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## Tarpon Springs by the Decades : A Stroll through Our History

James Anthony Schnur

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# “Tarpon Springs by the Decades: A Stroll through Our History”

Mr. Jim Schnur

Historian, Pinellas County Centennial, Heritage Village  
Special Collections Librarian, University of South Florida St. Petersburg  
Wednesday, January 30, 7:00 p.m., Tarpon Springs Public Library

**OPENING SLIDE** Good evening. It is wonderful to be here in Tarpon Springs, at the beautiful public library where I had the honor of working as a reference librarian and assistant library director in 1997. This library is just one of the many community treasures in Tarpon, a city that has taken a lead among its Pinellas peers in preserving its history and revitalizing its historic treasures.

**DECADES** Between late 2011 and early 2012, I offered a monthly series of programs in the Pinellas Room at Heritage Village, just south of Largo, with the theme “Pinellas by the Decades.” These programs, now available on the county’s website and YouTube, took us for a walk through the historical landscape of the Pinellas peninsula, with a focus on events from the Armed Occupation Act of 1842 through the centennial of our independence from Hillsborough County last year (1912-2012). For tonight’s program, I will focus on some of the major milestones of human settlement in the Tarpon Springs area, with an emphasis on events up to about the 1960s. We cannot cover everything, of course, but if you are looking for more information about events from our past, I can think of no better place to start your research than this beautiful library and the railroad depot just a few steps away!

As we look at the history of the northern Pinellas peninsula, we must remember that the history of human settlement spans more than one thousand years. Although high tides have washed away traces of footprints before the twentieth century, we will bring some of them back to life this evening. **INDIAN MOUND**

[Overview of shaping of Florida peninsula since last ice age and Pre-Columbian settlements]

**JUNGLE PRADA** In April 2013, we commemorate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Juan Ponce de Leon’s arrival as the first documented European in *La Florida*, we should remember that while so many view Florida as a place with little or no history before a certain ‘mouse’ arrived in the Orlando area a little more than forty years ago, our history is one that spans centuries. The first notable expedition to come to the Tampa Bay area and the Pinellas peninsula was the Pánfilo de Narváez expedition that reached a site they called *Rio de las Palmas* (River of the Palms) at or near Jungle Prada in present-day St. Petersburg in April 1528. Hearing about rumors of gold northward in the interior of *La Florida* at a place known as *Ocali*, Narváez and his expedition set out on a failed and fatal mission.

**MOHR @ JOHNS PASS** During the first Spanish period, a chapter of Florida’s colonial history that spanned 250 years between 1513 and 1763, itinerant fishing “rancheros” appeared along the coastline.

Although this image captures the “million-dollar” view from a palm hut near Johns Pass around 1900, it represents the type of simple structures found at rancheros. These rancheros, some of which continued to reappear even after Florida became a territory of the United States in 1821, were places where Cubans, Spaniards, occasional runaway slaves, and others sustained themselves by enjoying the bountiful harvests of fish and seafood available to them.

**1839 MAP** Between 1817 and 1858, Florida experienced three wars in which American authorities attempted to remove the Seminole Indians and their allies, including runaway slaves, from Florida. The longest of the three, the Second Seminole War, began in 1835 and continued until 1842. During this time, much of Florida’s west coast, including the Tampa Bay area, was unsettled. **FORT BROOKE** Only a few forts, such as Fort Brooke, an outpost near Channelside that the city of Tampa grew around, were in existence.

**1842 MAP** As the war came to an end in 1842, members of Congress wanted to find a way to encourage whites to settle in central and lower Florida to act as a buffer between the remaining Seminoles to the south and the growing plantation culture to the north. Thus, they passed the Armed Occupation Act, a measure that provided up to 160 acres (approximately four high school campuses) of land to certain applicants who agreed to live on site for five years, cultivate a minimum of five acres, and bear arms to “handle” any Indians or runaway slaves. This act was so successful that it became the model for the Homestead Act of 1862 that opened the Upper Midwest to settlement. **1856 MAP**

**CIVIL WAR MAP** Although the Civil War affected Florida, much of the action occurred away from the Tampa Bay region and the Union blockade of coastal waters made life difficult for those who remained. Federal forces maintained a presence down at Egmont Key, near the mouth of Tampa Bay, and occasional missions along the coast looked for those who tried to bring in supplies from Cuba, but the area around Tarpon avoided much of the conflict. One way that local residents helped the Confederate cause was to boil salt water, saving the brine so that it could be used to preserve smoked meats. There was even a “cattle cavalry” that included local families such as men in the McMullen clan who herded cattle to feed Confederate troops at “grazing speed” since no railroads connected Florida with other states of the Confederacy.

