Legacy to the people: community and the Orange County Regional History Center

Summer 2002

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LEGACY TO THE PEOPLE: COMMUNITY AND THE ORANGE COUNTY REGIONAL HISTORY CENTER

By
Robert L. Beatty, II

2002

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LEGACY TO THE PEOPLE: COMMUNITY AND THE
ORANGE COUNTY REGIONAL HISTORY CENTER

by

ROBERT L. BEATTY, II
B.A. University of Central Florida, 1994

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of History
in the College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Central Florida
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ABSTRACT

The development and birth of the Orange County Regional History Center is perhaps unlike any other local history museum in the United States. Its story is worth telling because of its long gestation, the difficulties in bringing this center to life, and the goals of the people who made it possible. All of these elements are a vital part of the history of Orange County, Florida and should not be overlooked.

In this light, this thesis will discuss more fully three topics in relation to the creation of the new History Center. First, it will look at the American museum field and its role as a community-building enterprise in American society. Second, it will examine the history of Central Florida, a region that sorely lacks a strong sense of community. Third, it will trace the transformation of the Orange County Historical Society and Museum from a small volunteer-run museum into the Orange County Regional History Center, the largest history museum in Central Florida.

The ultimate goal of the History Center is to foster a sense of community in a region with little feeling of connectedness. This community-
building goal has evolved from both a renewed emphasis on community service in the museum field, and the desire of the History Center's leaders and staff to serve more effectively the Central Florida region. My thesis tells the story of the history and development of the Regional History Center, an institution dedicated to bringing the diverse community of Central Florida together for discussion, dialogue, and reflection. It also identifies some of the new roles and functions it must assume in the future and the new tasks that await it as it strives to become more useful and relevant to its community. In that way, and through that resource, the institution can help build the foundation for a more promising future for present and future residents of Orange County.
To my wife Candy who supported my graduate school adventure to my daughter Ryan who inspired me to finish this thesis. I love you both very much.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Dr. Jonathan S. Perry and Dr. Rosalind Beiler my thesis committee members for their assistance. Special thanks to committee chair Dr. Shirley Leckie for her invaluable guidance and support throughout the entire thesis process. Thank you also to Sara Van Arsdel, Executive Director of the History Center, for her willingness to share her knowledge of this story with me.
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<td>AAM</td>
<td>American Association of Museums</td>
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<td>AHW</td>
<td>American History Workshop</td>
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<tr>
<td>BCC</td>
<td>Board of County Commissioners</td>
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<td>GHA</td>
<td>Gerard Hilferty &amp; Associates</td>
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<td>GOV</td>
<td>Great Oaks Village</td>
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<td>Orange County Historical Museum</td>
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

On September 29, 2000 the Orange County Regional History Center opened its doors to the public for the first time in the former 1927 Orange County Courthouse. Surrounding the remodeled courthouse is Heritage Square, an urban plaza built on the site of the county’s 1892 Orange County Courthouse. Across the street is the Orange County Public Library and two blocks to the east is Lake Eola, one of Orlando’s signature parks, with its impressive Centennial Fountain. In a very real sense, the new Regional History Center is already playing a role in the revitalization of the core of Orlando’s downtown.

More importantly, the new History Center has also added to its traditional role as a repository for the region’s material culture. Following the precepts currently espoused by the American museum movement, the Center now strives to be a place where Central Floridians can come together not only to view exhibits but also to exchange ideas and information in a variety of settings and through partnerships with other community organizations. This means that the History Center may do what no other entity has yet done; it
may help Central Florida gain a clearer understanding of its past. In that way, the region, which has grown so quickly and which lacks a citizenry and corporate elite that sees Orlando as its hometown, can gain a better sense of itself as a region with a heritage worth studying and learning from. That, in turn, will assist the citizens of Orange County as they seek to determine the region's future direction and to realize the unfulfilled dream of the History Center's founders and the current mission of its director and its staff. With this new community focus, the History Center is an ideal match for its constituency, a citizenry in desperate need of stronger sense of regional identity and direction. In short, it is a citizenry in search of a sense of belonging to a community that does more than provide jobs and houses, one that will one day become their "home."

The development and birth of the History Center is perhaps unlike any other local history museum in the United States. Its story is worth telling because its long gestation, the difficulties in bringing the Center to life, and the goals of the people who made it possible, are all an important part of Central Florida's story and should not be overlooked. In that light then, this thesis discusses three topics in relation to the creation of the new History Center. First, it looks at the American museum field and its role as a community-building enterprise in American society. Second, it examines the history of
Central Florida, a region sorely lacking in a strong sense of identity and community. Third, it traces the transformation of the Orange County Historical Society and Museum from a small volunteer-run museum housed in a variety of shifting locations until, at last, it emerges as the Orange County Regional History Center, the largest history museum in Central Florida.

Since the story of the History Center is inextricably intertwined with developments in the American museum movement, Chapter One tells the history of that field. Currently, the museum discipline is undergoing a change in its focus as today’s museums begin to look outward toward the communities they serve rather than inward at their collections and exhibitions. Every museum that has ever existed has felt this tension between its role as a collector of artifacts on the one hand, and its role as an institution that must serve and educate a larger community on the other. Museum origins, in fact, go back to ancient history when, early on, these institutions existed solely as educational centers reserved for scholars. Later museums expanded their audience by developing into places to display collections of artifacts, whether religious or secular. Nonetheless, these audiences were still limited and elitist. In America, museums took on an additional role---to educate the public. They thereby furthered the cause of the fledgling American democracy. This ideal later evolved into today’s belief that a museum’s principal role is as a
community-service institution. American museums have adapted to this trend and many are now focusing on including programs and exhibits that speak to and touch broader and more diverse elements of their service areas. This development is not without peril, since museums now run the risk of alienating or offending the elements of their communities that were most likely to make substantial contributions or donations to the museums' operations in the past.

Since the current History Center has as its goal serving the Central Florida region, Chapter Two will present a historical overview of the region. It is a region with a short recorded history, currently undergoing tremendous changes. This chapter will trace the development of Central Florida and how it metamorphosed from a region in which the population was biracial and dependent on agriculture into one that was far more ethnically diverse and, today, overly dependent upon the tourism industry. These changes have occurred amidst rapid growth and high population turnover, two factors that greatly impede the development of a region's sense of community. As a result, Central Florida hosts an increasingly diverse population, rarely united in its focus, and in need of a resource to bring its residents together to develop a better sense of their common and interconnected community.

Finally, Chapter Three will present the history of the Regional History Center from its earliest days to the present. While it existed in various
locations throughout its history, it now has a permanent home in the 1927 Courthouse. It also now has a mission focused on serving a constituency with rapidly changing needs and demographics. The History Center has had some noteworthy successes in its short life, yet it still struggles to find ways to serve a large, disparate, and diverse constituency. Many citizens of Orange County, especially those of African-American descent, recall past racial or class injustice. Others struggle without access to jobs that pay a living wage and sending their children to under-funded schools. Against this backdrop, the History Center must provide exhibits and programs that illuminate the region’s past to shed historical light on its present-day issues.

In sum, the ultimate goal of the History Center is to foster a sense of community in a region with little sense of connectedness. This goal has evolved from both a renewed emphasis in the museum field, and the desire of the History Center’s leaders and staff to serve the Central Florida region more effectively. The following chapters tell the story of the development of the Orange County Regional History Center, an institution dedicated to bringing the diverse region of Central Florida together for discussion, dialogue, and reflection. In that way, and through that resource, all elements of Orange County can hopefully build the foundation for a more promising outlook for present and future residents.
CHAPTER 2: THE AMERICAN MUSEUM MOVEMENT: A QUEST FOR RELVANCE

In 1991, Sara Van Arsdale, Executive Director of the Orange County Historical Museum, attended the Museum Management Institute (MMI) in Berkeley, California. A question an MMI instructor posed to attendees reflected the immense challenges facing museums in America as the twenty-first century approached. “If your museum closed its doors tomorrow, would anyone notice?” one workshop leader asked. “Would anyone care?” In essence, the question asked museum professionals in the MMI program to evaluate the purpose of their institution’s existence and to examine its true significance to the community it purported to serve. The question was valid because in too many instances, museums had become solely places to house a collection with little or no interpretation of that collection. For some time, many of them had been places where the public went to see a display of “things” to be looked at and appreciated for their intrinsic value.

The questions raised were disruptive and disconcerting for they implied that American museums were no longer significant for the communities they
serve. In the past, everyone agreed that museums brought stature to a community and were a valuable resource that represented what a strong community could achieve. Community leaders generally have appreciated museums as educational resources for children, as places for families to enjoy together, and as places where a community's heritage was displayed (often in its best possible light).\textsuperscript{2}

The questions were also thought provoking to Van Arsdel because the museum she oversaw at this time was at the very beginning stages of its transition from a small county museum into a regional history center. The Historical Museum was housed in facilities it shared with the Orlando Science Center. And while the museum made some attempts to develop more exciting exhibitions, a majority of its permanent exhibits were solely static displays of artifacts. It had no professional researchers on staff and its archives were open to the public for very limited hours. Although the museum was beginning the process to develop into a facility that matched the ideals of the American museum movement, it was not yet an institution dedicated to community building.

The changes facing Orange County's Historical Museum in the early 1990s are facing museums throughout America today. Like the Historical Museum, American museums are confronted with a future in which they must
become very different from the institutions they have been in the past as American society as a whole becomes more diverse and less cohesive. Both internally (by professional organizations) and externally (by their own communities), museums are called upon to become institutions that reflect the increasingly multicultural aspects the populations they serve and expand their programs and exhibits accordingly. Museums now must seek to be “many kinds of different things in many kinds of different ways for many kinds of different people,” according to Stephen Weil of the Smithsonian Institution’s Center for Museum Studies. They can no longer count on the support of their local constituencies simply because they are museums. Instead, they are now required to justify their existence as community resources.

At the same time, a museum can survive only if its usefulness to its community is distinctive. What it offers its community must be significantly different from what other local organizations, many less costly to operate, can offer. In the present day, museums must undergo a tremendous change. They must cease being insular institutions that function solely as caretakers and scholars of the past through the collection and study of artifacts and become instead dynamic and active members of the community they serve.

History museums have traditionally served as repositories for the history of a particular region or subject. Like all museums, their primary missions
include collecting artifacts. In addition, history museums document history through their collections and work with the public to determine what is important to preserve and research. Although these missions remain, history museum professionals are reevaluating their ways of accomplishing these goals at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Once more, today's museums must win the support of a broad public if they are to remain in existence.

In the past, "ordinary" citizens often perceived museums as institutions that catered to a wealthier clientele. In the twenty-first century, professionals call for museums to recognize this perception of exclusivity and adapt to it. As Richard Kurin comments, "What is out is elitism; what is in is communalism . . . What is out is exclusivity, what is in is connectivity." Moreover, museums, in both their exhibits and programs, need to affect the entire community in which they are housed. Since museums can no longer exist solely as receptacles that guard heritage or as sanctuaries for scholars, they must become community forums often as a way of winning financial support from taxpayers, organizations, corporations, or individual donors. They must be places where all residents can share their stories and exchange information about their different cultures. In that way, museums will be able to create linkages between and among groups of people.

Although professionals who work in museums agree that their
organizations must become more responsive to increasingly heterogeneous communities, they need to overcome the perception that they are institutions that cater only to an elite population. This perception is valid and remains part of the cultural baggage museums carry with them to the present. For it is rooted in the past and, until recent times, in their traditions. It is a part of their history.

The first museum in history had no mission to serve the masses. Indeed, the word museum signified a temple dedicated to the Muses, those goddesses who looked over the welfare of the epic, music, poetry, astronomy, oratory, history, tragedy, dance, and comedy. Around the third century BCE, Ptolemy I. Soter founded the most famous museum of that time in Alexandria. Although the collection of objects is the defining characteristic of the modern museum, and Ptolemy's museum contained some objects (including statues of famous thinkers, surgical and astronomical instruments, animal hides, and a botanical and zoological park), the Mouseion of Alexandria was primarily a university or philosophical academy. Euclid headed its mathematics faculty and Archimedes, Apollonius of Perge, and Eratosthenes were some of the noted scholars who lived, researched, and studied at and around Soter's museum. Although museums are no longer necessarily viewed as scholarly training grounds, this research focus exists now in a more informal form. The
education of both scholars and the general public remains a core value in the modern museum field.\textsuperscript{10}

The practice of housing collections remained the primary function of museums in the Middle Ages and was in many ways an outgrowth of the pilgrimage movement. As the movement grew from local pilgrimages to full-fledged crusades across Europe to Jerusalem and the Holy Land, shrines were created, often in churches or cathedrals, in order to store and to display to a curious lay public, the relics that were said to be the bones or artifacts of early saints, apostles, the Virgin Mary, and even pieces of the cross of Jesus. Those with sufficient means traveled throughout the world collecting items not only to display their wealth and power, but also to create places where individuals could study, as they had done in the earliest museums. The function of collecting items for both display and study is inherited from the earliest public museums.\textsuperscript{11}

Although similar in structure to the modern American museum, at this juncture the museum movement focused primarily on private collections and the interests and whims of the person collecting the items. The emphasis was often upon collecting the beautiful, the curious, and the “holy.” Artifacts gathered together included noted works of art, historical rarities, and scientific specimens and equipment. Despite the obvious potential for these early
museums to serve a more educational role for their communities, there was little, if any, public dimension in them. Prevailing thought held that as long as the collections were private, they could be kept relatively safe under lock and key. As soon as the public was admitted to the museum, collections would need to be guarded against theft or handling.\textsuperscript{12}

In the late seventeenth century, museums gradually changed from a place to store a wealthy owner's private collections of art and artifacts to a place that exhibited these artifacts to the general public. Residents of the city of Basel, Switzerland, concerned that the fine cabinet of Basilius Amerbach might be exported during the reformation in Switzerland, purchased it in 1662. Nine years later they arranged for its display in the university library. That became the first university museum in 1671. In 1683, the Ashmolean Museum opened in Oxford, England. It displayed the natural history collection of John Tradescants, Senior and Junior. After purchasing Sir Hans Sloane's natural science collection, the British parliament established the British Museum in 1750.\textsuperscript{13}

While the public museum movement gradually gained momentum in Europe in the late eighteenth century, the American museum culture developed more gradually. Although not credited with founding the first American museum, Charles Willson Peale is considered the first great
American museum director and, therefore, the founder of the movement in the United States. Since the late eighteenth century, his institution has served as the model for American museums. Although today it is best known for his display of the portraits and busts of Revolutionary War heroes, it was in many ways a forerunner of today's museums. In it he exhibited his own personal array of items, mainly examples of natural history, flora and fauna, and animals including birds and insects, placed in settings that looked like realistic backgrounds to visitors. In addition, the museum exhibited experiments in electricity as well as some in perpetual motion.\textsuperscript{14}

In many ways, Peale's standards and ideals for his museum's audience mirror the current trend in the museum community. Today's belief that a museum should provide a service to the community as a whole was one of the founding principles of Peale's Museum in Philadelphia. He hoped his museum would serve the needs of "the unwise as well as the learned."\textsuperscript{15} In keeping with this commitment, Peale extended the museum's hours into the evening, "[t]o accommodate those who may not have leisure during the day light [sic] to enjoy the rational amusement which the various subjects of the MUSEUM afford."\textsuperscript{16} Peale also intended to attract women as well, stating that, "It is my wish to behold ladies among my hearers."\textsuperscript{17}

To accomplish his goal of educating the general public, he created a
museum that presented a "world in miniature" organized to follow eighteenth century Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus' taxonomic system of classification.\textsuperscript{18} Unfortunately, his methods of exhibition were better suited to giving visitors a sense of the natural world than they were to giving them a deeper understanding of history and human culture. Nonetheless, American museums well into the late nineteenth century followed Peale's rather static and intimidating model of displaying artifacts and collections. The result was that they focused more on the artifacts and how they were arranged for display than on educating the general public or fulfilling the museum's social function as a community resource. Peale's vision of utilizing the museum as an educational facility for the masses was largely unrealized.\textsuperscript{19}

Following Peale's lead and as an outgrowth of Victorian principles and values, the late nineteenth century was the great museum-building era in American history. Museums of that era were created around a belief that objects could and would tell stories to the untrained observer. The museum builders of this era thought that objects, at least as much as books and other texts, were true sources of meaning and knowledge. As William Wilson, director and founder of Philadelphia's Commercial Museum, informed Edward Everett Ayer, President of the Field Museum in Chicago, "All museum material should speak for itself upon sight. It should be an open book which tells a
better story than any description will do." This mentality led museum directors and curators to present their artifacts in glass cases that contained specimens. Reproduced in room after room, this method led to a dull and dreary visitor experience by twentieth-century standards. To the professionals of the era, however "objects occupied center stage," according to Steven Conn. Museum designers encouraged visitors to observe these objects free from distracting text or context and thus initially on their own terms and later in relation to neighboring objects. The relationships in which museum objects were arranged, moreover, were intended to convey a narrative. Museum professionals, however, left it entirely to the museum visitor to discern the meaning of the object and its importance in the display that was presented.

