

# REFLECTIONS

FROM CENTRAL FLORIDA

THE MAGAZINE OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

FALL 2022  
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Photo courtesy of Jim Leatherman



*The Historical Society's mission is to serve as the gateway for community engagement, education, and inspiration by preserving and sharing Central Florida's continually unfolding story.*

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*The History Center is accessible with elevators on every floor.*

## FROM THE DIRECTOR

### AN EVOLVING MUSEUM

On September 10, the History Center is proud to unveil an exciting exhibition about the alternative music scene that erupted in the Orlando area in the early 1990s. Titled *Figurehead: Music & Mayhem in Orlando's Underground*, it captures the energy and drive of this period in our not-too-distant past, the importance of art and design as cultural expression, and the continuing importance of music in Central Florida in changing times.

In this issue of *Reflections*, we'll look behind the scenes at the exhibition and also at other aspects of our musical past, from classical music to rock super bowls to boy bands. We'll also look, through images from our collection, at some early Black voices in local radio and explore the vital contributions of Rollins College to radio, especially through its station WPRK, the broadcast voice of alternative culture in the area and the "best in basement radio."

This issue also includes the final installment in a two-part series about influential pioneer John Moses Cheney, who was a strong supporter of music and theater culture. This part of his story, however, concerns his important role in establishing the future Orlando Utilities Commission, an essential development in the growth of the City Beautiful.

From Cheney's time in early Orlando to today, our community's cultural pursuits have reflected the times, as have all our concerns. The History Center seeks to paint a complete picture of our history to underscore how the ripples of our attitudes and actions through time extend



into the recent past. While we're proud of the work we've done and the awards we've attained, we're working hard to build a better museum, even as we recover from the pandemic's considerable effects on our resources.

We're deep in the exploration stages of fully renovating and updating our current exhibitions and seeking ways to expand them. Much has changed since the History Center opened more than two decades ago, and we're researching and growing our collection to better reflect the experience of our entire Central Florida community.

We also seek to offer more diverse programming and special exhibitions on topics we plan to include in our future visitor experience. This work takes thoughtful time and care, and we go forward with dedication to building strong relationships across the community and engaging in meaningful conversations. As always, we welcome your comments and participation. ■

– Pamela Schwartz, Executive Director,  
Orange County Regional History Center

## FROM THE COLLECTION

This bumper sticker might not turn many heads today, but in the late 1990s it proclaimed that you had been at a Grateful Dead concert at the Orlando Arena in 1994 – and were tear-gassed by the police. After the Sunday night show was canceled, a crowd of nearly 400 tried to force their way into the Monday night show and were met with three types of tear gas. Someone with a sense of humor about the event created this bumper sticker as well as another version reading, "Never Had Such a Gassed Time, Orlando 94." ■





CONTRIBUTORS



TOM CLOUD

Through four decades, Tom Cloud has been an attorney at GrayRobinson, focused on local and state government, utility, land-use, and environmental law. He has served as legal counsel on the Historical Society's board and has published numerous articles on Florida law and history. In 2021, he received the prestigious Paul Buchman Award from the Florida Municipal Attorneys Association.



RICK KILBY

Rick Kilby, seen here in his grunge phase, is the author of *Florida's Healing Waters: Gilded Age Mineral Springs, Seaside Resorts, and Health Spas*, winner of a silver medal for Florida nonfiction at the Florida Book Awards and the Florida Historical Society's Stetson Kennedy Award.



GABBY MCGEE

Gabby McGee has degrees in museum studies and historic preservation and has worked at the U.S. Capitol and National Building Museum. Currently doing exhibits for the Town of Oakland, Florida, she enjoys historic fun facts, reading, and going to theme parks.



MELISSA PROCKO

A native Floridian, Melissa Procko is a proud alumna of the University of Central Florida, where she earned a B.A. in anthropology. She is the former research historian at the History Center, where she began work as digital archivist for the One Orlando Collection, which documents the Pulse tragedy.



WENXIAN ZHANG

Wenxian Zhang has been a member of Rollins College faculty since 1995. He is the Head of Archives & Special Collections at Olin Library, a member of the Asian Studies Program, and a full professor in the College of Liberal Arts in Winter Park, Florida.

On the cover: The band Archers of Loaf performs outside at the Edge venue in downtown Orlando on December 5, 1994. According to the *Orlando Sentinel*, the club gained notoriety after a March 1995 concert where Courtney Love, the lead singer of the band Hole, was accused of punching out several members of the audience during the show.

Photo courtesy of Jim Leatherman



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THE MAGAZINE OF THE  
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*Reflections from Central Florida*  
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**The Joseph L. Brechner Research Center**  
was created through a donation from the late Marion Brody Brechner in honor of her husband, Joseph (1915-1990), an award-winning journalist, community leader, and freedom-of-information advocate. Materials available for research include prints and photographs, archives and manuscripts, architectural drawings and records, books, and other published materials pertaining to Central Florida history. The Brechner Research Center is located on the fifth floor of the Orange County Regional History Center and is free to the public by appointment. We welcome scholars, students, genealogists, filmmakers, journalists, and the general public to conduct research by appointment during our visiting hours.



## UPCOMING EVENTS

For more events, visit [TheHistoryCenter.org/events](http://TheHistoryCenter.org/events)  
(All events are subject to change.)

### FIGUREHEAD EXHIBITION PROGRAMS

#### LUNCH & LEARN – I'M WITH HER: WOMEN IN THE CENTRAL FLORIDA CLUB SCENE

Friday, September 2, noon – 1 p.m.

Hear the stories of the women who built a vibrant and unforgettable music scene.

#### FIGUREHEAD OPENING BASH

Opening Bash  
sponsored by



Friday, September 9, 6 - 9 p.m.

A ticketed fundraiser featuring live music, food, and drinks and a sneak peak of the new *Figurehead* exhibition!

#### THE STORY OF FIGUREHEAD: A PANEL DISCUSSION

Saturday, September 10, 1 – 2:30 p.m.

Get the inside story behind the music scene as we welcome pioneers of the *Figurehead* era who were instrumental in promoting shows, establishing concert venues, and releasing local music through their own record label.

#### SENSORY SUNDAY: THE MUSICAL MUSEUM

Sunday, October 16, noon – 4 p.m.

Join us for some sensory-friendly fun for the whole family!

#### TOTALLY EIGHTIES POP CULTURE TRIVIA HAPPY HOUR

Thursday, October 20, 5:30 – 8 p.m.

Test your knowledge of the 1980s as we explore the music, movies, and pastimes of this most excellent decade for a chance to win some tubular prizes.

#### LUNCH & LEARN – IT'S GONNA BE CENTRAL FLORIDA: THE BOY BAND CRAZE

Friday, November 4, noon – 1 p.m.

Learn more about larger-than-life boy bands of the 1990s and early 2000s that started right here in Central Florida.

#### ART OF THE UNDERGROUND: A FIGUREHEAD PANEL DISCUSSION

Saturday, November 5, 2 – 3:30 p.m.

Discover the role of ephemeral art in community building as we explore the art of Orlando's underground music scene of the 1980s and '90s.

Figurehead  
programming  
sponsored by



#### LUNCH & LEARN – FIGUREHEAD SHOWCASE: DEEP CUTS & B-SIDES

Friday, December 2, noon – 1 p.m.

Dive further into the world of Orlando's independent music scene with this expanded look at the History Center's *Figurehead* exhibition.

#### MUSICAL MAYHEM FAMILY DAY

Saturday, December 3, 10 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Rock out with the whole family as we explore Central Florida's musical past!

#### TOTALLY NINETIES POP CULTURE TRIVIA HAPPY HOUR

Thursday, December 15, 5:30 – 8 p.m.

Brush up on all things from the 1990s because we'll be exploring the music, movies, and pastimes of the decade that was "all that and a bag of chips."

#### COFFEE & CONVERSATIONS SERIES

Each installment will feature a member of the community who was active in Orlando's underground music scene in the 1980s and '90s as a guest docent who can share this fascinating history through their own unique perspective.

Sunday, September 18, 2 – 3 p.m.

Sunday, October 9, 2 – 3 p.m.

Sunday, November 13, 2 – 3 p.m.

Sunday, December 11, 2 – 3 p.m.



#### SMITHSONIAN DAY LIVE

Saturday, September 17

Museum admission is free all day with a Smithsonian Museum Day ticket. To receive free admission, guests must present an official Museum Day ticket.

#### LUNCH & LEARN

##### ON THE BRINK OF WAR – ORLANDO AND THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

Friday, October 7, noon – 1 p.m.

The Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 focused on the tiny island of Cuba but caught the attention of the world. Central Florida played a critical but often overlooked role in this historically significant standoff.



## POSTER DESIGNERS HELPED PUT ORLANDO INDIE MUSIC SCENE ON THE MAP

★ BY RICK KILBY ★

When I moved to Orlando in the late 1980s, the city was in the midst of a boom that had started with Disney World opening in 1971 and was accelerating toward the long-awaited debut of Universal Studios in 1990. I arrived after the demise of Orange County’s citrus era, when the region morphed into a tourism behemoth that attracted talented and hopeful workers from all over the globe. By the early ’90s, these new residents were creating a major impact on the region, and you could feel a palpable energy of raw potential pulsing through the community. Creativity of all kinds was bursting at the seams.

A downtown in atrophy, with little life outside of Church Street Station, was about to be reborn as a destination for cutting-edge live music. The musical scene that emerged as a result of this metamorphosis caused ripples that still resonate throughout the region today.

The distinctive look of this period was established by rock posters that helped put the Orlando scene on the map. Jim Faherty, founder of Orlando-based Figurehead Records, maintains that five local graphic designers and illustrators were largely responsible for that unmistakable visual identity. In many ways the look they shaped was the antithesis of the squeaky-clean, family-friendly Disney image. The posters they

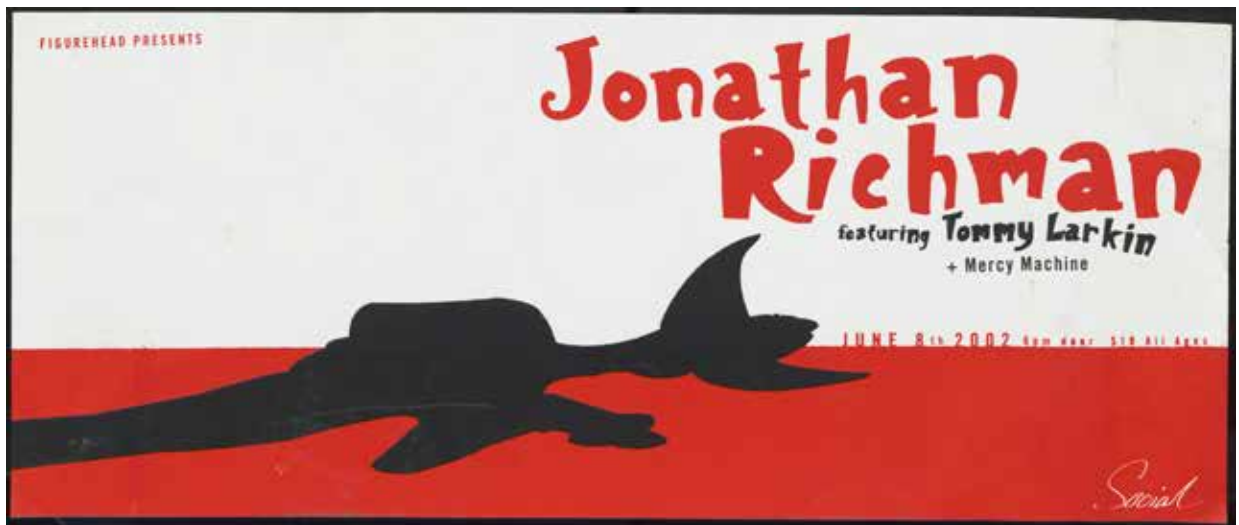
created had roots in punk rock but ultimately evolved into something much more sophisticated.