**BUGGY** Settlers started coming to the area after the Civil War. **MEYER HOME** In 1867, Frederick Meyer came to the area from Marion County and settled north of the Anclote River. His brother, Franklin B. “Benjamin” Meyer, arrived a few months later. Their family founded the settlement of **Anclote** and established the **first general store at Anclote**. Between 1868 and the mid-1870s, most of the newcomers lived in Anclote, with the site of Tarpon Springs remaining a forest with abundant wildlife. In 1869, Wyatt Meyer was the first child born at Anclote. By the early 1870s, early spongers from Key West began to harvest sponges in shallower waters along the Gulf to the west of Tarpon, using Anclote as a stopover point or settlement. **SAM HOPE HOME** By one account, over ninety-percent of the men who came to Anclote in vessels were “of English extraction,” many of them from the British West Indies, while others came from the Florida Keys. They used Anclote as a base while harvesting sponges.

A little background on the name of the river and the settlement: The word “Anclote” derives from the Spanish word for a keel or a small anchor commonly used by sailing vessels. **1744 MAP** Maps from the 1700s forward note the presence of the Anclote River. **1763 MAP**

Others came in the 1870s. George Inness first learned of the beauty along north Pinellas peninsula in 1875. An 1892 oil painting, **Early Morning, Tarpon Springs**, depicted life in the remote community. He and his son, George Innes Jr., were notable American artists. By 1876, Alexander W. Ormond and daughter Mary settled in the area near present-day downtown Tarpon Springs. Census records indicate that the Ormonds had lived for awhile in Tampa before journeying to the wilderness once found outside of this building. **BUGGY**

In early 1877, Joshua Boyer, a native of the Bahamas, sailed along the Anclote River to Spring Bayou. At that site, he met Alexander and Mary Ormond. In April, Joshua and Mary wed and built a **small cottage** (now at Heritage Village) near the current intersection of Boyer Street and Pinellas Avenue. According to more than one account, Mary is credited with giving the community its name in or about 1880 when she remarked, “See the Tarpon spring” or something to that effect, near the bayou. During the early 1880s, the Boyer and Ormond families had much of this area to themselves, with the nearest settlement of note being Anclote to the northwest. Few people lived in the area south near Wall Springs and Saint Joseph Sound, with the next settlement of note being the “Curlew” settlement that had started around 1869.

John Alexander Sutton, the founder of Curlew, came to that area in the late 1860s. Sutton also established the adjacent Curlew Methodist Church. The logs for the church were hauled by ox cart from this land to the waterfront and sent by raft to Turner's sawmill below Clear Water Harbor. According to a story related by one of Sutton's sons, William P. "Uncle Will" Sutton, John named the church after the many pink curlews he saw along the coast. Soon, the name "Curlew" soon was used throughout the settlement.

Back to Anclote: On September 12, 1878, a post office opened at the Anclote settlement, with William W. Cobb serving as postmaster. The post office at Anclote remained in service until 1915, but soon events to the east and southeast would transform settlement patterns.

In order to settle its debts related to accrued interest on railroad bonds, the state's Internal Improvement Fund agreed to sell four million acres of land along peninsular Florida to **Hamilton Disston**, an entrepreneur from Philadelphia, in exchange for \$1 million on February 28, 1881. Nearly 150,000 acres of this land fell within the present-day boundaries of Pinellas County.

