

REFLECTIONS

FROM CENTRAL FLORIDA

THE MAGAZINE OF THE HISTORICAL
SOCIETY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA



FALL 2023
VOL. 21 NO. 2

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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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Unless otherwise noted, all archival images in this issue are from the Historical Society's collection at the History Center.



Sponsored in part by the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Arts and Culture and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture.

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

FROM THE DIRECTOR

LOTS TO SMILE ABOUT

What a summer we've had at the History Center! As temps begin to cool (ha ha) we transition from the free laughter of our summer campers to the joyous excitement of school tours filling the building.

We have a huge roster of great programming scheduled for this fall, and we hope you'll join us (check out TheHistoryCenter.org/events). Consider becoming a member of the museum, if you aren't already, to receive free admission, preview access, and loads of other benefits. Your contributions help make our award-winning work possible.

Speaking of awards, the American Association of State and Local History honored our museum staff with the national Leadership in History Award for our current exhibition, *Figurehead: Music & Mayhem in Orlando's Underground*. If you haven't visited to enjoy it yet, you should. While you're at the museum, you can check out all of our other improvements around the galleries. Our courtroom and transportation narrative enhancements are just a few of the many yet to come on our way to being an even better museum.

I'd like to take a few lines to thank you: our generous members, supporters, and patrons. We had a record-breaking success last spring, as we raised 212 percent more than in previous years through our United Arts Collaborative Campaign.



You supported sponsorships for summer campers who might not otherwise be able to attend, as well as paid internships for three incredible students representing the next generation of thoughtful and committed public historians.

As you read the fascinating articles gracing the pages of this publication, we hope you'll grow an even deeper interest in Central Florida's history and stop to think a moment about what you're contributing to the story. You're an important part of history. ■

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



On May 2, 2023, History Center staff welcomed leaders from South America who are participating in the International Visitor Leadership Program – the U.S. Department of State's premier professional exchange program, implemented locally by WorldOrlando. The visitors are part of a project titled "Countering Holocaust Denial and Antisemitism to Combat Racism & Identity-Based Hate," and they share an interest in recognizing the impacts of difficult history in their communities.

ABOUT THE COVER

Aviator and adventurer Martha Esch poses with a vintage airplane during her 1988 barnstorming tour of America. Esch successfully hitchhiked to each of the 48 contiguous United States via aircraft over the course of 183 days, beginning and ending her journey at the Orlando Executive Airport. *Photo by Gary Harwood, courtesy of Kent State University Libraries (Special Collections and Archives).*

CONTRIBUTORS



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Betsy Culpepper is the community engagement director for Grace Medical Home. She has served on numerous nonprofit boards including the Junior League of Greater Orlando, and was its president in 2006-2007. She holds a B.A. in speech communications from the University of Florida.



JOY WALLACE DICKINSON

Joy Wallace Dickinson wrote about Central Florida's past in the *Orlando Sentinel* for two decades. In her Orlando youth, she avidly read Jean Yothers's "On the Town" columns. Her historical mystery, *Secrets of the Flamingo Café*, takes place in 1948.



JEREMY HILEMAN

Jeremy Hileman is the assistant curator of collections at the History Center and an alumnus of Florida State University. He previously served as a One Orlando registrar, working with material related to the Pulse tragedy.



PAMELA SCHWARTZ

Pam Schwartz is an Iowa farm girl transplanted in the City Beautiful. She likes fancy eatin', genealogy, and her two wild mutts. She took Cheney Mason's oral history and knew she had to tell the tale of Lenny Randle.



CLAY WATERS

A seven-year resident of Clermont, writer Clay Waters earned a master's degree in library and information studies from the University of Alabama. His website, ClayWaters.org, featuring links to his published stories, poems, and reviews.

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FALL 2023
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Reflections from Central Florida
The magazine of the Historical Society of Central Florida Inc. focuses on the Florida counties included within the History Center's mission: Orange, Osceola, Seminole, Volusia, Lake, Brevard, and Polk. The History Center is located at 65 East Central Boulevard, Orlando, FL 32801. Visit our website at TheHistoryCenter.org

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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.

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History HAPPENS HERE

ORANGE COUNTY REGIONAL
HISTORY CENTER

DOWNTOWN ORLANDO

TheHistoryCenter.org/events



FIRST SATURDAYS! HISTORY ALIVE

The first Saturday of every month from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., visitors engage with history through enhanced interactive experiences and themed hands-on activities the whole family can enjoy.



LUNCH & LEARN

On the first Friday of each month at noon, join us in-person or online for a different interesting program about Central Florida history, the museum, and more.



THIRD THURSDAYS

The best-kept secret in Orlando! The History Center is open late on the third Thursday of each month with free admission from 5 to 8 p.m.



SENSORY SUNDAYS

On the second Sunday of the month, join us for some sensory-friendly family fun at this program presented in partnership with Autism Society of Greater Orlando.



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 Travis at 407-836-8584 or Travis.Puterbaugh@ocfl.net.



Celebrating a Century: An Angebilt Vignette Featuring Sam Stoltz

In late June 1921, developer J.F. Ange announced plans for a million-dollar, 240-room hotel at the northeast corner of Orange Avenue and Oak Street (now Wall Street).

Orlando's own Murry S. King, Florida's first registered architect, designed the elegant hotel, which broke Orlando height records when it opened on March 14, 1923 (Ange sold his interest shortly thereafter). It's now an office building at 37 N. Orange, just west of the History Center (also a King-designed building).

This undated photo from our collection is identified as the Seminole Room in the Angebilt Hotel. The wildlife painting above the bed appears to be the work of Central Florida artist and entrepreneur Sam Stoltz. Nicknamed the "world's greatest poultry painter" early in his career, Stoltz

moved to the region from the midwest in 1950 at the age of 50. In addition to the Angebilt, his artwork adorned many homes and commercial buildings including the Fidelity Title and Loan Company, Dubsdread Country Club, and Grace Phillips Johnson's palatial home in College Park.

But the best surviving examples of Stoltz's work can be seen in the houses he built and decorated in the College Park neighborhood of Orlando and the Mount Plymouth community in Lake County. In addition to his trademark rockwork, used in fireplaces and landscaping elements, Stoltz homes often featured murals, bas relief sculptures, and painted pecky cypress timbers. His subject matter was often local flora and fauna and especially featured birds. Stoltz was quoted as saying, "There is so much local color and material here in Florida, there is no need to go afar for inspiration." ■

Hitching a Ride

The Incredible Journey of Martha Esch

By Jeremy Hileman

For some people, it can take a lifetime to discover what they are truly passionate about. There are those among us, however, who seem to have known what moves them right from the very beginning. For Martha Esch, who grew up in the northeastern Ohio suburb of Fairview Park during the 1960s, aviation captured her imagination as a child and has been an enduring love ever since.

LIGHTS AND SHADOWS

The Esch family home was situated just across a valley from the Cleveland Hopkins International Airport, a source of a great fascination to young Martha, who often spent evenings staring out the living room window at the twinkling runway lights in the distance.

When the sun was shining, she challenged herself to catch the

silhouettes of passing planes in the grass behind her house. “I could see the airplane’s shadow going right across our backyard. And I would try to run for it and hit the shadow, and I felt like that was good luck,” Esch recalls. “I loved watching the airplanes fly over and always wondered what it would look like to be up in one looking down.” Soon, she would find out.

Orlando Sentinel Archives at the History Center



Above: Martha Esch says goodbye to well-wishers at the Orlando Executive Airport as she begins her journey.



At a stop in her native Ohio, Esch waves to a pilot at the Kent State University Airport, where she worked during her time in college.

Photo by Gary Harwood, Kent State University Libraries (Special Collections and Archives)



The Rosie O'Grady's Flying Circus gives a "smoky salute" to a plane piloted by Mac Barksdale carrying Martha Esch on the first leg of her journey from Orlando.

At age 14, she took her first flight, riding in a 1920s era Ford Trimotor plane at the invitation of a classmate's family. If there was any doubt previously, her passion for aviation was fully ignited. Esch was particularly fond of vintage aircraft, which she affectionately refers to as "aeroplanes" to differentiate them from more modern counterparts.

A routine visit to the library as an 11th grader would prove influential. "I found a book on the bookshelf that totally directed . . . the path of the rest of my life," Esch recalls. Published in 1973, the book, *Vagabonding in America* by Ed Buryn, is a counter-culture guide to exploring the United States.

In a short passage titled "Airplane Hitchhiking," Buryn describes a lesser-utilized form of hitchhiking in which the individual in need of a ride approaches not motorists on the highway but private pilots in small airplanes. "That's what I'm going to do," Esch declared to herself. She borrowed the book over and over again until the librarian suggested other students be given a turn.

The day after her school's senior prom – "which I was not invited to," Esch is quick to point out – she hitchhiked via airplane for the very first time. She would make it all the way to

Montreal, Quebec, but had to make the return trip on a Greyhound bus because of a 1976 Canadian air traffic controller strike.

Though she came from a loving family and experienced a happy upbringing, Esch would always feel the call of adventure. "It was a very nice little place that we lived, but I wanted to see the world," she recalls. The summer after her high school graduation, she drove to Florida, where her interest in painting led to the opening of a modest art supply store in Madeira Beach. Though the operation was short-lived, it allowed her to spend her days creating art and enjoying the beauty of the Sunshine State.

Esch returned to Ohio to seek higher education. At Kent State University, she studied both art and aerospace flight technology and graduated in 1981 with a bachelor's degree. During her time in college, she worked on the line crew at the school's airport, clearing snow from the tarmac and fueling small planes. She also earned her commercial pilot's license and worked as a flight instructor.

Following college, Esch again made her way south, ending up in Central Florida after a stint in the Keys. Her brother lived in Winter Springs, not far from the Orlando County Airport in

Apopka (now known as the Orlando Apopka Airport), so she sought permission from the airport's owners to park her RV on the property and became immersed in aviation culture.

BARNSTORMING ACROSS 48 STATES

In 1987, Martha began plotting her most ambitious trip to date, hitchhiking in and out of each of the 48 contiguous United States in the old-fashioned airplanes she was so passionate about. For nearly 10 months, she would spend her mornings sitting in a café, hand-writing letters to aviation enthusiasts around the country, asking if they would provide rides or put her in touch with someone who could. "I knew there was enough generosity amongst these people with the antique aeroplanes," she says.

She devised self-imposed parameters to guide her barnstorming tour. "I had lots of rules for myself," she laughs. First and foremost, all the planes in which she traveled were required to be vintage in nature, defined as being at least 25 years old. She could spend time doing other activities while in a given location, but she had to return to the airfield where she had been dropped off and board a plane there in order to advance.

