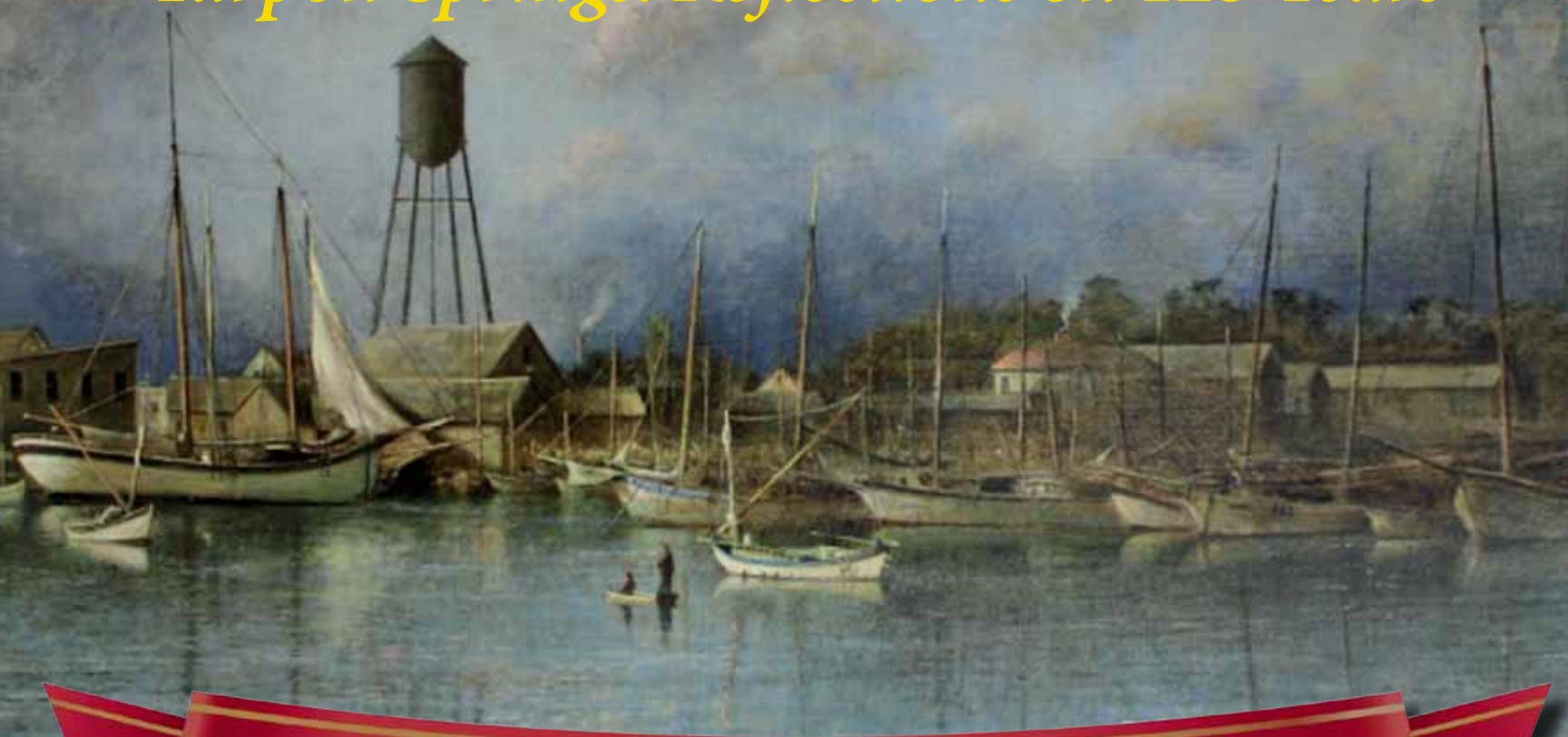


CELEBRATING COMMUNITY

Tarpon Springs: Reflections on 125 Years



City of Tarpon Springs, Florida 1887-2012

CELEBRATING COMMUNITY: *Tarpon Springs, Reflections on 125 Years*

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*Cover Art: TARPON SPRINGS PORT by George Inness, Jr., 1853-1926 (oil on canvas).
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TARPON SPRINGS AREA
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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FOREWORD

Tarpon Springs' residents and visitors alike should find this collection of articles celebrating the City's 125 years of history a fascinating journey through time. Five noted authors share their expertise, illuminating diverse facets that make this community unique.

Known widely as the sponge capital of the world and for the Greek culture supporting it, this volume sheds light on the area's prehistory through archaeology, its broad maritime heritage, an arts legacy built upon two generations of the Inness family, the town's extraordinary richness in both "high style" and vernacular architecture, and the dramatic changes brought to Tarpon Springs by World War II. Significant photographs from the archives of the Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society and important artwork from the area add visual dimension.

Not mentioned by the authors, but in my mind of enormous consequence in the history of post-World War II Tarpon Springs, is the bypassing of the city by today's US Highway 19. What may well have been deemed an adverse commercial effect 60 years ago has resulted in a historic built environment and cultural landscape thanks to the historic preservation movement this bypassing indirectly enabled.

The success of historic preservation in Tarpon Springs demonstrates that preservation is not backward-looking or against progress. Instead, preservation has sought to manage the future so as not to spoil the very qualities of life that have made Tarpon Springs so attractive in the first place. Here one sees that historic preservation is not an end in itself, but a strategy to achieve neighborhood stabilization, economic development, community conservation, and tourism development. A bright future for Tarpon Springs lies, in part, in its past.

Roy Hunt
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Left: The Tarpon Springs Sponge Docks, c. 1915 and 2010.

CHAPTER 1

PREHISTORY, ARCHAEOLOGY, AND THE EARLY YEARS

Brent R. Weisman, Ph.D.



In Ages Past by Christopher M. Still (2002, oil on linen, 126 in. x 48 in.). Florida House Chambers in the State Capitol, Tallahassee.

Human beings first came to the Tarpon Springs area at least 12,000 years ago. The world they saw was very different from today. The earth was in the throes of the Great Ice Age. A massive volume of the planet's oceans were frozen into mile-high mountains of glacial ice. The climate was cooler and drier than it is now because so much of the available water was locked up in ice. Worldwide sea levels were much lower, exposing vast areas of continental shelf as dry land. Sea levels were low enough to reveal continent-sized land masses such as Beringia, the 1000-mile wide now-submerged terrain that connected northern Asia with North America, bridging what is now Siberia to present-day Alaska. The first human inhabitants of North America hunted their way across this terrain, moving ever east and south across the continent. They did not come all at once, and some may have come by boat and skirted their way south along the Pacific coast, but it was these people whose descendants made their way into Florida. Archaeologists call them

Paleoindians. Very little is known about them and probably will never be known. There were not many of them and they made very little impact on the land. Parts of the land where they lived were on the continental shelf now submerged beneath the Gulf of Mexico.

The Paleoindians almost certainly hunted, fished and gathered plant foods on this broad flat stretch of land, especially in areas where rivers and streams cut their way across the sands toward the Gulf's edge. Some archaeologists have spent their careers in the quest for submerged remains of this Paleoindian way of life, but the underwater world is slow to give up its secrets. Around water holes and springs Paleoindians hunted mammoths, mastodons, ancient bison, and land tortoises—animals that would not survive the end of the Ice Age. Archaeologists sometimes find fossilized bones of these animals that show butcher marks from stone tools or even death by spearpoint. Because stone tools are imperishable and nearly everything else of

the Paleoindians has disappeared, everything about stone tools—how and when they were made, what they were made from, what they were used for—has attracted a great deal of archaeological attention.

Paleoindians and the Florida Indians that came after them were not interested in digging deep holes or tunneling shafts into the earth to get the kind of rock they needed for their tools. The ideal rock had to be accessible, plentiful, and easily worked and sharpened into serviceable knives, spearpoints, and cutting edge tools for working wood and fleshing hides. This ideal rock was found in the Tarpon Springs area in outcrops from Bailey's Bluff south to Caladesi Island. Known as "chert," this rock was formed inside the limestone sediment laid down when Florida was covered by shallow seas, long before the Ice Age during the Miocene geological epoch more than 10 million years ago. Limestone contains the fossilized remains of many tiny marine organisms, both plant and animal. Over millions of years,

as these muds turned into rock, silica from some of these tiny skeletons became concentrated within the limestone to form chert. This same shallow sea was also home to ancient coral reefs, some of which also became fossilized stone. Fortunately for the Indians, the silica in chert and coral gave them glass-like qualities and they could be sharpened into very effective tools. Chert, and more rarely coral, were found in abundance in rock outcrops. These outcrops, which supplied the raw materials that were so vital to the Indians' stone tool technology, became important resources and were used for many thousands of years. Chert and coral became the anchor of Indian existence in the Tarpon Springs area over those thousands of years of prehistory. One can walk the bluffs and shoreline today and see where these people of long ago came to do their work. They are known best by what they have left behind—the many flakes of rock discarded as a tool was shaped from a lump of stone, and every so often a stone tool itself, broken, worn out, or simply lost.

About 10,000 years ago the climate was becoming warmer and the melted glacial ice was returning to the sea. Warmer temperatures and rainfall became more common, and the earth became a wetter place than it had been for more than a million years. This was a new geological epoch called the Holocene. Sea levels continued to rise as the ice caps shrank. Vast areas of land became submerged as the oceans expanded. The continent of Beringia, once the gateway to the Americas, fell beneath the covering seas of the Arctic Ocean. Florida's broad continental shelf was covered by the Gulf of Mexico, submerging territory once roamed by the Paleoindians. Animals that had adapted to Ice Age climate could not survive in this warmer world. About 4,500 years ago Florida became the Florida we know today, in size, shape, and by the types of plants and animals that characterize its natural communities. Generation



Tarpon Springs area spear points. Collection of Richard & Vickie Hague, on display at the Tarpon Springs Heritage Museum.

by generation, native peoples were adjusting to life in this new Florida and were discovering that they could live quite well. Archaeologists call the early part of this adjustment the Archaic period, spanning the years from about 10,000 to 6,000 years ago.

Many opportunities presented themselves for life in this new watery world. As wetlands formed in low ly-

ing areas along the coast and in the river drainages of the interior, fish and shellfish found conditions perfect for growth and reproduction, and they began to live there in great abundance. Although humans certainly knew how to fish and collect shellfish from time immemorial, they now had the opportunity to make this natural bounty a dietary mainstay. The plentiful oysters, clams, and fish provided a steady nutritious diet making it possible for more people to live together over longer periods of time. The need to pick up and move to follow the seasonal cycles of game animals was no longer as important. People could find everything they needed in the local environment. The estuaries were rich sources of food. Life was more secure than it had been for the earlier Archaic people or the Paleoindians. Populations grew and more people were living in this area of Florida than ever before.

This new wetlands way of life brought many changes to prehistoric Indian culture. Archaeologists have much more to work with in understanding



Black dirt midden. Photo courtesy of the Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society.

how these people lived and how they saw their world. At the places where they lived—along the bayous and backwaters of the Anclote River and in the coastal marshes—prehistoric Floridians discarded the remains of their everyday life: oyster shells, fish bones, turtle shells, the occasional deer bone, a broken stone tool, bits of charcoal, and lenses of ash from cooking fires. Over hundreds of years as these piles of trash grew larger, they came to resemble small mounds and became raised features of the landscape. Archaeologists call these

mounds “middens.” Many of them remain beneath the homes and yards of residential Tarpon Springs. Some parts of a midden contain shells which were thrown out after meat was removed and eaten. Some areas of middens are mostly blackened soil that can show where people lived and how they spent their time. Carefully peeling back the layers through archaeological excavation provides an experience of traveling through time to a distant world, so far removed from our own yet exists right beneath our feet.

Sifting through these midden layers also reveals pottery not found in the earlier Archaic and Paleoindian cultures. Pottery, made from clay into different shapes for different pur-



Pot found in the Safford Mound. Courtesy of the Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society.

poses and fired to make it hard and usable, but when broken ended up in the household trash, became a layer in a midden. Archaeologists delight in finding pottery because it gives them new insights about how these ancient people interacted with their environment and with each other. Because styles of pottery decoration and the kinds of clay mixes used differed across regions and by time period, archaeologists can use pottery

types to mark different time periods and sets of related pottery types to define archaeological cultures and areas. Based on the presence of specific pottery types, it is known that after the Archaic period the prehistoric people of Tarpon Springs participated in the Deptford, Weeden Island, and Safety Harbor archaeological cultures. These cultures are named after sites where these pottery families were first recognized and defined. Beginning with the Deptford Period (about 500 BCE) and ending in Safety Harbor times in the centuries before the first Europeans came to Florida (in the early 1500s) native peoples lived and thrived on the bounty of land and sea.

It is unclear exactly where or by whom pottery was first invented or how many times or how the idea of pottery making first came to Florida, but its uses are well known. It is very good for boiling soups or stews made from plants and small bits of meat too small to roast, like small fish and shellfish. Pottery bowls were used to serve food and to store water, nuts

and seeds. Pottery makes food preparation and consumption more efficient. Furthermore, pottery is made from wet clay, and wet clay invites the decorative impulse. Pottery is a medium of human creative expression, no less so in antiquity than in the modern world. Like their contemporaries across Florida and elsewhere in native North America, the Indians of Tarpon Springs decorated their pottery using a variety of styles and techniques. To decorate the wet clay surfaces of their pots, they pressed carved wooden paddles into the clay to create simple linear designs, complicated circular or curvilinear patterns, and waffle-iron-like grids. They cut in sharply incised designs with pointed sticks, bones, or shells, stippled in patterns of small punctuations, and cut away areas of clay to create raised designs. Their designs were not random or free-form, but very regular, patterned, and traditional. Designs were passed down from one generation to the next with styles and methods that were nearly unchanged over hundreds of years, evidence that family life and society

were stable for long periods of time. When big changes in pottery design are seen—as for example when the elegant and precise motifs on Weeden Island pottery became careless and clumsy on pottery of the Safety Harbor period—it indicates that something changed in the way people were living. Pottery alone does not give all the answers, but does hold important clues.

Pottery also provides insight into the spiritual world of prehistoric Floridians, especially how they saw life after death. Pottery was placed in burial mounds with the dead. Some of it was specially made for funereal purposes: it may have held food and drink for the deceased; it was placed on the sand used to cover the dead to consecrate the burial; and some of it may have been owned by the deceased. As populations grew in the Tarpon Springs area and people began to stay put for longer and longer periods of time, they communally honored their dead by interring them with special rituals in burial mounds made of sand. In recent years people

seeking the finest pottery made in prehistory dug up burial mounds in acts of wanton destruction. Digging up burial mounds is now against the law in Florida and in many other states except in special and highly regulated circumstances. If on federal property, digging up mounds violates federal law, but great damage has already been done. Some damage, although not intentional, was even done by archaeologists in an earlier era when excavation techniques were less precise. Unfortunately, this was the fate of the two best-known prehistoric burial mounds in the vicinity of Tarpon Springs.

In January 1896 the first of these, named the Safford Mound, after the prominent Tarpon Springs resident Anson Safford, was excavated by the Smithsonian Institution's Frank Hamilton Cushing. Cushing, one of the most colorful and controversial figures in the early history of American anthropology, was already famous as the “man who lived with the Indians” for his previous in-depth study of the Zuni Indians. Now he

was on his way to more fame as the discoverer of the “Court of the Ancient Pile Dwellers” in the muck of Key Marco on Florida's southwest coast. Temporarily delayed in Tarpon Springs, awaiting use of the converted sponge boat that would serve as the base of his Marco expedition, Cushing busied himself with exploring the archaeology of Tarpon Springs, quickly learning of and then organizing digging crews for the excavation



Frank Hamilton Cushing, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution [Item ID: Port 22]. Used by permission.

of the Safford Mound on the edge of downtown, and the Hope Mound located in a wooded hammock some seven or eight miles to the north.

As it appeared to Cushing, the Safford Mound was 6 feet tall and 128 feet across. He directed a local crew of laborers to dig a trench to a depth of almost 10 feet, slicing through the middle of the mound itself into the natural ground below. This revealed a pit dug before the mound was started, which was below two subsequent distinct layers of soil used to build the mound. In Cushing's estimate at least 600 complete or partial skeletons were buried in the layers throughout the mound, some in bundles of bones and others tightly pulled up into "skeleton packs." With them and sometimes in caches on their own were dozens of pottery vessels, of the types now known as Crystal River Incised, Swift Creek Complicated Stamped, Weeden Island Zoned Red, Weeden Island Incised, Safety Harbor Incised and others. This indicated the range of geographical connection that these people had and the

hundreds of years that the mound was in use. Some of the vessels had been "killed" by intentionally knocking a hole out of the bottom. Cushing also found objects made of galena, mica, and greenstone, which indicated long-distance trade with cultures to the north.

Cushing thought that Safford Mound was a ceremonial center, the long-standing sacred hub of the region's ritual life. The Hope Mound was excavated by the expedition's artist Wells Sawyer while Cushing focused on Safford. It was taller and more conical than Safford Mound and had fewer burials (perhaps only 50). It also had three layers, but showed a narrower range of pottery types and a briefer period of use, perhaps restricted to the early Weeden Island period. The most important person buried in the Hope Mound seems to have been a middle-aged woman adorned with pearl and conch shell beads and a repousse-style copper pendant over her breast. The archaeologists found the charred remains of pyre-like structures in Hope and Safford, possibly indicating a stage



Medicine bottles found on the Safford property during excavation. Photo courtesy of the Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society.

in the burial ceremony when the corpses were exposed above ground before final interment. As places of the dead, the Safford and Hope mounds are the last best look at the lives of these prehistoric people, what brought them meaning, how they saw themselves in this world and the afterworld, and how they related to one another. By late prehistory they began to fade into obscurity, at least as we know them archaeologically. There are some mounds along the Anclote River where chiefs or priests

might have staged ritual performances; if so, their society gave some people more power and authority than others. But the function of these so-called temple mounds has yet to be confirmed. When the first Spanish conquistadores passed through this area of Florida in the 16th century they steered to the east and moved on, not finding it worth their time to raid and plunder. The Spaniards brought with them a new way of life, and the world transformed yet again. When the Spaniards and colonial Europeans who followed faded into history, Americans eager for opportunity once again brought human settlement to Tarpon Springs. Hamilton Disston was one of the first of these men who saw a future of prosperity in developing land for wealthy people from the North, eager for new ventures or simply seeking a refuge from the frigid winters.

The City of Tarpon Springs was incorporated in 1887 and welcomed the arrival of the Orange Belt Railroad. Soon others sought their livelihoods in the waters of the Anclote

River and the coastal lagoons. The famous sponge industry got its start, attracting both Bahamian spongers and an influx of Greek immigrants. Meanwhile, as transportation by sea took on commercial importance, the need for safe navigation became a priority. On September 15, 1887 the Anclote Key Lighthouse was lit for the first time by keeper James Gardner. By land and sea Tarpon Springs was now connected to the modern age.

