

2025-2026

EXPLORE



A publication of the **Palatka Daily News**



Putnam's history on full display in Explore

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History is quite possibly our wisest, most consistent guide if we choose to accept the help. Through history, we learn from our and other people's missteps, figure out how to improve upon the things we know could be better and set ourselves up for better futures.

Existential and philosophical pondering aside, history is just fun – and interesting. That is why for the second year in a row, the Palatka Daily News has filled the pages of our Explore special section with stories from and about the past. The stories in the 2025 Explore were originally written in the mid-1980s. We added information to some of those stories, especially the ones about the Palatka Daily News, but everything in this magazine provides information about Putnam County and the municipalities within.

Inside, you will read about how a woman's attempt to beautify her property with a pretty, yet invasive, flower species led to a St. Johns River infestation the Army Corps of Engineers is still battling. You'll learn how the shape of a body of water in the

south end of Putnam County inspired people to name the community in which it's located Crescent City. Readers will also learn about us!

In the year since the 2024 edition of Explore was published, the newspaper was purchased by Blue Crab Publishing, which is owned by a Palatka native. We've moved our printing from our 1825 St. Johns Ave. building to a printer in Callahan. We've also moved ourselves out of that building and into another St. Johns Avenue building, but this one is in downtown Palatka.

There is so much in this edition that can give us a better appreciation of the past, a clearer perception of our present and more insight into the future. I guarantee everyone – even people like me who have lived here for decades – who reads this year's Explore will learn something new about Putnam County.

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PALATKA DAILY NEWS

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Newspapers come and go, but the Palatka Daily News perseveres

In Putnam County through the years, there have been at least 14 papers and a number of political broadsheets. Having lasted more than 100 years, it's no wonder the Palatka Daily News is celebrating the fact.

Trying to trace back the history of the Palatka Daily News and decide which papers it is descended from has been, at times, difficult, and the trail has been elusive. In a business that involves reporting the news, the lack of record-keeping by the papers has been frustrating.

Maybe the failure to keep more detailed records has something to do with the sheer weight of getting out a paper, whether weekly or daily. Additionally, publishers and printers through the years

have faced other unexpected problems – fires and bankruptcies, to name two. And it is important to remember starting a paper has not always been the involved and costly process it now is.

However, problems with pinning down exact dates have complicated compiling a record of the Daily News. In the past, we have wavered between worrying the paper was either less than 100 years old or more than 100 years old – there's nothing worse than missing your own birthday celebration.

In the course of putting together this record of the Daily News' history, we have dug up a number of details about the paper. Research has led us to believe the Daily News probably began as a daily – although a two-page daily – and only later became a weekly before finally returning to daily status again.

The first newspaper of record in Putnam was the Whig Banner, founded by George M. Grouard Jr. around 1843. The Whig Party was then the leading party in Florida although it eventually died out. Grouard chose Palatka because of its importance as a "depot of transportation." In those days, the population of the county was 687 of which 204 were slaves.

Other newspapers filled in the void left after the Whig Banner folded.

George W. Pratt, a circuit-riding Methodist minister-journalist, founded the Eastern Herald in 1869. That became the Times-Herald, which eventually merged with the Daily News under the ownership of the John H. Perry newspaper group.

Pratt brought his own printing press with him and for 23 years put out his paper. Two of his sons, Joseph and George, took up their father's trade and went on to publish the Leesburg Commercial, which was a sister paper to the Daily News, and the Sumter County Democrat.

In 1881, the Putnam County Journal made its appearance. The editor of the paper was S.B. Harrington, and the cost was \$2 per year in advance.

In 1883, Alex Wattles of Eufala, Alabama, came to Palatka and a few years later founded the Palatka Advertiser, believed to be the forerunner to the Palatka Daily News. His son, W. Howard Wattles, served as the city editor, and another son, Frank, worked in the printing department.

Some of the confusion about the Daily News' background comes from the founding in 1884 of a paper known as the Palatka Daily News. Although called the Palatka Daily News, there have been some questions raised as to whether it is today's Daily News. Benjamin Harrison was the publisher. For \$1 a year, subscribers got not only the daily news but the Palatka



Russell and Vickers Publishing Co. - PDN Archives

Continued on page 6



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Palatka Daily News was located on South Second Street. - PDN Archives

News continued from page 4

Weekly News.

In 1884, with three papers publishing, river trade brisk and more tourists coming to the Gem City every year, Putnam County's future looked bright. That was before a devastating fire hit the city Nov. 7, 1884, and destroyed much of downtown. Even before the smoke cleared, Palatka residents were working to rebuild.

In 1885, a new paper, The Southern Sun, founded by Thomas J. Appleyard, began publishing. After four years of publication, Appleyard sold the Southern Sun to the Palatka Herald, formerly the Eastern Herald.

In 1891, H.A.B. McKenzie, a newspaperman from Augusta, Georgia, and Jesse Burtz founded the Palatka Weekly Times. The timing couldn't have been better because Palatka was already beginning to fade as a tourist center after residents failed to lure Henry Flagler here. Instead, he built the Ponce de Leon Hotel in St. Augustine and routed the East Coast Railway southward, thus drawing tourists to the southern portion of the state.

Before long, McKenzie, who later served as a state representative, bought Burtz's share and that of another shareholder. After his death in 1926, his son, Henry, took over the Times, which was considered the official organ of the Farmers Alliance in Putnam County.

McKenzie and the Pratt sons eventually consolidated their papers to form the Times-Herald. In Crescent City, Sen. William Russell was the owner and editor of the Crescent City News.

A series of freezes hurt the citrus industry and thus reduced the number of people heading to Putnam to make a living growing the golden fruit.

On Jan. 2, 1902, Wattles sold the Advertiser to William Russell of Crescent City and M.M. Vickers, a printer from Maryland. The new publication became the Palatka News and Advertiser.

The Times-Herald and the Palatka News and Advertiser were the strongest and most influential voices in Palatka and Putnam County for the next 55 years.

Others kept trying to start rival newspapers – at least three were started and failed.

On Oct. 11, 1919, the Palatka Daily News (formerly the News and Advertiser) went daily. Ignoring its earlier lineage and folio numbers, the News on that day began as Volume 1, No. 1. Why the sudden change is unexplained.

The Daily News was published every afternoon at an aged flatbed press on South Second Street. Newsboys gathered in front of the pressroom as they had been doing since daily publication began and

waited for the paper. It was a tradition that would continue until the paper moved to a new home at 1825 St. Johns Ave. on April 17, 1967.

During the boom days of 1926, a special Progress Edition was put out with the help of R.B. Mahaffey and H.D. Harkreader. At 88 pages, it was the largest edition ever printed by the News.

Mahaffey and Harkreader wanted to stay with the paper and a stock company, the Southern Publishing Co., was formed. Vickers was the vice president, Calvert L. Estill was the secretary and editor, and Gladys Pursley Tuten was the bookkeeper, office manager and stockholder. Other stockholders included Harkreader, W.P. Deneen, J.V. Walton, A.B. Codrington and Edward Richards.

The president of the company was C.C. Codrington, owner and publisher of the DeLand News. One day, he was in Palatka, ran into Walton and went home owning the majority of stock in the new publishing company.

About a year after the company was formed, the Florida boom bubble burst and banks began closing and businesses began failing. That meant less money for advertising and hard times for papers. Many papers of the day had long supplemented their operations by job printing. Even those sources began drying up.

Codrington pulled out of the paper and Vickers became president. A. Bev Baker, who had come to the News as a reporter and associate editor in 1926, became the editor and general manager in 1938, one year after the Daily News moved from 115 S. Second St. to a three-story building at 109 S. Second St.

Continued on page 8



In 1967, the Palatka Daily News moved to 1825 St. Johns Ave. - PDN Archives



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Palatka Daily News building on 1825 St. Johns Ave. in 2019. - PDN Archives

The old flatbed press and hot metal machines continued to turn out the paper. One page set in lead type would weigh 150 pounds, far different from the lightweight computer set page now in use.

When World War II came, putting out a paper became more difficult as newsprint and ink were in short supply. Editors of both newspapers had to limit the size of their papers to conserve paper and ink. Advertising improved but space was limited.

Vickers died in 1943 and his share of stock went to his daughter, Ola Dear Kane. When Baker died in the early 1950s, his wife Jean took over management of the paper.

After the war, the county's economy suffered because the cypress industry was nearly gone and there were fewer jobs to be had. In time the Hudson Pulp and Paper Co. was persuaded to build a mill in Palatka and that boosted the economy.

In the early 1950s, Jack Harper founded the Putnam County Sun, a small tabloid printed outside of Palatka. In 1960 he sold the paper to T.G. Kent, who soon closed it. A group of businessmen then organized the Putnam County Journal, which continued for several years.

The Journal's owners, headed by Clyde Middleton Sr., allowed the paper to pass out of existence as an active publication in 1965.

In 1958, John H. Perry Newspapers purchased both the Times-Herald and the Palatka Daily News, and the two papers were merged.

In the summer of 1962, Bob and Lora Britt, former owners of the Delray Beach Journal, moved to Palatka to become the

publisher and editor of the Daily News.

Major technological changes were taking place in the newspaper industry. John Perry purchased the 1825 St. Johns Ave. building and built a modern plant of 10,000 square feet to house the new "cold type" equipment and a Goss offset press. The era of printing directly from type, whether handset or cast on a Linotype machine, was coming to an end.

In November 1970, the Palatka Daily News had a new owner, Cowles Communications. Thirteen months later, it was purchased by The New York Times Co., which would own the paper until 2000. Edward C. Walthall, who became the publisher with Cowles ownership, remained with the paper until early 1974.

He was replaced by J.M. "Jody" Delzell, the previous general manager, who was named publisher. Under Delzell, the paper came into the computer age in 1978 with the purchase of an online computer system for inputting stories

and typesetting. Delzell was tapped by the New York Times Group as the senior publisher of a number of other papers in the Times' growing family.

The Daily News in 1985 began an expansion program that has more than doubled the size of the building. Renovations to the various departments and the installation of a larger press and an additional computer system are among other changes.

After nearly 30 years of ownership, which included the newspaper evolving to pagination to put together its publications, The New York Times Co. sold the Daily News in 2000 to Community Newspapers Inc. out of Athens, Georgia. Under CNI's leadership, the Daily News began publishing online while maintaining its print edition.

The paper was sold again in 2024, this time to Blue Crab Publishing, which is owned by Palatka native Charlie Douglas. Shortly thereafter, the paper ceased printing its three publications a week at its on-site plant, opting instead to have the paper printed in Callahan.

With the Daily News' press no longer in commission, it was dismantled and removed from the 1825 St. Johns Ave. building, where it had been installed 38 years prior. Rather than having its employees remain in a building that went largely unused, the Daily News returned to its roots in downtown Palatka. In April 2025, the paper began operating out of 220 St. Johns Ave., Suite 2.