As a graphic designer and fan of indie music myself, and also a contemporary of the “Figurehead Five,” I had a front-row seat to this burst of inspiration on paper. I must confess admiration (and perhaps a bit of envy) for the five – as designers and musicians. In addition to being successful graphic designers and illustrators, all of them – Thomas Scott, Jeff Matz, Scott Sugiuchi, Greg Reinell, and Klaus Heesch – were in rock bands, at least briefly.

Above, in background: Yellow tensioned silk is used in the screen-printing process.



Klaus Heesch designed this poster for a performance by singer-songwriter Jonathan Richman at The Social in downtown Orlando in 2002. Richman did many shows with Figurehead over the years.



## FROM NICOTEENS TO GIANT MEN

The Figurehead Five cut their teeth in an era of FM radio, legendary independent record stores, and earth-shaking concerts. Thomas Scott grew up in western Pennsylvania, had a voracious appetite for live punk music, and worked in record stores before coming to Central Florida, where he reunited with his buddy from up north, Jim Faherty. Scott Sugiuchi grew up in Orlando on a diet of classic rock and joined his first band as the bass player while he was a student at the University of Central Florida (UCF). Klaus Heesch, on the other hand, remembers immersing himself in country music before discovering new wave while in high school. Jeff Matz had guitar lessons in high school but did not play in his first band until his college days at the Ringling College of Art and Design in Sarasota. Greg Reinell didn't arrive in Central Florida until he was a senior in high school, but he soon found himself in a band. Often the five designed flyers for their own bands.

Several of the designers would play together; Sugiuchi and Heesch were both members of Giant Man, and Heesch and Matz were in Killing Everything. Thomas Scott was only briefly a member of a band called Sleeping Arrangements that may best be remembered for performing at Figurehead Records' first show.

Sugiuchi and Reinell's bands both had a degree of musical success beyond Orlando. The Hate Bombs, Sugiuchi's band, released records that gained attention in the garage-band music scene, enabling them to tour extensively. Reinell fronted a number of bands, including the Nicoteens, but his most successful band, Nutrajet, was signed by a British label and toured overseas. In the '90s the Hate Bombs and Nutrajet would perform together around town. Nutrajet earned a reputation for being extremely loud, to which Reinell would snarl, "If you're gonna be a rock 'n' roll band, then be one."

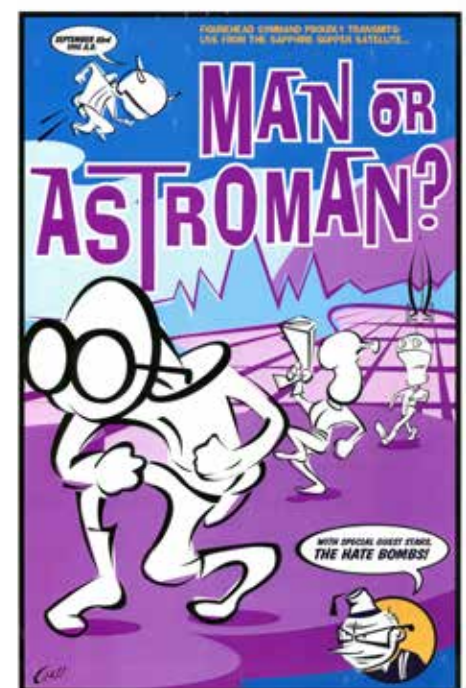
## ARTISTIC TENDENCIES

All five designers agree that their love of music informed their design work for Figurehead. While working on show posters, they were aware of one another's work, but each of the five had different paths to becoming visual artists. Reinell, perhaps the best pure draftsman of the group, remembers taking up drawing at the age of 4. Thomas Scott grew up wanting to be a comic-book artist but turned to graphic design after concluding that "he couldn't draw well enough."

By college, however, they were all accomplished enough to have opportunities to go to art school. Scott attended the Pittsburgh Art Institute; Reinell was offered (and turned down)

a Pell grant to attend the prestigious Art Institute of Chicago; Sugiuchi studied graphic design at UCF; Matz graduated from the Ringling College of Art and Design; and Heesch was offered a scholarship to the Savannah College of Art and Design but instead went to UCF because it offered computer-based design classes.

Their design careers all started modestly. This was the period just before computer-based desktop publishing became the industry standard, and several of the five started out doing paste-up, which is preparing mechanical artwork by hand for offset printing. Eventually Jeff Matz found



Scott Sugiuchi designed this poster for a show at which his band, the Hate Bombs, played with the garage-surf band Man or Astroman at Orlando's Sapphire Supper Club in 1995.

his way to work in advertising agencies, which led to the creation of McQuien Matz, a two-man agency he started with copywriter Ron McQuien. When they became successful, mostly on the strength of work for Disney Resorts, the small agency hired Thomas Scott. After hours, Scott would work on band posters for Figurehead, which is how Matz got connected to Faherty. When Scott left to start his own design business, Eye Noise, he was replaced at McQuien Matz by Klaus Heesch.

#### **“RETINA-SEARING EYE CANDY”**

Matz has described his process for designing show posters as a creative exercise to be solved quickly, after hours, often using “found art.” Pop culture heavily influenced the visual language of all the designers, from Hanna-Barbera cartoons and spaghetti western movies to mid-century kitsch and vintage science fiction.

Despite advances in computer graphics, the Figurehead Five embraced a low-tech approach to design, to maintain what Sugiuchi called a “punk rock aesthetic.” Heesch remembers striving for a “cut-and-paste” look by “hand-doing stuff and photo-copying.” Eye-catching imagery was the key to creating an effective poster, and the designers used black-and-white engravings from clip-art books, elements from old ads with oversized halftone dots, and original drawings to illustrate a song or something related to the band.

Often images were combined to create sophisticated visual puns. The goal, according to Reinel, was to get “asses through the doors” with a concept that was appropriate for the band and not just a product of the “artistic ego” of the designer who created it. In a 2018 social media post promoting an exhibit of what he called his “retina-searing eye candy,” Reinel reminisced about prowling the streets in his poster art persona, “Stainboy,” and “painting the city with dangerous rock poster Day-Glo.”

One method of reproduction that would ultimately make their posters more collectible was screen printing, a

technique used mostly for T-shirts in which ink is forced through a porous screen onto the printing surface. Initially a third-party vendor had to do the printing, but when Heesch bought his own screen-printing equipment, Matz and Scott started “pulling prints” at Heesch’s studio. Screen printing allows for opaque, vivid ink colors that can be printed on a wide variety of paper stocks, and each print of an edition is a unique work of art due to the handmade nature of the process. “That’s when poster making got really fun,” Heesch recalls.

#### **A CONTINUUM OF CREATIVITY**

Before Figurehead Records and the indie rock music scene evolved in Orlando, no one gave the city’s musical climate any credit, according to Sugiuchi. At the time Athens, Seattle, and Austin were known as hotbeds of indie music, but to Sugiuchi, the Orlando scene was equivalent. Matz agrees that Figurehead put Orlando on the map for touring indie bands. The work of the five designers helped establish the Orlando scene’s visual identity, and their work earned national recognition.



A Greg Reinel poster promoted surf-guitar legend Dick Dale at the Sapphire Supper Club.



The popularity of the show posters extended well beyond the concerts they were intended to promote. The Figurehead Five earned accolades for their work in professional publications, at award shows, and as part of a growing show-poster culture epitomized by the Flatstock exhibition held annually at the South by Southwest (SXSW) festival in Austin. There, fans can view show-poster displays and meet the artists who created them.

I vividly remember my favorite posters created by the Figurehead Five. I have Thomas Scott's Iron and Wine poster on my office wall. Jeff Matz's Anti-Pop Music Festival poster based on a Russian prison tattoo earned recognition in *Communication Arts* magazine. Greg Reinel's epic black-and-white poster for guitar legend Dick Dale portrayed a scantily clad woman

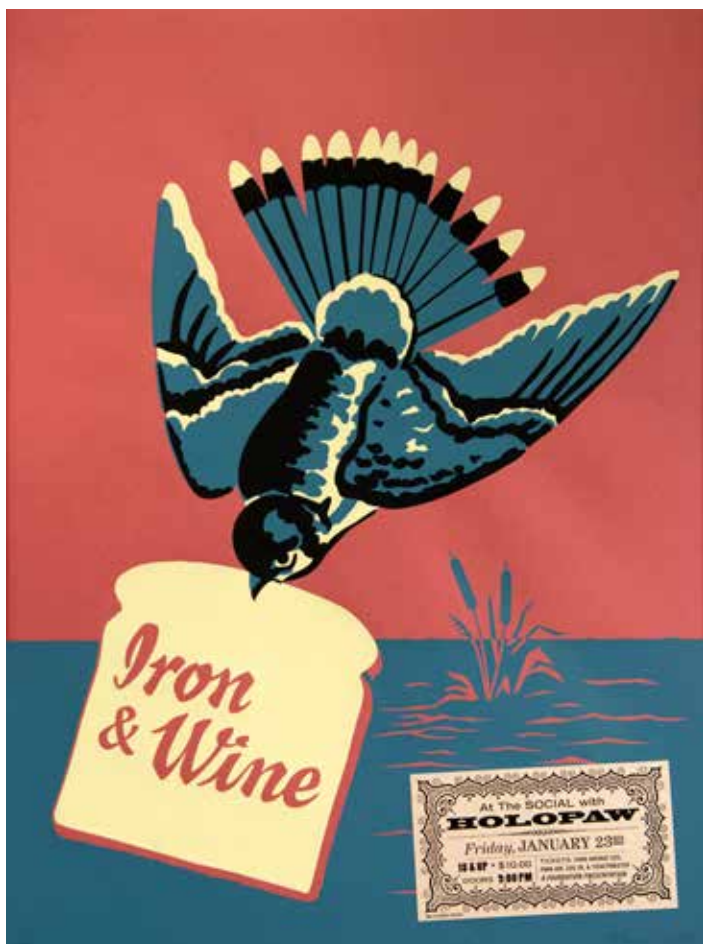
surfer on waves of human skulls, rich in his trademark idiosyncratic detail.

