

Organizations

Most of the good things which have happened to the islands are the results of the concerted efforts of some organization or a combination of clubs. Having had no "political body" to turn to for help, public-minded citizens have banded together, sometimes under one name, sometimes under another, to promote the interests of the community.

The first civic organization was the FORT MYERS BEACH PROPERTY OWNERS' ASSOCIATION started in 1930 "to advance the needs of a growing community and to help beautify public and private grounds." One of the primary undertakings was the planting of six hundred coconut palms. These were put along Estero Boulevard from San Carlos Boulevard south to Connecticut Avenue which was as far as the road went at that time.

The Lee County Bank had a nursery then, and offered to supply the trees for 75¢ each, but the Association shopped around and bought them from another source for 25¢, plus another five cents for the planting. Two years later E.E. Damkohler sold the Association a large number of six-foot palms for 75¢ and agreed to deliver and plant them for that price. Many property owners took advantage of these offers and fine specimens, planted at that time, still beautify our roadways and home grounds.

The minutes of the Property Owners' Association, of which Bert Waite was the first president, show that in 1931 there were sixty improved properties on Estero Island. Things were moving right along in the early '30's and the Association was boosting all the way.

Through their efforts. the first voting precinct was established in 1932. That same year, a good deal of favorable publicity came this way when Santa arrived at the Beach in whiskers and bathing suit, via the Gulf by boat. It was the first of the much-publicized Christmas parties which have become one of our traditional events. Another important event of 1932 was the establishment of a non-sectarian Sunday School.

The Association sparked the move to get the first electricity brought in from Fort Myers in 1932. Prior to this the Beach Hotel and a few other places had their own light plants run by gasoline engines. Telegraph service was

established in 1933.

It was that same year that the Property Owners cited the need for a garbage disposal system and for mosquito control, and in 1935 there was agreement within the Association that the Island should incorporate to take care of sanitation, insect control, and to promote roads. Also, they stated, incorporation would insure an orderly growth to the community. This matter did not come up for voting, however, until 1945 at which time 67 voted for incorporation and 75 against it.

Since that time the question of incorporation has been brought to vote four more times and each time has lost by a very narrow margin. Old timers who have sweated out these campaigns are inclined to take a dim view of some newcomers when they ask, "Why hasn't anything ever been done about incorporating the Beach so we can control our own affairs."

Lee County was created in 1887 and Fort Myers was incorporated In 1885 with only 45 freeholders turning out to vote. An odd fact is that in 1965, the Beach is ten times larger than Fort Myers was at that time, and has not yet been able to incorporate.

The year 1940 marked the first time Fort Myers Beach was classified separately in the United States census. That year there were 473 people listed as living here. A gain of 175 more residents were shown five years later. The 1950 census showed only 711 permanent residents, but there were more living quarters than that. A fact which showed that the community was growing in popularity as a resort. In 1960 the census showed a population of 2,500, a gain of 250%, in ten years--400%, in twenty!

B. I. A.

Strange as it may seem, data on the strongest organization on the Beach has been the hardest to pin down. The BEACH IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION is the outgrowth of the old Beach Property Owners' Association. At just what point the B.I.A. assumed that name and began to operate under it could not be determined with certainty. The early minutes and records are apparently lost and there is such a diversity of opinion among those who were here at the time -- dates ranging from the late thirties to the late forties -- that we

cannot set a positive date. The best information points to 1946 with Art Hamel, Sr., as president and Mrs. Madge (Tiny) Roberts, secretary.

From the very first, an intense interest in community affairs was taken by the membership and every project to improve the islands was entered into with enthusiasm. The members were the leaders and the pushers. Help and money has been given toward all things which made for better living here; such projects as the channel marking in the Bay, beach and road clean up campaigns, Christmas and Fourth of July festivities and almost any community effort one could name.

Originally the B.I.A. had a dues-paying membership but after the Association was incorporated in 1949, every resident, permanent or temporary, automatically became a member and the organization was supported by contributions. In 1965 when the B.I.A. was reorganized, this was changed back to the original method and now members pay \$2 per family to belong.