With its location central to numerous government headquarters, a handful of food and drink establishments, and the famed Palatka riverfront, the Daily News is sure to thrive in the years to come.



New location at 220 St. Johns Ave., Suite 2. -Brandon D. Oliver/Palatka Daily News



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How putting together a paper was done



Goss printing press that printed the Palatka Daily News in December 1981.

- PDN Archives

For years, putting a newspaper together was a tedious and time-consuming job.

When the Palatka Daily News began publication, the newspaper was put together literally letter by letter. A member of the composing staff would sit in front of cases of type and pick out each letter and assemble them into a line in a hand-held device called a “stick.” When a line of type was completed, it was wedged tightly in the stick and carefully put in place to form part of a full page of type.

These small pieces of type could easily fall out, even when the entire page was locked into an iron frame and put on the press. If pieces dropped out, workers called it “making a pie” because all the “ingredients” had to be put back

together again.

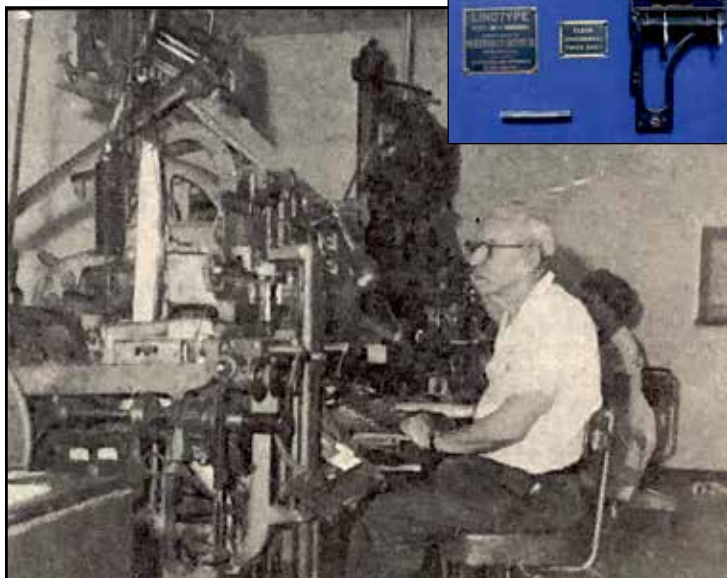
Once the newspaper was printed, all the pieces of type had to be put back into the correct cases designated for each letter. Former Daily News Publisher J. M. “Jody” Delzell remembers apprentice printers could easily get letters in the wrong box because printers put the letters in the page upside down and backward. The P’s and Q’s, especially in small letters, were quite similar and easy to get in the wrong box. “This gave birth to the expression, ‘Mind your P’s and Q’s,’” Delzell said.

The process of putting a page together was speeded up by the invention of the Mergenthaler Linotype machine in 1886. Instead of picking each letter out of a case, an operator sat at a Linotype machine and typed a line that would be cast in a complete line on one lead slug.

It could take an expert printer about a minute to hand set a line of type and another minute to put the type back in the cases for reuse. Linotype machines could set about 12 lines of type per minute. One of those expert linotype setters was E.J. Lewis, a Palatka native who retired from the Daily News in 1974. He worked at the Daily News during the time John H. Perry owned the company, before it was owned by The New York Times Company and later by both Community Newspapers Inc. and Blue Crab Publishing.

Lewis began in the newspaper business at the age of 17 and remembers that “Pressure on the (Linotype) keys actually was so sensitive that one could almost look at the key and a matrix (letter) would fall from the magazine in which the whole font was kept.”

Former pressman Leroy Wiggins worked at the Daily News when Linotype was used. He remembers there were three Linotype machines used in the 1950s and 1960s where operators sat and typed stories given to them by the editors. As they typed, metal letters dropped into lines and in turn into columns. These “lines” were then put in place in a frame the size of the newspaper page and if any corrections were needed, a whole line would have to



Operating the Linotype was L.A. “Cy” Wilhite. Inset: An actual piece of a Linotype that was gifted to publisher J. M. “Jody” Delzell.

- PDN Archives

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be changed. "That's the reason they called it 'line type' because they had to do everything by the line," Wiggins said.

To help keep the letters from falling out of place, a fiberboard matrix would later be made from the assembled pages. Wiggins would then pour hot metal into the pad and make a cast of the page. This was the method known as "hot type."

Working with hot type was a hard job, Wiggins recalled. "I would stay wet (from sweat) from the time I arrived at work until I left – the metal had to be kept at about 450 degrees to pour the casts," he said.

At first, these lead casts were flat and only one page at a time could be printed. The printing industry later developed a cylinder cast so that the solid lead cast could fit around a cylinder on the rotary press. Each of the metal page casts weighed about 50 pounds and was about one inch thick, Wiggins said.

How the paper is done now

The Palatka Daily News has been through many changes from 1967 to 1985 – so many in fact that the office building, the way the newspaper was produced and even the paper itself looked drastically different from the way they did earlier in the century.

By the mid-1980s, technology had advanced so dramatically that the newspaper could be put together in a matter of hours compared to an almost daylong process used as recently as 1967.

The many changes implemented by the Daily News since 1968 include going from "hot type" to "cold type," replacing typewriters with computer terminals, the invention of the laser photo machine from which photographs from around the world can be sent over telephone lines to anywhere in the world, and the advances of computers used in printing the newspaper.

In 1968, the employees of the Daily News were just getting settled into their new offices on St. Johns Avenue after moving from Second Street. In addition to getting used to new offices, the staff was also getting used to a new way of printing the newspaper. That new way was by offset printing.

With technological advances, the Daily News was able to abandon the "hot type" printing method. Since 1979, the Daily News staff has used computers and continues to add more computers in various departments as the newspaper and technology expand.

Until the 1990s, newspaper articles and advertisements originated in a computer terminal rather than from pieces of metal. A story was typed into a computer terminal, known as a front-end system. After an editor approves the story, it is

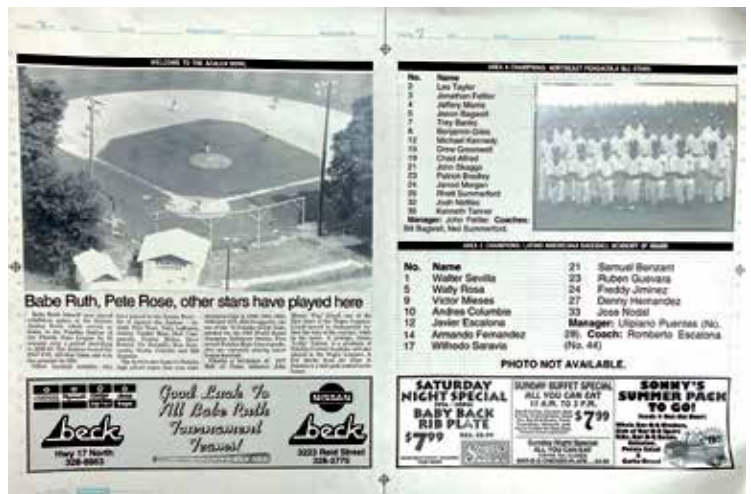
Delzell said cylinder casts were significant because they allowed the press to operate from a continuous web of rolled newsprint rather than being printed one sheet at a time and fed by hand.

Printing newspapers by hot type and the way Delzell, Wiggins and Lewis remembered were things of the past and seldom found in working newspapers today. Technology has moved so quickly in the past 40 years, that most of the old ways have been replaced by the dazzling complexities of computers.



The composing department pasted up ads and news pages, pulling artwork from the file drawers. Today, these same filing drawers are still used to organize the advertisements for the upcoming editions.

- PDN Archives



Example of a paste-up news page layout.

- PDN Archives

Continued on page 14



From local festivals to community events, there's always something exciting happening right in your backyard. Dive into the rich tapestry of Palatka's history, explore charming neighborhoods, and support local businesses that make our city thrive. Join us in celebrating the spirit of the place we proudly call home. Pick Palatka and watch us go!

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Negatives were shot with a camera, processed and then paced into a plate burning machine to burn the images to the metal plates that would then be mounted onto the press. In more recent years, a Computer-to-plate machine would burn digital files to the metal plates.

- PDN Archives

sent through the computer to a central processing unit where two computers “talk” to each other. The computers translated the story into computer language so the typesetting machine would know what to print. The typesetting machines could set about 325 lines of type per minute.

The phrase “cold type” originated because the story was printed by the computer typesetter onto a piece of paper rather than being cast in hot lead, as was used at the Daily News as late as the 1950s. That piece of paper was then pasted on a sheet the size of the newspaper page, a negative of the page made from a thin aluminum plate, which was then mounted on the press and printed the newspaper. The whole process takes about five hours, compared to the almost day-long process used just 20 years before the Daily News used “cold type.”

Cut to 2025, and the process seems more like a walk in the park. Daily News journalists can type their stories on their computers or phones at work, home or anywhere else with a solid internet connection. After the stories, advertisements and other content are approved, the paper’s paginators use InDesign, a layout program that eliminates the need for excessive outdated equipment, to flow the content on the pages.

The Palatka Daily News ceased printing on-site in 2024, instead having a Callahan-based company do the job for us.

The way the paper is produced was not the only change around the Daily News from the 1960s to the 1980s. The paper itself took on a new look and the offices from which the paper was produced changed several times.

Noticeable changes in the look of the newspaper included the ability to print spot color and color photographs, the headline typeface changing to a bolder and easier-to-read style, and the newspaper stories being printed in single columns instead of varying widths.

The most obvious change at the Daily News in those two decades to casual observers was the upgrading and expansion of the offices. The expansion of the facilities was completed in 1986 with an open house held in July. In addition to the building being bigger, it was designed in the most modern way at the time with room for future growth of the staff.

While the Daily News saw its share of growth, the rise of online journalism led to the decline of old-school printing presses. After it stopped printing at its Palatka location, the Daily News moved to a smaller, more manageable set of offices at 220 St. Johns Ave., Suite 2. Despite the smaller space, the Daily News is poised to be as efficient as ever, being closer to government

and downtown actions, which will make covering the news more exciting.



Today, newspaper pages are digitally designed on computers and sent directly to a plate burning processor.

- Palatka Daily News



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SCAN ME!

Shape of lake gave name to Crescent City



Aerial view of Crescent Lake, Crescent City.

- Courtesy of World Maps

Crescent City in the southernmost part of Putnam County owes its name to the shape of the lake bordering the town.

Mrs. Charles Griffin is credited with naming the town Crescent City because the shape of the lake reminded her of the crescent moon.

The name gained favor and was adopted.

But long before Mrs. Griffin visited, others had come to the area and settled. A Lord Dunn of England has been credited with discovering the lake and creek in the 1700s. Both were named in his honor and the creek is still known as Dunns Creek.