The stage was set, and on May 28, 1988, at the Orlando Executive

Invites You To:



**See Vintage Aircraft
and meet Col. Joe Kittinger
and the Crew that keeps our
aircraft flying high through the skies of Central Florida.**

SATURDAY, MAY 28, 1988 9:00 A.M. to 10:00 A.M.

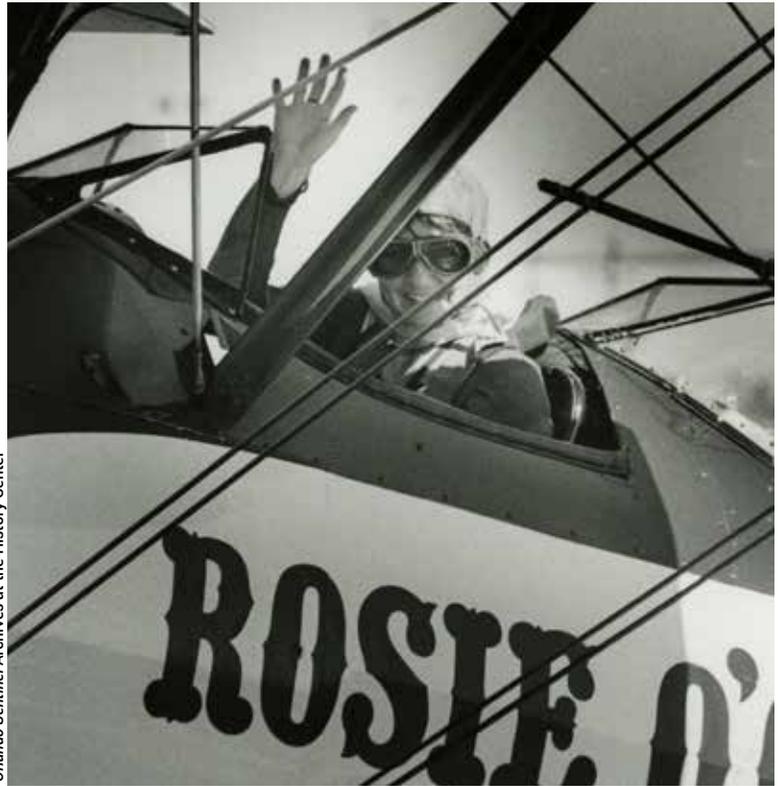
Join the Crew for a rousing send-off as Col. Joe Kittinger flies Martha Esch on the Inaugural Flight of her BARNSTORMING USA PROJECT at 10:00 A.M. in Rosie O'Grady's Classic Stearman Biplane.

Afterwards join the Good Time Gang, downtown at Church Street Station for a Rockin' Rollin' Twistin' and Shoutin' GOLDEN OLDIES STREET PARTY and the Grand Opening of the Church Street Station Historic Depot.

Rosie O'Grady Flying Circus is located at the Orlando Executive Airport, Robinson St./Crystal Lake Dr. Entrance

• RING (407) 422-2434 •

Orlando Sentinel Archives at the History Center



Above, left: An *Orlando Sentinel* advertisement promoting Esch's send-off. Above, right: Esch returns on the final flight of her journey in Rosie O'Grady's Flying Circus's Stearman biplane piloted by Col. Joe Kittinger.

Airport, a 29-year-old Martha Esch would begin the journey of a lifetime. Originally, her plan was to take the very first flight with aviation pioneer and famed Air Force Colonel Joe Kittinger.

That initial flight with Kittinger was not to be, however; his 1943 Stearman biplane, part of the Rosie O'Grady's Flying Circus, was experiencing engine trouble. Instead, the distinction of being the first pilot of the journey went to Mac Barksdale in his 1946 Aeronca Champion.

It would take six rides that first day for Esch to get across the Florida-Alabama border. With nothing more than a backpack of essentials and 12 typed pages of contacts she had gathered during her planning stage, she would begin chipping away at her list of states. Her pre-trip leg work had resulted in a story in *Flying* magazine, giving her a bit of notoriety among the flying community that proved helpful in securing rides. At airports, she was easy to spot, in her traveling outfit reminiscent of a pilot from a bygone era: high laced boots, leather helmet, and flying goggles.

MAKING IT WORK

Despite the early fanfare, the trip was not always glamorous. At night, Esch slept wherever she could: on the floors of airplane hangars and in abandoned flight control towers, in empty passenger terminals, and even in an airport limo that conveniently had been left unlocked overnight. The days when she struggled to find a ride seemed to drag on, as she waited alone in hopes that her luck had not run out entirely. Somehow, she always made it work.

There were also times that made the struggles worth it. Stunning views of the Grand Canyon, Niagara Falls, and the Grand Tetons. An airshow in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, a motorcycle rally in Sturgis, South Dakota, and a night out at a roadside honkytonk in Laramie, Wyoming. All the unique and wonderful things that make America worthy of exploration. With each new day, Esch experienced a little more of the world she had always longed to see. More than anything, she found the beauty in connecting with others. Some of the pilots Esch flew with would keep contact with her for years

to come, and others she would never see again. Regardless of how long she knew them, she still considers each and every one a friend who helped make her dream a reality.

All told, it took 330 flights and 199 different pilots to successfully complete the goal of visiting 48 states. A total of 29,117 miles and 183 days after she left, Esch returned to Orlando on November 26, 1988. Joe Kittinger made good on his promise to participate, piloting the final flight of the trip. She was welcomed back by a crowd of supporters, none more important to Esch than her family, who traveled to share in her excitement at the culmination of such a monumental effort.

"It was a marvelous welcome home," she says. The journey had come to an end, but the memories made would stick with her forever.

After the completion of her trip, Martha drove cross-country to California, which serves as her home base to this very day. She currently owns a bed and breakfast in the city of Locke, near Sacramento. In the winter months, when tourism wanes and her

business is shuttered, Esch travels by van, usually finding her way back to Central Florida for brief stints.

During these visits, Martha puts her artistic skills to work, hand-lettering names on boats and other signage using genuine gold leaf, an increasingly rare skill. She also enjoys spending time with her two adult children, Charlie and Mary, of whom she is incredibly proud. The three even formed a family band, releasing an album together in 2019 under the name “Sismombro.”

It has long been Esch’s goal to complete a book about her experiences during her 1988 trip. Drawing from her meticulous flight logs, as well as her thoughtful (and humorous) personal insights, the manuscript is a hit in the making for a potential publisher. Esch’s working title is “Have Goggles, Will Travel.” If released, it will no doubt serve as a source of inspiration to untold numbers of young adventurers, much like *Vagabonding in America* did for Esch herself.

Many years removed from one of

her greatest journeys, she is still following her passions with an uncommon enthusiasm. She has lived the sort of life that many people daydream about, but few have the courage to truly pursue. “If something turns you on, go find a way to do it,” she advises. With a never-ending supply of great stories to show for her efforts, Martha Esch has undoubtedly always found a way. ■



Orlando Sentinel Archives at the History Center

Esch kisses her sister-in-law, Pam Esch, after returning back to the Orlando Executive Airport at the conclusion of her ambitious 29,117-mile trip on Nov. 26, 1988.



Rosie O’Grady’s Flying Circus

A celebrated fixture of the Church Street Station entertainment enterprise, Rosie O’Grady’s Flying Circus was created to celebrate the aviation of yesteryear. The small group of pilots was headed up by retired U.S. Air Force Colonel Joseph Kittinger, an aviation pioneer best known for performing the highest skydive in history from 102,800 feet in 1960 (a record that stood until 2012). Under Kittinger as vice president of flight operations, the Flying Circus pilots used their vintage airplanes to

skywrite advertisements for Rosie O’Grady’s Good Time Emporium, while passengers looking for the best views in Orlando could take a ride in one of the group’s iconic hot air balloons. Kittinger and company took great interest in Martha Esch’s aviation hitchhiking endeavor, participating in the festivities during her departure and return at the Orlando Executive Airport, home to the Flying Circus operation.

THE JUNIOR LEAGUE OF GREATER ORLANDO: 75 YEARS OF COMMUNITY IMPACT

By Betsy
Culpepper

Junior League magazine
cart at Orange
Memorial Hospital,
December 1949.



The Junior League of Greater Orlando is celebrating its 75th Anniversary this year. The Junior League is an organization of women committed to promoting voluntarism, developing the potential of women, and improving the community through the effective action and leadership of trained volunteers. Here's a look at its community impact throughout Central Florida over the years.

Note: In 2018, the Junior League of Greater Orlando donated a collection to the Orange County Regional History Center relating to its organization's history from 1933 to 2013. The donation encompassed 42 boxes containing scrapbooks, publications, administrative files, event materials, yearbooks, reports, news clippings, and photographs. To date, the History Center has digitized 46 scrapbooks, which serve as the basis for the majority of the imagery in this article.

THE 1960s

- Projects during the 1960s included an award-winning children's puppet show, a docent program and suitcase exhibit for the Central Florida Museum (now the Orlando Museum of Art), a new art library and studio classroom for Loch Haven Art Center, and program development for public television on WMFE.
- Tours of the Artmobile gallery, housed in a school bus, reached 20,000 elementary school children. The Magic of Music educational series aired on WFTV-Channel 9 from 1961 to 1964 and was required viewing in public schools in 10 counties.
- In 1966, the Orange County Juvenile and Parental Home was adopted as a new project. Gala Concerts became much-anticipated annual events and were turned over to the community in 1969.
- The League's most notable and longest-running community program, the Bargain Box Thrift Store, opened in 1961 in Winter Park. The Bargain Box sold gently used items donated by League and community members to raise money for community projects.