This method of display reflected the Victorian era's fascination with material goods. With the rise of industrial America and the accompanying expansion of the middle class, Americans had more disposable income than before. They spent it on material goods such as furniture, photographs, and useless curios. Conn notes that objects found in middle class parlors demonstrated the aspirations of this class. Given the new importance placed on material objects, it is not surprising that Victorians were the great American museum builders, a notion not lost on those who lived during that era.
Writing in 1876, Philadelphia paleontologist Edward Drinker Cope noted, "As the middle ages were the period of cathedrals, so the present age is one of colossal museums, and of an extensive development of knowledge of the sensible creation."\(^{25}\)

Museums were important to these Americans for yet another reason; they gave them a sense of control. As the outside world became increasingly more chaotic and incomprehensible because of advances in science, technology and the growing importance of the disruptive theory of evolution, order and rationality could be and were neatly maintained within the museum.\(^{26}\) What resulted was the creation of static museum displays of collections, endless exhibit halls of artifacts and specimens exhibited with little labeling and even less interpretation. Museums essentially required their visitors to view their collections and appreciate them on their own merit, simply because they were there to be appreciated. This model continued to influence American museums throughout the twentieth century. At the same time it moved the museum field far from what many considered its primary mission---educating the public through its exhibitions and inspiring citizens to feel a greater sense of involvement in the history and accomplishments of their respective communities, regions, states, or countries.

In 1942 Theodore L. Low prepared a report for the American
Association of Museums' (AAM) Committee on Education on the reasons why museums were failing to serve their broader publics. Looking at the historical focus of American museums, Low noted that a public service role for museums was not a new concept, nor was their failure to appeal to the population as a whole. Quoting from a speech given in March 1880 by philanthropist Joseph H. Choate at the opening of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's newest wing, Low noted, “art [has become] the idle pastime of the favored few, and not, as it really is, as the vital and practical interest of the working millions.”

Although Choate spoke of art museums in particular, Low used it as an analogy for the entire museum field in America. In Low's view, a social ideal had been present when the American museum movement had begun.

Low also studied a museum's role in the social structure of its community. Reviewing the historiography of the field, he wrote that the conception of the museum as an instrument for social enrichment was not merely a modern idea in museum philosophy. Founders of both large and small museums had been pursuing that ideal for some time. Early American museum professionals believed that the institutions they were establishing were destined to play an important role in community life. Low saw it as unfortunate that the vast majority of American museums established in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries failed to answer this call. “It is
very apparent,” he concluded, “that museums still lack a definite goal, still are elaborating on past procedures rather than looking into the future, and are still content with minor sallies into the field of public education.”

Low attributed this lack of focus to the attention early museums had paid to physical growth; they had to have artifacts in their collections before those artifacts could be used for display and for study. However, “[i]nstead of merely temporarily postponing the fulfillment of their duties to their community,” he argued, museum professionals “became hypnotized by the charms of collecting and of scholarship.” They ignored their duty to serve the community as a whole. Low conceded that their earlier concentration on amassing collections had been necessary but now many museums had become complacent and satisfied with the extent of their activities. In the process they had forsaken their primary mission, which was to serve their community.

In his 1942 study Low also argued that museums should make popular education their primary mission. In his view, that mission surpassed the acquisition and preservation of collections and the emphasis on scholarly study as a museum’s primary mission. At the same time he strongly opposed relegating museums to serving primarily the upper strata of society. Instead he urged museum professionals to serve a wider public audience and to cultivate relationships with the American middle class. Despite Low’s call to action,
the typical American museum, which emphasized objects and specimens, remained for the general public a very static and forbidding place. His warnings went unheeded until AAM began another in-depth study of museum issues in the mid-1980s.

In 1982, the Commission on Museums for a New Century formed “to study and clarify the role of museums in American society, their obligations to preserve and interpret our cultural and natural heritage, and their responsibilities to an ever-broadening audience.” Two years later, AAM published *Museums for a New Century: A Report of the Commission on Museums for a New Century*. Although this work focused primarily on the current and future state of museums in America, it supported Low’s notion that American museums had remained insular and self-serving institutions. The report noted that although the Victorian ideal of social reform was evident in nineteenth-century museum charters and the educational focus of museums of the 1930s and 1940s, it was not until the 1960s that museums answered Low’s call for a renewed social consciousness in their collections and programs. Thus, they made their largest gains in this area between 1969 and 1984.

In *Museums for a New Century*, the commission argued that the public perception of museums in the late 1960s and early 1970s was that museums were ivory tower institutions existing outside of the mainstream of society.
During this time society had challenged the traditional authority afforded these institutions and had questioned their relevance. Museums had responded by reaffirming their commitment to a public role, reaching out to their communities.\textsuperscript{35} Museums such as Richmond’s Virginia Museum of Fine Arts expanded its outreach program to bring its resources beyond Richmond’s city limits and the New Muse Community Museum of Brooklyn began efforts to preserve items with significance to African heritage.\textsuperscript{36}

In initiating programs for groups who had traditionally felt excluded from their services, museums had become more accessible to more citizens. Museum directors now recognized that they should form closer ties to their public, and their institutions now began to take more seriously their obligations as public entities. They established standards of ethics and quality as well as a broad-based system of financing in which government, business, foundations, individuals, and the museum itself shared responsibility. These institutions also became more deeply aware of their own public obligations and their integral duty to America’s social and cultural life. Furthermore, American museums began to see more clearly their connections to one another, which led to the development of a sense of community among museums. The institutions accomplished these objectives by developing more educational programming that appealed to a broader and more varied audience. Museums
also established better relationships among themselves within the museum field. They formed more collaborative relationships with other community agencies, and most importantly, American museum established strong partnerships with schools.\textsuperscript{37}

The report looked closely at the museum field on the eve of the twenty-first century. It maintained that a museum's strong ties to its community put it in the position to make its significance "profoundly felt and highly esteemed."\textsuperscript{38} The commission believed that the transition to the twenty-first century would not be totally smooth, that there would "be great stress, tremendous problems, and a pressing need for creativity."\textsuperscript{39} Faced with these issues, the challenge for museums is to achieve the highest level and form of public service.\textsuperscript{40}

As the Commission on Museums for a New Century predicted, American society has continued to undergo tremendous change in the past twenty years, primarily in its growing racial and ethnic diversity and the expanding age of its population. That fact has provided the major impetus for change for American museums of today.\textsuperscript{41} Edmund Barry Gaither, director of the Museum of the National Center of Afro-American Artists as well as co-founder of the African-American Museums Association, believes the impetus stems from two sources:
the recognition that many cultural groupings that previously have been rendered invisible in our population no longer accept that status, and the fact that recent immigration from other parts of the Western Hemisphere as well as more distant areas has altered the makeup of many communities—large and small, urban and semirural.42

As the America populace continues to become more ethnically diverse and, as a whole, ages, minorities constitute a much greater percentage of the population than ever before in its history.43

Few exposés on the state of the American museum community affected the field more profoundly than the AAM's groundbreaking report *Excellence in Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums*, a 1992 outgrowth of AAM's 1984 *Museums for a New Century* report. *Excellence in Equity* redefined museums as institutions of public service and as providers of education. The latter service includes exploration, study, observation, critical thinking, and contemplation and dialogue.44 Its title links two concepts that the authors saw as key to the American museum community in the current age. These are excellence in all services they offer a community and inclusiveness that embraces the cultural diversity of modern-day America. The report, moreover, emphasized three key ideals: that a commitment to education is a museum's central public service; that museums must become inclusive places that welcome diverse audiences; and that dynamic and forceful leadership (from individuals, institutions, and organizations both within and outside of the
museum community) is the key to fulfilling the potential of museums for public service in the twenty-first century.45

Van Arsdel first encountered a draft of *Excellence in Equity* at MMI in 1991 and the ideals put forth in the report significantly affected her vision for her museum.46 It challenged museums to reclaim their significant role as members of their communities and as vital community resources.47 It declared that in providing a broad educational focus, museums performed “their most fruitful public service . . . by fostering the ability to live productively in a pluralistic society and to contribute to the resolution of the challenges we face as global citizens.”48 The authors maintained that a museum that makes a commitment to excellence in the public sphere also makes decisions about collections, exhibitions, and programs that are supported by meticulous scholarship and show respect for the various cultural and intellectual viewpoints of the community.49 Museums influenced by the concepts of excellence and equity in all activities “have the potential to nurture an enlightened, humane citizenry that appreciates the value of knowing about its past, is resourcefully and sensitively engaged in the present, and is determined to shape a future in which many experiences and many points of view are given voice.”50

*Excellence in Equity* posed three questions to the American museum
community both rhetorically and as a challenge. They were

- How can museums, which have so much to contribute to the collective human experience, welcome the broad spectrum of our society?
- How can they use the abundance of their collections and their scholarly resources to enrich and empower citizens from all backgrounds?
- How can museum professionals and trustees effect the serious and lasting change needed to assure that museums are integral to the social fabric?\(^5\)

To provide answers to these questions, the report issued a series of recommendations. Of the ten, three directly influenced the creation of the Orange County Regional History Center. These three were that museums must

- Reflect the diversity of our society by establishing and maintaining the broadest possible public dimension for the museum
- Assure that the interpretive process manifests a variety in cultural and intellectual perspectives and reflects an appreciation for the diversity of the museums' public
- Commit leadership and financial resources---in individual museums, professional organizations, and training organizations and universities---to strengthen the public dimension of museums.\(^5\)

Thus, with these questions and guidelines in mind, Orange County Historical Museum staff and museum consultants devised the exhibit and interpretive concept of the new Orange County Regional History Center.

As Bonnie Pitman stated in her preface, *Excellence in Equity* called for a fundamental change in how museums interpret their service to their
community and society in general. Museums, she argued, must embrace that challenge so that all citizens can more completely experience the public dimension of American museums.\textsuperscript{53}

Inspired by the challenge issued by \textit{Excellence in Equity}, the leaders and staff of the Orange County Historical Museum staff dedicated themselves to following the principles and guidelines set out in this work. They know, however, that to reach these goals, the museum would have to thoroughly research the history of the region to present a more inclusive interpretation of its past. The institution would also have to examine different ways to present that history it make it comprehensible to the general public. Finally, it would also have to balance accuracy in its presentations with its desire to knit the community together.

Staff and leaders of the museum were determined to use the Orange County Regional History Center as a museum and educational facility devoted to a multicultural interpretation of history. In that way, they were determined to contribute towards building a sense of community in Central Florida.\textsuperscript{54} To understand the full implications of their task, however, one must explore more fully the history of the region and the ways that it was similar to other New South communities and the way in which it was distinctive.
CHAPTER 3: ORANGE COUNTY, FLORIDA: A SEARCH FOR COMMUNITY

To be effective as a community-building institution, a historical museum must present and interpret its community's past, must address its unique features, and must strive to present a balanced story to its citizens. Thus, to understand and assess the mission of the present Orange County Regional History Center, one must first examine the history and development of Central Florida, the region it strives to serve.

Historian David Goldfield notes that in the nineteenth century, many southern towns and cities were not urban at all in their orientation. To many southerners, they often existed mainly as places to serve the needs of an agrarian population and an agricultural hinterland. Thus, these towns and cities generated little sense of attachment to a greater whole among their civic or town leaders. Many of these cities and metropolitan areas grew most rapidly during the twentieth century. This was especially true after World War II when new industries had moved south and air conditioning made life more bearable in the region. The increasing popularity of the
automobile, the annexation of smaller communities, and the proliferation of suburbs in a region that prided itself on its less intrusive government and thus less restrictive codes for land use and development meant that many core cities and their metropolitan service regions increasingly sprawled across an ever larger geographical region. Given their heritage, these new metropolitan centers were ill-prepared for the urban—let alone metropolitan—problems and issues they now confronted.

This model applies to the Greater Orlando Metropolitan Service Area (MSA) today and thus to Orange County and Central Florida. To the west Orange County contains housing developments in places like Ocoee and Winter Garden that only yesterday were agricultural communities. To the east, former pasture land has given way to proliferating suburban communities such as Waterford Lakes. Since the late 1960s, urban sprawl in Orange County has made it increasingly harder to distinguish one portion of the region from another, thus making it more difficult to create and sustain a sense of community in Greater Orlando.

Although Central Florida (or the Greater Orlando MSA) is a newcomer among the nation's large urban centers, its recorded history dates to 1513 when the Spanish, led by the explorer Ponce de Leon, stepped foot on the peninsula he named Florida. Later, conquistador Hernando de Soto made the
earliest contact with the Native people of Central Florida in his explorations into the Florida interior in 1539. Although neither he nor any other Spanish explorers ever established permanent settlements in Central Florida, Spanish disease and the sporadic military raids of these newcomers decimated the region’s original inhabitants, the Timucuan Indians. By 1759 only twelve Timucuans remained in Florida and in 1763, after Spain signed a treaty ceding Florida to Great Britain in exchange for Cuba following the Seven Years’ War (or the French and Indian War), the Spanish took the last remaining Timucuans to Cuba with them where these exiled Native peoples lived out their lives. Less that 300 years after Ponce de Leon’s, arrival the Timucuans were extinct.²

During the periods in which they owned Florida, the Spanish introduced two main agricultural products which were later instrumental in the development of Central Florida---cattle and citrus. Ponce de Leon introduced cattle on his first voyage to Florida in 1513 and cattle production later was an integral part of Spain’s early mission system in Florida. To maintain these missions economically, the friars and Spanish settlers, who followed in their wake, successfully raised cattle for beef along the east coast of Florida in the late sixteenth century. Over time, some cattle strayed into the interior of Florida where they proliferated until they eventually numbered in the
thousands.\textsuperscript{3}

In addition to introducing cattle to Florida, early Spanish settlers also brought citrus trees to the state, probably in 1565 at the founding of St. Augustine. Citrus flourished in Florida and on April 2, 1579, conquistador and Florida’s first colonial Governor, Pedro Menendez de Aviles, reported of abundant groves near St. Augustine.\textsuperscript{4} Like cattle, Spanish cultivation of citrus extended well beyond their early groves, as settlers and natives carried its seeds throughout the peninsula. Although the modern citrus business did not develop until three and a half centuries after Ponce de Leon’s arrival, the influence of the Spanish in introducing citrus to Florida’s sub-tropical interior cannot be overstated. Citrus remained Orange County’s primary economic export from the late nineteenth century through the late 1980s, a period of about 100 years.\textsuperscript{5}

To the Spanish, who held control of Florida from 1513 through 1763, Florida was always a neglected colony. During its reign its empire gradually declined in comparison with the British and French empires, and Spain governed the colony loosely. For this reason, Florida was a haven for runaway slaves from British plantations in Georgia and the Carolinas. The Spanish encouraged this practice and in 1738 even established a town north of St. Augustine, Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose, for these freedmen and
-women as a buffer against British invasion. This free African settlement has come to be called Fort Mose.\textsuperscript{6}

In 1763, Spain traded Florida to the British in exchange for Cuba. While the British were never very successful in colonizing Florida, they did establish indigo, rice, sugar cane, and cotton plantations in the colony, largely by using political appointments and land grants to entice wealthy Carolina planters to move to the colony. Their plantations would not have been established without the labor of a sizeable number of slaves imported into the colony along with these planters. In fact, the colony's population grew by 12,000 people under British rule, and over half of them were slaves. Unlike Spanish Florida, any semblance of freedom for these slaves was only a remote possibility under British rule, and slaves continued to escape to join Indians living in the colony's interior.\textsuperscript{7}

In 1784, Spain regained control of Florida as part of the Treaty of Paris and its second period in Florida was basically an extension of the first. During this last period of Spanish rule from 1783-1821, Florida felt the effects of the continued decline of the Spanish empire. The colony was primarily "a small frontier military outpost which stood near last in line when the limited resources of the Spanish empire were distributed," according to Thomas Graham.\textsuperscript{8} Spain faced challenges from land-hungry Americans to the north, as
well as the British, who hoped to quickly regain their lost colony.⁹

To counter these threats, the Spanish attempted to ally with Indians living in Florida, primarily members of the Creek Confederation torn by internecine warfare in Alabama.¹⁰ Creeks had already begun moving to Florida beginning in the late eighteenth century. Their migration increased in 1814 after an American militia force—in particular the Tennessee militia led by Andrew Jackson—defeated Red Stick Creeks at the Battle of Tohopeka or Horseshoe Bend in Alabama on March 27, 1814. After the battle, Jackson imposed harsh treaty conditions on the Creeks, many of whom migrated southward into Florida rather than comply with the treaty.¹¹ These Creeks eventually intermarried with the remnants of Florida's Native peoples such as the Apalachee, Yamassee, Yuchi, Tequesta, and Apalachicola and formed a new society under the name Seminole. The exact origin of the name Seminole is not known but is believed to derive from one or two sources. The first is the Muskogee word “sim-in-oli,” meaning, wild or free. The second is the Spanish word “cimarron,” usually applied to shipwrecked sailors, which also means wild or abandoned.¹² Whatever the actual origin of the term, it referred to the racially mixed people who were relatively recent arrivals to Florida.

