

## **Civic Services**

### Mosquito Control

At this time, Fort Myers Beach probably has the best mosquito control in southwest Florida, although there are still times when anyone, unfamiliar with the situation earlier than 1949, would hardly believe it.

In the summer of 1949 the two islands were formed into a mosquito control district -- the vote was 155 to 7-- and Bill Tooley, Jewell Ursoleo and Travis Cowart were elected directors. There had been some attempt at control before this using funds raised by subscription but now the money needed would be produced from taxes and effective plans could be made. The two mill tax brought in about \$4,500 the first year. This board spent many hours consulting with experts, selecting equipment and materials and fighting criticism of the program. Now, with a higher millage, we have a budget of well over \$60,000 per year and the majority of islanders believe it is money well spent. The board still has to spend hours and days studying new chemicals and new methods--and fighting criticism of the program.

When the state matching funds became available, to be used for permanent improvements, a dragline was purchased to be used for ditching and thoroughly draining the low spots around the islands.

In the spring of 1957 a county-wide mosquito control act was drawn up to be presented to the State Legislature proposing that all monies and equipment within the county be placed under county control for use all over the county. Since Fort Myers Beach already had the money and paid-for equipment to do a good job locally, our residents were loath to take a chance on having that equipment thrown into a county pool and used in far away areas, and having additional taxes, besides, to pay for necessary county equipment. We asked to be "included out" of the act. While our voices were hardly heard county-wide, they did reach Key West and Senator Bill Neblett flew up to the Beach where he was persuaded that our stand was right and just, and he insisted that the bill be introduced excluding the Beach from the county-wide system.

It proved to have been a wise decision. A few years later our district was

enlarged to take in a small area on the mainland which includes Siesta Isles and Tip Top Isles.

## Fire and Rescue

Until the late '40's our attempts at fire fighting had been more or less of the old bucket brigade type, but in 1949 a Volunteer Fire Department was formed. Earl Howie, first fire chief; Travis Cowart, 1st Captain; Al Lea, 2nd Captain, Frank Galla, 3rd Captain and Bob Smith, Secretary-Treasurer formed the core of the crew. The only equipment available at that time was a Jeep with a pump and a small amount of hose.

From this modest beginning has evolved our present fine fire department. Its two large pumper trucks have large tanks, plenty of hose, ladders and other necessary equipment and there is also a tanker truck that specializes in grass fires.

The Rescue Squad was started as a volunteer unit by the Fire Department in 1962 and made a part of the tax district in 1963. A specially designed panel truck is used, splendidly equipped for first aid in case of accidents or illness.

The Squad has made an unexcelled record for quick response to any local emergency whether it be on the water, on the streets or in the homes. The fast action of the men, on duty around the clock seven days a week, has prevented many serious accidents from becoming more serious.

A radio station hook-up with the Sheriff's office and the deputies' cars, and with other fire stations over the county, makes for quick cooperation in any direction.

The Fire Station is also designated as a United States weather station. with official rain gauge, thermometers, wind velocity and direction indicators.

All of this is financed by a two mill tax upon the Fire District which includes the two islands and a small amount of mainland territory laying near.

## Disposal Service

In the earlier days garbage was no particular problem; you just dug a pit,

tossed it in and the coons and birds took pretty good care of it. Then as more people came it did present a problem and a negro man and his family started a collection service of a sort.

However, in 1950 a "reformed executive" from Ohio, Glen Carver, saw the possibilities and the need and bought out the former operator. He installed modern equipment and used modern methods and gave the Beach a disposal system any community could take pride in. Where many towns are happy to get one collection a week, we have always had two -- and not from a littered front curb but from the rear of our property.

Perhaps one of the greatest benefits from this service was the clean-up of our "front yard." Prior to the new system, many people took their own garbage to a roadside dump on the Beach Road, supposedly back in the woods. However, people being as they are, many pitched their bundles from their cars on the highway making a most unsightly spot near the entrance to the islands. Through the efforts of Mr. Carver and the B.I.A., this was cleaned up In the early '50's and even the scars are now gone.

At the present time, Travis Cowart, one of our real "old timers" is head of the Beach Disposal Service.

A photograph of the early fire station appears at this point in the book (p.49).