

## Early Subdivisions

The first subdivision on the Island was platted in 1911 by H. C. Case. It extended along the Beach about three quarters of a mile each way from Connecticut Avenue and was part of the Robert Gilbert homestead. On this plat, Estero Boulevard is shown as Eucallptus Avenue and on later plats as Eucalyptus. Perhaps the first surveyor was not a very good speller. This tract was re-subdivided in 1913. A fifty-foot road shown along the beach in front of the lots in the subdivision apparently was not developed at that time. Beach erosion has made it impossible to do so now.

It was not until 1916 that another subdivision was put on the market when T. P. Hill subdivided a large tract starting at Crescent Street, running south-east and ending just south of the present Gulf Echo Motel. Beachside lots were of normal size but those on the north side were extra large and ran to the Bay; many were "approximately nine acres or ten acres." Brush and palmettoes were so thick that no attempt was made at an accurate survey. In those days no engineer was about to tramp through the mangroves for the sake of an acre or two of "cheap" land.

After Hill subdivided, it was some three years before more lots were put on the market. E. E. Damkohler and C. S. Fickland established Seagrape Subdivision on Mango and Avocado Streets in 1919. Avocado was renamed Chapel Street in 1952.

In 1921 Tom Phillips put Eucalyptus Park, part of the original Case subdivision, on the market. With the exception of those along the highway, the plat consisted of twenty-foot lots. No one seems to know why such narrow plots were designed except to be able to advertise a "lot" at a very low price--the same gimmick is still being used in this county. In April of 1921, Crescent Park Addition, bounded by Crescent Street and Primo Drive, also was platted by Tom Phillips. Here the First Canal, back of Crescent Street, was built by Phillips in 1924. In 1934 a large number of canal lots, each twenty-five feet wide, were sold for \$35 apiece.

In 1924 Donald Foley put in Highland Park and specified that no house should be built there for less than \$4000. He was too optimistic, for it was over thirty years before ANY house was built. Hercules Park was put on the

market this same year but there is no record of the owner's name on the original subdivision plat--perhaps he wanted to remain anonymous.

The following year, 1925, was the year of the big boom and anything having a Florida tag on it could be sold whether the buyer saw it or not. It mattered not whether it was on top of the water or underneath. The old plat books still show a subdivision on an island across the Bay from the present water tower, which is under water at every spring tide and is completely covered with mangroves, yet some one paid big money, sight unseen, for these lots which were shown only on some "developer's" map.

In January of this year. W. W. Watson put his Watson's Subdivision (Delmar Road) on the market. Although he did not dignify the street with a name at that time and his lots were only twenty-five feet wide and eighty feet deep, he did put in a forty-foot road and provided a place at the Bay for a turn-around. This was more than the developer did on Miramar in May of the same year. He left only eighteen feet for a roadway and utilities, and there was no way to turn at the Bay. In those days no one cared whether you could get out if they could just get you in. Have times changed much?

In June, Gulf Heights, a long way down the Island, with the beach itself providing the only road, was established by "The Hendry Brothers." Four months later the Fort Myers Beach Development Company, whose members we could not ascertain, opened Venetian Gardens and named not only their roads, but also their canals. On the plat the road is named Parlemo. Now it is known as Palermo and the question of which is right remains unsolved. The two canals, locally known as the Second and the Third canals were called the Canal Grande for the shorter one and the Rio Del Lido for the longer, Grandiose, indeed.

It was in October of that year that a Mr. Spalding. whose first name has been lost to history, locally at least, established Gulf View Plaza with Coconut as his street. He must have taken his cue from the Mirimar plat, for he, too, failed to make provision for a way to turn around at the Bay.

The arch at the north end of the swing bridge was built by Tom Phillips when he promoted much of San Carlos Island as a subdivision in 1924. This was before the road now in use was built and cars still came down the Bunche

Beach road and then along the beach. A wooden bridge with a fifty cent toll ran from the San Carlos Marina site to about where Snug Harbor is today, to take travelers on to Estero Island if they wished to go. This bridge went out in a hurricane and later the present swing bridge, almost at the same location, replaced it.

Sam Headly, who has lived at the Beach for many years had at that time a fleet of Model-T taxis which brought hundreds of land seekers down from Fort Myers for the weekly fish fries and to view the Phillips subdivision. A million dollar hotel was started on San Carlos Drive on the bay. The old foundations are still there but the hotel was never completed.

A photograph of the arch built at the north end of the swing bridge appears at this point in the book (p.13).

Things went along in fine shape during 1925 and early '26. Then, all at once, the customers were gone. The easy money had been spent and almost before anyone had a chance to comprehend what was happening, the thirties were on them, and for the next few years property moved with extreme sluggishness.

Only three additions were established in the next ten years. Winkler's First, in February 1930 started at Bay Street and ran west to the Gulf Echo Motel. (The present Beach School and our Public Library are on part of this ground.) Winkler's Second addition, subdivided in April of 1935, was just east of the first plot.

Things were beginning to move again when, in 1936, Hugh McPhie came along with McPhie Park, a part of the land he had homesteaded from the government years previously. In 1937 and 1940 he added to the subdivision.

Jack and Esther Power laid out Gulf Island Manor in 1941 and gave their lot owners more for their money than anyone else had ever done. They provided a lovely little park on the Bay, and on the Beach they kept an area for the use of the residents of their subdivision with an access road from the Manor. A sun shelter was built and maintenance for the little park provided. The Manor was the first in which the developer put in water and paved

roads.

Gulf-Bay View was established in 1941 also, and the subdivision with its two streets (Ohio and Virginia), with the canal between, became one of our lovelier districts.

During the Second World War years, and for some time afterwards, the real estate business was in the doldrums, but with the war over, many of the young fellows who had spent the time at Buckingham and Page Fields began to remember what an unspoiled tropical country this was. They came back bringing their families and friends; others, like the authors, had found the place by accident and felt immediately, "this is it." By the early fifties, the area had "caught on" and we were beginning to burst at the seams.

Until 1951, when Howard Garl built the drug store, the whole north-west part of the Island from San Carlos Boulevard to Estero Pass at the tip, was owned by the Collier Interests and on it was the old lighthouse and the quarantine reservations, land set aside for governmental facilities in case the Island ever developed into a commercial port. What a shame all of this was not retained as a public park!

Island Shores at the north end of the island was platted in 1950, and Laguna Shores at the other end in 1951. Holiday Shores was also a 1951 addition. Sandpiper Village followed in '52 and Holiday Heights and Flamingo Park in 1953. Others, large and small followed in rapid succession. Most of them, of course, are re-subdivisions of earlier ones. Some caught the public fancy and built up rapidly while others did not and it is hard to put a finger on the reason why.

An aerial photograph of the north end of Estero Island appears at this point in the book (p.15).