Florida: Pineapple Press, 1988), 184; Eunice White Beecher, “Mrs. Henry Ward Beecher,” *Letters from Florida* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1879), 12-13.

³⁴ United States Railroad Administration, *Florida and Southern Winter Resorts* (1919).

Chamber of Commerce in 1920, recognized the disparity between pioneering tales such as Beecher's, and the enthusiastic salesmanship of railroad companies. Mixing both messages, the Board produced their own handbills stating "a man with the same intelligence and energy required for success in the north" could make more on ten acres in the South than a Northerner could with eighty, all while living in a climate "where the summer and flowers never die." Indeed the leaflet affirmed, "Florida is the land of opportunity; but the idler, the lazy man, the chronic kicker, will find the same difficulties that beset him here as elsewhere."³⁵

As that "great and noble experiment" of Prohibition was finding its way to Pinellas County in the early years of the twentieth century, bridging the barrier islands to the mainland topped civic leader's and developers' agenda. Owner of five hundred acres on the northern portion of Long Key, William McAdoo hired a St. Petersburg's Municipal Pier contractor to span Boca Ciega Bay and connect the island to mainland St. Petersburg. Running two lanes from the west shore of St. Petersburg, at Villa Grande Avenue, motorists on William McAdoo's bridge would disembark at today's Eighty-Seventh Avenue on Long Key. The wood slatted, rickety construction, toll and all, connected St. Petersburg to McAdoo's new project, St. Petersburg Beach. Despite complaints that "he charged a toll and operated at his whim," said Jari Mogavero, site coordinator of the Gulf Beaches Historical Museum in Pass-A-Grille, McAdoo's bridge was a great achievement for local tourism and the barrier island bound.³⁶

³⁵ St. Petersburg Board of Trade, *Souvenir Pamphlet*, St. Petersburg Museum of History: Chamber of Commerce Collections, c1919.

³⁶ Jari Mogavero, Interview by author. Gulf Beaches Museum of History, St. Pete Beach, Fl. April 1, 2006.

While the bridge lasted nearly a decade, McAdoo's land holdings on Long Key were entrenched in legal issues and greed for many years. Regardless of his business prowess, McAdoo and his teeth-rattling bridge drew attention to St. Petersburg and helped establish its gulf beaches. One entertaining tale of William McAdoo's attempt at selling his grand plan of a seaside attraction on the small island deals with boom time antics and buried treasure. Bordering McAdoo's property sat another small barrier island to the north. With the help of a few accomplices and a sturdy wagon, McAdoo had devised a devious plan to make headlines for his beach assets. In the stealth of night, McAdoo buried a large wooden chest loaded with lead weights near waters edge. The following morning, ensuring that several tourists were in view to witness the "discovery," McAdoo and his crew removed the "treasure," loading it on a drawn wagon. With McAdoo driving and his shotgun-brandishing partners protecting their find, the trio headed into St. Petersburg where the "treasure chest" took center stage in the front window of a local downtown bank. The modern day pirate's plan backfired. An incorrect account soon spread that the chest had been unearthed on the island adjacent to McAdoo's St. Petersburg Beach, stripping the island of a tall tale and permanently labeling the key to the north "Treasure Island."³⁷

Although the Pinellas barrier islands have a long, rich history of settlers, "real development," wrote Karl Grismer in *The Story of St. Petersburg* "began with the completion of the bridge." No longer required to secure passage aboard a vessel to visit Pass-a-Grille, Sunday drivers and winter residents welcomed the span. By 1928, tourists turned out in droves to visit pristine beaches, supped on fifty-cent seaside smorgasbords,

³⁷ Frank Hurley, Jr. Interview by Author. June 17, 2006.

and gawked at Thomas Rowe's impressive Don CeSar hotel.³⁸

Erected at a cost of \$1.5 million and named for a renowned opera, Rowe's Don CeSar added "another big attraction to the Sunshine City as the largest and most magnificent hotel on the Gulf of Mexico." As Pass-a-Grille became "an important center of social life," Thomas Rowe's towering pink stucco and stone hotel, "the Don," became a playground for the rich and famous. McAdoo's bridge, like Rowe's majestic Don CeSar, would grace the cover of tourist post cards, illustrating the rickety toll overpass and the cerulean waters of Boca Ciega Bay below.³⁹

Foley's Ferry Finds Frontier

While George S. Gandy was accomplishing the east-west dream of spanning the bay, St. Petersburg real estate pioneer J.G. Foley and civic booster Charles Carter devised a solution for the north-south problem. Before the Gandy Bridge, travel from St. Petersburg to Bradenton required a ninety-mile adventure. This trip followed a route through northern Pinellas, eastward to Tampa, then the final sixty-mile southwest stretch to Manatee County. Although George Gandy's bridge connected Tampa to Pinellas and the Gulf beaches, reducing the St. Petersburg to Bradenton journey nearly by one-half, folks in southern Pinellas felt this to be an unnecessarily long trek for a destination only seven miles to the south.⁴⁰

Rather than using costly steel and cantilevered concrete to span the mouth of

³⁸ Grismer, *The Story of St. Petersburg*, 134-135; Jackie Shewmaker, Interview by author. Gulf Beaches Museum of History. St. Pete Beach, Florida. March 25, 2006.

³⁹ Stockbridge, Frank, and John Perry, *So This is Florida* (John H. Perry Publishing, 1938), 177; Hurley, *Surf, Sand and Postcard Sunsets*, 162.

⁴⁰ William Frazer and John Guthrie Jr., *The Florida Land Boom: Speculation, Money and the Banks* (Westport, Connecticut: Quorum Books, 1995), 133-135; Federal Writers Project, *Florida: A Guide to the Southernmost State* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1939), 287-288.

Tampa Bay, entrepreneurs Carter and Foley decided on a more attainable and affordable solution. Their idea was to shuttle automobiles and their passengers across the bay by boat. The partnership organized and launched the Bee Line Ferry Company in February 1926. The ferry departed from Pinellas Point every forty-five minutes, heading southbound and docking at the northern tip of Manatee County. The Bee Line's southern terminus, Piney Point, was reached in less than forty minutes, and traversed, as the company promoted, "the last American Frontier." The Bee Line junket described the portage as a nature excursion that afforded commuters the opportunity to soak in the tranquil surroundings hassle free. For three dollars, passengers could park their autos, then leisurely watch seagulls and pelicans gliding above the ocean spray, while wave-riding dolphins frolicked in the bay.⁴¹

So popular and practical was the Bee Line fleet, it rapidly expanded to three diesel ferryboats: the *Pinellas*, the *Manatee*, and the *Sarasota*. Daily, the aptly named trio jointly shuttled about fifteen hundred automobiles and their passengers—saving their clients forty-nine miles of non air-conditioned driving each way. Although a round trip cost three dollars per auto, passengers on foot or bicycle paid only twenty-five cents each way. Due to a two thousand percent increase of automobile traffic on Pinellas roads in the first few years of the company's operation, the wait often took hours. Nevertheless, the ferry ride did offer foodstuffs, as much salt air as one could breathe, and a welcome respite from the bone jarring drive *around* Tampa Bay. "The value of this ferry can hardly be overestimated," forecasted *The Tourist News*, "St. Petersburg will be on direct

⁴¹ Grismer, *The Story of St. Petersburg*, 212-215; Philip Morgan, "Sunshine Skyway's History Spans 45 years," *Tampa Tribune*, Sept. 6, 1999.

route to Miami and other points in the extreme southern part of the state.”⁴²

Busboys Become Businessmen

Many events coalesced in St. Petersburg in the early 1920s to create the whirlwind real estate frenzy known primarily after its subsequent collapse in 1925-26 as the Boom. Whether the primary cause was Henry Ford’s suggestion of a five-dollar-a-day minimum wage, combined with massive postwar layoffs that sent investors southbound with pockets full of life savings and severance pay, or the 1921 Gulf Coast hurricane which prompted massive repairs and construction in Pinellas, is unclear. What is certain, however, is that for several untamed years, St. Petersburg, like many Florida communities, rapidly expanded. A dozen impressive hotels and hundreds of apartment units sprang up from the once barren sandlots. The resulting building frenzy fed the dreams of many men bent on spanning the bays surrounding Pinellas.

Between the construction of the Gandy Bridge and the Bee Line Ferry, Florida’s latest building bubble began to deteriorate. Speculation and greed made way for railroad embargoes on the East Coast, limiting the amount of building goods available for construction. With the capsizing of the *Prinz Valdemar* in Miami Harbor, in January 1925, and the jammed shipping routes that followed, Bankers and developers were forced to foreclose on pending projects or severely limit further building. Paper profits were like confetti blown to the wind by September 1926, however, when a mighty hurricane blew through Miami, destroying countless dreams and pushing Florida into an economic tailspin years ahead of the nation.

⁴² Pinellas Planning Council, *Historical Background of Pinellas County, Florida*; Ruth Marshall, “Via the Bee Line” *Tourist News*, Sept. 18, 1926, 9; Morgan Stinemetz, “Bee Line Ferry was a Great Way to Travel,” *Sarasota Herald Tribune*, Oct. 11, 2004.

Within a few weeks following the Bee Line's inaugural run, John Lodwick and other city representatives, along with railroad officials, Chamber members, bankers, and merchants statewide, gathered in Jacksonville. Chaired by Peter O. Knight, the "Florida Takes Inventory Congress" sought to address the concerns of citizens, civic leaders and officials from dozens of communities in response to the sudden shift in prosperous times.⁴³

Nearly as quick as it made businessmen out of busboys, the building boom had come to a screeching halt. In several short years, St. Petersburg had more half-completed infrastructures and vacant lots than it could fill in several decades. Massive road paving projects, sewer and water distribution points, and platted subdivisions lay idle in the remotest of areas. While significant improvements and advancements had been achieved for St. Petersburg during the boom years, the majority of land caught up in those dizzying days was now vacant and unfulfilled vision. Consider that in the November 22, 1925 edition of the *St. Petersburg Times*, there were over one hundred thirty pages advertising boom-era real estate sales alone. "But, remember, the 1925 boom was not an urge to retire to a pleasant cottage in Florida or bask in luxurious villas or seaside hotels," wrote realtor cum historian Walter P. Fuller of the frenzy. "It was, instead, a greedy delirium to acquire riches overnight without benefit of effort, brains, or services rendered."⁴⁴

It would seem that few factors could compete with the bust and its impact on tourism in Florida. Fortunately, for St. Petersburg, the city had its sunshine, superlative surroundings, miles of new roads, along with instrumental bridges and ferries connecting the city to points east, west, and south. Because it still housed unlimited boosters and

⁴³ "Many to Attend Inventory Meet," *New Smyrna Daily News*, March 31, 1926, 8.

⁴⁴ Fuller. *This Was Florida's Boom*, 22.

boasters eager to sell St. Petersburg to the tourist trade, the city fared better than most during the depression years. More obviously, the Sunshine City employed a sophisticated weapon during those cloudy days, the master of media attention: John Lodwick.

