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Jordan Park Collection [finding aid]

Nelson Poynter Memorial Library. Special Collections and University Archives.

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Jordan Park Collection



A Collection Guide by
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Fall 2009

Special Collections and Archives
Nelson Poynter Memorial Library
University of South Florida St. Petersburg

Introduction to the Collection

The materials in the Jordan Park Collection nearly were discarded; the good fortune of the preservation of these items is considerable. Special Collections and Archives at the Poynter Library received the various photographs, property records, maps, documents, and scrapbooks from Dayton Stone on 18 June 2009. Stone had discovered these items while cleaning out an abandoned property in St. Petersburg. Subsequent review of the materials revealed the necessity of some conservation work and arrangement due to the condition in which these items had existed prior to his fortunate discovery. These records fill an important gap in our history.

Historic sources strongly indicate that Jordan Park was named for local black pioneer, Elder Jordan Sr., and that he donated land for the housing project. Indeed, Jordan Sr. was a successful entrepreneur who owned a reckonable amount of real estate in St. Petersburg during the height of the Jim Crow years. It should also be noted that Jordan Elementary School, the second school available to local African American students in St. Petersburg, sat in close proximity to the site where Jordan Park housing project was built. (The red brick school building still stands and has been renovated for use by a local Head Start program as part of the city's Midtown initiatives.) Elder Jordan Sr. built housing along 22nd Street South (the thoroughfare at the heart of St. Petersburg's black community), as well as houses laid out in courts further southeast of this area. Logical inference based on several historic sources point toward the housing project being named for Jordan Elementary School, and the school being named for Jordan Sr., who was for all purposes, a prominent developer in the local African American community.

The initial Jordan Park residential units were constructed between 1939 and 1941. After some success in relocating residents from derelict structures to this new facility, authorities approved additional housing at the Jordan Park site. The majority of the funding for its construction came from federal sources during the New Deal as part of the Wagner-Steagall Housing Act passed in August 1937. The City of St. Petersburg received \$1,750,000 from the federal government for the purposes of clearing slums as well as creation of the housing project. Despite the largess of the federal government, city official initially seemed hesitant to accept federal dollars as the city had to supplement this project by providing ten percent of the funding necessary. Fortunately, local opposition for this development subsided, and St. Petersburg became one of the first cities to obtain such funding for public housing through this housing act.

Beyond the importance of the items specifically concerned with Jordan Park, there are several photographs and records that document the substandard housing that existed in St. Petersburg's African American neighborhoods at the time that Jordan Park was expected to replace, including structures in Peppertown and the Gas Plant district. Many of the original black neighborhoods have since transitioned into other use (including the site of Tropicana Field on the former Gas Plant property) with little reference material available to researchers to learn about them. The Jordan Park Collection fills many gaps in the historical record and allows researchers to reconstruct, in part, certain neighborhoods from the time in a way not previously possible.

Scope and Contents

The materials in this collection presently occupy approximately 3.80 linear feet of space.

Preservation Note

The majority of the items in the collection are in good condition; however, there are a few items in poor condition and therefore unsuitable for physical handling by researchers without gloves or for an extended period of time. The three scrapbooks composed of collections of news clippings have deteriorated due to the acidity of newspapers and scrapbook pages and the glue used to affix the clippings to the books; the pages of these scrapbooks are oxidized and are in fragile condition. Ultimately these fragile items will be scanned or photocopied with intention of both fostering preservation and assuring availability. There are two books, (“Slum photo album” and “Appraisal Report”), that vividly document the housing in the Jordan Park area; there are photographs adhered with tape in both books. Additionally, the “Appraisal Report” book is bound with rusted metal bracing, and the “Specification Jordan Park Extension” books is bound with rusted metal brackets.

Provenance of the Jordan Park Collection

This collection falls under the Local and Regional History provenance of the Special Collections and Archives department, Nelson Poynter Memorial Library, USF St. Petersburg.



Container Listing

Maps

- 1) *Plan Showing Existing Buildings on Site No. 2 Housing Authority of City of St. Petersburg, FL; “Geo. C. Prather’s Sub.”; “Debose Bungalow Court”;* May 9, 1938.
- 2) Housing Survey map; “28th to 31st Streets & 5th Avenue to 6th Avenue South showing Negro Occupation”; onion paper.

3) 20th Street South to 31st Street South & 3rd Avenue South to 5th Avenue South; the words “Cottage Park” are written in pencil in the center of the map; locations of “Feed Company”, and railroad are depicted; onion skin.

4) *Part Site #3, Housing Authority of the City of St. Petersburg, 510 Hall Bldg, Phone 7341, CW Abbott*; “NW1/4 of NE ¼ sec. 26-31-16”; 28th Street South to 25 Street South and 11th Avenue South to 7th Avenue South; “Wildwood Court”.