Other settlers came and landowner George Oliver bought 1,800 acres in the 1850s including what is now the heart of the city. He had a plantation known as the Oliver Plantation. More settlers came after the Civil War including some of the soldiers who had served in the area and sought the peace of the area.

In 1876 Major E.G. Dyke was hired by an early real estate firm to survey the town and the plat was recorded with the county on May 19, 1876.

In 1885, the Florida Legislature passed an act incorporating Crescent City.

An early history of the town was written by George Miller Sr., whose father had helped establish the Beach and Miller Steamer Line. In his history, he wrote of the early days of the citrus industry and noted "first indications of orange grove

culture was in 1867 when Mr. Grimsley planted orange trees across the lake from Crescent City." The resourcefulness of early growers in fighting the cold was noted.

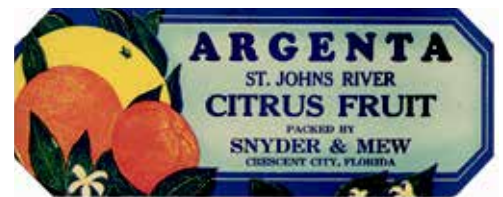
The first trips to Palatka to take produce and get mail and supplies were taken on small boats which had to be rowed. Those trips were made once a month and took three days. Later came schooners and finally steamboats. An effort in the early 1880s to gain a railroad right of way by the Jacksonville, Tampa and Key West Railroad was fought because of concerns over noise.

The railroad thus ran from Huntington to Seville via the Crescent City Junction, two miles west of town. In 1886 the first train came through. A canal was dug between Lake Stella and the lake at Crescent City Junction to improve transportation.

In the early days, logging and mill operations were set up in the heavily wooded area. Other businesses include a crate mill, a bucket and tub factory, turpentine stills and fishing.

Several hotels and boarding houses were built in the 1880s to accommodate the increasing number of visitors.

From the early days, education was important in the area and the first schoolhouse was built in 1868.



A citrus packing label.

- Courtesy of Florida Memory



Painting of the original railway station. - PDN Archives

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Above: Postcard of the new European style Kupperbush hotel. Bottom right: The Larkin house 1880s.

- Courtesy of Putnam Florida Historical Society

Glittering hotels catered to tourists

Imagine Palatka as the Disney World of the 1880s and 1890s.

True, there were no Space Mountains or Magic Castles but there was the then-exotic world of the Ocklawaha and semi-tropical Florida to explore. And then, as now, the warm rays of the sun were there to comfort winter-weary tourists.

To cater to the tourists there were huge luxury hotels offering modern conveniences and elaborate service.

Since the years following the Civil War, Putnam County had drawn more and more of the tourist trade and by the time of the 1884 fire in Palatka, there were a half-dozen hotels. The fire came just before the height of the tourist season and, counting on the continuation of the tourist trade, businessmen decided to rebuild.

What they rebuilt was grander than what had been. The Putnam House was probably the best example.

Continued on page 20



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Arlington Hotel, pictured in the 1880s was later razed to make way the Hotel James.
- Courtesy of Putnam Florida Historical Society



It was built circa 1869, renovated 1876 and burned in 1884. Located on Front Street, it was photographed after the 1876 renovation.
- Courtesy of Florida Memory



People gathered at the St. Johns Hotel. - Courtesy of Florida Memory



The Graham Hotel at the turn of the century used fresh palm fronds for decorations in its dining room.

- PDN Archives

Originally built by Col. Hubbard L. Hart, it was rebuilt on its original location facing North Second Street and extending from Lemon Street (now St. Johns Avenue) to Reid Street. There was no shortage of space – the hotel had 500 rooms. The dining room extended the length of the building and guests enjoyed breakfast, lunch, dinner, tea or supper during various times of the day. Entertainment included musical performances, humorous readings and dramatic recitations.

Visitors who signed the guest books included Mrs. Henry Ward Beecher, Clara Barton, Jay Gould, H.B. Plant and Joshua Speed.

The Putnam House pattern was repeated in hotels throughout town.

One hotel, the Westmoreland (later the Saratoga), offered a swimming pool that contained sulfur water, thought to have medicinal qualities.

Other hotels included the Carleton House, the Lafayette, the Hotel Osceola, the Graham Hotel, the Arlington, the Phoenix House and numerous boarding houses.

The pattern was repeated although on a smaller scale throughout the county. One notable hotel in Crescent City was the Sprague House. Visitors such as William Jennings Bryan and Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt were listed on guest registers there.



View of the Saratoga Hotel, Front Street. - Courtesy of Florida Memory

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Advertisements from the April 6, 1926, Progress Edition published by the Palatka Daily News. - PDN Archives

Maybe the best way to explain the land boom in Florida during the 1920s is to use the word "wacky." "You had to be there to believe it," said one woman who had visited Florida during the boom and visited Miami with

her Florida aunt. "There were card tables set up on the streets and people were conducting business. We just went down for the free trip they offered." Even so, her aunt, who had lived in Florida long enough to know better, ended up buying a piece of property in a "soon-to-be-developed" mangrove. She wasn't the only one.

to head for paradise. Putnam County, too, had its share of eager land sellers and buyers in the 1920s. The 1926 Progress Edition, put out by the Palatka Daily News, was filled with advertisements for new subdivisions

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Advertisement from Dec. 27, 1922 - PDN Archives

At least she later managed to sell the property. To this day, at the Putnam County Property Appraiser's office, people come in looking for that golden bit of land the father or grandfather bought. "They think they've got a gold mine and then they won't believe you when you tell them the property isn't worth anything," said a deputy appraiser. Although the people have a deed and a map showing property in the middle of a grid of streets, the property is often in the middle of acres and acres of palmetto scrub and the nearest neighbor is an armadillo.

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The three banks of Palatka are a unit in endorsing the Putnam County Progress edition, to be issued by the Palatka Daily News.

Through their respective cashiers they not only commended the edition as being a most progressive step for advertising the community, but have also made liberal reservations of advertising space.

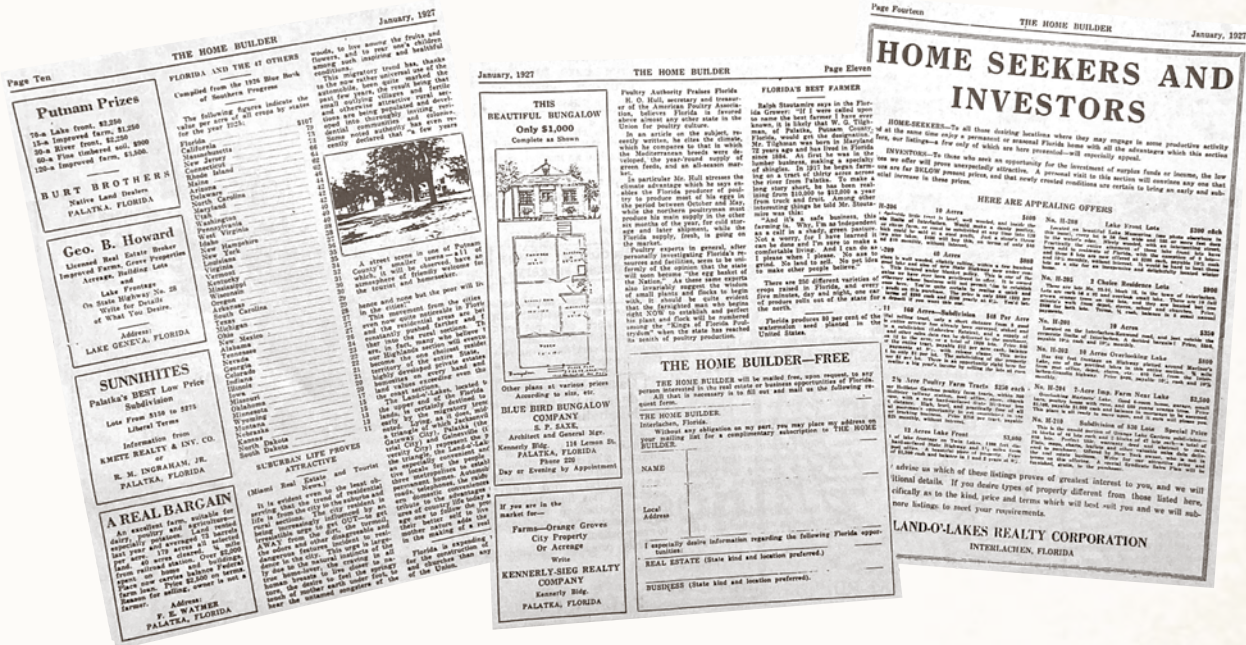
That the community should adver

A section of the article promoting the Progress Edition published Feb. 11, 1926. - PDN Archives

and home sites. The advertisements and news stories touted the amenities of the various communities, as well as the climate and the number of miles of brick streets.

Carl Fisher of Miami Beach is generally credited with the first successful campaign in 1919 to attract land buyers. He dredged sand from the bottom of Biscayne Bay and turned

it into a seashore and went after willing investors. By 1925, Florida was "a coast-to-coast real estate office." The problem was that the wealth was all on paper, and in time, that paper dream crumbled. The stock market crash in 1929 finished off the free-flowing investments.



These pages came from a special 1927 Putnam County edition of "The Home Builder," a journal of inspiration and opportunity for the home seeker.

- PDN Archives

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The steamer City of Monticello, a sidewheeler, is shown tied up to the Florida Southern Railway dock in Palatka

- PDN Archives

Hyacinths clogged river, hampering boats

You can have too much of a good thing, as Florida residents learned after an ornamental plant from South America took over the surface of the St. Johns River.

The water hyacinth, originally brought to the San Mateo area by a woman returning from New Orleans before the turn of the century, clogged the river in time. With the waters heavily traveled by steamboats, the hyacinth proved a menace to tourism and trade.

According to the noted river historians Hannah and Cabell, Mrs. W.F. Fuller of San Mateo and Brooklyn acquired some water hyacinths from a South American pavilion at the New Orleans Cotton Exposition and brought them home. After they overran her fishpond, she took the “lovely blossoming plants” down to the St. Johns River and tossed them in. The river turned out to be the perfect place for the hyacinths.

The plants flourished and soon infested the rivers in huge masses.

In South America, the hyacinths had been kept under control by one of their natural enemies, disease insects. Those enemies were lacking in North America and the hyacinths were soon out of control.

High waters seemed to fill the river with the plants, floating them out of the swamps to the river channel and filling the stream from bank to bank, sometimes completely stopping navigation. It was by no means unusual for smaller pleasure craft to run afoul of the hyacinths to such an extent that they were sometimes forced into idleness for several hours before a channel could be opened.

Oldtimers in the area declared that the plants

Continued on page 28

Rollin’ Rollin’ on the River

Steamboat whistles, the clanging of bells, the rattle of wagons on the wharf planking, the chant of stevedores, the uneasy straining of vessels at the hawsers, bales of cotton piled high on the docks, the slap of the St. Johns River under the keel, and the raucous shouts of wagon drivers – this was Palatka in the late 1800s.