When I arrived in Orlando, it felt like it was a place struggling for an identity. Today I've witnessed it evolve into a dynamic city that celebrates creativity and diversity. "We're all part of a continuum," Reinel professes, noting that the vibrant music scene in Orlando had "real positive energy" and a distinct "sense of possibility."

Heesch expresses a similar sentiment, noting that Orlando matured into a community with a forward-thinking "collaborative spirit." Having observed Orlando's evolution from a similar perspective, I admit to a sense of nostalgia for those days when the town seemed to buzz with a fresh energy. But I can also connect the dots to who we are today from that brief period when eye-catching, innovative artwork plastered downtown windows. ■



Jeff Matz created this limited-edition, screen-printed design for an Orlando-based indie music festival. The two-color poster was featured in *Communication Arts* magazine.



This screen-printed poster from the author's collection was designed by Thomas Scott. It features three opaque inks on a colored stock with concert information on an attached inset.

## THE FIGUREHEAD FIVE ★



### Thomas Scott

Current occupation: Principal designer at the Walt Disney World Company  
Band: Sleeping Arrangements  
AKA: Eye Noise



### Jeff Matz

Current occupation: Owner of Lure Design  
Bands: Killing Everything, Romey Buzley, MK Ultra, Gwendolyn, Tinnitus Rex



### Scott Sugiuchi

Current occupation: Self-employed creative director, living in New Mexico  
Bands: Giant Man, Hate Bombs, Stents, etc.  
AKA: Gooch, Backbone, Vibranium



### Greg Reinel

Current occupation: Artist and illustrator  
Bands: Nicoteens, Nutrajet, Screaming Iguanas of Love  
AKA: Stainboy

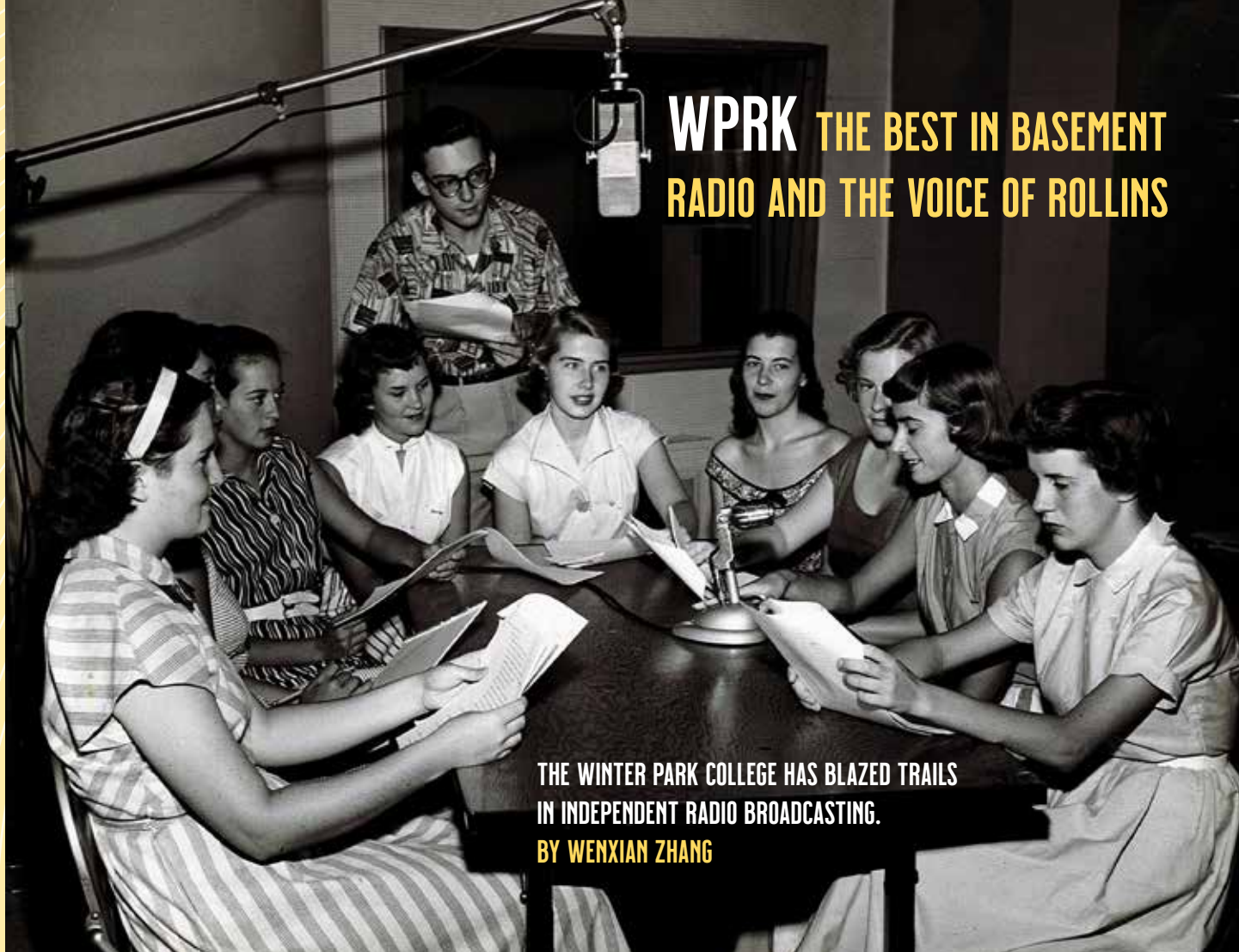


### Klaus Heesch

Current occupation: Product design manager at Meta  
Bands: Giant Man, Killing Everything, Digginlilies, Gasgano



# WPRK THE BEST IN BASEMENT RADIO AND THE VOICE OF ROLLINS



THE WINTER PARK COLLEGE HAS BLAZED TRAILS  
IN INDEPENDENT RADIO BROADCASTING.

BY WENXIAN ZHANG

A broadcasting session during the 1952-1953 academic year in the WPRK studio at Rollins College in Winter Park.

Often called “the best in basement radio and the voice of Rollins,” radio station WPRK has been on the air in Central Florida for 70 years. It is not the first station to broadcast from the Winter Park college, however. As a national leader in pragmatic liberal arts education, Rollins has a long history in radio broadcasting. In 1924, when radio was still in its infancy, Professor Edward F. Weinberg and a group of physics students launched Central Florida’s first radio signal at 580 AM from a small dance studio on campus. Weinberg even came up with the call letters himself: WDBO (“Way Down by Orlando”). It was one of the first college radio stations in America, but Rollins soon had to give up the endeavor because of operational expenses.

When the college’s Mills Memorial Library was constructed in 1951, a media studio was added in the basement of the building, located

at the center of campus. Orlando philanthropist William B. Calkins donated funding for equipment, inspired by a wish “to enlighten young people with regard to the great spiritual joys and truths,” Rollins President Hugh McKean noted, and the college’s Board of Trustees passed a resolution to establish a new radio station with a mission that would “be of such nature as to raise the spiritual level of the college and the community.”

On December 8, 1952, WPRK began broadcasting with 10 watts of power. The first voice aired was that of President-Elect Dwight Eisenhower, who offered these lofty dedication remarks: “This new FM station of Rollins College can help to spread and advance the great ideas which keep men and women free. Whether the ideas come from the great music or poetry or other literature of the past, or from debates and reflections of today, the people of our country who are listening in will be the richer.”

## GROWING IN POWER

Initially, WPRK was on the air for only a few hours each weekday evening, but daytime programs were soon added. After broadcasting on 88.1 FM, its radio frequency was soon changed to 91.5 FM in 1953. With further financial support from the college and community, WPRK’s transmitter power was enhanced to 250 and then 1300 watts.

As originally envisioned, most of the station’s early programs were of a cultural and educational nature, including discussion forums, science talks, sports roundups, and presentations by local artists and community personalities. In addition to a great music lineup, the station also broadcast special events such as Rollins’ Animated Magazine and the Winter Park Bach Festival. By 1962, WPRK had “more listeners per watt than any other radio station in Florida,” according to a 1962 *Winter*



*Park Star* article. By 1964, the station began to operate seven days a week. During the 1970s, WPRK was on the air from noon to midnight, and summer programs were added in the 1980s.

### VITAL ROLE ON CAMPUS

Since its founding, the student-run radio broadcasting of WPRK has been a vital part of campus life. For many years, it was one of the largest student organizations on campus, with dozens of DJs and student volunteers covering different shifts and tasks. The radio operation also has had a positive influence on curricular improvement

and student learning experiences at Rollins. Not only were some courses in broadcast production taught over the years, but the station also contributed to the development of the Communications Studies program later on. Many students and alumni have fond memories of their time working at the station in the basement of Mills, and such experiences have had profound impacts on their careers and personal lives. After college, some pursued work in business, finance, education, and marketing, while others engaged in related professions such as journalism and media communication.

Notable among them are Chris

“Mad Dog” Russo of SiriusXM (class of 1982), Jim Bowden of Major League Baseball’s Network Radio (class of 1983), and Maria Paz Gutierrez of RadioLab (class of 2015), while the internationally popular DJ Diplo stands out among WPRK’s former community volunteers.