Archaeology of the recent historical past of Tarpon Springs can bring new insights into the lives of these early residents in dramatic and tangible ways that the written record cannot. It is known from the chinaware and broken bottle glass found in the trash dumps in the mangrove fringe of Anclote Key that the lighthouse keepers, their families, and assistants did not lead primitive, isolated lives, deprived of the consumer goods so desired in modern society. One can see and touch the medicine bottles that might have been used by physician

Mary Safford to dispense remedies to the ailing residents of Tarpon Springs. One can see that the past is still very much a part of the present, whether evidenced in the stone tools or shell middens of now-nameless prehistoric peoples or in the glass bottles and broken dinner plates buried in the Safford backyard.



Pottery sherds found at sites near the Anclote River. Photo courtesy of the Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society, by Phyllis Kolianos.

CHAPTER 2

WHAT HAPPENED TO ALL THOSE BOATS? A SKETCH OF MARITIME HERITAGE

Jeff Moates



In Tarpon Springs, the community's heritage—its artifacts, photographs, history, cultural connections, and reenactments—is tied to the sea. Residents and visitors who walk along the Sponge Docks today and look out over the inner harbor can see the activities and the historical interpretations around them and feel a connection to the Tarpon Springs that once was. While some maritime pursuits have changed and even diminished, those who still make their living from the water do so in similar ways, on similar looking boats, and in the same waters as their ancestors did some 50 or 100 years ago. From these fisherman and spongers we can learn about the sea, the difficulties they faced, and the exploits in which they took part.

Descendants of fishing families tell stories of an earlier time and their desire to put into practice the traditions and techniques passed down through generations. This is heritage at work in Tarpon Springs. Heritage infuses the past, made opaque by time, into our lives today and reveals

links to exciting and enriching opportunities for the future.

In the early decades of the 20th century, Tarpon Springs quickly became a renowned commercial capital of the sponge fishing industry, rival to other maritime enclaves in the Mediterranean world. Greek sponge diving families helped usher in this success. Skilled in maritime trades and savvy in entrepreneurial spirit, these emigrating families harnessed the commercial potential of the sea sponge and brought about the unique character and style of Tarpon Springs. This continues to be expressed in numerous ways including the style of watercraft brought over and utilized in the sponge trade. This Greek tradition pours through the town and spills over into the surrounding region. Along the south side of Tampa Bay people can trace their second, third, and fourth generation roots to the sponge industry and related endeavors in Tarpon Springs.

Before the influx of Greek spongers in the early 1900s, area settlers and seasonal fishermen from Key West

and the Bahamas capitalized on the rich fishing grounds and sponge beds located offshore. Some 140 years ago the area developed, as many coastal settlements in Florida did, along an accessible waterway. The mouth of the Anclote River served as the area's original settlement where fishermen, spongers and traders from these and other Florida ports could stop to offload and load marketable goods before shipping out to travel up and down the coast. But what happened to all those boats? What is it about them that inspires our imaginations? What activities other than sponge fishing occurred on these waterways?

Resources located in and along the Anclote River and its surrounding springs, bayous and bays served the area's original settlers well. Many adapted their own fishing and farming traditions to support life on the edge in this distinctly Florida environment. In addition to farming the land, these early settlers harvested resources from area waters using flat-bottomed work boats as a base for net fishing. In order to suit the needs

of Florida fishermen, craftsmen who built and operated these vessel types drew upon design origins from the famous “sharpie” style boat found along the northeastern seaboard in the early 19th century. Due mainly to the economy of construction and adaptability of this boat type, its use spread south along the mid-Atlantic and tidewater states, ultimately arriving in Florida by the late 19th century by pioneers from these very same regions.

Florida boatbuilders outfitted these vessels, sometimes referred to as “skipjacks,” as both working craft and yachts. These sailboats had centerboards that helped the relatively flat-bottomed boat sail close to the wind. The hulls also drew a very shallow draft, an advantage in the abruptly changing bay bottoms and inlets of Florida’s coastal environment. With variations on the type of sailing rig used, these boats could be handled easily by a small crew allowing for a focus on their catch, mostly of mullet and other near-shore and inshore species. Based on what is seen in other Florida coastal communities of

the time, it is likely that early settlers in Anclote and Tarpon Springs built and utilized these same vessel types.

In addition to the rich fisheries in the area, early settlers also learned of the abundant and valuable sponge beds located just offshore. But the story of the sponge industry does not account for all of the activities that the new citizens enjoyed in area waters. Originally founded as a resort town, Tarpon Springs and the surrounding waters of the Anclote River and Spring Bayou acted as much as a playground as they did a place of work. Indeed, before Tarpon became a capital in the sponge industry its founders, like many in Florida, praised the benefits of the spring-fed waters as a natural health rejuvenator with restorative power in hopes that travelers and tourists would be drawn to the area. In order to improve accessibility to these outsiders, a rail connection was completed in 1887, the year townsfolk voted to incorporate Tarpon Springs. This brought an increase in travelers and settlers to the city, due in part to Hamilton Disston and his busi-

ness associate Anson P.K. Safford. They had decided to make Tarpon Springs the new site for the Florida office of the Lake Butler Villa Company and the base of operations for all of Disston’s Florida lands. With this new influx of people and capital, Tarpon Springs began to develop and become home to a new winter resort. Railroads brought people to the area, but the waterways around Tarpon Springs still served as the main arteries.

Various light-drafted watercraft shaped transportation for locals and visitors alike, but many also provided a business connection among the river and



Steam launch Ellen billows smoke in the air with passengers at Pinders Landing on the Anclote River. Photo courtesy of the Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society.

bayous. Sometimes pleasure or recreational watercraft served dual purposes, as was the case with some barges, small rowing skiffs and canoes. At times, they acted as much as a platform for delivering goods as they did for delivering people on weekend excursions or picnics upriver to Pinders Landing. Boaters usually led the pack with a steam or gas-powered launch. Vessels like the *Star* and the *Ellen* signaled a salute to a new reliability and luxury on the water.

Besides recreation, area leaders also wanted to ease coastal travel and saw a benefit in establishing a link via the Gulf of Mexico to other cities and towns. Business leaders in Tarpon Springs worked quickly to establish the steamboat line for the *Governor Safford* in order to move people and goods quickly along the coast. Built in Wilmington, Delaware in 1885, *Governor Safford* plied the waters from Cedar Key to the mouth of the Anclote and south into Tampa Bay. On the surface, *Safford* appears to have been built in the well-established tradition of the eastern-style

steamboat with side paddlewheels, enclosed decks, and a rounded stern. She employed an efficient steam engine complete with the “walking beam” apparatus seen above the superstructure. However, the elegant and regal *Governor Safford* drew too much water to navigate the shallow reaches of Florida’s coastal rivers and zones. At Anclote, another boat was needed to finish the trip inshore.

At the covered pier at the mouth of the Anclote, passengers would meet the shallow-draft *Mary Disston* to travel upriver to Tarpon Springs and Spring Bayou. According to sources, local Captain John Topliff designed the vessel for a shipbuilder based



Sidewheel steamboat Governor Safford in the Gulf of Mexico. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory (floridamemory.com/items/show/148797).



Steamboat Mary Disston stands ready along an unknown shoreline, possibly Anclote Key. c. 1886. Photo courtesy of the Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society.

in Cincinnati. The *Mary Disston* offered travelers the trip inland aboard a smaller, wood-burning steamboat. Its propulsion was fixed at the stern, not along the sides as the *Governor Safford*’s was. Travelers could enjoy the open-air lower deck of *Mary Disston*, which also acted as a storage area for fuel and cargo, or the enclosed and possibly more luxurious deck on the vessel’s superstructure behind the pilothouse.

Sponge harvesting began in Tarpon Springs by the mid-1870s when seasonal turtlers and fishermen discovered the offshore beds by accident. Locals soon employed the established



Sponge harvest operations occurring at the shoreline along Bailey's Bluff. Note the extensive network of kraals behind the rows of sponge dinghies. A kraal was a staked pen where harvested sponges were corralled for further washing by the tides. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory (floridamemory.com/items/show/8818).

method of harvest, which used multiple boats acting as a team. Crewmen aboard early sponge boats conducted most of the work from a fleet of smaller boats, or dinghies, which were carried on board or trailed behind a larger vessel. Spongers and crewmen referred to this larger boat as the “mothership.”

Motherships served to coordinate the work of the smaller boats and to store the harvested load of sponges. These boats were usually small to medium-sized sloop or schooner-rigged sailboats with up to six or more crewmen

on the larger craft. Today, several of the smaller dinghies that would have been associated with the larger boats are displayed throughout the tourist walkways and shops of Tarpon Springs. These small boats—work boats almost always powered by oars—resemble the offshore fishing boats typical along the U.S. eastern seaboard, in the Caribbean, and especially throughout Mediterranean maritime countries. They exhibit a rounded bottom and broad beam, which creates a larger inboard capacity for cargo and gives more stability in rougher waters.

Typically crewmen worked their way in the dinghies along the shore

of the shallow gulf in search of good sponge beds. These were usually only 20 to 30 feet deep, so spongers carried lightweight poles with grapples or hooks on the end that could reach the sea floor. Each sponger peered through the water using a glass-bottomed bucket to site the sponges and then snatch them with the hook. The hooking boat operators collected their catch aboard the dinghies, and upon reaching capacity transferred their harvest to the larger vessels. Once aboard the motherships, sponges were cleaned and dried to remove organic material for the prevention of rot. Spongers then transferred their catch to shoreline kraals



These are typical sponge dinghies at work. While one crewman looked through a glass-bottom bucket to site the sponge beds, the oarsman would locate the dinghy in the right spot. The operation had to work in water depths where the hook pole could reach the bottom. Photo courtesy of the Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society.

for cleaning and processing before the final phases of snipping and pruning or readying for market began.

Sponge fishing by hooking boat continued to profit from large harvests during the course of the sponge industry. As time wore on, fishermen hooking sponges utilized any small sailing craft capable of navigating shallow waters. Some of the boats were intentionally modified or purposefully built to do away with the need for the smaller fleet of dinghies common to earlier schemes of sponge harvesting. One vessel in particular, the hooking boat *Duchess*, is an example of a vessel built and modified specifically for sponge hooking. It appears that builders cut out her bulwarks near the bow to provide freedom of movement for the crewmen that were hooking sponges below. At the time she was nominated to be included on the National Register of Historic Places (1990), *Duchess* was one of only a few sponge industry boats from Tarpon Springs that still existed.

Beginning in 1886, one man is given

credit for instituting and capitalizing on all phases of harvesting, processing, marketing, buying, and selling of sponges in Tarpon Springs. John Cheyney established the Anclote and Rock Island Sponge Company in 1891 and constructed the earliest sponge warehouses at Bailey's Bluff across the Anclote River from Tarpon Springs. Cheyney's business sense and networking skills served the industry well. Early on he em-



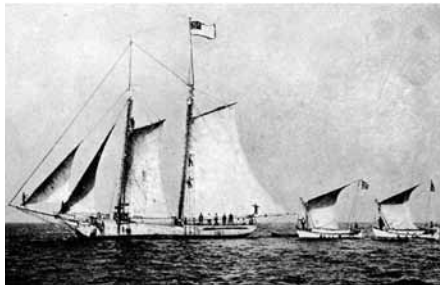
Duchess tied up at a dock in Tarpon Springs. Note the bulwarks, or gunnel, cut out near the bow. The owners intentionally modified Duchess to make it easy for sponge hookers to move around on the deck. (flheritage.com/facts/reports/places/Sites/8PI01704_duchess.cfm).

ployed John Cocoris, a Greek sponge buyer and technical expert working in Tarpon Springs for another sponge warehouse and processing company in Tarpon Springs. Later, as the industry gained prominence, Cheyney would represent the sponge divers to ensure they could continue to practice their tradition of harvesting sponges in rubberized suits and copper diving helmets.

With the financial support of Cheyney, Cocoris launched the first mechanized sponge boat from Tarpon Springs that employed sponge divers. This method, established in the Mediterranean with the advent of the diving helmet and suit, increased the efficiency of harvesting sponges along the Gulf Coast four-fold. Cocoris soon brought his wife and brothers over from their home of Leonidion, Kynourias, Greece, beginning the immigration of Greek families to Tarpon Springs. Where Cheyney's dedication to the success of the industry was singular, Cocoris, among many others, led the mass of Greek sponge divers, making Tarpon

Springs the town that it is today. These sponge divers also brought with them an established tradition of boat types and boatbuilding that forever changed the local maritime landscape.

In 1907 two traditional Mediterranean-style boats sat on the deck of a large oceangoing steamship alongside a few soon-to-be Florida sponge divers. They sought out the waters of Florida's west coast as their destination. The two boats were of the Greek type traditionally known as the *sacoleve*, double-ended sailboats characterized by dramatic and angled rises at the ends, as well as a broad beam



Two small traditional Greek-style boats trail a large schooner, or "mothership." This may have been a typical offshore operation before efficiencies in sponge diving made it easier for a single sponge boat crew to operate alone. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory (floridamemory.com/items/show/149418).

giving very little freeboard amidships. Most likely in a show of their dedication to the traditional vessel, Greek fishermen brought the actual boats with them as they emigrated west across the Atlantic. For those building new sponge boats in Tarpon Springs there were no drawn plans, only memories and models that served as the guides for ship carpenters and craftsmen. As more and more divers arrived in Tarpon Springs, these boat types, with their recognizable stem piece and forward angled mast at the bow, quickly became commonplace near the newly established Sponge Exchange.

Boatbuilding in Tarpon Springs occurred as quickly as craftsmen arrived. They began producing boats needed for the demands of the fast-growing industry. Carpenters constructed these vessels as much from traditional knowledge as they did from lines of sight. It is not surprising though, as this was typical of the practice among boatbuilders of the day. Craftsmen cut and trimmed timbers to fit an idea of what the ship



A traditional sponge diving boat, or sacoleve, exhibits the design elements that typified many of the first sponge boats to arrive in Tarpon Springs. Note the double ends and very little freeboard. This type of boat was well-suited for the use of oars. The sailing rig used on the original sponge boats was a sprit mainsail and a forestaysail set to the stem. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory (floridamemory.com/items/show/162573).

should look like. They did not have the luxury of pre-manufactured timbers that were meant to be placed in a particular spot in the hull. As time wore on, builders in Tarpon Springs, such as Kaminis, Arfaras, and Macrenaris, expanded their repertoire to build just about any form and vessel type from sponge boats and shrimp boats to pleasure craft and launchers. With a contract from the United States military, the M.S.T. Company, also located in Tarpon Springs, constructed heavy duty barges for war efforts beginning in 1918.

By the 1920s, efficiency in sponge diving and mechanization increased. Boatbuilders also began to adapt

to some of these changes in technology. As engines overtook wind power for these vessels, boatbuilders made modifications to the traditional Greek-style boats. By then, builders had modernized the old-style lateen rig to a gaff-headed yawl, and added a jigger mast at the stern. Soon these sails became supplemental power for the modern method of propulsion. No longer double-enders, craftsmen built the newer vessels with squared-off transoms to accept the engines, shafts, and propellers that were now commonplace. *St. Nicholas III* is a



The modern Tarpon Springs sponge boat has retained many of the traditional characteristics of the original sacoleve type. The changes that can be noted in this photograph include the mainmast, which now supports a gaff type mainsail, and the addition of a jigger mast located at the stern. Boatbuilders also modified the stern with a squared transom to incorporate engine power. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory (floridamemory.com/items/show/78666).

good example that can be seen today along the Sponge Docks. She is still employed in the sponge harvest and fishing industry and characterizes these changes on the original Greek sponge boat hull. Even though the nature of the sponge boat changed, features of the *sacoleve*, like the dramatic rise at the bow and broad beam, remained as a signature of the “new” traditional design.

The sea and surrounding waters provided more than a means to an end for the early settlers, sponge fishermen, boatbuilders, and others who called the area home. Even though the sponge industry had declined in large part by the 1950s, the waterways of Tarpon Springs acted, and continue to act, as the hub of social gatherings for area residents. Just as throngs of winter guests enjoyed the area's riches, thousands today celebrate the cultural traditions that are recognized as embodying Tarpon Springs. In terms of the rich maritime traditions of the area, it is clear that all these boats effectively changed the social fabric of a fledgling settlement in the Florida wilderness and its navigable waters.

Many of the types of boats discussed in this essay have been lost to rot and disrepair, lost among a waning industry and to inevitable salvage and abandonment. After a worthy life at sea any boat type still consists of frames and spars or sails and rudders. Important as they are to the physical existence of these vessels, these parts are often the most ephemeral. Many of the traditions of a community's maritime heritage survive in a more concrete way in the stories, descriptions of the past, cultural traditions, and artifacts that remain from previous times. These are the things that enrich a community today.

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CHAPTER 3

DEVELOPMENT AND ARCHITECTURE

Ellen J. Uguccioni



The City of Tarpon Springs was once known as a playground of the rich, who brought with them a dazzling array of “high style” architectural designs. It was also a working village where sponges were harvested by Greeks, mainly from the Dodecanese Islands. Initially the fishing community’s building styles were derived from Greek village traditions. This modest type of design is called “vernacular,” and in this case the houses were vernacular with a flair reminiscent of the Greek islands. The need for functional buildings associated with the sponge industry and the increasing Greek population changed the ethnic makeup of the city and its look, traditions, and rituals; a place was created where both immigrant and native-born people lived and worked together.

OUT OF THE WILDERNESS

The importance of courage, tenacity and adventurous spirit of the men and women who conquered the frontiers of America cannot be underes-

timated. When the Civil War ended in 1865, the Gulf Coast of Florida was one of the areas that was left relatively untouched by civilization. The first documented settlers in Tarpon Springs were the brothers Frederick and Ben Meyer and their wives, both named Sarah, who arrived in 1867. The Meyer families resided in log cabins in the settlement that became known as Anclote.¹

Another early name associated with the area was Samuel Hope, a Confederate captain in the Civil War. Hope purchased land on the north side of the Anclote River. The area began to see more settlement when William Lawrence Thompson brought his family from Bronson, Florida in 1864. Thompson homesteaded about three acres of land several miles south of what would become Tarpon Springs. He planted the first orange trees in the area. The home he and his family shared was primitive at best. Materials for home building were abundant; the forest provided the raw materials.

¹ Gertrude J. Stoughton, *Tarpon Springs, The Early Years* (Tarpon Springs, Florida) 1975, 6.

Lumber was hand hewn on site and timbers were joined by mortise and tenon construction, as nails were at a premium.

