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Transcript

Ben Brotemarkle

Florida Frontiers, the weekly radio magazine of the Florida Historical Society, is made possible in part by the Department of State Division of Historical Resources and the State of Florida. It's also made possible by the Jessie Ball du Pont Fund, and by the historic Rossetter House Museum and Gardens in Eau Gallie, celebrating pioneer history, the natural environment, and women's history, available for weddings and events at rossetterhousemuseum.org.

This is Florida Frontiers, the weekly radio magazine of the Florida Historical Society, on the web at myfloridahistory.org. I'm Ben Brotemarkle and coming up on the program, Tarpon Springs begins each year with a unique Epiphany celebration, reflecting the town's Greek heritage.

Tina Bucuvalas

Most of the people there do speak Greek. And they get up in the morning and have Greek food, and sweep out their courtyards, which have various plants you might see in Greece, you know, and they'll have their coffee outside.

Ben Brotemarkle

With a new year upon us, we'll reflect on the passage of time.

Connie Lester

We create complex calendars to schedule every moment with slots for every conceivable activity, including time to record this segment of Florida Frontiers.

Ben Brotemarkle

And we'll talk about New Deal public works projects in Florida. All that ahead on Florida Frontiers.

In the city of Tarpon Springs, you can listen to Greek music, try the tasty pastry, have a meal of lamb stew, or a unique Greek seafood dish, sip the licorice flavored alcoholic beverage ouzo, and enjoy many other aspects of traditional Greek culture. You can see the Neo-Byzantine style architecture of Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and watch the sponge divers unload their catch on the city dock downtown. Tarpon Springs has the largest percentage of Greek Americans of any city in the United States. Even before the first 500 Greek sponge divers arrived in Tarpon Springs in 1905, a thriving town was already in place. The Disston land purchase of 1881, when Hamilton Disston bought 4,000,000 acres of land for \$0.25 an acre, led to the establishment of Tarpon Springs. Disston brought businessman Anson Saffer to Tarpon Springs to stimulate develop. Tina Bucuvalas is curator of arts and historical resources for the City of Tarpon Springs and says that Safford moved into a small dogtrot style Cracker house.

Tina Bucuvalas

They improved the house by adding a second story and expanding it. And it became quite a showcase, basically trying to show the elegant way that people could live in Florida at a time when this was really in many ways, still kind of a frontier town. But through the influence of Anson Safford and Hamilton

Disston, and the wealthy northerners that came into town, you know, they did, Tarpon Springs did develop to, to become one of the early and very elegant resorts.

Ben Brotemarkle

The Victorian home that Safford created can be enjoyed today. The Safford House Museum features period furniture and original family artifacts that preserve the home as it was in 1883. Soon after Anson Safford began developing Tarpon Springs, the Orange Belt Railway came to the town in 1887. The train depot is now a museum. Sharon Sawyer is archivist for the Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society, which operates the museum.

Sharon Sawyer

The building we were in was built in 1909, because the original railroad station burned down in 1908. And this was restored in 2005 to its original, the floors, you'll notice in the pine floors out front, and also the warehouse floors in the back, are the original. The walls we've left with the writing on it. And so this is, this was segregated when it was built. There's, if you go out front, there's a colored waiting room and a white waiting room. And then there was a wall in between the two that was torn down in the 70s, not until the 70s. The Stationmaster's Room is the next room over, and we have exhibits in that, and then the warehouse area we have pretty much the history of Tarpon Springs that you can go through. So, it's a neat museum.

Ben Brotemarkle

Displays at the Tarpon Springs History Museum include profiles of prominent physicians, including Doctor Mary Jane Safford. Mary was Anson Safford's sister and is believed to be the first female physician in Florida. Shelving and bottles from the 1880s drugstore are also displayed, along with artifacts from the Orange Belt Railway. Sharon Sawyer.

Sharon Sawyer

One thing about the railroad it was brought here by Peter Demens, Demens landing in Saint Petersburg. He brought the railroad from Sanford to Tarpon Springs, and then on down to Saint Petersburg. And it was supposed to be the longest 12 gauge, I guess it is, railroad in the United States at that time. So before the railroad came, everybody had to get here by boat or wagon. So the railroad in 1887 made the big difference here in town, I believe.