**ANCLOTE (2 IMAGES)** By the following year, 1882, Captain John B. Walton, a surveyor, arrived along the upper Pinellas peninsula with Major Mathew Robinson Marks (a former Union officer who worked as an engineer and attorney), and other members of an advance party sent by Hamilton Disston to inspect lands he had purchased. Before the end of the year, **Anson Peacely Killen (A.P.K.) Safford**, third governor of the Arizona Territory, also reached the remote homestead of Joshua and Mary Boyer near

Spring Bayou. Safford, a former Territorial Governor of Arizona, left for Florida by January 1882. In addition to surveying the future site of Tarpon Springs, Walton also platted the area that became known as "Yellow Bluff," now the unincorporated area of **Ozona**. Most sources use 1882 as the founding year of the Tarpon Springs settlement.

In December 1882, Hamilton Disston visited the area near **Spring Bayou (4 IMAGES)** and decided to develop the area into the settlement that later became Tarpon Springs. During this year, Disston also decided to place 9,500 acres around Lake Butler, now known as Lake Tarpon, into a development enterprise known as Lake Butler Villa Company.

**SUTHERLAND** The Disston Land Company and its companion, the Gulf Coast Land Company, had placed agents to sell lands along the upper frontier to investors in the Northeastern United States, as well as England, the Low Countries, and other areas of Europe, by 1883. Brochures encouraged prospective owners to take a coach ride to the area from Cedar Key, more than 100 miles away. Tarpon's first official hotel opened at the present-day intersection of Pinellas and Tarpon avenues. Known as the Tropical Hotel, this simple two-story structure had originally been built as a place for the first wave of workers who came to the area to design the city.

**MERES BUILDING** Walter F. and "Mother" Amelia Meres managed the Tropical Hotel. They came to Tarpon in 1883 with their son, E.R. Meres, who later worked with John K. Cheney and entered the sponging business. Later renamed **The Ferns Hotel**, the Tropical Hotel continued to operate well into the twentieth century. On November 7, 1883, the first post office in Tarpon Springs proper opened.

Disston's Lake Butler Villa Company built the three-story **Tarpon Springs Hotel** in 1884. The seventy-room structure sat near Tarpon Avenue and Orange Street until a fire destroyed it in 1906. The St. Nicholas Cathedral sits near that site today. Nathaniel Stone Patten opened the first sawmill in Tarpon. During the early years of the settlement, Patten also constructed three steamboats that offered locals and tourists excursions along the Anclote and the Gulf.

**1886 MAP** The summer of 1884 saw the arrival of Granville Edwin (G.E.) Noblit Sr. at the age of twenty-two. Originally from Pennsylvania, he left his hometown with plans to travel to Tampa. At the time, the rails ended near Wildwood, meaning that he had to complete his journey via stagecoach. He spent some time in Tampa, but decided in July to follow a friend to the Tarpon area. Though he became a surveyor for the Orange Belt Railway after his arrival, his original intent was to become a tradesperson and carpenter. He began working on the railroad by late 1884 under the supervision of Captain Charles Dix (C.D.) Webster. Noblit's efforts as a surveyor guaranteed that the Orange Belt would pass through the Tarpon settlement.

Others also arrived. By the mid-1880s, African-American settlers lived along lands near Patten's Sawmill, located along the Anclote River. The area became known as Patten's Quarters. An area a few miles outside of Tarpon Springs was settled by many members of the Gause family and became known as Gauseville. The Gauses played an important role in the development of upper Pinellas and Tarpon.

Prior to the arrival of the railroad, merchandise, supplies, and passengers usually came to the region from Cedar Keys. By this time, the steamboat **"Governor Safford"** brought people and goods to the mouth of the Anclote, where a smaller **steamer**, the "Mary Disston," met the boat and completed the journey to Tarpon.

The year 1887 was a busy one in this area. On February 12, Tarpon Springs formally incorporated. Of the forty-six registered voters in the area, thirty-four met in a school building to vote in favor of incorporation. Viola Keeney Beekman donated land along what is now East Tarpon Avenue to establish **Cycadia Cemetery**. The earliest recorded burial at what is now Cycadia Cemetery occurred fifteen years earlier, in 1872, when C. L. Webster was laid to rest. That same year, **the lighthouse at Anclote Key began operation (2 IMAGES)** as an important navigational structure near the mouth of the Anclote River. The arrival of the lighthouse elevated the importance of the small settlement of Tarpon at the same time trains first arrived in the area along the **Orange Belt Railway**, which reached the small and remote settlements of upper Pinellas, including Tarpon Springs and Yellow Bluff (now Ozona).

