

‘Far from civilization’: 1910 Sarasota (Part 1)



Real History
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Sarasota Herald-Tribune
USA TODAY NETWORK

Welcome to Sarasota. It’s 1910 and, if you’ve come by train, the Seaboard Air Line Railway, aboard No. 81, pulling out of New York at 1:25 p.m., you have passed through 23 cities and towns during the journey down, including: Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, Richmond, Portsmouth, Raleigh, Columbia, Savannah; then on to Jacksonville followed by the small communities of Baldwin, Waldo, Ocala, Wildwood, Dade City, Plant City, Turkey Creek and Tampa.

It has been a long journey, over 36 hours, but at last the conductor calls out, “Sarasota!”

The train chugs slowly into the wooden station at First Street (today’s Lemon Avenue) and Main and when it finally comes to a standstill, you file out to be-



A dry goods store in downtown Sarasota around the turn of the 20th century. PHOTO PROVIDED

gin your reconnaissance of the area.

If you’re looking for a place to stay, I recommend Dr. Jack Halton’s The Halton on Gulf Stream Avenue. Formerly a sanitarium, it has been converted into a hotel to accommodate the Palmers on their first visit in February. It offers beautiful bayfront accommodations, has a tennis court and is the perfect location for boating and fishing.

The old DeSoto Hotel, renamed the



First National Bank was opened as the Citizens Bank by Owen Burns on the Southeast corner of Pineapple and Main Street. Note the octagonal shaped bricks (where the Zenith Building is today.) PHOTO PROVIDED

Belle Haven Inn, once the pride of the fledgling community, has fallen on hard times but will be refurbished and under new management by the end of the year and when the Palmers return in October, they will take rooms there.

For less expensive accommodations, choose the Sarasota House at Five

Points or The Inn at Main Street and Palm Avenue; a rooming house upstairs and a livery stable on the first floor.

You’ll note immediately that while there are wooden sidewalks, the streets are not paved, and there are far more horses and buggies than there are automobiles. In fact, the center of Five Points still has a trough from which the animals drink. Also, be mindful where you step, animals are permitted to wander freely, much to the chagrin of the townsfolk who regularly have their yards and gardens trampled upon.

Downtown Sarasota is beginning to have the look of a bona fide town which status it laid claim to in 1902 when it incorporated, choosing as its motto, “May Sarasota Prosper.” The buildings and houses that line the way along Main Street are still wooden, and fires are a constant threat. When the 16-room Bay View Hotel at Main Street and Palm burned down at the beginning of February, the rest of the downtown was fortunate that it did not go up in smoke with

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Modern

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A mangrove peninsula offers natural protection and is home to abundant and diverse wildlife. This appeals to buyers who want to be in a natural Old Florida setting. The private roads in Hidden Harbor are brick and most of the streets are canopied with old growth oak trees which mingle with palms, wild coffee bushes, huge ferns, bromeliads and vivid tropical flowers. A homeowners association maintains this deed-restricted neighborhood and member fees are \$150 per month.

When the current owners bought and renovated this property last year, they intended to keep it as their personal forever vacation home. But, then things changed as a new mindset emerged.

“During the renovation we lived in the house and just fell in love with the



The owners’ suite features a spacious spa bath.

Siesta Key lifestyle,” said the wife. “During that time we began to question – like a lot of other COVID-confined people did – whether we had to live year-round in the Northeast to do our jobs. And it turns out we don’t. So we are moving to Florida permanently and becoming residents. But to do that, we need a bigger house. We are in the process of trying to find a large vintage home on water that



The entire upper floor is the owners’ suite and offers scenic views of the canal and mangrove islands. PHOTOS BY JOHN WARREN/SUNCOAST AERIALS

we could renovate. Ideally, we want the same kind of neighborhood as Hidden Harbor, but that may be hard to duplicate because this place is very special.”

Rubin

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outperforming the national index, with approximately \$260 million in sales volume year-to-date, an 11.2% growth from the previous year. A similar performance can be seen in Sarasota’s multifamily and condominium market, with approximately \$718 million in sales volume year-to-date.

Elliot Rose, a talented Sarasota-based commercial real estate broker with Coldwell Banker Commercial NRT recently shared with me that, “developer interest in greater Sarasota continues to be robust. Coastal sites suitable for luxury condominium redevelopment are highly pursued, including ‘bulk purchases’ of existing condo complexes. Downtown mixed-use redevelopment of existing buildings and suburban land tracts for residential single-family homes in the residential categories are currently in high demand. In addition to local and regional interest, developer interest from domestic urban markets abounds, especially from the Northeast and Midwest.”

Among the 2021 Mid-Year Update’s findings, Coldwell Banker Commercial brokers are also witnessing a tenant’s market, with a drawdown from a previous need by businesses for large office space to demand for much smaller spaces that are below 10,000 square feet. Increasingly, companies are adopting a hybrid business model and looking to save on the overall cost of leasing office space. This desire for smaller office space comes from a variety of businesses, including new enterprises, labs, professional service providers, medical offices and cryptocurrency traders. This shift in demand could see landlords offer established and prospective tenants anything from fully furnished office space to high-quality central business district (CBD) assets at discount pricing. While the commercial real estate market trends in Florida across all sectors ebbs and flows, understanding these shifts and keeping our finger on the pulse of the market is key to being a part of the economic impact driven by the commercial real estate sector throughout our state.

Duff Rubin is the president of Coldwell Banker Realty in Florida.

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History

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it. That fire was followed shortly thereafter by another at the Bradley Boarding house and stables that also spread to the Sarasota Lumber Company, E.B. Grantham's home, and C.C. McGinty's office building, which was saved only through "super-human efforts." In that blaze the train depot nearly caught on fire and several freight cars were burned.

But by 1910 more and more brick and rusticated block buildings line the way from the train station to the dock on the bay, and finally, in September 1911, the Sarasota Fire Department is organized.

The prominent names in town are Whitaker, Lord, Edwards, Higel, Blackburn, Roberts, Chapline, Wilson, McDaniel. Sarasota has had a folksy weekly newspaper, the Sarasota Times, published here since 1899 by Cornelius Van Santvoort Wilson and his wife, Rose. After he dies on Sept. 28, 1910, Rose will operate it herself until she sells in 1923, never missing a Thursday afternoon issue.

Surprisingly, given its small size, the Sarasota of 1910 has more than a few recreational opportunities. Many come for the sportfishing, which is unparalleled, as is the hunting. By today's standards, unbelievable amounts of all manner of fish are caught and often used for photo opportunities to advertise the town and the hotel at which the fisherman stays.

One example of many reported in the Sarasota Times: "Six guests of the Sarasota House went out in the launch Dido to the grouper banks and in six hours landed 820 pounds worth, the largest weighing in at twenty-six pounds was landed by Mr. Burke who was enthusiastic over the fishing."

Another party caught an estimated 2,500 pounds of king fish with the paper duly reporting "king fish were there by the thousands."

Sarasota also lays claim to having the first golf course in Florida. (Actually the claim is that first golf course in the country was here, but that was later proven to be false.) Gillespie, who brought golf to Florida, had put in a two-hole practice "course" when he arrived with his sticks in 1886 and in 1905 laid out a true 9-hole course that ran from



The view from Sarasota's Palm Avenue looking toward Five Points, circa 1915. PHOTO PROVIDED



Fishing was one of the first tourist attractions in Sarasota. PHOTO PROVIDED

Links Avenue.

Entertainment includes musicales at the hotels. One put on by the Belle Haven Inn by Mrs. George L. Whipple was described as "most enjoyable," and included a piano solo by Mrs. Smith who regaled the other guests with Sweet Genevieve, "a gem of her own composition"; then a vocal solo by the Rev. W.F. Allen of the Methodist church of Calvary. The evening went on with Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep and ended with F.A. de Canizares of Wayne, Pa., who sang "Lost Chord and Anchored."

If you feel up to making the journey, Braidentown offers the Warren Opera House, "the finest theatrical building on the West Coast of Florida" which seats up to 800 and offers 40 pieces of scenery.

For Sarasota, plays are put on at the Sarasota High auditorium. At the end of

December, the Braidentown Dramatic Club puts on "Charley's Aunt," reportedly "well attended and a splendid play throughout."

Many community-wide events are held on Sarasota Key (Siesta Key) at the home and grounds of "Uncle" Ben Stickney, the gentleman for whom Stickney Point Road and the Stickney Point Bridge are named. He is held in high esteem by the locals who appreciate his gracious hospitality.

Upon his death in 1912, the paper said of Stickney, "His frank and friendly manner and genial good nature carried sunshine wherever he went. No one on the bay was better known or counted his friends in greater numbers and every transient visitor, having once met Mr. Stickney, on returning to Sarasota, always enquired for and expressed a wish to again meet the cultured old gentleman."

Dr. Jack Halton hosts a picnic for his guests at Stickney's "romantic grounds," with the Sarasota Times reporting, "On our arrival we found dainty sandwiches and coffee waiting us. After doing justice to these we unanimously agreed that another enjoyable day, never to be forgotten, was a record of the past."

Another nod to recreation and entertainment and the positive impact it will have attracting newcomers is the formation of the Sarasota Brass Band. This is lobbied for the Sarasota Times, which tells its readers, "There is nothing that

gives so much snap and go to a town as a brass band. It gives people entertainment of a good, pure elevating and wholesome sort. It draws people to a town to visit, and it brings people to a trade, too. Let's have a band and keep abreast of the times."

The instruments arrive in March 1910, and after months of practice, the band, under the direction of Dr. F.W. Schultz, are ready to give its first concert on the Fourth of July. It becomes a regular staple, leading parades, playing at different venues around town and welcoming dignitaries at the train station for an obligatory welcome to Sarasota salute.

In January 1910 a guest at The Halton writes to the Times, "We are glad we came, notwithstanding the fears expressed that we should not be comfortable 'so far from civilization.'" This guest calls Sarasota "a quiet little village [that] offers no attractions for those who are dependent upon fashion and amusements, but for those wish to get away from the strenuous life, this care-free existence will bring rest and refreshment." Signed: A Tourist.

Far from civilization is not too much of an exaggeration, but we are connected to the outside world by train, have been since 1903. And since 1895 John A. Savarese's steamship Mistletoe has provided regular service for passengers and freight between Sarasota and Tampa, three days a week.

Next week: Part 2

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