Already an amalgamation of a variety of Native American tribes, the Seminoles also incorporated into their society runaway slaves who had escaped
to the Florida interior from American or British plantations. Although Black Seminoles often lived in separate villages, they were still considered part of the tribe. The acceptance of slaves into Seminole society is what first ignited conflict between the Seminoles and the citizens of nearby slave states such as Georgia and Alabama. It was these wars against the Seminoles which provided the impetus for American migration to Central Florida.\textsuperscript{13}

In the First Seminole War, commencing in 1817, Andrew Jackson led American troops in a series of skirmishes in the Florida Panhandle. After a few relatively easy victories in the panhandle, Jackson turned his attention toward St. Augustine, Spanish Florida’s capital. At this point, President James Monroe, facing the possibility that England might declare war on the United States since Jackson had executed British subjects on Spanish soil, ordered him to cease operations, and negotiations between the United States and Spain regarding the transfer of Florida began. In 1821, Florida officially became a United States territory three years after the end of the First Seminole War.\textsuperscript{14}

Following the First Seminole War, over 5,000 Seminoles retreated to the interior of Florida. In 1823, thirty-two Seminole chiefs signed the Treaty of Moultrie Creek, which heavily favored the United States by confining the Seminoles to some of Florida’s worst land. It established a Seminole reservation in the interior of Florida, which included the land comprising the
Central Florida region today. The reservation forced the Seminoles to settle no closer than 20 miles from the coast, and granted 28 million acres in Florida to the United States and reserved 4 million acres for the Seminoles. The Seminoles also agreed to cease all trade with Cuba and turn over their runaway slaves to the U.S. government. A drought in 1825 and a freeze three years later added to the Seminoles’ miseries. As a result, these proud and fierce people eventually began to hunt on their old lands. At the same time they confronted whites who, in turn, were beginning to encroach on Seminole land. Faced with growing demands among disgruntled non-Indians who were clamoring for the removal of all Native peoples from the southeastern United States, the Congress of the United States, at President Jackson’s insistence, passed the Indian Removal Act in 1830. That Act gave the government the authority to forcibly move the Seminoles and four other Southeastern tribes—the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Creek—to an area west of the Mississippi River. Although many of the Seminoles complied, several hundred refused to leave Florida.

Instead, those Seminoles, intent on maintaining their dwindling homeland, struck back against the American settlers in a series of attacks. On December 28, 1835, the Seminoles, under the direction of Osceola, ambushed a U.S. Army force of 110 men, commanded by Major Francis Dade,
approximately 60 miles west of Orlando. This stunning attack, which led to a
call for more troops to fight the Seminoles in Florida, resulted in the Second
Seminole War. Lasting from 1835-1842, it was the longest American war of
the nineteenth century.17

For military reasons, the Second Seminole War directly contributed to the
establishment of an American settlement near present-day Orlando. In
1837, as the Seminoles were effectively waging a guerrilla war against their
removal from Florida, General Thomas Jesup, commander of American troops
in Florida, ordered construction of a series of forts a day’s march apart or
approximately every fifteen miles.18 In response, U.S. troops built posts
throughout Florida. Fort Gatlin, erected in November 1837 on a hill between
the lakes that eventually became known as Gatlin, Gem Mary, and Jennie
Jewell, spawned the settlement that eventually became the city of Orlando and
the seat of Orange County.19

The civilian community centered around Fort Gatlin had inauspicious
beginnings. The 1840 census showed 73 people (presumably soldiers) in
Mosquito (Orange) County; of these, 70 were men and three were women.20
Aaron Jernigan, Orange County’s first civilian settler, arrived at Fort Gatlin in
1843, with 700 head of cattle, two African-American men (presumably slaves),
and an elderly white man. Jernigan later built a house at the site and in
January 1844 brought his wife and children to the area from Georgia. Not only was Jernigan the first Central Florida settler, but he was also the first to take advantage of the Armed Occupation Act of 1842. This Act, which granted 160 acres to anyone who would homestead in Florida for a minimum of five years, served a dual purpose. It helped to populate the Florida territory with U.S. citizens, and it helped to expel the Seminoles from the area. Over the ensuing years, other families of settlers who moved into Central Florida clustered around Jernigan's homestead and Fort Gatlin, which the army had deactivated in 1839. With the final withdrawal of troops from Fort Gatlin after a brief reactivation in 1849, the abandoned stockade and Jernigan’s home became the nucleus of the new settlement in Central Florida.

Aaron Jernigan’s stamp on the early community in Orange County was substantial. After Florida achieved statehood in 1845, Jernigan was elected as Orange County’s first state representative. By May 1850, the settlement was granted a post office and the hamlet that had materialized appeared as Jernigan on an 1855 map. In 1856, the settlers won enough votes in a countywide election to move the Orange County seat (formerly at Enterprise which had just become a part of newly created Volusia County) to Jernigan. According to one account, they accomplished this in a bit of election-day chicanery. Judge James Speer knew that Florida election rules allowed
members of the militia to vote in any district they happened to be in on
election day. By promising militia troops stationed in Sumter County an
elaborate barbecue, he enticed them to come to Orange County to vote. As a
result, Jernigan won the election handily. The fledgling town was renamed
Orlando shortly thereafter.\textsuperscript{23}

The exact origin of the name Orlando is not clear. The version officially
adopted by the city is that Orlando was named after Orlando Reeves, a soldier
in the Second Seminole War. According to legend, Reeves alerted his sleeping
military unit of an impending Seminole attack on their camp near Lake Eola.
This cost him his own life but saved the lives of his fellow troops. Although
this makes an interesting story, later research has shown that there was no such
soldier named Orlando Reeves in the area during the Seminole War. Some
conclude that the name might have come from the carving of the name
"Orlando Re---s" into a tree along an old Seminole trail near Lake Eola. Other
sources point to Judge Speer, who proposed the name Orlando after a character
in Shakespeare's play \textit{As You Like It}.\textsuperscript{24} Wherever the name came from, the U.S.
Post office officially recognized the name Orlando in September 1857, and
three weeks later, B.F. Caldwell donated four acres of land to the county for a
courthouse. Although the community did not build a permanent courthouse
for another six years, Caldwell's donation shifted development away from
Jernigan's original settlement and toward present-day downtown Orlando.\textsuperscript{25}

The boundaries of Orange (or the former Mosquito County) changed continually from its founding in 1824 through the creation of Seminole County in 1913. An early map of the county shows Mosquito County created from St. Johns County in December 1824. Included in its original borders were parts of today's Flagler, Marion, Lake, Brevard, Indian River, St. Lucie, Martin, Orange, and Palm Beach counties as well as the entire area of Volusia and Seminole counties. In all, the original county included within its boundaries well over 7,000 square miles. However, the county began to shrink in 1828 when the U.S. government ceded over 1,200 square miles to the Seminoles. As other regional counties formed, the border was moved again in March 1844, giving the county 2,600 square miles.\textsuperscript{26}

Mosquito County was renamed Orange County in January 1845 and given more land the following month to increase its total area to 4,650 square miles. The state continued to revise Orange County's borders, eventually shrinking it to 1,500 square miles when it created Volusia County out of its northernmost portion in December 1854. Between December 1866 and February 1874, Orange County's borders with Brevard County were altered, and the county's size increased to 2,000 square miles. Beginning in July 1887 and continuing through April 1913, three more counties were created out of
Orange County. They included Osceola County (1887), Lake County (1887), and Seminole County (1913). Orange County is currently 910 square miles.27

Orange County’s early population grew from 73 original inhabitants in 1840, to 12,584 in 1890.28 A combination of two factors drew early settlers to the region---an abundance of land and Central Florida’s relatively mild climate. This combination allowed cattle ranching and citrus growing to thrive since both needed large amounts of land and citrus groves also required mild winters.29

Although later outweighed by citrus, cattle ranching was Central Florida’s first major economic enterprise, and one that Seminole Indians had engaged in successfully before their removal. The availability of land, combined with the large herds of scrub cattle roaming the region, attracted non-Indian settlers to the area in the mid-nineteenth century.30 Florida cattle were so numerous that beef became the state’s primary offering to the Confederate cause during the Civil War, especially after the fall of Vicksburg in 1863 closed off the Confederacy’s access to the trans-Mississippi cattle supply from Texas.31 By 1864, Florida had established armed commissary companies collectively known as the “Cow Cavalry” which were responsible for procuring and guarding Florida cattle for the war effort.32 Following the Civil War, many of Central Florida’s newest residents were drawn to the region.
because cattle roamed freely throughout the countryside; those who caught and branded them could claim them. Florida cattlemen, known as cowmen or cowhunters, explored the Florida prairie, gathered up the stray cattle, herded them into pens approximately 10 to 15 miles apart, branded them, and later drove them to Florida's coasts where they would be shipped northward.³³

Cattle ranching remained Orange County's chief economic export throughout the 1880s when citrus overtook it. Nonetheless, it remained vitally important to the region. Ranching suffered a series of setbacks beginning in 1918 when a devastating Texas fevertick epidemic ravaged Central Florida. To combat the problem, the State of Florida enacted mandatory dipping of cattle in an arsenic solution in 1923. The free-range (meaning no fences) nature of the Central Florida cattle industry made capturing the cattle for treatment extremely difficult, and many cattlemen sold their herds rather than comply with the order.³⁴ The state dealt the Central Florida cattle industry another blow in 1949 when it passed a state-wide fence law, which ended the days of the free range in Florida.³⁵ Today, Orange County is urbanized and most of its remaining cattle ranches are in its most eastern portion.³⁶

Although cattle ranching was vital to the Orange County economy, citrus put the county on the map. Citrus became Orange County's primary
export beginning in the 1880s, when the first railroads made their way into the region. As they had done with cattle, the Seminoles had cultivated early Spanish oranges in groves later discovered by early American settlers. Although their fruit was sour, pioneers noticed that its hardy root system survived the region's freezes, and pioneer citrus growers grafted different varieties of budwood to produce a sweeter fruit. The later varieties they added produced juicier oranges that matured before the coldest part of winter.37

The basis for the modern citrus business in Orange County can be traced to Lake Monroe in present-day Seminole County.38 In the 1870s, Connecticut native Henry S. Sanford, a former United States diplomat to Belgium under the Lincoln Administration, moved into the region after the Civil War, and planted groves on 145 acres near Crystal Lake. Sanford eventually brought in over 140 different types of citrus and exotic fruits to his groves, and his chief contribution to the citrus enterprise in the region lay in his efforts to expand the market for Florida-grown citrus.39

In the late 1880s, the arrival of the railroad allowed growers to get their fruit to market before it spoiled. The number of Orange County farms grew from 220 by 1870 to 2,099 by 1890, a 950 percent increase in twenty years. By 1895, Orange County contained within its boundaries 21,737 acres of land devoted to citrus production. The railroad also brought with it large numbers
of people, many of whom settled in the region. They were attracted in part, no
doubt, by the new economic opportunities offered by cattle and citrus,
especially the latter. Between 1870 and 1890, Orange County’s population
grew from 2,195 to 12,584, a 570 percent increase.\(^{40}\)

Despite its strong beginnings, the citrus industry was dealt an almost
fatal blow in the winter of 1894-1895 when two bitter freezes hit the region.
Known collectively as “The Great Freeze,” it struck on December 29, 1894,
when temperatures reached a low of 18° in Orlando and severely damaged the
citrus trees. A warm and moist January followed and the trees responded to
these stimulants by producing sap and new growth. When the second freeze
hit on February 7, 1895, and temperatures fell as low as 19°, the defoliated
trees literally popped open as the freezing sap split their bark.\(^{41}\) This freeze
devastated citrus groves and production since it killed more than 90 percent of
the trees. Orange County land values plummeted, and in order to pay off
mortgages which could not be covered by a non-existent citrus crop, many
grove owners sold their properties at a loss.\(^{42}\)

Orange County took another fifteen years to recover from the Great
Freeze. The amount of acreage devoted to citrus declined considerably, from
21,737 in 1895-1896 to a low of 7,334 in 1909-1910.\(^{43}\) Between 1890 and
1900, the number of farms in Orange County dropped almost by half, from
2,099 to 1,218. By 1910 citrus production was still suffering from the effects of the freeze although the number of farms grew slightly to 1,497. The freeze also affected Orange County’s population, which saw a decrease for the first and only time in its history, from 12,584 in 1890 to 11,374 in 1900.44 By 1910, citrus had finally recovered and Orange County’s population had risen to 19,107. Furthermore, the value of citrus produced exceeded $675,000, which was close to its pre-freeze production.45

In the years following their recovery from the Great Freeze, growers created an effective method of marketing citrus cooperatively through the Florida Citrus Exchange. With an expanding market for their product, Orange County citrus growers almost doubled the acreage devoted to orange groves in the next nine years by increasing their holdings from 7,334 acres to 14,576 acres in 1919.46 Mechanization and science spurred their success as well. Dr. Philip P. Phillips introduced airborne crop dusting and later developed a new method of pasteurizing canned juice to make it taste better. Those innovations, especially the latter, laid the basis for the orange juice industry.47 Technology gave citrus another huge boost in April 1946, when Florida Foods, Inc. of Plymouth processed the first commercial pack of frozen concentrated orange juice. The company did so on the basis of a process originally developed to create nonperishable orange crystals for U.S. troops in World
Between 1948 and 1955, Orange County was the second largest citrus-producing county in Florida. It began a gradual decline in 1955, dropping to the third largest citrus-producing county in the years between 1955-1971, and falling to fourth between 1971-1974. Central Florida's weather, a primary reason for the success of the citrus industry, was also the catalyst for its decline following a series of devastating freezes in 1983, 1985, and 1989. Many grove owners who replanted after the 1983 and 1985 freezes sold their property after the freeze that occurred four years later. By 1987, Orange County had fallen to the eighth-ranked county in Florida in the number of farms devoted to citrus. The expansion of the tourist market, mainly due to Walt Disney opening the Magic Kingdom in Orlando in 1971, also hastened the decline of citrus. Grove owners, who had lost heavily as a result of freezes in the 1980s, found their properties held more value to land developers. By the end of the 1980s, most large-scale citrus growers had moved into South Florida after the 1989 freeze and the name Orange County was solely an homage to the crop that had put the region on the map.

While agriculture dominated the Central Florida economy for its first 120 years, a late-developing phenomenon in Orange County's history is its present-day dependence on tourism. Although tourism has been a part of the
local economy throughout its history, Walt Disney’s decision to build his theme park in Orlando helped make Orange County one of the foremost tourist destinations in the nation and the world. It also signaled the end of agriculture as the region’s primary economic lynchpin.

Central Florida’s tourism industry did not begin with Disney and also would not have been possible if not for a constantly and rapidly improving transportation system in the region. In the late 1880s, early tourists visited present-day Seminole County by taking cruises along the St. John’s River on steamboats that navigated the rivers, lakes, and lagoons of the Florida interior more effectively than sailing ships. Although steamboat travel was an improvement in transportation, it was unreliable, slow, difficult, and not conducive to the development of large-scale tourism. For this reason, the railroad was almost as important to the early growth of the community and the tourism industry as it was to the citrus industry. Many of the tourists liked what they saw, and the region developed a reputation as a good place to live, sentiments local boosters sought to encourage. A promotional pamphlet touted the region as “phenomenal as there are no oil wells, factories or mines, the population depending entirely on its orange groves, truck gardens and unrivaled climate. Orlando is built on the peel of an orange.”

Although steamboats and the railroad provided a start for the Central
Florida tourism industry, large scale tourism did not begin until the mid 1910s and the 1920s when the state and region embarked on a road-building movement to cater to the expanding middle-class tourist trade. Good roads became essential to the tourism market since they allowed larger numbers of people to arrive more quickly than ever before. With the assistance of the U.S. government, Florida spent approximately $14 million annually between 1923-1929 constructing roads such as the Dixie Highway and the Tamiami Trail. The Dixie Highway, built through Orange County, provided a direct transportation link between Central Florida and tourists from as far away as Ontario, Canada. Later, Orlando Sentinel publisher Martin Anderson and others promoted Central Florida as a stop on Florida’s Turnpike (original plans called for a road traversing the east coast of Florida) as well as building I-4 through downtown Orlando. These two roads—Florida’s Turnpike and I-4—were major factors in Walt Disney’s choice of Central Florida as the site for Walt Disney World.

Noting that only two percent of visitors to Disneyland in California came from east of the Mississippi River, Disney desired a theme park in the eastern portion of the country. And when he first flew over Central Florida in 1963 and saw the intersection of I-4 and the Turnpike, he declared that the region was the site for his new park. What Disney saw were two highways that
connected to major national transportation arteries. To the east, I-4 connected to I-95, a road traversing the Atlantic coast from Miami to Maine. To the west, I-4 intersected with I-75, a road which linked to I-10, which spanned the country, from Florida all the way to California. These roads would allow tourists easy access to Disney's eastern theme park.\textsuperscript{55}

Disney's reasons for choosing Central Florida mirror those of the area's first pioneers and visitors; the region had year-round good weather and abundant, cheap, and thus easily obtainable land. Disney set up a number of dummy corporations to secretly purchase the cattle pastures and swamp land for his park. He knew that if word leaked that the Disney Corporation was purchasing the land, prices for the property would skyrocket.\textsuperscript{56} In addition, Orange County made generous and unusual concessions to Disney to lure his company to the region. The most important concession included the establishment of the Reedy Creek Improvement District, which empowered the Disney corporation to act as its property's sole governing agent.\textsuperscript{57} These powers, moreover, extended to building permits as well as the power to issue bonds. Along with these concessions, Orange County gave Disney a break on property taxes, agreed to provide law enforcement through the Orange County Sheriff's Department, and also agreed to allow Disney to provide its own security enforcement within their parks. Finally, it assumed the responsibility
for building and maintaining access roads to the parks.

Although area historians and leaders still debate whether Disney has been as good for the region as it has been for Disney, there is no doubt of the major impact Disney has had on the region. Richard Foglesong, author of *Married to the Mouse: Walt Disney World and Orlando*, criticizes Disney for its use and, in some cases, abuse of its governmental immunities. Foglesong reports that although Disney has generated a significant amount of local tax revenue and other monies through businesses in the tourist corridor, that revenue may not be enough to offset the drain on schools, public utilities, the increasing need for roads because of the constantly increasing traffic congestion, and the lack of affordable housing for low wage earners that the expanded tourism industry brings with it.

These problems are steadily increasing for Central Florida since it is now one of the world's most visited tourist destinations. In 1969, the year before Walt Disney World opened, 3.5 million tourists visited Central Florida. In 1971, the first year the Magic Kingdom opened, the number almost tripled as Orange County hosted over 10 million visitors. By 1989, when Disney opened Disney-MGM Studios, the region hosted over 30 million tourists. Tourism remains big business in Central Florida with over 43.3 million visitors in 2000. Currently, 26.5 percent of jobs in the region involve tourism.\textsuperscript{58}
Despite its success in becoming a preeminent tourist destination, the region faces serious issues with community and community identity. The vast majority of the residents of Orange County have moved here from someplace else; fewer than 30 percent were born in the state of Florida. In the past thirty years, Orange County has shifted from an agricultural economy to a service economy in which a majority of its residents are employed in industries that focus on travel, tourism, and entertainment. Moreover, many have found that the region's low-wage service economy does not give them the chance to gain the socioeconomic and social mobility they desire. Many leave within a short period of time and, hence, the population retains a high degree of transiency. These factors contribute to the region's fast-growing but at the same time constantly-shifting population base. For example, although 63,848 people moved into Orange County in 1999, 56,045 moved out of the region in the same year. As this trend continues, it is becoming increasingly harder to find people who think of Orange County as "home."

The Healthy Community Initiative (HCI), a grassroots organization of Orange County citizens founded in 1993, addressed these issues in its Legacy 2000 study, written by Alan AtKisson and Sydney Green. Released in July 2000, Legacy 2000 graded the "health" of the Central Florida community at 60 on a 100 point scale. Specifically, Legacy 2000 pointed out some of the issues
facing the region, by measuring the community’s health through four index points, “Nature, Economy, Society, and Well-Being.”

Of the four indicators, Nature scored the lowest. This is due to increased urban sprawl, declining water quality and supply, and dependence on fossil fuel. For the Economy index point, Legacy 2000 noted that the local economy was prosperous but also vulnerable, since it was too dependent on low-wage jobs and, moreover, vulnerable to economic downturns, a fact driven home following the September 11, 2001 attack on America.  

More importantly to this study, the Society index point noted mixed social progress. It found that voter participation had declined, student-teacher ratios were high, and the population as a whole had a low level of literacy. Moreover, the rate which students ended a school year in a different school than they started remained high. Between 1992 and 1997, they averaged 46 percent, or 10 percent above the already high state average. Finally, newspaper readership continues to decline among the county’s population. On the other hand, the public perception of local government had improved and juvenile crime had declined slightly.  

For the Well-Being index point, Legacy 2000 reported that although Central Floridians were a relatively healthy people, they had a mixed overall well-being. While the region’s infant mortality rate had declined, more babies
were born undersized (which could contribute to problems later in life). Finally, although Central Floridians lived longer, more were overweight and many suffered from depression.$^{65}$

A few of the indicators *Legacy 2000* addressed fell into “Very Dangerous” and “Dangerous” levels. These included Energy, Land Use, Education, and Child Learning. Others, such as Mental Health, Voting, Tree Canopy, and Child Poverty received a “Strong Caution.” Of particular interest to this study, AtKisson and Green were unable to measure the Arts and Culture and Community Connectedness indicators. In commenting on the vitality of Central Florida’s arts and cultural life, the authors report, “The fact that little meaningful data is available [on the subject] is itself an indicator that this community is struggling to build up its arts and cultural life.”$^{64}$ Although AtKisson and Green were unable to determine the best way to measure the Community Connectedness indicator, they reported that the topic, by its very nature, is linked to all of the community’s indicators examined in the study.$^{65}$

Although *Legacy 2000* was a thorough assessment of the state of the community in Central Florida, it did not measure the impact of the growing diversity of the community. These changing ethnic demographics are key underlying factors that complicate the region’s quest for a sense of cohesion. This is a new challenge for Central Florida as its ethnic demographics had
remained relatively static from its founding in 1840 through the 1980s. In its early years Orange County's population was predominantly white. In fact, it hovered in the high 80 percent of the population every census year between 1840 and 1890, with the exception of 1850, when slaves comprised 49 percent of the population. In addition, until the 1990s, the predominant minority group was African American. Since that time, the Hispanic population in Orange County has filled that role.

The 1890 census showed the first significant increase in the "non-white" population. As job opportunities increased in the expanding citrus industry, Central Florida's black population increased from 15 percent in 1880 to 28 percent by 1890. In all probability they were drawn to the region by the opportunity to earn wages as agricultural workers or as wage earners in nearby timber and turpentine camps outside Orange County. By 1900, blacks represented 36 percent of the population, a direct effect of the Great Freeze of 1894-95. From these figures, one can surmise that many white citrus growers were able to move when they went bankrupt because of the Great Citrus Freeze while many African-Americans laborers were not. The trend continued in 1910, as 40 percent of the population was by then African-American. By 1920, when the citrus industry had fully recovered, the white population in Orange County regained its 1890 form. By that date, many African Americans
had emigrated from Florida to northern cities because of the demand for labor brought on by World War I. At that time, the white population comprised 73 percent of the population, a figure that was met or exceeded every year for the next 80 years.69

Although Orange County’s white population never dipped below 73 percent between 1920 and 2000, it spiked upward to 80 percent in 1950 and to 85 percent ten years later.70 This was primarily due to the two factors—cheap land and warm weather—that brought large numbers of newcomers to the region. Veterans who trained in the region during World War II resettled in Orange County after the war. And in 1958, the Glen L. Martin Company (now Lockheed-Martin) built a plant in Orlando. Each of these migrations brought predominantly white families to the region.

The African-American population comprised the majority of Central Florida’s minority residents for Orange County’s first 160 years. Like most of the South after the Civil War, Central Florida developed its own biracial character. Yet economic and social opportunities for African Americans were minimal. Blacks lived in communities separate from established white communities and worked as railroad workers, domestic servants, agricultural workers, or farmers.71 Eve Bacon recorded one incident in 1868 when forty African Americans went to vote in Orlando and “were whipped out of town.”72
And while no official date is available for the establishment of Jim Crow laws in Central Florida, C. Vann Woodward reported that the state of Florida adopted a poll tax in the early 1900s to prevent African Americans from voting. In 1905, the state adopted laws requiring segregation of railroad stations. As the twentieth century progressed, segregation developed as the law in Orange County and persisted until well into the 1960s.73

In the 1880s, early African-American communities sprang up in conjunction with Orange County cities. Two of the first communities were Hannibal Square and Eatonville, each of which stands today.74 Loring Chase and Oliver Chapman created Hannibal Square west of Winter Park in 1881 as an area where blacks, who served as domestics and laborers for Winter Park residents, could live.75 The community of Eatonville, outside of Maitland, was founded in 1882 when Maitland Mayor Josiah Eaton sold land to Joseph Clarke, who had tried earlier, without success, to establish a community for freedmen in Florida just after the Civil War. On August 15, 1887, it became the first incorporated African-American community in the United States.76

As in the rest of the South, African Americans in Central Florida faced discrimination and diminished economic and social opportunities. Although Orange County as a region avoided many of the troubles of Birmingham and even St. Augustine during the Civil Rights era of the mid-twentieth century, it
endured incidents of racial intolerance and episodes of violence. Most notable was an election-day race riot in the city of Ocoee on November 2, 1920. Although the exact circumstances surrounding the riot have yet to be written, local chapters of the Ku Klux Klan were definitely involved. In a letter sent about one month before the riot, the "Grand Master Florida Ku Klucks [sic]," threatened prominent local Republicans W. R. O'Neal and John M. Cheney for encouraging local African Americans to register to vote.77 One week before Election Day, the local Klan marched in a parade in downtown Orlando.78 The Ocoee Riot of 1920 left at least eight people dead, July Perry, an African American, lynched; and the entire black section of Ocoee abandoned.

Other major racial incidents occurred in Central Florida in the mid-twentieth century. In summer 1949 Lake County Sheriff Willis McCall (a noted racist) arrested four young black men from Groveland and accused them of raping a white woman. The case drew national attention as the suspects were beaten while in custody and McCall shot two who were allegedly trying to escape (eventually two of the defendants were freed on appeal in the 1960s).79 Shortly after the Groveland incident, Harry T. Moore, an early Civil Rights pioneer and one-time executive secretary of the Florida NAACP, was assassinated on December 25, 1951, when a bomb exploded in his house near Mims in Brevard County.80 Although neither incident occurred in Orange
County, racial violence was prevalent in Orange County as well. On November 1, 1951, the Ku Klux Klan dynamited a Creamette ice cream stand on Orange Blossom Trail which had ignored warnings to stop serving black and white customers from the same window.  

Despite these incidents, Civil Rights did come for Central Florida African Americans. Under pressure and in conjunction with the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, Orlando abolished its White Voters' Executive Committee. As activists pushed for integration of public facilities and schools, Mayor Bob Carr named an interracial council in 1957, which helped to ease the transition from a segregated to an integrated society. School desegregation began in 1962 with Durrance Elementary, since many of its white students were the children of Air Force families, who had attended integrated schools in other sections of the country. By 1969, a majority of Central Florida's outlying communities, under pressure from the federal government, integrated.

Although the African-American population dominated the "non-white" category in Orange County for its first 160 years, the number of Hispanics living in the region began to gradually increase in the late twentieth century. Hispanics numbered 19,551 in 1980--or 5 percent of the population--and 161,641 by the year 2000--18 percent of the population. By the latter date
they had overtaken African Americans as the most numerous minority group in Orange County.\textsuperscript{83}

The dramatic rise in the Hispanic population in Orange County was primarily due to a wave of Puerto Rican migration that began in the 1980s when one third of the Puerto Ricans moving to Florida chose to settle in the Central Florida region. Since 1990, nearly 60 percent of all Puerto Ricans moving to Florida settled in Orange County and the surrounding area. Currently they represent seven percent of all newcomers to the region.\textsuperscript{84} Like most who move into the region, Puerto Ricans are moving for two reasons. They are drawn by the availability of land, in the form of affordable housing, and the area’s sub-tropical climate, which is similar to the climate of their home island.

It is important to note that the Puerto Rican population that now calls Orange County home, is much different from previous migrations from the island to the United States. Whereas Puerto Ricans moving to the U.S. in the 1950s and 1960s were primarily working-class families who migrated to major cities (New York in particular), the current immigrants include more members of the middle class and some professionals.\textsuperscript{85} Although many moved to Central Florida because of the availability of land, the climate’s similarity to their homeland, and its proximity to the island, these are not the sole reasons. They
are also leaving the island to escape its growing crime problem, and now choose Central Florida because of its reputation for a higher degree of law and order.\textsuperscript{86} For example, the number of serious crimes reported in Puerto Rico in 1993 was more than double that of Orange County.\textsuperscript{87} This Puerto Rican migration has left a strong stamp on the region and is a major contributing factor to the rapidly changing demographics in Orange County.

According to the 2000 Census, not only do non-Hispanic whites currently make up only 58 percent of the population, minorities now include African Americans, Hispanics and a rapidly expanding Asian population.\textsuperscript{88} By 2010 no one ethnic group will comprise a 50 percent majority. Instead, Orange County will be made up of shifting pluralities. The resulting diversity, although enriching the social and cultural life of the region, complicates the task of creating a sense of community in Orange County and demonstrates a need for a common resource that can bring the community together.

Central Florida's growing ethnic diversity, combined with its economic transformation from citrus to tourism, and tremendous growth resulting in urban sprawl, has led to the region's decided lack of community identity. Community connectedness is a problem in Central Florida, a fact driven home when by the authors of \textit{Legacy 2000} who were unable to measure the factor. By the late 1990s, the Orange County Historical Museum and Society
recognized these issues in Central Florida and prepared to respond to the call for community service in *Excellence in Equity*. While no one entity can overcome all of the factors facing the region, the transformed Historical Museum, armed with a deeper understanding of the historical background of Orange County and also of the present-day issues confronting the region, would seek to fill this community-building role in its community.

To measure the quality of the History Center’s efforts and accomplishments, however, one must gain first a deeper understanding of its history. One must also examine the various transformations it endured, as well as the support it cultivated from various groups, before it could assume its current responsibilities and begin to fulfill its new more community-oriented mission.
CHAPTER 4: LEGACY TO THE PEOPLE: COMMUNITY AND THE ORANGE COUNTY REGIONAL HISTORY CENTER

“On September 29, 2000, history will change forever.” This statement was the marketing line the Orange County Historical Society created to celebrate the grand opening of the $35 million Orange County Regional History Center, a project completed over an eleven-year span. Although hyperbole, history in Orange County had indeed changed forever. Orange County had rallied behind a cause that the Historical Society and Museum had been fighting for since its founding in 1942, an appropriate home to celebrate Central Florida’s story.

The opening of the new History Center was the final step in the changes the institution had undergone from its origins in the 1940s as a volunteer-run museum to a museum staffed by over thirty full-time employees today. It is headed by Sara Van Arsdel, an experienced museum director, and its Education, Exhibits, and Collections departments are staffed by museum professionals. Throughout this almost sixty-year process, the museum has constantly struggled for legitimacy, particularly in finding an appropriate
home. Prior to opening the Regional History Center in the 1927 Orange County Courthouse, the museum hosted exhibits in five different locations. But its current location in the 1927 Courthouse is particularly appropriate and, in a sense, represents a closing of a circle. This is because the museum originally opened on the same site in 1942 in a small room of the 1892 Courthouse.²

A number of factors influenced the institution’s journey from a small historical museum similar to many small county museums throughout the United States to the Regional History Center. First, the journey involved two visionaries as leaders of the Historical Museum. They were Judge Donald A. Cheney, appointed in 1957 as the first director of the former Orange County Historical Commission, and Sara Van Arsdel, Executive Director of the Historical Museum and History Center since 1986.³ Each recognized the inherent problems with the region’s sense of community and each envisioned the museum as much more than a collection of artifacts. In their view it should become a community resource. Second, none of the changes would have been possible without a change in the membership and focus of the Board of Directors of the Orange County Historical Society, a group initially founded to raise funds to build the History Center’s first permanent home at Loch Haven Park. In the 1980s the Board evolved from the original group of
Orlando natives into a group of business leaders and activists committed to raising the profile of the museum. Finally, the change would not have been possible without the support of Orange County government—particularly the first Orange County Chairman Linda Chapin—which funded the majority of the History Center project. Chapin viewed a new History Center as a vital resource for Central Florida and one that would knit together an increasingly expanding region and a growing and ever more diverse population.

As with many American community museums, the History Center's beginnings can be attributed to a group of local women, mainly second and third generation Orlando natives, who founded the Antiquarian Society on April 1, 1932. The Society focused on preserving American antiques and not necessarily artifacts related solely to Central Florida. Its mission was

to cultivate a better knowledge and understanding of American Antiques [sic] and to encourage the preservation thereof, especially in Florida, for the benefit of future generations; to establish and promote proper ethical standards among collectors and dealers in antiques; to encourage and cultivate the study of Early American History with particular reference to the Homes [sic], Domestic Life [sic] and Customs [sic] of those times; and to promote generally an interest in the study of Antiquarian subjects.

Members voted to hold meetings twice a month, with each member responsible for a program and "entertaining the society." Active membership was limited to fourteen women and restricted to residents of Orlando. Programs for the first year of meetings covered topics such as antique chests, sideboards, and
chairs as well as Staffordshire China ornaments. Subsequently, members heard guest speakers and visited private collections, museums, and historic sites. In addition, the Society hosted an annual Christmas party, smaller luncheons, and various other parties for its members.¹

In 1934, the Society held its first public antiques exhibit to benefit a Girl Scout building fund. This was actually the first history exhibit ever held in Orange County. The exhibit remained open in the Washington Arcade for three days and "was a brilliant success," according to the Antiquarians.⁹ A year later, the Society formed a museum committee in hopes of opening a permanent history display.¹⁰

By the early 1940s, Society records indicate that their plans to open a permanent display were becoming a reality. In 1941, the Society's formal museum project began as Orange County initiated plans to demolish the 1892 Orange County Courthouse. To discourage this, the Antiquarians worked to preserve it as a museum. On August 5, a newspaper article, "Make Court House Into Museum, is Plea of Orlando Women," reported that a delegation of 50 women representing the Antiquarian Society had begged the Orange County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) to make the 1892 Courthouse property available for an historical museum and cultural center. Governor of the Society, Lois Harold noted that the courthouse "offered a perfect site to
house the relics that would and do come to the [Society].”

To demonstrate the potential attraction of a museum in Orlando, the Antiquarians noted the drawing power of the St. Augustine Museum, the Ringling Art Gallery, in Sarasota, and the Plant Museum in Tampa. The Society’s efforts bore fruit. It began its first meeting of the 1941-1942 year with a tour of the 1892 Courthouse in preparation for the opening of their new museum.

In celebration of Orange County’s centennial, the Orange County Museum opened its first exhibit on April 15, 1942. It was a replication of a Central Florida pioneer kitchen. The Antiquarian Society sponsored the opening, with three members acting as “hostesses” for the event. A local newspaper reported that the exhibit consisted of “many unusual items pertaining to the early days [of Central Florida] . . . [which included] early lighting fixtures, cooking utensils, old Spanish land grants and deeds.” Moreover, some of the items were loaned to the museum and some were gifts. By fall 1942, the Society opened the museum for three hours each Friday, and its members staffed it with volunteer hostesses. Besides the permanent pioneer kitchen exhibit, rotating exhibits included special displays of antique toys, old spurs, early banks, English and American silver articles, and other collectibles.

To add variety to its exhibits, the Antiquarians asked local residents to lend their collections for exhibit, especially collections of pattern glass, buttons, old
programs, samplers, and silver.\textsuperscript{17} On March 19, 1943, the museum celebrated its first year of operation with a gala event that paid tribute to the women who had made the museum a success. At the same time, the Society began planning the opening of a second exhibit room in 1943.\textsuperscript{18}

In subsequent years, the Society continued to staff the museum with volunteer hostesses and rotated local collections for exhibit. One exhibit during the second year of operation included items from America’s military past such as “guns, muskets and rifles, medals, swords, civil war [sic] bullets and bullet molds, [and] canteens.”\textsuperscript{19} In diversifying their displays, Society records noted that most of their visitors now were men, but members expected that to change as their displays included more “feminine relics.”\textsuperscript{20} To accomplish this, the Society later hosted exhibits on glass and china, buttons, figurines, and paper weights.\textsuperscript{21}

The Orange County Museum suffered some of the problems Theodore Low noted in his report, \textit{The Museum as a Social Instrument}. Like the caretakers of the early American museums, the Antiquarians primarily focused on building a collection of artifacts. The collection, moreover, was more a hodgepodge of items with little or no interpretation than a cohesive collection. As the museum grew, its permanent collection expanded until, according to one account, it consisted of “unrelated portions of collections, individual items
of local lore, old photographs, old costumes, old toys, old everything." The museum rotated exhibits, mainly private collections, on a regular basis. An average of 30 people visited the museum each week during operating hours, which were Fridays from 2 to 5 p.m. Between 1942 and 1957, during its existence under the auspices of the Antiquarian Society, the museum continued to close each spring for the summer and reopen each fall.

By 1954, after 12 years as a seasonal museum, community interest in building a larger and more permanent historical museum rose. In a letter to the editor of the *Orlando Sentinel*, E. H. Gore, author of an early history of Orlando, praised the virtues of the existing Orange County Museum. Gore noted a surprisingly large number of visitors on the Friday after Thanksgiving and implored the community to give more support to the endeavor. "What we need is a larger place for the Museum," Gore wrote, "and new show cases [sic] in which to display the many valuable articles that have been donated from time to time."23

Yet while the museum’s popularity grew, circumstances forced it to relocate in 1957. The 1892 Courthouse was evidently in a state of disrepair. After concrete slabs and bricks fell from the building, City of Orlando building inspector Ralph Jones condemned it.24 After losing their home, the Orange County Museum packed up its collections for storage and closed its doors for
Almost simultaneously, the Orange County BCC formed the Orange County Historical Commission on June 10, 1957 and appointed native Orlandoan Judge Donald A. Cheney as its first chairman. From the point of his appointment in 1957 through his retirement in 1980, Cheney was a tireless promoter of Orange County history. As a native of Orlando, he was a logical choice for the first Commission's chairmanship. Not only did he come from a family that had already contributed greatly to Orange County, but his father, Judge John M. Cheney, had been an important civic booster for the community. In 1901, John Cheney had founded Orlando City, Water, and Light (now the Orlando Utilities Commission). He had also been instrumental in the building of the Cheney Highway, the first road to connect Orlando to Titusville.25

Like his father, Donald A. Cheney was also active in the community's civic affairs. In 1917, he had served as Orange County's first Boy Scout scoutmaster, before founding the Rotary Club of Orlando in 1920, and organizing the Central Florida Boy Scout Council two years later. Professionally, he had set up the first juvenile court in Orange County in 1919 and had served as its judge from 1921-1923. At the same time, Cheney was instrumental in creating a county-run "parental home." The first of its kind in
Florida, it exists today as Great Oaks Village.\textsuperscript{26} He also served as president of the Florida Conference of Social Work and the Florida Probation Association.\textsuperscript{27}

Orange County founded the Historical Commission specifically to take over the Orange County Museum founded by the Antiquarian Society. The museum and its collections had expanded to the extent that the Antiquarian Society was no longer able to care for either and had requested Orange County's help.\textsuperscript{28} With an annual Orange County budget of $1,500, the Commission would collect artifacts focused solely on Orange County history.\textsuperscript{29} The Historical Commission was responsible for, Cheney wrote, "collecting, arranging, recording and preserving historical material including books, pamphlets, maps, manuscripts, family histories and similar papers relating to the history of Orange County."\textsuperscript{30} It was also "to procure and preserve narratives of the early pioneers, their exploits, perils, privations and achievements, and to collect material of every description relative to the history of Florida's Indian tribes, wars, soldiers, schools and churches."\textsuperscript{31} Finally, he noted the Historical Commission was "authorized to mark by proper monuments or tablets the location of forts, Indian mounds, or other places where historical events have occurred."\textsuperscript{32} Since the 1892 Orange County Courthouse had played such a key role in the institution's history, it
was appropriate that the first artifact received by the Historical Commission for its collections was the cornerstone of the 1892 Courthouse.³³

At its first meeting, the Commission authorized Cheney to ask the Orange County BCC for space for its headquarters on the eighth floor of the new Courthouse annex. Specifically, the Commission wanted permission to reopen the former Orange County Museum at the same site.³⁴ Since the Historical Commission was an Orange County-appointed board, it established an Associate Member program to encourage community involvement and support.³⁵ Dues ranged from $1 for a Regular Member, to $100 for a Life Member. The money raised was reserved to be invested in a fund for a permanent home for the museum.³⁶

While the museum had remained closed since 1957, the Historical Commission began to publish the *Orange County Historical Quarterly* in September 1959 and add to its collections. Although early *Quarterlies* contained articles on the histories of Central Florida communities, the South Florida Railroad, churches, and banks, Cheney’s vision for a home for the Historical Museum remained a constant theme throughout its years of publication. The December 1959 *Quarterly* celebrated the laying of the cornerstone of the new Courthouse Annex, where the County BCC had granted the Historical Commission space for offices and a museum.³⁷
The Historical Commission spent 1962 refurbishing exhibit cases and decorating the "exhibition room" on the eighth floor of the Courthouse Annex, in anticipation of a November opening of the new museum. After discovering that artifacts exceeded exhibit space, the Commission postponed the museum's opening until 1963 as it expanded the museum's exhibit space. Finally, on June 18, 1963, the museum formally reopened as the Orange County Historical Museum. Following the grand opening, the museum remained open on Tuesday afternoons from 2 to 5 P.M. By September 1964, the Historical Commission had received a $1,050 increase in its budget, which raised it to $2,550. Of that amount, $1,200 was specifically earmarked for the salary of a part time secretary to "catalog and file historical books and records, artifacts and memorabilia and other historic exhibits for use by the general public." By May 1965 the BCC had granted the museum additional exhibit space for its expanding collection in the Courthouse Annex. A regular attendant now staffed the museum, which was open Monday, Wednesday, and Friday afternoons from 2 to 5 p.m. Under Cheney's leadership, however, the museum's collections outpaced physical surroundings, and it was unable to exhibit its newest artifacts. On January 20, 1967 the Commission began discussing a fundraising campaign to expand its space, specifically by acquiring
a permanent home for the museum. Although a fundraising drive did not begin immediately, member Jenkins Dolive successfully proposed to earmark money derived from life memberships as well as special gifts for a building fund. For all intents and purposes, planning for a new facility was underway.

As the museum outgrew its location, Orange County government’s need for the museum’s space in the Courthouse Annex grew as well. By late 1970, after being open for eight years in the Courthouse Annex, the museum moved to the second floor of the Christ Building at 27 East Central Boulevard. It reopened on April 30, 1971, and continued its regular operating hours of Monday, Wednesday, and Friday afternoons.

This latest relocation spurred Cheney and the Historical Commission to action, especially since Cheney saw the new location as unsatisfactory. He lambasted the new facility noting that it is not only utterly inadequate for ordinary purposes but lacks proper space for offices, meeting rooms, a sales counter, storage room, and repair shop. There is no related parking at this crowded downtown location and for many the long stair-way [sic] to the second floor is a real problem. The old building is a veritable fire-trap destined to be demolished ere long. The situation cries aloud for concern and action.

In the same article, he also wrote that although the Orange County Commission had been cooperative in providing support for the museum’s routine operations, they were unable to provide a modern building for the museum. To raise funds to build a permanent home for the Orange County
Historical Museum in Loch Haven Park, the Historical Commission formed another organization, the Orange County Historical Society in April 1971. At the April 1971 Historical Commission meeting, Cheney explained that the City of Orlando had agreed to donate a site in Loch Haven Park for the museum if the Historical Society could raise enough funds to construct the building “commensurate with the current plans for the park and big enough to house the present historical collection [of the Historical Museum].” Richard B. Rogers, grandson of Orlando pioneer settler and former Mayor Cassius A. Boone, designed the initial sketches for the new building at the southwest end of Loch Haven Park. In addition, the new museum would be jointly managed through a partnership between the Historical Commission, the new Historical Society, Orange County government, and the City of Orlando (which owned Loch Haven Park and leased the land to the museum). According to Cheney, the new museum would finally “provide an adequate and permanent Historical Center and cultural program to preserve the unique heritage of Orlando, Orange County, and Central Florida.”

On January 21, 1972, the Historical Commission unanimously approved Rogers’ plans for the building, which included one large exhibit hall and a small office space. Initial cost estimates for the building were $150,000 and in anticipation of future growth, its design allowed for future expansion. The
September 1973 *Historical Quarterly* reported that the Historical Society had accepted the invitation of the John Young Museum (the original Orlando Science Center) to build the Historical Museum adjacent to its complex. “This will not be a merger,” Cheney reported, “but an arrangement under which each organization will retain its identity and separate program but use certain facilities and services in common, . . . effecting considerable savings.”

After 30 years in a variety of facilities, the Historical Museum would finally have a permanent home in Loch Haven Park.

During this push for a new building Cheney began to enunciate in writing his vision for the museum, a vision that remains a core part of the History Center’s mission today. He initially attempted to rally the community behind the project by impressing upon it the need for a strong cultural community. In March 1973, he wrote that a new building would provide “a base of operations for [a] service of related activities to the people of Orange County.”

Pleading for community support, Cheney noted that “too few people have been concerned enough to give their time, influence and encouragement to a project worthy of the background and culture of this area.” He criticized the Christ Building location once again writing, “Our present location and situation are a disgrace to an enlightened and progressive community and cries aloud for concern and action.”
Further expanding his vision, he wrote a year later explaining that the museum sought a new facility not only to house and display the museum’s collection, but also to better serve the community. As was the historic mission of American museums, the new Historical Museum would develop “a broad program of research and education and publication and related services which flow out into the community and enrich its life and culture.” To Cheney, an appreciation of local history was indicative of a strong community. Pleading for public support, he wrote, “As heirs of the past we inherit, not only the fruits of yesteryear, but also the obligation and privilege of preserving the record of the past and making it available in its various forms to those who shall follow after us.”

Cheney was his most emphatic about the Historical Museum and its worth to the Central Florida community in an article in June 1974. Much like the historic mission of the American museum culture espoused by organizations such as the American Association of Museums, Cheney envisioned the Historical Museum to be much more than an exhibition of objects. The Historical Museum would “be a living center of historical information, of research and study, of the collection and preservation of records, of publications, of classes, of group meetings, a veritable educational and cultural institution with a mission of service to the people of Orange County and
To reinforce this point he referenced the dramatic population and industry surge in Orange County since World War II. He wrote,

In so short a period of time Orange County and Central Florida have become a metropolitan center of population, of industry, of entertainment, and of social life. People have been busy planning, developing, building and . . . making money. Lest we 'gain the whole world but lose our own soul' . . . should we not also build for the cultural welfare and spiritual growth of our community? Cheney clearly envisioned the Historical Museum as an important player in the Orange County community. In that sense his vision mirrored the historic focus of the American museum culture, that museums existed to serve their communities. In 1974, Cheney called the museum a "living center of historical information." Twenty five years later, this vision became part of the mission of the new Orange County Regional History Center.

By September 1975, the Historical Society had raised enough funds to begin construction on the Historical Museum at Loch Haven Park. The new building would finally provide the space for the museum to serve a wider variety of the community's interests. He hoped that community volunteers would involve themselves and help the museum "develop an enriched program of public service and a satisfying personal experience for all involved." To that end, the new museum would focus on the community and would, "open up a wider field of service to the community." Although founded on this
mission, the museum did not truly focus on it until the late 1980s. Even then that purpose was not fully realized until the opening of the Regional History Center in September 2000.