Woman's Club

On October 9, 1950, forty women with a long range program for civic planning formed the FORT MYERS BEACH WOMAN'S CLUB and elected Mrs. J.B. Kavanaugh president. Other officers elected at that first meeting were Mrs. W.C. McGee, Mrs. R.D. Newton, Mrs. E.L. Stansbury and Mrs. Rodger Shawcross. Lucy McGee, Eleanore Stansbury and Helen Van Brunt were probably the spark-plugs of the group, although every member there deserves much credit. Their aim was to work for cultural improvement and to aid the B.I.A. in civic betterment. Such a vast amount of territory those two aims have encompassed The Woman's Club has worked right along with the B.I.A. and other organizations to get mail delivery, street signs and street paving. They have sponsored or assisted in the 4th of July celebrations, the County Park Christmas parties (Santa and the tree and goodies), the fashion fiestas, youth club dances and roller skating, teen club activities and other community entertainment. They have provided book reviews, hobby workshops, card parties and lectures; cooperated with garden clubs, beautification groups, and made their influence felt generally. They have made this a pleasant place for winter people to come back to.

Two prime projects, the birthing of the Beach Free Public Library and

acquiring the Community Hall (now officially named the Beach Woman's Club) have entailed endless work and planning.

A number of years ago, the B.I.A. had acquired the former school building which was financed through donations of the Islanders and built with W.P.A. labor. The land which still belonged to the county school board, was leased to the B.I.A. for twenty years. The building was used as the community hall and the Woman's Club aided in its maintenance. After the disastrous fire following hurricane Donna in 1960, the Club gave \$1000.00 toward rebuilding the hall and adding a complete kitchen. In 1963 the B.I.A. gave the building to the Woman's Club which then incorporated and bought the land from the school board. Projects to raise the money to do this ranged from A to Z but working together has brought a fine sense of fellowship. Regular groups within the club include book review, ceramics, arts and crafts, bridge, music appreciation, home and garden. and a beautification committee.

Photographs of the early school building which now is home to the Woman's Club and of the shell collection appear at this point in the book (p.54).

Legion and Auxiliary

The MELVIN COWART POST 247 AMERICAN LEGION seems to have been like "Topsy" at first--it just grew. It was active and doing a great deal of good locally prior to its official organization on April 16,1951. The Post took the name of a local man who fell in defense of his country, Melvin Cowart, the son of Mrs. Ollie Cowart and a brother of Travis.

Melvin Cowart Post 274 has taken a leading role in many phases of community life; it concerns itself with veteran affairs, advises and helps. Yearly it sponsors Boys' State, the American Legion School Awards, Little League, Memorial Day services, presentation of flags and the promotion of all phases of patriotism. The Post has always taken a prominent part in Civil Defense and consistently cooperates with other civic groups for community good. By its very nature, it also has performed certain less known but important community functions such as entertainment of the Blue Angels, acquiring erosion funds, formulating hurricane plans etc. These activities are greatly facilitated by the Post owning its own home where all veterans are

welcome.

AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY: Sometime after the American Legion Post organized, construction was begun on their Home on Crescent Street, its present location. The previous site of the converted barracks building was approximately where Don Adt's Insurance Company stands. The Saturday and Sunday work parties became the meeting place of family and friends. If the wives wanted to see their husbands during the week-end, they joined the group, bringing food and drink, and boosting the morale of the hard working crew. Many long hours of work and fellowship went into that Home.

And as day follows night it was only logical that the Legion members interested their wives in forming an Auxiliary to help further its aims and purposes. The charter , applied for in 1951, was granted in 1952 and was presented to the first president, Mrs. William (Pat) Mellor by Commander Rufus Yent at "a gala Sr. Patricks Day party." Other officers were Secretary Isabella S. Jennings; Treasurer Mildred Yent; Historian Sue Davison; Chaplain Priscilla Wood.

In the first year of operation the Auxiliary sponsored a first aid class through the Red Cross, bought snake-bite kits for the community and sponsored a bed in the St. Petersburg Crippled Children's Hospital. During the ensuing years other projects and responsibilities of national and community nature have been carried on: child welfare, civil defense, promoting Americanism in our school, sponsoring Girls' State to name a few. The most important of these has been the Walking Blood Bank, established in 1961. A roster of available doners has been maintained and over 100 pints of blood have been given for Beach residents and visitors. This year, in cooperation with Lee Memorial Hospital, the blood bank has been changed wherein blood may be given at any time and the "bank" credited so that it is already available at times of emergency.