Ben Brotemarkle

It was the sponge industry, though, that really put Tarpon Springs on the map. By the mid-1800s, there was a thriving sponge industry in the Florida Keys, but by the beginning of the 20th century, Tarpon Springs was the largest sponge port in the United States. While sponges in the Keys were harvested with long poles, in Tarpon Springs, Greek sponge divers don canvas suits with round metal helmets. Tina Bucuvalas explains what makes the Tarpon Springs community unique.

Tina Bucuvalas

Florida is the only place in the country that sponges grow. And the sponge industry was the biggest maritime industry in Florida, and we're talking millions in the late 19th century, which was quite something. And Key West at that time, you know, in the 19th century, was a bigger producer, but once

the sponges were discovered in this area in 1873, the whole area from here up to Apalachicola became a hotbed of sponging, and eventually Tarpon Springs became a market for sponges. And when Greeks came into this area as sponge buyers John Pakoras, he realized that the way sponges were harvested in Greece would produce far more than the methods, the hooking methods they were using in Florida. So they brought over Greeks and it was advertised that there was a lot of business to be done here. So at first 500 came in 1905, and then within a couple of years, there were 1500 and there were lots of boats. And it very quickly made Tarpon Springs the sponge capital of the world. But Tarpon Springs was a big important town at a time when Saint Pete was a wide place on the road, and there were buyers here from Europe. It was quite a place. And before long, I mean, within a couple decades, the Greeks were the majority, or well, I would say they were the dominant population element because there were several population elements. There were the as the Anglo element and the African American, which had a very big Bahamian influence because of the sponge industry. But for a long time, the Greeks were the dominant population element. So, the fact that this was a big pocket of Greek culture and has remained so, I was talking to a friend of mine not long ago in Miami, who's a cultural geographer, and she pointed out that this is the only place in Florida that has such a unique, ongoing, whole cloth pocket of European settlement. There are places with Latin American settlement, West Indian settlement, but European communities, this is this is unique in Florida.

Ben Brotemarkle

With the large influx of Greek sponge divers and their families to Tarpon Springs, businesses to serve them were established, including restaurants, grocery stores, bakeries, and coffee houses. Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church was constructed in 1907 and expanded in 1943, with marble imported from Greece. The unique Epiphany celebration held on January 6 attracts people from around the world. Following a ceremony at Saint Nicholas, the congregation walks to the sponge docks downtown, where a wooden cross is thrown into the water. The young man who retrieves the cross is believed to be blessed for the year. The Patriarch of Constantinople, who is the Greek Orthodox equivalent of the Pope, came to Tarpon Springs in 2006 for the 100th anniversary of the city's unique Epiphany celebration. Tina Bucuvalas, former folklorist for the state of Florida, explains that there are many examples of Greek culture in Tarpon Springs.

Tina Bucuvalas

I think in in all instances in which there are large bubbles, you know, of population, such as with Cubans in Miami, you know Greeks here, you get more of a whole cloth culture, and here the culture has been brought over pretty much whole cloth. I mean, as one writer pointed out, when the Greeks came here, they actually changed their lives very little from what it was in Greece because the climatic conditions were very similar. They were in the same occupations, they were living together, you know, and eventually they brought their families over in a certain part of town, you know, they brought the priests and religion and basically, it was very much like living in Greece. And so even today, you know, after people have been here, some people for four or five generations, you know, depending how quickly and when they came over you, there is still a big segment of the population that speaks Greek. I live in the part of town called Greek Town and most of the people there are Greek and most of the people there do speak Greek. And they get up in the morning and have Greek food, and sweep out their courtyards, and which have various plants you might see in Greece, you know, and they'll have their coffee outside. And the old ladies and their headscarves will be going over to Saint Michael's Chapel, or Saint Nicholas, or

whatever, or down to the bakery, the national bakery down the street, which is a Greek bakery, or Halki market, which has been there for 100 years or so. The men will go, walk right by my house to go to the Kafenion, which are traditional men's Greek coffee houses. A lot of them who are old divers and things will go down to the sponge docks, which is a few blocks down the street and just hang out at the docks to hang out with other old guys and see what the divers and things are doing, you know. It's, you know, the people with the gift shops, while it may look like tourist shops, the culture there is very much an active Greek culture. The dominant language is probably Greek. If you go down there, you, I mean, if I go down there to go to the Halki market, I'll spend 2 hours, you know, talking to various people, you know, it's like living in a small Greek town with all the ups and downs.