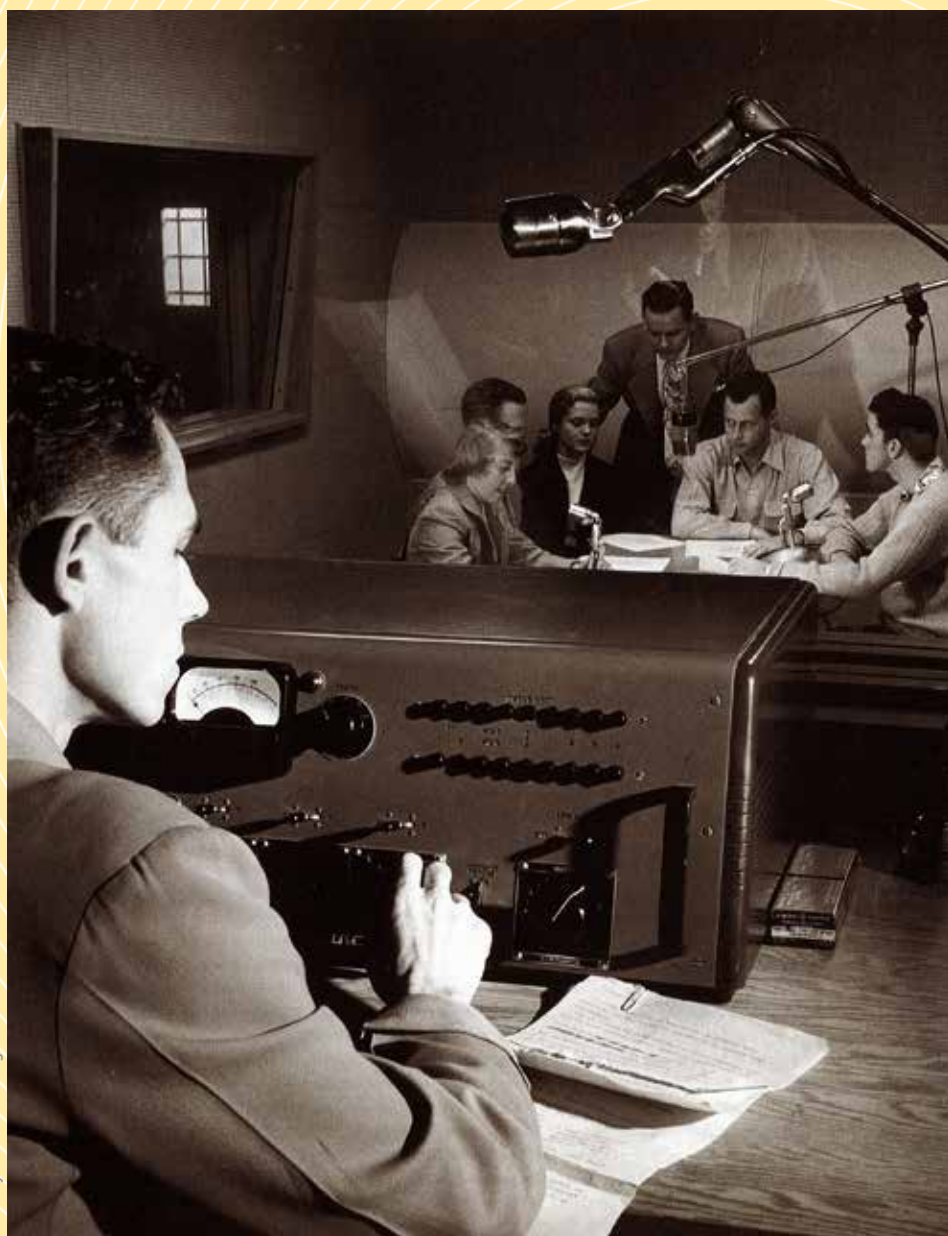
Benjamin Aycrigg, a member of the class of 1949 and WPRK’s first program director in 1952, worked at WDBO briefly before being appointed as an instructor in Speech and English at Rollins. Aycrigg went on to become WKMG’s news anchor in Central Florida for many years and became known as the “Walter Cronkite of Orlando television.” Another notable person affiliated with WPRK was Gordon Fraser, former World War II correspondent and longtime NBC broadcaster, who served as the station’s general manager and greatly shaped its growth between 1982 and 1990.

At the end of Fraser’s tenure, students petitioned the administration for expanded hours, more involvement, and greater control of the programming. Consequently, hours of operation were increased; initially they expanded to include the 8 a.m. to 2 a.m. daily timeslot and then, in the mid-1990s, 24-hour broadcasting began.

### AN INDEPENDENT VOICE

Since then, WPRK has been fully run by students with a general manager who oversees its administration. Such initiatives led to the further development of WPRK as a genuine media outlet for the creative voices of students. These programs also helped to distinguish WPRK from other radio stations in Central Florida. For financial and marketing reasons, Rollins even considered proposals for affiliation takeovers by other networks. However, because of students’ strong opposition to these, throughout its history WPRK has remained an independent voice in the metro Orlando region.

In terms of programming, music has been the largest segment since the station’s founding, and classical music dominated the airwaves during the early decades. Then WPRK’s



WPRK’s first program director, Ben Aycrigg (standing), conducts a radio talk show. Aycrigg was a member of the Rollins class of 1949.





WPRK DJ Carla Borsoi, class of 1992, broadcasts her free-form alternative “PUNK-tuation Show” from the basement of the Mills Memorial Center at Rollins.

lineup began to broaden to include more pop, rock, and contemporary tunes, reflecting the changing cultural landscape of the country and students’ own evolving interests. Besides classical, other popular genres frequently aired include indie rock, variety, hip-hop, punk, metal, and movie soundtracks.

WPRK has also contributed to the growth of the larger music community in Central Florida. Known as Orlando’s hip radio station, WPRK prides itself on airing music ignored by the mainstream. “It’s a blues station. It’s also, at various hours of the week, a jazz station, a reggae station, a country station and a late-night punk station,” as journalist Dana Eagles has noted in *Winter Park Magazine*. In addition, WPRK regularly features live performances by hometown musicians in its studio and sponsors concerts on campus such as the Fox Fest, an annual festival with multiple genres by local artists and student talent that takes place during Family Weekend each year.

The twenty-first century marks a few notable milestones in WPRK’s history. From January 17-21, 2005, 25-year-old WPRK DJ David Plotkin successfully completed 110 consecutive hours of on-air programming that included spinning CDs, hosting music bands, and interviewing local artists and civic leaders. His impressive accomplishment exceeded

the Guinness World Record in broadcasting at the time and helped raise more than \$16,000, which then made streaming possible. In 2006, WPRK.org was launched, and online streaming has since reached global listeners in Germany, Brazil, Finland, the United Kingdom, Canada, Mexico,

Ecuador, Australia, and France, among others.

On September 10, 2017, Hurricane Irma caused significant damage to WPRK’s antenna and forced the radio station off the air, leaving online streaming as the only way for listeners to connect for a period of eleven months. Finally, in 2020, after the major renovation of Mills Memorial Center (previously Mills Memorial Library), WPRK moved into its new broadcasting studio on the first floor of Kathleen W. Rollins Hall, where it remains a key part of the vibrant and central student hub on campus.

For the last seven decades, WPRK has been a vital part of Rollins and the greater Central Florida community. Currently, the student-run radio station is on the air and online 24/7 year-round with more than 80 weekly

shows, each one crafted by its own set of hosts, who range from students to faculty and staff members to community volunteers. Its signature programs still broadcast new indie music and an eclectic mix of genres rarely played on commercial airwaves.

From alternative music and live performances by local bands to earnest discussions of politics, economics, books, and global issues, WPRK exemplifies “how passion and drive – plus a healthy dash of spontaneity and originality – combine to create a successful enterprise,” Sarah Hartman wrote in *Rollins Magazine* in 2014. As a celebrated local cultural and artistic undertaking with its unique, independent voice, the station symbolizes “the enduring medium of radio, as well as the importance of local radio stations in the community,” music journalist Lauren Silvestri has noted. “WPRK is college radio at its best,” according to *Orlando Weekly* critics in 2012: “Run by students, programmed by students, and enjoyed by the entire community. Orlando wouldn’t be the same without WPRK!” ■

*Note: The author, a Rollins professor and head of the Rollins Archives and Special Collections, gratefully acknowledges constructive reviews from Professors Rachel Walton and Jonathan Harwell, and feedback provided by Greg Golden, class of 2011, 2016 MBA, and director of Student Media at Rollins. Unless otherwise noted, quotations about WPRK are from materials in the Rollins College Archives.*





# FROM ARIAS TO AEROSMITH

## CENTRAL FLORIDA MUSIC FESTIVALS

BY MELISSA PROCKO

Above: The crowd at Orlando's first Rock Super Bowl in May 1977. Facing page, bottom: Winters End in Bithlo, 1969, aimed to be Florida's Woodstock.

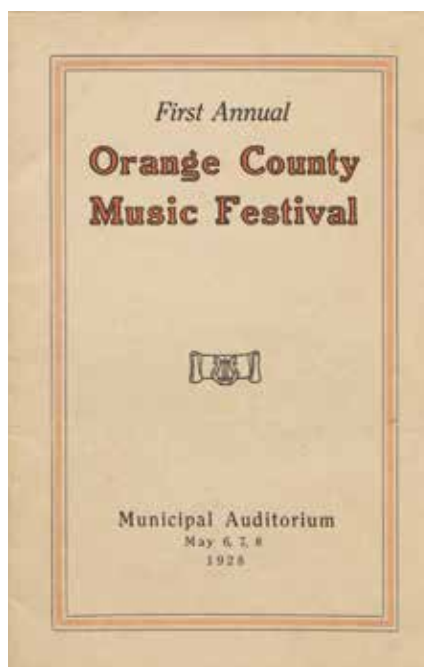
Orlando Sentinel Collection

Whether seen as a symbol of high society or a way to give voice to social protest, music has been bringing people together for thousands of years. From Orlando's first known festival in 1917 to huge concerts that rocked the Tangerine Bowl, the Central Florida music festivals of the past have set the stage for the successful events of today such as the Electric Daisy Carnival or even College Park's JazzFest. Here's a look at a few milestones.



### SPRING MUSIC FESTIVAL, 1917

Organized by Orlando music teacher Walter Drennen in 1917, the Spring Music Festival brought notable singers and opera enthusiasts to Orlando for two days of performances. In preparation for the program, the width of the Lucerne Theatre stage was increased at least 6 feet to accommodate the 200 members of the Elijah Chorus. The festival was discontinued at some point after 1922, but its popularity proved that Orlando music events could attract an audience.



### ORANGE COUNTY MUSIC FESTIVAL, 1928

Organized in observance of National Music Week in 1928, the Orange County Music Festival was promoted as a renewal of Drennen's Spring Music Festivals. Also called the Orlando Music Festival, the event featured three days of performances at Orlando's Municipal Auditorium and highlighted nationally known artists as well as Central Florida talent including the Orange County Symphony Orchestra and performers from the Ebsen School of Dance. Despite its reported success, the festival didn't gain enough traction to last beyond 1933.

Orlando Sentinel Collection



## WINTERS END FESTIVAL, 1970

Judging from 1970 news reports, the Orlando area experienced its first large-scale encounter with 1960s counterculture during Easter weekend that year, when thousands of rock fans descended on a muddy ranch-land site in Bithlo, 15 miles east of Orlando, for what was promoted as a Florida version of Woodstock. *Orlando Sentinel* accounts brim with descriptions of apparently exotic long-haired hippies sporting peace signs. “The cows were peaceful and so were the kids,” one staff writer reported. “From the air, it was hard to tell the difference except the cows were eating grass and the kids were smoking it.”