The Legion Home is a friendly place. "The American Legion Auxiliary is the largest organization of women in the world and, if you are eligible for membership, there is room for you."

A photograph of Melvin Cowart after whom Post 247 of the American Legion is named appears at this point in the book (p.56).

Art Association

In 1951 THE BEACH ART ASSOCIATION was organized through the efforts of Mrs. Charles F. Green, with approximately a dozen people attending that first meeting at her home. Mrs. Green recalls that in the beginning it was difficult to get even three people together. She served as the first president of the group, Mrs. Frank Hitner, vice president; Mrs. Eleanor Stansbury, recording secretary; Mrs. M.W. Quave, corresponding secretary and Rolfe Schell, treasurer.

The opening of William Henry's Art School, and classes conducted by Morgan Dennis (probably best known for his famous Black and White scotties) and by Peter Kerr in 1951, whipped up added interest. Captain and Mrs. Hugh Branham, who established the Branham Shell Museum, were the organization's first honorary life members.

The Art Association aimed to promote the study and appreciation of, and interest in creative arts. Probably no one other organization has done as much to bring people to the Beach and to bring them back again. The eager amateur has been as warmly welcomed as the talented professional. Activities have included arts and crafts markets and any number of exhibitions, both local and imported. It has sponsored shows of the Sarasota Art Association, The Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Florida Federation of Art. Gulf Shore Inn has always been associated with art groups, having housed many traveling exhibits as well as being a "hanging" gallery for local artists.

When David V. Stahl was president in 1961, the Association was reorganized and incorporated under the name Fort Myers Beach Art Association, Inc. Mr. Stahl is once more president for the 1965-66 season with approximately 165 enrolled members.

The Art Association recently purchased property on Donora Street and plans are in the formative stage for a new building.

Yacht Club

THE BEACH YACHT CLUB was the outgrowth of an inspiration of a handful of

boating enthusiasts. Mr. and Mrs. Paul Fell, the Joe Ainsworths, the Hugh Whytes and Bobby Goetz, among others, were gathered together one evening back in 1950 and first thing anyone knew, here was a yacht club with Paul Fell elected commodore!

The Yacht Club has been one of the leading fun organizations of the Beach. Many overnight and week-end trips to Sanibel, Captiva, Boca Grande and other Island points of interest have been made. The regular monthly meetings have turned into cook-outs on near-by islands. At Dog Key extensive work was done clearing an area for picnic grounds and building a pier. This area was turned over to the Boy Scouts but when the shelter burned down the project was abandoned. The Yacht Club also built the picnic shelter at the County Park.

A major interest has been channel markers in Estero Bay. These now connect with markers at Bonita, providing an inside channel all the way.

Coast Guard Auxiliary

When it was organized in late 1957, THE COAST GUARD AUXILIARY was a very welcome addition to this sea-going community. Up until that time there was no official body to call upon when there was trouble on the water. Many a worried wife or mother has lived through hours of suspense wondering why a long over-due boat had not come in. Prior to the coming of the U.S. Coast Guard in the summer of '63, the Auxillary's activities were mainly search and rescue. For several years this flotilla had the highest number of assists in the district. Since the establishment of the Coast Guard Station, the work has been largely educational with emphasis on water safety. Also, much of the local boat inspection has been in the hands of the Beach Flotilla.

Coast Guard

Early in July 1963, a Coast Guard station house boat, said to have cost some \$50,000, completely airconditioned and comfortably furnished, was installed at the San Carlos Marina. D.G. Rash, Chief Bosun, with nine men under him, was in charge of operations. It was a red-letter day for the Beach.

On July 19, Rear Admiral I.J. Stephens commissioned the new U.S. Coast Guard Search and Rescue Station, followed by open house and a demonstration of what could be expected of the equipment and personnel.

Local Coast Guard Auxiliary members officially representing the Beach were C.K. Shogren , Division Captain, Jim Midgley, Beach Flotilla Commander and Don Decker, Beach Flotilla Vice Chairman.

At the time of commissioning, Admiral Stephens stated that this was to be a temporary station, that a permanent base was expected to be built later, probably on Sanibel. This plan was abandoned and a spot was selected here at the Beach. This cite, although suitable and recommended, proved to be too expensive, so at the present time it looks as if the temporary station might become permanent.

A 1963 photograph of the Coast Guard station house boat appears at this point in the book (p.59).

Lions and Auxiliary

THE FORT MYERS BEACH LIONS CLUB was presented its charter on January 15, 1953, at a party given at the Fort Myers Lions' Den by the Fort Myers Club for the Lions and their ladies. Rufus Yent was the first president,, supported by officers Ned Hills, Carl Kragh, John (Doc) Wilson, Leo Hunt, Art Hamel, Jr., Rodger Shawcross, and directors William Kunkle, Olen Bee, Rolfe Schell and Walter Thomas. The Lions have been sparkplugs in almost every Beach activity and have taken an important part in all community affairs. Our Annual Beach Day, one of their principal contributions, has always been a success. They have supported their own national projects, raised money for the blind, and can be cited as one of the outstanding clubs in the district. In 1958, five years after the Lions Club organized, the local ladies formed the Lions AUXILIARY. Taking a cue from their spouses, these women have been outstanding in their contribution to the community. They have made donations annually to the Beach Public Library and the Beach Beautification Committee; they have assisted in various welfare drives and, since the opening of Edison Junior College, have maintained a \$200 scholarship which is awarded each year to a Beach student attending E.J.C.

Rotary

THE FORT MYERS BEACH ROTARY CLUB was Chartered on April 12. 1955 with Rolfe Schell serving as president for the first two years. The local club

has, at this time, thirty-five members, representing most of the businesses.

The Beach Club's International Committee is in the process of building a library for the school children of Islas Mujeres, a small island off the coast of Mexico.

The Beach Rotary Club sponsored the formation of the Cape Coral Rotary Club in June 1964 and is currently working on the formation of a club in Bonita Springs.

Beautification

The present BEACH BEAUTIFICATION COMMITTEE, organized September 14, 1959, at the home of its first president, Charles Wyland, is the end result of many earlier efforts to preserve and enhance the beauty of our islands.

The first Beautification Committee was appointed in 1930 by the Beach Property Owners' Association, (the forerunner of the B.I.A.). Since then a series of beautification groups, some lasting one season and some several years, have been formed. All have left their mark on the community, but as the village grew, individual organizations could not begin to do an effective job, hard as they might work.

Postmaster Wyland, who, incidentally, established the first furniture store at the Beach, called together a number of individuals who were interested in beauty and proposed that a permanent organization, comprised of a representative of every civic group on the islands, be started. He stressed the fact that by working and consulting together, pooling their efforts and money, more interest would be generated and more effective work could be done.

True to his expectations, the Beautification Committee has become one of our healthiest Beach organizations. The charming garden at the Arch is a fitting memorial to the man whose spark welded these groups together.

Working hand in glove, almost literally, with the beautification committee, is the ESTERO ISLAND GARDEN CLUB. Mrs. Irene Paden sparked the group into action and November 11, 1959, they organized and elected Mrs. E.

Carlisle Hunter their president. Mrs. Arthur Viets was the first secretary and Mrs. T.V. Nichols, treasurer. Soon after organization they affiliated with the National Federation of Garden Clubs.

Long range projects of the club and the horticulture group of the club have included the landscaping of the school grounds, the library and the Arch at the entrance of Estero Island. Once a year they sponsor the Litter Bug Clean-up campaign and in the fall they promote a plant sale at which time they urge people to beautify the islands by planting flowers, trees and shrubbery "everywhere." Bob and Ida Creech, who grow as a hobby many of the plants for this sale, are probably responsible for as much of the greenery on the Beach as anyone since Mr. Damkohler planted his first palms.

The Beach Library has a very fine collection of books on gardening and horticulture which were donated by members of the Garden Club.

Photographs of the Wyland Memorial Garden and the Beach Free Public Library appear at this point in the book (p.62).

Chamber of Commerce

The BEACH BUSINESS ASSOCIATION was organized in 1951 by local merchants who eagerly backed Walter Thomas' slogan "Save a Trip to Town." This was the year the Beach Bulletin was established and through good publicity, local people began to realize that almost all kinds of merchandise and services were available right here at home. A few years later the Association was expanded to include accommodations owners. and the name was changed to the HOLIDAY CLUB. From this developed the Beach Chamber of Commerce whose charter, granted in April, 1959, showed 183 charter members, several of whom took duplicate memberships. Bob MacLeod was the first president and was assisted in his duties by twelve board members. It is from these twelve that the Chamber officers are selected.