Cheney realized that the museum needed direction from a museum professional in order to reach these goals. By 1976, the museum sought “a full-time qualified and experienced Curator/Director . . . to tell us what to do . . . according to accepted museum standards of procedure.” Clearly Cheney understood that the museum needed a professional to accomplish its objectives and on January 15, 1976 the Historical Commission hired Dr. Frederick J. Shaw, Jr., as its first Curator. Shaw came to the Historical Society from the University of Florida with “a broad knowledge of American Cultural History [sic].”

Shaw’s reign as director of the Historical Museum was brief and Historical Commission minutes only mention him four times. Although Cheney praised Shaw for his work with the move to the museum at Loch Haven Park, the minutes note that Orange County terminated his employment effective July 31, 1976 due to financial considerations. But his termination may also have been due to a difference of opinion with Cheney. Meeting minutes dated July 29, 1976 record correspondence between Shaw and Orange County Administrator Jim Harris regarding Shaw’s authority in museum
On August 1, 1976, Jean Yothers, who had been working at the Historical Museum as an assistant since January 1975, assumed duties as Curator of the Historical Museum. An Orlando native, she was the granddaughter of Orlando pioneer Joseph Bumby, a former *Orlando Sentinel-Star* columnist, and a history buff. Although she was not necessarily a museum professional, her interest in local history was important to the Historical Commission and to Cheney in particular.

After operating in the Christ Building for five years, the Orange County Historical Museum officially opened on October 17, 1976, at 812 Rollins Avenue in Loch Haven Park. Over 500 people visited the museum at its grand opening. Not a year after opening, the Historical Museum began plans for an expansion of the building. In spring 1977 the Historical Society Board of Directors approved a $75,000 fund-raising campaign to finance this 4,000 square foot wing at the south end of the new building. It would hold a workshop area for exhibit development as well as provide a larger storage area for the museum’s collections.

In its early years in Loch Haven Park, Historical Museum exhibits
included an old saloon, an old postcard display, a recreated 1880s parlor, and a quilt exhibit. Educational programs included a guest speaker on the Florida Cowmen as well as a program given by Confederate Civil War reenactors. In June 1978 the Historical Quarterly took subscribers on a virtual tour of the Historical Museum whose exhibits included Billy the Swan ("the tyrant of Lake Lucerne"), a Florida cracker whip, a blacksmith shop, country store, Victorian Parlor, and items from the 1892 Courthouse.

The Historical Museum now focused on preserving the heritage of the Central Florida's early settlers and pioneering families. While the museum catered to this "old Orange County" clientele, Central Florida increasingly attracted residents from outside the region. Immigration into Central Florida due to World War II, the Martin Company, and especially Walt Disney World, had transformed the region. Orange County was no longer sparsely populated and predominantly agricultural but was instead an urban center with over 450,000 residents by the end of the 1970s.

Throughout this decade, the museum had continued to expand. In June 1979, Cheney again presented a plan to add more exhibit space to the museum. At an estimated cost of $180,000, the addition would sit on the west side of the museum and it would eventually double its exhibit space. Richard B. Rogers, architect of the original Historical Museum, designed the
new wing, which would be two stories tall and include exhibit space, offices, and meeting rooms. The Cheney Wing, as it would later be called, opened in 1982 at a total cost of $350,000.

Although Historical Museum exhibits at this time primarily reflected the history of white settlement in Central Florida, the museum did translate the self-guided museum tour into Spanish in 1978. Yet despite the contributions minorities had made to Orange County's history, it still did not feature any exhibit on their communities. Most glaring was the lack of any exhibit on African-American history. In many ways it is unrealistic to expect that the museum under Yothers' direction would include black history in its exhibits. In this regard, it was representative of its sister institutions. Museums throughout the country, and the South in particular, were not yet addressing the subject. And Yothers, a former member of the Antiquarian Society and granddaughter of an Orange County pioneer, was a member of a generation that often did not see the importance of the accomplishments and history of groups beyond their own race and culture. They were most concerned with preserving their own history, and the Historical Museum's exhibits, collections, and programs reflected this line of thought.

Possibly in response to pressure from the African-American community, the Historical Museum finally broached the topic of African-American history...
in 1983 when it accepted an apparently authentic slave cabin to serve as a focal point of an exhibit on African-American history. Although the Historical Society appointed a committee for the slave cabin project, no exhibit ever materialized. By 1986, the cabin had deteriorated into a pile of rotting wood. The Historical Museum did not open a full exhibit on African-American history until September 1987 and did not build a permanent exhibit on African-American history until the History Center opened in 2000.

In 1986, after ten years at the helm of the Historical Museum, Jean Yothers retired as Director. In her place, the Historical Society hired Sara VanArsdel, Historical Sites Supervisor and Curator of the Fort Christmas Museum. Under VanArsdel's leadership, along with a change in the membership and focus of the Historical Society's Board of Directors, the Historical Museum would begin its long transformation from a small, volunteer run and managed county museum, to a 67,000 square foot Regional History Center managed and curated by museum professionals.

VanArsdel's initial vision for the Historical Museum was similar to that of its founder Donald Cheney. In her opening article in the Historical Quarterly, she spelled out her goals for the museum, which were to reach out to the community and to concentrate on more educational programs. She noted that too little time had been spent teaching history in schools. "It is of the
utmost importance,” she wrote, “that [children] understand and are aware of the lessons and the delights that their past can teach them.”73 She also noted the special place history has in a region and implored the community’s assistance in preserving it. “Central Florida is growing too fast, and much of the heritage here is being lost or is already gone. Each of us must make an effort to preserve that which makes this area such a special, unique, and wonderful place to live.”74

The exhibits in the Historical Museum in 1986 bore little resemblance to the current History Center. They told no stories and consisted of vignettes of items collected by the Antiquarians, an Orlando Sentinel hot type press room, an exhibit on the recently demolished San Juan Hotel, and cases containing scrapbooks. Yet despite its relatively static exhibits, Van Arsdel recognized some potential in the Historical Museum. Her experience working at Fort Christmas had given her an understanding of the depth of Orange County’s history, a history for which she coined the phrase, “B. D., Before Disney.” Very few of the museum’s exhibits reflected twentieth century history so some of the early exhibits Van Arsdel oversaw included the history of Martin-Marietta, Florida Hospital, and citrus. Cheney’s writings inspired her to steer the Historical Museum toward finding a better way to communicate Orange County and Central Florida’s history to the region.75
While the hiring of Van Arsdel brought the museum its first director with past museum experience, the Historical Society’s Board of Directors, the governing body of the Historical Museum, underwent a tremendous change in the 1980s and 1990s. Once an inactive and very loose-knit organization of long-time Orlandoans, the Society transformed itself into an organization dedicated to fulfilling Cheney’s and Van Arsdel’s visions of a dynamic community-focused institution. When John Blexrud joined the Board in the mid-1980s, “it was not particularly that exciting of an environment because there really wasn’t much to do . . . I think probably the most exciting thing we would vote on . . . [was] where to hold the Christmas parties.” Blexrud and others “were fairly embarrassed by the kind of visitor experience . . . [at the] museum in Loch Haven Park . . . There wasn’t much to do there. If you’d been once, there was certainly no reason to go again.” The Historical Museum did not have a strong identity; community support, in terms of financial support from Orange County, membership in the Historical Society, and museum attendance was abysmal. In the eyes of more than a few Board members, the Historical Museum was a second-class citizen in the cultural landscape of Orange County.

By the late 1980s, Van Arsdel and the Board of Directors realized that the institution needed to undergo a significant change. For some, it was a
matter of institutional survival. The existing Historical Museum in Loch Haven Park appealed to a narrow segment of the community, primarily Orlando natives. Orlando native and former Board President Andy Serros agreed with this assessment. Serros said,

The natives . . . loved the museum. As soon as you walked in there, it was ours . . . We’d have cracker barbecues, we had covered dishes. Our Christmas party was mostly people that we knew from Orlando High School, [though] it was not an exclusive society of old-timers, the nucleus was the natives and the locals.79

For this reason, the Historical Museum did not necessarily appeal to anyone beyond that market segment. A majority of Historical Society members fit the “old Orlando” demographic and many were senior citizens. Blexrud recalled that the Board recognized that the museum “probably wouldn’t exist very long without something that a) brought in more membership and b) broadened our appeal to more families and younger people.”80

Van Arsdel and the Board of Directors faced an even tougher dilemma when the Orlando Science Center began plans in the late 1980s to vacate Loch Haven Park and rebuild a state-of-the-art science center. Since the Historical Museum shared a building with the Science Center and a majority of its visitors came as a result of this arrangement, the Historical Society Board had to decide whether to remain at their current location or to relocate and reinvent the institution. This decision was crucial for the Board as the
institution’s survival was at stake.\textsuperscript{81}  

Fate intervened in the mid-1980s Orange County when lawmakers decided that the Courthouse complex at the corner of Central Boulevard and Magnolia Street was too small and plans were made to build a new courthouse further uptown.\textsuperscript{82} Though Orange County had a spotty historic preservation record to this point, the Orange County BCC, particularly Linda Chapin and Bill Donegan, were determined to save the 1927 Courthouse. It was significant that the BCC worked to save the building, for throughout its history the community had lost many of its historic to new development and decay as well as a lack of interest in historic preservation.\textsuperscript{83} Past disregard for these landmarks had resulted in the loss of several historic keynote downtown buildings, most notably the Historical Museum’s first home, the 1892 Courthouse and the San Juan Hotel, one of downtown Orlando’s historic landmarks from the 1880s, which was razed in 1979.\textsuperscript{84}  

To study possible reuses of the 1927 Courthouse, the Orange County BCC appointed a task force in September 1989.\textsuperscript{85} According to Chapin, the impetus behind the task force was a desire to save the building and not necessarily to build a new history museum.\textsuperscript{86} Commissioner Donegan’s Courthouse Re-Use Task Force worked with ArtSoft Management Services to investigate the feasibility of reusing the Courthouse as a museum or museum-
related attraction. The task force’s guidelines required that in any reuse plan, the Courthouse had to become a popular entertainment destination for downtown, serve local residents primarily, remain under control of Orange County government, be compatible with existing museums and attractions, have public support, preserve the historic character of the building, and house dynamic and changing activities. In March 1991, after eighteen months of study, the Courthouse Re-Use Taskforce concluded that relocating the Historical Museum to the 1927 Courthouse was the best plan for its reuse.

Although Donegan believed the Courthouse to be a logical new home for the Historical Museum, the Historical Society Board of Directors was initially not interested in relocating downtown. Despite this disinterest, Historical Society President Andy Serros served on Donegan’s task force anyway and Van Arsdel and her staff, as Orange County employees, provided staff support for the project.

The Historical Society’s lack of interest in the building came from several sources. The first was the poor condition of the 1927 Courthouse at the time of its decommission as well as the concrete and turquoise tiled international style annex, which was built and attached to the building in the 1960s. Second, the Historical Society and Museum had a large investment in the Loch Haven Park location. They had raised funds to erect the building
and had added to it twice over the years. The third issue was the historic lack of financial support from Orange County government, the specific reason Serros was against the project. “At one time,” he commented, “I was thinking they’ll move out [of the courthouse], give us the key, we move in with dust cloths and vacuum cleaners.”91 In Serros’s eyes, the idea that Orange County would support the project with $21 million to renovate the courthouse and build a history center was historically beyond the realm of possibility.92

Yet each of these issues would be resolved to the Historical Society’s satisfaction. First, the annex would be demolished and, in its place, the City of Orlando would build what is now called Heritage Square, an urban plaza in the center of downtown Orlando. Second, although the museum had operated in the Loch Haven Park location for more than ten years, the museum’s profile was relatively low, and the Historical Society’s Board of Directors saw the tremendous opportunity they had in moving the museum to an historic building.93 Third, Orange County’s financial support was crucial for the Historical Museum and Society. They knew that to be successful, the institution would need to significantly redesign its exhibit concept and that to draw visitors from Central Florida, the new museum had to consist of interactive and dynamic exhibits. “When anybody lives in Central Florida,” Blexrud stated, “they’re exposed to the very best of entertainment from Disney
... the other theme parks." VanArsdel and the Board believed that to successfully raise the profile of the institution to the Central Florida community, the new museum and its exhibits and programs would have to be on a similar level, in terms of quality, with the theme parks.94

In addition, the new museum would need to answer the call of the American museum community, specifically the challenges issued in 1992's Excellence in Equity report. Any new museum should reflect Central Florida's diversity and establish and maintain a broad public dimension. Moreover, its interpretation should demonstrate a variety of cultural and intellectual perspectives and an appreciation for the diversity of the museums' public. Furthermore, the museum needed to commit its leadership and financial resources to strengthen its public dimension.95 In short, the museum would have to be community focused, or it would suffer the same fate as its predecessors.

For this reason, all involved in the initial stages of the project maintained that Orange County government's support of the project, under the leadership of Chairman Chapin, was the essential element in the decision to renovate the 1927 Courthouse for use as a History Center. Board member Randy Rush remarked that Chapin "was a tireless supporter of the project... and it's fair to say that it might have happened without her, but it wouldn't be
what it is [today]." Chapin saw the project as a key component in helping Orange County develop a better sense of community and with her encouragement and support, Orange County provided additional funds to the Historical Museum to expand its staff to over thirty employees. In addition, it funded $21 million of the $35.7 million project.97

To accomplish the redesign, the Historical Society worked with exhibit design professionals, and initially hired American History Workshop (AHW) as their first exhibit design firm in 1994. Yet after working with AHW for a year, neither Van Arsdel nor her staff was comfortable with the exhibit plans and designs submitted by AHW. They never fit their ideas for the new museum and AHW seemed to be more interested in showing conflicts in the community rather than those aspects that would contribute to a sense of community. While these conflicts are a part of the region’s history and therefore need to be included in its museum, Van Arsdel believed that AHW’s overemphasis on them simply was not a successful way to showcase Central Florida’s history. Because of these differences in the presentation of Central Florida history, Orange County did not renew AHW’s contract in 1995, which was for Van Arsdel “one of the uglier moments of the project.”98

After severing ties with AHW, Orange County hired Gerard Hilferty & Associates (GHA) to refocus the exhibit creation process and include the
theme of building community as the guiding principle of the History Center's exhibit plan. This theme developed from several sources. First, in September 1995, Van Arsdel, Historical Society Board members, and Orange County staff took a trip to national historical museums in preparation for the exhibit design project. They visited museums in Washington, D.C.; Minneapolis; and Cincinnati. In touring the Minnesota History Center’s “What is a Community?” exhibit on that trip, Van Arsdel realized that community building was exactly what the Central Florida community needed. It was a core value in the founding of the Orange County Historical Museum, and an ideal which Van Arsdel had adopted as her own vision for the museum.99

The community building ideal also fit directly with the theme of Orange County Chairman Chapin’s administration. According to Chapin, building community was the most important focus of her administration. She believed that the region had grown quickly and had so many newcomers that its residents “lacked an awareness of and a commitment to its past.”100 She saw history as a way to engage the community, to encourage its members to start putting down roots in the community, and begin to realize that Orlando is “not the town that Disney built.”101

Once the community-building theme was established, GHA worked with the museum staff in a series of workshops to develop the interpretive concept. 
of the museum. These workshops defined the mission statement of the
History Center and then determined how the exhibits would be designed to fit its mission, which was “To serve and educate the community through the preservation and interpretation of the rich cultural heritage of Central Florida and its relation to the world.”

Under GHA’s guidance, Van Arsdel and her staff also defined the new History Center’s role in the community. For the first time in its existence, the museum would focus specifically on the values of the American museum culture. The new History Center would serve as “the repository of material culture, the disseminator of knowledge, a place of wonder, contemplation, and discovery, a place of civic identity, and a place to gather.” GHA added a final role, which was to be “a forum for discussion of cultural issues.” The staff also established the Center’s formal goals and objectives, some of which were present from its beginning. The new History Center would:

- Interpret the rich history of the region by creating meaningful, memorable, and pleasurable experiences through exhibits and educational programs and by using the museum’s collection to interpret the history of Central Florida
- Collect significant and original objects of our material culture
- Preserve and conserve the history of Central Florida
- Be a resource for regional history information for the general public and scholars
- Be an economically successful institution
- Be the cultural center of the Orlando community by being a dynamic, visitor-centered organization for the community.
GHA also asked the museum staff two questions to discern the staff’s interpretation of community building in Central Florida. The questions, “What does ‘community’ mean? What does it mean specifically in Central Florida?” helped define the community need the new History Center would fulfill. One answer, given by an unnamed staff member, defined for staff and exhibit designers the challenge of creating community in Central Florida,

I don’t know if Central Florida really has a true community yet. Too many people have “loyalties” to other areas of the country and world. I do believe there are isolated areas of “community” but I haven’t sensed those connections generally here. I hope the new museum will help to tie everyone---newcomer and native alike---together in some way. Until Central Floridians can feel “us” on some level, we will be at the mercy of every politician, developer and corporation that chooses to come down.