The event, called simply “Winters End” on posters, had been planned for Miami but was moved north after wrangling about permits that continued in Orange County. Meanwhile, thousands of music fans headed to Bithlo, where they set up tents, cooked potatoes and beans for one another, and waited for rumored acts that included Bob Dylan (he didn’t appear). Cars bearing license plates from almost every state jammed U.S. Highway 50, the *Sentinel* reported.



Less than two weeks before the event, set for March 27-29, Orange County had passed an ordinance mandating strict regulations for festivals, such as limiting music to eight hours followed by a 24-hour period with no music. Winters End organizers applied for a permit, but no performances took place on the first night, Friday, March 27, as a legal battle raged throughout the weekend.

With the festival’s fate still up in the air, musicians finally took the stage late Saturday afternoon and were followed by the Allman Brothers, joined by headliner Johnny Winter. Winter’s band at first refused to perform without being paid, but eventually band members did join Johnny and Edgar Winter on stage. Sweetwater closed out the festival’s most successful night with a performance that lasted until 4:30 in the morning.

Some attendees started Easter Sunday with a sunrise service followed by a rock performance by a group known as Storm, but many packed up to leave what some later remembered fondly as “Mudfest.” By Monday, only a handful remained, and the promoters, their attorney, and the site’s owner were charged with violating the county’s ordinance.

In the months following, the Orange County Commission replaced its impromptu 1970 ordinance with a new home-rule law that tightened restrictions on outdoor music festivals. Officials seem to have viewed rock music, and its fans, as a potential public nuisance. Big-name concerts were rare. Some concerts did take place at the Orlando Sports Stadium and the Tangerine Bowl, but rock fans often had to travel to the Lakeland Civic Center or Tampa Stadium to see their favorite bands perform.

## ROCK SUPER BOWL, 1977

Orlando’s rock fate changed with the 1977 renovation of the Tangerine Bowl (later the Citrus Bowl), which increased its capacity to more than 50,000. Rock concerts became a welcome source of revenue, and Orlando’s stadium was promoted as a potential venue.

The first major rock show at the Tangerine Bowl, on May 29, 1977, featured Fleetwood Mac, Bob Seger, Kenny Loggins, and Chick Corea with his group Return to Forever. Despite a midafternoon thunderstorm that caused a three-hour delay, the inaugural Rock Super Bowl attracted nearly 40,000 and was deemed a success. Loggins opened the show at 7 p.m., followed by Seger and the Silver Bullet Band before Fleetwood Mac took the stage and played for two

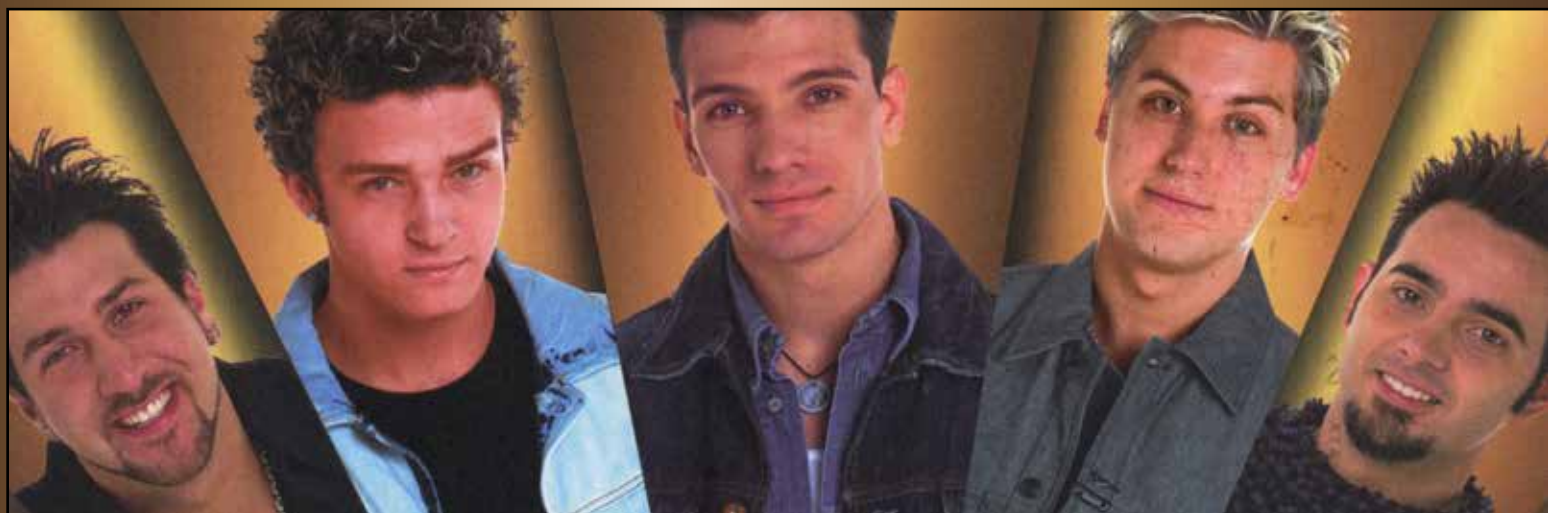


Rock Super Bowl VI in April 1979, also called the Florida World Music Festival, featured headliners Aerosmith and Ted Nugent. “Florida” was intentionally spelled with an extra “R,” copying the “Texxas” in the Texxas World Music Festival.

hours, closing out the first of 19 Rock Super Bowls at the stadium between 1977 and 1983. Over the years, the all-day concerts attracted tens of thousands of fans to see big-time bands including the Eagles, Aerosmith, Van Halen, the Rolling Stones, and more.

Today, Central Florida festivals highlight some of the great artists that call the area home. They also bring tens of thousands of music fans to Orlando annually. The playlists may be different and the venues much larger, but music still draws people together just as it did when music teacher Walter Drennen planned his productions more than a century ago. ■





# A HISTORY OF BOY BANDS IN ORLANDO IN FOUR SONGS

**Groups that got their start in Central Florida in the 1990s changed pop music forever**

*By Gabby McGee*

Above, from left: Joey Fatone, Justin Timberlake, JC Chasez, Lance Bass, and Chris Kirkpatrick of \*NSYNC, from a postcard in the History Center's collection. Below: An *Orlando Sentinel* classified ad placed by Lou Pearlman in 1992 sought potential boy band members.

“Boy band, noun: A group of young men who sing pop music and dance, whose music and image are designed to appeal to a young teenage audience.”

— *Oxford English Dictionary*

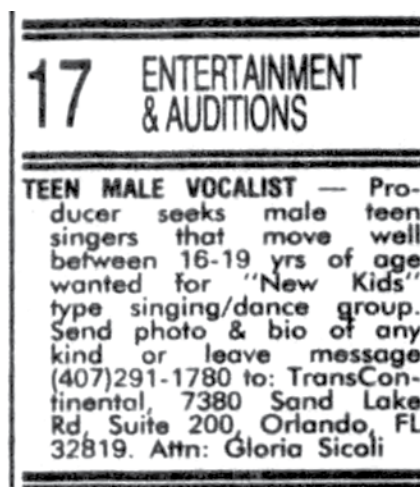
Boy bands have been around for decades: think of the Jackson 5 in the 1960s and New Kids on the Block in the 1980s. But never were such bands more beloved than in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and Orlando was at the center of the action.

That might seem odd, as writer and former MTV video jockey Dave Holmes has noted, “but it actually kind of makes sense,” he says. “There are a lot of theme parks, there are a lot of young entertainers. . . . It’s like Hollywood, but you can afford it.”

Let’s look back at popular boy bands with ties to Central Florida, through the lens of four of their songs.

## Backstreet Boys: “Larger Than Life”

Although the Backstreet Boys are “larger than life” now, when they got their start in Central Florida, the boys were just like any other teenagers.



Orlando natives Howie Dorough and A.J. McLean, along with former New Yorker Nick Carter, met at local auditions for commercials, theater, and television, particularly at the

newly relocated Nickelodeon Studios at Universal Studios Florida. Born in 1980, Carter had moved with his family to Ruskin, Florida, when he was 4 years old and had performed in talent shows and commercials and at Tampa Bay Buccaneers games. The three teens discovered a distinctive harmony when singing together, along with a passion for classic soul music.

The trio auditioned for record labels but didn’t make their big break until 1992, when record producer Lou Pearlman placed an ad in the *Orlando Sentinel* announcing auditions for a teenage boy band. McLean’s decision to audition set the stage for what would become a story of worldwide fame. Carter, who was 12 in 1992, faced the choice of joining the Mickey Mouse Club or the new band; he chose the latter. Dorough was quickly added to the line-up, and the search began for two more boys to round out a group of five.

Central Florida was uniquely situated for finding the right voices



for a boy band; with theme parks and film studios, there were plenty of teenage performers auditioning around town. “Orlando is known as the tourist capital of the world,” publicity executive Jim Reyes noted later. “You have all this great talent working at Disney, working at Universal. So you have this amazing cadre of artists and singers, and then here comes this guy, Lou Pearlman, auditioning and looking for a boy band.”

Enter Kevin Richardson, a Disney World cast member at the time, and the initial trio became a foursome. Richardson eventually called his cousin, Brian Littrell, who would become the final member of the quintet. Littrell arrived in Orlando from his and Richardson’s hometown of Lexington, Kentucky, where the cousins had grown up singing at festivals in the style of Boyz II Men.

The new band’s name was inspired by an Orlando outdoor flea market, the Backstreet Market – long gone now but a popular teen hangout at the time,

May 8, 1993, at Grad Nite in Sea World Orlando to more than 3,000 teenagers and then traveled across Florida performing at shopping malls and charity events.

Surprisingly, the Backstreet Boys’ big breaks came in Canada and Europe, but they also rose on the top charts in the United States, contributing to the rise of mainstream pop and MTV. Their first platinum hits were “Quit Playing Games (With My Heart)” and “Everybody (Backstreet’s Back).” In 1998, Orlando Mayor Glenda Hood presented the group with the keys to the city.

### \*NSYNC: “It’s Gonna Be Me”

Lou Pearlman reached mogul status thanks to the overwhelming success of the Backstreet Boys, but he wanted more. Once again, Orlando was the perfect spot to find teen talent. In 1995, he spotted a young Chris Kirkpatrick singing in a doo-wop group at Universal Studios Florida.

Pearlman told Kirkpatrick that if he formed a band, Pearlman would finance it.

Mickey Mouse Club alums Justin Timberlake and JC Chasez were contacted, along with fellow Universal team member Joey Fatone, who performed at the theme park in the stage show “Beetlejuice’s

Rock and Roll Graveyard Revue.” Lance Bass, who worked with the same vocal coach as Timberlake, flew to Orlando from his home in Clinton, Mississippi, when he got the call. Thus \*NSYNC was born on October 1, 1995. Fun fact: The star that begins the group’s name (represented here by an asterisk) was inspired by a meeting with a famous illusionist in London, who told the band members that if they put a star on their first CD, it would reach No. 1 on the charts.