In 1960 the Fort Myers Beach Chamber of Commerce became a member of the United States Chamber and in 1961 joined the Florida State Chamber. There has always been close cooperation between the Beach Chamber and the Fort Myers-Lee County Chamber.

Joseph Taylor was hired in 1962 as the first manager and the following year was made manager-treasurer. Ms. Winnie Holland Aymar was the secretary and presided at the information booth that first year and after her resignation, the post was filled by Mrs. E. E. Marshall.

Tarpon Hunters

It is difficult to pinpoint just who first inspired the Beach Tarpon Hunters' Club, but thinking back, Frank Dellabella recalls Jack Cathcart and Dick Berguin as being the first to suggest it. Frank Dellabella and Bob Pelton, being at the Tarpon Tackle Shop at that time, kept the idea going, and on September 8, 1961, an organization meeting was called. Attending were six couples: the Frank Dellabellas, Bob Peltons, Charles Tuckers, Rennie Roots. Roland Roberts and Ken Lowells. They appointed a by-laws committee consisting of Jack Cathcart, Walter Thomas, Ace Lee, Frank Dellabella, Stan Ollis. Bea Root. On October 30, 1961, The Tarpon Hunters Club of Fort Myers Beach held its first open meeting at the Beach School Auditorium. Officers elected were: Frank Dellabella, president; Stan Ollis, vice-president; Vernon Kruse. treasurer; Libby Roberts, secretary. Board of Directors were: Walter Thomas, Ken Lowell and Bob Pelton.

The Club is dedicated to furthering the grand sport of Tarpon fishing, promoting good sportsmanship, and conservation.

The Club has received nationwide publicity from having the National Outdoor Writers attend a monthly hunt in 1963.

Among its civic projects are the floats entered each year in the Pageant of Light Parade and the Shrimp Festival Parade.

The Club has greatly helped promote summer tourist business on the Beach, besides having a whale of a time (beg pardon-a tarpon of a time) with its open-to-everyone tarpon hunts and its family activities.

Realtors

It has been said in Florida that when a coconut falls it's bound to drop on the

head of a real estate salesman. Fort Myers Beach is not without its full share of vendors of property. In 1959 Edna Smith and Nancy MacLeod felt it was time to up-grade the public image of the profession. They and their husbands, Bob Smith and Bob MacLeod, were realtors, so it was decided that a BOARD OF REALTORS would be the means to this end. Nineteen local realtors made up the original board and their charter was granted December 12. Bob Smith was the first president, Nancy Nash MacLeod, vice president and Connie Brigham, (Mrs. Ralph Brigham) secretary-treasurer. Their prime objectives were to further the professional standards of the real estate business and, through discussions, iron out different problems confronting brokers and properties.

In addition to activities pertaining to real estate, they have taken part as a group in civic affairs.

P. E. O.

Chapter CO of the P.E.O. Sisterhood (the 93rd in the State of Florida) was granted a charter March 27, 1963. P.E.O. is an organization, international in scope whose purpose is to promote education among women. "Educate a man and you have educated a man. Educate a woman and you have educated a family." The sisterhood owns Cottey College, an outstanding women's junior college in Nevada, Missouri. It provides scholarships for gifted women of foreign countries who wish to come to the United States to study, and it operates a million dollar educational loan fund. First officers of CO were Adelaide Brown, Sue Campbell, Gertrude Crawford, Edith McIntosh, Bessie Rieck, Betsy Campbell and Ruth Workman.

A. A. R. P.

The A.A.R.P. (American Association of Retired Persons) is the youngest organization on the Beach at this time, with, perhaps. the most mature members. Formed June 9, 1964, under the direction of the president of the North Fort Myers chapter, William Hull, it is a non-profit, non-political organization of persons over 55 years of age, aimed to stretch retirement insurance, medicine, and related services. It also points up the fact that older folk have much to offer the world in useful services, happy relationships and individual well-being. AARP is helping to provide the

opportunities for such a realization. Mrs. Ralph Schrock was elected president. Her officers are Robert Dominice, Mrs. Celita Pike and Mrs. William Staggers