The Orange Belt, constructed under the leadership of Peter Demens in partnership with Hamilton Disston, was originally supposed to follow a path to lands Disston held in southern Pinellas. He had plans for a settlement that he envisioned would rival Pensacola and New Orleans, and called this site Disston City which is the present-day location of Gulfport. Disston and Demens had a dispute over railroad financing, and in a historic turn of events, the railroad made an eastern turn, bypassing Disston's land holdings in Gulfport and ending up along the waterfront of Tampa Bay on lands owned by John Constantine Williams that later became St. Petersburg. The railroad extended into the **waters of Tampa Bay (2 IMAGES)**, providing a way to ship citrus harvests by rail or boat. While most historical accounts talk about 1888 as year that the Orange Belt came of age—because that is when St. Petersburg had its true beginnings—the railroad actually helped Tarpon and upper Pinellas by 1887.

Levin D. Vinson arrived in Tarpon Springs in 1890. **VINSON HOME** He joined his brother, J.M. Vinson, in operating a Tarpon mercantile store. Vinson owned other businesses in Tarpon. For awhile, he partnered with J.B. Cowser in the sponging business, with whom he operated the first motor boats used during sponge diving at Tarpon. Also in 1890, the original railroad depot in Sutherland opened at the northwest corner of Florida Avenue near Alternate US Route 19 in what is now Palm Harbor. Similar to other early depots in the Orange Belt Railway system, this building had Russian architectural features. A larger depot to handle the area's growing agriculture commodities opened in 1903.

In the early 1890s, families of African ancestry started to arrive from Key West, the Bahamas, and other areas of the Caribbean to work in the sponge industry based at Tarpon. Some lived on the south end of the mouth of the Anclote River, at a small settlement called Sponge Harbor, directly across the river from the Anclote settlement. The site is near the area known as Alexis Point today. Earlier, during the 1880s, African-Americans from other parts of Florida and the South had arrived for jobs in citrus groves and sawmills as the community along the Anclote River took shape. They settled in an area known as

"Charlestown" located between South Levis Avenue and South Pinellas Avenue around East Martin Luther King Jr. Drive.

By the 1890s, Tarpon tried to boost its reputation as a tourist destination. One nickname for the settlement that became popular in the 1890s was the "Florence of the Pinellas Peninsula." By the first decade of the 1900s, markets rebranded Tarpon as the "Venice of the South."

In 1891, **John K. Cheyney** formed the Anclote and Rock Island Sponge Company with support from Hamilton Disston's business interests. The creation of this company was an important step for Tarpon as it grew into an important center for the sponge diving industry in Florida. Two notable pioneers and siblings passed away within a week of one another that year. In early December, **Dr. Mary Jane Safford**, an early reformer and probably the first female licensed physician in Florida, died. Her older brother, Anson P. K. Safford, died on 14 December. **The Safford Memorial** pavilion at Heritage Village, originally erected in the 1890s at Cycadia, preserves their memory as early leaders of Tarpon.

G.E. Noblit had a telephone line established in 1892, making him the first person in Tarpon to have a telephone connection. During this year, he also purchased the Tarpon Livery Stable that A.P.K. Safford had owned until his death in 1891 and kept it until 1903. By the 1890s, Noblit also assisted in the transportation of sponges from Bailey's Bluff and the small town. His first telephone line connected the docks where they unloaded sponges with the livery stable, a distance of nearly five miles.