Above: An undated \*NSYNC postcard from the History Center’s collection. Left: A 1991 *Orlando Sentinel* ad promotes the Backstreet Market near International Drive, which inspired the name “Backstreet Boys”; the ad describes 700 vendors and 10 restaurants “under one air-conditioned roof.”

**Orlando's #1 shopping and entertainment value!**

Introducing Backstreet Market – a shopping experience with prices so low, you won't drop from shopping or get soaked by the admission fees of gated attractions. Instead, you'll be dazzled by a selection of merchandise spanning 700 vendor spaces ... offered by merchants from around the world. You can enjoy ten restaurants under one air-conditioned roof, float high above the crowds in a hot-air balloon, or mingle with costumed characters.

Backstreet Market, Orlando's newest attraction, offers a "Mall-ternative" and a new dimension in shopping and entertainment. This bargain hunter's paradise features an unparalleled combination of festive atmosphere and prices beneath those of outlet stores. Backstreet Market truly has something for everyone.

Come experience Backstreet Market ... and get more for your vacation dollar than any place in Central Florida. It's your chance to get away from Mainstreet prices and grab some one-of-a-kind Backstreet bargains.

So far, you've been entertained by the mouse, soaked by the whale, and thrilled by the ape. Now ... come and save with the flea!

Come experience Backstreet Market and get more for your vacation dollar than any place else in Central Florida!

WET N' WILD CARIBBEAN  
★ Backstreet Market  
SAND LAKE RD.  
CANDIDA AVE.

Located off I-4 Drive at corner of Center and Canada Ave.

**back street market**  
an open-air market

Richardson has recalled.

“It was a flea market, but when there was no flea market, there was a big parking lot,” Richardson said. “That was where the kids would drive their cars, hang out with their convertibles, and listen to music. That’s how we got Backstreet.”

The former flea market was destined to become a household name when the Backstreet Boys became official on April 20, 1993. “The Boys” performed their first-ever concert on

(It reached No. 2 rather than the top spot, but who’s counting.)

\*NSYNC’s first public appearance took place at Disney’s Pleasure Island on October 22, 1995, but much like the Backstreet Boys, the group toured Europe before bringing their first album back to the U.S. With their second single, “It’s Gonna Be Me,” they challenged the Backstreet Boys for supremacy. When the Backstreet Boys turned down a major TV appearance on the Disney Channel in 1998, \*NSYNC jumped at the chance, and within six weeks the group’s songs were topping the charts.

The boy-band rivalry was actually manufactured by Lou Pearlman to get more publicity. Known as “Big Poppa,” Pearlman played the role of genial father figure to these teenagers, who looked up to him. He invited them to his house and took them out to lavish dinners, and they confided in him. Unfortunately, he was not quite the teddy bear he seemed.



## \*NSYNC: “No Strings Attached”

Before long, both the Backstreet Boys and \*NSYNC discovered that the money they were raking in with sold-out performances and chart-topping albums was not sweeping into their bank accounts. The big bucks stopped at Pearlman's pocketbook. The Backstreet Boys learned they had received only \$300,000 for their work, while their record label received millions. After months of hard-fought battles, the Backstreet Boys said "I Want It That Way," not Pearlman's way, and got out of their contract with Pearlman to the tune of \$30 million.

After \*NSYNC hit 10 million records, Pearlman took them out to dinner and presented them with checks. The amount? Just \$10,000. \*NSYNC followed in the Backstreet Boys' footsteps, and their *No Strings Attached* album was the first \*NSYNC released after saying "Bye Bye Bye" to Lou Pearlman. (The album included a song titled "Just Got Paid.") The album broke the record for most albums sold in its first week – a record that stood until 2015.

## O-Town: “All or Nothing”

In 1999, after losing his two boy bands, Pearlman came up with an idea for a television show that would help him find the next big thing. The first iteration of the reality series “Making the Band,” which aired on ABC, focused on Pearlman’s search for a new boy band, which drew its name from Orlando’s “O-Town” nickname. Bands LFO and Natural were also created this way.

Eventually Pearlman was arrested on charges of embezzling more than \$300 million in one of the largest Ponzi schemes in U.S. history, and in 2007 he was convicted of crimes including conspiracy and money laundering. (He died of cardiac arrest in 2016 while in prison.) In spite of Pearlman's crimes, the boy bands that got their start in Orlando thrived and paved the way for modern-day groups such as One Direction. Boy bands changed the pop music genre forever and will always have a spot in music history. ■

[illegible]

# What now, boys?

**Still looking.** Ansel (clockwise from bottom left), Estrada, Underwood, Perick and Miller continue to pursue credibility.

Members come off as dull and petty

In attuned disbelief, the band O-Town watches a tape of its disastrous performance at last year's *American Idol* suggest.

"It's like the chorus — it's the worst," says Ashley Tink. "I was like, 'This is the worst I've ever heard of.'"

It sounds like our throats are bleeding. ...

The band's handlers acknowledge that the group was damaged by the performance. The network's "Lipstick Nation" is a trashy, raucous, O-Town-in-an-off-key mode on national television.

...the band "can never allow to make another performance like that."

The scene underscores the permeable tie to ABC's *Making the Band*, which returns for a second season tonight. The show's point once seemed to be: Can this prefabricated band succeed?

Now the overriding question: Does O-Town deserve to prosper?

Making the Band's producers have been assigned to give the band a promotional tour. But it does depend on the band's limited talent.

TV REVIEW

**'Making the Band'**

Cast: Ashley Tink, Erik Estrada, Chris Calkins, The Pinks, Jack Underwood. Where and when: Thurs. 8-9 p.m. on MTV Channel 9. What to watch: The band's first CD.

Revealing key:

- ★★★★ Excellent
- ★★★ Good
- ★★ Average
- ★ Poor
- NR Not Rated

RELEASED BY: WB

O-Town inhabits the shaky ground between media curiosity and maligned musical ac-

By JIM ABBOTT

Bubble-gum pop was supposed to be dead by now, but apparently no one told O-Town, the boy band that also plays one on

When ABC's *Making the Band* returns to the airwaves (8 tonight, WFTV-Channel 9), Orlando's most famous pop star wannabes get another 13 weeks to win the hearts of pre-pubescent fans in

And though there are signs of progress, the TV show has fallen far short of blasting Jacob Underwood, Erik-Michael Estrada, Ashley Parker Angel, Dan Miller

and Trevor Penick into the rarified air of the Backstreet Boys and 'N Sync.

At Spencer's Gifts in Orlando Fashion Square, there are no O-Town posters to compete with boy bands, Creed, Britney Spears, Limp Bizkit or the "15 reasons that a beer is better than a woman."

The only presence is three lonely O-Town refrigerator magnets displayed at ankle level—below Dorothy and Toto, Lucy and Ricky, the Simpsons, Betty Boop and Scooby Doo.

"They haven't made a big impact," said clerk Aiyana Akutagawa, 20, of Orlando. "Give them time and they'll be big, unless the boy-band thing dies, like I'm hoping. I hate all those bands that sound like."

Not that O-Town is without its hometown fans. In January, the band inspired roughly 2,000 girls to descend on Planet Hollywood at Downtown Disney West Side

"It was insane and it was ear-shattering," said Kathy Burns, Planet Hollywood's public relations manager, who said the ruckus compared to receptions for Bruce Willis and Arnold Schwarzenegger. "People see them every week on TV and they feel they know them, so it's kind of like a soap opera phenomenon."

The band's debut single, "Liquid Dreams," has become a weekend staple at the Universal Entertainment and Skating Center in Orlando, says Harlyn Navarro, 17, a junior at Colonia High School who works at the

Girls are screaming, but O-Town finds itself in precarious



From top left, clockwise:  
*Orlando Sentinel* pop-music critic Parry Gettelman previewed the Backstreet Boys' sold-out 1999 concert; two \*NSYNC postcards from the History Center's collection; Lou Pearlman's mug shot after his arrest; two *Sentinel* articles under the headline "What Now, Boys?" advanced the second season of the TV show "Making the Band" and analyzed the outlook for the band O-Town in April 2001.



## IN SEARCH OF

JOHN MOSES

# CHENEY

BY THOMAS A. CLOUD

### THE FATHER OF ORLANDO UTILITIES

A NEW ENGLAND LAWYER SETTLED IN ORLANDO IN 1885, SHAPING OUR CITY AS FEW OTHERS HAVE. THIS IS THE CONCLUSION OF A TWO-PART SERIES CHRONICLING CHENEY'S IMPACT THROUGHOUT THE REGION.



From his arrival in Orlando in 1885 until his death in 1922, John Moses Cheney shaped the city as few others have. His accomplishments as lawyer, jurist, progressive politician, theatrical producer, vocalist, and community supporter contributed much to Orlando's rising status as a desirable destination in early 20th-century Florida. Perhaps the chief reason Cheney deserves to be remembered in Orlando concerns his creation of the city's first utility, the Orlando Water Company – the precursor of the Orlando Utilities Commission, today's OUC.

#### INVESTING IN ORLANDO

The Orlando Water Company began life as an investment vehicle for a group of Pennsylvania investors looking to take advantage of an active Florida real estate market. Funds were raised and the initial phase of the water system constructed, but in 1886 the city improvidently issued the franchise to the wrong party, Alfred Parker of Huntington, Pennsylvania, who secured the franchise by misrepresenting his relationship with the investors.

While the water system was under construction with money from one set of Pennsylvania investors, Parker attempted to sell the



ORLANDO UTILITIES COMMISSION • ORLANDO, FLORIDA



So for the modern equivalent of a little more than \$15,000, Cheney secured the rights to a franchise that today, as OUC, contributes an annual dividend approaching \$100 million dollars to Orlando's budget. By any measure, the settlement was smart. Cheney quickly assisted the investors in reorganizing as the Orlando Water & Sewerage Company.

He dealt with these challenges by searching for real-world solutions. Starting in 1901, he negotiated an extension and modification of the water franchise while obtaining a new franchise, Orlando's first, to provide electric arc lighting in the city. The original, tenth-of-a-megawatt (100 kilowatt) generating plant was powered with what we now consider "biofuel" – compressed peat blocks, then wood chips, based on Central Florida's extensive wood supply.

Cheney's nascent utility enterprise did not enjoy continuously rising prosperity. Cost recovery for these early utilities depended more on annual income from renting hydrants and per-fixture fixed payments rather than metered consumption.

Statement of Earnings and Expenses  
of the  
Orlando Water and Sewerage Co. of Orlando, Fla.  
For three years ending June 30th. 1896.