In 1876 A.W. Ormond and his daughter Mary moved from South Carolina to become the first occupants of what would become the city limits of Tarpon Springs. Their cabin was built near what is now Spring Bayou, at the corner of Lake and Pinellas Avenues. Love flourished among the scrub palmetto and mosquitoes when a young adventurer named Joshua Boyer arrived from sponging in Nassau and Key West and made his way up the Anclote River. He built a cabin close to the Ormond’s homestead, where he became a welcome guest. Within a few months, on April 14, 1877, Joshua Boyer and Mary Ormond were married. Mary, impressed with “the giant tarpon that swarmed in the bayou, leaping in the sunlight and tossing off showers of spray,” coined the name for their tiny settlement—Tarpon Springs.²

² Stoughton, 7.



The Boyer Honeymoon Cottage, which is preserved at Pinellas County's Heritage Village.

Their home is a pristine example of the frame folk vernacular design that was the standard for the time. Consisting of one room, the sides of the house were clad in vertical planks called “board and batten.” The steeply pitched front gabled roof was built to extend out over the porch. Slender wooden vertical piers supported the porch roof. One window, a luxury for the time, allows light to penetrate the interior. The house is raised off the ground to keep out water and insects.

Simply defined, architecture is the art and science of designing and constructing buildings for human habitation. Design—the assemblage of the roof, windows, porches, dormers,

number of stories and all other elements—lead to classification of style.³ In the mid-19th century, American architects looked to the precedents of the historical world—the Classical, Renaissance, and Gothic in particular. All could be classified under the generic term “Victorian,” named for Queen Victoria who sat on the British throne for 63 years (1837-1901).⁴ She exerted an enormous influence on style and fashion during her lifetime. Victorian styles in America reflected eclecticism during that period and into the first decades of the 20th century when architects were practicing a revival of popular European styles.⁵ Another major force in the development of American house styles at that time was the availability of periodicals, newspapers and catalogs of do-it-yourself kits offered by major companies, such as Sears-

³ National Register of Historic Places, *Bulletin 15*, defines style as “...the combination of elements that create the form, plan, structure, and style of a property.”

⁴ Spiro Kostof, *A History of Architecture* (Oxford University Press, New York), 1985, 635.

⁵ In 1857, Richard Morris Hunt was the first American to study at the prestigious *Ecole des Beaux Arts*. (Kostof, 649).

Roebuck, that illustrated the most popular fashions of the day.

The architecture of Tarpon Springs is a fascinating combination of defined style and folk architecture. There are unique building types that were created specifically for functional purposes, such as “kraals,” used to temporarily house sponges taken directly from the sponge boats, and warehouses that were used to further process the sponges before auction.

The style of many of the early homes and commercial buildings in Tarpon Springs is vernacular, which encompasses the different regional building traditions that were passed down through the generations. The “salt box” types found in New England, the “I” houses of Charleston and the “shotgun” houses of the southern United States are all good examples of regional types that can be called vernacular. In Florida, the term “folk Victorian” best describes the home-grown character of many of the early houses and commercial buildings.⁶

⁶ Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to*

The form that influences the traits of vernacular style is largely the result of the availability of raw materials and the climate. While “Victorian” is usually associated with high style, in reality, many modest homes used various elements of the larger, more articulated styles to embellish them.

The growth of Tarpon Springs before the turn of the 20th century was ensured when Philadelphia saw manufacturer Hamilton Disston took the opportunity to buy four million acres of Florida land for 25 cents an acre. About 20,000 acres of his purchase were located in what became Pinellas, Pasco and Hillsborough counties. Disston chose Tarpon Springs as his headquarters because it was positioned along a major sailing route approximately halfway between Cedar Key and Tampa. In 1882, Disston and a number of his business associates arrived at the small fishing village at the mouth of the Anclote River. As the Anclote River narrowed, it became necessary to board a steam-

boat with a shallow draft and flat hull that could navigate the river as it approached Tarpon Springs, which was about a mile inland from the river’s mouth. Among the associates who joined Disston on that trip was Major Mathew Marks, a surveyor who, in 1882, laid out the original town plat for Tarpon Springs.⁷ Also with him was his long-time acquaintance Anson P. K. Safford, whom Disston chose to lead his operations in Tarpon Springs. Originally from Vermont, Safford had served two terms as governor of the territory of Arizona under the presidential administration of Ulysses S. Grant (1869–1877), and had made his fortune in silver mining. After he moved to Philadelphia he became acquainted with Hamilton Disston.

Disston deeded some 9,500 acres to the Lake Butler Villa Company and Safford was elected as its president.⁸ Safford and Disston wanted to create a winter resort for wealthy residents,

who they hoped would then invest in other Florida projects. They selected the land surrounding Spring Bayou on which to build these houses, not only because it was a beautiful area, but also because of its proximity to the spring that was thought to have medicinal qualities. The area became known as the Golden Crescent because of the bayou’s shape and the wealth of those who would build winter homes there.

THE GOLDEN CRESCENT

Private homes for wealthy patrons were built around Spring Bayou, taking full advantage of the view. Boathouses were built on the shore so that recreational craft could be accessed quickly. Besides the boathouses that lined the shore, there were concrete walkways, site walls, docks, lighting and a beautifully designed staircase that led down to the docks. Today the land around the bayou is called Craig Park (formerly known as Coburn Park), where many enjoy fishing, walking along the seawall and the beauty of Spring Bayou.

American Houses (Alfred A. Knopf, New York), 1996, 454.

⁷ “The History of Tarpon Springs,” Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society website (tarponspringsareahistoricalsociety.org).

⁸ Stoughton, 8.



The homes along the Golden Crescent represent many Victorian styles. Governor Safford built a house there for his large family, which included his sister Dr. Mary Jane Safford, the first woman to practice medicine in Florida. The 1883 Safford House illustrates a vernacular tradition with neoclassical forms. It began as a one-story wood frame cottage, distinguished by two equally spaced gables. To accommodate his extended family Safford added a second story using the original roof trusses and gables. The second story featured Victorian gingerbread details, a cupola, win-



Above: Spring Bayou postcard. In the collection of the Tarpon Springs Cultural Center. c. 1920.

Left: The Golden Crescent around Spring Bayou. Photo by Gen Crosby (2013).

dow hoods, bargeboard brackets and patterned balustrades. Proportions are narrow, and tri-sided windows, with striking stained glass in the transoms, extend outward from the wall in the bays below the roof to create a visual focus. Slender rectangular posts separate this substantial frame residence into symmetrical bays. The neoclassical influences can be seen in the front facing gables (reminiscent of a pediment in a Greek temple) and the narrow proportions of the home itself. The very strict symmetry of the home is an important characteristic of the neoclassical revival.

After Anson Safford and his sister Mary Jane both died in December

1891, his widow Soledad sold the valuable waterfront property on which the house stood to George Clemson. The Safford House was moved to its present location at 23 Parkin Court. Soledad rented out rooms to boarders and called the house “Villa Ansonia.” She made some structural changes, adding a wide wrap-around porch on the top floor. After her death in 1931, her third husband sold it in 1946. A succession of owners held the property, enclosing much of the porch area to enlarge the interior space, and divided it into several apartments. The City acquired the Safford House in 1994, restored and adapted it for re-use as a museum with the assistance of State and Federal funds.⁹



The 1883 Safford House. Photo by Brian Swartzwelder (2008).



Marshall H. Alworth House, built in 1895. Photo by Ellen J. Ugucioni (2013).

Marshall Alworth was one of the richest men in Tarpon Springs, having made his fortune in iron ore. Alworth was a faithful winter visitor who came from Duluth, Minnesota. Built around 1895, his home has a careful symmetry created by the extruded center pyramidal roofed second story bay, flanked on either side by a gable roof. The paired sash windows of the extended center bay also help to further emphasize the balance of the home. The porch, which extends across the entire width of the home, alludes to the high ceilings in the front rooms. Slender columns,

spaced at regular intervals support the porch's shed roof. The most interesting detail of the house is its wooden balustrade composed of square shapes reminiscent of the craftsman style. Because of its eclecticism, the style is best described as wood vernacular.

Perhaps the most elegant and eye-catching house on Spring Bayou is "The Crescent Place," built and designed by Edward Newton Knapp, the man who convened the meeting to incorporate Tarpon Springs on February 12, 1887 (see page 22). Also called the Knapp House, it was built in 1886 in the Queen Anne style. Almost every surface of the house is ornamented, and there are few straight lines. The narrow proportions of the house give it the appearance of being squeezed onto the lot. The main façade is arranged in three bays, with two steeply pitched gables flanking the tower which extends beyond the roof line. The tower is unique in its thin proportions at the base that rise to a bulbous section. The tower's multi-sided roof is adorned with multi-colored tiles that create a

diamond shape in the center. The tri-sided porch, which frames the main entrance, is a tour de force of Victorian spindle work as the slender columns meet the eaves. The extremely narrow windows in the side bays and the porch add to the perception of height. The Crescent Place's curved shape and motif follow the lines of the property, which in turn mirrors the shape of Spring Bayou and the Golden Crescent.



George Clemson Auxiliary, c. 1902. Photo by Ellen J. Ugucioni (2013).

Another home on Spring Bayou that illustrates the melding of a neoclassical vocabulary with vernacular traditions is the Clemson Auxiliary building. The home has a formal symmetry established by the center bay that ex-

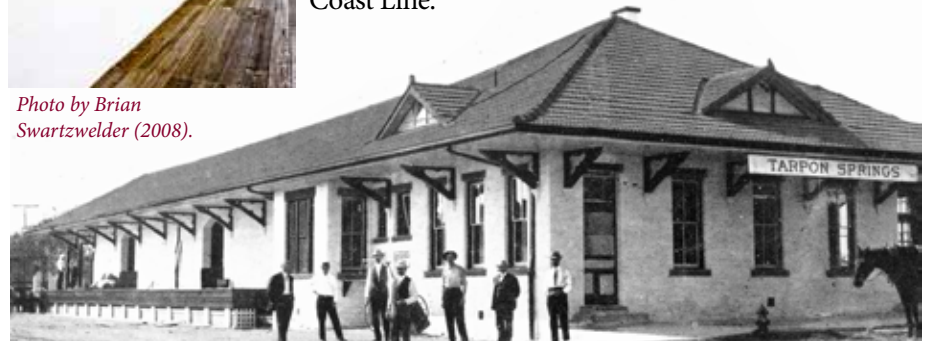
tends out and forms a porch flanked by two bays that are approximately the same distance from the porch. Besides its exact symmetry, the classical element that immediately demands attention is the pediment of the central second-story bay. Here, a Palladian window fills the space and is highlighted by the deep eaves of the triangular cornice.¹⁰ The two-bay section has the feel of a Grecian portico, but here the columns are replaced with simple wooden posts that support a rudimentary entablature. The wooden cladding runs horizontally and is almost overwhelmed by the highly complex asphalt tile hipped roof. The ornate brick chimney is a staple in Tarpon Springs houses.

In 1887 Tarpon Springs was incorporated, the lighthouse was built, the first black church opened, and the first railroad arrived. The city donated land on which to build a depot and Hamilton Disston provided the land

for the right-of-way. A New Yorker could now reach Tarpon Springs by rail in only 36 hours. Passengers changed trains in Sanford, Florida to the Orange Belt Line and traveled the final leg into Tarpon Springs. With the railroad came important new possibilities that included the city's population growth and the availability of commodities and building materials that were immediately put to use. Eventually owner Peter Demens' finances collapsed and the Orange Belt Line became part of the Plant line and later, the Atlantic Coast Line.



Photo by Brian Swartzwelder (2008).



Train Depot, c. 1909. Photo courtesy of the Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society.

The original train depot was built of wood and burned, along with an entire city block, in a devastating fire in 1908. The Atlantic Coast Line Railroad Depot at 160 East Tarpon Avenue was completed in 1909. The new station, a masonry vernacular building, is one story composed of a rectangular floor plan. The gabled roof on the long side terminates in a hipped roof section at the end. The roof eaves extend out and monumental wooden brackets add a distinctive touch. The sash windows of the passenger waiting section are evenly spaced, and with the addition of triangular dormers bring light into the building. After the last train departed Tarpon Springs

¹⁰ The Palladian window is named for Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio, which is often featured in Adam or Federal styles in the United States. It consists of a larger arched window flanked by smaller windows.



Meres Building. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory (floridamemory.com/items/show/118796), Photo by Robert L. Stone (2003).

in the mid-1980s, the building was restored with Federal grant funds and became home to the Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society.¹¹

The downtown district on Tarpon Avenue between Pinellas and Ring Avenues displays a charming collection of brick and concrete block and stucco buildings from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Built in 1914 by well-known Florida architect Leo Elliot, the Meres Building is a two-part masonry vernacular commercial building. Owned by one of the most active sponge traders, Ernest Meres, it is two stories in height, with storefronts on the first floor and

what had been the Hotel Meres on the second. The building is striking, particularly because of the second story, which features evenly spaced sash windows that are sheltered by a shed roof supported by decorative brackets. Above that is a stepped parapet wall that terminates in the center with a stepped semicircular freestanding brick panel that still carries a plaque “MERES 1914.”

THE SPONGE CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

Sponge harvesting and processing have been central to the city’s economy, giving rise to building types unique to the industry. Although the Sponge Exchange on Dodecanese Avenue was modernized in the late 20th century and looks very different today, the photograph illustrates its appearance in the early 1900s. The sponge warehouse in the center was adjacent to the sponge house, which would have been filled with individual bins for each owner’s catch. The processing of sponges began while the sponges were still on the boat, with the crew cleaning them as much

as possible. Sponge kraals (or crawls) were built on shore in makeshift enclosures of wire, where the sponges would be stored to further dry and be bleached by the sun, until they were moved into a sponge packing house. The N.G. Arfaras



Sponge cleaning, c. 1920. Photo courtesy of the Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society.



Sponge exchange, c. 1920. Photo courtesy of the Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society.

¹¹ *Historic Tarpon Springs Walking Tour* (City of Tarpon Springs, Florida, 2007), 9.



Arfaras sponge warehouse, 2003. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory (floridamemory.com/items/show/119108). Photo by Tina Bucuvalas.

Sponge Packing House shown above was a functional, vernacular building designed for the particular work that took place inside it.

Both the N.G. Arfaras and the E.R. Meres sponge packing plants are one-story wood frame buildings. Both feature a one-story shed-roofed extension that, in the Meres plant, ran along the entire length of the building. These are simple, utilitarian buildings with a single door in the gable end. The interiors have large open areas for pounding the sponges to remove any remaining detritus; the walls are lined with storage bins for sponges awaiting packing and shipping to both wholesalers and retailers. The Arfaras building has

horizontal wood siding and a small one-story gable roof extension off the main building. While there are few windows, there is a garage-door-sized opening in the side for moving sponges. The E.R. Meres building was built in 1905 and is the oldest remaining example of a sponge packing plant building; the Arfaras packing plant was built in the 1920s.¹² Both are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Dodecanese Boulevard became, and still is, the epicenter of the sponge industry. One- and two-story shops, usually owned by Greeks and mainly constructed of brick, line Dodecanese Boulevard. Many of the stores originally sold supplies for the spongers. These commercial structures fall into the category of folk vernacular. Decoration was created by patterns in the brick facades, often on the summit or parapet of the building. Today Dodecanese Boulevard retains most of the early 20th century buildings, most specializing in souvenirs for the tourist trade. Visitors can still

¹² *Walking Tour*, 33.

buy natural Tarpon Springs sponges. Sponges have unique shapes that are perceived by many as sculpture and not simply something to be used for practical purposes. They are valued instead for their innate beauty.

The former City Hall at 101 South Pinellas Avenue was built in 1915. The building type is Greek Revival, a style that became popular in America beginning in the early 19th century. Its popularity was due to its strong association with classical traditions and democracy. Ancient Greece gave us democracy, and it was only fitting that buildings such as courthouses, town halls and libraries would be built in the neoclassical style. In addition to the imposing Corinthian



The original City Hall, restored and adapted for use as the Tarpon Springs Cultural Center (2008). Photo by Brian Swartzwelder.



Thompson-Jukes House on Tarpon Avenue c. 1887 is an example of dog trot style. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory (floridamemory.com/items/show/151775).

columns, the focal point of this two-story brick building is its double story portico with a fully detailed cornice that terminates in a pediment. The evenly spaced 8/8 light double-hung windows are further embellished by stone sills with a keystone in the center at the summit of the arch. The central entrance is a miniature of the portico with double-leaved doors surmounted by a pediment. The main building features a heavy cornice that follows the perimeter of the roof line. An elegant bell tower from a Colonial Revival tradition is a fitting termination to the building.

Designed by prominent architect

Ernest Ivey Cook, the building originally housed the mayor's office, city clerk and other municipal offices, as well as a meeting chamber. The garage bays for the fire department were located on the side. Beginning in 1987 the building was restored with state grants and by the City of Tarpon Springs. Most City offices were relocated to the former Tarpon Springs High School at 324 East Pine Street. Today the building serves as the Tarpon Springs Cultural Center, another example of the City's growing sophistication and adaptation of a fine building.

THE FRUIT SALAD DISTRICT

In the northwest quadrant of the historic downtown area, the names of the streets include Lime, Orange, Pineapple, Banana and Lemon. The street names led to the nickname "Fruit Salad" district. During the 1920s the Florida boom affected every community. The Great War was over, there was no income tax and, for the first time in a long time, people had disposable income. With millions spent on advertisements to entice north-

erners to buy into the year-round sunshine, thousands made the trek to Florida to buy a winter home. In Tarpon Springs many new subdivisions were platted in sparsely developed areas like the Fruit Salad district.

One of the most popular house forms all over the country in the 1910s and 1920s was the bungalow. Usually one or one-and-a-half stories, bungalows are said to have originated in the Bengal region of India, where a common native dwelling called a "bangla" was adapted by the British, who used them as houses for colonial administrators. The residence on Ba-



Bungalow on Banana Street. Photo by Gen Crosby (2013).

nana Street pictured on the previous page is a good example of the bungalow type. The front gabled roof of the second story extends forward so that it actually covers the first story porch. The eaves of the second story gable are a prominent feature, and large-scale brackets add another decorative feature. The popularity of the bungalow was both its modest cost and the ability to change different features so that it was personalized. For example, the square piers that rest on masonry bases could easily be changed to a cylindrical column resting on a wood-faced base; or tapered piers resting on a wooden porch could have different styles of balustrades across the entire front.¹³ The same is true for the second story, where wooden half-timbering in the gable end could give it a more Gothic look. Sometimes the front porch itself was covered with a gable roof, or the two-story porch behind it was offset. It is next to impossible to describe all the variations found in Tarpon Springs. The bungalow's relatively small scale and economy of materials made it a

¹³ McAlester, 454-455.

perfect middle-class house. The Fruit Salad community was developed from the earliest days into the 1970s. There is an amazing variety of styles such as Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, Craftsman, wood and stone vernacular, and from the 1950s onward, ranch and split level. A walk through the area is a walk through time.

GREEK TOWN

The ever-growing need for housing and the natural tendency for people to choose to live among others who share their language, traditions and faith, led to the creation of an area now known as the "Greek Town." Not surprisingly, many Greek families chose to make their homes close to—but behind—the Sponge Docks and activity on Dodecanese Boulevard.