Citrus crops in the area suffered from harsh freezes of late December 1894 and February 1895 that decimated local groves in the Tarpon and Palm Harbor areas. To put this into perspective, another freeze of this magnitude did not hit Pinellas groves until 1962. After the terrible freezes of the winter and with ridership in decline, the syndicate that took possession of the Orange Belt Railway from Peter Demens decided to lease the railroad to **Henry Plant** since the widespread destruction of citrus groves wiped out the prospects of hauling citrus from the groves along the railroad for years. Plant renamed the line the Sanford & St. Petersburg Railway and made it part of the Plant System of railroads. Plant, of course, was the architect of the Tampa Bay Hotel, now the **University of Tampa**. He transformed the narrow gauge railway into a standard gauge.

Sponging became more important, and harvesting practices more complex, after the dawn of the twentieth century. Also, Tarpon grew as a community. Similar to Ybor City within Tampa and the once independent municipality of West Tampa where Howard and Armenia now meet Interstate 275, Tarpon grew into a true multiethnic community during the early 1900s. In Ybor and Tampa, it was the white Anglo community, the Spanish/Cuban/Italian and some German immigrants of the cigar industry, and the African American and Afro-Cuban communities that shared space.

The growth of Tarpon's African American community led to the creation of **Rose Cemetery**. Although the earliest recorded burial dates to 1904, many believe that earlier burials at this historically African American cemetery did take place. Located at North Jasmine Avenue and East Orange Street, Rose (originally Rose Hill) Cemetery sits across the street from Cycadia Cemetery. One of the most notable

burials in this cemetery connected the nineteenth with the twentieth centuries, past with present. In March 1925, J. Richard Quarls, born as a slave in South Carolina in December 1833, was found in his home on Pine Street shortly after passing away. Quarls, who called himself (and was well-known in the community as) Christopher Columbus, had fought alongside his master's family for the Confederacy during the Civil War. He assumed the name "Christopher Columbus" after coming to Tarpon in 1910 because of concern for how the local community would view his service to the Confederacy.

After his death, the local Tarpon chapter of the Ku Klux Klan sent his widow a check for \$10. Buried at Rose Cemetery, the exact location of his grave had been forgotten over the years as earlier headstones rotted or disappeared. They later located the site with ground-penetrating radar. On February 2003, Christopher Columbus was honored again in a rededication of his gravesite with a new headstone in a unique ceremony: In this cemetery established during the Jim Crow era of racial segregation, members of the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Sons of Confederate Veterans attended the event, the Confederate flag was present, and "Dixie" was played.

Of course, the other ethnic community that grew in prominence was that of the Greek immigrants who came to this area beginning in 1905. **John M. Cocoris**, a sponge agent who first came from his native Greece to America in 1895, received financial support from John Cheyney that allowed him to bring the first team of Greek sponge divers to Tarpon. Nearly 500 Greek men had arrived in the city by the late summer. Cocoris first moved to Tarpon with his wife in 1902. In 1906, the Sponge Exchange Bank received its charter, making it the first bank chartered by the state in Tarpon.

In 1907, John Cheyney and Ernest Meres established the **Sponge Exchange**. Over the next few years, spongers bypassed Bailey's Bluff as they chose to sail their catches directly to the sponge docks at the Sponge Exchange. George Matthews founded the Tarpon Springs Leader, a paper that captured the news of the growing city.

**SPT MASTHEAD** That same year, on February 23, W.L. Straub, the editor of the St. Petersburg Times, also made news with his paper. He printed an appeal known as the "Pinellas Declaration of Independence" in the newspaper. He called for the creation of a separate Pinellas County, noting that in the nine years since he first visited the area, "one of the first impressions was of surprise that it should be attached to Hillsborough County" since it is largely separated by the "great sheet of Tampa Bay."

**CARTOON** In response to growing sentiments for independence fueled in part by W.L. Straub's Declaration, state Rep. W.W.K. Decker of Tarpon Springs got the House of Representatives to pass a division bill, but it went nowhere. Other attempts occurred before our "division" finally took place in 1912; more on that in a minute.

First some bad news: Fires on January 28 and February 11, 1908 destroyed a number of buildings in the center of Tarpon Springs, including the first railroad depot and many freight cars. The new depot built in 1909 served the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad for many years and later became the **headquarters for the Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society**.