River traffic was so intense that the St. Johns was perpetually churned to foam by the paddle wheels of a myriad of craft purveying to the economic life of the state.

These were the days of the river steamers, an era that faded into the past, making way for the railroads and automobiles.

But they were perhaps the greatest days ever seen, before or since, for the city of Palatka. The river boats were the jetliners of their day and brought the high and the mighty, the rich and the poor, the gambler and the

businessman, into this new frontier to seek adventure and fortune.

The late J.H. Haughton, a lifelong resident of Putnam County, related memories of the steamboat days to the Daily News in 1927.

Recalling the old vessels that plied the river, Haughton mentioned the Hattie Barker and the Carrie

running between Jacksonville and Sanford; the Lizzie Barker and the Nick King making the longer runs from Palatka to

Savannah in the early 1870s, while the early 1880s saw the City Point and the Dictator riding the waves from Charleston to Palatka, where connections were made with the Clyde Line.

The City of Palatka, a twin-screw steamer, made the stupendous journey from Palatka to New York, carrying passengers and cargo both ways.

There were innumerable rivercraft



in those days. The Pastime, the Sappho, Magnolia and Water Lily made daily trips between Jacksonville and Palatka. The boats left each community at about 7 a.m., completing the trip by 4:30 p.m., carrying the mail.

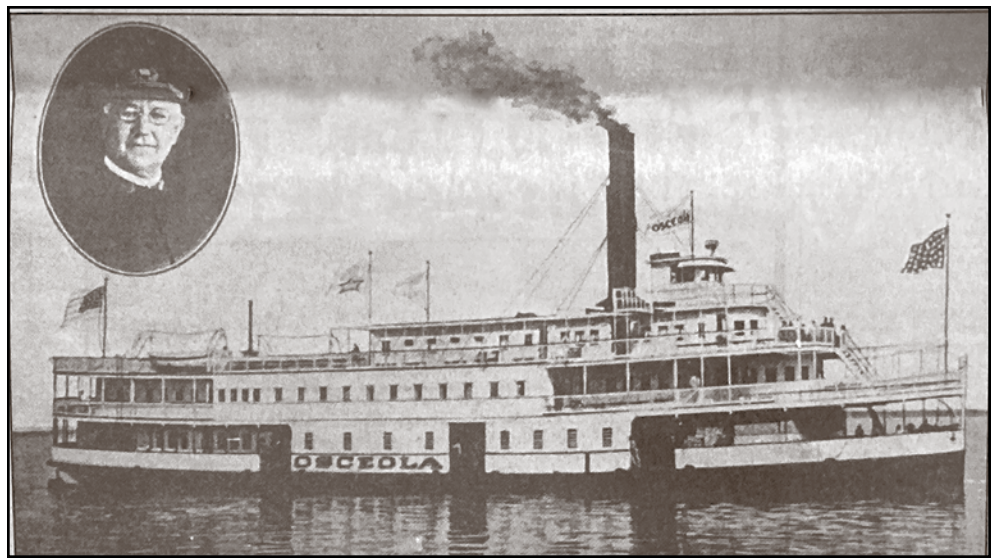
Then there was the Eliza Hancock and the John Sylvestre making the run in opposition to the H.T. Baya and the Sylvan Glen.

There also was the Chesapeake, an old Mississippi riverboat, the Welaka, the Everglades, Frederick deBarry of the deBarry line making a port of call here on the run from Jacksonville to Sanford.

The City of Sanford burned on the river about 1891 near Picolata with a loss of 30 lives.

The Osceola, a triple-decked floating palace, was the pride of the Clyde Line fleet. It was one of the largest sternwheelers on the river and carried both passengers and cargo.

There were the Teasdale boats on the Ocklawaha, some of them plying as far as Leesburg from Palatka. They included the Meta and the Lolliboy. Also, the boats of the Hart Line, the Griffin, the Panasofkee,



The Clyde Line's Osceola was a familiar sight on the St. Johns. T.W. Lund was captain of the Osceola at the time this photo was made.

- PDN Archives

the Ocklawaha, the Okeehumpkee, and the Hiawatha.

The Okeehumpkee and the Hiawatha were the last boats of the Hart Line afloat. The Hiawatha was beached on Hart Point in 1924.

The City of Jacksonville, a double

sidewheeler, was one of the most palatial craft of its kind and was still in operation until the 1930s after 50 years of service.

The Beach and Miller line ran boats up Dunns Creek to Crescent City. Some of the boats owned and operated by this firm were the Anthy, Escort, Comet, Star,



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Hyacinth *Continued from page 26*

were so dense at times that planks could be thrown on the hyacinths to support the weight of a man walking from a dock to a schooner.

In the early years, attempts by the government to clear the choking rivers with chemicals proved unsatisfactory when it was found that only the tops of the plants were destroyed while the roots flourished, propagating new plants.

When the U.S. War Department tried yet another spray in 1937, a newspaper reported on some past eradication attempts. "It seems the old fellows tell it that the government sent a boat into the river some years ago for the purpose of spraying the water hyacinths with creosote. It was thought that the creosote would kill the water plants and that they would soon disappear.

The results were far different from what officials thought it would be. The creosote killed only the tops of the plant and the roots lived on, propagating new plant pests. And then there was another result. Cattle along the river ate the doctored hyacinths and died.

Owners tried to ask the government to pay for the animals, but they refused.

After a while, some of the less patient individuals went out on the river with long rifles under their arms and announced that they would shoot the next creosote boat that appeared. No more showed up and thus that attempt to control the hyacinth failed."

In the late 30s, the United States War Department announced the use of a new contraption to destroy the large floral gardens, continuing its reputation as a nuisance in St. Johns. The machine, known as the "Kenny" and costing \$94,312 to build, had a cruising speed of about seven miles per hour. Engineers speculated that the crusher would consume approximately 60 square yards of vegetation per minute.

The water hyacinth, ever-present many years after the steamboat era, also proved to be the breeding place for blind mosquitoes, a real problem for waterfront cities.

Numerous attempts have been made since to destroy the plant but without notable success.



Undoubtedly, the woman who brought the bulbs from South America never realized that she introduced one of the greatest nuisances the state has ever known.



The Palatka wharf was busy a place in the 1900s as tourist and residents took excursion boats. The picture is from a postcard of the era.

- PDN Archives

Crescent City, Georgia, Gov. Sanford and Crescent.

Other boats, some individually owned, were the David Clark, Fannie Dugan,

Anita, Mary Draper, Rosa, Florida, Flora, Kennedy, Swan, Twilight Gazelle, Spitfire.

The George M. Bird was specially built for H.B. Plant who pioneered railroads into the area that helped kill the river traffic.

A couple of ferry boats called the Armsmear and the Louise connected the White railroad which approached the river at the old site of Rolestown and took passengers to Palatka, East Palatka and St. Augustine.

So great was the competition for business among the river craft that the lines would carry a passenger between Palatka and Jacksonville for 25 cents and supply his dinner.

Making the Silver Springs trip up the Ocklawaha were the boats of the Baulknight line. They were the

S.P. Baulknight and the Tuskawilla. Captain H.A. Gray piloted his Marion, Captain J.E.

Lucas had his Metamora, and Colonel DeVall had a boat called Daylight.

The boats making the Ocklawaha trips were all sternwheelers because of the narrow channel and sharp turns. They brought vast cargoes of cotton and hides to Palatka wharves which in those days extended from 200 yards north of the bridge all the way around the present city dock.

The City of St. Augustine and the George W. Farwell made about two trips a month between Palatka and New York, while the City of Monticello and Palatka made voyages to Charleston.

The Palatka was built in Palatka. It later capsized at Picolata landing. The Pilot Boy was a wood hull stiff shaft (one shaft activated paddle wheels on each side) and was owned by the Palatka and Jacksonville Steamboat

Co. of Palatka, Harry M. DeMontmollin, president. Their offices were at the foot of Lemon Street on the north side (where the Cultural Arts Center is now located). The Clyde Line offices were across the street.

The Pilot Boy, which had been out of service for some



Abandoned steamboat Pilot Boy.

- Courtesy of Florida Memory



Passengers aboard the river boat Okeehumkee.

- Courtesy of Florida Memory

time, sank in Palatka in 1923 just north of the Wilson Cypress Co. plant. Its captain was Charles Knight.

Commerce was the name of the game, and the St. Johns River was the artery of trade. Old newspapers containing accounts related by people living here during that era tell of as many as 2,000 bales of cotton on the Palatka wharves with 24 ships loading or unloading at one time.

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Hart Line's Hiawatha steamboat traveled between Palatka and Silver Springs.

- Courtesy of Florida Memory

Tropical scenery, mysterious depths were part of Ocklawaha

At the turn of the century, Palatka's harbor remained a busy one with tourists still coming to make the run down the Ocklawaha River to Silver Springs.

Writers compared the trip and its scenery to Jules Verne's "Ten Thousand Leagues Under the Sea" and called it a "visit to fairyland."

Heavy advertising in the form of cards, brochures and booklets helped spread the word of the charms of the area. While the language was flowery, and some claims exaggerated, the booklets were effective. Thousands of tourists from shortly after the Civil War through the 1910s headed for Palatka and the Ocklawaha River.

Even today reading a tourist booklet of the time can make you want to grab the nearest boat and plot the course of the steamboats once more.

The following description was given in a tourist booklet issued by the Ocklawaha



Brochure for Hart Line's Ocklawaha and Silver Springs river trips.

- Courtesy of Florida Memory

and St. Johns Navigation Co for the season of 1902:

"This remarkable river, Ocklawaha (crooked water) rising in a chain of large, freshwater lakes, at the elevation and watershed of the Florida peninsula, runs about 175 miles to the St. Johns River. The tourist route from Palatka to Silver Springs includes 25 miles of the St. Johns River, 100 miles of the Ocklawaha River, 9 miles of the Silver Springs Run, and Silver Springs.

The fame of the Ocklawaha River and Silver Springs, for pleasure travel, as well as for commerce, is largely due to the genius and enterprise of the late and lamented Col. H.L. Hart, long and widely known throughout the country as the owner of the oldest orange grove and most beautiful flower garden in Florida, so largely resorted to by Northern visitors; but particularly as the originator



Not all the boats on the St. Johns were steamboats. This boat, The Mist, was billed as a "fast launch for hire."

- PDN Archives

and proprietor of the famous Ocklawaha Tourist Steamboats, which have been patronized and warmly commended by the most and warmly commended by the most eminent travelers and by thousands of tourists, for nearly 35 consecutive years.

Col. Hart, a native of Vermont, established the famous Hart's Line, in 1860; cleared out the river of fallen

trees, and other obstructions, at great expense, and at the close of the civil war commenced the building and running of passenger steamboats to Silver Springs, and continued the business with increasing popularity and number of passengers to the time of his death.