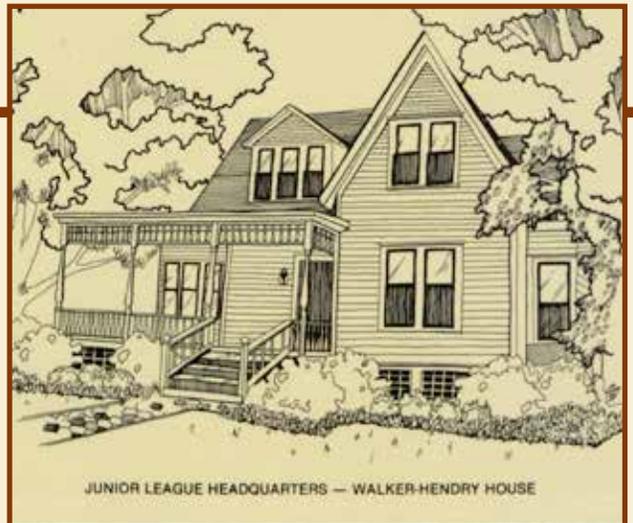
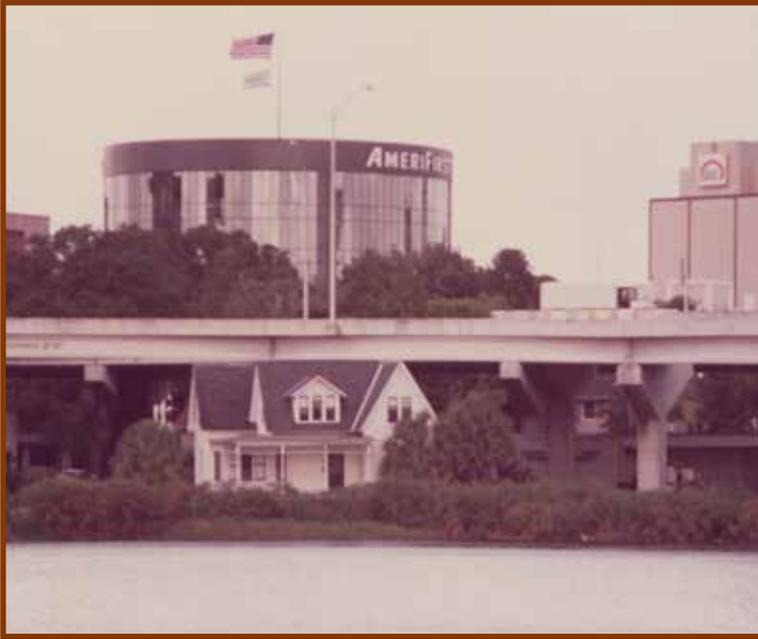


THE 1970s

- Education initiatives included the Discovery Room and the Five Sense Store at the John Young Museum and Planetarium (now the Orlando Science Center) and an environmental-education center at the Central Florida Zoo.
- In 1972, the ADDitions school volunteer program began in 14 pilot Orange County Public Schools where 260 volunteers served 10,000 volunteer hours. The first adult daycare center was also established.
- The Junior League of Orlando was chosen as one of ten demonstration sites nationwide for Volunteers Intervening for Equity (VIE), a program that trained retired people to serve as advocates for children's rights with the Juvenile Justice System, the precursor of the Children's Youth Network.
- The Junior League of Orlando received its first Walt Disney Service Award in 1974.
- In 1975, the Junior Service League of Winter Park merged with the Junior League of Orlando to form the Junior League of Orlando-Winter Park, the largest Junior League in Florida.

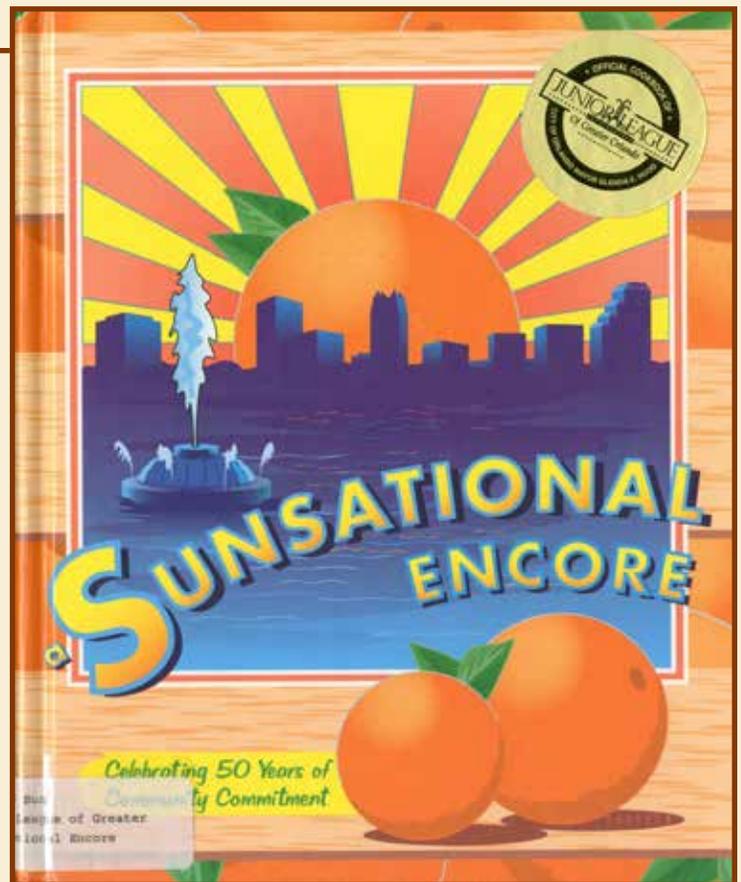
THE 1980s

- The Walker-Hendry House, one of Orlando's few remaining Victorian homes built in the 1890s, was gifted to the Junior League to serve as offices and remained its headquarters for 31 years.
- Community projects in the 1980s included Hospice, Seagrave House, Partners in Education, Spouse Abuse, the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Arnold Palmer Hospital for Children & Women, the Coalition for the Homeless, an organ-donor awareness program, SWEEP (Solid Waste Education for Environmental Protection), Rock Haven Youth Center, the Meissen Porcelain Exhibit at the Orlando Museum of Art, and the establishment of the docent program at Leu Gardens. Fundraisers included apple sales in Apple Annie, the League's Follies shows, and the Bargain Box.
- A popular fundraiser for Junior Leagues across the country were cookbooks reflecting their city's regional tastes and fares. In 1982, under the chairmanship of Susan Gluyas and Shannon Gridley, the Junior League of Orlando-Winter Park published its first cookbook, *Sunsational*, in an edition of 20,000 copies that featured original artwork by Jeni Bassett.
- During this decade, the Junior League of Orlando-Winter Park was the first organization to receive the Summit Award from the Women's Resource Center.



THE 1990s

- In 1992, the Junior League of Orlando-Winter Park became the Junior League of Greater Orlando.
- Orange and Seminole County Back-to-School Fairs provided school supplies for underserved children. The League was instrumental in building the first Ronald McDonald House in Central Florida and providing its first trained volunteers and also provided information and education to raise HIV/AIDS Awareness.
- Green Circle Diversity promoted children's self-worth, awareness, and appreciation of differences and similarities in others to Orange County second graders. Project Lifeline, in partnership with the Central Florida Council on Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness, promoted organ and tissue donation. Partnering with the Response Sexual Assault Resource Center, a speakers' bureau educated and provided support services to students and Navy personnel on date and acquaintance rape.
- The League helped establish Orange and Seminole County Teen Courts, where a jury of first-time offenders' peers determined community-service sentencing as an alternative to Juvenile Court or school suspension. Partnering with the Community Service Center, the League helped open the Crisis Nursery, a short-term residential care facility for endangered children that also served as a nonthreatening counseling and referral resource for parents.
- In 1997, the Family Support & Visitation Center opened as a place for families experiencing difficulties to visit in a safe environment; the Junior League was a founding partner for this initiative.
- The League's Child Watch project was instrumental in the development of the Howard Phillips Center for Children & Families.
- In 1999, the Junior League published its second



cookbook, *Sunsational Encore*, which featured historic citrus-crate labels as artwork. Members who organized the initial 15,000-copy printing included Lynn Luzadder, Kelly Acree, and Marianne Vanness.



THE 2000s

- During this decade, Teens Ending Abusive Relationships offered an interactive high school health science program to raise awareness of unhealthy and abusive behaviors and provide referral resources.
- At the Coalition for the Homeless's Women's Residential Counseling Center, Junior League members tutored and built a tot lot for school-aged residents and provided life-skills training for women.
- The Community Action Team trained volunteers to fill the one-day volunteer needs of nonprofit organizations.
- A mentoring program, Footsteps to Success, encouraged at-risk teens at Great Oaks Village to make informed lifestyle choices and gain independent living skills.
- In 2008, the inaugural Kids in the Kitchen event to combat food insecurities attracted 400 attendees.
- The Girls Advocacy Project at the Juvenile Detention Center supported teenage girls through mentoring and life-skills trainings.
- As community needs evolved and tourism became a bedrock of family-friendly entertainment, dances at Rock Haven ceased in the early 2000s, remaining true to the building's roots as a center for teen dances, the City of Orlando leased the Loch Haven Community Center (the former Youth Center) to the Orlando Ballet.

THE 2010s

• In 2012, the Bargain Box moved from Winter Park to North Orange Avenue and in 2018, after many years of sales, the shop ceased operations as competition from online thrift marketplaces proved too difficult to offset the costs of operation. • In response to the 2016 Pulse tragedy, Junior League members organized a stuffed-animal drive to comfort survivors and their families as they moved through the immediate aftermath. • The group donated the Walker-Hendry House to the City of Orlando in 2012, and in 2019 the house was renovated and currently serves as the headquarters for the onePULSE Foundation. • In 2017, the Little Black Dress Initiative was launched to build awareness of the restrictions poverty places on choices, opportunities, and access to resources. • The 10th Annual Halloween Hustle 5K raised money for hunger issues. • In 2018, the Mayor's Matching Grant was awarded to the Junior League's Healthy, Informed, Playful (HIP) Kids program hosted at the New Image Youth Center. HIP Kids events focused on reducing childhood hunger and improving health through education sessions. • The organization also participated in a Coast to Coast Human Trafficking Awareness social media campaign in conjunction with the Junior Leagues of Tampa and Daytona Beach.



A BIG Thank You to our fabulous community Volunteers!

From the Junior League Facebook page



From the Junior League Facebook page

THE 2020s AND BEYOND

Like everyone else in 2020, the Junior League continued its commitment to volunteerism through the pandemic with virtual engagement opportunities.

A COMMITMENT TO LEADERSHIP AND VOLUNTEERISM

All members of the Junior League of Greater Orlando have the opportunity to serve in leadership positions if they desire. From chairing a committee to planning a fundraising event, from serving in a board position to managing committees of volunteers, the Junior League continues to provide hands-on, real-life experience that easily translates into civic engagement. Many prominent women community leaders credit their involvement with the Junior League as an ideal training ground for understanding effective civic leadership.

Women who have an interest in becoming involved are welcome. Visit www.JLGO.org to learn more. ■



Youth & Family Services
Administrative Offices 1718 →

Great Oaks Village
Administrative Offices 1718 →

Major League Drama at Tinker Field

BY PAM SCHWARTZ

Note: This article contains profanity in quoted material.

On March 28, 1977, Orlando's Tinker Field readied for the upcoming Spring Training game between the Texas Rangers and the Minnesota Twins. What might have played out like any other nine-inning affair instead turned into a national event when the Rangers' recently benched second baseman, Lenny Randle, hauled off and punched his manager, Frank Lucchesi, during batting practice. This would set the stage for one of the more wild spectacles in Major League history, involving a now-legendary Central Florida criminal defense attorney.