Ben Brotemarkle

The Greek history and culture of Tarpon Springs is preserved in a new heritage center, with exhibits and artifacts and space for public gatherings. Greeks have the dominant culture in Tarpon Springs, but archivist Sharon Sawyer has lived in the city for almost 60 years and says that all people get along in this small community.

Sharon Sawyer

The Greeks and the Anglos, everyone as far as I can remember, got along. It was like a community project for all of us. Some of my best friends are Greek girls, some of them are cracker girls, you know. It's just it's still got that small community feeling about it, so. There are a lot of people that have moved in, but it still has that small community feeling and you don't find that everywhere.

Ben Brotemarkle

A trip to downtown Tarpon Springs provides the opportunity to see spongers at work sailing into port on boats with unique Greek designs. Tina Bucuvalas

Tina Bucuvalas

There is a special kind of sponge boat that developed in the Aegean which is called an actor, mas, which is a type of tirhandils, which is a type of Greek fishing boat. But this particular boat was designed for sponging, and the some of the spongers swear that this is still the best design, and back in the early days and up until, you know, a few decades ago, these boats were being produced, hundreds and hundreds were produced from here to Apalachicola because Greeks went all the way from here up the coast. And we're working in maritime industries. So for instance, the one that's sitting in the middle of this sponge exchange as the display was built in Apalachicola and sailed down here for sale. Yeah, but yeah, these boats have a very different bow, you know, than most boats do, different design, you know, but they're very stable and have all the right stuff, you know, to carry the sponges and everything. The last, the last boat builder, Greek boat builder is George Saroukos, who got a, received a Folk Heritage award in 2009 and there's only one working Greek sponge boat, and it's his last boat that he built and that's owned by Tasso Karastinous, who, who also won a Folk Heritage award in 2010 as a sponge diver and captain.

Ben Brotemarkle

The history and culture of Tarpon Springs is preserved at the Safford House Museum, the train depot museum, and the Heritage Center. While tourism has eclipsed sponge diving as the economic engine

driving Tarpon Springs, it's still the living active maritime community that attracts tourists to the downtown docks.

Tina Bucuvalas

It is a working waterfront and, although the sponge industry has shrunk, a lot of the boats, but not all of the boats still dock there. The city has essentially given them this part of the downtown working docks to have their boats, and they conduct, do conduct their business from there. So during a significant part of the year from about the beginning of April, end of March, you know to November, through November the spongers will be coming in and going out. And you know when they're not having downtime and working on their boats and out there, they are loading, unloading sponges, processing sponges. They are actually the best ambassadors for the town because almost all of them are very articulate and very willing to talk to people and explain what they're doing and, you know, are essentially demonstrating the processes right there on the docks. And then and then are surrounding the docks area across the street are various shops. Many of them are gift shops, but there's also quite a few restaurants, and it's not just for tourists, that's where locals go too, all the time, you know, so people can experience culture. There are, you know, some of the shops are full of Greek CD's or videos where again, you know where locals go, you know, so people can still come in and have access to Greek culture that way.

Ben Brotemarkle

Tina Bucuvalas is curator of arts and historical resources for the City of Tarpon Springs. We also spoke with Sharon Sawyer, archivist for the Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society.

This is Florida Frontiers, the weekly radio magazine of the Florida Historical Society. I'm Ben Brotemarkle visit us anytime online at myfloridahistory.org, where you can find archived editions of this program, watch our public television series, Florida Frontiers, and much more. That's myfloridahistory.org.