Bound Volumes

1) Book of Titles

- Green cloth binding
- West Coast Title Company, (St. Petersburg, FL), prepared an album of titles to the JP lands for the Housing Authority; from an 1884 title to Hamilton Disston to “all Transfers, Mortgages, Liens, Judgments, and other proceedings which describe or purport to affect the caption lands herein” [sic]

2) *Specification Jordan Park Extension Low Rent Housing Project No. FLA 2-1A AT St. Petersburg, Florida*”

- The name E.R. Stetson appears in pencil on the cover

3) *Appraisal Report of Site #2 Housing Authority of the City of St. Petersburg FLA. May-2-1938*

- Cardboard binding covered with blue-gray cloth
- Typed title page- Appraisal report of the fair market value of various properties in St. Petersburg, Florida, LOW RENT HOUSING PROJECT, Appraisal of Site No. 2 for Housing Authority of the City of St. Petersburg as of May 2, 1938 by: A.B. Fogarty, Realtor, Boyd J. Outman, Realtor, Appraisers
- Each entry contains detailed information hand-drawn sketches of property dimensions; small, very sharp photographs of structures; detailed form includes: location, district, land, improvements, (including condition of plumbing), “architectural attractiveness”, composition of flooring, city assessed values, city taxes, etc.
- Photographs are affixed with tape
- Includes index page

4) Slum photo album

- Orange paper album
- Photographs are affixed with tape, some sticking to the to the backs of facing pages
- Narratives accompany the photographs
- Three sections, divided by blue blank pages
- Section One – “Pictures on the following pages are typical of the buildings located on the property purchased as site for Jordan Park Project...”; photographs of five houses that were demolished, address, description, presence of utilities or lack thereof, water source, privy location

- Section Two – “Pictures on this and following pages are typical of the homes in which all the tenants of Jordan Park formerly lived.” Each entry contains one or two photographs of houses, generally shot at an angle. Some depict back yards, and in some cases a handful of people were photographed but are not posed. Narrative for each picture includes name of resident, their old address, their new address at Jordan Park, date of moving into new residence, information on sanitary facilities, presence or absence of electricity and water sources, structural condition of house.
- Section Three – “The pictures on the following pages show a part of the houses found in a sub-standard survey made in November and December 1938. All of them were rechecked during December and January 1941. Comments covering findings on each survey are with each picture or set of pictures.”

Photographs - There are two sets of loose photographs

First Set – Jordan Park Construction photographs

- Photos were removed from an album, because of the acidic paper they were fixed to, as well as the lack of a contextual narrative, the original album was disassembled, the black embossed paper cover retained.
- Photos are numbered 001-028, (a, b, c...etc. added to number if there was more than one photo to a page). Numbers and order selected by archives staff.
- Photos are dated; the date range is July 8, 1939-December 15, 1939
- Several construction scenes include bystanders and construction workers.
- Includes photos of completed structures, and structural details (e.g. brickwork), as well as interior shots.
- Aside from the Jordan Park construction photos, there are a series of “Delegates to the Convention of Florida Housing Authorities” pictures as well. Also, there is one photo labeled, “Durkeeville, Jacksonville”.

Second Set – Originally in a universal vertical file pocket labeled “Abstract of Title”

- Photos are numbered from 029-053, with a, b, c...etc. added to the number as necessary. Numbers and order selected by archives staff.
- Dates vary or are not noted.
- Some photos are duplicates.
- Some of the individuals depicted are named.
- One photo includes a newspaper clipping of its reproduction in the St. Petersburg Times.
- There are photos of Jordan Park in its initial completion.
- Photos meant to depict slum housing are included.
- One photo is of Liberty Square, Miami.
- Most of the photos are clearly taken at a time contemporary with Jordan Park’s construction. However, there are four 3 x 4 color photos of Jordan Park from a more recent time, possibly the 1980’s. They depict possible sidewalk construction.

Scrapbooks with Newspaper Clippings

- 1) Scrapbook, some pages loose, many in brittle, poor condition. Red, with the words “SCRAPBOOK” in gold lettering on cover; gold emblem on cover, 1937, “Housing Authority of the City of St. Petersburg, Florida”. Articles date back to the early 1960’s.
- 2) Loose, brittle pages, poor condition, red scrapbook, with articles dating back from the late 1950’s to the early 1960’s.
- 3) Scrapbooks with black cover, (embossed with an small image of a dog); “Scrapbook” is in gold lettering on cover; worst condition of the three scrapbooks; very fragile brittle pages, with articles dating back to the 1940’s.

Folders – These are single items that have been placed in archival folders

- 1) “substandard housing score” forms
 - This was originally in a large folder labeled, “HOUSING SURVEY/28th to 31st Streets & 5th Avenue to 6th Avenue South showing Negro Occupation”.
 - The forms were originally bound with a now rusted metal bracket; the bracket was removed and the pages are loose.
 - Each form is filled out in pencil, with the penciled notes at the top of page listing the race of the resident, (“White” is underlined in red pencil, “Negro” is underlined in blue), name of the resident/owner if they are “White”, and the general physical description of the dwelling, e.g. how many stories, number of rooms.
- 2) *Looking toward the eighties: a quadrennial report concerning public housing in St. Petersburg, Florida*
 - Published by the housing authority.
 - Dated November 1980.
 - Professionally produced promotional brochure.
- 3) “Mr. Taxpayer” flyer, original and copies; “Here are the facts showing your losses on Jordan Park Housing Project No. 1”.
- 4) Loose clipping from St. Petersburg Times; Nov. 13 1949; photograph of dilapidated house with text.
- 5) *Construction & Development Cost, Jordan Park Project, FLA-2-1, June 24, 1940*