A FIRST-ROUND PICK

Randle had been a first-round pick of the Washington Senators and tenth pick overall in June 1970. After little more than a season in the minors, he debuted as second baseman with the team in 1971. A versatile player, Randle split most of his time between second and third bases, also logging some playing time in the outfield. His best season statistically came in 1974, when he hit .302 with 157 hits in 151 games played, finishing 21st in balloting for the American League's Most Valuable Player award.

By Spring Training 1977, however, the Rangers were ready to elevate 1975 first-round draft choice Bump Wills

– son of 1962 National League MVP Maury Wills – to Randle's starting role at second base. Randle didn't think he was getting a fair shake at earning back

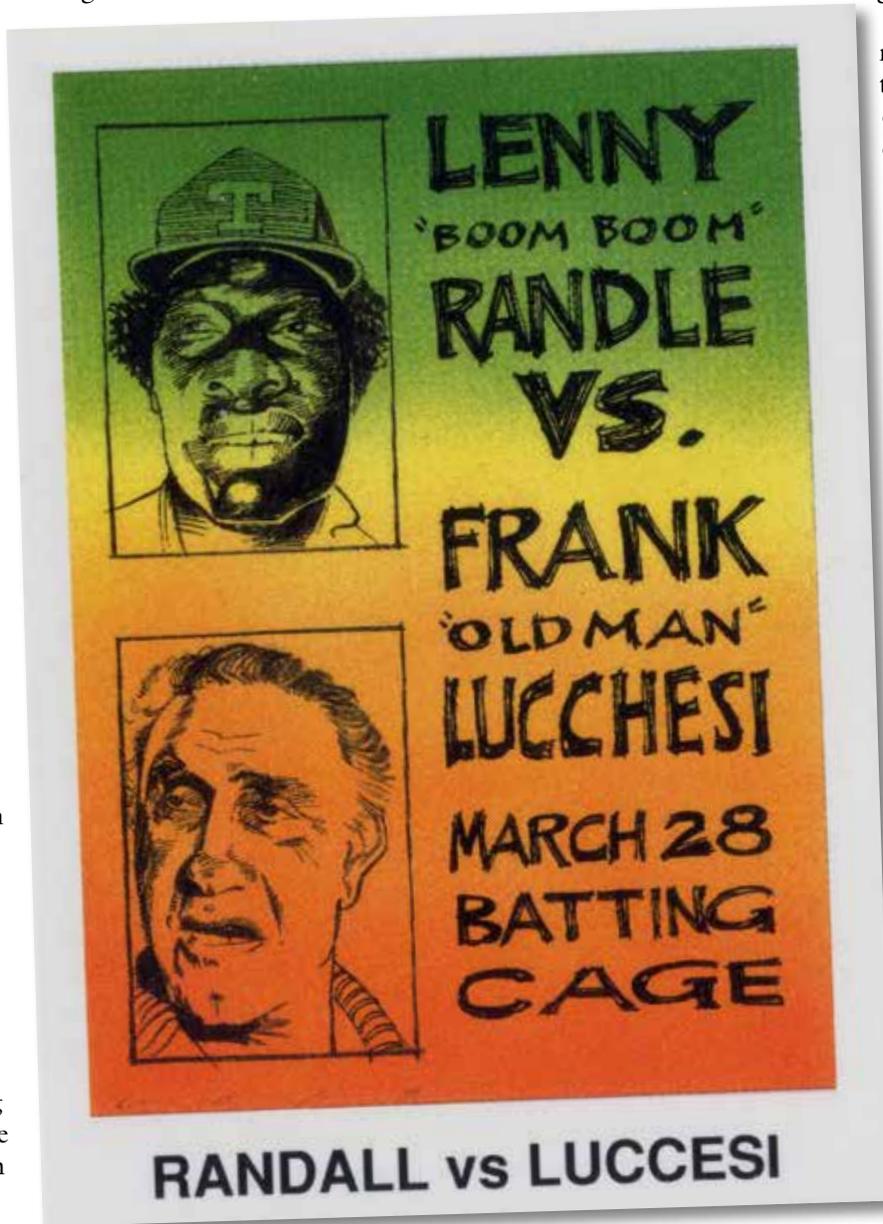
explained, "I'm tired of these punks saying play me or trade me. Anyone who makes \$80,000 a year and gripes and moans all Spring is not going to get a tear out of me."

Though Randle was not mentioned by name, the remark seemed a clear reference to his discontent. The term "punk" – considered a major insult to a young Black man at the time – ignited a fuse inside Randle, as he would later confess during the civil suit against him.

During batting practice prior to the game, Lucchesi headed toward the dugout tunnel when Randle approached to confront his manager about his comments. As the two talked, and with no notice, Randle's right hand shot out to strike Lucchesi. The 28-year-old Randle landed several swift blows before his 50-year-old manager hit the ground. Lucchesi spent a week at Orlando's Mercy Hospital and needed plastic surgery to repair his cheekbone, which was broken in three places.

Randle was charged with assault but ultimately pleaded no contest to battery. His attorney, Richard

Neuheisel, admitted that "Lenny knows he erred and there must be punishment. If we don't think that punishment is fair, we intend to fight."



The Foul Ball Trading Cards company remembered the scene at Tinker Field on March 28, 1977, in a 1991 card.

his spot and had no qualms sharing his feelings on the subject. Just a week before the game at Tinker Field, Lucchesi in a session with the media



A 1977 baseball card for the Texas Rangers shows Lenny Randle in the front row, second from right, and Frank Lucchesi, second row center, as manager.

During this first trial in early April 1977, Orlando Judge Maurice Paul – who notably was also involved in creating the Reedy Creek Improvement District – administered a tongue-lashing to Randle. “You should change your profession to boxing and get in the ring and give your opponent an equal opportunity,” the judge said, adding that “not only organized baseball but organized sports has suffered as a result of your action.” Randle ultimately received a \$10,000 fine and a 30-day suspension from Major League Baseball.

A SECOND CASE OVER SECOND BASE

Before he could even serve his full suspension, Randle was traded to the New York Mets for cash and a player to be named later (Rick Auerbach). The Rangers ultimately parted ways with Lucchesi as well, firing him on June 21, 1977, but this duo’s brawl continued. A month after the first trial, Randle faced a civil suit filed by Lucchesi, who sought \$200,000 in damages. Lucchesi also hoped to make an example of Randle. As he explained in an interview with the *Miami Herald*, “I’m going to make sure that nothing like this happens again. I’m going to make sure that no player ever hits another baseball manager, basketball coach, a football coach.”

A few days before the civil case was to be tried in late 1978, Randle and his new attorney, Thom Rumberger, had

a disagreement on strategy that resulted in Randle firing his legal representation. “He is fearful of a Southern judge and Southern jury. The last few months we have had philosophical differences concerning the conduct of his claim. He believes it is a civil rights matter and I’m of the opinion that [it] is provoked alleged assault and battery,” explained Rumberger.

A deputy sheriff in the Orange County Courthouse recommended to Randle’s wife, Mercedes, that she go across the street from the courthouse (now home to the Orange County Regional History Center) to 127 N. Magnolia Ave. and request the help of attorney J. Cheney Mason.

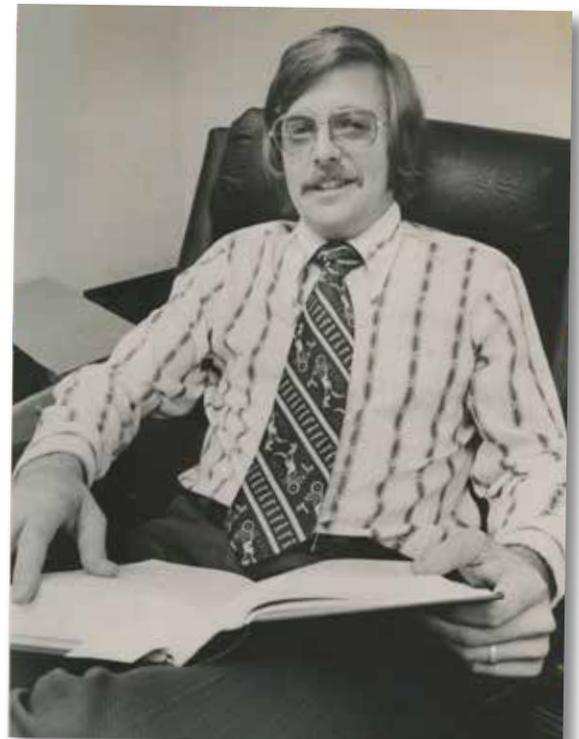
Admitted to the Florida Bar in 1971, Mason was then in the first decade of a 51-year career that would make him one of the most storied criminal defense attorneys in Central Florida. In 2011, he would gain national attention as a member of Casey Anthony’s defense team. When Mercedes Randle came to his office in 1978, he was already recognized for displaying a willful disregard for convention, including not wearing a suit every day to work. That presented a problem if Mason were to act fast to aid Randle – attorneys had to appear in court in a suit –

and Judge Bernard Muszynski had denied a court delay request from Randle, who was hoping to find new counsel. [Mason also became known for colorful speech, and quotes from him that follow are rendered without redaction in the interest of historical accuracy.]

In a 2022 oral history interview with the History Center, Mason looked back at the Randle case. It began for him as he gathered as much information as possible from Mercedes Randle during a car ride to and from his home in Altamonte Springs so he could change into the required suit.

When Mason arrived back at the courthouse, he walked into the courtroom during the middle of a doctor’s testimony showing x-rays of a fractured bone in Lucchesi’s face. The scene of the young defendant Randle being left without representation infuriated him. “Here’s two lawyers, a jury in the goddamn box, and here’s this 22-year-old Black kid [Randle was 28] sitting at this big table without even a fucking yellow pad,” Mason said. Throughout his career, he deeply believed everyone was entitled to a defense.

J. Cheney Mason early in his 51-year career as a defense attorney.



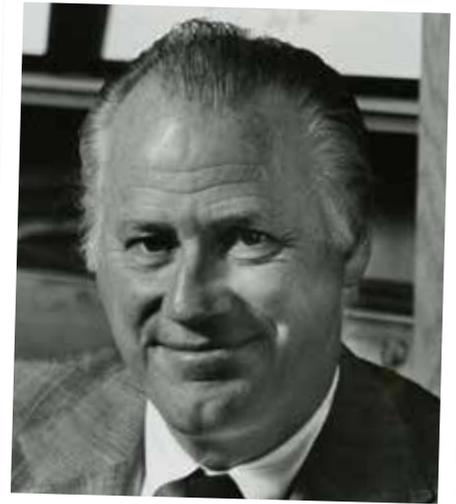
TRIAL ATTRACTS BIG NAMES TO ORLANDO

The defense strategy of Mason and his partner Donald Lykkebak claimed Lucchesi was aggressive and racist, citing figures that showed the Rangers had gone from 13 Black players to just four while he was manager, *Orlando Sentinel* sports editor Larry Guest noted in a December 1978 column. "People who know baseball and Frank Lucchesi know such suggestions are pure poppycock," asserted Guest, who closely followed the trials.

The case drew notable individuals to town in support of Randle, including civil rights activist Jesse Jackson, Randle's former manager Billy Martin, future Hall of Famer Lou Brock, and the then recently

retired home-run king Hank Aaron.

Mason recalls Jackson visiting him at his office. The case had received national publicity, Jackson said, and he wanted to make sure Randle received a fair trial. Mason explained that he would do his best for Randle but bluntly told Jackson not to interfere. "I'm not a racist," Mason remembers telling Jackson. "We're doing a great job and we're going to win this goddamn case. But if you get out there on Orange Avenue in downtown Orlando and start parading and stuff, I'm gonna lose." Consequently, Jackson and his entourage supported Randle by appearing in the courtroom but did not demonstrate publicly.



Bowie Kuhn, commissioner of Major League Baseball, 1969-1984

Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons



Orlando - Dec. 7, 1978 - Rev. Jesse Jackson leaves the Orange County courtroom with Lenny Randle today. Rev. Jackson was there for support. Photo by Red Huber.

Orlando Sentinel Archives at the History Center

A few days into the trial, Mason received a phone call from the commissioner of baseball, Bowie Kuhn. He and two of his associates requested to meet Mason downtown at the Harley Hotel (now the Metropolitan) across from Lake Eola at 151 East Washington. Mason felt leery of the arrangement, he recalled in 2022, and described the scene inside the hotel room at the Harley.

"One of these giants, alongside him is another giant, they're there protecting Commissioner Bowie Kuhn against me. I looked at them and they were not friendly, they were not welcoming, they were not anything. I just looked at one guy and I said, you know, I don't know what your job is, but it is clear to every one of you all that you can beat me up, easily. But here's one thing, I will fucking leave bite marks on you."

Kuhn didn't like the negative publicity the case had drawn and tried coercing Mason into telling Randle just to pay the fine so it all could be settled. Mason told Kuhn to pay it himself as he took his leave.

The *Orlando Sentinel's* Red Huber snapped the Rev. Jesse Jackson (left) with Lenny Randle at the Orange County Courthouse on Dec. 7, 1978.

In December 1978, Lucchesi's civil case against Randle settled for \$20,000, significantly less than Lucchesi had been seeking. Billy Martin pitched in \$10,000, and Randle's mother-in-law offered to pay the other half.

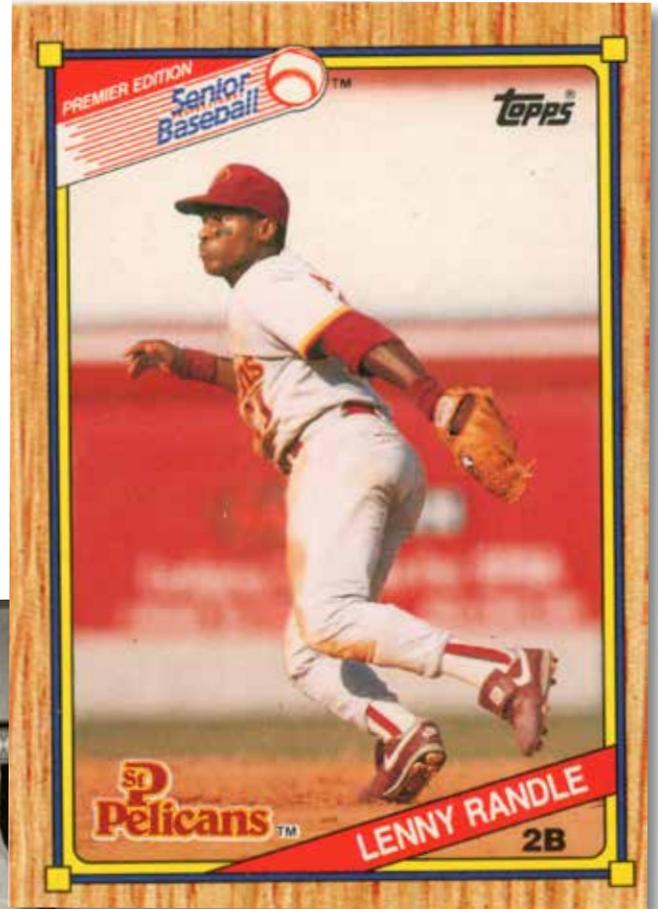
THE MOST INTERESTING MAN IN BASEBALL

Following his time with the Rangers, Randle would go on to play on several Major League teams including the New York Mets, New York Yankees, Chicago Cubs, and Seattle Mariners. He was part of numerous memorable moments in baseball history, including playing in the "10 Cent Beer Night" riot at Cleveland Stadium in 1974, standing at the plate in Shea Stadium during the New York City blackout of July 1977, and blowing a baseball across the foul line during a game at the Kingdome while playing for the Mariners in 1981 – perhaps his most humorous performance.

In 1983, Randle became the first American Major Leaguer to play baseball in Italy, where he set the record for the longest home run in the Italian Serie-A1 league. Following his time in Italy, he returned to Florida in 1989 and played in the Senior Professional Baseball Association for the St. Petersburg Pelicans. He speaks several languages, wrote, published, and performed a hip-hop song, and dabbled in stand-up comedy. *Rolling Stone* magazine once called him "The Most Interesting Man in Baseball."

Lucchesi went on to hold various minor and major league roles managing and scouting over the next decade, most notably with

the Chicago Cubs, before retiring from baseball in 1989. Each of the lawyers and judges involved, Mason included, would continue on to notable accomplishments from changing long-standing case law to



Orlando Sentinel Archives at the History Center

Above: Lenny Randle in the Orange County Courthouse with Richard Neuheisel, his attorney in April 1977 when he pleaded no contest to battery. Right: A Randle baseball card from his days with the St. Petersburg Pelicans.

protecting the Everglades. This one seemingly inconsequential event in Orlando's history included many already, or soon to be, powerful players and prominent places in Central Florida's landscape.

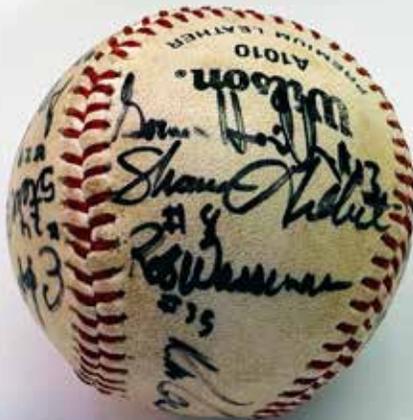
In the end, a March 29, 1977, story about Randle and Lucchesi's Tinker Field incident by *Dallas Times Herald* reporter Blackie Sherrod offers an ironic coda to their saga. "In a corner of the dugout, by the bullpen telephone, while Rangers players milled about in stunned aimlessness [due to Randle's outburst], a small white card glared from the wall. It was the lineup for Monday's game. The second line read: Randle, 2b." Randle, it seems, would have received his fair shake after all. ■



Franchises in all sports have come and gone over the years in Central Florida. Some are largely forgotten to time. When told of the existence of these teams, newcomers to the area – and even longtime residents – might say, “the Orlando who?” Still, local sports fans made lasting memories and bonded with their teams, even if only for a short while. Here’s a selection of artifacts from our collection that relate to a few of the teams that have called Orlando home.

Baseball signed by Southern League champion Orlando SunRays, ca. 1991

Once known as the Orlando Twins, the team was rebranded after it was purchased by Orlando Magic owner William du Pont III in 1990. The SunRays won 85 games in 1990 and followed that up in 1991 with a series win in the Southern League championship over Birmingham for Orlando’s first baseball title since 1981.



Baseball cap for the Orlando Americans of the American Football Association, ca. 1981

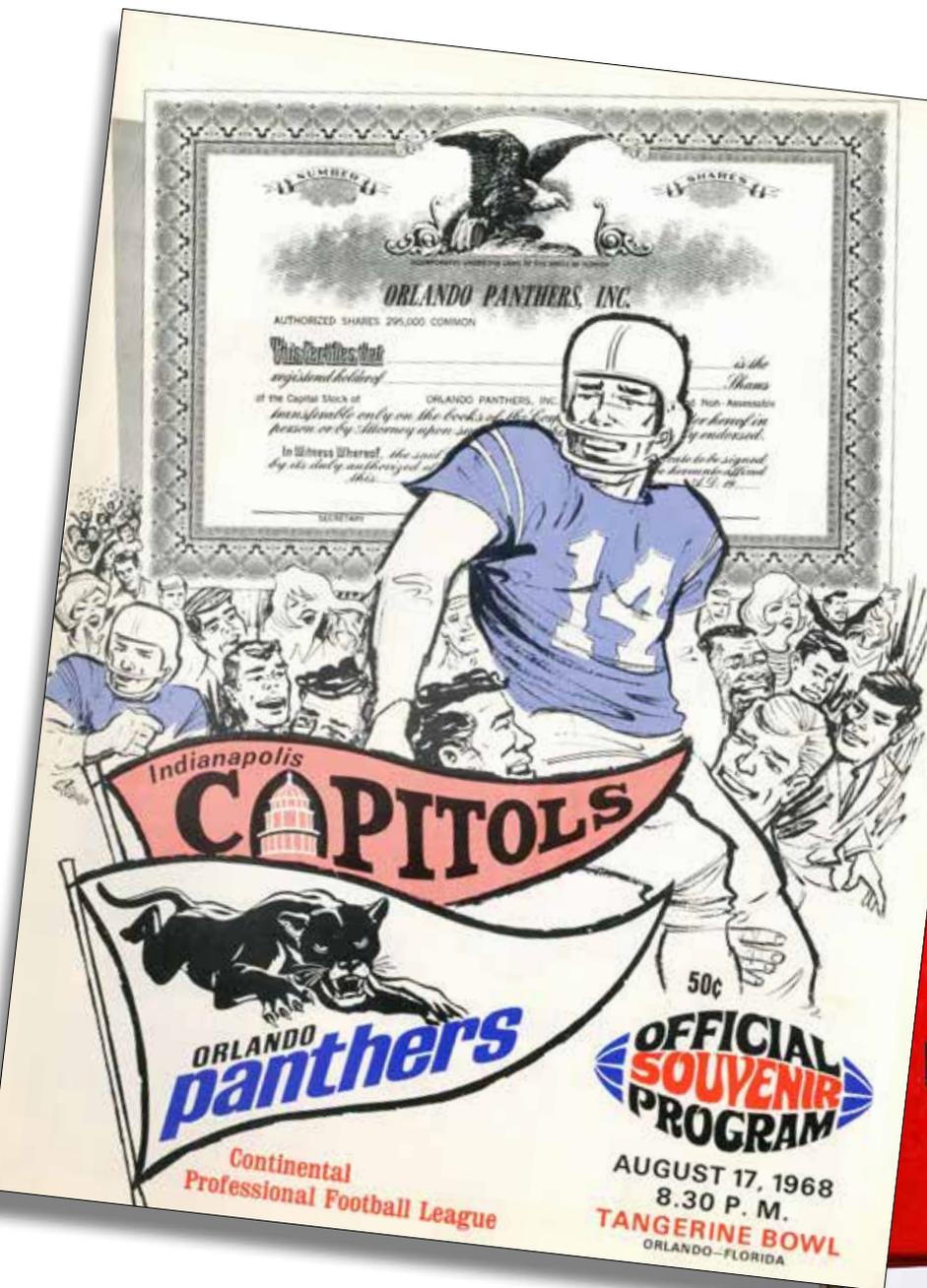
In 1981, the Orlando Americans finished with a 3-7 record but failed to gain traction with fans or the business community. The team played for one season in the American Football Association, which operated from 1977 to 1983. In this troubled league, three of the ten franchises would fold before the conclusion of the 1981 season.



Game ticket for the Orlando Juice of the Senior Professional Baseball Association, ca. 1989

The Senior Professional Baseball Association debuted in 1989 with eight teams located across Florida, including two locally, the Winter Haven Super Sox and Orlando Juice. The Juice finished third in their division with a 37-35 record but were a failure at the box office. The team played for just one season, and the league folded in 1990.





Game program for the Orlando Panthers of the Continental Football League, ca. 1968

The Panthers were a professional football team that played in the Continental Football League, which operated from 1965 to 1969. The team was an immediate success on the field, advancing to three straight league championship games from 1966 to 1968 and winning the league title in 1967 and 1968.

Folding seat cushion for Florida Blazers of the World Football League, ca. 1974

The Florida Blazers joined the upstart World Football League for its inaugural season in 1974, finishing with a 16-7 record. In the World Bowl against the Birmingham Americans, the Blazers trailed 22-0 entering the fourth quarter but staged a stirring rally that ultimately fell short by just one point.



Hockey puck for the Orlando Seals of the Atlantic Coast Hockey League, ca. 2002

The Orlando Seals played in the Atlantic Coast Hockey League during the 2002-2003 season. The Seals finished with a 43-14 record and captured the league's President's Cup championship. The league folded after the season, but the Seals would play games in Orlando and Kissimmee in other leagues until 2007.



CYG COB SAYS:

The Secret Legacy of Howard Phillips

BY JOY WALLACE DICKINSON

In 1954, the influential Orlandoan poured his love of words, his sharp wit, and his strong opinions into a newspaper column with a mysterious byline inspired by the city's beloved swans.



Howard Phillips's college career was not what you'd expect for a fruit grower from Orlando, he recalled decades later. As the elder son of Florida citrus legend Dr. Philip Phillips, he had been expected to follow in his father's footsteps. But in 1923, as graduation neared, he had not been sure about that – not sure at all. In his years in Cambridge, Massachusetts, far from his hometown, he had immersed himself in English literature, worked hard on the drama club, and met luminaries such as the playwright Eugene O'Neill. He even considered a job at the Theatre Guild in New York. But in the end, Phillips did return to Orlando, where in the 1920s he started on a path that would make him his father's successor in business and philanthropy.

From today's perspective, he made an impact on his hometown that few Orlandoans could equal. Dr. Phillips Charities, his family's philanthropic legacy, has invested more than \$220 million in the community, its website notes, and Howard Phillips's historic role has been recognized as vital. When he donated his family's home on Lake Lucerne to the city in the 1970s, it helped inspire Orlando's early historic preservation movement. His own house on Lake Formosa was ultimately transformed into Orlando's Mennello Museum of Art.

He left other legacies, too. The oral-history interviews Phillips recorded in 1975 brim with details about Orlando in the early 20th century, when his father, whom folks called Doc, and his mother, Della, hosted music recitals in their grand home. (You can hear his reflections, in his own voice, at OrlandoMemory.com.) But years before that, he created a more hidden gift for the future. In 1954, Howard Phillips secretly wrote for the *Orlando Sentinel* more than 50 columns under the pen name "Cyg Cob." In thousands of typeset words, he revealed much about his community and about himself – a man whose life, like the column, was at once quite public and deeply private.



Howard Phillips's mother, Della (above) accompanied him on piano at violin recitals during his Orlando childhood.

A LIFE IN THE SPOTLIGHT

The Phillips family "became as famous for what wasn't known about them as for what was," a *Sentinel* feature noted in 1987. "They drew the line at becoming anything approaching a public presence in the city." But that was never strictly true of Howard Phillips. From his youth, his name had appeared in Orlando's newspapers. From his rose-decorated 16th birthday party to his dancing skills in a musical revue – he "could move his feet to music as well as any professional," the writer effused – he had grown up in the city's spotlight, when everybody knew his name. His 1918 Orlando High School graduation even took place in the Phillips Theatre, which his father opened in 1917.

As he joined the family business, his name continued in the news. In the 1920s into the '40s, social items noted Howard Phillips's travels, "looking after his father's large citrus interests," and reported on his guests, including the English author Cecil Roberts, who dedicated a novel to him. Articles detailed his 1928 lecture on drama to the Sorosis Woman's Club, his thoughts on subjects ranging from the game of bridge to the marketing of tangerines, and his military service in World War II. He joined the U.S. Army as a captain at Orlando Army Air Base in late March 1942, when he had

just turned 40, and served as a supply officer for 18 months in Europe, returning in September 1945 as a lieutenant colonel.

By the 1950s, Howard Phillips had long experienced his movements being reported in his hometown in a newsprint parade a little like an antique version of today's Instagram feed. Beginning on Feb. 16, 1954, he turned the tables and became the one doing the writing, offering a singular public view into his private thoughts and opinions through a new *Sentinel* column, "Cyg Cob Says." The author was a "native Orlandoan" whose true identity was a secret, an editorial note explained.

COLUMN WITH A LIGHT TOUCH

In that first column, Cyg Cob set the stage for his fictional persona as he related being summoned to see The Man, his nickname for the paper's publisher, Martin Andersen. Through a cloud of cigar smoke, The Man lays out his vision for the new column – something with a light touch, "something about the old timers and the new timers, . . . nothing about the two timers, though. . . . Keep it interesting and amusing. Get people talking about it."

Avoid "fancy words" and big ideas about politics, The Man tells Cyg. Instead, emulate the columns by Billy



The "Cyg Cob Says" newspaper column referred to the powerful publisher Martin Andersen (above) as The Man or Mr. A.



Howard Phillips (center) and his father, Dr. Philip Phillips (right), were photographed together in 1956, a couple of years after Howard Phillips's secret work on the *Orlando Sentinel's* "Cyg Cob Says" column. The man at left is not identified in notes with the photo, which was perhaps related to the two Phillipses' establishment of the Committee of One Hundred of Orange County, a nonprofit aimed to aid the families of law enforcement officers and firefighters who were killed in the line of duty. Born in 1874, Dr. Phillips died in 1959.

Rose in New York or Herb Caen in San Francisco – the kind often called three-dot journalism, because they contained varied items, strung together by ellipses, in a pastiche of gossip, witticisms, jibes at neighboring communities, and as many local names as the columnist could muster. Those names offered a vital way to connect with readers during a time when syndicated material was increasing in newspapers across America.

SWANNING AROUND

Some readers cheered the new column right away. “Whoever this fellow is, he sure knows how to write in a breezy, humorous and interesting manner,” one letter to the editor declared.

Writing as Cyg Cob, Phillips also supplied those valued local names in sketches of venerable families and notes on entertainment news, but over the weeks, he also served up meaty opinions about topics ranging from citrus concentrate to the value of loyalty in human affairs.

It was an ambitious undertaking, hung on the fictional framework of 1950s-style domestic comedy. Cyg worries about money, wrangles with his wife as she cooks up schemes with the hifalutin Lady-Next-Door, and contends

with a supposedly wealthy bachelor relative, Uncle Billy Swann – a sly reference to Orlando’s most famous bird.

Known as the “Tyrant of Lake Lucerne” (Howard Phillips’s home territory), the real Billy the Swan died in the 1930s but gained immortality in Orlando lore through his habit of terrorizing other swans and schoolchildren. He’s still with us, as a work of taxidermy in a glass case in the History Center’s collection.

The name “Cyg Cob” was also swan-inspired. A cob is a male swan, and “Cyg” was short for cygnet, the name for a young swan. Not long after the column began, a little drawing of two swans appeared with it – the work of cartoonist Lynn “Pappy” Brudon. “We presume the bigger swan is Uncle Billy . . . or perhaps the author, Cyg Cob, himself,” an editorial note explained.

But the fictional Cob family were clearly not birds but people, who went to restaurants, dances, and movies. Their names were the kind of intentional silliness that set “Cyg Cob Says” apart from other *Sentinel* columns. They were part of “Our Town,” as Cyg Cob called his city, and provided the kind of inside joke that might make Orlando readers smile.



Courtesy of Joy Wallace Dickinson

Much of Howard Phillips’s 1975 oral history was recorded at Wind Drift, his 1947 ocean-side home in Daytona Beach Shores.

SERIOUS OPINIONS, BIG WORDS

Writing as Cyg, Howard Phillips expressed serious opinions as well as swan silliness. He wasn’t crazy about architect Richard Boone Rogers’s design for Orlando’s new city hall, for example (the one demolished in 1991, as shown in the movie *Lethal Weapon 3*), even though Phillips admired other modern buildings. His 1947 home at Daytona Beach Shores, called Wind Drift, looks more like a product of the Bauhaus than a beach cottage – although his friends called it that – and his 1971 house on Lake Formosa that would become the Mennello Museum also featured modern lines.



Writing as Cyg Cob in 1954, Howard Phillips relied on his knowledge of Orlando’s past, people, and icons, including Billy the Swan (above), the city’s most famous bird, whose name inspired a character in the fictional Cob family that appeared in some “Cyg Cob Says” columns.



“I may not approve of Dick Boone Rogers’ plan for a new city hall but that is just a difference of taste,” Howard Phillips noted in “Cyg Cob Says” in 1954. The mid-century city hall was imploded in 1991, a moment captured in the 1992 film *Lethal Weapon 3*.



Courtesy of the Orlando Sentinel



Howard Phillips's column persona, Cyg Cob, touted singer Yma Sumac's March 1954 Orlando concert, noting that her voice gave him goose bumps.