These steamboats are of recess sternwheel type, of original and unique

design, the model of which was exhibited by the U.S. Government at the World's Fair in Chicago. They have been rebuilt from time to time with larger dimensions, being about 87 feet in length and 22 in width with upper and lower saloon decks, having 25 good staterooms accommodating 50 to 60 first-class passengers.

These steamboats are strongly built for special, safe and sure navigation of this most crooked and peculiar stream. They are remarkable for comfort and steadiness of motion. They are kept in first-class condition and are commanded by skillful captains, and stalwart and faithful pilots, who have guided these boats for many years.

The kindness and courtesy of the officers, and the generous bill of fare, as well as the memorable incidents of the trip, have been universally commended.

The most delicate tourist finds an outing on this river, with its ever-changing scenes, and with its tonic air, laden with balsamic odors of the forest, an inspiration to health and good cheer.

River and plantation melodies are usually rendered by the Black crew members at night.

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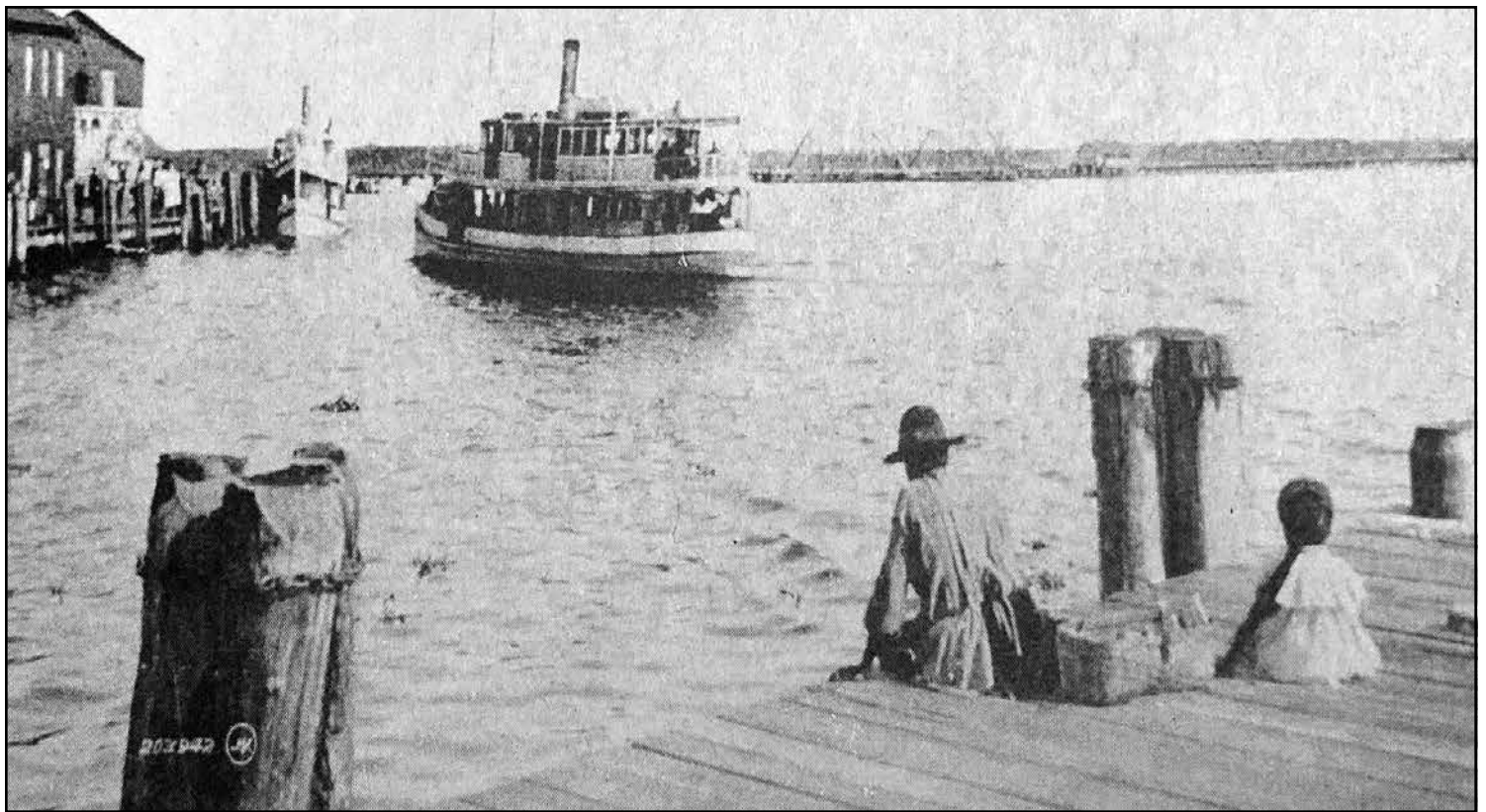
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Steamboats docked on the riverfront in Palatka until the early 1920s as tourists continue to come for the river ride to Silver Springs.

- PDN Archives

THE OCKLAWAHA RIVER

Leaving Palatka, the steamboats pass up the St. John River twenty-five miles, where they enter the old forest of the Ocklawaha, of towering cypress, pine and palmetto, clad in vines and air plants and reach the terminus at Silver Springs, around 135 miles. The transparent and marvelous waters of Silver Springs run for 9 miles, pouring into the Ocklawaha, a crystal stream over which the steamboats pass, so mirror-like, that fish, turtles, alligators and all living things therein seem suspended in air.

The flora and fauna of the entire route excite continuous interest, and the ever-winding current abounds in alligators and turtles. Semi-tropical birds of fine plumage add to the wildness of the scenery. A round-trip from Palatka to Silver Springs affords a view by daylight of all the most beautiful parts of the river.

No tourist has seen the most beautiful natural scenery of Florida if he has not sailed up and down the swift and mystical current of this romantic stream, one of the most famous rivers of the world that has attained distinction, and one of the most popular routes on the American Continent.

THE NIGHT SCENES

Most effective of all is the Ocklawaha by torchlight. The Black pilots kindle their lightwood flambeaux. The resinous yellow flames light up the banks with their dense growth of cypress, palmetto, pine, the gum tree, the slender palm, flowering horse-chestnut, the bay-tree and the blossoming dogwood, the magnolia and the rhododendron, the woodbine, the orchid and sweet scented jasmine, together with rank tropical water lilies fringing the water line. And now behold the illuminated glory of

the towering palmetto, the mighty vine-twined cypress, and the lofty pine!

Their tossing, waving, festooning mosses become silvered garland.

Their spreading tops are crowned with a foliage of splendor. The dark water sparkles with amethysts. It is a weird and glorious vision.

The region of the Ocklawaha is rich in fossil remains of the mastodon, the hippopotami and other varieties of animal life, and at the "bone-yard," so-called near Silver Springs, have been discovered the bones of the whale, the vertebrae of which were nineteen inches in diameter, and the petrified remains of a marine monster ninety feet long and five feet in diameter. There are many Indian sand mounds along this river, containing ornamental and useful implements of stone and copper.

SILVER SPRINGS

Silver Springs are the outlets of an underground river that daily discharges into the Ocklawaha River three hundred million gallons of water. These springs are contained in five limestone basins bearing names suggested by the hues of the rock and the variegated mosses therein. The largest basin is about eighty-five feet deep by two hundred wide, and the water is so transparent that a dime thrown to the bottom can be clearly seen, and all objects placed in this water immediately take on an iridescent glow.

To look into these mysterious depths forcibly reminds one of Jules Verne's "Ten Thousand Leagues Under the Sea."

But no pen can describe this great natural wonder of the American Continent - the traditional and veritable fountain of youth of Ponce de Leon.

A visit to Florida, without a trip on the romantic Ocklawaha is in-complete, for it presents a phase of tropical scenery peculiar alone to this state.

It will be as new and novel a sight to the traveler as he ever experienced and something never to be forgotten.

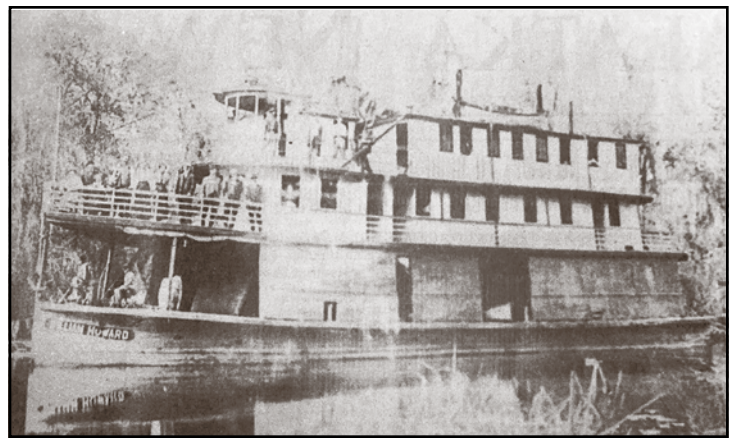
Gen. U.S. Grant, on his return from a tour of the world, pronounced the Ocklawaha the most charming of rivers, and this trip one of the most pleasing events of his life.

The Rev. Dr. Cuyler says, "The visitor to Florida who misses a trip on the Ocklawaha on one of these famous river steamboats of Hart's Line, fails to behold the greatest attraction of the state."

Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe called a trip up the stream a visit to "fairyland." of her fellow passengers she said: "They returned from their trip fairly inebriated with enthusiasm, and wild with inherent raptures. They had seen Europe, Italy, Naples and the Blue Grotto, but never, never had they in their lives seen aught so entrancing as this. It was a spectacle weird, wondrous, magical – to be remembered as one of the things of a lifetime."

Of her own impressions of the Ocklawaha she says: "The boat glides on from hour to hour, as the river winds and turns and doubles upon itself, with still the same flowery solitudes, reverberating with the same wild cries of birds glittering with slanting sunbeams. Festooned with waving garlands that hang from tree to tree...."


Of her entrance into Silver Springs, she says: "We seemed floating through an immense cathedral where white marble columns meet in vast arches overhead and are reflected in the grassy depths below. The dusky plumes of the palmetto waving above, lit by torchlight, looked like fine tracery of wondrous sculptured roof. The brilliant underwhite of the bay leaves, the



William Howard had three boats running from Grahamville on the Ocklawaha-to-Palatka trip. In addition to this one, the *William Howard*, there was *Sophie Howard* and *Mary Howard*. The three carried passengers and cargo. - PDN Archives

transparent red of the water maple, and the soft, velvet feathers of the cypress, had a magical brilliancy, as our boat passed through the wooded isles.

"The reflected firelight gave the most peculiar effect. The gray moss that steamed down seemed like trailing veils of silver, and was of wonderful profusion. Clouds of fragrance were wafted to us from orange groves along the shore; and the transparent depth of the water gave the impression that our boat was moving through the air. Evers pebble and aquatic plant we glided over seemed, in the torchlight, invested with prismatic brightness. What a sight was that! There is nothing on earth comparable to it!"