In 1911 Abe Tarapani arrived in Tarpon from New York City. This same year, he opened a shop known as the New York Bargain Store that would be renamed Tarapani's Department Store in 1935. The year 1911 also marked the year the **legislature passed a bill** signed by the governor allowing residents of the Pinellas peninsula to seek their independence from Hillsborough. It was not automatic; it required a vote. The breaking point, literally and figuratively, occurred when a poorly constructed bridge along Long Bayou between Bay Pines, now where Tyrone Boulevard becomes Bay Pines Boulevard, collapsed less than two months after it opened as a man herded mules across it. **VOTES** As you can see, while southern Pinellas supported independence, some in Tarpon were wary, fearing they would trade one bully (Tampa) for another prospective bully (St. Petersburg). Indeed, much of the first year of Pinellas County's existence was a battle between interests in St. Petersburg and Clearwater over the location of the county seat. Ultimately, Clearwater prevailed, though there are stories that the construction site for the original wooden courthouse had guards around the clock in case St. Petersburg folks tried to come up and burn it down.

**TARPON NEW COUNTY** Indeed, as evidence that regionalism between northern and southern Pinellas County and eastern and western Pasco County had not died down, in January 1917 business interests in and around Tarpon Springs proposed the creation of a new county named in honor of President Woodrow Wilson. The bill submitted to the 1917 legislature did not gain approval, but demonstrated growing tensions. The outline of "Wilson County" would have included lands north of Dunedin and lands in western Pasco, including the communities of Sutherland, Wall Springs, Crystal Beach, Ozona, Odessa, Tarpon Springs (the proposed county seat), New Port Richey, Elfers, Hudson, Seven Springs, and Anclote.

**ROOSEVELT BLVD** The 1920s marked the advent of the real estate land boom in the greater Tampa Bay area, with most of the construction taking place in Tampa, **St. Petersburg**, and Sarasota. **ARCADE IMAGE** Although much of north Pinellas remained agricultural, the Arcade Hotel offered a taste of the land boom when the Mission Revival hotel and shopping building opened along Pinellas Avenue after being constructed in 1925 at a cost of \$100,000. **1920s SPONGE AREA (2 IMAGES)**

**2 FRUIT IMAGES** Although the Great Depression hit the local economy hard, at least there was citrus to eat in the winter! During the New Deal of the 1930s, Coburn Park, presently known as **Craig Park**, a park that Tom Coburn gave to the city enjoyed improvements as part of a project by the Works Progress Administration. Transportation improved with the opening of the **Ben T. Davis Causeway** (later renamed **Courtney Campbell Causeway**) in 1934. Captain Ben T. Davis and his company operating Davis Causeway charged a toll of fifty cents per round trip in the 1930s. Similar to the Gandy Bridge, which also started as a private toll road, tolls were lifted on the causeway in 1944 under the War Powers Act of 1941 when the federal government acquired the bridges so that those in the military did not have to pay tolls to cross the bay.

World War II transformed Florida, as more than 170 military installations covered the Sunshine State. To put this into perspective, the population of Florida in 1940 was 1.9 million. Seventy years later, the population has grown to nearly ten times that number. During the late 1940s, bad outbreaks of red tide

affected much of the Pinellas coastline. Also, sponge blight began to ravage the coastal resources and threaten the sponging industry.

To escape these moments, residents could enjoy two films that depicted the importance of the sponge industry on the big screen. On July 8, 1948, they enjoyed an early preview release of 16 Fathoms Deep, a film about the local sponging industry shot in color. Actors Lloyd Bridges and Lon Chaney Jr. appeared in starring roles. The film was based on a book by Eustace Lane Adams, a one-time resident of Tarpon. July 25 marked the official release date for the film. Another film was released in December 2 1953: **Beneath the 12-Mile Reef** recounts, in dramatic fashion, battles between the Greek sponge divers of Tarpon Springs and the Conchs in Key West as they compete for territory along the Florida Gulf coast. **BENEATH POSTER** Scenes used in this color film vividly captured many locations in Tarpon Springs and included local residents. Peter Graves, Terry Moore, and Robert Wagner appeared in the film.

