

*Clearwater: A Pictorial  
History 1983  
S. S. S. S.*

was begun at the north end of the beach.

Nearby, other notable developers included Ranson E. Olds, the automobile tycoon, who purchased fifty-eight square miles of land now known as Oldsmar. He intended for Oldsmar to be a large farming-industrial colony for retirees from his factories, but his \$4.5-million project sputtered, and in 1923 Olds sold out to Harold Prettyman. Prettyman was a master promoter and determined to make Oldsmar a resort city. His ambitious plans included a magnificent hotel, yacht basin, and race track. But, like so many other dreams, his plans were dashed by the land bust of 1927 and the subsequent Wall Street Crash of 1929.

With the fast-track development taking place in Pinellas County, local government officials were pressed to provide more and more improvements. In 1923 a bond election for \$2,863,000 for bridges and roads passed. From 1924 through 1926, twelve special road bridge districts were created in Pinellas County. According to Grisner's *Story of St. Petersburg*, bonds totaling \$6,251,000 were sold, covering the cost of 167 miles of highways and bridges.

Clearwater and St. Petersburg received a vital transportation link to Tampa when the Gandy Bridge was completed in 1924. It reduced the distance between St. Petersburg and Tampa from forty-three to nineteen miles. At the time it was the longest automobile toll bridge in the world. George (Dads) Gandy, who built the bridge, made a speech when it was completed which might have been the shortest speech in history. His speech: "The bridge is built."

Clearer to Clearwater another invaluable transportation link to Tampa came in 1934 when the Ben T. Davis Causeway was completed, after seven years of construction. It was a toll facility at first, which cost car and occupants fifty cents for a round trip. During World War II the government forced the sale of Gandy Bridge and Davis Causeway and the lifting of tolls. The reason was to make more expedient air force personnel trips to MacDill Air Force Base from homes and recreation facilities along the beaches, according to Hampton Dunn's *Yesterday's Clearwater*. The name Ben T. Davis Causeway gave way to Courtney Campbell Causeway after World War II when state road department improvements were made to the causeway. Courtney Campbell was a Clearwater resident who was responsible, to a large degree, for these improvements. The name Ben T. Davis was not forgotten, though, as it

became the name of the Tampa municipal beach at the Tampa side of the causeway.

However successful these transportation links to various communities in Pinellas were, by 1926 there was still no bypass of downtown core areas, and the isolated nature of the peninsula was to be a continuing problem over the years.

Sometime between December 1925 and June 1926, the Florida boom came to an end. At this time the public lost interest in Florida land, and real estate values dropped to low levels, according to Covington's *Story of Southwestern Florida*. To understand why the boom ended, it is necessary to understand why it began: "The 1925 boom was not an urge to retire in a pleasant cottage in Florida or bask in luxurious villas or seaside hotels... it was instead a greedy delirium to acquire riches overnight without benefit of effort, brains, or services rendered." (Fuller, *This Was Florida's Boom*)

Following the boom came the Depression. The stock market crashed in October of 1929, and Clearwater, along with the entire nation, felt the immediate effects. While construction slowed to a crawl, winter residents still came, but spent money exceedingly cautiously. Merchants could barely pay rents, and laborers and craftsmen left the area looking for work. Fruit packinghouses in the Clearwater area dwindled, and to make matters worse, the Mediterranean fruit fly hit the area in 1930. Arsenic was sprayed on the citrus before entire crops were spoiled.

Some relief to the area came in the form of federal monies which helped to alleviate local unemployment. One thousand people were employed with the construction of the Bay Pines Hospital and the Veteran's Administration Center. And in St. Petersburg the Works Progress Administration was responsible for the development of the Whitted Municipal Airport. At the same time the program was also responsible for a water system to the beaches.

A 1930 census showed citrus was the most important agricultural product of the county. The construction industry and the citrus industry each employed about 8 percent of the population of the county, according to the Pinellas Planning Council's *Historical Background of Pinellas County*. This history states that though the Depression dragged on for years, the local population continued to increase. Pinellas County jumped from 28,265 people in 1920, to 91,852 in 1940.