Year ending June	Revenue	Cost of operating.	Net earnings.
30th. 1893.	\$10,890.40	\$4,137.80	\$6,552.60
1894.	10,794.13	4,013.21	6,730.92
1895.	11,003.94	3,784.28	7,239.66
	<u>32,488.47</u>	<u>11,915.07</u>	<u>20,573.40</u>

Statement of Construction and Repairs.

Accounts for three years ending June 30th. 1895.

	Construction	Repairs
Year ending June 30th. 1893.	\$1,779.13	\$578.46
" " " 1894.	333.44	111.93
" " " 1895.	117.32	350.71
	\$2,229.89	\$1041.10

Construction\* the cost

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of the original as the same appears on the records of the County of Los Angeles, California.

correct, to the best of my knowledge and belief.

*J.M. Ch...*

Orlando, Fla. Oct. 19, 1895.

Knowledge and belief.

~~J. M. Cheney~~ *Scout*  
Orlando Water &  
Sewerage Co.

Report of Disbursements of  
The Orlando Water and Sewerage Co.  
For the year ending August 31st. 1896.

Pump House. { Includes only supplies for Pumps  
and Boilers. Vig. Oils, Cotton waste & c.

1895	Sept.	7 55	
	Oct.	20 53	
	Nov.	-	
	Dec.	8 25	
1896	Jan.	1 25	
	Feb.	8 75	
	Mar.	35	
	April	10 88	
	May	1 75	
	June	-	
	July	14 04	
	Aug.	-	
	<b>Total</b>		73 15

Fuel.

1895	Sept.	-	
	Oct.	20 75	
	Nov.	78 00	
	Dec.	22 50	
1896	Jan.	42 50	
	Feb.	75 50	
	Mar.	119 50	
	April	150 00	
	May	65 50	
	June	21 50	
	July	51 50	
	Aug.	-	
	<b>Total</b>		642 25

Salaries

Includes pay of local Manager & 2 Engineers.

1895	Sept.	186 66	
	Oct.	186 67	
	Nov.	186 67	
	Dec.	186 66	
1896	Jan.	186 67	
	Feb.	186 67	
	Mar.	186 66	
	April	186 67	
	May	186 66	
	June	186 67	
	July	186 66	
	Aug.	186 67	
	<b>Total</b>		2,200 00

Expense. { Includes Office Expense, Extra Help,  
Hauling, Repairs, Taxes, Boiler Insurance.

1895	Sept.	86 20	
	Oct.	21 08	
	Nov.	161 15	
	Dec.	47 60	
1896	Jan.	31 52	
	Feb.	77 02	
	Mar.	-	
	April	-	
	<b>Total</b>		2,200 00



Without long-term franchises, utility companies encountered difficulties persuading banks to advance credit for plant expansion. Predicting customer growth then was no more precise than it is today, given the vagaries of the stock market and the bubble-like Florida real estate market. These difficulties are the primary reason often cited in OUC's origin story to explain why Cheney sold his utility to Orlando.

### THE BIRTH OF OUC

That origin story for OUC is unique among Florida municipal utilities. If Jacksonville, Lakeland, or Tallahassee has one, it hasn't survived. In Orlando, the story has often been told something like this.

Peter Herdic installed the first water system (popularly called "Peter's pipes"), quit because of the Great Freeze of 1894-1895, and was replaced as manager by John Cheney, who did the best he could – but the trials of technology and finance proved just too challenging.

Then, shortly after the end of World War I, Orlandoans elected as mayor a visionary political dynamo, Eugene Duckworth, who foresaw the need for the city to own the utility. The "Cheney regime" persuaded smart-thinking citizens to vote for a bond issue to buy the water and electric plants and expand the utility system. The Florida Legislature then created OUC to be headed by five men of "splendid business acumen." The rest, as they say, is history.

Like all creation myths, this story leaves a lot out. For one thing, Herdic died in 1888, after tangling with Parker's schemes, well before the Great Freeze, and Cheney had already reorganized the water company before then, too. Moreover, while the new-fangled technology and financial markets certainly were a challenge, Cheney was in large measure equal to the task.

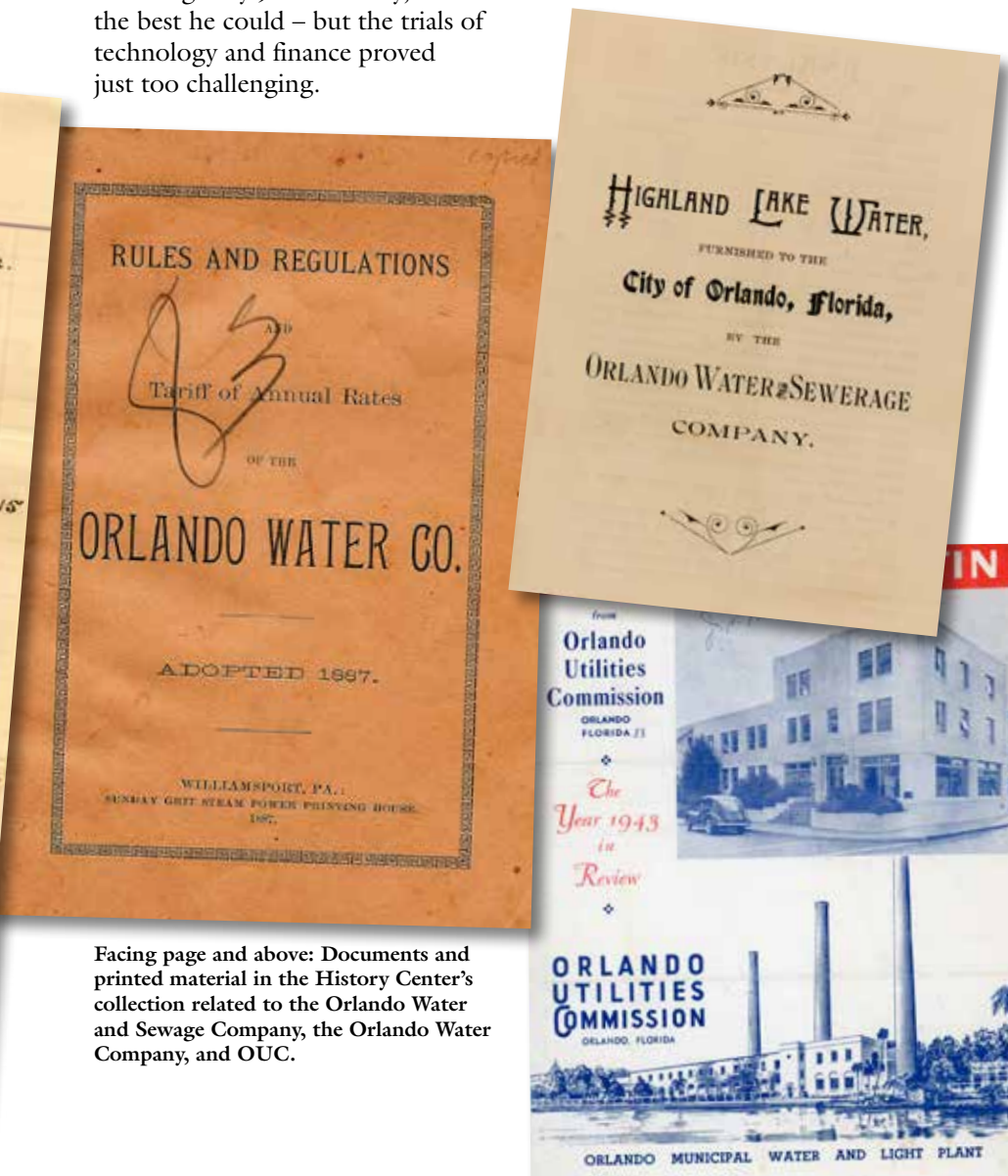
The core of the whole true story, however, revolves around the acquisition of the utility. It's what attracted me to Cheney and his water and light company in the first place. To understand that part of the story, it helps to know a bit about the process used for the sale, something legal wonks call a "franchise purchase option."

In 1899, the Florida Legislature (at Henry Flagler's request) mandated that all city street franchises be limited to a 30-year term and be subject to a "buyout" option. Since the law was adopted in 1899, there have been only ten documented cases in which a city sought to invoke the buyout clause. Only five of those resulted in a transfer, and only two involved a city buying an electric system where it had none before. One was Winter Park, in 2005; the other was Orlando, in 1922.

Besides being the first of its kind, the Orlando case stands out for another reason. Every other one of these cases involved a years-long legal war in which no means were spared to stop, rock, and block a sale. On the surface, there's no indication of anything remotely resembling the usual trappings of knock-down, dragged-out litigation surrounding Cheney's sale of the Orlando Water and Light Company. As usually told, events more closely resemble a kumbaya moment rather than a war to the knife.

Beneath the surface, however, lies a far more interesting tale. In fact, Cheney really didn't want to sell – he tried to extend the franchise. A competing political faction literally dragooned department-store owner Eugene Duckworth into running for mayor and spearheading the acquisition effort. Cheney certainly cooperated with the transfer, but he decided to put the onus for the decision to purchase the utility on the city.

It was a decision driven as much by his declining health as it was by the terms of the franchise contract. Duckworth's insistence on naming a management board consisting solely of the bankers who ultimately underwrote the bonds was a key ingredient in selling the sale to Orlando voters. Once the die was cast, people did unite behind the sale and the bond issue.



Facing page and above: Documents and printed material in the History Center's collection related to the Orlando Water and Sewerage Company, the Orlando Water Company, and OUC.

## THE ORLANDO MAYORAL ELECTION OF 1919

Before the sale, relations between the utility and the city had not been perfect. Ten years after the City Council agreed to a second water-franchise extension and a first electric-franchise renewal, negotiations bogged down over two issues: whether Cheney would add filters to the utility's Lake Highlands water plant and a missing purchase-option clause, mandated by state law, in the 1901 franchises.

These issues were finally resolved in the spring of 1912, and a state-mandated referendum resulted in approval of the franchises. But the question of filtration and the reliability of service continued to be sticking points between the city and the utility, resulting in litigation. As the franchises neared their end, more people began to advocate for municipal ownership, and the issue rose to prominence in the dramatic 1919 Orlando mayoral race.

In the lead-up to the race, the Orlando political ring associated with Samuel Yulee Way floated Duckworth's candidacy in the *Orlando Morning Sentinel* without telling Duckworth about it. He learned the news by reading about it while he was out of town on a business trip. When Duckworth returned, his department-store partner, N. P. Yowell, talked him out of running. Members of Way's group reportedly locked Duckworth in an Orlando doctor's office to persuade him to run, but he remained unconvinced until he was approached by what he termed "pressure boys" who threatened him if he ran. That's when he chose to run against the incumbent mayor, James L. Giles.