Clay Davis
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All-star talent finds home in Palatka

Much of Palatka's rich sports tradition is concentrated within a few blocks of Ravine Gardens.

There's Jim McCool Field at The Historic Azalea Bowl, where Babe Ruth swatted home runs into the Gardens during his barnstorming days and while running a baseball school in Palatka in the early 1940s. The field was named in February 2025 after McCool, the legendary football coach who also coached Palatka South to state baseball championship in 1975.

The Bowl was home to the Florida State League Palatka Azaleas from the mid-1930s to the early-1960s. Johnny Vander Meer managed here. Future major leaguers Vic Davalillo and Tommy Helms played here.

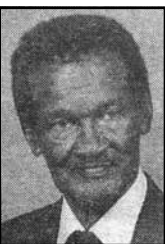
So did Pete Rose with the Cincinnati Reds' Tampa farm club, as did a young Chipper Jones with Jacksonville Bolles School against the Palatka Panthers in a famous 1989 game won by the Panthers, 1-0.

The Bowl was home to five high school state championship teams – 1929, 1963, 1965, 1966 and 1975. The ace of the '75 team, Bill Swaggerty, pitched in the major leagues, as did 1990 Palatka High grad Greg "Boo" Mullins.

Yet for all the tradition that lies within the Azalea Bowl, two of Palatka's greatest baseball players learned the game on the fields of the Northside.



Jon Henry "Pop" Lloyd



James "Lefty" Turner

Born in Palatka in 1884, John Henry "Pop" Lloyd, moved to Jacksonville as a teenager and went on to become one of the early stars of the Negro Leagues, posthumously earning a place in the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1977.

A protégé of Lloyd's, James "Lefty" Turner, was a three-sport star at

Central Academy before going on to the Negro Leagues himself in the 1940s. In retirement, Turner was one of Palatka's best-loved personalities until his death in 2000.

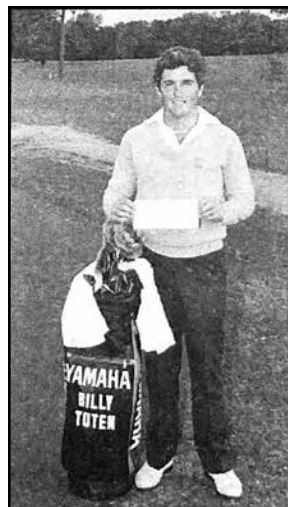
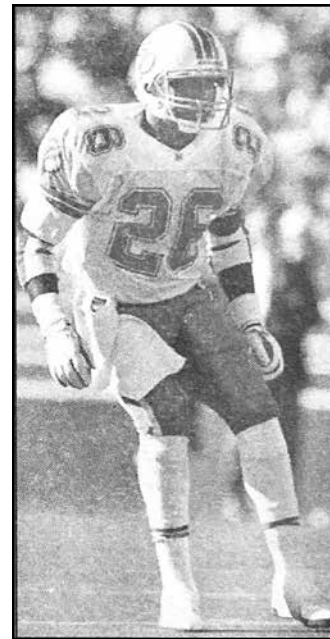
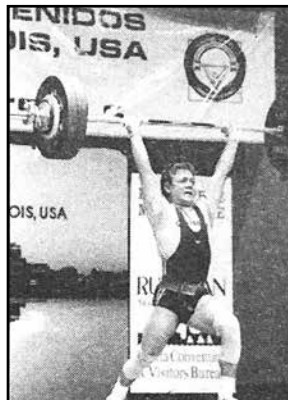
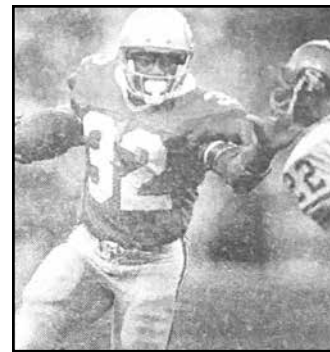
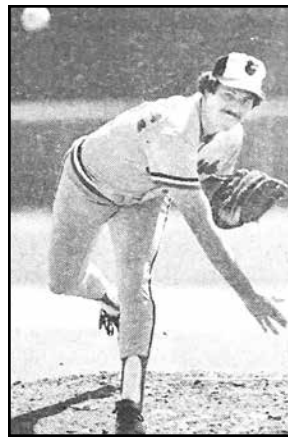
Across from the Azalea Bowl sits 55-year-old Veterans Memorial Stadium, where future Pro Bowl fullback John L. Williams set school rushing records as the Palatka Panthers claimed the 1981 14-0 class 3A state championship.

A University of Florida star as well, John L. Williams made two Pro Bowl appearances with the Seattle Seahawks and was a Super Bowl captain of the Pittsburgh Steelers.

A teammate on the 1981 Palatka High squad, defensive back Jarvis Williams, who passed away in 2010, became an All-American at UF and went on to a solid NFL career with the Miami Dolphins and the New York Giants.

Other NFL alumni from Palatka schools include Willie Offord (Minnesota Vikings), Darryl Oliver (New York Jets, Atlanta Falcons), Darcy Johnson (New York Giants, St. Louis Rams) and Charles "Rabbit" Smith (Chicago Cardinals), who was 79-37-9 as Palatka Senior High football coach from 1952-63.

Palatka football teams have made 26 state playoff appearances, including five in a row from 1999-2003. The 1983 team was state runner-up, the 2000 team a state semifinalist.



Clockwise from top: Bill Swaggerty, John L. Williams, Jarvis Williams, Billy Tuten, Bryan Jacobs

- PDN Archives

Palatka's rivalry with St. Augustine dates to 1922 and is the state's second-oldest high school football series - the oldest in North Florida.

On the other side of Ravine Gardens from the Azalea Bowl lies Palatka Municipal Golf Course, a Donald Ross-designed layout built in 1925 and home to the Florida Azalea Amateur tournament.

Former Masters champion Tommy Aaron won the 1960 Azalea title, along with another PGA Tour professional, Dan Sikes.

Palatka Municipal was the high

school course for Billy Tuten, U.S. Public Links champion in 1982 and '83 and a veteran of three U.S. Opens and one Masters.

Still, another Palatka High golfer, Sean Pacetti, has played professionally and brought one of golf's biggest names, John Daly, to the local course for a number of fundraising pro-am tournaments in the 1990s.

Finally, the Azalea Bowl shares a parking lot with the National Guard Armory – home for Palatka high school basketball teams in the years before it had its own gym, as well as professional boxing and wrestling programs in years gone by.

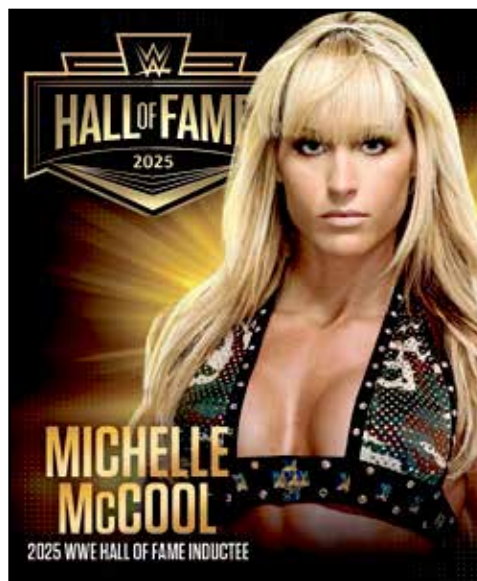
Ravine Gardens itself is home to Palatka's top foot race, the Floyd 4-mile run – held annually in conjunction with the Blue Crab Festival.

Not that Palatka's sports history can be contained within a few blocks around Ravine Gardens.

Then there's Michelle McCool, who was a three-sport athlete at Palatka High in the late 1990s who in 2004 became a pro wrestling star and in 2025 was elected into the World Wrestling Entertainment Hall of Fame. She is the niece of Jim McCool.

Palatka has produced two state high school championship teams in boys' track and eight in weightlifting. The most distinguished alumnus of its weightlifting program is Bryan Jacob, a member of U.S. Olympic teams in 1992 at Barcelona, Spain, and in 1996 in his adopted hometown of Atlanta.

Central Academy basketball teams won at least two state



Michelle McCool, WWE Hall of Famer, class of 2025.

- Courtesy of Michelle McCool

championships – one boys' team, one girls' team – in the late 1930s and early 1940s. None other than Turner played on the boys' championship team, then coached the girls' championship team while he was home from playing professional baseball.

Turner is one of five standout athletes for whom public ballparks are named around Putnam County.

Mary "Wish" Wisham moved to the area within a few years after having spent six seasons with the All-American Girls' Professional Baseball League – the league popularized in the 1990s movie "A League of Their Own" – and pitched

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Mary Wisham

-PDN Archives

and played for local slowpitch and fastpitch softball teams for more than 20 years. She played first base for the 1974 Florida Truck and Tractor slowpitch team that won the ASA State Championship and placed 10th in the ASA nationals at Louisville, Kentucky.

A West Putnam ballpark is named in honor of Wisham, who threw out the ceremonial first pitch when Palatka High's new softball field opened a few years ago.

A city park is named in honor of Shaw Buck, arguably Putnam High's greatest athlete over the first third of the 20th century. Buck was all-state in baseball three years, all-state in football two years and honorable mention all-state in basketball three years.

He lettered in football for the University of Florida in 1931 and coached Putnam High football for two years before going on to a long and distinguished coaching career in Lake County.

One of the most remarkable achievements from a Palatka team in the early 1900s was a 108-0 girls' basketball triumph over a team from

south Jacksonville.

That team was nicknamed "Panthers" long before the present-day Palatka High adopted the nickname in 1977.

Recently, both John L Williams (softball) and Jarvis Williams (basketball) had fields named in their honors at Booker Park on North 10th Street.

Palatka has had a number of top-flight softball teams over the years. First Baptist Church won a national church league championship in 1984. The C-Hawks, who have gone by the Palatka A's and various other names over time boast multiple tournament titles.

St. Johns River State College has had teams in almost every sport but football since it opened its doors in 1958, but the Vikings are best known in the sports in which they currently field teams – baseball, volleyball and softball.

Its gym is named in honor of Bill Tuten, St. Johns' original athletic director and the coach of several successful basketball teams in the 1960s. The 1966-67 team, led by Palatka's Bobby Stevens, made the only national tournament appearance in school history.

The SJR State baseball field is named for John Tindall, whose 30 seasons as coach include a number of conference championships and state tournament appearances. Coached since 2009 by Palatka High product and native Ross Jones, the Vikings have been among the best Division II junior college teams the last few years and went to back-to-back World Series in 2023 and 2024.

The SJR State softball team has had success recently as a Division

II junior college program and in 2024, made school history by winning the World Series championship in Spartanburg, South Carolina.

