

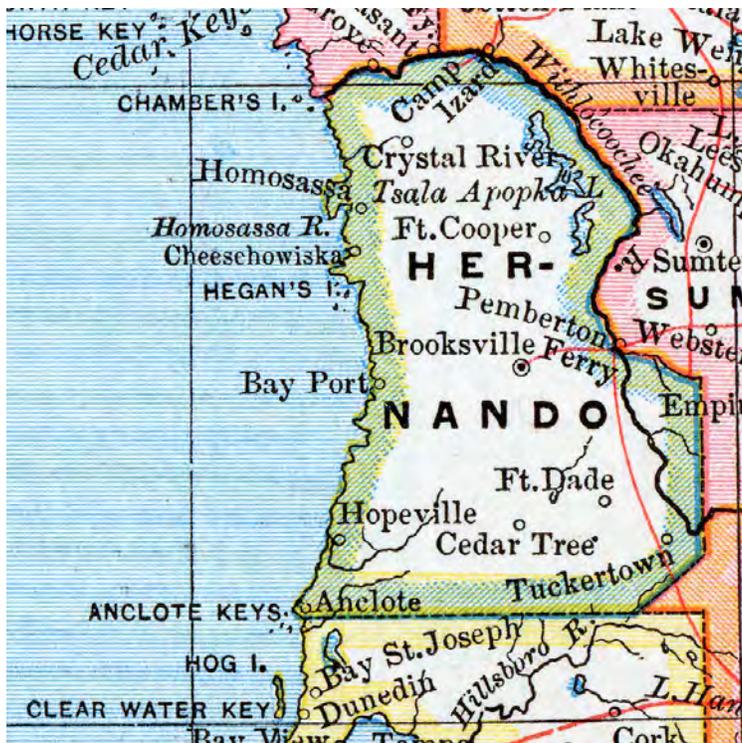


WEST PASCO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

January 2016

How Pasco County was created



If you were living in what is now New Port Richey in early 1887 you were a resident of Hernando County. You wouldn't have had many neighbors, as the population of the southern one-third of Hernando County, which would become Pasco, was only about 4,000 people, and most of them lived around Dade City.

Hernando was then a much larger county than it is now. In 1887 Pasco and Citrus counties were created from the southern and northern parts of the county. The map shows Hopeville, the name of a post office that existed from 1878 to 1881, before the name Port Richey came about.

Residents in what would become Pasco County, unhappy with the long trip to Brooksville, the county seat, held a mass

meeting and signed a petition calling for the division of Hernando County into two counties. In a letter written in 1927, Dr. Richard C. Bankston recalled that he and Jefferson Alexis Hendley would travel to Tallahassee as a committee of two to lobby the legislature. They were instructed to call the new county "Banner" County.

Bankston recalled that the name "Banner" County was not well received, as each legislator regarded his own county to be a "banner county," and prospects for the new county did not look good. It then occurred to him to change the name of the proposed county to Pasco County, and the proposal turned things around, such that the bill was passed easily.

During this period, United States senators were not elected by the people, but instead were chosen by the individual state legislatures. The Florida legislature had just selected Samuel Pasco to be the new U. S. senator from Florida. He was a popular figure in the state.

The bill was amended to create not one, but two new counties, with Citrus County being formed from the northern part of Hernando County. The bill was introduced in the Senate by Austin S. Mann.

On June 2, 1887, the bill to create the two new counties was signed into law by Gov. Edward Aylsworth Perry. Although the two counties came into existence on the same day, lists of Florida counties usually show Citrus as the 44th county and Pasco as the 45th.

According to the recollection of Clinton Edward Spencer, a pioneer resident of Dade City, with the split into only two counties, the border would have been too close to Brooksville to allow that town to remain the county seat of Hernando. The original bill specified a border about 8 miles south of Brooksville. Col. Spencer, as he was known, interviewed for a 1920 newspaper article, recalled that he went to Tallahassee on the last Sunday of the 1887 legislative session and met with the senator and two representatives from Pasco County and by grim determination and insistence had the bill introduced and rushed through the legislature.



The law creating the two new counties specified temporary county seats, Mannfield for Citrus (named for State Sen. Austin S. Mann) and Dade City for Pasco.

On Apr. 11, 1889, the election to name the permanent Pasco county seat was held. Dade City won with 432 votes. Gladstone received 205 votes. Pasadena received 96; Urbana, 20; Fort Dade, 4; Clear Lake, 2; Jefferson, 2; and Owensboro, 1. It is believed that Gladstone was a proposed new name for San Antonio.

