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Florida Frontiers Radio Transcripts

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## Florida Frontiers Radio Program #494

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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](http://rossetterhousemuseum.org).

This is Florida Frontiers, the weekly radio magazine of the Florida Historical Society, on the web at [myfloridahistory.org](http://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**

This time of year, many people vowed to quit smoking, including cigars. We'll go to the Shade Tobacco Museum. 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.

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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 grateful that you spend your time here. On Florida Frontiers. 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. This time of year, many people vow to quit smoking, including cigars. Holly Baker takes us to the Shade Tobacco Museum.

### **Holly Baker**

Florida native Drew Padgett teaches history at Robert F Monroe Day School in Quincy, Florida. He also volunteers at the Havana History and Heritage Societies, Shade Tobacco Museum in Havana Florida. He

told me about the once booming shade tobacco industry, and Havana's role as the center of shade tobacco production in the early 20th century.

### **Drew Padgett**

Shade tobacco is tobacco grown under the shade. It was used mostly for cigar wrapping, so when cigars were really popular starting after the Civil War, cigars became a preferred way to smoke tobacco. We had a really big boom in cigar production starting in 1870s, 1880s, into the 1890s. It has to be grown in a particular way, you want a leaf that is not only soft and flexible, but obviously one that tastes good too, and that is strong enough to bind the tobacco within the cigar. And shade tobacco was only grown in two parts of the United States: in the Connecticut River Valley, so around Hartford, Connecticut, and here in Gadsden County, and a few other counties surrounding, particularly Decatur and Grady County, which is right across the Georgia, Florida border to the north of Gadsden County.

### **Holly Baker**

The railroad first came to Havana, FL in 1902, and soon farming and shipping of shade tobacco became very profitable.

### **Drew Padgett**

Havana as a town wasn't established until the early 1900s. Before that, there were a few communities that had been around since after the Civil War. Salem, literally this is the name of the place Coon Bottom is the name of an area, Concorde. Not only do you have growers that started growing more and more shade tobacco in that particular area of Gadsden County, Havana is in the northeastern corner of Gadsden County. A railroad was built near the Salem community, and when that railroad was built, people obviously gravitated more toward the railroad, so Havana got its name, obviously from Havana, Cuba, in honor of tobacco grown in the area, and by the 1910s, 1920s we have stores, including fertilizer, feed, farm supply stores. Obviously, we have other community businesses pop up, whether it be restaurants, obviously city government, municipal services, you have theaters, you have stores, you have a bustling small town economies starting to emerge right there by the railroad. And Havana would boom until shade tobacco started fading. In the 1960s, 1970s.

### **Holly Baker**

For nearly 100 years, almost everyone in Havana, Florida and the surrounding communities worked in the thriving business of growing, curing, packing, and shipping.

### **Drew Padgett**

Havana a lot of tobacco was grown in the area. When it comes to its actual processing and packaging. Most of that happened in Quincy, the county seat. Quincy is one of the oldest towns in the state of Florida, think it's like 10th oldest. It was platted in the 1820s, so it has been around a really long time. Even to this day, there are four or five buildings within the town that were built in the 1830s that were still standing. It's a very, very old town. It was very influential, especially in territorial and civil war Florida, especially being right down the road from Tallahassee. But a lot of packing houses were in Quincy. I think Havana had four, a lot more growing around Havana than actual processing, so Quincy probably had a little bit, or actually had more activity than Havana did. But Havana's culture and identity and history, obviously in its name, definitely tied to shade tobacco. And it, I mean. Into this day like it is,



it shaped the town, and a lot of people are proud of that heritage. And our museum exists for that reason, to make sure that heritage lives on.

### **Holly Baker**

The Havana History and Heritage Society Shade Tobacco Museum is housed in the Planters Exchange Building, a historic landmark built in 1928. The Planters Exchange once served as the main manufacturer of fertilizer, and supplier of pesticides and farm supplies needed by the shade tobacco growers in Gadsden and Madison counties. The Shade Tobacco Museum is dedicated to preserving the history and the significance of shade tobacco. Drew Padgett.

### **Drew Padgett**

The goal of the museum has been to educate visitors not only about the community and the heritage of the town, but to appreciate shade tobacco and what it did for Gadsden County for over 100 years. I mean, this was an industry that defined and shaped what Gadsden County became, especially in terms of its demographics. And it's a culture, as a primarily agricultural county, even into the 21st century.

### **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 visit us any time online at [myfloridahistory.org](http://myfloridahistory.org). Production assistance for Florida Frontiers comes from Connie Lester and Holly Baker. The program is edited by Jon White, Happy New Year from all of us at the Florida Historical Society. I'm Ben Brotemarkle.

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