No discussion of the Palatka sporting scene can be complete without mention of its most prominent feature, the St. Johns River.

Palatka is the starting point of the Jacksonville Rudder Club Mug Race, a 38-mile sailboat race that started in 1954.

Powerboat races were a long-time centerpiece of the Azalea Festival before they curtailed out of concern for the manatee.

The river, Rodman Reservoir and surrounding waters are widely known for bass fishing. Palatka has been host to numerous Bass Anglers Sportsman Society professional tournaments over



Top: John L. Williams, his family and former Palatka Mayor Terrill Hill stand in front of the north softball field at the John Henry "Pop" Lloyd Sports Complex on Dec. 21, 2024, after the softball field was named after the former pro footballer.

Bottom: The family of Johnson Session Sr. gathers in front of the new field dedicated in their late relative's honor on Dec. 21, 2024, at the John Henry "Pop" Lloyd Sports Complex.

-Photos submitted by Terrill Hill



Larra Wallace/Palatka Daily News

Above: BASS Elite anglers launch at sunrise on St. Johns river. To Left: Palatka's Cliff Prince reels in a bass from the St. Johns river during the 2022 Bassmaster Elite Series event in Palatka.



-PDN Archives

the years, including numerous Bassmaster Elite events at the St. Johns River in the last decade. The river has been the setting for a number of fishing-themed television programs.

Palatka is home to the Wolfson Children's Hospital Bass Tournament, which is billed as the largest tournament east of the Mississippi.

Fishing has had its share of local stars, most notably professionals Terry Scroggins, Preston Clark and Cliff Prince, who won his first Bassmaster Elite tournament title in 2024

when he captured the What-A-Burger Bassmaster Elite at Wheeler Park in Decatur, Alabama.

The fishing is such that it has attracted celebrities for weekend getaways.

The Babe himself even loved the fishing here.

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Top headlines through the Great Depression

The news never stopped amid the Great Depression, and just as it is today, readers saw scandal, political changes, pop culture news and a decade of hard-hitting headlines.

Putnam County readers of the Daily News were getting all this national and local news for a good price in the late 1930s – about 65 cents per month.

Here are some of the hits:

Women, who had been voting for more than a decade by 1931, started taking their places in Washington that year.

On Oct. 1, 1931, the Daily News ran a large photograph of Congresswoman Ruth Bryan Owen from Florida's 4th District.

The caption beneath the photograph explained Owen would speak at the “county courthouse bandstand at 8 o’clock” that Saturday night and would be entertained prior to that at a dinner hosted by the Palatka Business and Professional Women’s Club.

By the next month, visiting members of Congress were bumped from the headlines by more internationally flavored news.

India’s Mahatma Gandhi visited London on Nov. 21, 1931, and many newspapers around the country were filled with accounts of his visit.

The Daily News’ Associated Press story appeared under this headline: “Gandhi Is Shocked at Scant Attire

of Vain Femmes.”

The story began: “Mahatma Gandhi went to a reception last night at the home of Lady Astor, but today he disclosed that the gowns of the women guests caused him to lower

One year later, the headlines of autumn were devoted not to politics but to a nightmare that stalked a hero and his family.

The headlines in the Daily News often mentioned the kidnapping of the Lindbergh baby. On Oct. 1, 1934, the headline read: “Psychiatrists to Exam Bruno Hauptmann,” the man arrested in the Lindbergh case.

On April 7, 1938, Florida news was filling the front page of the Daily News.

“Florida Sheriff Shot to Death” was the boldface headline across page one that day, and the story told of the shooting death of Sheriff D.C. Adkison of Walton County. The county constable was arrested and charged with murder in DeFuniak Springs.

The Aug. 6, 1938, edition featured a photo on page five of Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney. The advertisement promoted the local Howell Theater’s showing of “Love Finds Andy Hardy.”

In October of 1940, Palatka’s New Theatre was showing the film, “An Angel From Texas” with Eddie Albert and Jane Wyman.

As the world raged on, a new decade began.

On Jan. 20, 1941, the Daily News front page was filled with items about Roosevelt’s inauguration for his third term.

On Feb. 19, 1941, Roosevelt, as well as much of the country and world, was seeing more and more



Palatka Daily News front page from Oct. 1, 1931 -PDN Archives

his eyes in shame.”

Political splits were making headlines, as usual, when Oct. 14, 1933, rolled around and Democratic presidential contender Franklin D. Roosevelt was happy by the division.

The headlines that fall were filled with California Sen. Hiram Johnson’s turn on President Herbert Hoover.

headlines like this one that appeared that day on Palatka newsstands, "Nazis On March, Reported In Yugoslavia."

A dirt road just north of the Rice Creek Bridge on U.S. 17 bears witness to the ill times brought to Putnam County and the nation during the 1930s.

The county-operated poor farm located there is now the reason for calling the dirt-graded track Poor Farm Road. An overgrown cemetery nearby is filled with many who apparently died in the "poor house."

The "Long Boom" that preceded the catastrophic crash in October 1929 brought prosperity to Putnam County, as did Roosevelt's New Deal programs after that crash. For many Putnam residents, however, the times were hard, and some did not survive them.

County archive records dating back to January 1929 show the

expenses of the poor farm totaled \$211 to the county commission that

month.

Mrs. G.W. Wadkins managed the poor farm. According to one clerk who

herself to keep going in the job." Her recordings in a simple ledger, made brittle by the passage of five decades, showed her own salary at \$50 per month. The trips to the Cury Grocery Company were recorded. The bill for September 1932 was \$22.77.

Another entry in the county's poor farm records that year shows men admitted to the farm by Sheriff Hancock. Occasionally, there were entries besides names that indicated: "left on own accord."

But all was not so bleak during the era.

Palatka and Putnam County saw much progress from the 1920s and into the next two decades.

Ravine Gardens State Park was built around the natural setting in Palatka, more schools were constructed and the county seat finally got two hospitals – Glendale Terrace and Mary Lawson Sanatorium.

Memorial Bridge was built in tribute to the veterans of World War I.

Famous people continued to visit, such as Babe Ruth, who held

baseball training clinics in Palatka.

And the city got a new library, which is now the Larimer Arts Center.



Palatka Daily News front page from Oct. 13, 1933 -PDN Archives

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Palatka Daily News front page from January 20, 1941



- PDN Archives

An era ended for the area in 1924 when the captain of the Hiawatha turned her bow toward Hart's Point and rammed the triple-decker steamboat into the swampy bank.

The Clyde Line withdrew service on the St. Johns River in 1928. With the increasing prominence of the railroads, it was no longer commercially feasible for the steamships to haul freight.

The tourists, too, had abandoned the once-glamorous Ocklawaha River run to Silver Springs as they found newer, more sophisticated spots to visit.

And on Jan. 17, 1935, G.W. Gornto of Florahome died. His death marked the end of another era of local history — a painful death for the family and a sorrowful history for the nation. Gornto was the last living Putnam County Confederate soldier.

Reportedly, the last Union soldier in Putnam, E.B. Olmstead, died July 11, 1938.

During the 1920s, Palatka viewed itself as a hub city in Florida, and a movement to relocate the state capital from Tallahassee caught the city's attention in 1921.

A full-page newspaper advertisement in May 1921 clearly showed Palatka leaders were making a concerted pitch to have the city named Florida's new seat of state government.

The promoters of this idea also had some chic thinking. It wasn't simply Palatka, the state capital, it was "Palatka On the St. Johns," the newspaper ad noted.

Promoters argued Tallahassee was too far from the center of the population.

Concise thinkers behind the concept put it clearly: "The Center of Population and Transportation of Florida is Palatka." That was true then.

Not only did Palatka residents want their city to be the new state capital,

they had an idea as to where the new Capitol building should be built. The newspaper ad continued: "An ideal Capitol site on the rest of Palatka Heights with a magnificent view across the St. Johns.

The locals wanted the Capitol placed in the area where the C.L. Overturf Jr. District Center is today. Of course, the Palatka residents' plan never worked.

By the beginning of the 1940s, much of the old Palatka with its grand hotels, civilized amusements and steamboats, was beginning to fade as the river town started to change.

But the hard times of the Great Depression, the glory of the river and the sparkle from the riverboat era were blended into the city's past, and Palatka, like the rest of Florida, was about to take off come 1940.



Acme Manufacturing Co. was located on Madison St. Owned by Herbert K. Wolfenden, it made heads for crates.

- PDN Archives

Savoring that \$18.75 pay envelope

In 1942, Naomi Brooks Wilkinson took a job at a box factory in Palatka. She writes of her experience in many ways typical of other workers in mills and factories at the time.

Can you imagine how happy I was to have a job at a for sure 35 cents per hour?

I do mean a job, not a position. It was 1942.

My husband was in the service, and my two children and I were living with my parents. Dad was sick and unable to work.

I went to work at the box factory by the railroad in a large tin building facing Lemon Street (St. Johns Avenue) across the street from Hood's Grocery. We made wire-bound wooden crates for packing citrus fruits and vegetables. I worked the night shift, 5 p.m. to 5 a.m., and would keep telling myself,

"After this hour, just so many more."

My job was to stand between two revolving chains and place sharp-ended sticks in cleats on both sides of the box foundation.

As the chains moved quite rapidly along, others placed thin wooden slates in the special cleats to form the sides. The chain continued on through the stapler, which stapled the continuous running wire from huge rolls. At the end was a cutter that separated the boxes, and they

were inspected and stacked in bundles for shipment.

I wonder if somewhere it is done the same way today. I am most certain there would be a significant difference in the pay schedule.

We had a 30-minute shutdown for lunch, and the foreman relieved us each in turn for a restroom and water break twice each shift. He was a very nice person, and if it was very cold, he would give us a break to go to the office and warm up for a few minutes by the fire.

The 5 a.m. train whistle as it came in from the south was our signal – a most welcome sound. We would begin shutting down machines, and when the train pulled into the station, we rolled down the doors 'til the day shift came in at 7 a.m. It was a long and cold or hot walk home, but that \$18.75 pay envelope at the end of the week made it all worthwhile.



Example of a crate factory.

- Courtesy of Florida Memory



Postcard of a scenic view showing a garden path.

- Courtesy of Florida Memory

Azalea Ravine Gardens Brought Glorious Color

If Putnam County were to claim an official flower it would have to be the azalea.

The prominence of the azalea came about because of the building of the Azalea Ravine Gardens on Twigg Street.

There is some evidence that the ravine was used as an encampment area by Civil Wars troops.

As to how the ravines came into being there is one legend told that the three deep ravines were dug by a miser who lost a nickel in the vicinity. Whether he ever found the coin isn't told.

Scientific evidence suggests the ravines are a natural formation

probably caused by erosion from the springs in the area. Credit for the ravines becoming a blossoming paradise goes to a Palatka road contractor. The late Thomas B. Gillespie fathered the idea of the gardens and the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, and the Civil Works Administration provided much of the money that made the dream a reality.