The answer has served as a driving force for the creation of the exhibits at the History Center and continues to guide its mission today.

What has resulted is an institution that tells the story of Central Florida’s past from the Ice Ages through the present day and on that basis attempts to extrapolate trends into the future. The History Center contains thirteen permanent exhibits, that cover the topics of Florida’s Natural Environment, First People, European Contact, the Seminoles, the Pioneers, Cattle, Citrus, Transportation, Tourism, the Land Boom, Aviation, and Disney. The thirteenth exhibit, called Communities, is the culmination of the
visitor experience, and is designed to show some of Central Florida's most
diverse and changing communities and, in addition, to gather input from a
visitor as to his or her impression of the community of Central Florida.108

The History Center's exhibits tell a much more complete story of
Central Florida's past than the museum has ever done previously. The exhibits
contain artifacts, but they display them in context rather than in static cases,
thereby allowing the audience to become more engaged by interacting with
them. The exhibit on the Natural Environment and sinkholes contains a
replica of the famous Winter Park sinkhole of 1983 that visitors can step into.
Its exhibit on the Seminole Indians uses replicas of Seminole log homes to
display artifacts and tell the Seminole story. The Tourism exhibit utilizes parts
of actual Model T Fords to tell the story of Tin Can Tourists, early visitors to
Central Florida. In addition, the exhibits are enhanced with interpretive
programs that focus on a more inclusive story of the region's history including
its minority communities. Guided tours focus on the reasons why people and
businesses have moved to Central Florida, and what they have done since their
arrival. Throughout the center, visitors see evidence of the patterns that made
Central Florida the community it is today. These are its land resources, its
year-round good weather, and its people, through the stories of its earliest
inhabitants and those increasingly diverse groups that moved to the region
later. The History Center is now an integral part of Central Florida’s cultural landscape. It fits squarely within the community-service guidelines implicitly required by the Central Florida community and explicitly set by professional museum organizations such as the American Association of Museums.

In some staff meetings at certain Historical Society events, Van Arsdel will often quote a letter she received from Forrest Clark, a long-time Historical Society member. In his letter, Clark told of his feelings about the opening of the History Center. He wrote:

The opening program and the magnificent history center [sic] were highpoints of my life, especially [sic] my later life. In one very important way they connected me to my past and in a good way provided a link that tied my life all together. Merely to see the old building again, even in its new incarnation, was an enchanting and life affirming experience. I shall never forget it . . . What a legacy to the people. What a legacy to the region.\textsuperscript{109}

Clark’s words echo the mission of the History Center which strives, on a daily basis, to accomplish its mission to build a better community in Central Florida.
CHAPTER 5: EPILOGUE

The institution now called the Orange County Regional History Center is founded on the principles of community-based service. Although these ideals developed in the early phases of the American museum movement, it took the Center many years to reach these goals. Each change the institution endured, from the small, volunteer-run Orange County Museum through today's professionally-managed History Center, expanded the work of predecessors and moved the institution closer to its present mission.

Members of the Antiquarian Society, who developed the early historical museum, were dedicated to preserving the material culture of the inhabitants of Orange County, a largely agricultural region in which Orlando---then fairly small---was its core city. As the county grew, became urbanized, and diversified its economy, Orlando changed from a typical small southern city serving agriculture to one that was the center of a large metropolitan region. In response to these developments, Donald A. Cheney, the founder of the Historical Museum, recognized the community-focused role his institution could play for the region's newly heterogeneous and rapidly expanding
population. Although Cheney's vision for the museum was not fully realized during his tenure, director Sara Van Arsdel later built upon his ideas and expanded them to include new trends in the American museum movement. The result of the efforts of Cheney and Van Arsdel is today's Regional History Center whose mission is to utilize its position as an historical museum to help foster a greater sense of community in Central Florida.

This community focus carries with it certain challenges. Like any publicly-funded institution, the History Center has to continuously weigh its responsibilities for presenting and interpreting the past with its need for continued funding and widespread support. Presently the Center receives approximately two-thirds ($2.1 million) of its financing from Orange County and raises the other one third (approximately $900,000) on its own through attendance, fee-based programs, facility rentals, grants, and donations. Although Orange County will remain a major source of its funding, the Center should also seek to reduce its dependence on this money. By obtaining grants from private foundations and funding from interested corporate sponsors, it will continue to broaden its exhibits and enhance its programming. At the same time, whatever the source of its funding, it must never compromise its professional integrity as it seeks to interpret and analyze both the successes Orange County has experienced and the continuing challenges that it faces. In
terms of its successes, Orange County has, in a few decades, grown from a largely rural Florida county to a metropolitan region with a remarkably diverse population that today is a world-renowned tourist destination. In terms of its problems and challenges, Central Florida is a region where the average worker earns thirteen percent below the national average and one in which eleven public schools received an “F” on the 2001-2002 Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test.²

With these factors in mind, the History Center seeks to be an important part of the Central Florida community. In many ways is already successful in this mission, particularly through its educational programming, its community partnerships, and its current work through its collections and exhibits departments. Yet there are also some specific items the Center needs to address in the future to fulfill its mission more effectively. This is especially true in regard to its permanent exhibitions.

As a beginning, the History Center needs to work towards including some of the more painful episodes of the region’s past in its exhibits. Even where progress has been made in terms of giving greater opportunities to minorities or greater social justice to various groups, the reverberations of past conflicts continue right down to the present. Although a local history museum must be a place where the entire community feels welcome, conflicts---
sometimes violent—are a part of Orange County's past, and need to be included in its history museum. The History Center is an ideal place to discuss these past conflicts in terms of their implications for the region today. Although the Center's Education Programs department has addressed these issues in several programs, they are not offered on a daily basis and, therefore, are not available to everyday History Center visitors.

In particular, the History Center's exhibit on Central Florida's African-American community needs significant remediation, an issue that is being addressed as this thesis is nearing completion. In fall 2002, the History Center will open a new permanent exhibit entitled How Distant Seems Our Starting Place: The Triumphs and Tragedies of the African-American Community of Central Florida. The exhibit will represent a significant improvement in the Center's current exhibit on Central Florida's black community. To accomplish this revision, the History Center is working with a committee of members of Orange County's black community to create an exhibit framework and topics that the committee identifies as important. The new exhibit will explore the development of local black communities, as well as the social and political climate for African Americans in the region. It will also discuss issues such as the Ocoee Riot of 1920, segregation, and the Civil Rights movement. While some of the topics the committee has chosen are potentially divisive, museums
must tell complete stories of the past, and that means including the stories that are painful as well as those that cast the region in a flattering light.4

Another way in which the Center can make further progress in its endeavors is by increasing the diversity of the Board of Directors of the Historical Society of Central Florida, Inc., its governing body. Although the membership of the Board changed in the 1980s, and represents a better cross-section of Central Florida business and civic leaders, it still remains primarily white and male. To more accurately represent the Central Florida community, the Board must recruit individuals who can represent more fully the changing face of Greater Orlando.

While the composition of the Board does not yet reflect the diverse population of the region, the staff of the Center has sought to make certain that the programming it offers is more relevant to the needs of all citizens of Orange County. It has done so by hosting programs that address both difficult as well as other less controversial topics in Central Florida's past. Most significant, the Center has held two different programs on the Ocoee Riot of 1920, one of the most violent episodes in Orange County’s history. In addition, it has presented a lecture series on the Civil War in Florida, an interactive group discussion on the effects of the “Great Freeze” of 1894-95, and a speaker researching Peliliklaha, the Black Seminole village of Negro
Abraham. All of these programs have been offered as a way for Central Floridians to connect with their heritage. In that way, all of its citizens can gain a sense of their contribution to the region’s development. At the same time, such programs have presented opportunities for all groups to come together for dialogue and reflection on difficult topics. The History Center will expand such opportunities in the future.

Providing educational programming for children represents another important aspect of the Center’s function. These programs include both guided tours of the History Center (focused on benchmarks established by the State of Florida for the teaching of social studies and other disciplines), and a series of classes the Center delivers at local schools. This programming also includes dramatic performances as part of its History Theatre program with professional actors portraying historic Central Florida characters in the first person. Because visitors, particularly children, need to see their own faces in the history they learn, staff have developed scripts for characters who are African American, Native American, and Hispanic in origin, and, of course, both male and female.5

Another key element of the History Center’s community focus is the development of community partnerships. With these partnerships, both formal and informal, the History Center has attempted to reach out to serve
many different, and often underserved, segments of the Central Florida community. In “History on the Go,” a partnership with Orange County’s group foster care facility Great Oaks Village (GOV), staff took fifteen children from GOV on field trips to historic sites and museums throughout Florida. Through a grant-funded project with Howard Middle School, one of Orange County’s most racially mixed schools, the History Center has worked with faculty and students to create a community heritage curriculum and to develop a student-run museum in the school’s media center. The Center has also worked with the local chapter of the National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ) and the Hindu University to host a community dialogue after the September 11 attack and has served as the site for several of NCCJ’s “Build an Inclusive Community” diversity workshops. At the same time the Center is strengthening its relationship with the History Department at the University of Central Florida (UCF). This partnership includes providing internship opportunities for UCF history students and a teacher training program coordinated in conjunction with Orange County Public Schools.

In 2002, the History Center formed one of its most recent formal partnerships with the Healthy Community Initiative of Greater Orlando, the organization that commissioned the Legacy 2000 study. Entitled We Are Central Florida: Our Heritage, Our Sustainability, and Our Diversity, this program
will involve youth from five Orange County high schools as they examine the region’s heritage through research, collections, and educational programming. We Are Central Florida is unique in that it involves local organizations already involved in community-strengthening activities (the History Center, HCI, and NCCJ) in an initiative that works to foster greater community involvement among area youth. It is an ambitious attempt by the History Center to forge partnerships to build community in Central Florida.

Through these efforts, the History Center reaches out to serve local residents who might otherwise not have used its services. It also attempts to solidify its relationship to its citizenry by working directly with other organizations in Central Florida. Through more formal partnerships, such as We Are Central Florida, the institution uses its role as a community center to bring forth issues that will encourage dialogue in building a better sense of community in Central Florida. Although the History Center has been successful in its work with other local organizations, it must sustain these partnerships as a major focus of its initiatives. This is important because community service must remain its primary mission, or the institution will cease to be relevant to its constituency.

A third element in the History Center’s community-focused approach is through its collections and exhibitions. Since August 1999, its Collections
Department has focused on collecting only artifacts and photos that directly relate to the history of Central Florida. As it continues to build a better artifact and archival collection, the Center needs to recognize the dearth of items in its collections relating to the black community of Central Florida since the institution did not historically collect artifacts and archival material relating to local black history. Although some work in this area is currently being accomplished with the revised African-American exhibit, the institution needs to continue to redress this oversight as the history of this community is too important to the story of Central Florida to be underrepresented in its artifact and archival collections. In addition to this task, the institution must also begin to collect artifacts from some of Central Florida’s newest minority communities, most notably the Hispanic and Asian communities. In sum, the Center must continue to endeavor to be a place where the heritage of all segments of the population is presented and preserved.

The Center is already addressing some of these issues through its temporary exhibitions. Since opening in September 2000, its Exhibits department has worked with other museums, community organizations, and community committees to create exhibits, both small and large, that are historically accurate and appeal to different segments of the region’s population. These include three major temporary or traveling exhibitions:
Pirates! (created by the Mel Fisher Museum), Blast Off: From Sci-Fi to Space Flight (created by the History Center to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of Alan Sheppard’s flight on Mercury 7), and Follow that Dream: Florida’s Rock and Roll Legends (created by the Museum of Florida History in Tallahassee). In July 2002, History Center staff will design and install its fourth major exhibition, The Highwaymen, an exhibit of paintings by the Highwaymen, a group of African-American landscape painters centered around Fort Pierce, Florida.

In addition to these large-scale exhibits, the Center has also hosted several smaller exhibitions. These exhibit topics include Central Florida’s Hispanic Community, Vanishing Communities (primarily Central Florida citrus and African-American communities that are no longer in existence), an exhibit of Girl Scout memorabilia, as well as the Florida landscape paintings of local artist Ann Barnes. Each of these exhibits, both large and small, is designed to appeal to different segments of the Central Florida community and to draw these people to the History Center.

While the institution embraces its role as a community-service institution, the true impact of its actions cannot yet be thoroughly assessed. First, the Orange County Regional History Center is still too new as a major part of the Central Florida community to evaluate its significance completely. Also, it will remain difficult to measure the building of a better sense of
community in Central Florida and the Center still needs to determine what measurements will constitute the attainment of this goal. And although the History Center has a role in bringing the Central Florida community together, it cannot, by itself, stop the flood of in-migration and out-migration in the region. Additionally, until Central Florida can lessen its dependence on the low-wage service economy, many of its residents will continue to be more concerned with economic survival than with the good of the community as a whole.

Despite these factors, in some ways the institution has already been successful in its attempts. Since opening on September 29, 2000, over 100,000 people have been to the History Center. This figure includes visitors who visited on their own or as part of community organizations or tour groups, attended educational programs or special events, or have rented parts of the History Center for community events, fund-raisers, and private parties. It has also established several successful partnerships with community agencies throughout Central Florida, allowing the institution to serve a wider segment of the population.¹¹

Portions of the Central Florida community, moreover, have already embraced the History Center as a community resource. Many of its visitors and partners now see the institution's value to the community, and in surveys
and focus groups, give it high marks. One visitor commented that the history presented by the History Center helps develop “a sense of responsibility and caring for the community.” Another remarked that a sense of the community’s past is very important because “we lack a sense of place and identity” because of the region’s rapid growth, and “we need an institution [like the History Center] to bring that into focus.” Still others have commented that the Center is a place that all Central Florida newcomers should visit to gain a sense of their new community. To these people, the History Center fulfills its mission as a place to build a stronger sense of community in Central Florida, and gives hope that the Center can help the region’s residents to use the window of the past, to connect people in the present, and to build a better community for the future.
Chapter 2


4 Ibid., 13. Harold Skramstad is the retired President of the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village.


6 Weil, Introduction to Museums for the New Millennium, 14. Kurin is director of the Smithsonian’s Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies.


8 Paul Greenhalgh, “Education, Entertainment and Politics: Lessons From the Great International Exhibitions,” in The New Museology, Peter Vergo,
ed. (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 1991), 74. Although Greenhalgh’s statement is in reference to museums in the United Kingdom, this holds true for museums in America as well.


10 Edward P. Alexander, Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums (Nashville, TN: American Association of State and Local History, 1979), 6-7.


12 Alexander, Museums in Motion, 9-10, 23, 42-43.

13 Ibid., 42-43.

14 Ibid., 11.


16 Ibid., 5.

17 Ibid., 6.


21 Ibid., 6-8.

22 In other words, objects should be displayed without any interpretation.

23 Ibid., 7-8.


25 Conn, 6-10.

26 Ibid., 15.


28 Ibid., 8

29 Ibid., 7.

30 Ibid., 8-9.

31 Ibid., 8-9.

32 Ibid., 20, 29-36; Alexander, *Museums in Motion*, 221.


36 Ibid., 57.
37 Ibid., 19-20.

38 Ibid., 22.

39 Ibid., 23.

40 Ibid., 23.

41 Ibid., 24.


43 AAM, Museums for a New Century, 24.


45 Bonnie Pitman, Preface to AAM, Excellence and Equity, 4-5.

46 Sara Van Arsdel, interview by author, tape recording, Orlando, FL, 11 November 2000, Orange County Regional History Center Archives, Orlando, FL (hereafter referred to as OCRHC Archives) and author’s personal collection. Sara Van Arsdel, private e-mail to author, 7 July 2002, author’s personal collection.