Grace Warlow Barr, *Orlando Sentinel* food editor, called her friend Howard Phillips "the town's No. 1 gourmet" in a 1968 feature.

When it came to music, Cyg Cob expressed eclectic tastes. If you needed salve "for your troubled soul," he advised readers, buy Marian Anderson's album *Songs of Schubert*. He was a big fan of the Peruvian vocalist Yma Sumac but perhaps not so much of revered composer J.S. Bach, whom he said "sometimes bores his listeners."

In expressing such opinions, Phillips-as-Cyg gleefully ignored his instructions to avoid fancy words. He once described the phrase "The Good Old Days" as a "paralyzing panegyric." He had also been told not to grind any axes, but he was used to speaking his mind. "I am not known for my mildness," he once said years later, and he sure wasn't mild when he wrote that Orlando's Jaycees had lost their "oomph" and ability to think big. In a rebuking letter to the editor, the club's president, Andy Serros, called Cyg Cob "grossly uniformed." *Orlando Evening Star* columnist Hanley Pogue also took Cob to task, touting the good works of the group's "young businessmen."

Phillips even turned his wit toward himself a couple of times. "Howard Phillips is considered a hard-working,

hard-driving [regular Simon Legree], hard-playing old bachelor," his alter ego Cyg Cob wrote. "He pretends to be younger, on the dance floor for instance, than he really is." Howard Phillips was "something of a mystery," Cyg noted in another column.

"MAN ABOUT THE GLOBE"

After a prolific six months, "Cyg Cob Says" came to an end in July 1954. Perhaps it turned out to be more work than Phillips could manage and maintain his business duties, which involved shepherding the sale of the Dr. Phillips grove holdings to the Minute Maid Corp. later that year. Or perhaps he wanted to spend the rest of the summer in San Francisco, which he had visited for years on business and for its legendary opera season. Soon, his name turned up in the society pages there. A 1957 item described him as "that attractive man about the globe whose home base is Orlando, Fla." In 1959, his "annual opera visit" was noted along with his stay in an apartment in the toney Russian Hill area.

And if Phillips's column was over, he continued to be a presence in

Orlando's papers as the years rolled on. In 1956, a profile by *Sentinel* veteran Henry Balch deemed him "Orlando's most eligible bachelor, if he didn't seem impossible to catch" – a statement perhaps more true than Balch understood. In 1968, Phillips's good friend Grace Barr, the *Sentinel's* food editor, hailed him as "the town's No. 1 gourmet" and offered his advice on salad dressing, and in 1971, as he approached his 70s, he made news by opening his new home for tours to benefit the Central Florida Museum and Planetarium in Loch Haven Park.

Howard Phillips was a millionaire, after all, in the years when that meant something, and his real life was a far cry from that of the fictional Cyg Cob, who fretted about money and pleasing his boss. After such a life, one might expect to find a gravestone for Howard Phillips among the Orlando pioneers in Greenwood Cemetery or in the Dr. Phillips Cemetery, where his parents are buried. But when he died in San Francisco in September 1979 at the age of 77, his ashes

were scattered from a plane over San Francisco Bay, according to his wishes. His death remains painful to write about, even decades later and for those of us who can know him only through the words he left behind. The *San Francisco Examiner* reported it under the headline “Millionaire identified as murder victim.” The police described the 27-year-old man later convicted in Phillips’s death as a “drifter” known for preying on gay men.

In Orlando, friends and associates reacted with grief and tributes. Grace Barr wept and described her friend’s

love of art and literature and the “wonderful warmth” he displayed for “every phase of life.” Martin Andersen, “The Man” in Cyg Cob’s world, described the “countless” good works that Phillips had insisted be kept out of Orlando’s newspapers over the years. And Jean Yothers revealed that Phillips had been the man behind Cyg Cob a quarter-century earlier – something even his closest associates didn’t know.

Perhaps his secret column was one of the ways Howard Phillips maintained a life that was both public and private – a life that didn’t fit the mid-20th-

century image of what a business tycoon was supposed to be. For a brief time in the middle of the 1950s, Cyg Cob gave him one way to express his intellect, his creativity, his humor, and his views about the world.

He was at once the globe-trotting sophisticate and the son of “Our Town” who had grown up with Orlando and believed in its future. “I can get features for my column from my fly-specked memory of yesteryear,” he wrote as Cyg Cob, “but tomorrow, to my mind, is the time that really counts.” ■



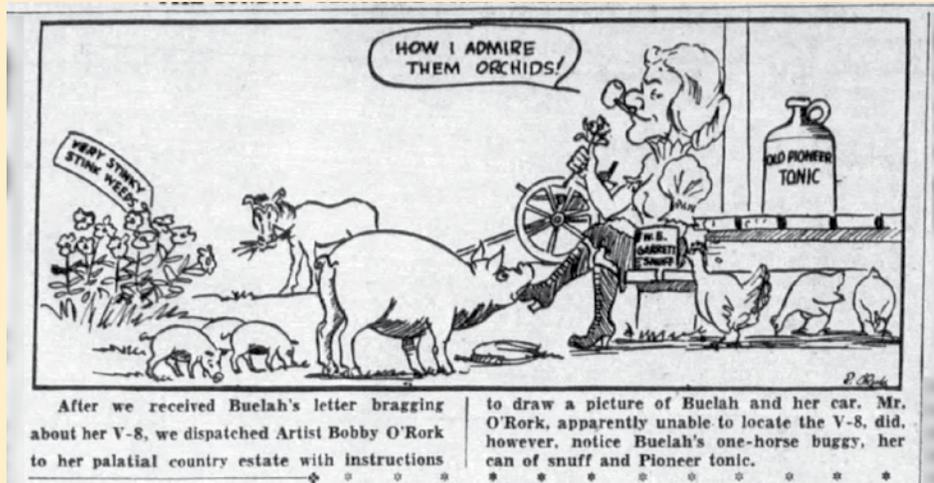
Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons



ORANGE AVE. AT PINE ST. ORLANDO, FLA.

Several significant Orlando buildings are associated with Howard Phillips and his influential family. His 1971 residence on Lake Formosa (top) became the home of Orlando’s Mennello Museum of American Art. The grand Lake Lucerne home (above, left) in which he lived with his family starting about 1912, is on the National Register of Historic Places. In the 1970s, Phillips gave it to the city, which sold it after his death to Orlando Landmark Defense, Inc. Money from that group’s 1981 sale of the house supported early historic preservation efforts. (The home is now a private events center.) In 1916, Dr. Philip Phillips, Howard’s father, hired architect Murry S. King to design a theater at Orange Avenue and Pine Street. It opened in 1917 as the Phillips Theatre (above, right), a venue for movies, live entertainment, and community events including Howard Phillips’s 1918 high school graduation. The building was once home to the W.T. Grant five and dime store.

AN “INSIDER” COLUMN EVOLVES



A cartoon (left) accompanied a “Beulah Backwoods” letter in 1939; the author was actually Roberta Branch Beacham (right).

Howards Phillips’s “Cyg Cob Says” was not Orlando’s first local column when it appeared in 1954, but it played a role in the evolution of a kind of chatty “insider” column that ranged widely from entertainment and culture to local history and current issues to the social goings that were once only the domain of the “women’s pages.”

In a time of strictly defined gender roles, “Cyg Cob Says” appealed to both men and women, at least some of the time, and paved the way for its successor, Jean Yothers’ “On the Town,” which took the ideas outlined in the first Cob column to a new level. In a later era, Dean Johnson’s popular “Commander Coconut” column in the *Sentinel’s* Calendar section might be seen as another link in the evolution.

If publisher Martin Andersen did devise the outlines for “Cyg Cob Says,” he might well have been inspired by the popularity of “Beulah Backwoods,” whose letters appeared sporadically in his papers starting in 1939 and continuing into the 1970s. Their real author, Roberta Branch Beacham, was the daughter of one prominent Orlando family who married into another. Her mother, Jessie Branch, is credited with coming up with “The City Beautiful” slogan in 1908.

Beulah Backwoods excelled at poking fun and dishing gossip through the persona of a tough denizen of the piney woods. Like the *Sentinel’s* daily front-page tidbit “Cracker Jim

Sez,” her writing exemplified a strain in American humor in which upper-class folks seemed to both ridicule and lionize poor country people, casting them as ignorant yet plain-spoken and wise.

In her printed letters, Beulah expressed herself in elaborate dialect that was far from the speech of the educated Mrs. Beacham. “We seen Harry Leu down to his store tother day & he says why ain’t you all been out to view my estate?” she wrote in 1941. She gabbed about everyone, including Andersen himself. “Dear Martin, Where in the name of all git out do you keep yourself?” she began one letter. “It looks to me like you would stay home once in a while and git acquainted with the homefolks.”

Some Orlando old-timers must have been in on the joke about who was behind both Beulah and Cyg Cob, who tipped his hat to Beulah more than once. If you really want to know about Orlando in the old days, he once noted, ask Beulah Backwoods – “she remembers everything.”

Beacham and Phillips were children of Orlando pioneers, while the writer who followed Phillips’s Cyg Cob, Jean Yothers, was from the next generation and the grandchild of another influential early family, the Bumbys. She had acted as Phillips’s assistant on his column, doing research and legwork. After the last “Cyg Cob Says” column appeared on July 1, 1954, she took up the mantle on July 13, with “On the Town,” bearing her byline. ■



Jean Yothers gives directions to a visiting dignitary in a photo for her *Orlando Sentinel* “On the Town” column in 1957. After Howard Phillips’s death in 1979, she revealed that in 1954 Phillips had been the secret writer behind “Cyg Cob Says” and that she had helped with research.

THE CITRUS TOWER IN CLERMONT:

An Orange-Colored History of One of Florida's Oldest and Tallest Attractions

By Clay Waters

For more than 60 years, the Citrus Tower in Clermont has stood sentinel over a deep slice of Central Florida. Featuring a 360-degree observation deck that provides a view of eight counties, the orange-and-white edifice, situated 23 miles west of Orlando, was built to hail the area's citrus industry. That industry is no longer viable in Lake County, but the Citrus Tower still retains its appeal as one of the state's longest-standing, and tallest-standing, tourist attractions, harkening back to when Florida's population was a mere four million (in 2023, it stands at more than 22 million). Throughout its orange-hued history, the Citrus Tower has hosted glassblowers, a citrus-packing plant, alligators, candymakers, pythons, a future governor, and even a vice president.

After years of imagining and planning, construction began in July 1955 on a high elevation point – high for Florida, in any case – right off of U.S. Highway 27. Today that stretch of U.S. 27 has six lanes, but at the time it was only a two-lane highway, one lane running north and one south. The Citrus Tower's grand-opening ceremony a year later, on July 14, 1956, was attended by C. Farris Bryant, then a Democratic primary candidate who would be elected Florida's governor in 1960. Gov. LeRoy Collins was invited but sent a telegram instead.