Joining us now is Connie Lester, associate professor of history at the University of Central Florida, director of the RICHES Digital Archiving project, and editor of the Florida Historical Quarterly. Well, Connie, a new year is upon us.

Connie Lester

Yes, Happy New Year. The end of the old year and the beginning of the new is perhaps a good moment to reflect on time. In our hurry up world, time is money, and we are admonished to make the most of our time. We create complex calendars to schedule every moment with slots for every conceivable activity, including time to record this segment of Florida Frontiers. Google will remind us if we have any free time, just so we know that we can schedule something else. Computers chime and watches beep to signal the next appointment. Alexa adds her two cents as well. Watches and clocks once showed the passage of hours and minutes with the sweep of a delicate hand. Now, digital watches present the hour, minute, second, and fraction of each second. A relentless march into the future. For most of human history, philosophers were aware of the passage of time and the use of time, but time was not such a taskmaster. Time was measured in agricultural seasons and religious holy days. Dawn, Noon, sunset, and night were the principal determinants of any day. Weather and season shaped the year as experience and folklore connected the two to establish planting and harvesting times. Religion overlaid the work regimen and determined holy days throughout the year for reflection, and festivals, and individual days also allotted times for prayer and worship. The advent of the clock, and more importantly the use of the

clock to order work, was frequently met with resistance, and sometimes violence. Workers who rebelled against the workshops and factories of the early modern period frequently smashed the clock as the hated symbol of their work regimen and abuse. In the early 20th century, Frederick W Taylor created a scientific system of management that his detractors derisively called Taylorism. His system was based on time and motion studies to make workers more efficient and more profitable to their employer. Workers claim that the implementation of such studies denied them control over their own bodies. Clocks and time were essential in transportation, the creation of accurate maps and better navigation through the plotting of longitude depended on precise time. Likewise, railroads required knowledge of precise time in order to move trains safely, particularly when they were using the same track. The railroads established the time zones in the United States, and railroad time was the official time, with train companies issuing conductors gold pocket watches to keep the trains moving on time. First, as railroad traffic became more reliable and predictable, and then as air travel became the norm, we began to measure distance by time. Today we say it takes 4 hours to fly to Denver from Orlando, not that it's 1800 miles between the two cities. As social media became a significant part of our lives, we document for all the world to see that our lives are full and complete, showing how busy we are, every minute is filled with activity. Children schedules are calculated minute by minute to be sure they have all the experiences we deemed essential to a well-lived childhood. Play dates, sports, arts, study, fill the day and often relegate parents to the role of chauffeur. Even college professors who once envisioned a life of great thought find themselves rushing from meeting to meeting, hurrying to meet publication deadlines, grade student papers, and write lectures, without time for even a modest thought, never mind a great one. If the pandemic has taught us anything, it may be that there is beauty and regeneration in quiet and thought. We can see that many are reconsidering how their time is spent and reclaiming from their employers and the world the right to decide how, where, and when they work. This may be a passing moment, but perhaps it is worth considering what some of the great thinkers have said about time. "How did it get so late so soon? It's night before it's afternoon. December is here before it's June. My goodness, how the time has flown. How did it get so late so soon?" Doctor Seuss. "'I wish it need not have happened in my time,' said Frodo. 'So do I,' said Gandalf. So do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us." JRR Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*. "Yesterday is gone, tomorrow has not yet come. We have only today. Let us begin." Mother Teresa. "We must use time wisely and forever realize that the time is always ripe to do right." Nelson Mandela. Happy New Year. My wish for you is that you are pleased with the way you use your time.

Ben Brotemarkle

Happy New Year to you, Connie and we're pleased that you use your time here on Florida Frontiers, and congratulations on your first full year with us.

Connie Lester

Thank you.

Ben Brotemarkle

Connie Lester is Associate Professor of History at the University of Central Florida, director of the RICHES digital archiving project, and editor of the Florida Historical Quarterly.

This is Florida Frontiers. In the 1930s the United States government came together to launch expansive New Deal public works projects that benefited Floridians. Holly Baker has more.