47 This is Theodore Low’s “social instrument” idea.

48 AAM, Excellence and Equity, 6.

49 Ibid., 6.

50 Ibid., 6.

51 AAM, Excellence and Equity, 6.

52 Ibid., 7.

53 Pitman, Preface to Excellence in Equity, 5.
Chapter 3

1 David Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers: Southern City and Region, 1607-1980* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 90-91, 152-153, 192-195; David Goldfield, *Race, Region, and Cities: Interpreting the Urban South* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 44. Although Orlando is the urban hub of Orange County, any use of the term urbanization and city in this chapter connotes the growth of the region of Central Florida and not solely the City of Orlando.


5 Louis W. Ziegler and Herbert S. Wolfe, *Citrus Growing in Florida*, rev. ed., (Gainesville, FL: The University Presses of Florida, 1979), 4-5. Jim Robison and Mark Andrews, *Flashbacks: The Story of Central Florida's Past* (Orlando, FL: Orange County Historical Society and The Orlando Sentinel, 1995), 121, 139. Eventually, the Seminoles proved adept at herding these stray cattle, and in the late 1700s were raising more cattle than anyone else in Florida.


7 Landers, 66-67.

Prior to Spain regaining control of the colony, the owners of British plantations had relocated their slaves to the more stable environments of Savannah, Georgia and the Bahamas. See Larry Eugene Rivers, Slavery in Florida: Territorial Days to Emancipation (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2000), 6.

Ibid., 4.


The Seminoles also contain members of Choctaw and Oconee descent as well as people of the Apalachee, Yamassee, Yuchi, Tequesta, and Apalachicola tribes, Florida’s original inhabitants. For a more in-depth look at the origins of the Seminole tribe see Mahon, 1-17. See also Weisman, 5-7.


Mahon, 72-73; Robison, 17-18.

For more information on the Third Seminole War, fought mostly in southern Florida, see Weisman, 58-59 or Mahon, 321.

Robison, 22.
Although the exact location of the fort has not been determined, it is believed to be on the grounds of a former U.S. Navy sonar lab in the vicinity of Gatlin and Summerlin Avenues in Orlando.


Shofner, 29; Orange County Regional History Center Exhibit Essays (hereafter referred to as OCRHC Exhibit Essays), “Pioneer Life,” OCRHC Archives and author’s personal collection, 4.

Bacon, 9.

Ibid., 14; Robison, 49.

Robison, 50.


Ibid., 194-202.


Robison., 139.

For more information on Florida’s role in the Civil War see Anthony Joseph Iacono, “So Far Away, So Close to Home: Florida and the Civil War Era” (Ph.D. diss., Mississippi State University, 2000).

Ibid., 8; Canter Brown, Jr., “The Civil War, 1861-1865,” in Gannon, The New History of Florida, 243. This became especially important to the Confederate war effort after the fall of Vicksburg July 4, 1863 since Texas
could no longer supply beef to the Confederate armies. For more information on the Cow Cavalry, see Akerman, 84-99.


36 Robison, 144.

37 Ibid., 121.

38 At that time, Seminole County was a part of Orange County.

39 Robison., 122. In fact, Florida Citrus Mutual credits Sanford and Swedish botanist Carl Leonard Vihlen with the development of the Valencia strain of orange, the basis of the orange juice concentrate business in Central Florida.


41 Swanson, 131.

42 Robison, 125.

43 Swanson, 132.


46 Ibid.; Swanson, 132, 134, 136. This concept inspired other local growers to establish cooperatives in Winter Garden, Apopka, and Plymouth and also led to the formation of the Orlando Citrus Growers Association.
47 Robison, 125; OCRHC Exhibit Essays, “The Citrus Industry,” OCRHC Archives and author’s personal collection, 4-5. A majority of Florida oranges are grown for juicing.

48 Robison, 125; Swanson 155.

49 Florida Crop and Livestock Reporting Service 1948-1973 found in Swanson, 36.


51 Shofner, 39; OCRHC Exhibit Essays, “Transportation,” OCRHC Archives and author’s personal collection, 2-3.

52 Shofner, 40-41.


54 OCRHC Exhibit Essays, “Tourism,” OCRHC Archives and author’s personal collection, 2-3, 6-7.


56 Ibid., 36-48.

57 Orange County made these concessions to Disney based on his plans for his Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow (EPCOT), a model residential community for 20,000 people. Yet the EPCOT theme park which opened in 1982 bore no resemblance to the community Disney proposed to Orange County leaders in 1963. See Foglesong 55-70 and 100-107.


61 Ibid., 4-5; The use of the term “prosperous” could be argued. While many tourism-related businesses thrived in the economic growth of the 1990s, many Central Floridians employed in these industries struggle to make a living wage.

62 Ibid., 4-5.

63 Ibid., 5-8.

64 Ibid., 33.

65 Ibid., 4-8, 11, 33, 42.

66 In the census years between 1840 and 1970, “non-white” refers mainly to African Americans. Since 1970, the Orange County population has seen a significant increase in its Hispanic and Asian populations. Any reference to Orange County’s minority population after 1970 refers to primarily African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians.


70 Ibid.

114
Orlando did not yet zone residential areas according to race in the 1880s when James Magruder established Orlando's African-American community of Jonestown just west of what is currently Greenwood Cemetery near downtown Orlando. Jonestown was Orlando's only African-American community east of Division Street in downtown Orlando.

Bacon, 29.


Hannibal Square is now referred to as West Winter Park and is currently facing challenges with redevelopment as an extension of the tony Park Avenue shopping district in Winter Park. See Mary Daniels and Fairolyn Livingston’s comments on the “African-American Community Forum” program of the Orange County Regional History Center recorded on videotape 28 February 2001, OCRHC Archives and author’s personal collection.


Robison, 58-59.

A copy of this letter can be found in the OCRHC Archives.

The exact details of the Ocoee riot are not known. As of today, a definitive study has yet to be written on the riot. In 1969, Lester Dabbs, Jr. wrote a master’s thesis on the riot entitled “A Report of the Circumstances and Events of the Race Riot on November 2, 1920 in Ocoee, FL” (Master’s thesis, Stetson University, 1969). A copy resides in the OCRHC Archives. In addition, there are several groups currently studying the riot including the West Orange Reconciliation Task Force and Democracy Forum. Democracy forum also commissioned a play about the riot which has been performed in several venues in Central Florida.


Shofner, 135.


Chapter Four

1 In 2000, the Orange County Historical Society changed its name to the Historical Society of Central Florida, Inc.

2 The site is currently Heritage Square, the park at the south of the History Center property.

3 The Orange County Regional History Center is a public-private partnership between Orange County government and the Historical Society of Central Florida, Inc. Throughout its history, the Regional History Center has been known by the following names: the Orange County Museum, the Orange County Historical Museum, and the Orange County Regional History Center. It is important to note that the History Center staff and Historical Society board of directors specifically rejected the name “museum” because a museum is often seen as boring. In the interest of space, all use of the terms “museum,” “Historical Museum,” “center,” and “History Center” refer to the organization now open as the Orange County Regional History Center.
In 1937-1938, the Collectors and the Questors, two other local antiques organizations were formed under the Antiquarian umbrella. In the interest of space, all three organizations will be called the Antiquarian Society.


Based on the culture of Southern society, it can be assumed that this membership was limited to white women.

“History of the Antiquarian Society of Orlando, Florida.”

Unfortunately Mrs. Harold died before the museum was opened.

“Make Old Court House Into Museum is Plea Of Orlando Women,” n.p. (believed to be Orlando Morning Sentinel), 5 August, 1941, found in Antiquarian Society Scrapbook 33a, OCRHC Archives.

“History of the Antiquarian Society of Orlando, Florida.”

“Pioneer Kitchen To Be Opened on April 15,” n.p., n.d., found in Antiquarian Society Scrapbook 33a, OCRHC Archives.

“Museum to Have Formal Opening This Afternoon,” n.p., 22 May 1942, found in Antiquarian Society Scrapbook 33a, OCRHC Archives.

“Orange County Museum Has Many Early Days Exhibits,” n.p., 28 May 1942, found in Antiquarian Society Scrapbook 33a, OCRHC Archives.

Antiquarian Society Scrapbook 33a, OCRHC Archives.
17 “Tea Table Chatter,” n.p., n.d., found in Antiquarian Society Scrapbook 33a, OCRHC Archives.

18 “County Museum Celebrates First Year of Operation,” n.p., 19 March 1943, found in Antiquarian Society Scrapbook 33a, OCRHC Archives.


20 Ibid.

21 Antiquarian Society Scrapbook 33a, OCRHC Archives.

22 “Orlando’s Little Known Museum,” The New Orlando Pictorial Post, p. 7, 19 May, 1950, found in Antiquarian Society Scrapbook 33a, OCRHC Archives.

23 E. H. Gore, “Interest Grows In Orlando Museum,” Letter to the Editor, The Orlando Sentinel, 6 December 1954, found in Antiquarian Society Scrapbook 33a, OCRHC Archives.

24 Frank Murphy, “Old County Courthouse Condemned,” n.p., n.d., found in Antiquarian Society Scrapbook 33a, OCRHC Archives. The 1892 Courthouse was demolished shortly after it was condemned.

25 State of Florida Highway 50 now follows the general direction of the Cheney Highway.

26 Great Oaks Village is a key partner in the History Center’s current community initiatives.


29 "D. A. Cheney Historical Chairman," Orlando Sentinel, 3 October, 1957, p. 5-A, found in Antiquarian Society Scrapbook 33a, OCRHC Archives.


31 Ibid., 1.

32 Ibid., 1.

33 This artifact is presently in the lobby of the Orange County Regional History Center.

34 Donald A. Cheney, “Historical Commission Launches Program,” OCHQ 1 (September 1959): 1. The annex was built on the same site as the 1892 Courthouse and attached at the south end of the 1927 Courthouse.


37 The OCHQ was never an historical journal but rather a self-published document distributed to members via mail. In the 1980s, the Historical Society began to have a the OCHQ professionally printed.


The Historical Society, formally incorporated on June 30, 1971 as a non-profit 501 (c)(3) corporation.


Ibid., 2.

Ibid., 2.


Donald A. Cheney, untitled article, *OCHQ* 16 (June 1974): 1. The italicized emphasis is mine. The Historical Museum which opened in Loch Haven Park never fully realized Cheney’s vision and never told a complete story of Central Florida’s history.

Ibid., 1.


Ibid., 1.

Ibid., 1.

Orange County Historical Commission Minute Book 1, OCRHC Archives, 120.


The Historical Museum would not hire a director with museum experience until 1986 with the hiring of Sara Van Arsdel.


For information the roots and founding of American history museums see Mike Wallace, Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 4-32.


74 Ibid.

75 Sara Van Arsdel to author, private e-mail 29 November 2001, author’s personal collection.

76 John Blexrud, interview by author, tape recording, Orlando, FL, 9 November 2001 OCRHC Archives and author’s personal collection.

77 Ibid.

78 Blexrud interview 9 November 2001; Andy Serros, interview by author, tape recording, Orlando, FL, 15 November 2001 OCRHC Archives and author’s personal collection.


80 Blexrud interview, 9 November 2001.

81 Ibid.


86 Linda Chapin, interview by author, tape recording, Orlando, FL, 29 November 2001, author’s personal collection.

87 The task force specifically studied the use of the building as a facility for each of the museums in Loch Haven Park, the Orlando Science Center, the Orlando Museum of Art, and the Orange County Historical Museum.

88 Courthouse Museum Task Force, Orange County Courthouse Reuse Study, Phase I Final Report, October 1990, located in 1927 Orange County Courthouse Conversion Project to a Regional History Center Cultural Facilities Application, OCRHC Archives.


90 The annex, the original home of Cheney’s Historical Museum, would need to be razed since their design conflicted with the neoclassic architecture of the original Courthouse.


92 Serros interview, 15 November 2001. After seeing the outpouring of support for the project from Orange County, the City of Orlando and the Downtown Development Board, Serros changed his view and is a supporter of the new History Center.

93 Blexrud interview, 9 November 2001; Randy Rush, interview by author, tape recording, Winter Park, FL, 16 November 2001 OCRHC Archives and author’s personal collection.

94 Blexrud interview, 9 November 2001; John Daughtridge, interview by author, tape recording, Orlando, FL, 13 November 2001 OCRHC Archives and author’s personal collection. Each board member also noted that the institution would need to rename itself when it opened at the 1927 Courthouse. All agreed that the term “History Center” was much more active.
and engaging than “Historical Museum.” In addition, the word “Regional” was added to the name to expand the audience base served by the new facility.

95 *Excellence in Equity*, 7.

96 Rush interview 16 November 2001. See also Blexrud, Daughtridge, and Serros interviews.

97 Total funding breakdown is as follows: Orange County Government-$21.7 million, the Orange County Historical Society-$4 million, the Downtown Development Board and City of Orlando-$6.5 million, the State of Florida-$3 million in grants, and $500,000 from various grant sources for feasibility studies and preliminary design work.

98 Van Arsdel interview 11 November 2000;

99 Van Arsdel interview 11 November 2000. Every Board member interviewed credits Van Arsdel with developing the community building focus and theme for the new History Center.

100 Chapin interview 29 November 2001.

101 Ibid.

102 Van Arsdel interview 11 November 2000; Michael Perkins, interview by author, tape recording, Orlando, FL 14 November 2000, OCRHC Archives and author’s personal collection.


104 Ibid.

105 Ibid. The original document sent from Hilferty used the term “service-oriented” in place of “visitor-centered.” Staff members objected to the use of the term “service-oriented,” calling it vague and subjective. For this reason, History Center staff adopted the term visitor-centered for use in their goals and objectives. The term “economically successful” was added in the wake of the financial problems of the Orlando Science Center. The History
Center and Historical Society plan to achieve this through its admissions, educational programs, sponsorships, and receiving grants.


107 Van Arsdel interview 11 November 2000.

108 Perkins interview 14 November 2000. Currently the History Center is working with members of the Central Florida African-American community to revise the Communities gallery to open a large-scale exhibit on local African-American history called How Distant Seems Our Starting Place: The Triumphs and Tragedies of the African-American Community of Central Florida.


Chapter Five

1 Of the two-thirds Orange County funds, over $800,000 is money spent solely to operate the Courthouse building. Because the BCC was determined to preserve the Courthouse, this money would have been spent by Orange County Government with or without the History Center’s relocation.


3 “How Distant Seems Our Starting Place” is a line from the James Weldon Johnson poem Fifty Years 1863-1913: On the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Signing of the Emancipation Proclamation.

4 The committee chose to divide the exhibit into historical time periods, each corresponding to national events in African-American history: pre-1840-
1865, 1865-1877, 1877-1896, 1896-1954, 1954-present. One of the topics
the committee chose to include was “Fear,” since many of the committee
members grew up in Orlando during segregation. For this reason, incidents
such as the Ocoee Riot, Willis McCall and the Groveland case, and Harry T.
Moore’s assassination, will be discussed in the exhibit.

5 This concept of living history interpretation is similar to that of the
historic reenacting community and the visitor experience at Colonial
Williamsburg. The Center’s History Theatre program was a finalist in the
United Arts of Central Florida’s Arts Educator of the Year awards in 2001.

6 This partnership is unique in that Historical Museum founder Donald
A. Cheney also founded Great Oaks Village. The Healthy Community
Initiative of Greater Orlando, Inc. funded this program through its Youth
Philanthropy Program,

7 The ethnic breakdown of Howard Middle School is 48 percent
African-American, 34 percent white, 12 percent Hispanic, and 4 percent Asian.
Dr. Phillips, Inc., the foundation established by the family of citrus magnate
Dr. Phillips, funded the Howard Middle School museum program. The
museum opened May 10, 2002. The program was selected for a 2002
National Association of Counties Achievement Award.

8 NCCJ staff has served as moderators for the Ocoee Riot panel
discussion and will also moderate a community dialogue presented by Orange
County Chairman Richard Crotty’s Central Florida Youth Advisors regarding
area youth reactions to September 11.

9 The Center requested funding for this program through the Institute
for Museum and Library Services’ National Leadership Grants for Museums.
The History Center will facilitate the community heritage program, HCI will
oversee the community “health” study, and NCCJ will facilitate the diversity
element.

10 Bob Beatty, We Are Central Florida: Our Heritage, Our Diversity, and
Our Sustainability, grant submitted to the Institute for Museum and Library
Services (IMLS) on 1 March 2002. IMLS will announce grant awards in July
2002.
The number also includes over 30,000 school children who have visited on field trips.

Visitor comments, author’s personal collection.

Ibid.
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