

Pinellas County and Tampa

Pinellas County lies on the west side of Florida, and is part of the Tampa Bay area. The Tocobagan tribe were living here at the time of the invasion by the Spanish Conquistadors in the year 1528. Many of the Tocobagans did not survive, and many of the Spanish later perished in their hunt for gold. The Point of Pines (which became Pinellas) was inhabited only sparsely for many years.



Early Floridians

Spain ceded Florida to the United States in 1821. Seminole tribes had by that time settled to the north and east of Tampa Bay.

In the early 19th century, a settlement grew and was called Clear Water with about fifty families. Citrus trees were introduced to the area. A Russian immigrant ran his Orange Belt Railroad through Clear Water and to the south, and established a new town which he named St . Petersburg. The agreeable climate near the Gulf encouraged residents and winter visitors.



Sponge Divers

To the north of Clearwater, Greek sponge fisherman established a thriving sponge and fishing industry in Tarpon Springs.

Tampa lies further east, and also has a fascinating history. It was a small fishing settlement for many years. A railroad magnate built an impressive hotel fronting the river, with architecture owing much to Byzantine/Russian/Victorian and other styles. It did not survive the Depression in the 1930's, and has now become the University of Tampa.



University of Tampa

Cuban cigar makers settled in Tampa more than one hundred years ago, and started a thriving cigar industry. Some of the families had lived in Cuba for generations, but others had settled in Cuba from Spain and Italy. This area of Tampa is called Ybor City. Large cigar factories were constructed. The workers sponsored a good reader to read aloud to them while they shredded the tobacco and rolled the cigars. These 'lectors' provided an education with interesting literature. Large mutual societies were formed, such as the Italian and Spanish Institutes, which provided financial, medical and family services to the community. The former cigar factories and stores have become Saturday-night centers for jazz and nightclubs, with some interesting

restaurants and stores.

Much of our area was covered with orange, lemon, grapefruit and other citrus trees. The fruit was taken to the north by railroad and ship. Ships returning brought old red bricks as ballast, which were used here to make roads. There was also pig and chicken farming.



Cigar Workers Ybor City 1925

An island north of Clearwater was called Hog Island. One family lived there alone for many years. They raised pigs, and the father rowed the children to the mainland daily for school. One of his daughters wrote about it, but passed away recently. The island was later bought by a radio station who offered a free honeymoon to prize-winners in a contest, changing its name to Honeymoon Island. It is now a bird sanctuary and is owned by the State of Florida. It forms an important 'land-bridge' for birds migrating between North and South America.

The history of the area has an important bearing on its later development. Those who worked here were and are from many social and ethnic backgrounds, and this all contributes to our vibrant culture.

Over the years, hurricanes and tropical storms pushed up sandbars, parallel to the coast. These sandbars are now lovely beaches, joined to the mainland by causeways. They stretch all the way down our coastline. Clearwater Beach, Madeira Beach, Indian Shores, Treasure Island, St. Pete Beach and many others are now enjoyable resorts, enjoyed all the year round.



Clearwater Beach

St Petersburg and Clearwater and surrounding areas became desirable localities with an agreeable climate. The City of St Petersburg is well laid out and has many cultural activities. Clearwater has just opened a splendid new bridge to the beaches. Tarpon Springs is proud of its cultural heritage and encourages visitors to the sponge dock areas. Ybor City is still a distinct part of Tampa, with fascinating architecture. Tampa is a thriving modern commercial center and one of the largest US ports. The former railroad became the Pinellas Trail along which we can run, cycle, walk or use roller-blades.

There is certainly much here to see and do.