The M. Gonatos building expresses the art of bricklaying. Built in the period just after the boom, this 1927 two-story building has a corner entrance and the wings of the building angle from either side. The corner bay is the focal point and, at its highest point, there is a plaque with the

owner's name and date. Below the plaque the brick is laid in vertical courses. This band cleverly acts as a separation between the building and the parapet. There are two other rectangular concrete decorative plaques on the wings of the building. Another brick course using the end of the brick (rather than its long side – or "stretcher") begins the beautifully shaped parapet with curvilinear lines leading to the termination bearing the plaque. The number and types of brick coursing is evidence of a virtuoso bricklayer.

Wood frame vernacular homes of the bungalow type are evidenced by the second story's projection over



M. Gonatos Building. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory (floridamemory.com/items/show/118815).

the front porch. The gable end can include a sash window. The number of lights (individual panes of glass), configured vertically with a substantial surround suggests that a house was built very early, either at the end of the 19th century or at the beginning of the 20th. This house on Grand Avenue (right) is clad in horizontal wood siding, and the eaves of the roof project outwards. Wooden piers with a square profile are aligned so that the front entrance to the house is clear. The freestanding piers also bear a rudimentary capital, which distinguishes the house from others of its type.

After World War I, America entered into a period of abundance and optimism. Hundreds of residential subdivisions were created in south Florida when many northerners made their winter homes here. During that growth, one of Tarpon Springs' unique buildings was constructed at 210 South Pinellas Avenue. The Shaw Arcade is listed in the National Register of Historic Places because of its distinguished architecture and its as-



Bungalow in Greek Town. Photo by Gen Crosby (2013).

sociation with the expansion of Tarpon Springs during the 1920s.

One of the marketing tools used to lure potential residents here was Florida's centuries-old connection to Spain. "Mediterranean Revival" was coined to describe the flavor of the ar-

chitecture. Built in 1925 for \$100,000, the Shaw Arcade covered an entire block. It had stores on its first floor and a hotel on its second. Some of the more obvious Spanish details include the differing heights and roof slopes covered in barrel tile; the succession of towers at the corners and at the central entrance; the use of the round arch; and the arcade itself, a covered walkway which connects different parts of the building. The hotel survived during the hard times of the Depression, and changed owners several times. A fire in 1976 almost spelled the end for the building, and by that time, the hotel was losing business to newer and more modern hotels built along nearby U.S. Highway 19. Recog-



Hand-colored Shaw Arcade postcard, c. 1927. From the collection of the Tarpon Springs Cultural Center.



Art moderne residence on Inness Drive. Former home of 1920s bandleader and composer Bohumir Kryl. Photo by Gen Crosby (2013).

nizing the value of this monumental landmark, in 1986 the Shaw Arcade was restored and is now home to galleries, restaurants, shops and offices.¹⁴

During the Great Depression Tarpon Springs was fortunate to have its sponge commerce continue uninterrupted. Building continued, and as fashion changed the design for houses did as well. Art Deco and Art Moderne became the cause célèbre of the architectural world. Art Moderne is a style that avoids

straight lines in favor of curves, which create a sleek, modern look to a building. Instead of the typical hipped or gabled roof, Moderne homes use flat roofs to emphasize the circular sections. Built early in the period (1926) the home pictured at left features a central bay that is drum shaped and pierced with narrow rectangular windows to allow light to enliven the interior. The drum connects to a rectangular section, but still maintains the flat roof and segmented arched windows.

CHANGES DURING WORLD WAR II

The world changed dramatically during World War II. In Florida, citizen-manned aircraft warning systems were set up along both coasts. Watchers sat at the city's highest point looking skyward for enemy invaders. In Tarpon Springs a 32-foot tower at the city pier was used for a lookout post. Long-time merchant Abraham Tarapani organized the ground observer corps.¹⁵

The 1940s saw the construction of a monumental Greek Orthodox church. Since 1909, Greek Orthodox parishioners had worshiped in a small church. As their numbers increased, it was clear that a new and bigger church was needed. After many fundraisers organized by church members, and sponge boat captains who gave a portion of the value of their catch for the building, the Greek community raised approximately \$200,000 needed to build St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church at Pinellas Avenue and Orange Streets.

St. Nicholas is built in a traditional Latin cross plan with a central nave. Transepts bisect the church and terminate in a semicircular apse at the altar. One of the most spectacular aspects is its dome, built over the intersection of the transepts, which because of its size and location, takes a central role in the church. The icon painted in the top of the dome is of Christ Pantocrator, a familiar and important Byzantine subject that symbolically shows Christ as ruler of the world. St. Nicholas is replete with

¹⁴ *Walking Tour*, 4.

¹⁵ Stoughton, 106.

precious marble and two-dimensional icons which portray the teachings of the Bible. Many of the icons are mosaics made of glass tile backed with gold foil, called tessera; others are made of ivory and precious stones. The church design is said to be patterned after the Hagia Sophia, built as a cathedral by Emperor Justinian I in Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey) in the 6th century. The church was consecrated as a cathedral in 1946.

After the war, new industry found its way to Tarpon Springs, but the great-

est boon was tourism. In 1947 the sponge industry was greatly affected by a red tide algal bloom. Many of the structures along Dodecanese Boulevard that supported the sponge industry were converted into shops, restaurants, and museums. Hundreds of service men and women had returned to the community and new subdivisions were platted. The City offered lots at no cost to any veteran, providing they be built upon within a short time period.¹⁶

¹⁶ Stoughton, 111.

Victorian architecture, Greek flair, and many unique touches, such as rusticated block walls, make Tarpon Springs a popular destination. The city is a place of beauty and quiet contemplation. Visitors enjoy walking under enormous 100-year-old oak trees that provide a cool canopy throughout many of the streets. The historic downtown area is now an arts and antiques district. Today Tarpon Springs is a city of sophistication, telling its story through its people, buildings, and the pioneering spirit that still inspires and enlightens those who live there.



Left: St. Nicholas Cathedral postcard, c. 1950. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory (florida-memory.com/items/show/162541). Above: Interior, 2010.

CHAPTER 4

AN ARTS LEGACY IN TARPON SPRINGS GEORGE INNESS & GEORGE INNESS, JR.

Lynn Whitelaw



The Home of the Heron (1893), George Inness, American, 1825-1894, Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 115.2 cm (30 x 45 in.), Edward B. Butler Collection, 1911.31, The Art Institute of Chicago. Used by permission.

Let us believe in Art, not as something to gratify curiosity or suit commercial ends, but something to be loved and cherished because it is the Handmaid of the Spiritual Life of the age.

—George Inness

Quite possibly there is not another town in Florida as connected to an arts legacy as Tarpon Springs. This recognition is based on the accomplishments of two artists, a father and son, whose civic and artistic contributions shaped the early growth and development of the town. George Inness (1825–1894), recognized as one of America’s greatest landscape artists, created some of the most important paintings of his late career in Tarpon Springs in the early 1890s. The tradition continued with his son, George Inness, Jr. (1854–1926), who lived for part of each year in Tarpon Springs from 1902 until his death in 1926. If one spends any time in Tarpon Springs one will come across Inness Manor, Inness Drive, and the

paintings of George Inness, Jr. that hang in the Unitarian Universalist Church. Over the years this town on Florida’s Gulf Coast has proudly fostered this legacy through its support of the arts, a tradition that continues today as Tarpon Springs celebrates its 125th anniversary.

This story could begin or end in the 1920s, but legacies have a way of outliving pitfalls and surviving cultural changes as they pass from one generation to the next. The Inness story is that kind of legacy.

In the 1920s Florida was involved in a real estate boom extolled by powerful developers promising utopian dreams presented in the fantasies of Mediterranean Revival architecture. In Tarpon Springs this was evident with the construction of the Taylor and Shaw (Tarpon) Arcades as modern mixed-use developments of shops, offices, and one with a hotel, all designed in the Mission Revival style. Touted as the “Venice of the South” with miles of bayous and waterways, Tarpon Springs was known

as a health resort, a playground for the wealthy, a working port established by Greek sponge divers and their families, and a destination for the newly named “Tin Can Tourists” who flocked to the area in the winter months. Each group contributed to the city’s charm and importance. In a decade that began with unbridled optimism, Tarpon Springs was recognized as a center of cultural diversity and promise. To that end, the city planned to build an ambitious civic center, private funding was offered to establish an Inness Memorial Arts Institute, and in 1926 the annual Water Carnival included performances by the Metropolitan Opera Company.



Floating stage in Spring Bayou, c. 1924. Photo courtesy of the Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society.

These were bold actions for a small community. The dream of nurturing the arts was based at the time on the stature of the city's favorite son, artist George Inness, Jr. While he had received national recognition for the six paintings he had donated to the Unitarian Universalist Church in Tarpon Springs, his 1924 painting entitled *The Only Hope* was to become one of the most celebrated



The Only Hope, 1924. George Inness, Jr. On display at the Unitarian Universalist Church, Tarpon Springs.

paintings of the day. It was considered a symbol of world peace following the devastation of the Great War (1914–1918) and was sent on an ambitious tour around the United States. It was the focus of newspaper articles, reproduced in magazines, and when shown in the nation's capital, President Calvin Coolidge lobbied to have it permanently displayed in the Capitol. For George Inness, Jr., this was the zenith of his career.

Throughout 1925, stories of the success of George Inness, Jr. and an Inness-related real estate project dominated local newspapers. In a newly platted section of Tarpon Springs called Inness Park, promoters touted that beautiful Mediterranean Revival homes were to be built on Inness and Park Drives. Central to the development was to be the Inness Memorial Arts Institute, dedicated to Inness, Jr.'s father. It would include an art gallery, art studios and auditorium where, as the *Tarpon Springs Leader* stated, "future art lovers of the world will make a beaten path in their pilgrimages to this new shrine." On a

glorious Saturday, May 2, 1925, hundreds of people gathered on the hillside overlooking Kreamer Bayou in Inness Park to unveil a plaque and acknowledge the 100th anniversary of the birth



George Inness, Jr., c. 1925.

of George Inness. His son unveiled a large painting of Spring Bayou, dedicated to the memory of his father, entitled *Sunset on the Bayou*. Inness, Jr. stated that some of his father's most famous paintings "hang all over Europe and the caption on each one is Tarpon Springs, and lovers of art all over know of Tarpon Springs."

While this day would remain a high point for Inness, Jr. and for Tarpon Springs, it was short-lived. The real estate bust of 1926 put an end to the dream of an art center, Inness, Jr.'s painting *The Only Hope* was decried as too Christian to be universal and fell out of favor (typical of the fadism of the 1920s), and in July of

1926 George Inness, Jr. died at the age of 72 at his estate in Cragmoor, New Jersey. For Tarpon Springs, the collapse of Florida's real estate boom was tragically reinforced by a fire in 1927 that destroyed the Tarpon Inn, a 100-room hotel on Spring Bayou that had served as the center of the city's social life. An era was over and the Great Depression that followed brought to a halt the momentum of Tarpon Springs' growth until after World War II. Following his death, the artistic accomplishments of George Inness, Jr. were quickly forgotten in the annals of American art history, and the position of George Inness, Sr. as America's greatest landscape artist was pushed aside along with other 19th century artists in support of the avant-garde movements of European and American modernism.

To evaluate the position of the Inness painters requires an understanding of the unique history of the visual arts in Florida. The lure of Florida as a subtropical paradise within the boundaries of the continental United

States was great, particularly following the Civil War when artists came in search of a romanticized Eden where they could reconnect with nature following the carnage that had torn the country apart. Several great artists passed through during this time, including Winslow Homer, John Singer Sargent, Herman Herzog, Martin Johnson Heade and George Inness, but few stayed for any length of time and no artist colonies or "schools" of art were established.

For some artists, the appeal was Florida's abundance of wildlife. For others, particularly old or infirm artists, the health benefits of Florida's moderate winters, natural springs, and legends of a Fountain of Youth lured them to make the journey. Although there is sketchy documentation of his travels, it is believed that George Inness first came to the widely promoted "famous Tarpon Springs" sometime in the late 1880s or in 1890. The area was billed as one of the healthiest places in the United States and a promising area for investors. At the time, Inness was wintering in Thom-

asville, Georgia where many wealthy northerners maintained seasonal homes. It is possible Inness and some interested land speculators traveled by horse and wagon from Thomasville to the Florida boom town of Cedar Key. There they boarded a side-wheel steamer and traveled down the coast on the Gulf of Mexico to the mouth of the Anclote River, where a flat-bed steamer took them up the river to the new community developing around the protected waters of Spring Bayou. What Inness experienced on that trip would encourage him to return for longer stays in the early 1890s.

Toward the end of the 19th century several important events changed the perception of Florida and increased the number of visitors and artists coming into the state. The building of railroads on both the east and west coasts of the peninsula made access to Florida much easier. Luxury hotels built in St. Augustine, Tampa and on Clearwater bluff brought wealthy northerners to these emerging cities, where their investments would

ultimately change the development of the state. The Spanish-American War in 1898 brought military leaders, troops and dozens of illustrators to the Tampa Bay area. When they returned home they spoke of a land of opportunity where natural resources and modern comforts, electricity and telephones were making Florida a desirable and accessible paradise. For Tarpon Springs, positioning as a healthy winter destination of sunshine, salt air, balmy breezes, the therapeutic smell of pine forests and orange trees, and medicinal sulfur waters that bubbled in the bayou came in 1887 when the city incorporated, the railroad arrived, a lighthouse was built on Anclote Key and wealthy investors built impressive homes around Spring Bayou.



When George Inness returned to Tarpon Springs he came by railroad. It took him just 36 hours by train from New York, a speed that

would be the equivalent of jet travel today. In 1890 Inness was 65 years old and in declining health, exacerbated by the breaking of his right hand, with which he used to paint. He had been a life-long epileptic, an illness that often resulted in being institutionalized; however, Inness's intellect and artistic talent saved him from such a fate and he became renowned as a transcendental mystic. By the 1890s Inness was at the height of his fame and recognized as one of America's most famous living artists. Although he probably spent no more than a total of four months in Tarpon Springs between 1890 and 1894, the 15 landscape paintings that carry the name of the city in their titles, and seven that reference Florida, are among the most sublime and spiritual of his career. It may even be argued that abstract art began in Tarpon Springs with this body of work. These often dark and mysterious late paintings influenced the mystical works of Albert Pinkham Ryder and the reductive styles of Arthur Dove and John Marin. As a quintessential figure of American individualism,

Inness's process-oriented art also leads to the abstract expressionism of Jackson Pollock and the color field paintings of Mark Rothko.

Inness was an extremely complex personality who was influenced by many of the cultural, philosophical and religious currents of his day, including the French Barbizon School, the Hudson River School, transcendentalism, and the stylistic directions of luminism and tonalism. His association with the religious tenets of Swedenborgianism also served as a primary inspiration in his late work. The Swedenborgian religion was based on the writings of Emanuel Svedberg, born in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1688. He studied natural sciences and mineralogy, traveled extensively and was awarded the status of royalty for his scientific theories (whereby changing his name to Swedenborg). A spiritual epiphany came after studying underground mines in Europe. He proposed that nature had a hidden side beneath its façade, citing the riches of the mines under the earth. He published *Economy of the*

George Inness, c. 1893.

Soul Kingdom, a book which sought to understand man's spiritual "soul kingdom" for revelations of truth. This theological doctrine (also called New Jerusalem or New Church) grew and strongly appealed to intellectuals, writers and other creative thinkers in the 18th century. It was transported to the United States where it had a profound influence on the early 19th century transcendentalist thinkers. Inness became a follower in the 1860s and became the best-known visual artist associated with the organized religion. Prominent literary figure affiliates included Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, Edgar Allen Poe, and Henry James.

When Inness came to stay in Tarpon Springs, he rented a small house on West Orange Street. At first his visits were short, but they grew longer in the last years, particularly in 1893 when he created the majority of his Tarpon Springs inspired paintings. These works have Tarpon Springs in their titles and are reflective of the times of day: *Early Moonrise*, *Early Morning*, *Eventide*, *Twilight*, and



Early Morning, Tarpon Springs (1892), George Inness, American, 1825-1894, Oil on canvas, 107.2 x 82.2 cm (42 1/8 x 32 3/8 in.), Edward B. Butler Collection, 1911.32, The Art Institute of Chicago. Used by permission.



Orange Road, Tarpon Springs (1893). George Inness (1825-1894). Oil on canvas, 30 x 25 in (41 x 36 in. framed). Gift of Mrs. James L. Rose in memory of her mother Mrs. William A. Smith (Accession No. 47.192). Indianapolis Museum of Art. Used by permission. Museum Label: In the hazy, vaporous atmosphere of this painting, Inness tried to meld the natural and spiritual worlds.

Moonlight. The masterpiece Inness created in Tarpon Springs was a larger work, measuring 30 x 45 inches. The piece was titled *The Sun's Last Reflection*, although today it is better known as *The Home of the Heron*, now in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago (see first page of this chapter). There are several known studies for the painting, and it embodies many of the principles of Inness's scientific and religious investigations. Its enigmatic composition is one of the few paintings in which Inness does not include a human figure, and its ethereal light and mid-tone coloration define an artist of poetic greatness. Like many of his paintings from the late period, often entitled *Sunset*, the work metaphorically represents Inness in the twilight of his life.



Julia Smith Inness c. 1925.
Photo courtesy of the
Tarpon Springs Area
Historical Society.

Inness's adult children shared many fond memories of Tarpon Springs. George Inness, Jr., a painter in his own right and his father's biographer, was 41 years old when his father died. He destroyed over a hundred of his own paintings, which were inspired by his father's style, because a vision told him he needed liberation. He traveled to Europe in search of his own direction (he had been born in Paris and studied with his father in Rome in the 1870s, so he was comfortable in European art circles). Returning to France, he studied at the art academies and won awards for paintings created in the *beaux arts* style (two of which were later donated to the Unitarian Universalist Church). He also came under the influence of the French Barbizon School of landscape painting and it was here he truly found his voice.

Inness, Jr. married into wealth and did not need to work for the rest of his life. His father-in-law, Roswell Smith, was the founder of the Century Publishing Company and had been a collector of George Inness paintings. His daughter, Julia Goodrich Smith, was a New York socialite and a commanding woman who stood over six feet tall. She and Inness, Jr. married in 1879 and she remained devoted to her husband while also pursuing her own social and philanthropic interests.

When the Innesses returned to the United States in 1900 they settled

in New Jersey. In 1902 they decided to visit Tarpon Springs to establish a winter residence. They purchased the home on West Orange Street that George's father had rented in the 1890s. This was eventually named Inness Manor and was expanded into a 27-room house, studio and artist colony. They also purchased Camp Comfort, a property on the Anclote River about ten miles north of Tarpon Springs that often became the site of social gatherings during the winter months. The Innesses spent many months each year in Tarpon Springs and, for nearly a quarter of a century, integrated into the social elite of the growing community.

The story of the Inness, Jr. paintings in the sanctuary of the Unitarian Universalist Church is one of artistic and spiritual philanthropy. When six windows were blown out of the church during a storm in 1918, Inness offered to create paint-

ings to replace the windows. The first three paintings were based on scriptures selected by Mrs. Inness to represent the promise, realization and fulfillment of God's revelation. These works were created at his Camp Comfort studio and incorporated the landscape along the Anclote River as a kind of Garden of Eden.

In 1922 Inness, Jr. created a second series of paintings called The Triptych because he was inspired by three lines: "He leadeth me; In green pastures; Beside the still waters" from the 23rd Psalm. The paintings also introduce the signature "Inness (or sometimes called June) green" coloration for which he became famous. They were to serve as the altarpiece for the chancel of the church.

Inness, Jr. had finally found a style that drew upon his deep spirituality and reverence for nature. This provided the legacy to validate his belief systems without emulating those of his father. While Inness, the father, believed God revealed himself through highly personal spiritual



Portion of a hand-colored postcard of the Universalist Church, c. 1930. From the collection of the Tarpon Springs Cultural Center.

revelation, the soft-edged tonalist style of Inness, Jr. imbued with “Inness green” revealed the spiritual light of God seen in nature and conveyed by the artist.

Following the tour of *The Only Hope*, Inness, Jr. had the painting installed in a side transept of the Unitarian Universalist Church. Understanding that the church had become a pantheon for his work, Inness began a companion piece for the opposite side. *The Lord is in His Holy Temple* (8 ft. 8 in. x 6 ft. 5 in.) was Inness, Jr.’s

last painting. He finished it a few days before he died on July 27, 1926. It was hung in the studio of his Cragmoor estate and served as the backdrop for his casket during the funeral. Given to the Unitarian Universalist Church as a final act of spiritual kindness, the large landscape painting provides an intimate view of a grove of trees, symbolizing nature as God’s true sanctuary.

The legacy of George Inness, Jr. was kept alive by his widow Julia, who returned to Tarpon Springs each year

until 1940. She attended services at the church, became the founder of the city’s library, and provided other social and civic support to the city she had come to love. Over the years the Unitarian Universalist Church has remained a good steward of the Inness paintings, providing access to thousands of visitors while maintaining the necessary care of the paintings, including having them conserved in the early 1980s. The City of Tarpon Springs has shown pride in the Inness legacy through its support of the arts. During the nation’s bicentennial celebrations in 1976, the City established a program for creating murals to reflect the community’s culture and developing a performing arts presence. In 1986 an Inness Manor Designer Showcase regenerated interest in the human story of the Innesses in Tarpon Springs and, when the City celebrated its centennial in 1987, it recognized the Inness legacy by hosting a day-long symposium including two leading Inness scholars, Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr. and Michael Quick, who presented perspectives on the

The Triptych, based on the 23rd Psalm (1922). George Inness, Jr. On display at the Unitarian Universalist Church, Tarpon Springs.



Inness painters in Tarpon Springs and their place in art history.

The indelible mark of the Inness legacy continues to attract artists who cherish the creative environment and civic commitment of Tarpon Springs. When retired Michigan artist and educator Allen Leepa sought out Tarpon Springs as a preferred residence, his cultural philanthropy led to the establishment of the Leepa-Rattner Museum of Art on the Tarpon Springs campus of St. Petersburg College in 2002. Today, another Tarpon Springs favorite son artist, Christopher Still, combines extraordinary artistic talent, love of history, and a belief in art as a force for social and cultural awareness. Still's eight large murals of Florida's history that hang in the House of Representatives Chambers in Tallahassee proudly demonstrate that the arts legacy of Tarpon Springs continues, and will be passed on to future generations.

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Special thanks to Phyllis Kolianos, Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society, for access to the Inness Archives; Dr. Kathleen Monahan, Director of Cultural and Civic Services, City of Tarpon Springs, for access to materials associated with "The Life and Times of the Inness Painters in Tarpon Springs, A Symposium, April 27, 1987;" and, John Tarapani, Tarpon Springs businessman, for sharing his knowledge and information regarding the Innesses in Tarpon Springs.



The Lord in His Holy Temple (1926). George Inness, Jr. On display at the Unitarian Universalist Church, Tarpon Springs.

CHAPTER 5

WORLD WAR II: THE HOME-FRONT WAR

Gary R. Mormino, Ph.D.



World War II leveled old empires and created new nation states. The conflict obliterated ancient boundaries and peoples in Europe and Asia while sowing the seeds of colonial upheaval in Africa and the Middle East. But the war's transforming power also touched American cities and their residents. One such place was Tarpon Springs, Florida. On the eve of World War II, Tarpon Springs was a small city, its inhabitants numbering 3,402 in 1940. On VJ Day, August 14, 1945, Tarpon Springs' future seemed boundless. Victory had come with costs, and an examination of the years between 1940 and 1945 reveals a complicated story involving heroism and sacrifice, tumultuous change and human tragedy.

THE TERRIBLE AND NOT-SO-TERRIBLE THIRTIES

Floridians, for good reasons, celebrated the end of the "long decade" of the 1930s. The state of Florida had been reeling since 1926, when land values had collapsed, followed by the stock market crash of 1929. The Sunset Hills Country Club and First Na-

tional Bank of Commerce in Tarpon Springs represented two such casualties.¹ The 1930s had brought one bit of good news to thirsty residents. In 1933 newly elected President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Congress ended the misguided effort to ban alcohol. When the United States, in a wave of moral reform, passed the Eighteenth Amendment in 1919 prohibiting the consumption of alcohol, few groups were as dumbfounded by the decision as Tarpon Springs Greeks. Author Gertrude Stoughton described local reaction: "The Greeks, whose pagan gods and ancestors had probably invented alcoholic beverages, saw no sense in the new law—especially the sponge men coming ashore after three or four months at sea. Some

deep drinks and Homeric laughter seemed called for."²

The woebegone decade of the 1930s may have devastated the state's construction and tourist trades, but a series of developments buoyed local spirits. The visit by former President Calvin Coolidge brought favorable publicity. In 1932, Charles Rawlings, the soon-to-be ex-husband of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, published "The Dance of the Bends," a story about sponge divers in the *Saturday Evening Post*. The New Deal's hand was felt in Tarpon Springs, as funds from the federal government dredged the Anclote River channel, constructed parks, and provided relief for the needy and destitute.³

¹ Stoughton, 90, 96.

² Stoughton, 90.

³ Stoughton, 90-102; Rawlings, 10-11, 80-83.



Sunset Hills Country Club, c. 1920. Photo courtesy of the Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society



Former President Calvin Coolidge (center) visits Tarpon Springs in 1930. Photo courtesy of the Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society.

Ironically, the depression decade brought record profits to the sponge industry. In 1930, Tarpon Springs' boats brought to the Sponge Exchange a harvest amounting to \$800,000. Between 1935 and 1939, sales consistently approached one million dollars, an astounding figure for such a small community. New technological developments made sponging safer. The U.S. Coast Guard began announcing emergency messages to pilots, and in 1938, the radio station WDAE began broadcasting daily weather reports in Greek.⁴

⁴ Stoughton, 91-104; "With Sales of \$1,035,533 Sponge Sales in 1939 Were Second Greatest in History," *Leader*, January 5, 1940. Tarpon Springs *Leader* hereafter referred to as *Leader*.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND NEW WAYS

Irresistible new technologies profoundly influenced the citizens of Tarpon Springs: hidebound Greek sponge divers and their impressionable teenage children; African-American laborers and their families; Anglo businessmen and Midwestern tourists. Radio and movies played powerful roles as a cultural disseminator of news and entertainment. Youth were especially drawn to the airwaves and celluloid media, learning new dances and lyrics from popular films and tunes or more worldly tasks, such as how to light a cigarette, dress like a lady, or run the bases like "Joltin' Joe" DiMaggio or Aristotle George "the

Golden Greek" Agganis. Accepting new customs was not tantamount to assimilation. Elderly Greeks also attended the movies. The Royal Theatre's lineup included Greek-language films. Captain Scorpions featured an all-Greek "all talking and singing musical." The Victrola record player allowed young Americans to listen to their favorite Jazz Age tunes while elderly parents preferred Old-World ballads, blues, and folk songs. Chicago became the center of a thriving foreign-record and blues artist industry. When Joe Louis, the "Brown Bomber" fought, African Americans rooted for their hero as they heard his exploits on the radio.⁵

Rarely do new manners and customs sweep everyone along the same social arc. Consider the children of Greek immigrants born in the 1920s and '30s. Greek-Americans, like second-generation ethnics in Chicago or New York, felt whiplashed by parents who considered the old ways the best

⁵ "Midnight Show at Royal for Greek Fund," *Leader*, March 28, 1941; "Theatre Attractions, At the Royal," *Leader*, January 7, 1944; Cohen, 124-29, 132-39, 260, 328.

ways and their peers who felt more American than Greek, a generation staying in school longer, and feeling the Americanizing influences of the media and popular culture. This tug-of-war fascinated social scientists and writers who described Tarpon Springs. Consider the issue of courtship. In the late 1930s, Gordon Lovejoy studied the area's Greek community while writing his master's thesis. His observations are noteworthy. He concluded that many Greek immigrant fathers still insisted on arranging marriages for their children. Lovejoy noted, "Such a procedure as this is helped along by the almost Oriental seclusion in which the girls are kept. Since scarcely any of them have dates with either Greek or non-Greek boys, it is almost impossible for any of them to be courted." Regarding Greek teenagers, the author observed, "the fact that many of the Greek boys are, as a result of the greater freedom which they enjoy, breaking away entirely from the old arranged marriages in order to marry girls of their choice."⁶

⁶ Lovejoy, 50-53.

By the 1930s, Greek-American students flocked to Tarpon Springs High School. This was not always so. In the early years, Greek women were scarce and children were expected to work. The 1917 yearbook, *The Tarpon*, did not include a single Greek surname in the student body. By the 1930s, Greek immigrants had decided to invest their futures in America and Tarpon Springs. The Greek family exercised tremendous influence upon sons and daughters. A social worker testified that she could not recall any Greek families on relief. Greek teenagers appeared to have been remarkably law abiding and respectful of their parents. Greek-American sons enjoyed freedoms their fathers appreciated, but of which they did not always approve. A sociology student in the late 1930s observing Tarpon Springs noted, "Boy after boy of high school age, when asked by the writer if he intended to be a [sponge] diver, shook his head." Another young student, when asked about a career in sponging—an occupation that was relatively prosperous during these dismal times—answered, "I want

to go into something better. Maybe a lawyer." Still another referred to his parent's generation, "They're all crippled up with the bends." Parents, however, expressed pride that their sons wished to better themselves.⁷



Tarpon Springs High School Football Team, 1945. Yearbook collection, Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society Archives.

Although most Greek immigrant fathers neither understood nor approved of football or baseball, their sons proudly donned the maroon and white uniforms of Tarpon Springs High School. Athletic teams frequently resorted to benefit dinners and special events to raise needed funds. The Quarterback Club supported local athletic teams. In 1940, the *Leader* apologized to readers that

⁷ Lovejoy, 53; Tarpon Springs Historical Society, *The Tarpon yearbooks*.

the team's tattered football uniforms "were shabbier than those worn by any opponent." Greek names predominated the lineup, comprising at least eight of the eleven starters, including the quarterback. Also illustrative of the era and local economies were the nicknames of the local high school teams: the Tarpon Springs Spongers vs. the Largo Packers.

In Tarpon Springs, the years immediately preceding Pearl Harbor brought dramatic and traumatic newsflashes over radios and banner headlines. The radio and movie theater played powerful roles as cultural disseminators of news and entertainment. For local youth they served as guides to the New Tarpon, the Vogue, the Capitol, and the Royal theatres which also served generations of local residents. The new media brought the world and international events to the living rooms and auditoriums of Tarpon Springs residents. In rapid succession, the Munich Crisis, Orson Welles' "War of the Worlds," and Edward R. Murrow's descriptions of the Battle of Britain were broadcast

across Philco radios and flickering movie screens. Such immediacy made international crises more intimate and understandable.⁸

On the eve of Pearl Harbor, Greek immigrants had succeeded wildly beyond their dreams. The city and work force depended largely upon the sponge harvests. In no other city in the United States were Greeks so vital to a local economy and the lifestyle of its residents. In Florida, Greek-Americans had maintained their values and Americanized. Compared to most other immigrant groups and natives, Greeks enjoyed a good working relationship with African-Americans. The rosters and leadership ranks of local city councils, bank trustees, women's clubs, restaurants, and football teams featured Greek names. As early as 1916 the Greek-born pioneer John Cocoris served as sheriff and the first Greek on the Tarpon Springs City Council. Leading citizens had founded the Epiphany Lodge of the Greek-American Progressive Association. The lodge's



John Cocoris, c. 1916.

stated mission sought a "better understanding and acquaintanceship between Americans and those of Greek blood."⁹

But beyond the sponge dock, Americans remained skeptical, even derisive, of most immigrants and their children. In 1942, shortly after Pearl Harbor, George Gallup confidentially polled Americans and their attitudes toward their foreign neighbors. The question asked "how would you rate the people...in comparison with the people of the United States?" Predictably, Americans ranked the

⁸ Sklar, 161-248; Lenthall, 53-98.

⁹ "New Association Elects Officers," *St. Petersburg Times*, January 14, 1936.

peoples of Northern and Western Europe “as good as we are in all respects” the highest. Ranked directly behind Germany—and the United States had declared war against the Nazis when the poll was taken—was Greece. Ranking below Greeks were Jewish refugees and Poles, while Italians, Mexicans, and Japanese finished last. Clearly, Americans felt Greeks, along with Italian, Jewish, and Slavic Americans, had not yet entered mainstream American society.¹⁰

The most sensational and graphic example of injustice to Greeks in Florida occurred in 1931. Three young Greek divers were enjoying a night of carousing in the Gulf Coast town of Cedar Key. A local justice of the peace and sheriff’s constable arrested the men for drinking. Apparently, they were flirting with one of the lawmen’s girlfriends. What should have been a minor offense turned tragic when the drunken officials beat the

10 “An Analysis of American Public Opinion Regarding the War,” A Confidential Report by George Gallup, American Institute of Public Opinion, 1942. President’s Personal Files, 4721, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.

Greeks to death and then set the jail on fire. Eventually the courts convicted the Cedar Key men. A decade later the State of Florida refused to pay the family of one of the Greek victims. The family had asked for the sum of \$3,500.¹¹

WAR AND OCCUPATION OF THE HOMELAND

Most Greek men who left their beloved homeland hoped to return. Upon repatriating, they would command the respect that their new status guaranteed. And they did return in remarkable numbers—almost 50 percent—compared to other southern and eastern Europeans.¹²

The call to arms also lured Greek emigrant patriots home. Between 1912 and 1913, over 40,000 Greek men returned to fight the Turks in the First Balkan War, including volunteers from a new beachhead at Tarpon Springs. Ironically, many Greeks had emigrated, in part, to avoid manda-

11 Stoughton, 97; “\$3,500 Is Sought for Slain Sponger,” *Leader*, May 14, 1942.

12 Saloutos, 434; Frantzis, 180.



Article from the Tarpon Springs Leader, October 28, 1940.

tory military service. But historically, war heightens a sense of ethnicity and belonging, and hundreds of Greeks put on hold their American dream to fight for their motherland.¹³

The conflict in the Balkans reinforced the perception of the Ottoman Empire as the “sick man of Europe.” The fate of the Dodecanese Islands became a pawn in the imperial struggle to take advantage of the Ottomans’ far-flung and weakly-held empire. On the eve of World War I, European

13 Saloutos, “Greeks,” 434; Frantzis, 180.

nations maneuvered to seize the last remaining colonies in their imperial maws. Among the great European powers, Italy desperately wanted a seat at the imperial table. Bellicose leaders urged Italians to sanctify Ancient Rome through martial victory and imperial conquest. But where? Italy eyed the Ottoman-held colony of Libya on the North African Mediterranean coast. Diplomatic leaders fabricated an excuse for war, and in September 1911 the conflict began. Italy may have been woefully unprepared for war, but the Ottoman Turks were even less equipped. In the treaty that followed, Italy was awarded control of the Dodecanese Islands, including the prize of Rhodes.¹⁴

Tarpon Springs Greeks were crushed. Even if, as some have argued, Italy was a kinder power than the Turks, even if Italy proclaimed it was liberating the islands from the yoke of the Turks, rule from Rome was inherently unjust. “And though thousands of miles separated them from their island homes, time and distance did

¹⁴ Smith, 241-49; Bosworth, 49, 96-97.

not blunt their sentiments: they forgot not their duties,” wrote George Frantzis, a Greek-born scholar and author of *Strangers at Ithaca*. “With dedication they taught their children, at school, at home, and in Church that the Dodecanese islands must be liberated from Italy.” Greeks abroad celebrated each May 21 as Greek Independence Day.

Greeks at home and abroad expressed confidence that the Treaty of Versailles following World War I would restore the Dodecanese Islands to the rightful heirs. In May 1919 U.S. President Woodrow Wilson advised strongly that the 12 islands of the Dodecanese, with their predominantly Greek ethnic inhabitants, be returned to Greece. But Italy had earned a spot at the peace table by dint of Allied victory, and in a series of maneuvers that earned Italy the reputation as the “jackal of international diplomacy,” Italy held on to the Dodecanese, as well as acquiring the city of Trieste and Austria’s Alto Adige-Trento territories. Benito Mussolini’s seizure of power in 1922, and his pledge to re-

deem Ancient Rome, guaranteed that the Dodecanese would remain under Italian control.¹⁵

The Dodecanese islanders chafed under Italian rule. George Frantzis eloquently summarized the consequences of resistance: “All schools and churches were closed; beatings, banishments, jailing, and self-imposed expatriation by groups of natives ensued...From the 150,000 residents within the Dodecanese, only 60,000 remained. By the thousands they took refuge [abroad].¹⁶

WAR’S BEGINNINGS

On September 1, 1939, German forces crossed the Polish border, beginning the descent into a hellish chapter of history. On a human scale, World War II is terrible beyond comprehension. Between September 1, 1939 and August 14, 1945, the conflict claimed 19 lives every single second. In a war fought across five continents, Tarpon Springs represents a mere postage stamp on the map. But understand-

¹⁵ Smith, 248-49; Bosworth, 96-97.

¹⁶ Frantzis, 180-82.

ing the conflict at the local level allows an appreciation of the war and its consequences.

In retrospect, the years 1939 to 1941 seemed idyllic. American farmers, industries, contractors, and fishermen prospered. The local paper dutifully reported weekly and monthly sponge sales. In 1939, sponge sales totaled one million dollars, barely missing the record. The construction business boomed as the federal government erected new airfields and military bases in a rush to preparedness. Tourists returned to Florida and Tarpon Springs adjusted to a new tourist era. The elites that had once come for the springs and seren-

ity of Spring Bayou had discovered new destinations on the Gulf. Tarpon Springs' new appeal was the exotica of its Greek enclave, colorful vessels, and curio shops. The annual Epiphany celebration drew increasingly larger crowds. By the 1930s, tens of thousands crowded Spring Bayou; what had once been a local event was becoming a tourist spectacle. Merchants capitalized upon the opportunities. E.M. White Jewelry advertised, "Choice Assortment of Crosses and Chains." A student interviewed local businessmen in the late 1930s who thought that few tourists existed in the early days of sponging. "In those days the rare tourist who did find his way to the community was given sponges as a gift. How different is the situation today!"¹⁷

An "authentic" meal at a Greek restaurant completed the encounter. "Fried shrimp and combination salad as prepared only by Louis," promised an advertisement for Louis Pappas' Riverside Café...Greek cooking." To many tourists and local residents, a



Pappas family with their famous Greek Salad, c. 1942. Photo courtesy of the Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society.

trip to Tarpon Springs seemed like the closest thing to a Mediterranean cruise or a night out in Athens. An excursion to Tarpon Springs meant encountering a new world of smells, accents, and tastes: the first bite of the Greek-American Bakery's *baklava*, the serendipity of finding potato in Pappas's Greek salad, and the sheer adventure of ordering octopus and seeing the flaming fire of *saganaki*. Whether residents and businesses realized what was happening, Tarpon Springs was being reinvented.¹⁸

Events unfolding in Europe—the Battle of Britain, the invasion of



Original Pappas Restaurant, c. 1942. Photo courtesy of the Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society.

17 Lovejoy, 46.

18 Gabaccia, 114-17.

France, and the desert battles fought in North Africa—provoked a spirited debate among Americans. As late as December 6, 1941, a majority of Americans opposed U.S. involvement in Europe. The reasons ranged from bitter memories of trench warfare in the Great War to historic attitudes of isolationism to American Firsters, but Americans firmly resisted military involvement. In Tarpon Springs, divisions chiefly followed ethnic lines. For good reasons, Greeks supported intervention.

Intervention or isolation, America began preparing for war. In October 1940, young men between the ages of 18 and 36 waited anxiously as the first peacetime draft in American history unfolded. A headline in the local paper noted, “387 Draftees in Tarpon Register for Conscription.” Overall, 16 million men registered for the draft. Tarponites Herbert Reece Powell and Anthony Proestos “won” the lottery, as they held the second and sixth numbers selected by a blindfolded Secretary of War Henry Stimson. Nine other local boys had their numbers drawn, as well.¹⁹

19 “Tarponite Has Second Draft Number,” *Lead-*

In November 1940, the War Department announced plans for a bombing range located just north of the Anclote River. Objections from fishermen mothballed the idea. In 1940, the Marine Engine Works and Shipbuilding Company was awarded a small bid to construct six motor launches for the navy.²⁰

With the force of a thunderbolt across Mount Olympus, Italy invaded Greece on October 28, 1940. The headline in the *Leader* trumpeted, “Greece and Italy at War.” Il Duce had presented the Greek government a three-hour ultimatum to submit or be annihilated, Greek Prime Minister Ioannis Metaxas replied simply, “*Oxi!* (No!).” Metaxas, a monarchist, had seized power and dissolved the Greek parliament in 1936. He was suspected by the West of fascist sympathies, but he courageously rallied his countrymen to resist the invaders. The *Leader’s* headline reported simply, “Tarpon Residents Keenly Watching

er, November 1, 1940; “387 Draftees in Tarpon Springs,” *Leader*, October 18, 1940.

20 “Marine Engine Works Prepares to Build Small Boats for Navy,” *Leader*, November 3, 1940.

Developments.” The Italian government, which had entered the war on the side of Axis power Germany in May of 1940, was ill-prepared for combat. Italian leader Benito Mussolini, apparently perturbed at playing second fiddle to Adolf Hitler, ordered an invasion of Greece without even consulting his paranoid but dominant ally, quipping that Herr Hitler could read about the events in the newspaper. The invasion was a military fiasco, resulting in what one historian called “Italy’s greatest military disaster of the war.” Germany subsequently invaded Greece to salvage the ill-fated operation.²¹

The press immediately dispatched reporters to Tarpon Springs to gauge public opinion. Writing in *Collier’s Weekly*, the journalist Howard Hartley wrote that prior to the invasion, Tarpon Springs was bitterly divided into two factions. “One group was passionately loyal to the Metaxas regime, believing that the iron rule of the Hellenic dictator had saved Greece from Communism and chaos. The other

21 Smith, 407-8; Bosworth, 215, 461-64.

crowd clung tenaciously to the Venizelos banner, offered refuge to exiles of the mother country and denounced Metaxas as a foe of democracy.” But the invasion by Mussolini’s “invincibles” united the colony. “Italy’s declaration of war upon the ancient kingdom of Greece,” observed the *St. Petersburg Times*, “came as joyful news to Tarpon Springs Greek colony.” The reporter explained. “Fascist Italy has long been an archenemy of the Hellenic nation and with Greece’s entry into the European conflict on the side of Britain, the Greek colony here looks for the liberation of the thirteen Dodecanese islands.” George Emmanuel, a prominent sponge buyer and merchant, explained that he had three brothers-in-law who were serving in the Greek army and two cousins who were naval officers. He also pointed out that his son Michel, a University of Florida graduate, was serving aboard the USS *Illinois*. Louis Smitzes, a sponge buyer and ship chandler prophesied that Russia would ultimately “come to the aid of Greece.”²²

22 “Greeks in Tarpon Springs Rejoice Over Greece’s Refusal to Bow to Axis,” *St. Petersburg Times*, October 28, 1940; “Data Being Gathered

The plight of embattled Greece electrified Tarpon Springs. “Greek Relief” served as a lodestar. The newspaper faithfully reported the donors and contributions to Hellenic War Relief. Mayor Craig declared January 6, 1941, Greek War Relief Day. Nick Arfaras led the local efforts. Arriving in Tarpon Springs in 1905, he had succeeded wildly, first donning a diver’s suit and then a business suit as befitted the owner of the most successful sponge-packing business in Florida. Arfaras called a meeting at Philopotos Hall, urging all Greeks to attend. Several speakers, observed a journalist, “wore the white wool tights and flaring skirts of the evzones, whose bayonets drove the Italians out of Koritza. . . . More than three thousand dollars tumbled into the baskets.” The audience formulated a fund-raising plan. The finest sponges—every tenth specimen—were reserved for Greek war relief.²³

for Magazine on Greek War Relief,” *Leader*, March 28, 1941; “Hartley, 18-19; “News of War In Greece Excites Tarpon Springs,” *Tampa Daily Times*, October 28, 1940; “Tarpon Springs Greeks Say First Loyalty to U.S.,” *St. Petersburg Independent*, November 1, 1940.

23 Frantzis, 183-84; Hartley, 57; “\$1,504 Raised

Hollywood and Athens rallied to the cause. Across America, movie theaters served as dream factories that provided several hours of fantasy and magic in a world that needed hope and escape. Hollywood helped raise funds for Greece. Spyros Skouras embodied the American dream. A Greek immigrant who climbed the ladder to become president of Twentieth Century Fox, Skouras generously supported embattled Greece. Special midnight showings of the Shirley Temple film, *Bluebird*, and the Merle Oberon film, *Till We Meet Again*, raised proceeds for the homeland. In *Shrine of Victory*, underground Greek artists documented a stirring saga of the resistance efforts. The film appeared at the Royal Theatre for the Benefit Greek War Relief. “Now on the screen!” promised the movie marquee, “The first rousing story of Greece’s de-

By Calymian Society for War Funds,” *Leader*, January 21, 1944.



March 28, 1941,
Tarpon Springs
Leader.



Interior lobby and exterior of the Royal Theater on Tarpon Avenue, c. 1941. Photos courtesy of the Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society.

fiance that rocked the Axis...and thrilled the world.” A review noted that a copy of the film “was smuggled out of Greece...” Special admission fees ranged from \$1.10 for adults to 30 cents for children.²⁴

For some, neither Hollywood fantasies or harsh documentaries softened the anguish of being helpless to assist family. Nicholas Giallourakis, heartbroken that he could not help his family stranded in war torn Greece, committed suicide.²⁵

24 Saloutos, 436; “Midnight Show Saturday at Royal for Greek Fund,” *Leader*, March 28, 1941; “Shrine of Victory,” *Leader*, January 7, 1941.

25 “Despondent Over Fate of Family in Greece,”

Major George Hatzistavris arrived in Tarpon Springs in December 1940. A war hero, a Greek army officer and a political exile, the major arrived with the purpose of recruiting American volunteers for the cause. Politics—the U.S. Selective Service Act and the official American policy of neutrality—foiled the major’s plans. An ambulance purchased with “Bundles for Britain” relief funds, also appeared in Tarpon Springs. Don Avril, a St. Petersburg mechanic, was raising funds for Greek relief before he and the ambulance departed “for service in the

Leader, January 17, 1941.

Greek campaign.” Before its departure, the ambulance was displayed at the Halki Society dance at the Tarpon Springs Pavilion.²⁶

REMEMBER PEARL HARBOR

The first Sunday of December 1941 brought an extra hope of optimism. Across Florida, the date marked the official beginning of a tourist season that promised to be the greatest ever. Dupree Gardens, “the blossom center of Florida,” a popular tourist attraction located in nearby Pasco County, opened its gates. The Tarpon Springs Chamber of Commerce beamed with optimism knowing that it had purchased ample advertising space in northern newspapers urging Yankees to come south this winter. State chairman of the Greek War Relief association, John Diamandis, announced that a massive shipment of food had been dispatched to Greece.²⁷

In 1941 Sunday mornings were inseparable from church. Tarpon Springs

26 “Ambulance and Driver Bound for Greece Stop in City,” *Leader*, January 17, 1941.

27 “Newspaper Advertising in Northern Papers Placed By Chamber of Commerce,” “Churches.”

parishioners belonged to 15 different churches, ranging from All Saints Memorial Episcopal Church to the Emmanuel Tabernacle. The *Leader* listed six separate “Negro Churches,” including Mt. Moriah A.M.E. Church and Macedonia A.B.C. Church.”²⁸ Sunday afternoons in December 1941 reflected the blending of ancient and modern customs. The Sunday afternoon dinner had long been enshrined as an institution in the South, and Tarpon Springs dinner tables reflected the diversity of its eclectic population. African-American families had largely arrived in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, drawn by work building the railroads, jobs in the sponge industry, lumber and construction trades. Black women toiled as laundresses, cooks and domestic servants. Black or white, Greek or WASP, Sunday meals paid tribute to the harvests from the Gulf or freshwater lakes and creeks, the handiwork of gardeners, and the sign that a bountiful table affirmed the American dream. Chicken, often freshly drawn from backyard

coops, appeared on platters fried and spiced, smothered in a tomato sauce or baked. Wood-burning stoves could still be found in many kitchens. An exotic feast awaited Greek Orthodox returning from the Sunday Divine Liturgy: *youvetsi* (lamb with orzo), *keftedes* (meatballs) and potatoes in a tomato sauce, *fila* (Dodecanese-style *dolmades*), a tomato-cucumber salad, and Greek bread. Bakeries worked overtime to supply the Sunday demand. Sweet potato pie, *baklava*, or a simple arrangement of figs, citrus, and mangos satisfied a variety of tastes. American black coffee or thick Greek coffee completed the meal.²⁹

In a society that demanded long hours of hard labor, Sunday spelled rest. Sundays traditionally attracted many patrons to the cinema. Among the films playing local on December 7th were *You’ll Never Get Rich*, starring Fred Astaire and Rita Hayworth, and *One Foot in Heaven*, starring Frederic March and Martha Scott. Young males often listened to football

games on the radio. The more popular college games were re-broadcast Sunday afternoons. Young Greeks cheered their All-American ethnic compatriots, football stars Vincent Banonis (University of Detroit) and John Grigas (Holy Cross). During Sunday afternoon leisure men might wander to the Baynard Drug Company—“where the gang goes”—or the Venizelos Coffee House, named after a Greek patriot.³⁰

Shortly after 2:26 p.m., announcers interrupted the radio broadcasts. On CBS, John Daly told listeners, “The White House has announced that planes with red markings have attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.” Most Americans had no idea where Pearl Harbor was, but the word spread by telephone, telegram, and radio that Japan had attacked America. The next day they listened to President Roosevelt speak of “December 7th, 1941, a date which will live in infamy.” Within days America declared war against Japan, Germany, and Italy.

28 Churches,” and “Shipment of Food,” in *Leader*, December 5, 1941.

29 The author expresses thanks to Dr. Tina Bucuvalas who interviewed elderly Greek women to recreate a 1941 Sunday meal.

30 “Baynard Drug Co. Celebrates Its 20th Birthday,” *Leader*, 8 June 1945; “New Tarpon,” and “Royal Theatre,” *Leader*, December 5, 1941.

NEW REALITIES

Rarely had the ordinary rhythm of everyday life changed as dramatically as it did after Pearl Harbor. Illustrating this point, the first issue of the *Leader* following Pearl Harbor contained the following headlines: “Here’s What to Do If Air Raid Comes,” “Defense Plans For City Are Made Wednesday,” and “Patriotic Program Given Thursday By P.T.A.” Another story explained that Navy had modified its physical standards and asked young men to reapply for service. Readers quickly learned new terms that defined wartime: blackout, air raid, and “for the duration.”³¹

Tarponites also learned to accept new realities. The pre-war pleasures of a Sunday excursion, a new car, and beach bonfires fell victim to shortages, rationing, and security. A favorite pastime, attending the movies, also adjusted to the times. In addition to the proliferation of patriotic themes—

31 “Defense Plans,” and “Here’s What to Do If Air Raid Comes,” *Leader*, December 12, 1941; “Practice Blackout Tonight,” *Leader*, January 2, 1942; “Practice Blackout Here Is Very Successful,” *Leader*, January 9, 1942.

Remember Pearl Harbor and *Wake Island*—the admission fee changed. Occasionally patrons received admission for a contribution to a cause, or in one case, the donation of a piece of rubber or a musical instrument. Even the simplest pleasures—extra spoonfuls of sugar and a second cup of coffee—were suspended “for the duration.” But residents accepted the new restrictions with an understanding that they were all in it together. Perspective also mattered. In March 1942 Commander Comerford, chairman of the Upper Pinellas chapter of the Red Cross, announced that it was impossible to ship food to the starving Greeks of the Dodecanese Islands. That same month, Lt. Commander C.F. Edge of the U.S. Coast Guard announced that “for the duration, no one will be allowed on main Anclote key.”³²

Children adapted to a new world and a new order. Many fathers and older brothers were in uniform and gone during the war years. Male teach-

32 “Impossible to Get Food to Italian Islands: Red Cross,” *Leader*, March 27, 1942; “Public Is Barred From Anclote Key,” *Leader*, March 27, 1942.



Coast Guard at Anclote Key, c. 1942. Photo courtesy of the Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society.

ers, already a rarity in public schools, became even rarer as teachers, too, volunteered for the war. In one of the war’s more curious changes, Washington’s shadow touched public schools. In a ritual few could remember when it started, school children began the day reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. A new policy ordered that henceforth, “students...will salute the American flag with right hand over the heart instead of the outstretched open palm.” Clearly, any old custom that resembled Nazism was replaced and reformed.³³

33 “School Children To Salute With Hand Over

THE FOURTH ESTATE GOES TO WAR

The *Leader's* owner-editor was the remarkably talented Helen A. Hennig, a rarity in an age of male-dominated journalists and editors. After her husband, Major Jay Hennig, died in 1940, Mrs. Hennig took the reins of the newspaper that had reported local news since its beginnings in 1910. The *Leader's* staff of four included three women. During the war, the *Leader* was sent free to local servicemen stationed at home and abroad.³⁴

The front page of the *Leader* provides a cavalcade of Tarpon Springs' role in a far-flung war. Front page local events—visitations by residents' elderly aunts, the deaths of the prominent and not-so-prominent citizens, the weekly sales of sponges, and even the death of the Flanagan's 35-year-old family parrot—intersected with the sweeping forces of history: the Red Army sweeping

Heart," *Leader*, May 14, 1942.

34 Stoughton, 92, 106, 114; Hennig file, Tarpon Springs Historical Society.



Helen Hennig and staff of the Tarpon Springs Leader, c. 1942. Photo courtesy of the Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society.

across Poland and Germany, D-Day and Iwo Jima, and home-front prosperity and sacrifice.

In war and peace, the annual Epiphany celebration continued; indeed, the sacred rite reminded parishioners and tourists, bishops and agnostics, why we were fighting. The *Leader* described the mood and moment of each wartime Epiphany. The throwing of the golden cross represents a dramatic climax of the festivities, one symbolizing the casting of the gospel upon the troubled waters of the world and man's struggle to retrieve and attain truth. The anxious divers included Theofilis Katras. In 1941,

before a crowd of 5000 spectators, he "realized the dream of years and recovered the cross." The *Leader* noted, "For the first time this year [1941] the services lost their purely ecclesiastical significance. Mingling with the elaborately brocaded robes of the priests as they paraded though the flag-lined streets were the skirted uniforms of Foustanella and Evzone, the Greek mountain troops." Theophilis Katras returned for the 1944 Epiphany. By then he was Corporal Katras.³⁵

WINGS OVER TARPON SPRINGS

Only days after Pearl Harbor, the U.S. Navy advertised in the local paper for the "toughest job in the world—deep sea diving." Philip George Fatolitis, John Katras, and Anthony Proestos volunteered to become vaunted "frogmen," members of the Navy's Underwater Demolition Team. The war took the much celebrated Fatolitis to the South Pacific, where he

35 "Patriotic Touch Added to Epiphany Celebration By Offering Victory Prayers," *Leader*, January 9, 1942; "Thousands Witness Colorful Rites as Sponge Colony Celebrates Epiphany," *Leader*, January 14, 1944.



