

2016

## The Land Boom and Distant Clouds on the Horizon [1922-1931]

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### Recommended Citation

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## **“The Land Boom and Distant Clouds on the Horizon”**

*Remarks Delivered at the Third “Pinellas by the Decades” Program*

*Pinellas Room, Heritage Village*

*13 November 2011, 2:00 p.m.*

*by*

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Welcome to the third program of “Pinellas by the Decades,” a series of lectures and conversations sponsored by the Pinellas County Historical Society at Heritage Village to commemorate the centennial of our independence from Hillsborough County on January 1, 1912. From now through mid-2012, we will cover the historic landscape of the Pinellas Peninsula by remembering important events and discussing how these events shaped our history and present-day reality.

The focus of today’s lecture is to examine the period from 1922 through 1931. Our October lecture described the first ten years of our independence, 1912 through 1921, a time when arguments between north and south county over the seat of government became contentious, distant battles during the First World War served as a prelude to increased real estate speculation at home, and attacks by mosquitoes and hurricane force winds shaped settlement and reshaped coastal communities.

As we will discover during our program today, the Florida land boom brought prosperity to the peninsula. St. Petersburg's population soared, as did structures along the city's skyline. Much has been written about boom-era St. Petersburg, from the emergence of the Festival of States as a great community celebration **2 SLIDES**, to the construction of opulent hotels like the Soreno and Vinoy **SLIDE**, and, of course, the opening of the "Million Dollar Pier, **2 SLIDES**," and, for good measure, the "Million Dollar High School," the campus of St. Petersburg High School. **SLIDE** We will explore the land boom's effects in St. Petersburg of course, **3 SLIDES** but also look how events during this decade shaped other parts of Pinellas. Since we have a lot of ground to cover, let's start by talking about transportation. **TRANSP SLIDE**

Before the economic effects of the land boom could benefit the entire county, transportation networks needed a serious overhaul.

A large step forward occurred when voters overwhelmingly approved a \$2.863 million bond issue on June 5, 1923. **MAP SLIDE** By passing this measure, voters throughout the county supported plans to improve and expand the road network system in Pinellas County. This measure also called for the construction or improvement of bridges with reinforced concrete. **SLIDE** County officials awarded contracts for construction to begin by December 1923 on nearly 100 miles of improved county roads. Meanwhile, residents of some neighborhoods petitioned for the creation of special road districts and bridge districts to fund improvements that would connect to the county road network. Between 1924 and 1926, twelve special districts came into existence and voters in these districts approved bonds for \$6.251 million that included 167 miles of paved roadways and three causeways to the Gulf Beaches. By the end of the 1920s, Pinellas County had nearly 600 miles of public county roadways, with 325 miles paved. More than 1,000 miles of additional paved roads were found in the various municipalities.

One such bridge to the beaches, the original **Corey Causeway** span, opened in the mid-1920s along a new route that connected present-day St. Pete Beach with the Davista area now known as South Pasadena. **SLIDE** **Thomas J. Rowe**, developer of the **Don Cesar**, had advocated the construction of a concrete bridge to replace the 1919 wooden **McAdoo Bridge** that was about 1/2 mile to the north of this new span. Originally known as the **Blind Pass Bridge**, in August 1929 the causeway was renamed in honor of **S. Jack Corey**, a county commissioner who advocated on behalf of the bonds that allowed for the span's construction.

In 1924 **Thomas J. Rowe** acquired his first real estate in the Pass-a-Grille area when he bought eighty acres that later became **Don CeSar Place**. He had first arrived in St. Petersburg in 1919 and used his background in real estate to acquire parcels in the Sunshine City before coming out to Pass-a-Grille. **SLIDE** By 1928, the Don CeSar punctuated the landscape of Pass-a-Grille.

In the spring of 1924, workers put the finishing touches on the new approaches and bridge across Long Bayou, a familiar place to those who were at last month's lecture. **SLIDE** This is the site of the bridge that opened in the summer of 1911 and collapsed shortly thereafter, encouraging voters to vote for secession from Hillsborough. The wooden 1914 replacement span had also collapsed in the October 1921 hurricane. Prior to the opening of the 1924 bridge, workers also improved the roadway along the approach by including better pavement than the bricks laid into the sand for the old structure. The approach, of course, is Tyrone/Bay Pines Boulevard. Before the end of the year, Walter Fuller and other investors began an aggressive marketing campaign for their properties in the Jungle area. **SLIDE** The bridge served to connect St. Petersburg to the Bay Pines area until a replacement span opened in 1966 and its companion span--both still in use today--opened the following year.

As the countywide road network began to take shape, communities throughout the county formed partnerships to raise funds so they could maintain business connections by connecting to the roads. In June 1924, for example, a group of investors formed the **Dunedin Development Company** by getting options that allowed them to extend **Main Street** eastward from the settlement towards **County Road 1**. **SLIDE** These connections proved valuable, and led to immediate dividends. Less than two weeks later, on June 24, **Moffett W. Moore**, local developer and realtor, publicly announced that a St. Petersburg-based investment group had paid \$130,000 for about a mile of waterfront frontage on the "Harrison" tract north of the community. This purchase and other activities during the spring and summer of 1924 fueled speculation in Dunedin. Of course, M.W. Moore wasn't just a developer in Dunedin and one of its earliest historians--his family also occupied the Moore House here at the Village.

These events in Dunedin came nearly five months after the earliest phases of the land boom hit that community, according to some historians. On February 7, 1924, Frank Joy published the first issue of the **Dunedin Times**. On this same day, **George F. Washburn**--then Clearwater's largest landowner and taxpayer--

acquired the **Dunedin Lodge** and promised notable improvements in the area along **Edgewater Drive**. **SLIDE** The reshaping of Edgewater Drive and the construction of the **Fenway Hotel** along between Locklie and Lindhurst streets by 1923 brought a taste of the boom to Dunedin, even if the hotel remained unfinished for the next two years as funds depleted.

Not all of the improvements involved roads for motor vehicles. In April 1924, the new **Atlantic Coast Line Railroad** depot in Dunedin opened with great fanfare, replacing an outdated facility. Of course, this structure presently serves as the museum operated by the **Dunedin Historical Society**. **SLIDE OLDSMAR**

At noon on September 6, 1924, the **bridge connecting Safety Harbor and Oldsmar opened**, shortening the traveling distance to Tampa and marking the first bridge across Old Tampa Bay open to vehicular traffic. This bridge was along Philippe Parkway just north of Philippe Park near State Road 580. Of course, thirty years to the day later, another notable span opened on the southern end of Tampa Bay, the original Sunshine Skyway. We will talk about the importance of that span in a few months.

Of course, the "Granddaddy" of bridges in the Tampa Bay region made its public debut on November 20, 1924, when **Gandy Bridge** opened to the public, **SLIDE** marking the completion of the **first bridge to span Tampa Bay between Pinellas and Hillsborough counties**. **George S. "Dad" Gandy** first considered the possibility of a span across Tampa Bay in 1903, but did not begin a formal survey of sites until 1915. He created a company to build and operate the bridge in 1917 and received all permits and legislative approval from local, state, and federal officials by February 1918. Construction began in late 1920, with dredging operations extending Gandy Boulevard into Tampa Bay starting in September 1922 and pile driving operations to build the bridge piers beginning in July 1923. Constructed as a toll road, this bridge remained a private roadway until federal orders lifted the tolls during World War II.

The Gandy Bridge crosses a lot of water, but another notable developer bought into water and built a legacy of his own across both north and south county. On May 14, 1924, **David S. Welch**, a St. Petersburg entrepreneur who came to the area to establish a shipping line to Cuba, acquired **Wall Springs** from the Wall family. **SLIDE** At the time, Welch, a resident of Pasadena, was involved in road improvement activities in the Pinellas Park and Seminole areas, as well as the Gulf Beaches. Two weeks later, the St. Petersburg Coca-Cola Bottling Company signed an agreement allowing the soft drink company to **sell water from Wall Springs** in addition to its "Misto" brand. Trucks with glass-lined tanks brought the water from Welch's operations at Wall Springs to St. Petersburg for purchase at a dime a gallon by 1925.

Welch's name became famous again in 1926, when the **Welch Causeway opened as the first free bridge to the lower Pinellas beaches.** **SLIDE** This structure, connecting Madeira Beach to the mainland near Bay Pines, encouraged development along Olive Island and Long Key. The construction effort included dredging to narrow the distance across Boca Ciega Bay. The narrow bridge served as an important route to what would become Madeira and the Redington beaches. By the late 1950s, development along the islands prompted drivers to demand improvements to the narrow structure. The current Welch Causeway (also known as Tom Stuart Causeway) bridge that opened in the early 1960s sits a few feet north of the original span.

Later that year, the **Madeira Beach Casino opened near the present intersection of 150th Avenue and Gulf Boulevard** along a remote stretch of Long Key that later became the main intersection of Madeira Beach. **Albert B. Archibald** developed the site. According to one story, Archibald, a Florida resident since 1901, renamed the former Mitchell Beach holdings when he sought a name with "ira" in it to honor the memory of his brother Ira, a developer of Siesta Key. After some deliberation, the "ira" he selected was "Madeira," though the spelling was off by a little. Other stories about the naming of Madeira Beach also exist.

When looking at the land boom in St. Petersburg, much of the focus is on the immediate downtown area, as well as the Old Northeast and Snell Isle. These are certainly important parts of the story, but other areas also deserve attention. For example, on May 20, 1924, by a strong majority, voters supported ***bond ordinances and measures for a variety of improvements in the Bayboro Harbor district.*** **SLIDE** These improvements opened up much of the Old Southeast for development. One legacy of this time period is the "thrill hill" bridge along Third Street South over Salt Creek, the creek that connects Lake Maggiore and Bayboro Harbor. **SLIDE** By the fall of 1924, workers finished construction of a ***large utility plant building on the southwest shore*** of Bayboro Harbor. The tall smokestacks punctuated the skyline of the industrial district along the harbor until their removal a half-century later. The building, now known as ***Bayboro Station***, has been retrofitted to serve as office space.

Residential suburbs replaced citrus trees and farmland, especially southwest of downtown, in the area today known as Midtown. ***W.T. Baynard*** acquired an orange grove in the area near Eighteenth Avenue South and Sixteenth Street that he subdivided and transformed into the ***Fruitland Heights*** residential development, **SLIDE** a place that one boom-era advertisement called "the highest point in St. Petersburg." Lakeview, Childs Park, Thirteenth Street Heights, Bartlett Park, and other communities became destinations for those wanting to settle away from the downtown but near the street railway lines. Although many of these communities are predominantly African-American today, at that time blacks were prohibited from owning land in these communities.

**SLIDE BENCHES** A Southern city that required Jim Crow segregation, St. Petersburg's famed green benches remained off limits to the African-American community throughout the land boom. Even the requirement that blacks ride in the rear of city streetcars had painful results that went beyond the second-class status that many residents received: in following law and custom of the time, African American passengers heading to and from work often outnumbered white passengers, but were confined to the rear of the streetcars. **SLIDE** On at least one occasion, the weight at the back of a car so exceeded that of the passengers in the front of the streetcar that it went off the track, destroyed a light pole, and

crashed into a sweet potato patch along the roadway. Other derailments also occurred. Another common problem along the rural area of the lines, such as Tangerine Avenue to Gulfport, were the wild cows, horses, and razorback hogs that cut in front of—and sometimes landed under—the streetcars.

As suburbs in southern St. Pete took shape, a city north of St. Pete had an identity crisis: In December 1924, **P.J. McDevitt**, a longtime leader in Pinellas Park who had served as treasurer of the Florida Association development company that had started the settlement in the early 1910s, remained a leader in the area. **SLIDE** By March 1926, there was talk *of an "eventual union" with St. Petersburg* as members of the new Pinellas Park Planning Board met with colleagues from St. Petersburg and adopted similar regulations. **Walter P. Fuller** served on both boards simultaneously, after the Pinellas Park board appointed him "to insure perfect harmony." Likewise, St. Petersburg's city planner, **John Nolen**, also served on retainer to draw up plans for Pinellas Park.

As land prices escalated during the St. Petersburg boom, much of the acreage of the Pinellas Park area became attractive to poultry and dairy farmers. A February 1927 advertisement touted lands in "this thriving suburb of St. Petersburg" as the "ideal location for the homes of families of moderate means. ... the logical center of the poultry industry." In early 1929, Pinellas Park Mayor D.B. Ditty encouraged the town to enter floats in St. Petersburg's Festival of States Parade. To raise funds for three floats, they held a ham and bean supper that 150 people attended. One float, following the retirement theme of St. Petersburg, had members of the settlement's Four Score Club, people over the age of 80, riding in a car. Horse riders from the Pinellas Park Riding Academy preceded them. One farmer escorted "Porko," a pig dressed as a "hick farmer from the sticks."

The land boom's effects reached many Pinellas communities by 1925. In the Davista/Gulfport area, **"Handsome" Jack Taylor** designed the **Rolyat Hotel** ("Taylor" spelled backwards) in the area known as Pasadena Estates. **SLIDE** As the land boom came to an end, the hotel closed. After a stint as Florida Military



Academy, it became Stetson University's College of Law in the 1950s. That same year, 1925, the **first chamber of commerce at Indian Rocks** came together. On January 4, business leaders on another island organized the **Pass-a-Grille Board of Trade**. Agents from the **Bayview Investment Company** in St. Petersburg began an aggressive marketing campaign to develop the **Highland Park** area of Largo near **Highland Avenue**. SLIDE This, along with similar initiatives in the Seminole/Largo area, such as the Seminole Beach development planned on the Gulf Beaches that had began in the mid-1910s, demonstrates that many St. Petersburg-based companies expanded their development interests to other areas of the county. 2SLIDES OF SEM BEACH

The land boom came to Safety Harbor with the construction of the **Silver Dome**, a building with a Spanish architectural style that included apartments and shops, and the **Hotel St. James**, a signature structure still standing at the intersection at Main Street and Philippe Parkway that opened on March 6. SLIDE The St. James was built by **Virginia H. Tucker**, who named the hotel in honor of **Captain James F. Tucker**, her husband and a veteran of the Confederate Army. The Silver Dome remained part of the city's skyline until its demolition in 1981. Tarpon's **Arcade Hotel** offered a taste of the land boom when the Mission Revival hotel and shopping building opened along Pinellas Avenue after being constructed at a cost of \$100,000. SLIDE The **Cleveland Shopping Plaza opened** at the intersection of Cleveland Street and Missouri Avenue and became the **first notable Clearwater shopping center built beyond downtown**. The downtown skyline of Clearwater changed with the opening of the **city's first skyscraper, the Fort Harrison Hotel**, in 1926. SLIDE

Developments also connected the beaches of Clearwater with the main land. SLIDE On March 16, 1925, work began on dredge and fill operations for the construction of the **Clearwater Causeway**. The Tampa Sand and Shell Company won the contract for this project for what some called the "million-dollar" free causeway. How ironic that less than two months later voters in St. Petersburg approved a \$1-million bond to construct a new municipal pier known as the

"Million Dollar Pier" that opened in 1926. By mid-October, **C. Perry Snell** announced the opening of sales on his **Snell Isle** development, collecting nearly \$2 million in sales on opening day. **SLIDE**

That same month, the Gasparilla Beach Development Company stepped up its marketing campaign of the **Gasparilla Beach** subdivision near Pass-a-Grille. Improvements to this site, as well as **Ruppert Beach**, took place under the watchful eye of **Jacob "Jack" Ruppert**, an investor along Pass-a-Grille during the land boom who also served as owner of the New York Yankees at the time. **SLIDE** Large newspaper advertisements promoted Ruppert Beach with slogans such as, "Where every breath brings added health, and every moment pleasure." Ruppert even used his star player, Babe Ruth, to promote the location in a February 1926 advertisement. Later, this area southeast of the Dolphin Village Shopping Center became **Lido Beach** after developer **Pat Sergi** acquired the lands in the mid-1930s. The small cabins along this area remained a popular place to see Yankee players during spring training well into the 1950s, more than a decade after Ruppert's death in 1939.

Also in October, investors from Boston, New York, Miami, and St. Petersburg—in a partnership known as the **Tampa Shores Corporation**—purchased some of the interests in Oldsmar encompassing 4,000 lots in the original community site, 1,000 acres nearby, and all existing utilities and manufacturing facilities from the **Oldsmar Land and Development Company**. **SLIDE** The **Tampa Shores Corporation** paid approximately \$7,000,000. After this sale, the development became known as **Tampa Shores**, though the "Oldsmar" name later returned.

Similar to the development of Pinellas Park as a site for Pennsylvanians in the 1910s, a north county development launched in November 1925 targeted residents of Michigan. On November 19, Detroitier **Ephraim S. Frischkorn**, a longtime winter resident of Florida, embarked upon a large-scale marketing campaign to promote his **Dunedin Isles** development north of the Dunedin city limits. He established the **Frischkorn Florida Company** with **Robert S. Grant** as his

agent in Dunedin, and "branch" offices throughout Florida, even in places like Auburndale to Haines City. Recognizing the popularity of Dunedin's artesian wells throughout the region, he proclaimed that "Dunedin boasts the best water in Florida." **SLIDE** By late November 1925, Frischkorn predicted a \$50-million development that would add 24,000 new residents. By early January 1926, a glowing article in the *Evening Independent* called his proposed \$63-million development a "Fairyland", noting that 200 laborers, a large group of engineers, and large dredging equipment had started the clear trees, improve land, plat roads, and improve navigation along the short and narrow Curlew and Cedar creeks. **Donald Ross** began to lay out the golf course at the country club. Before the end of the year, he had chartered Pullman train cars that brought in investors and prospective residents from Michigan. Frischkorn's dreams faded as the national economy tumbled in 1929.

Another Dunedin story: this one is from December 1925. That month, **WGHB, the first radio station based in Pinellas County**, began broadcasting from the Fenway Hotel. Hotel owner **George H. Bowles** had the call letters fashioned after his initials. The hotel officially opened in early 1926, and soon the radio station became an expensive--and expendable--hobby. By the spring of 1926, the station was sold and later evolved into WSUN and moved to another part of the dial. Of course, the first radio station in the Tampa Bay area was WDAE, which went on the air from a Tampa studio on May 22, 1922.

Public school enrollment in Pinellas County peaked during the land boom, as 623 teachers and 18,997 students attended classes in fifty-six schools in 1926-1927. By 1929, the effects of the real estate collapse became evident, with enrollment dropping to 12,814 pupils who were served by 470 teachers in sixty schools.

Recreational opportunities expanded. By the late 1920s, the **Joyland Pavilion** on Clearwater Beach became a popular gathering place for social events. **SLIDE** Known by 1931 as "The Coolest Dance Pavilion in Florida," Joyland included a gathering place known as **Silver Dome Hall** (not to be confused with the hotel in

Safety Harbor), with its waterslide atop the dome and a pool below that attracted tourists and locals alike.

Recreational opportunities for African-Americans were limited: By 1927, **Jordan Beach** (sometimes called "**Jordan's Beach**") began as a "Negro" bathing beach along the shores of Tampa Bay, in the High Point area between present-day **St. Petersburg/Clearwater International Airport** and the area near the approach to the **Howard Frankland Bridge**. This became a popular, yet remote and segregated, gathering area for black residents from St. Petersburg who could not use the municipal facilities along the downtown waterfront, such as Spa Beach. White city leaders knew about this beach, and quietly supported its existence as a preferred out-of-the-way site for blacks to swim so that demands for a beach within the municipal limits could be indefinitely postponed.

Dignity did not always come in death, either. In 1926, Sumner Marble and Granite Works established **Lincoln Cemetery** on the east side of 58th Street South, just south of the Tampa and Gulf Coast Railway (now the Pinellas Trail) and north of present-day Boca Ciega High School. **SLIDE** At the time, it became one of the two notable cemeteries where African Americans could be buried in southern Pinellas. The other, Moffett's Cemetery, had already started to fall into neglect by the 1920s, prompting the removal of bodies from Moffett's and their relocation to Lincoln. This cemetery sat "on the other side of the tracks" from Royal Palm Cemetery, for whites only. Blacks in north county and many from Pasco had Rose Cemetery, just east of Cycadia Cemetery in Tarpon, as their resting place.

Another ethnic group made an appearance at Blind Pass in what is now the northern tip of St. Pete Beach: Seminole Indians. **SLIDE** As I mentioned during the first lecture, Seminoles really did not settle in Pinellas in the early 1800s, despite the name of a certain city. However, **F.P. Bouton**, a resident of St. Petersburg since 1916, and his Southern Exhibitions company brought a tribe of Seminole Indians to the then-remote beaches of **Blind Pass** and established winter residence in a village "where the Indians carry on their tribal life." **Josie Billie**, a

chief of the Seminole tribe of Florida, oversaw the construction of the village near Blind Pass Road along Boca Ciega Bay south of the Blind Pass Bridge. The first group arrived from the Everglades by motor bus in November 1928. **SLIDE** They brought along their own livestock and planned to live off the land by fishing and hunting. A reporter noted that while Billie was the only one who apparently spoke English, all of the Seminole Indian transplants seemed happy with their new settlement on the outskirts of St. Petersburg. As one contemporary account noted: "The men sing weird Indian songs and chatted joyfully as they fit up the poles for the wigwams." Bouton had a Christmas tree erected at the site as part of a publicity stunt and promised that each Seminole would get gifts. They returned for a second season, though the end of the land boom ended this attraction.

Another thing came to an end in 1928: the domination of local politics by the Democratic Party. Although Republicans had all but vanished from the Florida political landscape at the end of Reconstruction, they began to make early inroads in Pinellas in the November 1928 elections. **SLIDE** **Albert R. Welsh** won election as the first Republican senator in the state legislature to gain office as a member of his party since the 1872 election. He defeated Democratic candidate **S.D. Harris**. Welsh did not enjoy a long political career; he died on 22 September 1930. This election marked somewhat of a turning point, however, with Republicans winning many county offices; the shift in political parties would not happen elsewhere in Florida until many years later. **Gladstone R. Beattie** won election as the first Republican sheriff in Florida since Reconstruction after a bitter campaign between him and **Roy Booth**, his Democratic challenger. His tenure became marred by controversy in June 1929, when he was cited for lax enforcement of gambling laws when a grand jury indicted the **St. Petersburg Kennel Club** of operating a gambling establishment. **SLIDE** Also, **Harry R. Hewitt**, a St. Petersburg lawyer who came to the city in 1925, became the **first Republican in Florida elected as a county judge**.

Despite the rapid transformations of the land boom, **William L. Straub's** seminal history of Pinellas claimed that of the 147,760 acres in the county, approximately

22,837 existed as farmland during the mid and late 1920s—the highest percentage of any county in the state. **SLIDE** After celebrating the importance of agriculture, especially oranges and grapefruits, he remarked that “one of the treasures of Florida is the never-ending vision of the birds ... everywhere the pelicans, the gulls, the sandpipers, the plover and egrets and cormorants gather and sun themselves in solemn convention. ... In no other resort center in the world is there such a wealth of life in birds and flowers, trees and boats, groves and bees, butterflies and children and babies, all alike in the merriment and joy of freedom.” Building upon this statement, in 1928-1929, W.L. Straub claimed that Pinellas ranked fifth among Florida counties, having 814,664 citrus trees bearing fruit. The only counties with more at the time were Polk, Orange, Lake, and Hillsborough.

Aviation reached new heights along the peninsula. On October 12, 1928, city council members in St. Petersburg ***planned to develop a municipal airfield*** that would later become Albert Whitted Airport. **SLIDE** Many people assume that Albert Whitted was St. Petersburg's first airport. It was not. The first was Piper-Fuller Flying Field, located in the area of Tyrone Mall and Azalea near the old Rays spring training complex. That site opened in the fall of 1926. Fuller was a notable St. Petersburg developer; R. Piper came from Tyrone, Pennsylvania, which explains the naming of the boulevard near that popular mall of the same name. Before the end of the 1920s, ***Bronson C. Skinner*** (son of L. B. and Mary Skinner) led a group of local business leaders who acquired lands east of Alt. US Route 19 between Curlew and Cedar creeks, west of the Dunedin Country Club. This location became the home to Dunedin's ***Skyport***, an early airport where Skinner kept his aircraft, and allowed flying shows and flying lessons to take place.

During the boom years, some areas of the beach remained remote. As proof of the ***primitive nature of roadways along the Gulf Beaches***, an unfortunate accident involving casualties occurred about one mile north of Johns Pass, **SLIDE** along present-day Madeira Beach. An automobile driving along the beach (the sandy beach was still the main roadway along some segments) hit a derelict barge

submerged in the sand between Johns Pass and the Welch Causeway to the mainland. The barge had sat along the beach for about six months, with no interest in removing it. By some accounts, the car flew in the air about thirty feet before landing on its top. At the time, Archibald had to send someone down to the St. Pete Beach/Pasadena area to get access to the nearest reliable telephone connection. Telephone lines did not connect Johns Pass to Madeira Beach until July 1935.

Water flow in Johns Pass increased after government engineers and property owners along Sand Key **approved a measure to close the inlet at Indian Pass in 1929.** SLIDE Shifting sands along the pass, once located near present-day 182nd Avenue and the Redington Shores Beach Access, made it difficult or impossible to navigate at times. Filling of the pass took place during July 1929. A survey during the summer of 1930 confirmed that increased tidal flow through Johns Pass had created a deeper channel with stronger currents.

As the land boom came to an end, according to some sources, **St. Petersburg suffered from the highest per capita public debt** of any municipality in the United States by 1928. Miles of half-complete roadways spread south of Lake Maggiore to lands where few lived, or would live until after World War II. SLIDE Despite this difficult economics of the time, at least it did not snow in the Sunshine City and nearby truck farming and agricultural products provided ample food throughout the year. By October 1930, public school teachers in Pinellas County received only one-half of their pay. Things continued to deteriorate in the short term.

Although distant war clouds and America's entry into the Second World War would reshape the Sunshine State and revitalize Pinellas County's economy, another war hit the Gulf Beaches by September 1930. Winning this struggle on the home front would liberate the beaches and allow them to become "occupied territory."

**Virgil C. Almand**, a local developer in St. Petersburg and along the beaches, and others (including **David Welch** of Madeira Beach and **Thomas Rowe** of the **Don**

**CeSar**) established the **Anti-Mosquito Association** as a way of gaining public support for the creation of a mosquito control district. This proposal received voter approval in a referendum after the association successfully obtained nearly 3,000 signatures on a petition. Almand, Rowe, and Welch served as members of the commission and focused most of their mosquito eradication efforts, as one might expect, in the Sunshine City and along the Gulf Beaches.

Two notable events in west central Pinellas during 1931 played a role in reshaping much of the area during the 1930s and beyond. An April 1 explosion and fire destroyed most of **John S. Taylor's packinghouse** in Largo. This was a packing house at the site of Largo Central Park, just east of the intersection of Seminole Boulevard and Bay Drive, but not the structure many of you may remember. Residents rushed to the site, hoping to salvage the facility and the jobs it brought to the community. Very little was left undamaged. Taylor's workers went to other plants to fulfill orders during the rest of the 1931 season while construction began on a new facility that opened in early 1932 with improved machinery, such as washing and polishing machines for the citrus, as well as a conveyor belt system. The "improved" packing plant is the one that all of us remember.

On Bastille Day, July 14, 1931, a vote by the county commissioners had a revolutionary effect on the local economy that continues to this day. County **commissioners approved a financing plan to acquire a site at Seminole Point for the creation of a soldiers' home**, a facility that would become Bay Pines. The cost of the various lands under consideration between the Seminole roadway and Turtle Crawl Point (now part of War Veteran's Memorial Park) was \$100,000. As we will discover in our next lecture, the creation of Bay Pines became an important public works project during the Great Depression.

Speaking of a project that worked up public interest, a team of archaeologists led by **Jesse Walter Fewkes**, the Smithsonian's bureau chief for American ethnology, conducted excavations at **Weedon Island**. They examined mounds and located shards of pottery during the winter of 1923-1924. Incomplete documentation of



items located left many unanswered questions. Fewkes and his party arrived in St. Petersburg in November 1923 at the insistence of **Eugene M. Elliott**, an entrepreneur involved in the financing of the **Gandy Bridge** who had also secured large tracts of present-day **Weedon Island** from **Dr. Leslie Weedon** of Tampa, the landowner, in 1923. We are fortunate today that Phyllis Kolianos, Environmental Lands Manager at Weedon Island, is here to join us and talk about the history of that site. Phyllis . . . [Presentation by Phyllis Kolianos]

We do have time for some questions, if there are any. Thank you for sharing this afternoon with me as we talked about an exciting chapter of our past.