Chapter Two: The City that Advertising Built

Although it had taken John Lodwick less than ten minutes to pitch his promotional services to St. Petersburg Board of Trade secretary L.A. Whitney, Lodwick spent the rest of his life selling the Sunshine City. Hired on the spot in 1918, Lodwick had made his way to St. Petersburg with the very intention of becoming the first press agent for a Florida city. For Ohioan John Lodwick, during Cleveland's cold bitter days immediately following the end of the First World War, "the promise of glad days upon wide stretches of sandy beaches had an irresistible appeal." In those early days, few knew of St. Petersburg's charm and endless sunshine, and even fewer knew of the ample sunbathing and sporting events available on its ample shores. After nearly two decades of promoting, Lodwick's "constant pounding of the name St. Petersburg... made it one of the world's best known resorts."¹

Through paid advertisements and costly publications, boosting the city essentially founded St. Petersburg, but John Lodwick's design was as ingenious as it was cost-effective. At a time when Jack Frost was tweaking Northern noses, and the weather foul, Lodwick's pictures of bathing beauties frolicking in one-piece swimsuits garnered national press. All industry-free St. Petersburg had to sell was its sunshine, sand, and inviting environment. With the clever and cunning John Lodwick on the scene, St. Petersburg rapidly rose to world championship status, literally. Starting as the mid-

¹ Graham, "City Publicity Bureau Had Its Inception In Blizzard in the North," *Evening Independent*, Nov. 7, 1938.

twenties land boom was withering, and interest in Florida speculation plummeted, Lodwick devised a plan to make St. Petersburg the headquarters for a myriad of sports competitions. Tossing a tag line of “World Championship” on activities such as shuffleboard, horseshoes, chess, and lawn bowling, the city appeared in sports and society pages in newspapers nationwide. So well known was Lodwick’s influence as “the man who organized National Horseshoe Championships,” his rules and regulations of the “game every boy in America can get into” appeared in publications nationally.²

Like many masters of semantic sculpting, John Lodwick engaged his audience at a personal level. Whether they stayed for a weekend or a winter season, publicity material and other professional promotional prose recognized consumer penchant for activity, adventure, interaction, as well as his desire for being seen in the “playground of (one’s) dream.” Advertisements appearing in the January 1923 *New York Times*, for example, reminded readers they could travel to St. Petersburg, “where the sunshine is in people’s hearts as well overhead,” in a mere forty-four hours. “An alluring city for rest or relaxation,” 1920s St. Petersburg offered “golfing, bathing, boating, fishing, trap-shooting, tennis,” and “comfortable seats everywhere to rest and enjoy the sunshine and pastimes.” Lacking any hesitation, St. Petersburg’s booster sold the city as “the playground of your dreams, with accommodations to suit everyone.” Indeed, the Chamber of Commerce suggested, it was a virtual paradise for all who entered.³

Attempting to distinguish between the “staged” and the “authentic” vacation may have been less of a concern in early-twentieth-century promotional literature, suggest authors Hans Christian Anderson and Mike Robinson after investigating the

² John Lodwick, “Quoits and Horseshoes Easy for all Juniors,” *Oakland Tribune*, April 29, 1926, 31.

³ *New York Times*, 7 Jan. 1923, 8; *New York Times*, 21 Jan. 1923, 9.

consequences of literature on tourism. Literature's relationship within tourism may indeed be little more than a "created cultural form," available for commoditization as Dr. Anderson and Professor Robinson propose. John Lodwick typified the commoditization of "created cultural form" through his unique style of selling St. Petersburg.⁴

Known for his aptly titled "Lodwick Technique," the pitchman gathered newly registered guests, and took their photo alongside a recent catch from the pier, beside a bathing beauty, or under a shady palm tree. Anything indicative of the grand time tourists could have was fair game for John Lodwick. After a little polish and creative editing, he would then submit the "candid" shot with a prewritten script to the traveler's hometown newspaper. With one out of every four or five visitors registering with the Chamber of Commerce and Society Clubs, and Lodwick's endless effort to make contact with each guest, St. Petersburg received countless dollars worth of publicity as editors eagerly printed their citizen's exploits in the Sunshine City. Those tourists who had their photos captured and captioned by Lodwick surely did not mind playing a lead role in the Florida fantasy. The "reality" of John Lodwick's approach, however, mattered little since his imaginings could become genuine for the visiting tourist – or at least by the time their adventure was repeatedly retold back home.⁵

Prescribing Paradise

Since the final days of the nineteenth century, St. Petersburg's offerings received rave reviews and encouraging editorials, very much in the same manner that John

⁴ Hans Christian Andersen and Mike Robinson, *Literature and Tourism: Essays in the Reading and Writing of Tourism* (London: Thomson Learning, 2003), xiii, 5, 22-23, 40.

⁵ Rick Baker, *Mangroves to Major League, a timeline of St. Petersburg, Florida* (St. Petersburg: Southern Heritage Press, 2000); Arsenault, *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream*, 186.

Lodwick successfully emulated two decades later. One such perspective, in particular, attests to the unlimited advantage of the testimonial, and space afforded to the personal communiqué. Published in Woodstock, Virginia, the January 1899 testament of Virginian J.L. Wisman appeared in the *Shenandoah Herald* on the following Valentines Day:

ST. PETERSBURG, FLA.

January 31, 1899

Mr. Editor: -

I would like to tell you something of this, my second visit to this beautiful town, and, first of all of the delightful weather in this the most favored section of Sunny Florida. It is seldom that one seeks a fire here, and so far as the temperature is concerned, it is all that one could wish.

St. Petersburg's growth since I was here two years ago has been magical. Sixth avenue, the business street, and on which is located the Detroit and other hotels, has shelled streets, taken from deposits of fish bone shells, etc., found in the creeks and bayous, which make a beautiful and substantial roadway. It is a beautiful sight looking shoreward from the bay. A gradual rise of 60 feet to the half mile brings out prominently every portion of the town, and the pier which runs out three-quarters of a mile to deep water, always presents some features of interest to the stranger.

There is no doubt in my mind, having visited all sections of this state, but that St. Petersburg and vicinity enjoy many natural advantages not possessed by any other section of Florida.

A letter from home several days since informed me of the extremely bad weather you have beer having lately, which makes me wish all the more you could enjoy the delightful climate here. I actually believe if the people of Virginia and the more northern states had the slightest idea of conditions as they really exist in Florida, the state would not be large enough to entertain the guests to say nothing of those who would make this their future home. I have not found the 'spring of perpetual youth,' for which Ponce de Leon hunted so assiduously, but am thoroughly satisfied with my trip and know that I am greatly benefited.

J.L. Wisman⁶

So enthralled was Wisman with St. Petersburg that he continued to winter in the city for the next several years. Rarely missing an opportunity to share his knowledge of

⁶ J.L. Wisman, Editorial, *Shenandoah Herald*, Feb. 14, 1899.

the growing city to the good folks of Woodstock, Wisman wrote the *Shenandoah* with regularity. Just what was it that inspired vacationers to become walking, talking boosters of the tiny town? Could it truly be as simple as the congeniality among locals and the wide-open embrace tourists received upon arrival, mixed with ample sunshine? Answers are as numerous as Florida's sunny days; however, repeated and relentless praise of the city magnified St. Petersburg's achievements in more locations, and far cheaper than any slick big-city advertising firm. Again, the power and persuasion of testimonials are apparent in a final look into the endorsing and optimistic writings of Wisman:

ST. PETERSBURG, FLA.

Feb. 5th, 1902

Mr. Editor:

As my former letters to the *HERALD* have escaped the waste basket I will ask your kind indulgence once more, as this the shortest means of communication to my friends in old Virginia. It saves me many letters and reaches a larger circle than I could by letters...

I will now give you a further description of what St. Petersburg has: a bank, two saloons, seven hotels, one railroad, three dairies, two bakeries, a public park, 1 bicycle shop, 1 ice factory, bottling works, an ice factory, an opera house, two fruit stores, two restaurants, four drug stores, one curio bazaar, two undertakers, two jewelry stores, two livery stables, one barrel factory, one ladies' bazaar, a telephone system, two cigar factories, one furniture store, three barber shops, three meat markets, one stationary store, seven grocery stores, fine dry good stores, eight church edifices, an electric light plant, a fire department, score of boarding houses, two fruit packing houses, public water works system, 2,000 inhabitants, two newspapers, two hardware and furniture stores, two shoe and gents' furnishing goods stores, a graded and high school, one of the best auditorium buildings in the south, a normal industrial and manual training school &c., a surrounding country dotted with finest orange, grape, tangerine and other citrus fruit groves, pineapple plantations, truck farms and gardens in Florida, and plenty of room for more.

J.L. Wisman⁷

⁷ J.L. Wisman, Editorial. *Shenandoah Herald*, Feb. 7, 1902.

Wisman was far from alone in lauding the land of sunshine. As early as 1874 the medical profession sought a climate conducive to patient recovery and relaxation. They found it in Florida. In April 1885, at the New Orleans American Medical Association conference Dr. Washington Chew Van Bibber spoke of the benefits of Gulf Coast climate and topography. First suggested by London physician B. W. Richardson in 1874, the search for a “Health City” captivated many. Dr. Van Bibber answered the call in a summation of surveys and findings conducted by several field researchers. His conclusion declared Pinellas and its islands the healthiest and “best climate in Florida.”⁸

Entitled “*Peninsular and Sub-Peninsular Air and Climates: A Contribution to Sanitary Science, relating especially to the climate and healthfulness of Pinellas Peninsula, Florida,*” Dr. Van Bibber’s essay stressed several particulars, the first of which were scientific findings suggesting peninsulas and sub-peninsulas, such as Pinellas, benefited from advanced air and climate qualities more than their landlocked counterparts. Dr. Van Bibber’s proposition to sanitarium science called for the immediate construction of a “Health City.” He predicted “invalids and pleasure seekers, from all lands, will come to enjoy the delights of a winter climate, which, all things considered can probably have no equal elsewhere.” In answering the question as to where to build such a city, Van Bibber’s paper unequivocally stated construction of such a community should take place on the Pinellas Peninsula, adjacent to the “Gulf of Mexico, with the broad waters of a beautiful bay nearly surrounding it.”⁹

⁸ Grismer, *The Story of St. Petersburg*, 14; Hurley, *Surf, Sand and Postcard Sunsets*, 40; Washington Chew Van Bibber, “Peninsular and Sub-Peninsular Air and Climates: A Contribution to Sanitary Science, Relating Especially to the Climate and Healthfulness of Pinellas Peninsula, Florida,” 1885.

⁹ Grismer, *The Story of St. Petersburg*, 14; Hurley, *Surf, Sand and Postcard Sunsets*, 40; Van Bibber, “Peninsular and Sub-Peninsular Air and Climates,” 1885.

By 1914, additional tempting testimonials found their way into the February edition of “Florida’s Health Notes.” Published monthly by Florida’s State Board of Health, the publication listed the vital statistics of various cities. One particular report by St. Petersburg City Health Officer Dr. William M. Davis investigates St. Petersburg’s mortality rates. Dr. Davis summarized that “the low resident death rates corroborates what St. Petersburg claims to be – a health resort.” While early publicity of Pinellas owes much to these medical testimonials, one must note here the interest of two other men, Gustave Gehring and Frank A. Davis, who heard of Van Bibber’s high praise for the Pinellas area and its seemingly therapeutic environs. In 1892, seven years after Dr. Van Bibber’s proposal, local settler Zephaniah Phillips sold forty-five acres of his Long Key homestead to Dr. Gustave P. Gehring, who proposed building a sanitarium on the barrier key. His dream of an island oasis for the infirm, though, which had cost him eight hundred dollars, died in less than three years. By 1895, Dr. Gehring sold his shares, at a two hundred dollar profit, to four enterprising souls who attempted to create their own enclave, Morey Beach, named after the principal investor. Phillips, Long Key’s first homesteader, held the deed to an additional thirty-five acres and platted his land under a more familiar name, Pass-a-Grille City.¹⁰

Additional attempts to alter portions of Pinellas into a themed landscape continued. In 1906, Frank A. Davis, with the backing of Captain J.F. Chase, purchased two hundred acres of nearby Disston City (modern day Gulfport) with the intent on creating a Civil War veterans’ hideaway and retirement paradise. Like Florida’s largest landowner, Hamilton Disston, before him, F.A Davis bragged and boasted of southern

¹⁰ “Florida Health Notes” *Florida Board of Health*, February 1914; Hurley, *Surf, Sand and Postcard Sunsets*, 40; Grismer, *The Story of St. Petersburg*, 14.

Pinellas, but met with lackluster results in selling his tropical oasis. Throughout the later part of the century, Davis, who had been in New Orleans when Van Bibber read his “health city” paper, utilized his Philadelphia publishing company to reprint the report many times over. According to Robert Craven Jr., grandnephew of F.A Davis, his great uncle was greatly influenced by Van Bibber’s 1885 AMA conference report. For several years, Davis printed promotional pamphlets about the Pinellas Peninsula and its salutary benefits. From his “Facts and Suggestions for Persons Forced to Seek Permanent or Temporary Homes on the Pinellas Peninsula,” compiled in 1896, and his 1901 “Progress and Possibilities of St. Petersburg,” to his 1906 “Souvenir –St. Petersburg, the Pleasure City of the South,” F.A. Davis encouraged Northern doctors and tourists to experience Florida’s healthiest spot, St. Petersburg.¹¹

Several years later, with the Disston/Veteran City debacle behind him and requiring the healthy climes of Florida himself, Frank A. Davis proposed to build a sanitarium in nearby Tarpon Springs. Although the idea failed due to lack of interest, Davis remained in Pinellas and eventually brought an electrical plant to St. Petersburg and many other infrastructures required of growing city. As for Van Bibber, he too made an attempt at a Southern sanitarium prior to his medical findings, perhaps prompting him to promote Pinellas. Although he was not a direct owner, Van Bibber sent his son Claude and three investing Baltimoreans to secure what he deemed the best portion of Pinellas. Their purchase of the Pinellas Point from Maximo Hernandez’ widow, the areas first homesteaders, never saw the first sign of development and foreclosed. The investment

¹¹ Craven, Robert Jr., “Message From the President – 2004. F.A Davis Company,” www.fadavis.com/about_us/president_letter/letter_2004.cfm; Page S. Jackson, *St. Petersburg: An Informal History* (St. Petersburg, Fl: Great Outdoors Publishing Co., 1962), 88.

group quietly abandoned the land for back taxes. Though it may have been Dr. Van Bibber's financial goal to promote the area, it was certainly the countless references by Frank A. Davis, and subsequent reprinting of the Van Bibber report, which secured Pinellas's attraction to Northern visitors, and encouraged doctors in prescribing the destination for consumptives and invalids. "We can thank Providence for the peninsular setting, the blue skies and waters and the sunshine, reported the *Times* nearly a century later. "It just needed a little promotion. And for that we can thank the physician who proclaimed St. Petersburg the healthiest spot on Earth." ¹²

Turning Liquid to Land

After years of publicity stunts and promotions, St. Petersburg's grand entrance into the second decade of the twentieth century was unavoidable. The Sunshine City soon outpaced nearly every Florida town in growth and construction. Rivaling Miami Beach, while surpassing Jacksonville, and Tampa across the bay, St. Petersburg recorded well over twenty million dollars worth of building in 1925 alone. Accompanying the bay bridges and Bee Line ferry services, extensive changes occurred on Tampa Bay's waterfront. Turning liquid into land, as the adage goes, civic leaders and developers trenched and filled along the shorelines, creating artificial inlets and man-made islands for further speculation and lot sales. Resident C. Perry Snell epitomized the term 'land developer' through his dredged enclave, Snell Isle.¹³

¹² Hurley, *Surf, Sand and Postcard Sunsets*, 40; Fuller, *St. Petersburg and its People*, 9; Jackson, *St. Petersburg*, 88; Jim Schnur, "In Search of 'Health City,' but finding Yellow Fever," *Punta Pinal Newsletter*, Pinellas County Historical Society: Volume XXXII, No.2, June 2005; Jeanette Crane, "We Will be Known by What we Preserve," *Evening Independent*, May 25, 1979, 1-D.

¹³ "Florida Construction," *Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 9, 1926, 5.

During the heady boom years, 1921-1926, St. Petersburg proper expanded from eleven to fifty-three square miles in size. While many of the landscapes featured in the city's late 1920s advertisements simply were not there a few years prior, significant lands came into St. Petersburg's tax rolls through annexation. Additional land literally came forth from the oceans. Drastic alterations of the land occurred as developers emulated Tampa's Davis Islands and Carl Fisher's Miami Beach by scouring the bottoms of bays for salvageable sand to dredge and build upon. Where once stood a small spoil island, often submerged at high tide, land appeared nearly overnight. C. Perry Snell, self-proclaimed pioneer land developer and donator of downtown waterfront parks, opened the upscale Snell Isle subdivision in late 1925. His promotional plan called for clubhouses, golf courses, and fine stately homes, all on a pristine, yet pricey 275-acre island. In all actuality, Snell probably had less than forty or fifty acres that were above sea level at the time; but then came the dredges, dikes, and the determined men that transformed St. Petersburg's bays and waterfronts. Tourists turned buyers had their choice of hotels to pass the time during construction, but Snell shrewdly offered other accommodations, built on site, and recreation while they waited. From Shuffleboard and sunbathing, to unexcelled golf and gulf fishing, tourists had numerous options in St. Petersburg. There were concerts in Williams Park, horseshoes and lawn bowling on just about every open public park, and for those wishing to move their card games or nightly dancing closer to water's edge there was the newly created Million Dollar Pier.¹⁴

Since 1889, several piers of some fashion have extended from St. Petersburg's

¹⁴ C. Perry Snell, "Hours of Toil Bring Success to Enterprise," *St. Petersburg Times*, Jan. 30, 1927, 4; "City Park System Owes its Growth to Snell's Help," *St. Petersburg Times*, Jan. 30, 1927; Arsenault, *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream*, 198-201 ; Jean Monk, "St. Petersburg is Playground, Reporter Finds," *St. Petersburg Times*, Jan. 11, 1936.

shores, stretching into Tampa Bay. The railroad pier, for example, offered unlimited opportunities for anglers, sunbathers, and the carefree who dared the pier's toboggan slide. Following years of pier wars, waterfront improvement initiatives, and the devastating 1921 hurricane, boosters and civic leaders pushed for a grander replacement to the beloved attractions. With a name to match the construction costs, the Million Dollar Pier opened in 1926 to immediate fanfare. The Mediterranean-themed Pier, *Evening Independent* publisher Lew Brown's brainchild, offered dancing, shopping, and recreation. Since the city's birth, piers had proved popular, but the 1926 incarnation added an "instant destination for sun-seeking tourists to visit – and spend their money in St. Petersburg."¹⁵

As city boundaries expanded and scores of impressive boom-time hotels rose skyward, so did land prices and census figures. St. Petersburg's citizen count, which topped fourteen thousand by 1920, had nearly doubled as the boom was in full swing four years later. It paled in comparison, however, to the tens of thousands of annual visitors to the area. If automobile traffic figures offer indications to St. Petersburg's success then consider that in the first eighteen months following the 1924 opening of the Gandy Bridge, more than one million vehicles carrying Floridians, tourists, and their cargo, crossed Tampa Bay. Blessed with large and lavish hotels and more than seven thousand rooms for rent, 1920s St. Petersburg had truly become a major tourist destination. Travelers who dared not part with their hard-earned pay, yet yearned to see the southernmost state, flocked to Florida in their Model T Fords.¹⁶

¹⁵ David K. Rogers, "Proposal to honor editor is under fire," *St. Petersburg Times*, Nov. 25, 1997, B1.

¹⁶ "Florida Construction," *Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 9, 1926, 5; "Gandy Bridge," *Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 14, 1926.

Ford's Freeloaders

Lodging in Florida underwent drastic changes as the automobile dominated the tourist scene. While hotels remained the preferred choice for many guests, automobile enthusiasts embraced the freedoms that auto-camping brought, both financially and figuratively. For nearly three decades, Henry Ford's Model T, dominated the motorist movement. Lovingly labeled the Tin Lizzie, more than fifteen million Model T's rolled off Detroit, Michigan assembly lines. Straining its thin twelve-spoke wheels and twenty horsepower engine, drivers destined for a Florida retreat outfitted their touring cars with most anything needed on the journey. Packed with overflowing provisions, many of which were in tin cans, autos of all makes came together on the shores of Florida. Henry Ford himself became a regular visitor to the Sunshine State.¹⁷

"I will build a motor car for the great multitude," Henry Ford promised, "constructed of the best materials, by the best men to be hired, after the simplest designs that modern engineering can devise." More importantly and instrumental, Ford added in his 1908 Model T introductory speech, his motor car would be "so low in price that no man making a good salary will be unable to own one and enjoy with his family the blessings of hours of pleasure in God's great open spaces." Living up to his own message, Henry Ford spent countless moments touring and examining "God's great open spaces" in his Model T. Cruising on tires his passenger Harvey Firestone manufactured, while in a car he designed, Henry Ford often went camping with such luminaries as Thomas Edison, Teddy Roosevelt, and Warren Harding. Both Edison and Ford found Florida's west coast climate ideal. By 1916, after two decades of friendship, Ford and

¹⁷ Nick Wynne, *Tin Can Tourists in Florida 1900-1970* (Charleston, SC : Arcadia Press, 1999), 69; Kenneth T. Jackson, "The Crabgrass Frontier: 150 Years of Suburban Growth in America," 212.

Edison became neighbors in Ft. Myers, one hundred miles south of St. Petersburg.¹⁸

Ford's tourist advice and touring automobiles transformed many southern cities. "The boom in auto camping," offers one historian, "led initially to the establishment of public campgrounds, often in city parks." In St. Petersburg and Tampa, the tin can tourist was a welcome sight, at first. "Practically every Florida town and city, large and small, located inland or on the gulf," described an early travelogue, "provides a tin-can town or tin-can village for the tin-can tourist." Under the direction of Mayor Noel Mitchell, St. Petersburg's public Tent City provided low-cost, short-term accommodations to the independent, automobile-based traveler. Accustomed to drawing in visitors who could not - or would not - spend their hard-earned dollars in hotel fees, many Florida cities had hoped that automobile and trailer parks would recoup these losses in amenities and service fees.¹⁹

The success of the 1920-1921 tin-can tourist season was soon overshadowed by growing resentment towards "freeloaders." Many tin-can towns found "that an open handed and unsupervised welcome to any person (brought) nothing but annoyances, losses, and misery." Tin-can tourists were considered "pariahs" endeavoring to live on the cheap and undercutting seasonal labor wages, summarized one historian; thus it is unsurprising that many citizens discouraged the invasion of "automobile hobos." When the expected economic windfall failed to appear, many parks closed or turned to privatization. Such was the case for St. Petersburg's public Tent City. While criticism followed Noel Mitchell's campground initiative, few complained about his greatest

¹⁸Warren Susman, "Cultural Heroes: Ford, Barton, Ruth," in *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Warren I. Susman (Pantheon: New York, 1984), 122-149.

¹⁹Weiss, "Tourism in America Before World War II," 313; Roberts, *Sun Hunting*, 2, 92-93.

contribution to the Sunshine City, and its everlasting promotion, the grand and plentiful downtown benches.²⁰

Originally constructed in 1907, with broad seats and high backs, and painted orange, Mayor Noel Mitchell's addition of wooden benches outside his downtown St. Petersburg real estate business caught the attention of weary tourists and local merchants. Designed to offer plenty of room for the fatigued soul, and space for Noel "the Sandman" Mitchell's advertisements, the benches sprouted along downtown business storefronts. Several years, and mayoral elections later, the lack of uniform sizes, color, and garish advertisements prompted Mayor Al Lang to set a few standards. First, the benches must all match in dimensions, Lang insisted. More importantly, each bench was to follow the number of color choices first offered for the Model T, one. Instead of black, as required by Henry Ford due to its faster drying time, Al Lang selected a deep, dark green as the sole palette. Amidst much grumbling and protest, the ordinance took effect in 1916, creating an instant trademark for the city of St. Petersburg. In the decades to follow, Mitchell's construction, and Lang's subsequent standardization of the beloved benches paid homage to St. Petersburg's dedication to recuperation, relaxation, and recreation.²¹

Sunshine and Suckers

By 1924, advertisements in the *New York Times* claimed an estimated fifty thousand sightseers annually visited St. Petersburg, making it "one of Florida's most beautiful and popular winter resorts." Many tourists and land speculators chose to hang about and make their homes in the Sunshine City. The larger the geographically southern

²⁰ Weiss, "Tourism in America Before World War II," 313; Roberts, *Sun Hunting*, 2, 92-93.

²¹ Hampton Dunn, *Yesterday's St. Petersburg* (Miami: E.A. Seemann Pub., 1973), 29; Arsenault, *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream*, 136-137.

municipality of St. Petersburg grew, however, the more “northern” in citizenry it became. With each passing census, the city housed more and more New England and Midwestern residents, eager to escape the brutal cold seasons.²²

John Lodwick’s widely submitted articles enticed the freezing citizens of North America with promises of idle days in store for “winter visitors who have sought out this haven of relief from the colds and chills,” prevalent in northern climes. Like many other Southern cities, St. Petersburg has a nickname, or a slogan, as historians Stockbridge and Perry were apt to say; and the *Sunshine City’s* charm seemed as contagious as it was captivating. As early as 1910, St. Petersburg’s *Evening Independent* newspaper distributed, free of charge, every copy that came off the presses any day the sun failed to appear. Lew Brown, the *Independent’s* editor and vigorous promoter of St. Petersburg’s public waterfront, called his faith in dear old sol’s penchant for gracing Pinellas with its health rays the “Sunshine Offer.” Recalling P.T Barnum’s famous quip “that any man who should connect his advertising with the weather would make a tenstrike,” Lew Brown rolled out his “Sunshine Offer” in September 1910 with a full-page announcement. Word of the offer soon spread nationwide. “After two or three years,” reminisced Brown decades later, “full-page illustrated write-ups of the Sunshine offer were printed in the (multi-)colored Sunday supplements of practically all the great daily newspapers of the United States, giving it fourteen million (in) circulation.”²³

Until 1986, the *Independent* continued the tradition of free newspapers on sunless

²² “Bond Issue” *New York Times*. July 8, 1924, 25; Raymond Arsenault and Gary Mormino, “From Dixieland to Dreamland: Demographic and Cultural Change in Florida,” in *Shades of the Sunbelt: Essays on Ethnicity, Race and the Urban South*, ed. Randall M. Miller and George E. Pozzetta (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 170-175.

²³ John Lodwick, “St. Petersburg Sun Bathing Season On as Northland Shivers from Cold,” *Circleville Herald*, Feb. 9, 1929; “Major Brown Founds City’s Fame,” *Evening Independent*, Sept. 1, 1950, 2A; Fuller, *St. Petersburg and Its People*, 295-296.

days, averaging no more than four “free” editions per year. From the unwavering promotions and boasting from civic boosters like Frank Davis, Lew Brown, and John Lodwick, St. Petersburg’s catchphrase, “The Sunshine City,” could have very easily been “The City that Advertising Built,” as Stockbridge and Perry suggested in 1926. “For there is no other community in all Florida,” the authors note in *Florida in the Making*, “in which the united efforts of the entire citizenship have been so acutely and intelligently concentrated upon advertising its advantages.”²⁴

With all the hullabaloo and high praises of St. Petersburg and Florida’s west coast, the Roaring Twenties seemed an unstoppable era of wealth and growth. Realtors and binder-boys hawking the latest subdivision plan or available plat of land dominated the St. Petersburg scene. So tempting was the rags-to-riches delusion in St. Petersburg, the city claimed over six thousand realtors residing within its borders during the boom. Housing prices soared as investors and schemers sought out the Sunshine City for a quick profit. The roar was quick to turn into a whimper following the local real estate crash of the mid 1920s as buyers turned believers of the Florida Dream drove prices to the brink. Walter Fuller, once one of the largest landowners and developers of Pinellas County summarized the frenzy as “one of the periodic epidemics of gambling that have swept this country – a something-for-nothing fever with more color and substance than most.”²⁵

December 7, 1925, sixteen years prior to – and an ocean away from – the attack on Pearl Harbor, was nevertheless a day that indeed would live in infamy for many locals and investors as the clouds and skies over St. Petersburg grew more ominous with each passing hour. As the year 1926 was but a few weeks away, the tourist season was at its

²⁴ Fuller, *St. Petersburg and Its People*, 295-296; Stockbridge and Perry, *Florida in the Making*, 262.

²⁵ Fuller, *This Was Florida’s Boom*, 7.

pinnacle. On this very same day, delegates throughout the nation gathered in the city for the second day of a weeklong Convention of Investment Bankers Association. Cold and wet days lay ahead for the Sunshine City and its guests. The inclement and uninviting weather would last the whole convention. Convinced that claims of St. Petersburg's endless sunshine and curative climate, as well as Florida as a whole, were little more than boom-era ballyhoo, visiting bankers and financial investors left disgruntled and doubtful that the Florida boom should, or could continue. Investment bankers and city representatives hailing from other states encouraged citizens to be wary of Florida investments. Some even warned of a future bust.²⁶

During an interview with the *Wall Street Journal*, one investor warned "A bad condition is going to come about and the credit of Florida (will) be impaired" if Florida cities continue overextending themselves financially based on speculation and city indebtedness. Suddenly, the land boom ended as unexpectedly as it had begun."²⁷

Inflating A Grounded Economy

Between 1926 and 1927, St. Petersburg's construction and land speculation experienced a sharp decline. Gone were many of the laborers, construction crews, realtors, and the vast personnel support system required of a booming metropolis. Although a minor exodus of visitors occurred during these years, the tourist trade continued as northern investors rode Wall Street to the dizzying heights experienced prior to the nationwide economic downturn.

²⁶ *Florida: Souvenir of Florida Convention of Investment Bankers at St. Petersburg, December 6 to 12, 1925*, St. Petersburg Museum of History: Chamber of Commerce Collection.

²⁷ "Florida Cities Urged to Finance Closely," *Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 4, 1926, 8; Holly Atkins, "Wonders of Florida," *St. Petersburg Times*, May 27, 2002; Fuller, *This Was Florida's Boom*, 62.

Not all construction halted after the local speculation bust though. Through civic cajoling and government intervention, St. Petersburg's declaration of an industry-free downtown waterfront created much dredging activity in the Bayboro harbor. Constructed as a base of operation against prohibition-incited rumrunners and bootleggers, the United States Coast Guard opened a station on landfill created by the recent widening of shipping lanes. Additional acreage of Bayboro fill, dredged, dumped, and molded into land, turned into tarmacs, hangars, and airplanes. By 1929, Albert Whitted Airport opened for commercial aviation. Barely missing a beat, St. Petersburg's publicity director arranged for additional use of the facility prior to its completion.²⁸

As early as November 1928, John Lodwick's response to a grounded local economy was to stage a publicity stunt. Press releases announced the newest coming attraction to St. Petersburg, a Goodyear Blimp. Through his ties with businessmen and editors around the nation, Lodwick secured a small dirigible for the Sunshine City. Nearly half a football field in length and thirty-seven feet around, the Goodyear-Zeppelin Corporation's "Puritan" hailed from Lodwick's home state of Ohio. The Akron-based airship selected St. Petersburg as its southern base of operations, intending to study the area's climate and potential for future passenger possibilities.²⁹

Key West Citizen subscribers read of Lodwick's prediction that the arrival of the "Puritan" would be the first of its kind in Florida. "When the famous craft makes its

²⁸ Fuller, *St. Petersburg and its People*, 121; "Establish Southern Base for Baby Blimp," *Danville Bee*, Nov. 27, 1928; Arsenault, *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream*, 254.

²⁹ John Lodwick, "Southland's First Airship Base Located at St. Petersburg," *Cedar Rapids Tribune*, Dec. 28, 1928; John Lodwick, "Puritan to make Flight to Florida," *Key West Citizen*, Nov. 7, 1928; Note: Although Lodwick touted the arrival of the "Puritan" blimp to St. Petersburg, the good ship "Vigilant," according to Ohio's *Lima News* flew over the city as early as April 1930. Earlier in the year, the *Gettysburg Times* and the *Coshocton Tribune* reported the "Puritan," weighed down with sleet and ice, "ran into a (Kentucky) mountain," destroying the \$75,000 aircraft.

initial appearance,” Lodwick boasted, “100,000 west Floridians and winter visitors” will gather at Albert Whitted Airport to watch history in the making. Furthermore, Lodwick wrote of the baby blimp, “It is said that most of Florida travel from the North within the next ten years will be by this type of aircraft.” Little did Lodwick know that uncertainty would soon strike Wall Street or that Eastern Air Transport would extend their flying operations from New York into St. Petersburg. Both events helped turn Lodwick’s ambitions into a flying folly. “Even John Lodwick, the master of the well-timed publicity stunt, had not foreseen the stock market crash of October 1929,” historian Raymond Arsenault said of the city’s flying white elephant and costly storage. “As the hanger went up, the values of stock went down. And as the blimp glided among the clouds, the lofty dreams of the Sunshine City came crashing down.”³⁰

Between 1930 and 1931, as every local bank went insolvent, the speculative spending and extensive use of bonds for improvements saddled St. Petersburg with the nation’s second highest indebtedness of over eight hundred dollars per capita. Left with a huge overdue bill from an excessive past, St. Petersburg was ill equipped for the difficulties brought on by the Great Depression. As the national economy shrank by fifteen billion dollars, Florida tourism drastically decreased. By April 1930, real estate sales and total value of building permits plummeted to an all-time low. The worst was yet to come. At a staggering twenty-four million dollars, 1925 building permits values made investors giddy. However, 1932’s total value of building permits exceeded barely a quarter of a million dollars. St. Petersburg boom-fueled growth had ended, displacing more than ten thousand residents, though forty thousand residents remained in the city to

³⁰ John Lodwick, “Puritan to make Flight to Florida,” *Key West Citizen*. Nov. 7, 1928: 6; “Eastern Air Transport,” *Wall Street Journal*, Dec. 19, 1930, 3; Arsenault, *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream*, 254.

weather out the storm ahead.³¹

During his first forty-eight hours in office, President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered the nation's banks closed for a four-day "banking holiday," priming the pump for his "new deal." Within months, Roosevelt's "alphabet agencies" such as the Civilian Works Administration (CWA), Works Progress Administration (WPA), and the Public Works Administration (PWA) came to dominate the attention of congressmen and citizens across the United States. Locally in St. Petersburg, officials and civic leaders formulated long-range plans for brighter days in the depression-laden Sunshine City. Times were hard across the nation, but "at no time during the depression did St. Petersburg have an unemployment problem as acute as that of hundreds of industrial cities throughout the nation," penned Tampa Bay historian Karl Grismer. With the masterminding of publicity prince, John Lodwick, and his tireless staff, the Chamber of Commerce was "the driving force which kept St. Petersburg forging ahead, in good times and bad." Major relief to those remaining craftsmen and laborers eager to earn came to St. Petersburg early in the depression.³²

The Great American Monopoly

Whether it was indeed the healthy and recuperating benefits of Pinellas and the offer of free waterfront property by city boosters, or simply military and government foresightedness matters little compared to the boosts in budgets and morale that followed the building of a local veteran's hospital. The construction employed about one thousand workers. Over three million dollars flowed into the local economy as the nearly eight

³¹ "Florida Real Estate Sales," Wall Street Journal, April 1, 1930, 6; Arsenault, *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream*, 253- 255; Dunn, *Yesterday's St. Petersburg*, 32.

³² Grismer, *The Story of St. Petersburg*, 171-72, 260.

hundred-acre Bay Pines tract changed from wild thickets of mangroves, palms, and pines into the southeast's principal Veteran's Administration Hospital and regional headquarters.

In addition to the building of the V.A. hospital, St. Petersburg received part of the PWA's more than fifteen million dollar pledge to strengthen the U.S. Coast Guard. Almost seven hundred thousand dollars went towards the Bayboro Harbor as massive construction resulted in seaplane hangers and air bases. Further city improvements and avenues for travelers availed themselves as "the great noble experiment" of prohibition was repealed in 1933. While National Airlines began its operations from St. Petersburg's Albert Whitted Airfield, offering round trips to Daytona Beach and back, civic boosting urged tourists to continue their travel plans, "get a Sunshine Perspective" and "Come on Down to the Sunny Side of Life" in the Sunshine City. "What America needs is a sunny outlook on life, and the logical place to get it," insisted the Chamber of Commerce, "is on the West Coast of Florida – at Sunny St. Petersburg." Furthermore, newspaper advertisements acknowledged the drastic decrease in tourism and instructed readers to "follow the crowds southward." "Give yourself a rare vacation in the Sunshine City. Thousand are already here – and more are on the way." Tourism figures had shrunken to such low figures during the depression that Roger Babson, a well-reputed statistician, urged Florida cities, and civic leaders "to seek fame as a health center." Speaking to Tampa Bay advertisers and Kiwanis, Babson stated, "Florida has only one American monopoly – sunshine and climate" Capitalize on those two Florida constants, and America's nearly fifteen million folks over the age of sixty, suggested Babson, and

Florida's economy will recover.³³

St. Petersburg was well ahead of Roger Babson's advice. Although Depression-era tourists were spending considerably less than during their stay, St. Petersburg recorded tourism figures unequaled since 1928, totaling over thirty-one thousand registered visitors during the 1932-1933 season. Babson and the Chamber of Commerce were not alone in the promotion of paradise. During the first several years of the Great Depression, John Lodwick's endless editorials and articles selling the sunshine, its Festival of States parade, and the St. Petersburg-to-Havana boat races blanketed the nation. From the likes of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* and the *Charleston* [West Virginia] *Gazette*, to the *Kingston* [New York] *Daily Freeman* and the *Indiana Evening Gazette*, John Lodwick touted St. Petersburg's ability to look past hard times and focus on fun and pleasurable events for tourists of every lifestyle.³⁴

At some point in the mid 1930s, wrote Karl Gismer, the sense of hopelessness and dread eased throughout the nation. Locally, recovery from the Great Depression, "largely due to the indomitable spirit of St. Petersburg's citizens," came earlier than most. During the worst of times, noted Gismer,, "instead of weeping and wailing, they kept planning for the future" and supporting the Chamber of Commerce, insisting that tourist advertising continue.³⁵

³³ Hurley, *Surf, Sand and Postcard Sunsets*, 171, Baker, *Mangroves to Major League*, 173; *New York Times*, Jan. 1, 1933, 7; *New York Times*, Dec. 31, 1933, 5; "Florida Urged to Seek Fame as Health Center," *Tampa Daily Times*, April 12, 1933, 1.

³⁴ "Florida Tourists are Spending Less," *New York Times*, Jan. 29, 1933, 6; "More Florida Tourists," *Wall Street Journal*, May 20, 1933, 6; "Florida Travel Heavy," *Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 12, 1933; John Lodwick, "Boating Events Enliven Days at St. Petersburg," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Feb. 1, 1931, G1; John Lodwick, "Olean People Vacation in Sunny South," *Olean Herald*, May 16, 1931, 3; John Lodwick, "Charlestonians Are Attracted by Charity Events at St. Petersburg," *Charleston Gazette*, Dec. 27, 1931; John Lodwick, "Kingstonians at St. Petersburg," *Kingston Daily Freeman*, Feb. 26, 1931, 14; John Lodwick, "Local Tourist at St. Petersburg," *Indiana Evening Gazette*, Jan. 9, 1932.

³⁵ Gismer, *The Story of St. Petersburg*, 187.

Reports soon circulated claiming the post-holiday influx of winter visitors in 1934 “was the largest in the history of the resort.” Less than two months following the devastating Labor Day Hurricane of 1935 that lashed through southern Florida, Chamber ads and John Lodwick, mentioning nothing of the storm, focused on the area’s endless sunshine. The mayor, prompted by the “See Florida First” program, began listing the advantages of St. Petersburg, which had attracted visitors from all states of the union, every province in Canada, and from 26 foreign countries. “St. Petersburg is devoted almost entirely to the exclusive entertainment of the traveling public,” said Mayor John S. Smith. Predicting an onslaught of visitors near the half-million mark, Mayor Smith proclaimed not only do tourists feel the Sunshine City is like a second home, but with each passing year, “St. Petersburg’s winter population assumes greater proportion.” Even in the midst of the national recession and an uncertain future, citizens urged boosters to spend more on promotions.³⁶

The Chamber of Commerce and John Lodwick responded to citizen’s cries, insisting on continued Northern advertising, with catchy jingles. Promotions of the mid-1930s spoke of St. Petersburg’s “amazing variety of recreation and entertainment... literally something to do, to see and enjoy every happy hour,” selling St. Petersburg as the “perfect place to wait out the Depression.” No worries exist in the city, “Happy Days are Here Again,” claimed advertisements. “Why endure the discomforts of cold weather when it is so easy to come to sunny St. Petersburg, asked the Chamber, “Pick up and pack up – leave cold and care behind – and hit the trail for the land of palms and flowers and the city of Sunshine.” And St. Petersburg’s sunshine was exactly what city publicity

³⁶ “Florida Migration Heavy,” *Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 7, 1935; “St. Petersburg Offers Many Divertissements,” *Wall Street Journal*, Dec. 13, 1935, 8; Grismer, *The Story of St. Petersburg*, 187-188.

director John Lodwick had been keenly watching for the last year and half.³⁷

Beginning in June 1934, St. Petersburg truly became the “Sunshine City” to weathermen and winter visitors. For the next eighteen months, the sun never failed to appear over the blessed city, saving Lew Brown of the *Independent* from giving away free newspapers while prompting the city publicity master, John Lodwick for his next stroke of genius. He found it in the youthful faces of eight St. Petersburg toddlers. “All Sunshine, No Clouds in their Young Lives,” reported national newspapers, soaking up Lodwick’s story of “Sunshine Babies.” Cooing and smiling, one set of twin girls and six other tot’s photos radiated above captions claiming, “All eight of them have been taught to walk and talk without a sunless day.” For months, publications reprinted the article.³⁸

Lodwick needed the energetic editorials of St. Petersburg’s “Sunshine Babies.” His floating flop, the Goodyear blimp, spoiled Lodwick’s successful streak of selling St. Petersburg. The dirigible craze was comparable to the January 1914 inaugural flight across Tampa Bay, with Tony Jannus as the world’s first commercial pilot– both had tremendous civic support, but the novelties soon wore out their welcome. Once again, the clever antics of John Lodwick proved successful in securing St. Petersburg role as a premier winter resort, a veritable land of pleasure. The continued efforts of civic boosters were paying off. During the first ten months of 1935, St. Petersburg showed significant recovery as residential housing construction increased to match the throngs of new residents. In fact, reported the *Wall Street Journal* in December of that same year, “the

³⁷ “I’ll See You in Sunny St. Petersburg,” *New York Times*, Dec. 10, 1933; Arsenault, *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream*, 261; “Here is your Place in the Sun,” *New York Times*, Dec. 2, 1934, 9; “Happy Days Are Here Again,” *New York Times*, Jan. 7, 1934.

³⁸ “All Sunshine, No Clouds in their Young Lives,” *Mansfield News-Journal*, Dec. 13, 1935, 12; “All Sunshine No Clouds in their Young Lives!” *Hammond Times*, Nov. 15, 1935, 7.

strongest home-buying movement in the history of the resort is underway.”³⁹

Play Ball !

Although tardy in widespread advertising, St. Petersburg’s Chamber of Commerce, and its “army of specialists employed to exploit the sunshine,” claimed over 150,000 guests for the 1934-35 tourist season. St. Petersburg’s sunshine fever was nearly as contagious as the national pastime of baseball. And St. Petersburg had both.⁴⁰

Known locally as the “Ambassador of Baseball,” Al Fielding Lang initiated the long tradition of spring training in the Sunshine City. Major League Ball clubs from the Browns, Braves, Phillies, Cardinals, and the Yankees practiced pitching and base stealing on the city’s shores. “St. Petersburg thereafter was winter capital of baseball,” local historian Walter Fuller noted, “and Florida stole the Spring baseball show from California, Texas and other western states.”⁴¹

Aside from baseball and green benches, Al Lang took the Bathing Beauties, an icon created from Florida boom-era ballyhoo, further than the likes of Miami’s Carl Fisher or St. Petersburg’s John Lodwick ever managed. The former Sunshine City mayor inadvertently helped take a somewhat seedy bare-legged boardwalk contest to crowning heights. Aware of St. Petersburg’s success in promotions of parades and pageants, and the efforts of local pageant guru Leonora Slaughter, civic boosters from New Jersey sought Lang’s assistance. As Slaughter’s supervisor, Al Lang agreed to lend Leonora Slaughter for a few weeks to help revise a desperate Atlantic City spectacle. Innocently

³⁹ “St. Petersburg Building Demand Best in Years,” *Wall Street Journal*, Dec. 16, 1935, 10.

⁴⁰ “St. Petersburg’s Advertising and Tourist Tardy,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Dec. 24, 1935, 4.

⁴¹ Wayne Oliver, “Al Lang is Known as Ambassador of Baseball Clubs,” *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, April 1, 1942, 4; Fuller, *St. Petersburg and its People*, 139, 145;

enough, Lang had “loaned” her to committee members of the then unknown Miss America contest. Leonora Slaughter never lived in St. Petersburg again, making the Atlantic City assignment a lifelong pursuit, creating a modern day dynasty known worldwide.⁴²

Locally, Al Lang’s politics and pastime promotions earned him rave reviews from the city and throngs of thankful benchwarmers. As the 1930s concluded with tourism thriving, civic leaders pledged to open a new ball field in recognition of Lang’s achievements in advancing St. Petersburg. However, with European unrest and a probable Second World War looming, the ballpark for Al Lang, as well as the boastings of John Lodwick, would have to wait. As for the resort city of St. Petersburg, little would remain the same with the coming of the war years.

⁴² “Miss America Pageant Turns Into a Refined-Type Lady,” *Oklahoma Ada Evening News*, Sept. 1, 1963; “104 Lovely Leg-But not Shoddy Show,” *the New Mexican*, Sept. 3, 1963, 13; Ann-Marie Bivans, *Miss America: in Pursuit of the Crown* (New York: Mastermedia Ltd., 1991), 12-13.

Chapter 3: War and Beyond

In the fall of 1939, spurred by Adolf Hitler's invasion of Poland, the Second World War began with Great Britain and France declaring war on Germany. Concentrated efforts at sea, including effective submarine campaigns against British bound merchant ships, soon gave way to catastrophic waves of German offensives. Moving west, and gaining axis countries along his warpath, Hitler's retaliation for losing the First World War demanded attention from the world at large.

Desperate for land and natural resources to continue military actions against China, and certainly aware - if not in awe - of recent Blitzkrieg campaigns in France, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, Japanese officials signed the Tripartite Act with Germany and Italy in late 1940. Now able to occupy French Indochina and control trade to China, Japan could effectively construct military installations and wage war on the surrounding resource rich regions and European colonial holdings in the Far East.

American requests for Japanese withdrawal proved only to enflame the ensuing Tojo/Yamamoto drive of domination. Newly empowered Minister of War, General Hideki Tojo, unwilling to leave French Indochina, was past the point of negotiations. Consequently, General Tojo set in action the plan of Fleet Commander in Chief Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto for a "surprise offensive extending throughout the Pacific area."¹

¹ Franklin D. Roosevelt. *Joint Address to Congress Requesting a Declaration of War*. December 8, 1941; Records of the United States Senate; SEN 77A-H1, Record Group 46; National Archives.

Answering the Call

In the United States, policy makers and citizens prepared for their likely entrance into world war. By October 1940, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's signature on the Burke-Wadsworth Selective Training and Service Act – the first peacetime draft in U.S. history – made intervention all but imminent. Subjected to compulsory military service during the Civil War and the First World War, American men heard the call to arms and again responded in impressive numbers. Over the course of the Second World War, ten million males nationwide between twenty and thirty-five years of age were drafted for military service; the majority were selected for the Army. An additional six million men and women volunteered for enlistment primarily into the Navy, the Marines, the Coast Guard, and the Army Air Corps.²

Locally, in the Sunshine State, a quarter million of Florida's nearly two million residents responded to Roosevelt's rally. The St. Petersburg district enrolled nearly ten thousand local registrants in one day alone. While military enlistments were on the rise in St. Petersburg, the Chamber of Commerce and civic leaders followed suit in preparing for the future. By mid July, Chamber funds for tourist activities were estimated at over one hundred thousand dollars for the upcoming 1941-1942 season. City Publicist John Lodwick continued peppering society papers with the local happenings "in the warmth of the subtropics, under blue skies, and in a setting of flowers in full bloom." Lodwick even predicted a swelling tourist season in St. Petersburg nearing the half million mark.³

² Jim Schnur and Ellen J. Babb, *St. Petersburg Goes to War, 1941-1945*, St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg Museum of History/Florida Humanities Council, 1995 ; Kevin Starr, *Embattled Dreams: California in War and Peace, 1940-1950* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 4-6.

³ Arsenault, *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream*, 298; Gary Mormino. *Hillsborough Goes to Wa : The Home Front, 1940-1950* (Tampa: Tampa Bay History Center, 2001), 67; John Lodwick, "Gala Season

In addition to increasing their membership rolls with each wave of new residents and visitors, civic clubs and women's organizations prepared for "the duration" by expanding their activities. Thousands of other Bay Area residents—some determined, but most probably desperate—joined the migration north or flocked to the west, seeking their own "New Deal" in defense-related jobs. Understandably, many must have assumed and feared that there would be few war production benefits for industry-free St. Petersburg.

From Benches to Bases

Prewar St. Petersburg was a charming southern city centered on the tourist trade. It was also a community still small enough to rent a two-bedroom apartment for only thirty-five dollars a month; a town where residents like Rudolph LaVine and his wife could shop at Doc Webb's "World's Most Unusual Drugstore," witness 'real' mermaids, kissing bunny rabbits, and dancing chickens – all while purchasing a new men's work-shirt for under 70 cents. St. Petersburg was a also place where couples could stroll the hexagon-block sidewalks flanking downtown streets, treat themselves to a sidewalk vendor snack, or just relax on the city's famous green benches. "The outdoor watermelon stands were very popular," recalls Mrs. LaVine, "on warm days we would ride to Central and Sixteenth (Streets) and get a quartered, ice-cold watermelon for 10 cents."⁴

The celebrated green benches that graced the city's parks and sidewalks, however, had become noticeably vacant. Following the Great Depression, pending war restrictions nearly delivered a knockout blow to the Sunshine City. War, though a continent away, threatened to destroy the very fabric of St. Petersburg's tourist-dependent economy. Like

Opens at Florida Resort," *Hammond Times*, Jan. 16, 1938, 11; John Lodwick, "St. Petersburg Awaiting Half Million Guests," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Dec. 11, 1938, 6.

⁴ Mrs. Rudolph G. LaVine, *St. Petersburg Times*, Sept. 3, 1989.

tourist dependant Miami and Miami Beach, St. Petersburg was gearing up for the winter of 1941-42 tourist season when the news of Pearl Harbor made its way down the Florida shores. It was feared, for both cities, that inevitable war and governmental restraints would decimate the tourist dollars. “There were very few tourists because of gas rationing,” observed Mrs. LaVine, “and the military had priority on other means of transportation.” Unknown to her – or many others – this was only the beginning; a momentous change, more extensive and everlasting, was on the horizon. Even with war imminent, John Lodwick remained confident that St. Petersburg could manage another successful season. It seemed nothing could dissuade him from selling the Sunshine City. Newspaper editors and columnists across North America knew of Lodwick’s first love, St. Petersburg. Lauding his contributions locally, former mayor Al Lang declared, “No man ever did a greater work in publicizing the city.”⁵

Citizens respected Al Lang’s judgment. After all, it was Lang’s love of “America’s favorite pastime” that brought baseball training to Florida. For decades to come, datelines of ‘Florida’ and more specifically ‘St. Petersburg’ appeared in sports pages nationwide. Both as mayor and a civic-minded citizen, Al Lang assisted in advancing St. Petersburg’s image as a recreational paradise. It was through Lang that John Lodwick befriended Babe Ruth. St. Petersburg loved the ‘Sultan of Swat.’ Stories abound of the Babe’s kindness towards children, and his love for all things excessive. Boosters like Lang and Lodwick even encouraged owners and players to sign Major League contracts during spring training, making St. Petersburg the dateline for countless sports pages. Lodwick scored even more points for the city when he staged a ‘surprise’

⁵ LaVine, *St. Petersburg Times*, Sept. 3, 1989.

birthday bash for Ruth. Yes, many local citizens were fortunate to have known Al Lang. It was on Lang's advice that his associate Leonora Slaughter relocated to New Jersey. "Well, you ought to go up there and show them damn Yankees how to do a *real* job with a pageant," a grinning Lang advised Slaughter.⁶

So well adapted to the art of promotions, and prepared by her heady days of working for the St. Petersburg Chamber of Commerce, Slaughter excelled in Atlantic City. On 1 December 1941, she accepted the position as Executive Director for the Miss America pageant. The following week, on 7 December, morning newspaper subscribers read John Lodwick's latest plug for his beloved city. "What America needs this winter is an old-fashion nerve tonic," prescribed Lodwick, "and St. Petersburg has it." By mid-afternoon, however, as word of Pearl Harbor's bombing reached the States, vacationing in St. Petersburg became a remedy few could swallow.⁷

The future seemed uncertain for many. For the editors of the *St. Petersburg Times*, reflection on the past and future weighed heavily as 1942 approached. "The day has come," noted one such editorial, "when local business leaders, especially, are asking, 'Is this enough?'" For many city officials and merchants, it was not. "They feel," continued the perspective, "that St. Petersburg is now large enough – thanks to the vision of the men who founded it – to be both a great resort center and to have industrial

⁶ Paul Pederson, *Build it and They will Come: the Arrival of the Tampa Bay Devil Rays* (Stuart, FL: Florida Sports Press, 1997), 29; Grismer, *The Story of St. Petersburg*, 196-199, 215; "Miss America Pageant Turns Into a Refined-Type Lady," *Oklahoma Ada Evening News*, Sept. 1, 1963; "104 Lovely Legs-But not Shoddy Show," *the New Mexican*, Sept. 3, 1963, 13.

⁷ Bivans, *Miss America: in Pursuit of the Crown*, 12-13; John Lodwick, "St. Petersburg has a Tonic for Nation's Nerves," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Dec. 7, 1941.

resources, as well.” Once again, the *St. Petersburg Times* championed the city’s survival through selling its resources.⁸

Within six months of the attacks on Pearl Harbor, Midway, Guam, and the Philippines, the clear skies and exotic terrain of Florida became military training grounds. By war’s end, the government laid over fifteen miles of highway, erected more than forty aviation bases, and constructed the massive military installations and elaborate infrastructures required to house and support in excess of one million sailors, soldiers and airmen. From city-sized bases in Jacksonville to obscure bombing ranges in Sopchoppy, the Sunshine State housed over 170 military installations. Major defense contracts awarded to sparsely populated Florida came as a kick-start to a stalling statewide economy.⁹

Through ample political persuasion by Chamber and city leaders, aided by like-minded members of Congress and Florida’s Hotel Commission, the city of St. Petersburg landed a coveted role in the war effort. With spacious skies, thirty-five miles of sandy beaches and mangrove infused barrier islands, St. Petersburg was an ideal location for Army Air Corp training, and amphibious assault drills. Coupled with plenty of vacant and nearly abandoned hotels, the city essentially handed over the keys and opened her arms to one hundred thousand-plus service men. From hotel managers and local merchants to students and civic boosters, war efforts were widespread. In Florida, and certainly St. Petersburg, public participation and civic volunteerism extended beyond housing and

⁸ “City Now Large Enough to Have both Tourists and Industries,” *St. Petersburg Times*, Dec. 24, 1941.

⁹ Lewis Wynne, *Florida at War* (Saint Leo, Fl.: Saint Leo College Press, 1993), 1-8; Gary Mormino, “World War II” in *The New History of Florida*, ed. Michael Gannon (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 323-234.

hospitals for military trainees. As troops trained on the city's shores and barrier islands simulating the overseas battlefield, locals assisted at home.¹⁰

Women at War

Tampa Bay women filled war-vacated positions such as bus and streetcar operators, auto mechanics, and bank tellers. Many of these women not only worked in war jobs at Tampa shipyards as welders and riveters; they also managed families and households, and volunteered to do more for the cause. Whether women volunteered due to the same patriotism and propaganda that made 'Joan of Arc' and her infamous muscle-flexing sister 'Rosie' find war jobs, or if the call to volunteer were ones based on finances, companionship, and pride in learning new skills that motivated them is unsure. On the St. Petersburg home front, however, volunteering empowered countless women with an invigorated sense of independence, identity, and individuality.¹¹

With its intense nationwide campaigns to 'sell the war' and "supercharged atmospheres of patriotism and sacrifice" the war effort relied heavily on civic support and local volunteerism. Public policy and propaganda efforts were instrumental in defining the "new woman's role." Empowered by current circumstances, women were no longer "the helpless victims as portrayed in the photography of the progressive era."¹²

Modest groups of 'well-to-do' women, who often made assisting others a career, were the primary volunteers and social organizers prior to the turn of the twentieth

¹⁰ Baker, *Mangroves to Major League*, 191; Susan O'Brien Culp, "For the Duration: Women's Roles in St. Petersburg and Tampa during World War II," *Tampa Bay History*. 17 (Spring/Summer 1995), 24.

¹¹ Robert Smuts, *Women and Work in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 147, 155; Stephanie Carpenter, *On the Farm Front: The Women's Land Army in World War II* (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003), 142-147; Mormino, *Hillsborough Goes to War*, 52-54, 68-72.

¹² Mormino, "World War II," 337-338; Debran Rowland, *The Boundaries of Her Body: A History of Women's Rights in America* (Naperville, Ill.: Sourcebooks, Inc., 2004), 76.

century. It was not until much later that a different kind of volunteer work evolved. Associations began making use of thousands of working – and middle-class women on a part-time basis in activities such as PTA committees, Boy and Girl Scouts, community improvement organizations, and fund raising. In addition to these social and civic committees, women were asked to “muster (their) resources to meet immediate military needs” through conserving sugar, coffee, shoes, rubber, and fuel among other things. It was the rationing of food, however, that affected the stomachs of every citizen.¹³

Propaganda and publicity campaigns not only targeted women for gardening and food preservation, they urged every man, woman, and child to push, pull, or drag salvageable materials to donation points. Urgent and consistent reinforcement of daily salvage habits suggested that every bottle, bone, scrap of aluminum or tin would win the war. Articles of clothing that could be mended, patched, or stitched into something else not only provided consumer savings; they freed the manufacturing industry to produce those goods for the war effort. St. Petersburg women were also active in service recreation clubs such as the Bomb-a-Dears. The patriotic young women of St. Petersburg entertained, danced with, and provided companionship for local soldiers—of course, not until after “furnishing references acceptable to the Defense Mothers as to their moral characters.”¹⁴

Not all promotions and publicity, however, pushed for bond drives, recycling, and citizen support. Playing off the prevalent rationing theme, St. Petersburg’s Chamber members suggested a trip to St. Petersburg to “Get your Sunshine Quota.” “Now, as ever before, it is important for all Americans to keep health and energy in high gear,” the

¹³ Maurine Greenwald, *Woman, War, and Work* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980), 33.

¹⁴ Mrs. Stuart Warren, *St. Petersburg Times*, Jan. 1, 1943.

Chamber declared. In fact, other advertisements asserted, “St. Petersburg is America’s Sunshine base for freedom.” “Get your Vitamin ‘V’ for Victory at Sunny St. Petersburg.” Although the government had taken over all but one of the Sunshine City’s major hotels, the Suwannee, there were plenty of available accommodations, assured city boosters. “If you are not in war work, save fuel, protect your health and live in the sunshine,” advised city promotions. Moreover, solicitations stated, there is “No Rationing of Sunshine and Hospitality.” Writing as the ‘voice of the traveler,’ John Lodwick dismissed rationing’s impact on tourism, noting that St. Petersburg’s efforts to ensure an active resort atmosphere contributes to the “national morale so essential to the successful prosecution of the war.”¹⁵

Death of a Salesman

On October 16, 1942, as the death-toll overseas rose, the city of St. Petersburg lost one of its own. Slumping forward in his seat aboard a city streetcar, John Harris Lodwick, director of city publicity, died suddenly from an apparent heart attack. Local radio station WTSP issued two morning bulletins informing the city that “the man who had organized and headed St. Petersburg’s municipal publicity department for more than two decades, had succumbed.” His death at fifty-two years of age came as a shock to citizens and civic leaders alike. By one o’clock that afternoon, mourning the loss of “the pioneer booster,” the Chamber of Commerce closed its doors for the day.¹⁶

¹⁵ *New York Times*, Jan. 18, 1942, 5; *New York Times*, Feb. 1, 1942, 3; *New York Times*, Sept. 20, 1942, 11; *New York Times*, Oct. 4, 1942, 9; *New York Times*, Aug. 30, 1942, 11; John Lodwick, “The Voice of the Traveler,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Jan. 18, 1942, 4.

¹⁶ “John Lodwick Dies Suddenly,” *St. Petersburg Times*, Oct. 17, 1942, 1,18; “John Lodwick,” *New York Times*, Oct. 17, 1942, 15.

Survived by wife Margaret Guinter Lodwick, his mother Bessie, and nine siblings, John Lodwick was laid in his final resting place a few days later. In the overflowing Rhodes chapel in St. Petersburg, friends and associates gathered to pay respect to the “man who had spread the fame of the city far and wide.” Speaking at his funeral, Wyman Willingham, president of the Chamber of Commerce, commended Lodwick’s contributions. “Records reveal that the per capita cost of advertising and publicity in bringing winter visitors here is the lowest on record,” noted Willingham. “This is a tribute to the genius of Lodwick in his ability to obtain much valuable publicity throughout the country at practically no cost.” Tributes for Lodwick portrayed him in a fitting manner. City manager Glenn V. Leland had this to say of St. Petersburg first publicity director: “He gave his full time to his work and was instrumental in publicizing the city to the extent that it has become known as one of the nation’s leading resort centers. The length of his service in this capacity gained him a host of friends among northern newspapermen and accounted for hundreds of columns of city publicity which otherwise would have been impossible to obtain. A service that only a few men could have duplicated.”¹⁷

St. Petersburg had lost a founding father that fall, yet it managed to proceed forward with its goal of selling St. Petersburg. By the following summer, the city advertising committee had brought to the table an aggressive campaign to bring additional winter residents and new industries. With a proposed fifty thousand dollar budget, fifteen thousand more than the previous season, boosters aimed to promote the city in more than thirty-five leading newspapers, magazines, and trade publications. The

¹⁷ “Helped Build Better City, Mayor States,” *St. Petersburg Times*, Oct. 17, 1942, 18.

detailed plan sought a circulation figure well over eleven million. Stating that there were more than seven million American citizens over the age of sixty-five, suggestions were made “that these people can do the country a service by coming to St. Petersburg this winter, conserving their own health, saving fuel, and making more room in northern defense areas for essential war workers.”¹⁸

Local advertising agents listed three classes of tourists sought for vacationing in St. Petersburg: the elderly or those unfit for the military or war production work at home; those in ill health who required the sunny and therapeutic climes of the Sunshine City; and the families of soldiers and children “who need a warm climate during the winter months.” But boosting St. Petersburg’s annual winter tourist figures was not all that the Chamber of Commerce had in mind.¹⁹

In late June 1943, Chamber governors announced plans to advertise St. Petersburg during the annual Lions International Convention in Cleveland, Ohio. Members also requested a tally of available rooms and hotels for let, in preparation for their next drive to encourage war workers and service men to call St. Petersburg home. By September, revised figures estimated fifty million persons through nearly sixty newspapers and magazine would read of the upcoming fall advertising campaign. The Chamber’s new “Come See St. Petersburg this Season, If You Can” campaign curtailed the use of color ads for fear of promoting travel as a luxury, which the government highly discouraged. Even the word “winter visitors” replaced “tourists” for the duration of the war. Calculating that the prewar tourist seasons had been bringing nearly a quarter million visitors, each spending around two hundred dollars, boosters estimated a fifty million

¹⁸ “\$50,000 Ad Fund for City Urged,” *St. Petersburg Times*, June 22, 1943. 2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

dollar benefit to the city, “Figuring the value of the tourist trade as \$50,000,000 during a season, the \$50,000 spent for advertising represents a cost of only one-tenth of 1 per cent of the results.” This was a figure even John Lodwick, the king of free publicity, would have appreciated.²⁰

‘Reel’ Promotion and Readjustment

Aside from the city’s quest for additional visitors and residents through printed publications, local Rotary members introduced a new medium of advertising. The dawn of promotional films had arrived. Using “techni-color” film, city boosters traveled to Indiana where a city promotional film was widely shown before Valparaiso Rotary members. So captivating was the footage, audience members “could almost conjure in their minds” the wide, white sandy beaches and images of friends resting on the city’s green benches. Scores of films, many produced for the city by Skylark productions, featured the likes of Ma and Pa Sawyer, from “Any Town U.S.A.,” living life to the fullest in the Sunshine City. The Sunshine played the title role in many of these pseudo-documentaries with announcer Burrell Smith: “Inviting *you* to come along as we go once more in search of that which is interesting and exciting.” In a review of nearly two-dozen such films, the word ‘sun’ or ‘sunshine’ appeared in almost every title. From *Fun in the Sun* and *Liquid Sunshine*, to *Sunny Days* and *Life Under the Sun*, the films portrayed St. Petersburg’s attractions and accommodations as the ideal winter playground. Had John Lodwick been around for the introduction of these films at lodges and rotary clubs countrywide, he might have very well embraced the medium, discarding his pen and

²⁰ “C. of C. Plans Drive to Bring War Workers Here,” *St. Petersburg Times*, June 29, 1943; “City Plans Ads in 44 Papers, 12 Magazines,” *St. Petersburg Times*, Sept. 9, 1943, 3.

paper for reels of celluloid film. Lodwick also missed seeing the seeds of his labors come into fruition following the conclusion of World War II in the fall of 1945.²¹

Miriam Mullins, a cadet nurse at nearby Mound Park Hospital was training to aid the war effort. While studying in her room, on that memorable day in August 1945, Miriam heard the excited clamor of students and bolted for the door. She and her roommate were the first to reach First Avenue South and Fifth Street, where, outside the St. Petersburg Times building, they received one of the first newspapers “proclaiming the wonderful news.” It was then that Miriam realized, “the war had finally come to an end.”²²

After allied forces secured victory in Europe and the Pacific, and the confetti covering the streets of St. Petersburg was gone, the peninsula’s mighty military complex all but vanished. But at the same time St. Petersburg, with an impressive infrastructure and a booming citizenship, was reborn. As of 1940, Florida was the least-populated southern state and ranked only twenty-seventh nationally. Eventually, the World War II occupation of Florida came to include the hundreds of thousands wives, girlfriends, and children that trailed service men. The Sunshine State had created enough fond memories for families, veterans, and retirees to prompt a massive influx of new citizens. The increase in permanent population growth in St. Petersburg, as shown on the following page in Table 1, continues rising into the twenty-first century.²³

²¹ “Florida City Film Shown to Rotary,” *Vidette-Messenger*, Feb. 22, 1944, 2; St. Petersburg Chamber of Commerce Promotional Films, circa 1944-1950. St. Petersburg Museum of History: Video Archive Collection.

²² Miriam Mullins. “The Day the War ended: a remembrance,” *St. Petersburg Times*, July 25, 1995

²³ Herta Loeser, *Women, Work, and Volunteering* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), 157.

Table 1. Permanent Population and Percent Change City of St. Petersburg 1900-2000.

Year	City Resident	Percent Change	Non-city Resident	Percent Change	MSA*	Percent Change	Florida	Percent Change	United States	Percent Change
1900	1,075						226,740		74,244,500	
1910	4,127	282%					772,675	34%	91,073,000	21%
1920	11,107	268%	6,000	119%			966,775	26%	96,700,000	24%
1930	40,441	262%	41,140	68%			1,059,700	26%	104,765,000	23%
1940	70,120	72%	81,700	20%	120,000	18%	1,200,000	23%	114,000,000	24%
1950	96,114	37%	130,045	58%	430,000	25%	1,770,000	20%	128,000,000	15%
1960	142,750	48%	214,204	64%	650,000	24%	2,000,000	20%	136,000,000	17%
1970	186,109	30%	245,000	15%	1,000,000	22%	2,400,000	20%	141,000,000	14%
1980	230,000	23%	300,000	22%	1,500,000	21%	2,700,000	21%	148,000,000	15%
1990	280,000	22%	350,000	17%	2,000,000	20%	3,000,000	20%	154,000,000	14%
2000	320,000	14%	400,000	14%	2,500,000	25%	3,500,000	33%	160,000,000	14%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, The Florida Statistical Abstract, The U.S. Statistical Abstract; City of St. Petersburg, 2000 Demographic Profile; Note: *MSA includes Pinellas, Hillsborough, Pasco, and Hernando Counties.

The war years dramatically altered life for service personnel abroad and on the home front. In addition to a hero's welcome, returning GIs received governmental gratitude in a modified version of the New Deal. Aside from disability and educational assistance, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 included entitlements ranging from home loan guarantees to unemployment aide, and more significantly, job preference in the civil service sector and the right to reclaim prewar jobs.

Resembling the rest of the nation, tourism in Florida drastically changed after victory in the Pacific. The tone and scale of tourism in the booming 1920s were little more than a dress rehearsal for the performance and endless encores to come following World War II. Massive war production efforts throughout Florida left miles of improved public roads and extended highways, to which Americans and their automobiles readily flocked. With new pavement under their tires and paid vacation time in their pockets, visitors descended upon Florida in record numbers. For millions of retirees and returning

GIs, newly enacted legislation offered a new life, so why not live it in sunny Florida.

With the clutches of war released, the tourism machine geared up for a steady run. At the same time citizen and tourist income levels rose, so did transportation methods. The age of the commercial airline industry, while not necessarily new to Florida, was an added amenity for the tourist trade. The accessibility and great speeds possible with air travel allowed for less time on the journey and more time spent at the destination, wherever it may be.

On a global scale, military infrastructures once designed to maintain, house, and launch attack planes and flying fortresses, now idle, awaited the conversion to civilian commuting. Aided by growing postwar prosperity, cities that could boast but a few hundred citizens, and even fewer tourists just a few generations prior to the war, propelled to the top of Florida's destination choices. By war's end, as registration rates at the Chamber of Commerce increased, St. Petersburg held honor to a coveted standing. City boosters, citing American Automobile Association assertions that "more of its members traveled in and out of St. Petersburg than any other Florida city," claimed the "State Tourist Crown." John Lodwick would have been pleased.²⁴

St. Petersburg's population figures had also increased dramatically by 1945. Following the war's end, more than eighty-five thousand people claimed the city as their permanent residence. Well over seven thousand of them, along with dignitaries far and wide, turned out to honor Al Lang the following spring. With the armistice signed, Al Lang had finally received his greatest honor. The dedication of "Albert F. Lang Field"

²⁴ Maxine Feifer, *Tourism in History* (Stein and Day, New York, 1985), 220; Weiss, "Tourism in America Before World War II," 319-321 ; "St. Petersburg Claims State Tourist Crown," *Florida Times-Union*, May 7, 1946.

that spring was yet another indication the city was ready for continual growth as a resort city of pleasure. By summer, however, it was apparent to businesses and civic leaders that if the city truly wanted to span in new directions the Bee Line Ferry would have to make way for a permanent structure.²⁵

Bond Built Bridges Belay Bee Line

When the Bee Line Ferry had started operations, St. Petersburg was home to less than forty thousand residents. Hand-laid bricks lined the streets, tent cities dotted the city, and crewman Early J. McMullen began shuttling tourists and travelers across Tampa Bay. In 1934, Early J. McMullen, Jr. joined his father's crew. After several years of regulating passenger and performing yeoman's duty, Junior followed Senior's example and obtained a captain's license. The arrival of the Second World War temporarily split the father and son team. Since the Army Air Corps controlled the ferries during the war, the elder McMullen assisted his country by shuttling locals and soldiers from Tampa to MacDill Army Air Field. Trading cantankerous pelicans for kamikaze pilots, Early Jr. remained on a ship during the war. However, the ferry captain went from piloting a one-hundred ton vessel across Tampa Bay, to serving as a sailor on a three-thousand ton destroyer in the Pacific Ocean.²⁶

At the conclusion of World War II, the Port Authority of St. Petersburg, with assistance of the former owners, purchased the ferries from the government and resumed normal operations. Father and son reunited—eager to resume their rightful roles as captains of the Bee Line Ferry. Their joy was short lived. A bridge joining Pinellas and

²⁵ Will Michaels, "St. Petersburg's Passion-Baseball!" *Northeast Journal*, Vol. II, No. 2 (March/April 2005): 1, 10-11.

²⁶ Ron Matus, "Old Salt Spreads his Love of the Harmonica," *St Petersburg Times*, June 28, 2002.