The late 1940s brought other changes: One to the name of a signature lake and the other to a longstanding practice. To avoid confusion with the Lake Butler in Union County, the 1949 Florida legislature approved a bill that changed the name of Lake Butler to Lake Tarpon. Originally named in honor of the first surveyor general of Florida, Colonel Robert Butler, the name caused difficulties for a local citrus grower who used "Lake Butler" as a return address and soon discovered that his return mail was sent to Union County by mistake. By this time, the legislature had finally enacted a "fence law" that closed the open range in Florida. During the 1930s, a cow standing in the middle of Tampa Road would have had a right to be there. With the closure of the range, many of the cattle that once randomly roamed upper Pinellas were brought to places such as Boot Ranch near Oldsmar. Of course, though the large 'boot' still exists, the ranch has been replaced by shopping centers and developments.

**US19 SIGN** One noticeable development during the 1950s was the shifting of U.S. Highway 19. What is now Alternative 19, Pinellas Avenue, was once U.S. 19. Hoping to speed travel throughout the peninsula, a decision was made to shift U.S. 19 to the east in north Pinellas, cutting across what was then largely undeveloped land. **10 THEN-AND-NOW IMAGES** Here are some images from the 1950s that follow the path of this new road from Pasco County into the Pinellas Park area. **SPONGE BOATS 1956** As traffic started to bypass downtown, another neighbor along the Anclote River—**Victor Chemical Works (2 IMAGES)**, later known as Stauffer Chemical—left longstanding environmental concerns.

**FLORIDA PALMS** Meanwhile, much of the area east of Lake Tarpon remained undeveloped or agricultural in focus. New industries, such as General Electric and Honeywell in mid-county, and **Sperry** in Oldsmar, would once again change the landscape.

Before leaving, let's take a look at some images of Tarpon Springs from the 1960s. **9 IMAGES** By this time, sponging had started to decline and some of the former sponge facilities developed into other commercial establishments. New waves of tourism followed. Of course, this did not mean that the docks no longer attracted crowds, as is evidenced by the visit of notable people, such as Vice President **Spiro Agnew** in 1969. As we look forward to the 1970s and 1980s **(10 IMAGES)** we see that community

traditions remained strong, even as new developments to the south of Tarpon **INNISBROOK POST CARD** blurred traditional municipal boundaries as developments bordered upon one another.

To conclude, Tarpon Springs has a long historical tradition, and one that instills great pride. Among municipal entities in Pinellas, Tarpon has remained a leader in promoting an awareness of its heritage, a place where the **old city hall** finds new life as a cultural center, the old high school becomes the new city hall, and a **welcoming downtown** brings all of us together.

**CLOSING SLIDE** It has been a pleasure joining you this evening at the Tarpon library, and I do thank you for your interest. At this time, I would be happy to take any questions from the audience.

**Research for this presentation came from sources compiled by the presenter as part of an ongoing chronology of Pinellas County history. Please contact the author if you have specific questions.**

**Special thanks to Anthony Casale for editorial suggestions.**

# **“Tarpon Springs by the Decades: A Stroll through Our History”**

**Mr. Jim Schnur**

Historian, Pinellas County Centennial, Heritage Village  
Special Collections Librarian, University of South Florida St. Petersburg

**Wednesday, January 30, 7:00 p.m., Tarpon Springs Public Library**

A native and lifelong resident of Pinellas County, Schnur discusses the development of Tarpon Springs and nearby areas of northern Pinellas since the mid-1800s. Through vivid images and a rich narrative, he retraces the early settlements along the Anclote River, illustrates how the arrival of the railroad brought dreamers and developers, and describes how the sparsely settled frontier transformed into a vibrant and multiethnic community along the Pinellas peninsula. Real estate moguls, spongers, citrus farmers, tourists, and a growing residential population have played important roles in our history.

Schnur served as the Pinellas County Historical Society’s official historian of the Pinellas centennial of independence from Hillsborough County (1912-2012). Archivist and librarian at USF St. Petersburg, Schnur has taught college courses in Florida history since 1996. He had the honor of working as a librarian in the Tarpon Springs Public Library shortly after our beautiful facility opened its doors and enjoys returning to our community.

**FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC**