

Friends of Sarasota County History Center



Vol. I No. 1

WINTER 2006-7

Welcome to . . . Friends of the Sarasota History Center!

In the immortal (and somewhat deviated) words of a song of my generation:

"Don't it always seem to go, that you don't know what you've got till it's gone . . . They'll tear down a memory and put up a parking lot."

With a building boom unprecedented since the real estate glut of 1926, it is imperative that we as a community rally to preserve what remains of our considerable heritage. The irony of the present building boom is that, in 1926, nothing but trees were torn down to put up the buildings, and those are the very buildings at risk now. Preservation is also needed for the memories of what went before

and that is part of our task with the "friends." Pete and Diane Esthus were the unofficial historical caretakers for decades and are our vanguards now in this effort. Each of us has skills and resources that can be invaluable in their own unique ways.

So our challenge to you is to give us a call and let us know what you would be willing to do, from running an errand, to helping out at the Center. Your contribution will be appreciated and meaningful and a list of possible (not exclusive) areas are enclosed. We would also like your contribution in the form of advice and the directions that you would like to see addressed.

—By Dick Jackson

President's Message

Greetings! With this inaugural issue of the "Friends" newsletter, Vol. I No.1, the Officers and Board of Directors welcome you to the newest organization devoted to matters historical here in the Sarasota area. The "Friends" Steering Committee has labored for a year and a half in hopes that you will consider the "Friends of the Sarasota County History Center" your venue in which to be an active participant in the history of our little corner of paradise.

While supporting the History Center in its many endeavors is the primary purpose of the "Friends", we hope

to also schedule other activities both for education and personal involvement in events of a historical nature. After our February membership meeting the board will compile and distribute a list of members and a survey for: "What would you like the 'Friends' to be and/or do?"

Monthly membership meetings are not being planned—maybe quarterly, maybe semi-annually. But the Board of Directors does plan to meet monthly and the quarterly newsletter will help keep us in touch.

Keep making history.

—Pete Esthus

Looking for Volunteers

Once the History Center archives and offices are in their new location, the 701 North Tamiami Trail building will become the History Center museum. Although we expect to be sharing that building with the Sarasota Visitors Center, their staff will not be able to introduce visitors to our exhibits. For that reason we anticipate creating a corps of docents who will be trained to guide visitors through the exhibits and to answer their questions. It will be a great opportunity for you to learn more about Sarasota County's history and share what you know with others.

For those of you who would like to help organize, preserve and catalog the historical collections, in the new location at 6062 Porter Way there will be a special volunteer room in which to work. Jobs include, but are not limited to, computer data entry, archival processing and preservation activities, museum object cataloging, and clerical/office type work.

As many of us realize, the number of people with full memories of Sarasota County's past continues to decline. If you enjoy listening to the old stories and would like to help preserve them, perhaps the volunteer job for you is as an oral history interviewer! Training is provided.

If exhibit research or design is more to your liking, we will have space for three permanent exhibits and one rotating exhibit after a bit of reconstruction is completed in the museum building. Volunteer assistance will help pull those exhibits together sooner rather than later.

Please contact Jeff LaHurd at 861-6090 or JLaHurd@scgov.net to talk more about what you'd like to do as a History Center volunteer.

—Ann Shank

SARASOTA A History

Sarasota, Florida, was not always the thriving urban community that residents know today. This popular tourist destination on the Gulf Coast began its course of modern development with the Homestead Act of 1862 and a promise to a group of Scots that the land awaiting them in Florida was one of "milk and honey where gold grew on trees." Little



did the first settlers know that within a hundred years the deserted land they then called home would transform itself not only into a bustling real estate and tourism hub, but

also into a charming community with a personality all its own.

From the 1920s to the 1960s, the Gulf Coast town was described as "a community where no one was a stranger." In the 1920s, however, a clairvoyant full-page ad in the Sarasota Herald predicted "Sarasota's Growth Cannot Be Stopped." Indeed it couldn't. Sarasota soon became nationally known for its connection to the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus, its famous art museum and its celebration of modern architecture.

A longtime resident of Sarasota, Jeff LaHurd's ninth published work is his most comprehensive account of Sarasota's history to date. In this precise exploration of the county's history, LaHurd masterfully chronicles the steady growth of Sarasota and the people who made it possible.