In a diplomatic mission of sorts, the grand opening also drew representatives from Cypress Gardens in Winter Haven, to the south, and Silver Springs near Ocala, to the north. The Citrus Tower was situated roughly at the midpoint between those titans of Florida tourism. Water from Silver Springs christened the new attraction, while Cypress Gardens sent some of its famed Southern Belles.

In the mid-1950s, Central Florida tourism was a hodgepodge. Besides Cypress Gardens and Silver Springs, Bok Tower Gardens had opened in Lake Wales in 1929, and Weeki Wachee's underwater mermaid show opened in 1947, followed by Gatorland in 1949. In northeast Florida, the "Fountain of Youth" legend had been drawing tourists to St. Augustine and its supposedly magic waters for almost a century.

Origins in the 1940s

The story of the Citrus Tower begins in the 1940s. The concept was the brainchild of Clermont mayor and automobile dealer Ralph Harper, who had long tried to convince locals of the need for an observation tower to showcase Central Florida's citrus industry. The pleas fell on deaf ears until entrepreneur Alfred William Thacker came to town.

Thacker, owner of the Tilley Lamp Co. of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, vacationed in Clermont in 1952 and evidently saw potential there. He moved down and built the Skyline Motel on the north side of U.S. 27. He also owned an adjacent piece of elevated land that would become the proposed site of the tower.

Intrigued by Harper's idea, Thacker called on some friends from Pittsburgh, including Frederick Jack Toole, founder of the Triangle School

of Drafting, who would end up designing the tower. (In the 1960s Toole founded the Presidential Hall of Fame, adjacent to the Citrus Tower, which is still in operation today.) The architect on the project was Thomas Russell, also of Pittsburgh. Thacker would cart around a scale model of the proposed tower to local civic groups to drum up interest. The Florida Towers Corp. was formed, stock was sold, and construction began in July 1955.

The original plans envisioned a 60-foot height, but the tower kept growing in the shareholders' imaginations. Its final actual height of 226 feet made it the highest observation deck in Florida, stretching to 543 feet above sea level at the top. It remains the highest observation deck in the state, according to *Florida Traveler*.

From the lobby, visitors could ride via elevator to the open-air



Above: The Citrus Tower in Clermont under construction in late 1955 or early 1956. The attraction on U.S. Highway 27 opened on July 14, 1956. Promotional brochures from its heyday (left and right) show its setting among a rolling vista of orange trees, reaching as far as the eye could see, and advertised features including a glass-blowing demonstration, soda fountain, and gift shop.



observation deck with its waist-high concrete barrier and, on a clear day, take in a comprehensive view for 35 miles all around, a circle of Central Florida encompassing parts of eight different counties and showcasing vast rows of citrus groves. An estimated 17 million citrus trees, one-third of Florida's annual citrus industry, were once visible from the top of the Citrus Tower. The building itself was also striking, with bold colors that encapsulated the bright, creamy quality of an ice-cream treat.

Citrus queens were crowned at the Citrus Tower, charming newspapers as far away as Wilmington, Delaware. In the late 1950s, amphibious "duck tours" (actually repurposed World War II craft) took tourists to, and into, Lake Minneola. At the base, visitors could stop by the gift shop, dine at a restaurant, and witness a model orange-packing plant in action. The attraction even hosted alligators for a time during the 1960s. Jack Raymon's Wildlife Arena opened at the Citrus Tower in January 1960. A history of Clermont by local author Doris Bloodsworth features a 1961 photo of Raymon, a herpetologist, with " 'Old Hurricane,' believed to be the largest alligator in captivity." Thacker's animal-loving son William took over the renamed Citrus Tower Wildlife Arena in May 1963 and imported animals from his own private zoo.

Competition arrives

The Citrus Tower initially performed as hoped, attracting some 500,000 visitors a year in the 1960s. But its cultural cachet began slipping after the Florida Turnpike burrowed into Lake County and began routing people off Highway 27. Competition from Walt Disney World began to siphon off crowds in 1971.

A Miami-based conglomerate, Wometco, bought the property from the Florida Towers Corp. in 1972. (The unwieldy handle "Wometco" hails from the age of truncated corporate names; it was an abbreviation for the Wolfson-Meyer Theater Company, a movie theater chain based in Miami.) A poster from the era featured in the lobby of the Citrus

Tower reveals just where the tourist crowds were moving: "Spectacular! Florida Citrus Tower 17 miles from Disney World on U.S. 27 in Clermont."

Wometco tried to spur tourist interest, adding Carolyn's Candies and a glass-blowing studio hosted by the Boutz family of artists, led by Don Boutz. But by 1984 Wometco was looking to sell. The citrus groves were disappearing, cut down by greening disease and successive freezes in the 1980s, which made citrus farming unviable in Lake County. The view was "certainly not what it used to be," the general manager at the time, Ed Rainey, told the *Orlando Sentinel*.



Citrus Tower view, then (above) and now (below).

The attraction's appeal had reached its nadir by the mid-1980s. Visitor figures dipped to around 50,000 annually. A dystopian *Orlando Sentinel* article by Jeff Kuerth, dated December 10, 1985, began: "A mausoleum-like solitude descends upon the Citrus Tower at sunset. . . . Gone are the people. Gone are the trees." The structure was saved from closing when it was bought by another group of Miami investors in 1986, led by Mike Samole.

In 1988, the new owners added a tram tour to take visitors through an orange grove, where they could learn about the history of citrus in Lake County. Vice President Dan Quayle stopped by for a campaign rally in August 1992, during the unsuccessful Bush-Quayle re-election campaign. In 1995, new owner Greg Homan changed the original orange stripe to two turquoise stripes, as a tribute to Lake County's namesake lakes.

(The orange-and-white pattern was restored in 2015.) Two years later, Jeff Klinkenberg of the *St. Petersburg Times* wrote affectionately in a Feb. 16, 1997, article that the Citrus Tower was one of Florida's "strangest tourist attractions."

Greg Homan's son Scott and Scott's wife Heather took over in January 2019 and installed a coffee shop in the cheerful lobby, which retains the structure's original terrazzo tiles. Two glass display cases showed off old souvenirs and artifacts, including a Fisher Price View-Master disc dedicated to the attraction. The original carillon bells that used to chime at noon were displayed in the lobby, which also contained an updated scale model of the structure.

The view of citrus trees at the tower has been replaced in part by a present-day Florida landmark, a Publix grocery store that anchors a nearby shopping center. Community development is visible from every angle, along with several lovely lakes and even a few citrus trees. A YouTube comment on an archived video showing the view from the observation deck neatly, if opinionatedly, encapsulated the shifting status of the surrounding area: "The 1956 view shows nothing but citrus trees. The 1994 view shows nothing but open fields. Now, the 2007 view is nothing but houses. I miss the old days!"

Anyone who wishes to judge the view for themselves can ride to the top of the Citrus Tower, in a modernized elevator that retains its traditional "old-school" look, for a self-guided tour any day of the week. Signs posted around the observation deck, now enclosed with glass, point out the direction of various sights, including Sugarloaf Mountain, the downtown Orlando skyline – and, of course, Walt Disney World. ■

Note: In February 2023, the Homan family announced the sale of the Citrus Tower in September 2022 to a Colorado-based religious group, Simchat Torah Beit Midrash, led by Rabbi Ralph Messer and Maureen Messer. After renovations, the tower reopened to visitors in May 2023. For more information, visit CitrusTower.com.

HISTORIC HAPPENINGS

STORYTELLING THROUGH DANCE



On May 20, the History Center hosted an afternoon of South Asian dance and activities. Dancers from the Central Florida-based Asian Cultural Association performed Kathak dance, demonstrating the use of instrumental and vocal music, along with stylized gestures, to enliven storytelling.

JOY AND PAIN: BLACK MUSIC HISTORY



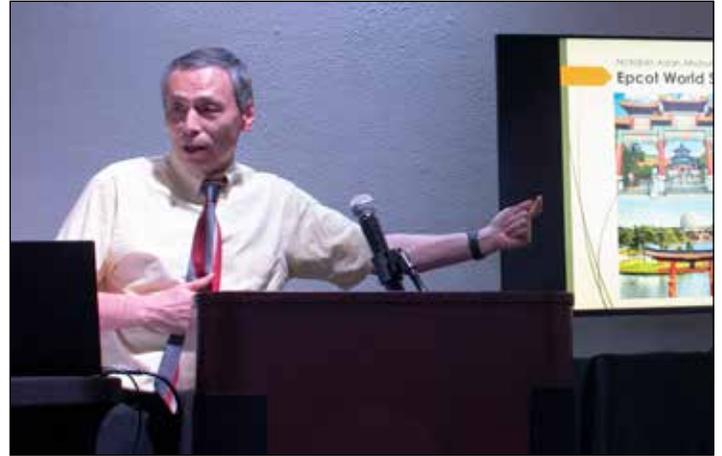
This Brechner Series lecture saw Don Harrell, University of Central Florida professor of Africana Studies, explore the relationship between music and society with a focus on rap and hip-hop culture, its proliferation, and its functional use in worldwide social justice movements.

A DAY WITH THE FLORIDA HIGHWAYMEN



As part of our Day with the Florida Highwaymen event in May, Dr. Renee Mills celebrated the life and work of her mother, the late Mary Ann Carroll, the only woman among the Highwaymen artists and the History Center's honoree at its annual Women's History Month Breakfast in 2022.

ASIAN AMERICANS IN FLORIDA



Prof. Wenxian Zhang of Rollins College, a recipient of the Cornell Distinguished Faculty Service Award and an Arthur Vining Davis Fellow, traced Asians' immigrant experiences and reviewed their contributions to Florida from the late 19th century to the present day during this May lecture.

TOM AND DAN PODCAST



Executive director Pam Schwartz and chief marketing and communications officer Scottie Campbell (bottom left) talked history on the popular Orlando-based comedy radio show "A Corporate Time with Tom and Dan" with Tom Vann (top left), Dan Dennis (top right), and Samantha Haar (bottom right).

SALLY'S NIGHT



On June 15, Dr. Kathleen B. Loftin of NASA spoke at our "Sally's Night" event inspired by the life and work of astronaut Sally Ride. Loftin talked about women in NASA's history and her own role managing research and technology projects at Kennedy Space Center.

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Calling all ghosts and ghouls:
it's time for our annual Trick
or Treat Safe Zone! Enjoy trick
or treating throughout the
History Center and
Orlando Public Library
along with creepy crafts,
candy, games, and more!
Costumes encouraged but
not required.

Free admission; children must
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ocls.info/trickortreat
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