Left: Navy diver
Anthony Proestos

Below: Coast Guard
at Villa Plumosa.
Photos courtesy of the
Tarpon Springs Area
Historical Society.



dove, helped build a lighthouse, survived a sinking ship, and many other harrowing episodes.³⁶

From a handful of military installa-

³⁶ "Navy Opens for Applicants for Deep Sea Diving," *Leader*, December 19, 1941; "A Last Link to Sponging Industry's Good Old Days," *Tampa Bay Times*, February 11, 2012; "Local Youth Recruited to Serve As Diver with the Coast Guard," *Leader*, September 11, 1942; "Former Diver Enlists as Naval Diver," *Leader*, August 14, 1942; information about Mr. Fatolitis provided by Tina Bucuvalas.

tions in the early 1930s, Florida became a citadel, home to almost two hundred bases and camps, bombing ranges and blimp stations. On the eve of Pearl Harbor, Pinellas County was an isolated, lightly settled peninsula, its population barely topping 90,000. Famous for its pristine beaches and tourist camps, Pinellas County became an armed camp; beaches were routinely assaulted by amphibious troops, tanks, and bombers. Tarpon Springs obtained a small Coast Guard facility to keep track of the myriad craft navigating St. Joseph Sound. Coast Guardsmen bivouacked at the Villa Plumosa. In 1943, the city hosted a banquet and dance for the crew of the visiting Greek vessel, *King George II*. City Commissioner Mike Samarkos raised \$2,600 for the Greek War Relief Fund.³⁷

Nearby Dunedin boasted the Amphibian Tractor Detachment, Marine Corps. There, recruits learned to maneuver the Roebling "Alligator," a two-track vehicle that could trans-

³⁷ "Coast Guard to Return Villa Plumosa to Owners," *Leader*, January 14, 1944; Stoughton, 109.

port men and weapons from ship to shore. Designed by Clearwater resident Donald Roebling in a machine shop on his estate, the "Alligator" was used in the Pacific Theater. Honey-moon Island doubled as a Pacific Island where Marines hit the beach.³⁸

The Army Air Forces established bases in St. Petersburg, Belleair, and Clearwater. The U.S. Coast Guard maintained a large installation along Bayboro Harbor in St. Petersburg. Across Tampa Bay, Tampa was home to two huge Army Air bases: Drew Field and MacDill Field. Servicemen crisscrossed the area, and many visited Tarpon Springs to experience a Greek colony in America. Tarpon Springs families and churches often invited servicemen to dinners and dances.³⁹

Daily, residents became familiar with the sounds and sights of P-38 Light-

³⁸ "Amphibian Tanks Received by Coast Guard," *Leader*, August 21, 1945; "WWII Marine Corps Amphibious Vehicle Was Developed in Dunedin," *Pinellas Newsboy*, July 5, 2009.

³⁹ Mormino, *Hillsborough County Goes to War*, 13-14, 89-97.

nings, B-17 Flying Fortress bombers, and B-26 Martin Marauders roaring overhead. Abraham L. Tarapani, a prominent Lithuanian-born Jewish businessman, World War I veteran, and owner of the New York Department Store, headed the local civilian-manned, 24 hours a day, aircraft spotting post. He also served as the commander of the Fernald-Millas American Legion post. Volunteers surveyed the skies from the tower located at the city pier, vigilant to the threat of German Stuka dive bombers.⁴⁰

Harrowing accounts document the dramatic stories. Lt. Charles Priest Jr. was piloting a P-51 Mustang when the aircraft malfunctioned and crashed. The pilot managed to parachute and land safely in the Gulf of Mexico. The crew of the sponge boat *Elizabeth Ann* witnessed the event. Captain Mike Miales managed to locate and rescue the pilot. On another occasion, a McCreary Fishery boat

40 "Civilian Aircraft Spotting Post Is Organized By Tarapani," *Leader*, December 19, 1941; "Abe L. Tarapani Reelected Legion Post Commander," *Leader*, April 17, 1945; Tarapani family file, Tarpon Springs Historical Society.



Left: Handmade birthday card for Abraham Tarapani signed by many well-known Tarponites including Helen Hennig, Bill Noblit, Mike Tsalickis, Lucille Ferguson, Mayor Craig and family (1943).

Above: Spotting tower at the beach. Courtesy of the Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society.

sighted a parachute attached to a floating figure west of the Anclote Lighthouse. When the floating body was hoisted aboard the vessel, fishermen discovered the figure was a dummy! It turned out that the dummy was a double used in the 1943 Howard Hawks film, *Air Force*. Filmed at Drew Field, Air Force starred John Garfield, Harry Carey, and Gig Young.⁴¹

41 "P-51 Mustang Burns in Gulf," *Leader*, July 13, 1945; "Pursuit Plane Falls in Gulf," *Leader*, May 15, 1942; "Movie Dummy Found Floating in Gulf," *Leader*, August 28, 1945; Mormino, *Hillsborough*

Gertrude Stoughton described "the most spectacular air display of the war," a combat training exercise that involved more than 200 planes—"Flying Fortresses, Mustangs, Warhawks, and Thunderbolts"—over the Anclote Lighthouse. Newspapers carried many accounts of training disasters. In 1942, two army training planes tangled wings over Clearwater and crashed, resulting in two deaths.⁴²

County Goes to War, 95-96.

42 Stoughton, 107.

ENEMY ALIENS

As international crises roiled the waters of diplomacy and politics, Greek immigrants became understandably nervous by the late 1930s. Since the U.S. Congress imposed strict immigration quotas in 1924, the stream of Greek immigrants had slowed down. Moreover, ethnic Greeks resided in Turkey and the Dodecanese Islands, further confusing their status. The life histories of Theophilis Tsangaris and Demetrios Gianicuris provide a fascinating window into the era. The two men pleaded with Federal Judge William Barker to speed up the path to citizenship. Immigrants who wished to become American citizens first had to fill out a petition, a form which asked life history data: place and date of birth of the applicant (and wife and children, if applicable), place and date of embarkation and arrival, and employment. The applicant also provided witnesses as to character. Following a period of three to five years and the successful passage of an exam, the immigrants became citizens. Theophilis followed

his brother, Dr. Theo Tsangaris, to Tarpon Springs. Theophilis recently was graduated from University of Tampa. Gianicuris had arrived in Tampa Springs from Turkey in 1910. A fisherman, he tied up his sponge boat to attend language school and become a citizen. “[Monday] he sailed...his boat for the sponge banks [as] an American Citizen,” the *Leader* observed in September 1941. Gianicuris and Tsangaris could not have imagined how their lives and adopted country would change in two and a half months.⁴³

In a cruel twist of history, the declaration of war against the Axis Powers meant that Greek immigrants not yet naturalized as American citizens were suddenly subject to new concerns and scrutiny because they were classified as Italians and therefore “enemy aliens.” In Tarpon Springs, 700 Greeks born on the Dodecanese were classified as Italian nationals. The FBI ordered Italian and Greek enemy aliens to surrender their

shortwave radio sets, cameras, and firearms; the law also required such persons to register and carry at all times certificates of identification. Furthermore, they were prohibited access to certain areas, a regulation that hurt fishermen. When journalists described the new legislation as “Draconian,” few realized the irony. Draco was a 7th century BC Athenian tyrant who imposed the death penalty for even minor offences. However, Greek-Americans had influential friends. “In the internal affairs of America,” observed George Frantzis, “95 percent of the spongers of Tarpon Springs belong to the Democratic Party.” On the national, state, and local level, the Democratic Party dominated the 1940s, and Greeks strategically took advantage of their alliances. Florida U.S. Senator Claude Pepper, whose wife grew up in St. Petersburg, visited Tarpon Springs frequently. Powerful friends besieged U.S. Attorney General Francis B. Biddle, arguing that “the Tarpon Springs Greeks were loyal Americans who hated the Italian rulers of their homeland.” In February 1942,

43 “2 Local Aliens in Group Becoming Citizens,” *Leader*, September 19, 1941.

Biddle announced that Greek immigrants from the Italian-occupied Dodecanese Islands were no longer considered “enemy aliens.”⁴⁴

THE NEW CATHEDRAL

The growth and prominence of the Greek community required a new church. In April 1941, ground was broken for a new church with a price tag starting at \$75,000. The task of raising such a sum was daunting, given that the community was already raising significant funds for Greek Relief. Moreover, the home front was committed to the purchase of war bonds and constant donations to worthy causes. An unexpected gift arrived from Greece. The Greek government had constructed a lavish pavilion made from 60 tons of marble quarried on Mount Petele for the 1939 World's Fair in New York City. By the time the festivities ended, war had broken out in Europe and offi-



Interior of the new Greek Orthodox church, c. 1946.

cials had no way of shipping the marble home. Tarpon Springs leaders, N.G. Arfaras and George Frantzis, visited Washington to confer with the Greek ambassador. The Greek government promptly announced the gift of marble for the construction of St. Nicholas Church. Arfaras also skillfully purchased 60 tons of steel only months before Pearl Harbor and subsequent shortages and restrictions.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Stoughton, 70-73.

Church officials decided to hold the 1942 Epiphany services in the partially built new church. Archbishop Athenagoras understood the symbolism of the Epiphany during a time of war. Nicholas G. Lely, the Greek consul-general arrived from New York. The *Leader* described the setting: “Tarpon Springs was gay with flags and buntings, streamers and tapestries depicting the first Epiphany, Greek and American flags flying side by side.” The Archbishop implored the crowd, “It is needless for me to appeal to you and particularly the spiritual children of the Greek Orthodox Church and of eternal Greece, to lend your fullest and wholehearted cooperation to the fight in which our country now is now engaged.” The St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church was consecrated April 23, 1944.⁴⁶

At 5:30 on the morning of June 6, 1944, the bells of St. Nicholas awakened the inhabitants of Tarpon Springs. A loudspeaker playing “God Bless America” accompanied the pealing of bells. D-Day, the Al-

⁴⁶ “Patriotic Touch,” *Leader*, January 9, 1942.

⁴⁴ “Registration of Aliens by Post Office Here Nears 500,” *Leader*, November 1, 1940; “Pinellas Enemy Aliens Have Till Feb. 14 to Give Up Contraband,” *Leader*, February 6, 1942; “Greeks from Aegean Islands Not Classed as Enemy Aliens,” *Leader*, February 20, 1940.

lies long-anticipated invasion of France, had begun. "Hundreds of persons of all denominations and creeds filled St. Nicholas church," reported the *Leader*, "to take part in solemn prayer service commemorating D-day." The Rev. E.E. Snow presided over the ceremony.⁴⁷

Patriotic sermons infused American churches and Tarpon Springs was no exception. The chaplain at MacDill Field in Tampa occupied the pulpit at the First Presbyterian Church, choosing a theme of "the servicemen's service."

A PEOPLE'S WAR

"This is not only a war of soldiers in uniform; it is a war of the people, of all the people, and it must be fought not only on the battlefield, but in the cities and in villages, in the factories and on the farm, in the home and in the heart of every man, woman, child who loves freedom. This is the people's war!" Thus the vicar passionately explained to his congregation when informed that Britain was at war, in the 1942 film, *Mrs. Miniver*.

⁴⁷ "Impressive Service Held at Cathedral Observing D-Day," *Leader*, June 9, 1944.

Moviegoers at Tarpon Springs' movie theaters understood the vicar's message. The home front's finest hour may have been the extraordinary outpouring of volunteers.

From its beginnings, Tarpon Springs residents formed myriad voluntary associations. Such societies cut across ethnic, racial, and class lines. During the war, a special urgency characterized volunteerism. Children contributed to the war effort by collecting everything from old tires to aluminum pots to newspapers. Posters urged citizens to convert waste paper into "suits of armor." Residents recycled bacon fat to be turned into explosives. In one week in 1944, volunteers hauled six tons of scrap metal from Tarpon Springs to Tampa, including old boat motors, Model T's, and tractors. "Giant Drive for Scrap," announced the *Leader*. "Every Tarpon Springs resident will be called upon Wednesday to help 'crack the Axis' in a city-wide 'Junk Rally.'" Weekly, the *Leader* reported the purchases of war bonds and stamps by area students and teachers.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ "War Bond and Stamp Sales at Schools Are

Women dominated the volunteer ranks. Women rolled bandages for the Red Cross, baked baklava for fund raisers, polished the church altar, and worked through their traditional networks to raise funds and morale "for the duration." Mrs. Guiley Clarke, volunteering from her perch at the pier tower, helped save a pilot whose plane had crashed in the Gulf. Young women poured coffee and danced with servicemen at the recreation room of the local Masonic Temple. Meredith Topliff Hupalo, a local artist, designed the insignia for the Hellcat Squadron. Her brother John Walter Topliff served in the Hellcat Squadron. For sheer sacrifice, two Tarpon Springs mothers deserved special accolades. Mrs. William McFather was mother of eight sons, five serving in the military

\$2,440," *Leader*, November 5, 1943; "Elementary Pupils Enroll 100 Per Cent In Junior Red Cross," *Leader*, November 29, 1942; "USO Drive in Tarpon Exceeds Quota on Opening Day," *Leader*, May 15, 1942; "Much Aluminum Is Collected in Drive," *Leader*, July 25, 1941; "Tin Salvage Drive," *Leader*, March 23, 1945; "\$1,504 Raised by Calymnian Society for War Funds," *Leader*, January 21, 1944; "Four Tons of Scrap Collected," *Leader*, August 21, 1945; "Convert County's Wastepaper into 'Suits of Armor,'" *Leader*, April 20, 1945..

and three working in defense plants, while Mary Stamathis pointed with pride at her five sons in the service.⁴⁹

But it would be a mistake to assume that the war's spirit of sacrifice and camaraderie dissolved immorality and lawlessness. While most citizens obeyed rationing regulations, a flourishing black market catered to those who wished to ignore the law. In 1942, Mayor J.M. Young summoned civic leaders to address "the perplexing problem arising from the sale of intoxicating liquors to servicemen stationed here." The chief of police argued that the problem could be traced to "jook joints" lying outside city boundaries.⁵⁰

SPONGES WILL WIN THE WAR

World War II interrupted and altered the rhythms of work, but the conflict

49 "83,140 Surgical Dressings Made in Year by Red Cross Class," *Leader*, January 7, 1944; "Tarponite Paints Insignia for New Hellcat Squadron," *Leader*, September 17, 1943; "Five Stamathis Brothers in Service," *Leader*, June 22, 1945.

50 "Conference Called To Seek Solution of Jook Joint and Liquor Problem," *Leader*, August 21, 1942.

also poured unfathomable amounts of federal and private money into the economy. Perhaps the most unusual economic contribution to the war effort was played by the Saunders Venom Extract Company. A local businessman-outdoorsman, Paul Saunders, developed and manufactured snakebite kits. Saunders began manufacturing kits in November 1942. His timing was providential: American troops were encountering jungle terrain at Guadalcanal. As if volcanic islands and tropical diseases were not bad enough, poisonous snakes lurked. The Saunders snakebite kit each contained a scalpel, a tourniquet, a vacuum suction pump, an antiseptic, and instructions. The Canadian government purchased 41,000 kits. Saunders later made his kits available to the public.⁵¹

The war boosted the Tarpon Springs shipbuilding industry. The Marine Engine Works received two contracts from the Navy to build boats for anti-submarine activity. A tight labor force, union wages, and the demand

51 Stoughton, 108.

for skilled trades resulted in some residents commuting to Tampa for work in the burgeoning shipyards. The demand for welders was so acute that hundreds of women entered the shipbuilding profession to become "Joans of Arc."

But sponging dominated the wartime economy, as it had the previous four decades. In the panic following Pearl Harbor and the fears of enemy aircraft and vessels pummeling the coasts, the government imposed a series of laws that undermined the local economy and threatened to paralyze fishing and sponging. A familiar pattern emerged: Federal authorities decreed new laws restricting access to the sponge beds or the availability of necessary equipment. Greeks negotiated and quarreled, appealed and compromised, and in the end, harvested rich profits during the war years.⁵²

52 "Shortage of Diving Suits Is Threat to Sponge Industry," *Leader*, February 6, 1942; "Sponge Industry Faced With Loss of Sponge Beds in Target Range," *Leader*, September 19, 1941; "Night Fishing in Inland Waters Is Modified," *Leader*, August 14, 1942; "Fishermen Ask For Relief From Ban On Night Fishing," *Leader*, November 6, 1942; "Gulf

Days after Pearl Harbor, the government announced that rubber was a critical wartime resource, and was subject to strict rationing. Sponge divers complained that most diving suits had been manufactured and imported from Japan. Complaints flowed to Washington, and politicians lobbied on behalf of Tarpon Springs. Quickly, the War Production Board announced that the sponge industry was considered “A-1 priority.” Rubber shipments arrived to meet the demand for new sponges. Prices soared, as the military needed sponges for “cleansing material for the fine lens of range finders and periscopes, crash pad upholstery for war planes and tank corps helmets and wipers for various phases of precision gear manufacture.”⁵³

To harvest sponges, access to the rich sponge beds was necessary. Wartime imposed new burdens and regula-

Coast Ban on Fishing Is Eased Slightly: *Leader*, February 26, 1943.

53 “Shortage of Diving Suits Is Threat to Sponge Industry,” *Leader*, February 6, 1942; “Increase in Rubber Supply For Diving Suits Is Recommended,” *Leader*, March 13, 1942; “Peterson Asks U.S. Aid for Tarpon Springs Sponge Industry,” *Leader*, February 26, 1943.

tions that affected fishing and sponging. In July 1942, the Coast Guard banned vessels from overnight fishing. Captains claimed yields had fallen by 50 percent. Spongers had to adjust to returning daily. One month later, the Coast Guard lifted the ban on 85 Tarpon Springs boats. Sales for the years 1942 were impressive (\$1.7 million), but the 1943 total of \$2.3 million broke the record as the most profitable year ever. The *Leader* boasted, “This picturesque capital of the world’s sponge industry today is enjoying a greater measure of war prosperity than any other community in Pinellas County.” The sponge industry continued to soar, breaking still another record in 1944 (\$2.55 million). An observer, George Frantzis, summarized the frenzy: “During the years 1941 to 1947 seventy diving boats and about 123 “Gantzerika” were bought and the industry directly or indirectly employed about 1200 men.”⁵⁴

54 “Coast Guard Lifts Ban on 48 More Tarpon Springs Boats,” *Leader*, August 7, 1942; “Sponge Sales Total Two Millions to Set New Highs,” *Leader*, November 5, 1943; “Sales for 1943 Amount to \$2,305,359; Greatest Year in History of Industry,” *Leader*, January 7, 1944; Frantzis, 195.