Jeff LaHurd is a regular contributor to the Sarasota Herald-Tribune, SARASOTA Magazine, SRQ and SARASOTA, Downtown and Beyond. He has authored numerous books on Sarasota's history, including Gulf Coast Chronicles: Remembering Sarasota's Past, Sarasota: A Sentimental Journey in Vintage Images and Spring Training, 1924-1960: New York Giants and Boston Red Sox. Raised in Sarasota, he and his wife Jennifer have four children.

From the back cover of:
SARASOTA: A History.

A History of the "Friends of the Sarasota County History Center"

At the urging of David Baber, General Manager of the Sarasota County History Center, a "Friends" steering committee was formed in July of 2005. Linda Greaves, Manager of the Office of Community Involvement for Sarasota County spearheaded the formation of the steering committee composed of private citizens Diane and "Pete" Esthus, Kim Hart, Bill LaGasse and Nathalie McCulloch. Also serving on the committee were David Baber, Jeff LaHurd and Ann Shank, members of the History Center staff.

The Articles of Incorporation were

filed with the Florida Department of State on August 17, 2005 and 501©3 status is being pursued. The purpose of the "Friends" is to promote programs and services at the History Center, further efforts to assemble historical exhibits, help preserve a constantly growing collection of artifacts and materials from our past and promote research for our future based on the heritage of Sarasota County.

As of December 31, 2006, the membership consists of 36 individual, 24 family and 8 corporate/organization members.

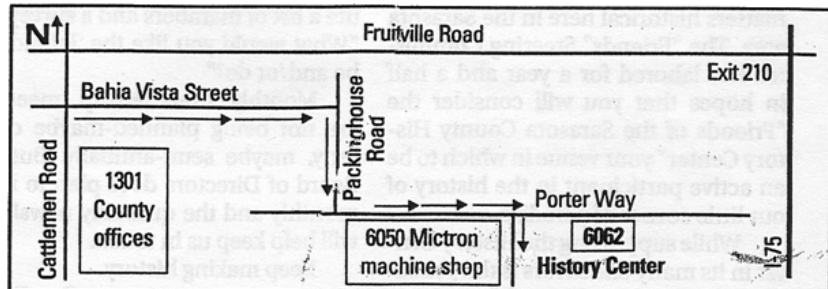
The History Center Has Moved!

The History Center's storage and administrative offices will be moving out to 6062 Porter Way on December 13th even though their current site at the Chidsey Library building (701 N. Tamiami Trail) will re-open in conjunction with the Sarasota County Convention and Visitors Bureau. The Chidsey site will still house the History Center Museum, and have historical exhibitions open to the public. According to the History Center General Manager Dave Baber, the move was done because of reasons named Charlie, Frances, Ivan, Jeanne, Dennis, Katrina, and Wilma. These are of course the names of hurricanes which threatened our fair city over the last few years (I still fold into the fetal position every once in awhile for no apparent reason). According to Dave, "We could not risk losing all of the irreplaceable materials, so when the Porter Way property became available, we

jumped at the opportunity."

Dave adds, "The property was enhanced to accommodate the History Center and will have much more office space in addition to a climate control system that will ensure the safety of the invaluable materials." The History Center as you probably know identifies significant buildings for the Register of Historic Places, administers the Historical Marker Program and maintains and collates a tremendous amount of historical documents, pictures and artifacts for use in a myriad of usages. Their scope goes way beyond that to public speaking, research assistance, and a whole bunch of other services, but now they can feel much more secure about the safety of the documents and materials that they and their predecessors have worked so hard for so long to collect.

—Dick Jackson



Marie Selby Botanical Gardens and the Christy Payne House

—Dick Jackson

In the manner of John Ringling, the property now known as Selby Gardens hosts a tremendous amount of Sarasota heritage that has certainly been a major contributing aspect to Sarasota and its cultural development.

Bill and Marie Selby moved to Sarasota around 1920, as Bill had long admired the landscape and the fishing that the area offered. He was an heir to the Selby Oil and Gas Co., which merged to become Texaco, and upon retirement the two moved to Sarasota. The site that they selected was very secluded as it was nestled in among the laurel and banyan trees along the shores of Sarasota Bay. They were far from social butterflies and the property near the Hudson Bayou inlet offered them the privacy that they desired. They built a modest two-story Spanish-style home among the foliage, and lived a very private existence. According to Selby Gardens president Roger Birkel, "Marie planted large tracts of bamboo directly in line with the development that was taking place to shield her eyes from the encroaching civilization."