Richard Forrester, a Jacksonville landscape architect, was hired by Gillespie to come up with the landscape plan. In 1933, Palatka City Commissioner E. W. Elliott presented Gillespie's plan to the commission. Eventually, a



The first crowned Azalea Queen

- PDN Archives



A VIEW OF THE
AZALEA RAVINE GARDENS OF
PALATKA, FLORIDA
A WONDERLAND OF MARVELOUS BEAUTY AND GORGEOUS COLOR



Above: Side view of a suspension bridge and the water wheel replica from 2014. Left: Vintage postcard of the original waterwheel.

- PDN Archives



Vintage postcards

- PDN Archives

committee that included Mrs. J.H. Yelverton, Mrs. H. C. Richard, Mrs. J.W. Hilliard, Mrs. H.M. Fearnside, Col. A. B. Kratz, J. L. Waits, H. F. Underwood, J. G. Spencer, Mayor Walter McNally, city manager R. M. Ingram and Gillespie were appointed.

Enthusiasm for the gardens was widespread but finding the money for plants was difficult. A request for the needed \$10,000 to buy out a Winter Garden nurseryman's entire stock including 75,000 azaleas reportedly went all the way to the White House for approval.

The story was told that President E.D. Roosevelt and his advisors were rather taken aback by the request for what was then an enormous sum. But Roosevelt reportedly finally remarked that if "they had the guts to ask for it, let's give it to them."

At one time some 2,000 people worked on the gardens with the government providing the funds. In 1934 it was reported \$250,000 had been expended on the Ravines, which covered 85 acres.

Azaleas were chosen as the theme for the gardens because they bloom from December to May and visitors could be assured of a complete cycle of blooms. Japanese magnolias were chosen to bloom after the azaleas and annuals to follow for the spring and summer.

In 1936, a 65-foot monument honoring President Roosevelt was erected by FERA workers. In 1938 the first Azalea Queen was crowned at the gardens, a tradition that continued for many years until the festival was moved to the downtown waterfront area.

The city took over the gardens but in 1969 gave them to the state because of problems with maintenance.

A native-born Palatka resident, Joe Marvin



Pretty natty Con, left, and Joe Marvin are all dressed up in new coats and hats in this photo snapped in 1926.

-PDN Archives

You could say that local history flows through Joe Marvin's veins.

After all, he was born in the Putnam Historical Museum. How close to history can a body get?

It wasn't the Putnam Historical Museum back then. It was just a house facing the St. Johns River (across the street from the Holiday Inn, the historic structure was moved to its present location a couple of years ago).

"My father came here in 1867. He was 16 years old, and he came here to work for his Great Uncle (Loper) Bailey, working at the Palatka Gas & Light Co. "My mother was here on a vacation trip, Palatka was a tourist town then and that's when they met," Marvin explains.

"We lived in that house until I was 3 years old and then we moved to the house on South 14th Street, and I lived there until I got married to Lenora. She was introduced to me by a friend. I was out of school, but she was still in high school when we met.

While still a child, Marvin remembers seeing the great freight boats pull up to the docks on the St. Johns River.

"I remember those well. One was the old Clyde Line," he says. "During the height of the Depression, Bill Gale and I would go down to that fish house (where the sheriff's office is now). They had the biggest catfish. They'd cut the big heads off and give those heads away to people to eat. One of those heads would feed a family of four, they were so big. We'd go down there just to see them.

And we played a lot of sandlot football and baseball. I boxed in school and later in the Navy," he says.

Marvin says that in those pre-integration days, there were white and black street gangs.

"It was 'war' all week long, and then on Saturday, we'd get together to play ball, and there was never any trouble. Come Monday, it was back to 'war' again.

When Marvin was only 6 months old, his father was involved in an accident that literally rocked the whole town. It was a major gas explosion, and his father was lucky to have survived the devastating blast.

"It was that big tank, down on Main Street (now gas company offices). I

was only about 6 months old when it happened, so I don't remember it, but I heard the tank blew up.

"My dad went up there to check it and it blew him off the tank and broke both of his legs. He was laid up for six months," Marvin says.

"Before the Depression, my father was in plumbing, and until then, we weren't rich, but we weren't poor. Then, when the bank closed, whatever they had went down with the bank. It switched our family (four children, Joe's two brothers Con and Philip and sister Barbara) from getting along real good to one of survival," he recalls.

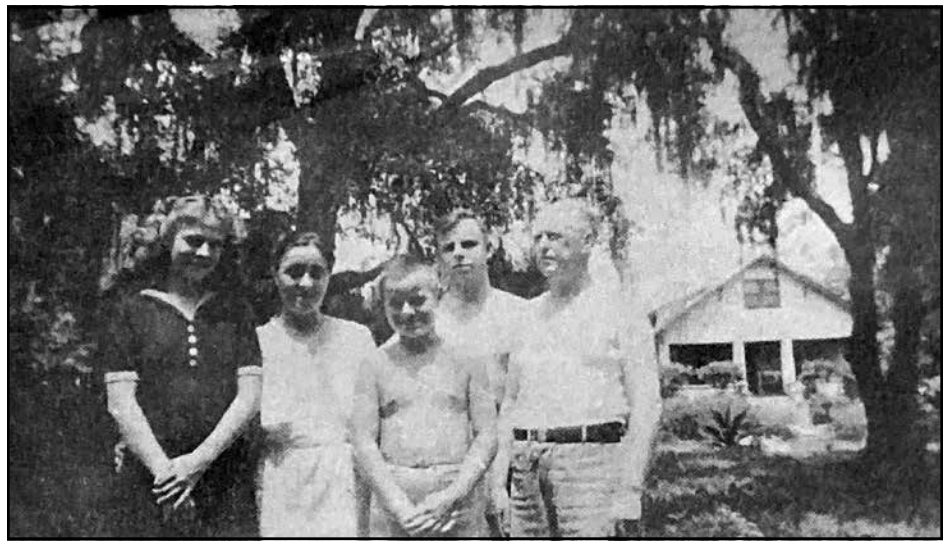
"You couldn't buy a job then," he says of those lean times in high school, but Marvin did manage to find a few odd jobs while he was still in high school.

"I worked everywhere since I was 14," he says.

"For fun, we'd hunt and fish.

We'd get deer, squirrel, turkey, quail — lots of them. I believe there are more deer around here now than then and turkeys too, but there were a lot more quail then and there always are lots of squirrels," Marvin says.

Continued on page 46



The family snapshot was taken in front of the family home on South 14th Street in 1940.

-PDN Archives

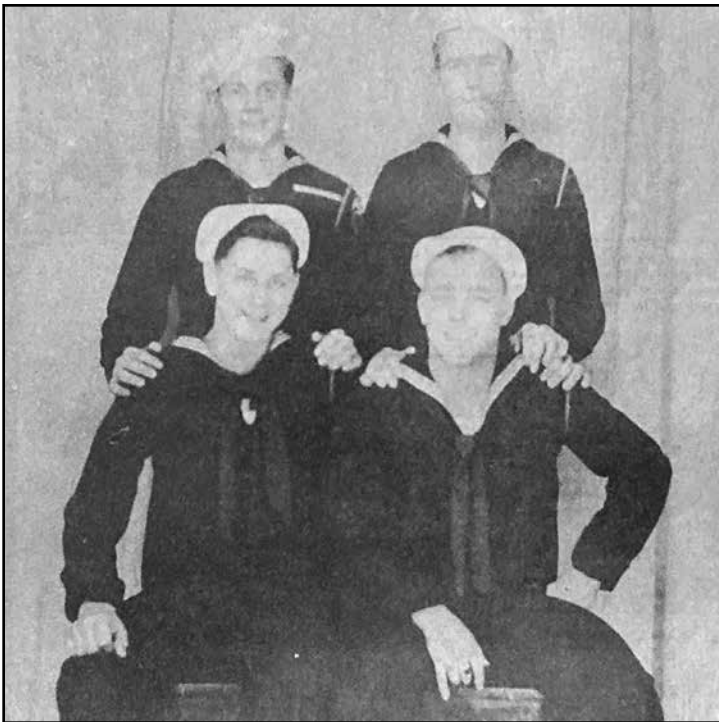
"We would hunt them to eat them then and I've eaten enough fish, you couldn't put all the bones in this building," he says with a sweep of his hand. "The St. Johns was clean then."

After several years of work on the river, is it as clean now as it was when he was a boy?

"Good heavens, no! I believe that on the south end of the river, where they drain the land - all that fertilizer, that's what's hurting the river. And they've destroyed a lot of those hyacinths. I don't know if that's good or bad." One summer during the Depression, Marvin worked as a lifeguard at the city pool, a fantastic edifice built entirely of wood and spring-fed. It was on Crill Avenue where a park stands today.

"I bet I taught about 500 kids to swim," he says with a laugh.

"My first job out of high school was for Max Becker. He had a



While in the Navy, Joe Marvin, bottom right was the pride of his shipmates - a winner in the boxing ring. Pictured with Joe are bottom left William Burhaman, top from left Jack Wilkinson and W.E. Pridgeon.

-PDN Archives

5 and 10-cent store on Lemon Street between Second and Third Streets.

I was a stock boy," he says. "Then I went to work for T.J. Hancock as a bookkeeper."

That was before he was sent to the Pacific on the Navy Ship U.S.S. Oklahoma.

"The biggest deal we went through was Okinawa. That correspondent, Ernie Pyle, was killed out there," Marvin remembers. He said the well-liked newspaperman's death saddened his ship's crew.

"After the war, I came back to Palatka, but I didn't fly home. I came back on a train. I didn't want to fly. I'd seen so many of those planes crash that (once in California) I said I got this far and I wanted to get home alive," he says.

While he was still in the Navy, Marvin's wife sent him a newspaper clipping that announced the arrival of Hudson Pulp & Paper Co. in Palatka. For the first time since the Depression, things were really beginning to look up in town.

"What with I-95 and I-75 kind of isolating us, if Hudson hadn't come to Palatka, the town would have dried up. It couldn't sustain the tourist attraction that it had," says Marvin.

When he returned, Marvin worked for a time selling tractor equipment within a five-county territory.

He didn't care much for the traveling.

"I went to work out at Hudson in 1948 and in 1952 I was head store manager. I had such a good staff, such good people working for me, I could have stayed home and have them send my check to me," he says. "I got bored."

His next job was with the tax assessor.

"I worked under three accessors,

Clinton Brooks, Larry Pritchett and "Dutch" Snyder, says Marvin who stayed with that office until his retirement.

Joe Marvin and Lenora had five children, four boys and one girl.

Only one of them still has a home here and Marvin doubts that the others will ever return here to live.

But to him, Palatka is the best spot in the world for him.

"I've been over most of the world, been to every state but three and I've never found a better place to live," he says, adding a twinkle. "I've bought two plots and figure I'll die here too."



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