A popular Orlando realtor and banker, Giles would serve six terms as the city's mayor. (His niece Edna Giles Fuller would eventually become the first woman elected to the Florida House of Representatives.) Giles' son, LeRoy, became the first general counsel to OUC. It is not entirely clear what James Giles' position was on purchasing Cheney's utility, although Cheney proposed to renew the franchises for a 40-year term in 1918. During the ensuing mayoral campaign, though, both candidates claimed to support acquisition.



Above: Orlando mayors Eugene G. Duckworth (left, in a later portrait) and James L. Giles. Facing page: A resolution signed by Orlando Mayor Bill Frederick declares Nov. 16, 1981, to be Judge Donald A. Cheney Day; John Cheney's name survives on a street sign for the Old Cheney Highway at East Colonial Drive near S.R. Road 436.

By all accounts, the campaign was a bitterly fought and hotly contested affair. Duckworth prevailed and set about the process of ending the franchises, obtaining financing, and purchasing the utility. Thirty years later, he claimed that the two city councilmembers elected to serve with him were put in office to prevent the transfer, a charge the only surviving member denied.

Both Duckworth and former councilman J.G. Manuel agreed, though, that there was disagreement over the membership of the governing board of OUC. That there was tension between Mayor Duckworth and Orlando's City Council is clear. Duckworth and his supporters successfully filed a recall petition to oust the two councilmembers. The recall attempt failed by a large margin at the ballot box, leading to Duckworth's resignation in early 1924.

### THE FINAL CHAPTER

During his negotiations with the city, Cheney was also facing health issues. By 1920, he had spent almost 40 years crisscrossing Florida through six statewide elections, as he litigated countless peonage cases as federal prosecutor; managed, directed,

and performed in Orlando theater productions; covered numerous capital murder trials; and operated a half dozen or so growing utilities.

Cheney also led the charge by the Orlando trade board (forerunner of the Chamber of Commerce) to facilitate the construction of the first paved road from Orlando to the east coast. He and his close friend W.R. O'Neal were constantly hopping a train to various places between Miami and Washington, D.C. It's likely that such a grueling schedule affected Cheney during the negotiations with Orlando, and his son Don attended most of the later meetings.

Before Duckworth's 1919 run for mayor, John Cheney had turned down the city's offer of \$400,000 for the utilities. About nine months later, he presented an ultimatum of sorts to City Council: buy the utilities or extend the franchises so that financing could be obtained.

The words were measured, but the message was clear: Put up or shut up. In a white paper written shortly before his death, Don Cheney himself said, "The issue was clear but a year of valuable time was lost in political maneuvering, curbstome oratory and other accompaniments



to the democratic processes of a local citizenship making up its mind on a public matter." Nine months after that, city leaders asked Don to "give them a price," and the Cheney's submitted a proposal of approximately \$850,000.

By August 1921, the parties agreed to arbitrate the value of the two utility systems. A month later, three engineer-arbitrators left Chicago, Illinois, for Orlando to begin the six-week process of determining a price. Their report was presented to the City Council in December 1921 and is now part of the Orange County Regional History Center's archives. Like virtually all modern-day purchase-option valuations (including Winter Park's), the appraisal was based on the cost of the assets, not a speculative-income approach. The price eventually came to a little over \$600,000 – approximately \$9.4 million in today's dollars.

State law further required a referendum for city freeholders to decide first whether to buy the utilities and then whether to borrow the money to consummate the sale. Don Cheney called the outcome "very much in doubt"; he credited the promise of an independent board made up of five bankers as the main reason that voters approved the sale and the loan.

It didn't hurt, though, that the city brought in a number of mayors from around Florida, including Jacksonville's mayor (and future governor), John Martin, to speak in favor of the purchase, which was approved by significant margins. There is no indication that either John or Don Cheney sought to block the sale; on the contrary, there is every indication that the Cheney's supported and cooperated with the transfer.

In January 1922, John Cheney was admitted to the hospital with what his son Don described as an enlarged liver. Following exploratory surgery, the doctors indicated there was nothing they could do, and Cheney went home to be with his family for what remained of his life. He died on June 3, 1922, while his second attempt at a federal judicial appointment was pending, while the utility sale had not yet closed, and before completion of the highway to the coast that would bear his name.

## TAKING STOCK

Don Cheney eventually sold the Cheney's remaining utility-related businesses to the Insull utility interests of the Florida Public Service Corporation, forerunner of Florida Power Corporation (now Duke Energy Florida). He became Orange County's first juvenile judge and was instrumental in supporting the Boy Scouts and in founding the Historical Society of Central Florida. As for Eugene Duckworth, he went back into business in 1924 and in 1936 won election to the office of justice of the peace, which he held until his death at the age of 84 in 1959. During his lifetime, Duckworth was largely credited with having the persistence to insist upon the independence of the managing board of OUC.

The Cheney-Dixie Highway was dedicated amid much fanfare on December 31, 1924. A copy of the dedication program remains the only photographic evidence of the two bricked obelisks that marked the road's beginnings in Orlando at Bumby Avenue and Colonial Drive. Only

a remnant of the original highway remains, replaced by a six-lane State Road 50.

During his life, John Cheney was often called upon as a sort of "grand master" of ceremonies. Once, while he was introducing Bicknell Young, one of the founders of the Christian Science Church, to an Orlando audience, Cheney remarked:

"If we accept history we can almost believe that it is a part of our human nature to be intolerant of all religions except our own. Inquisitions, tortures, persecutions and banishments seem a part of world life in all our past. But a new spirit is abroad and today who but the narrow minded will assert that all of the many churches of many creeds are not doing their own work for the bettering of man. It matters not whether you or I accept all or any of its tenets so long as good men and women do live by them."

Tolerance. Diversity. Consensus. Community improvement. Loyalty to your community. Even a century later, these qualities shine through John Cheney's life.

He gave us our first overall picture of Florida's Seminole people. Even his harshest political opponents, including gun-toting Sidney Catts, praised his demeanor and ethics. He stood for election as the perennial Republican candidate for virtually every major Florida statewide office, despite facing certain defeat at the polls. He vigorously attacked the hateful peonage system and stood up to those who would deny the right to vote, despite death threats. Without his energy, persistence, and love of community, Orlando likely would have missed its best chance at acquiring and forming OUC. He reflects the best of frontier Orlando. ■



Rick Kilby





# THROUGH THE CAMERA LENS

From the photo archives of the Historical Society of Central Florida

If you have photos you would like to donate to our collection, please contact Research Associate Noelia Irizarry-Roman, at [Noelia.IrizarryRoman@ocfl.net](mailto:Noelia.IrizarryRoman@ocfl.net) or 407-836-8581.

## On the Air: Black Representation on Orlando-Area Radio

Sponsored by the Orlando Negro Chamber of Commerce in 1953, the weekly Talent Toppers radio show gave Black youth in Central Florida an opportunity to showcase their talent. After auditions each Thursday at the Church Street headquarters of the Orlando Negro Chamber of Commerce, selected acts performed at the Carver Theater on Saturday afternoons in a 30-minute program broadcast by radio station WORZ. The programs (one of which is pictured at lower right) also used the air time to promote civic matters and events such as annual parades.

The program's time on WORZ was short-lived. After only nine shows, WORZ broadcast its last Talent Toppers on January 16, 1954. In early February, the Chamber announced a new radio series, following a similar format, to be broadcast on WLOF. The weekly talent show aired on Thursday evenings for 13 weeks. During this time, WORZ and WLOF were in the midst of competing for Orlando's Channel 9 television license, a battle that would continue for 29 years.

While the television fight may have had an impact on the Black talent shows, it couldn't bring down WLOF's "Clyde on a Cloud." Clyde Sanders, Orlando's first Black radio announcer, began spinning records nightly on WLOF in 1954, around the same time the station began broadcasting the weekly talent shows.

Originally airing from 11 p.m. to midnight, Sanders' late-night show introduced Orlandoans to early rock 'n' roll pioneers such as Little Richard, Chuck Berry, and Etta James. Sanders left WLOF in 1957 but returned to the airwaves by 1960 on WOKB, Orlando's first Black radio station, alongside fellow disc jockeys Nickie Lee, B.J. Jones, and Otis Jackson. Black representation on Orlando-area radio had come a long way from Talent Toppers in the early 1950s. These talented radio personalities were valued voices in the community, and WOKB brought their voices, and many more, to radios all across Central Florida. ■





# 2022 HISTORIC HAPPENINGS

## MYTHICAL MORNINGS



This adult program series inspired by our *Mythical Creatures* exhibition featured a fun look into Florida fantasy. Guests enjoyed light brunch refreshments at sold-out social events chock-full of interesting information about topics including mermaids, skunk apes, and dragons and their links to Florida myths.

## INTO LIGHT VIP OPENING



Alex Garcia-Barbon of AdventHealth spoke at the March 5 opening of the *INTO LIGHT Project Florida* exhibition. Presented in partnership with the Orange County Drug-Free Coalition and the INTO LIGHT Project, the exhibition presented original portraits of Floridians who have died from drug addiction.

## BRECHNER SPEAKER SERIES WITH N.Y. NATHIRI



On March 13, N.Y. Nathiri led an exploration of the life and work of Eatonville's Zora Neale Hurston. Nathiri delved into Hurston's important work as an anthropologist and activist, as well as community-driven efforts to promote Hurston's legacy in Central Florida.

## NICKELODEON STUDIOS LUNCH & LEARN



At April's Lunch & Learn, School Services Manager Shannon Elliston spoke on a subject dear to her heart: the rise and fall of Nickelodeon Studios at Universal Orlando. In our first program with both in-person and online participation, Elliston revisited the shows, experiences, and brand that shaped a generation.

## PULSE CROSSES ON DISPLAY



In 2016, an Illinois carpenter named Greg Zanis, moved by the June 12 Pulse shooting, created a wooden cross for each of the 49 who perished. We displayed the crosses Friday, June 10, through Sunday, June 12.

## FLORIDA HIGHWAYMEN MEET & GREET



Florida Highwayman artist Robert L. Lewis creates another masterpiece at our May Meet and Greet event. The History Center has hosted events highlighting the legendary painters for almost two decades.

# HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

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## TRICK OR TREAT SAFE ZONE

**Saturday, October 29**

**10 a.m. - 3 p.m.**

Enjoy trick or treating throughout the History Center and the Orlando Public Library along with creepy crafts, candy, and a scavenger hunt! Free for families with children ages 12 and under; children must be accompanied by an adult.



## A NEW EXHIBITION THAT REALLY ROCKS OPENS SEPTEMBER 10

Discover the story of how Orlando concert promoter Figurehead invigorated the area's musical landscape between 1985 and 2001.

Explore what made this time in the Orlando area so memorable – the bands and the clubs, the community and the chaos.

Tori Amos, courtesy of Jim Leatherman