Even though the Selbys were not very active socially, they will long be fondly remembered for their generous contributions both through the Selby Foundation, which has sponsored a wide variety

of philanthropic grants that permeate the Sarasota community, and by their bequeathing the beautiful property that now hosts the Selby Gardens. According to Roger, "Their generosity has allowed us to become not only a beautiful scenic destination that has fourteen and one-half acres of tropical landscaping, but also a haven for scientific investigation specializing in epiphytes, including a world renowned lab concentrating on orchids and bromeliads. Garden scientists have identified and named over 2,000 new plants and draw scientific experts from all over the hemisphere."

My gratitude to them goes back to high school when it seemed like every fifth over-achieving student in our class received one of the Selby Foundation scholarships, and all of the local projects that they made possible. One thing that really stands out to me personally is that both of my children were married and had their receptions at Selby Gardens, as did thousands of other lucky couples. The Garden-styled weddings still go on at a prolific rate.

The Selbys were followed to Florida by Christy Payne, who was also an oil magnate, rising to the rank of vice-president and treasurer for Standard Oil of New Jersey. His father, Calvin Nathaniel Payne, first visited Sarasota in 1911 when

it was little more than a fishing village of 2,000 residents. As was the case with Bill Selby, Christy also relocated here largely for the fishing and the natural beauty, and found both adjacent to the Selby tract. He purchased the 1.5 acre site and did exhaustive investigation before building the beautiful mansion that still graces the property. He opted for an eclectic style that leaned towards Southern Colonial, but with several unusual twists.

The house is built on a base of railroad tracks to help hurricane-proof it (a thought which many of us can now identify with), and it even had a solar heating system on the roof. It also boasted an innovation called the "disappearing stairway" that we now identify as our garage attic doors. Its contracted price was a formidable \$40,000 which, during the Great Depression, was pretty pricey. He moved in August of 1935, and Christy and Bill became constant fishing partners and outdoorsmen. The entire house was recently remodeled inside and out and is a beautiful place to visit or in which to hold professional meetings.

In addition to creating the estate, the Calvin Paynes will also be fondly remembered for the donation of the Payne Park property which originally helped bring professional baseball spring training to Sarasota and now hosts the tennis facility, a passive park and a skateboard park. The facility is currently under construction to provide a multi-faceted urban park. I am personally indebted to the Paynes for the beautiful mansion where my daughters' wedding pictures were taken, my younger days watching baseball games in Payne Park, and my adult lunch hours playing tennis. The future community plans for the site will do even more to cement their legacy. Thank you, Bill and Marie Selby and Christy Payne, for your lasting legacy to Sarasota.

MEETING NOTICE

In accordance with the "Friends" by-laws, election of the Officers and Board of Directors will be held at the first annual membership meeting Thursday evening, February 22, 2007, 7:00 p.m. at the new location of the Sarasota County History Center, 6062 Porter Way, Sarasota, FL 34232.

The nominating committee, Elmer Berkel, Hope Black and Ed Hoyt, will nominate the following slate:

President: George I. "Pete" Esthus
Vice President: Elmer Berkel
Secretary: Hope Black
Treasurer: Curran Smith

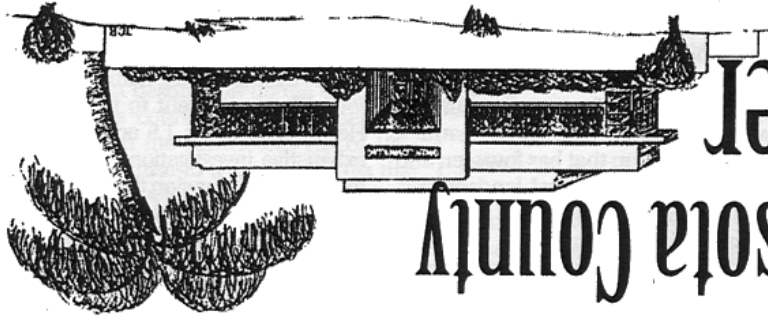
Board of Directors:
June Benowitz
Nathalie McCulloch
Diane Esthus
Kim Hart
Sue Tharp
Dick Jackson
Deborah Walk



For information call: 941-366-0787

Interesting Selby Facts:

- ☞ 180,000 visitors annually
- ☞ It has over 300 trees with a 30" diameter
- ☞ They have named over 2,000 new plants
- ☞ It hosts over 20,000 greenhouse plants.
- ☞ Sixty-six couples were married there in 2006



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