

Roads and Bridges

Originally San Carlos Island was part of the mainland but in an early day an attempt was made to drain an inland pond and a trench was cut from the pond to the Bay. Erosion and storms enlarged the trench through the Nigger Hole and a hurricane finished the job making it necessary to build a bridge-- the bridge locally called the "Little Bridge" which connects San Carlos Island to the mainland.

The first road from Fort Myers to the Beach was devious. Travelers came out McGregor Boulevard from the city, continuing toward Punta Rassa to the road which leads to the present Bunche Beach. From that point one traveled along the shore line, across the Nigger Hole, over a small wooden bridge, and on to Matanzas Pass with the road coming in near the location of the present swing bridge.

The old road was replaced by the present route in 1926 and 1927, and the following year the concrete "Swing Bridge" was installed. This bridge, which was moved from an east coast location, was sufficient for the time being but has been a source of irritation for at least fifteen years.

The only concrete road at Fort Myers Beach was built at that time. This bit of paving, starting just north of the Arch and running to the county pier, is now thirty-five years old and in just as good condition as when first constructed. It makes one pause and wonder if the "economy" of constructing our usual black-top roads is far outweighed by the expense of repairing and rebuilding them.

Prior to the coming of the shrimp fleet the turn bridge was hand operated, one man opening it by a sweep in the center--a hard, slow process. With the influx of boats, necessitating opening the bridge a dozen times a day, the procedure was too laborious so two men were put on the sweep. In 1950 the bridge was reconstructed to open and close by electricity. Unsuitable for this kind of machinery, the worn cogs and other works of the bridge (a "second hand" bridge in the first place,) now old and temperamental, began to be a source of concern. What if the bridge failed to open during a storm period, a fire or a medical emergency? Agitation for a new bridge with adequate machinery and power became second only to the weather as a subject of conversation. "A new bridge for safety sake" became the slogan of the day.

Meetings of citizens with officials brought proposals and counter proposals. As early as 1960 these conferences were being held. Finally, feeling they were getting nowhere with county or state officials, the local committee said, "Give us a bridge, any bridge anywhere, but get us a second bridge"

The County Commission finally decided that a bridge and causeway running from the south end of Estero Island to Bonita Beach was feasible, and the state made a survey and established the proposed roadway. This layout did not please some land owners so an alternate route was selected by surveyor Carl Johnson of Fort Myers. This was adopted by the county and Johnson became known as "the father" of the project. The Causeway and Bridges were begun in mid-July, 1963, and opened to the public on July 4, 1965. Traversing the four miles of water and island, this is sure to be a silver link in the chain of bridges which will someday connect all of the Gulf islands of the south west Florida coast.

A early photograph of what is now Estero Boulevard appears at this point in the book (p.17).