Holly Baker

Dr. Robert Krauss is an architectural historian and a disaster response specialist who works in Houston, Texas. Dr. Krauss wrote an article in the Summer 2018 issue of the Florida Historical Quarterly journal called "New Deal: Public Works in the Florida Panhandle, 1933 to 1940." He recently talked to me about President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, and how it transformed Florida through federal programs meant to employ Americans during the economic downturn of the Great Depression.

Dr. Robert Krauss

New Deal Public Works, and really what we mean by that are any federally funded projects that change both the human and environmental space during the New Deal period. And they fall under, of course, alphabet agencies, a blanket of those. And really, you know, the duty of Public Works, and especially in places like Florida and Mississippi, they usher in a period of tremendous economic, social, and political change. Transformation really of the natural environment and human built environment, early 20th century.

Holly Baker

One of the most successful programs of the New Deal was the Civilian Conservation Corps, or CCC, a federal worker relief program intended to employ young man to work on construction and conservation projects throughout the United States. The work done by the CCC in Florida between 1933 and 1942 established several state parks that are still enjoyed by visitors today. CCC workers built picnic facilities, buildings, fences, roads, and other infrastructure in order to make the parks accessible to the public.

Dr. Robert Krauss

The establishment of the Florida state park system is really driven by the CCC and their efforts on the ground throughout the state. I think the Florida State Parks were, most notably, a new presence, and visible presence in the Panhandle. So, you have places like Florida Caverns being actually surveyed by CCC crews, and the first tourism in DeFuniak Springs. Also, alongside the commercial aspects of this, the scientific piece, revolutionary sciences emerging from this on ecology, in botany, in places like Torreya Pines State Park and Gadsden County. And I think this speaks to the sort of utilitarian appreciation that New Deal had for environmental facets in the natural environment.

Holly Baker

The New Deal also significantly impacted Florida through road and bridge construction projects. Inspired by the Good Roads Movement of the 1890s, these construction projects predated the interstate highway program developed by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in the 1950s and led to the integration of car culture and increased tourism in the state.

Dr. Robert Krauss

One example of the use of public money to improve the infrastructure of the New Deal period in Florida was the Good Roads Program. What became the Gulf Coast Highway gained an impressive new bridge, the Gorrie Bridge opened to traffic in 1935, and that allowed Apalachicola to become connected with

the rest of Florida. The federal money in Calhoun County actually completed a major, long span steel bridge over the Apalachicola River that I believe is still in use. And it was one of those road and bridge construction projects in the Panhandle that fueled growth, and the development really that the industrial military complex in the region. Those road building projects were really transformative.

Holly Baker

New Deal construction projects also impacted communities throughout Florida by building new schools, playgrounds, libraries, gymnasiums, and other recreational facilities. Dr. Krauss.

Dr. Robert Krauss

Another way that you see this manifest is in municipal and local construction projects. South of Ocala, a lot of those municipal local construction projects were built on existing facilities, whereas in the Panhandle, particularly in counties that were majority African American like Gasdsen and Washington, you had a situation where there were no facilities to begin with. So, schools were built, swing sets were built, you know, recreational equipment, and boat docks, marinas were transformed. So, this had a very wide-ranging impact on local economy, particularly in places that to us would appear much more isolated than they are even now. Many of the roads and bridges we traverse to get to Panama City or Apalachicola didn't exist then, and the New Deal infrastructure allows those things to happen. So, to me, the New Deal and these basically construction projects change the face of Florida, as markedly as anywhere else in the country. There are those very localized impacts that remain today, and the sort of broader patterns as well.

Holly Baker

For Florida Frontiers, I'm Holly Baker, public history coordinator for the Florida Historical Society and archivist at the Library of Florida History in Cocoa.

Ben Brotemarkle

You've been listening to Florida Frontiers, the weekly radio magazine of the Florida Historical Society. Please join us right here again next week and every week. You can visit us anytime online at myfloridahistory.org and on Facebook. Production assistance for Florida Frontiers comes from Holly Baker and Connie Lester. The program is edited by Jon White. I'm Ben Brotemarkle, wishing you a happy New Year.

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