HOMETOWN HEROES

The *Leader* kept readers alerted as to the grand movement of armies and navies, as well as the journeys of the local “boys.” Each wartime issue contained a story on individuals as well as group portraits. On Christmas day 1942 a front-page story, “Ten Tarponites Listed in Draft Call For Next Week” was published, including individual names. In November 1943, the *Leader* reported that 522 men and women from Tarpon Springs were serving in the armed forces. Almost a year after Pearl Harbor, the dreaded story appeared: “First Tarpon Casualty Is Reported Killed On Guadalcanal.” The paper reported somberly the fate of Anthony Antonoglou, U.S. Marine Corps, 18-year-old son of A. Antonoglou, Sponge Exchange shopkeeper. In May 1943, readers learned that Mrs. Steve Zalampas had received a letter stating, “The Secretary of War desires that I tender his deep sympathy to you in the loss of your son, PFC Orby L. Kelly.” In 1945, the *Leader* announced the deaths of Sgt. R.D. Sanders in a German prisoner

of war camp and Alan D. Roberts in the Pacific.⁵⁵ Amid the tragic announcements were stirring stories of heroism and patriotism. Tarponites from all classes, ethnicities, and races participated in WWII. Elbert E. Gnann vacated his post as Tarpon Springs police chief to join the Navy Seabees. At the time of his enlistment, reported the paper, Gnann announced that he “was enlisting to get a crack at the Japs.” Indeed, he did, for it was later reported that Gnann had captured four Japanese prisoners in a cave. When he turned the prisoners over to authorities, he received a “receipt for four Japs.” Lt. John Corbin left the University of Tampa to enlist in the Army Air Corps. He

55 “Ten Tarponites Listed in Draft Call,” *Leader*, December 25, 1942; “Tarpon Soldier Loses Life in African Fighting,” *Leader*, 14 May 1943; Sgt. R.D. Sanders, Prisoner of War, Dies,” *Leader*, February 23, 1945; “1st Sgt. J.A. Lang Awarded Soldier’s Medal for Heroism,” *Leader*, April 27, 1945; “T-Sgt. Sidney Littell Gets Bronze Star,” and “S-Sgt. Paul Moltere Awarded Bronze Star,” *Leader*, April 27, 1945; “Lt. John Nicholson Bails Out When Ack-Ack Gets Plane,” *Leader*, April 6, 1945; “Robert Graham Survives Bombing on Carrier Hancock,” *Leader*, August 24, 1945; “Sgt. George E. Klimis, Liberated Prisoner,” *Leader*, May 18, 1945; “Alan D. Roberts Is Killed in Pacific Action,” *Leader*, February 5, 1945.

piloted B-17 bombers and bombed targets in Germany. Locals read the accomplishments of George Smitzes, a former sponge diver who rose from first lieutenant to captain; Lieutenant Bernard Mountain, whose air exploits in the Pacific Theater included the sinking of a Japanese submarine and four supply ships; and Lieutenant John W. Lyons’ actions aboard a B-25 bomber against German targets during the invasion of southern France. Major Arthur Ball received the Bronze Star for his bravery in Luxembourg, while Sgt. Zach Phillips was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross in the African and Mediterranean campaigns. First Lt. John Nicholson, a P-47 Thunderbolt pilot with the 324th Fighter Group received five oak clusters and a Distinguished Flying Cross.⁵⁶

56 “Police Chief With Navy Seabees,” *Leader*, March 5, 1943; C.P.O. Gnann Has Receipt For Four Japs,” *Leader*, June 15, 1945. See also “Lawrence Shove In Italy, Regiment Had Key Role in Push Thru Gothic,” *Leader*, March 2, 194; “Maj. Arthur Ball Awarded Bronze Star Medal,” *Leader*, 23 February 1945; Sgt. Zach Phillips Awarded DFC,” *Leader*, February 9, 1945; “News Release Made on Activities of Lieutenant Bernard Mountain”; “Lt. John W. Lyons, 12th Air Force,” *Leader*, June 22, 1945; “First Lieutenant John Nicholson,”

Clement McMullen, a graduate of Tarpon Springs High, became the city’s most highly ranked veteran. Promoted to brigadier general in 1942 and major general the following year, his military career began in 1917 when he trained as an army aviator. Following the Great War, he broke several aviation speed records. During WWII, he was awarded two Distinguished Service Medals, and in 1944 was appointed Commanding General of the Far East Air Force.⁵⁷

Tarpon Springs’ African-American legacy is largely ignored by the *Leader*. Occasionally, columns informed locals, “Local Negroes Recently Called In Army Draft.” “First Negro Girl Leaves for WAAC Training in Iowa,” the paper reported in 1943. In late 1943, 59 African Americans from Tarpon Springs were serving in the armed forces. But Danny Mae Singleton’s story was exceptional. More questions than answers pre-

Leader, February 23, 1945.

57 “Tarpon High Graduate Becomes Brigadier General,” *Leader*, August 14, 1942; “Former Tarponite Promoted to Major General,” *Leader*, May 14, 1943.

vail. Did blacks leave home in search of better paying defense jobs in the North? Did African-American veterans and workers feel emboldened by the war's rhetoric and change? Many historians have argued that the modern civil rights movement began during the war. In 1940-41, Pinellas County black leaders won a pivotal civil rights case. The NAACP represented black teachers, who were represented by Thurgood Marshall. The ruling forced Pinellas County to pay qualified black teachers a salary equal to comparable white teachers. Prior to the ruling, black teachers made significantly less than their white counterparts. Still, the closest high school for African-American Tarponites was Clearwater. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled unconstitutional the South's White Primary in the landmark *Smith v. Allwright* (1944) decision. Prior to the ruling, Florida's Democratic Party refused to allow African-Americans membership, and more significantly, the right to vote in the all-important primary. Statewide, membership in NAACP chapters dramatically increased.

Florida's most powerful Democrats, including the governor and attorney general, vowed to contest the court decision.⁵⁸

V-E DAY

On May 8, 1945, Germany formally surrendered to the Allies. Residents of Tarpon Springs, as elsewhere, greeted V-E Day (Victory in Europe Day) quietly, with the somber realization that victory was incomplete without the defeat of Japan. Flags remained at half-staff in honor of President Roosevelt, who had died the previous month. All the city's liquor stores were closed. The *Leader* observed, "Quiet hung over the city as the echoing of silence of guns over Germany."⁵⁹

One week later, the last German garrisons stationed in the Dodecanese Islands surrendered. "The Greeks

⁵⁸ "Local Negroes," *Leader*, December 25, 1942; "First Negro Girl Leaves for WAAC," *Leader*, March 5, 1943; "Tarpon Springs Has 522 Men and Women in Armed Forces," *Leader*, November 5, 1943; Gary R. Mormino, "GI Joe Meets Jim Crow," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 74 (July 1994): 23-42.

⁵⁹ "V-E Day Observed Quietly," *Leader*, May 11, 1945.

Have a Word For Liberation: It's Zito," ran an AP headline. "The Dodecanesians," George Frantzis wrote eloquently, "with their brothers of free Greece, fought side by side so that the freedom of these islands might be won after 416 years of enslavement and subjugation." The inhabitants of the Dodecanese Islands, once again, became Greek citizens in 1947.⁶⁰

V-J DAY: THE HAPPIEST DAY EVER

On August 14, 1945, news of Japan's surrender arrived around 7 o'clock Tuesday evening. Moments after the radio announcement, Fire Chief Marvin Walker sounded the town's fire whistle. For extra measure, the alarm lasted ten full minutes. "Many motorists started their car horns tooting," the *Leader* reported, "and many others to add still more clamor and din to the occasion, tied tubs, cans, and boilers to the back of their automobiles...Many firecrackers were heard, and as darkness came, sky-rockets and Roman candles put in

⁶⁰ "The Greeks Have a Word For It," *St. Petersburg Times*, November 19, 1944; Frantzis, 186-89.



St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Cathedral after the war. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory (floridamemory.com/items/show/65959).

their appearance to illuminate the sky.” It was the happiest day, collectively and spontaneously, in the history of Tarpon Springs.⁶¹

AN ACCOUNTING

The war years shook the foundations of every American community, and

⁶¹ “Joyous Demonstrations Follow Announcement of End of War in the Pacific,” *Leader*, August 17, 1945.

Tarpon Springs was no exception. How does one measure change over such vast terrain? Most significantly, the loss of life, tragic on an individual and communal level, was relatively and mercifully light. A city of 3,500 residents in 1940, Tarpon Springs had grown to 4,727 by 1945. The city lost eight men during the war. The city and nation, moreover, escaped bombing and military occupation during the war. In contrast, Greece suffered 300,000 deaths from starvation between 1941 and 1943. Historians estimate total Greek losses somewhere between 600,000 and 1,000,000. Tragically, the violence did not end when German and Italian troops surrendered. Old wounds and divisions resurfaced, and a terrible civil war fought among Communist, Monarchist, Liberal and American-British backed nationalists. When Constantine and Leroy came marching home to Tarpon Springs, they returned to a city and country where optimism and confidence underscored real and meaningful progress. Millions of veterans took advantage of a generous G.I. Bill, but well-paying jobs awaited

skilled workers who preferred to make up ground for lost years.⁶²

The war acted as an unofficial passing of the generations. Obituaries of the first generation of Greek immigrants became a familiar newspaper story during the war, “George P. Kalamakis, pioneer among the Greek residents, passed away.” Nick Kalanpedes, a tailor; Mike Tstraploses, an 82-year-old former sponger; and Nick Karavokinos, a sponger and World War I veteran, also died. Demosthenes Alissandratos, a merchant had arrived in 1905 and died in 1943, the same day as another pioneer, Mike Kalamaris, a 70-year-old diver passed away. Other headlines tell similar stories: “Café Operator Succumbs Suddenly,” “Aged Greek Meat Shop Operator Dies,” “Aristedes Kotakis, Sponge Operator Many Years, Dies,” and “Mike John Klimis, Resident 35 Years, Dies.”⁶³

⁶² “Greek Premier Says Many Still Starving,” *Leader*, July 24, 1942.

⁶³ “George Kalamakis, Pioneer Greek,” *Leader*, November 6, 1942; “Nick Kalanpedes Dies,” *Leader*, July 13, 1945; “D. Alissandratos Succumbs,”

The war was fought by young men. When these veterans returned, they became the new leaders. For the Greek community, the war was fought by the sons of immigrants. They returned more American than Greek. Unlike their fathers and grandfathers, the young veterans expressed little interest in returning to Greece to live. They were more concerned with getting married, starting families, acquiring an education and buying a home than the civil war in Greece or their mother's homeland village. The military had reinforced regimentation and Americanization. Greek Americans ate regimented, bland food, rarely saw a Greek Orthodox chaplain, and more likely danced with American girls at USO halls in Missoula, Montana, and Charleston, South Carolina. Some married American girls, shocking their parents. But the war also reinforced their

and "Aged Diver Passes Away," *Leader*, May 7, 1943; "Aged Greek Dies At County House," *Leader*, December 25, 1942; "Café Operator Succumbs Suddenly," *Leader*, December 4, 1942; "Aged Greek Meat Shop Operator Dies," *Leader*, July 24, 1942; "Nick Karavokinos Succumbs to Heart Attack," *Leader*, April 20, 1945; "Aristedes Kotakis," *Leader*, April 27, 1945; "Mike John Klimis," *Leader*, April 20, 1945.

pride at being Greek. For the first time, many of them met other sons of Greek immigrants. They understood the special bond and they took pride in hearing that one of the great aces of the war was a Greek-born American pilot, Steve Pisanos. Most importantly, the war reinforced the idea that they belonged here and that they were as American as the great-great-grandsons of New England Yankees and Southern cavaliers. If, before the war, many Americans still expressed concerns about the desirability of Italians, Jews, Slavs, and Greeks, such anxieties were largely dashed because of wartime sacrifices. When viewed against the horrors of World War II—the German concentration camps, the Japanese abuse of colonial subjects, the Soviet purge of Gypsies and Ukrainians—American ethnic differences seemed unimportant.

In the quarter century after its development, Sunset Hills had witnessed boom, bust, and war. During the war, the U.S. Army had erected a large tower and radar training camp in Sunset Hills. In 1946, Sun-

set Hills, a subdivision about a mile west of downtown, was struggling. The City of Tarpon Springs owned 200 lots in the subdivision, so Mayor Fred

Howard and officials unveiled a plan: The city offered a free lot to every Tarpon Springs veteran who promised to build a home within six months. At least 35 veterans accepted the offer. "I don't know of any other section in Tarpon Springs as pretty," said Robert L. Gause, a Navy veteran. Gause recalled his time aboard the cruiser USS *Indianapolis*, the vessel that transported the atomic bomb to Tinian Island, only to be torpedoed later by a Japanese submarine in the last days of the war. In the 1975 Stephen Spielberg movie, *Jaws*, the plight of the USS *Indianapolis* is revealed through the character portrayed by Robert Shaw. The sinking of the *Indianapolis* resulted in the deaths of al-



Robert Gause, survivor of the sinking of the USS *Indianapolis*.

most 600 sailors, most of them dying because of shark attacks. This terrible tragedy explains why the ship captain in the movie hated sharks.⁶⁴

CONSEQUENCES

Across America, Little Italies, Hunky

64 “Radar Training Camp in Sunset Hills Closed,” *Leader*, June 28, 1944; “Free Lots Project for Veterans,” *Tampa Daily Times*, June 17, 1950.

Hollows, and Greektowns lost their energy and critical mass following World War II. By the 1960s, these once-vibrant ethnic colonies, many located in inner cities in the north and Midwest, were largely abandoned. Largely impoverished African Americans and Latinos succeeded Italians, Jews, and Greeks. In Tarpon

Springs, Greeks succeeded in retaining their ethnic identity. The reasons for this are complicated. Located at the edge of a sparsely populated area until the postwar years—Pasco and Hernando counties numbered a total of 20,000 inhabitants in 1945—Tarpon Springs and its Greek enclave did not resemble the more traditional northern and Midwestern immigrant communities. Greek immigrants in Tarpon Springs had labored in an industry that helped reinforce and define a sense of Greekness. In no other American city had Greeks represented such a high percentage of a city’s inhabitants and dominated the ranks of an economic enterprise so critical as had the Greek immigrants in Tarpon Springs. By the postwar era, when the economic underpinnings of sponging were threatened, Greek-Americans deftly began to invest in helping preserve—and some would argue reinvent—a Greek enclave that was built around the theme of a sponging industry that no longer existed. The popularity of Greek food only enhanced the tourist appeal of Tarpon Springs.



Coffee house near the Sponge Docks, c. 1943. Photo courtesy of the Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society.



After the war: John M. Gonatos in his curio shop with Niki Vasilikis, who was the first Greek WAAC in 1942. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory (floridamemory.com/items/show/245154). c. 1946.

Uninterrupted prosperity may be the greatest legacy of the war. Veterans returned home with new opportunities. A grateful federal government provided cheap access to higher education or trade school, as well as benefits for housing and medical care. Florida boomed after V-J Day, and Tarpon Springs benefited from

construction and tourist booms in the 1950s and 1960s. Tourists motor-ing down Highway 19 stopped to enjoy the underwater wonderments of Weeki Wachee and the sensory and sensual delights of a Greek village on the Tarpon Springs waterfront. Dining in Greektown was more than simply eating; a new generation was

encountering more than Greek food. When visitors walked down Dodeca-nese Boulevard, they were having an ethnic experience.⁶⁵

The sheer growth of Pinellas and Hill-sborough counties—by the 1970s the combined populations surpassed sev-eral million inhabitants—meant that not merely tourists were descending upon Tarpon Springs on weekends. Local newspapers printed many sto-ries dealing with the sense of pride and loss as the older generation of Greeks were passing away. In 1964, Stavros Smirlis was still kneading dough, but recalled how six decades earlier Greek fishermen flocked to his bakery to stock up on his signa-ture hardtack, or how it took 15 days to heat up the old brick-lined ovens. When Mary Miaoulis died, reporters noted that she came from a legend-ary family of bakers, and how the Greek-American Bakery's baklava set the gold standard. During the war, she baked baklava to raise funds for the Ladies Kalymnian Society to help Greek refugees. In 1971, an *Orlando*

⁶⁵ Gabaccia, 102-03.

Sentinel reporter paid a visit to Lazaros Coffee House. He was not the first. In 1937, a sociologist had interviewed patrons in that already venerable institution. "No other recreational institution," he wrote, "occupies the position of importance in the eyes of Greeks that the coffee house holds. These open-fronted cafes with their sidewalk tables are sprinkled liberally throughout the entire city and it is to them that the Greek men come for purposes of business and amusement." The two stories separated by almost a half century felt as they were covering funerals for a passing age. The reporter lamented that once Tarpon Springs boasted 15 coffee houses, but that number had plunged to one. Today, one can still enjoy Greek coffee at Lazaros.⁶⁶

Louis Pappas' Riverfront Café, built of wood in 1925, became a must-stop for tourists. So many customers crowded

66 "Where the Greek Bread Comes From," *St. Petersburg Times*, October 25, 1964; "Old Methods Bake New Bread," *St. Petersburg Independent*, November 29, 1967; "Mary Miaoulis, Baker, Philanthropist," *St. Petersburg Times*, December 29, 1986; David Wilkening, "Coffee Sweet, Coffee Bitter," *Orlando Sentinel*, May 12, 1971; Lovejoy, 123-24.

the establishment that the owners erected a larger new restaurant in 1975 christened simply "Pappas." The architectural critic of the *St. Petersburg Times* reviewed the 42,000 square-foot structure. The restaurant employed six salad makers to create the dish that World War I veteran and cook Louis M. Pappamichalopoulos had created, adding his signature dollop of potato salad to the dish. If the Pappas Greek salad could not be found in any Athens or Rhodes restaurant, American tourists still expected potato in their Greek salad.⁶⁷

Greek-American veterans who wished to return to their old jobs sponging and fishing found an industry flush with profits and possibilities. Once again, Hollywood's magic touched Tarpon Springs and romanticized the lives and labors of Greek spongers. In 1947, the

67 "Pappas' Restaurant: A Family Affair," November 13, 1955; "Pappas New Restaurant Worth Wait," *St. Petersburg Times*, October 9, 1975; Jacquin Sanders, "Greece Gave the World its Salad, But Pinellas Added the Potatoes," *St. Petersburg Times*, September 20, 1985; "Pappas," *St. Petersburg Times*, October 9, 1975; "Pappas' Offers Fine Greek Cuisine," *St. Petersburg Times*, September 21, 1979; "Tarpon Springs' Dean of Dining," *St. Petersburg Times*, May 12, 2009.

Monogram Company came to town to film *Sixteen Fathoms Deep*. In the early 1950s, Twentieth Century Fox filmed *Beneath the 12-Mile Reef*. But not even Hollywood glamour could save the sponging industry from new threats. During the war years, American scientists successfully developed a synthetic sponge. Consumers eagerly replaced the more expensive natural sponges with cheaper vinyl and cellulose substitutes, along with new product lines of dishcloths and washcloths. What laboratories and factories failed to challenge, nature finished. In 1947, one of the worst red tide outbreaks ever recorded scoured the sponge beds and fishing banks of the Gulf. Frantzis described the atmosphere: "A whole forest of masts of the vessels stood as tragic martyrs of the fury that passed and generated in the depths of the Gulf...It was destruction and slow death of sea life and men." He added, "And so the proud sponge fleet of 70 diving boats and 130 hook boats gradually and slowly dissolved."⁶⁸

68 Frantzis, 203, 204; Snyder, 146-47; Stoughton, 102-03.

World War II represented one of the most dramatic chapters in the history of an ethnic community and city. Having survived the tremors of immigration, war, and revolutions in technology and commerce, Tarpon Springs faced profound challenges in the decades following the war. The poet Juvenal had once reminded Romans that luxury was more ruthless than war. Tarpon Springs had survived poverty and war. Could it survive hordes of tourists who were coming to a place that once was famous for sponging?



Postcard c. 1949. Collection of the Tarpon Springs Cultural Center.

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