Manatee Counties was desperately needed to accommodate the growing number of automobiles and passengers heading southbound. Local voters responded by approving a fifteen million dollar bond to construct the bridge. The 1947 bond issue mandated that all monies repaid come from tolls collected, not from taxes raised.²⁷

By 1950, citizens of St. Petersburg were eager for building to begin. To celebrate, the city hosted a blowout event that Fourth of July. Billed as the “Spans Across the Bay” celebration, the rockets’ red glare illuminated a crowd of five thousand spectators at Al Lang Field that evening. The daylong patriotic celebration announced the name of the bridge as well as the opening of construction bids. St. Petersburg Junior Chamber of Commerce members, allowed to pick an ideal moniker for the bridge, received twenty thousand entries for the honor. The winning selection, suggested by Mrs. J.C. Seymour of Indian Rocks, was the Sunshine Skyway Bridge. By mid-October, after securing additional construction bonds, the first of many dredges and steam shovels began digging backfill for causeways. To the relief of many, a bridge was finally coming.²⁸

In 1948, Floridians elected Fuller Warren as governor. During his four-year tenure, Warren was instrumental in securing the construction of the Pinellas-to-Manatee bridge, but not without controversy. At the time, Pinellas and most notably St. Petersburg relied primarily on the *St. Petersburg Times* and the *Evening Independent* for their daily printed news, whereas Tampa residents gleaned their information from the *Tampa Tribune*. Since the turn of the century, the two media outlets had been rivals—and competition for construction was as hard fought as subscriptions. Fortunately, for the

²⁷ June Young, *St. Petersburg: An Oral History* (Charleston: Arcadia Publications, 2002), 157.

²⁸ Holly Waggoner, *Skyway to the Sun* (Sarasota: Omnigraphis Publishers, 1988), 14-15; St. Petersburg Chamber of Commerce, *Sunshine Skyway Commemorative Book*. Sept. 6, 1954, 57.

Times and St. Petersburg, Fuller Warren and the *Tampa Tribune's* managing editor, Virgil "Red" Newton, had been bitter enemies since their college days at the University of Florida. This rancor followed both men to prominent positions of power. Neither the *Tribune* nor Warren mentioned anything nice about one another. It is likely that Governor Warren pushed for the Sunshine Skyway to connect Pinellas to Manatee, not Hillsborough, effectively eliminating any direct benefit to Newton or the *Tribune's* home county.²⁹

Construction of the 864-foot steel girder center-span bridge stretched four miles in length and connected six manmade causeways—for a total length of fifteen miles and a cost of twenty-two million dollars. Anchored to steel pilings up to one hundred feet below the water, "one of the world's most unusual bridges" required more than three hundred men and countless tugs, barges and steam driven rigs to complete. The massive bridge, able to withstand seventy-five-mile winds per square inch, had been designed to "withstand hurricanes of all known intensities." Towering nearly fifteen stories above the bay, the elevated structure provided a 750-foot wide passage for ships crossing Tampa Bay, thus eliminating the need for a drawbridge.³⁰

On Labor Day 1954, Governor Charley Johns officially opened the bridge to thousands of waiting automobiles and their excited passengers. Drivers turned out in droves to show their support and to be among the first to cross on this historic day. By midnight, fifteen thousand autos had spanned the waters. What once took over an hour

²⁹ Bently Orrick and Harry L. Crumpacker, *The Tampa Tribune: A century of Florida Journalism* (Tampa: University of Tampa Press, 1998), 11, 261; Philip Morgan, "An Amazing Span," *Tampa Tribune*, Sep. 6, 2004: B2.

³⁰ Walter Powers, "One of World's Most Unusual Bridges Steadily Rising in Lower Tampa Bay," *Tampa Tribune*, Jan. 2, 1953; Stan Witwer, "A Great Bridge Starts Across the Lower Bay," *St Petersburg Times*, May. 3, 1953.

was now a short ten-minute drive.³¹

The Bee Line Ferry Company, after nearly thirty years of operation, was obsolete. Railways and waterways could no longer accommodate tourists or commuters' demands. On that joyous "Bridge Unveiling Day of 1954," the Captains McMullen docked their respective ferries one last time and lowered their flags, signaling the end of an era. After twenty-years of service with the Bee Line Ferry, Early Jr. went on to navigate the St. Johns River for another outfit. The elder McMullen, having spent twenty-eight long years piloting nearly fifty-three thousand trips across the bay, hung up his captain's hat for the last time. The *Tampa Tribune*, setting grudges aside, declared the two-lane Sunshine Skyway to be "a mighty, massive yet graceful span of steel and stone, joint triumph of engineering and labor, it majestically reasserts the mastery of man the planner, man the builder" and graces the "sun kissed and Gulf-laved area of Florida's West Coast."³²

Barely missing a beat, St. Petersburg's Chamber of Commerce, and local businesses highlighted the bridge in their promotions. The construction of the Skyway culminated decades of dreams to span Tampa Bay. From George Gandy's 1924 "world's longest automobile toll-road," to the attention-commanding 1954 Sunshine Skyway Bridge, the Pinellas Peninsula no longer remained the remote hideaway, which John Lodwick eagerly sold. For better or worse, St. Petersburg's nickname of 'The Sunshine City' was becoming less apt than "The City of Change."

³¹ Holly Waggoner, *Skyway to the Sun*, 15.

³² Scott Taylor Hartzell, "Ferryman logged 52,300 Trips before Bridge Arrived," *St Petersburg Times*, Feb. 2, 2000; Orrick and Crumpacker, *The Tampa Tribune: A century of Florida Journalism*, 300.

Conclusion

Immediately following the death of John Lodwick, Nelson Poynter, president and editor of the *St. Petersburg Times*, wrote a glowing editorial of Lodwick's contributions and "the impetus his foresight and vision" had given the city. Through Lodwick's "vision and creative genius" in promoting St. Petersburg, he helped establish the Sunshine City as the "great winter capital of Florida's west coast," boasted the *Times* editor. Nevertheless, Poynter also recognized that the days of ballyhoo and civic boosting had run their course. The circumstances that afforded Lodwick the room to shine as St. Petersburg's publicity director had rapidly changed. "With the fullest credit," Poynter wrote, "and appreciation of men like Mr. Lodwick who had the foresight to take advantage of them while they existed, it is improbable that such a combination of circumstances will ever again take place in Florida's history."¹

Who else besides John Lodwick would have the town's mayor parade through the streets of New York, wearing all white with a gaggle of beautiful, scantily clad women at his side, selling St. Petersburg, or have that same mayor inspect bayside bathing suits on the "request" of the fictitious Purity League? Where else but St. Petersburg would shuffleboard, lawn bowling, and checkers reach world championship status, or would feature free newspapers when the sun failed to appear, and make stars out of babies who never saw a cloudy day? "Perhaps," eulogized the *St. Petersburg Times*, "it is symbolic that the end of John Lodwick's career came at a time when the specialized era of

¹ "John Lodwick – End of an Era," *St. Petersburg Times*, Oct. 17, 1942.

development in which he played so great a part, was in itself drawing to a close.” During his tenure working in promoting paradise, “John Lodwick’s name was synonymous with St. Petersburg.” However, the city of Lodwick’s era was no more. Indeed, the city of St. Petersburg had indeed transformed. The years of depression, locally and nationally, had demonstrated St. Petersburg’s need for diversification; and the war years forced civic officials to strive for growth and development outside the scope of the tourist trade.²

Spurred by alluring advertising campaigns, subtropical winds, and cheaper costs, well over four million tourist, armed with two weeks vacation time and more disposable income than every before, sought out Florida as a respite in 1950. The decade brought wave after wave of tourists to St. Petersburg, nearly half a million during the 1951-52 season alone. In late 1954, as the Sunshine Skyway Bridge was connecting the final gap, St. Petersburg had blossomed into a “city full of promoters,” suggested one report. “Some amateur and some ultra professional, but all of whom sing the praises of the Sunshine City.” The increasing use of DDT and air-conditioning made Florida’s pests and long hot summers more manageable. Visitors would eventually make Florida one of their top destination choices. However, this influx perpetuated the city’s aged public image.³

Sensitive and selectively avoiding those of retirement age in the 1960s, tourism factions and Chamber of Commerce members focused on capturing youthful illustrations for Northern locales. Contradicting a 1960 newspaper release in the *New York Times* –

² “John Lodwick – End of an Era,” *St. Petersburg Times*, Oct. 17, 1942; “‘Helped Build Better City’, Mayor States,” *St. Petersburg Times*, Oct. 17, 1942, 18.

³ Richard Warner, “Florida Gulf Shores-West Coast Communities Report Record Season With Crowds Still Arriving,” *New York Times*, Mar. 2, 1952; William Rivers, “City Full of Promoters,” *Panama City News Herald*, Aug. 22, 1954; “Gulf Towns Busy Building Bedrooms,” *New York Times*, Dec. 14, 1952; Gordon Patterson, “The Creation of the Florida Anti-Mosquito Association,” in *Paradise Lost? : the Environmental History of Florida*, edited by Jack E Davis and Raymond Arsenault (Gainesville : University Press of Florida, 2005),165-173; Arsenault. *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream*, 308-309, 313; Michael Gannon, *Florida, a Short History* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 118-119.

which claimed the city's fifty thousand school-aged children as proof positive that "St. Petersburg no longer considers itself an old folks' haven," the U.S Census continued recording increasing numbers of citizens over sixty-five years of age. The 1950 figure of nearly twenty-three percent soared to an unprecedented high of thirty-five percent in 1970. When compared to a national average around eleven percent, the long-standing national reputation as "God's Waiting Room" became more obvious as the city's image.⁴

In spite of the pundits' negative proclamations, tourists came in droves. However, the city's once renowned green benches "suddenly disappeared," observed the *St. Petersburg Times*, "a none too subtle hint to the city's senior citizens that their welcome was not so durable after all." The deluge of Florida devotees rarely wavered though. By 1970, more than three million automobiles were crossing the Sunshine Skyway annually, prompting the addition of an identical sister span to shuttle tourists to and from St. Petersburg.⁵

Shaking off the earlier nationwide energy crisis of the 1970s, the mid 1980s Florida tourist trade would influence Southern counties like Pinellas to the tune of 3.1 million annual visitors - pouring nearly two billion dollars into the local economy. On the eve of the twenty-first century the same area was spending more than three million in advertising dollars yet recorded an amazing eleven million day and overnight visitors.⁶

Prior to 1950 barely a dozen states actively promoted tourism. By 1980, every state had become active in tourism development. And it is no wonder. Today, tourism, a

⁴ "Fortunate Fifties - St. Petersburg Counts its Blessing, Cites rapid growth in Decade," *New York Times*, Nov. 6, 1960, 14.

⁵ Malcolm Jones, "A City Built on Changing Dreams," *St. Petersburg Times*, Feb. 12, 1989; Baker, *Mangroves to Major League*, 255; Douglas Waitley, *Roadside History of Florida* (Missoula, MT : Mountain Press Pub. Co., 1997), 28-40.

⁶ "Tourism: A Good Value for Pinellas County," *Suncoast Magazine* (Oct/Nov 1985), 127; "Tourism Officials to Spend an Extra \$750,000 to Attract Visitors," *Tampa Tribune*, Nov. 8, 1995.

formidable force driven by economics and opportunity shows no signs of wavering in the years to come. As Florida's number one industry – creating nearly twenty percent of the state's total economy – tourism generated \$51.5 billion and drew in some 74.5 million tourists to the Sunshine State in 2003.⁷

St. Petersburg has long been a stomping grounds for searchers of dreams, salesmen with schemes, and outdoor-lovers seeking sunbeams. Through the tireless and creative efforts of city boosters and boasters, the name St. Petersburg became synonymous with sun and lighthearted living, making the tourism industry a growing and profitable venture. And in the prophetic words of John Lodwick, “America is just beginning to wake up to the rich possibilities this new industry has to offer.”⁸

⁷ Linda K. Richter, “State-Sponsored Tourism,” *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 45, No. 6. (Nov.-Dec., 1985), 833; Visit Florida. “Recreational Facts about Florida,” www.visitflorida.org.

⁸ Jane Graham, “City Publicity Bureau Had its Inception in Blizzard in the North,” *Evening Independent*, Nov 7, 1938.

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