The election in Citrus County was a bitterly contested one, deciding whether to keep Mannfield or adopt Inverness as the county seat.

The Pasco County Commission met for the first time on July 18, 1887. Most of the original county officials were from eastern and central Pasco County, but District 5 was represented by Joseph Byrd Hudson.

The commission established the original ten voting precincts: Macon (later Trilby), Dade City, Richland (near Zephyrhills), Wesley Chapel, San Antonio, Chipco, St. Thomas, Loyce, Hudson, and Bailey (later Anclote or Elfers).

Interestingly, in 1887 there was also a proposal in the legislature to create a new county from the western part of Hillsborough County. The proposal failed, and Pinellas County was not created until Jan. 1, 1912.

WEST PASCO HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

The Stage Door Canteen



The place was the Stage Door Canteen. It was the 1940's. For many leaving home for the first time, the Canteen offered a place to forget your worries and enjoy some entertainment, fellowship, and some tried and true American Spirit. It was a place where Bette Davis served the desserts, Red Skelton told jokes, and Bing Crosby crooned. Today, all of this excitement is coming to New Port Richey as the next exciting event by the West Pasco Historical Society when the Spartan Manor Restaurant will be transformed into its own Stage Door Canteen on Sunday, January 31st.

Hosting the evening's show will be none other than local favorite, the one and only Jimmy Ferraro. Ferraro will welcome and delight crowds during the show the way Bob Hope used to. His lively banter and wit will surely be welcomed by all of those who attend. He will surely set the tone for a fun evening!

Throughout the show, guests will be delighted with performances by The Swing Sisters. The beautifully harmonious group will have you thinking you stepped back in time and are watching the greats, like the Andrew Sisters, as they belt out hits of the time, including *Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy*. Joining them is the beautiful voice of Andy Stefano, whose beautiful tones will make you think you are watching a live performance of Frank Sinatra.

Rounding out the performances is none other than the 42nd Street Band. They will provide music throughout the show, and are honored to participate in the Stage Door Canteen's Salute to Our Military.

"We are really excited about the great show that has been put together for this event," states Dan Callahan, Chairman of the West Pasco Historical Society's Fundraising Committee. "We know that everyone will have a great time and that you will feel like you are back in those by-gone years with some of the world's best entertainers."

Be sure to mark your calendars now and plan to buy your tickets early for The Stage Door Canteen on January 31, 2016, at the Spartan Manor Restaurant at 6121 Massachusetts Avenue in New Port Richey. Doors open at 1:00 p.m., dinner is served at 1:30 p.m., and performances will begin at 2:30 p.m.

Tickets to attend the Stage Door Canteen, including performances and dinner, are \$45 and are available by contacting the West Pasco Historical Society. All funds raised through this event will go directly to programs and projects for the West Pasco Historical Society. Sponsorships and full table reservations are available. Visit www.westpascohistoricalsociety.org or call (727) 847-0680 for more information regarding sponsorships and tickets.

We look forward to seeing you at The Canteen! (Below: Andy Stefano, Jimmy Ferraro, the Swing Sisters)



WEST PASCO HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Some history of Elfers



Photo at left: the Elfers school, which opened in 1915, now restored.

The community south of Port Richey and New Port Richey which became known as Elfers was originally inhabited mostly by fishermen, cattlemen, and grove owners.

Some early settlers were named Baillie, Gaines, Brown, Sheffield, Hay, Mitchell, Sawyer, Butler, Pittman, Anderson, Swartzel, Baker, Stevenson, Henderson, Pierce, and Eikel.

According to *Florida Cracker Days in West Pasco County 1830-1982* by Pauline Stevenson Ash, on Jan. 8, 1876, Rev. John W. Wells began serving as pastor of a newly organized church. This church is believed to be the first Baptist church in western Pasco County. According to Ash, the six charter members were W. F. Baillie and his wife, Allen Hill and his wife, Rosanne Baillie and W. A. Cobb. It was built where the West Elfers Cemetery is now located. Both Elfers First Baptist Church and Westside/Riverside Baptist Church trace their origins to this church.

A school identified in school board records as the Baillie school was in operation by 1877. The area was called the Baillie community at that time.

A community known as Sapling Woods was located southeast of New Port Richey, where East Elfers Cemetery is today. A Methodist church was built there in the 1880s. It later relocated to Elfers.

The name Elfers came about in 1909 when a post office by that name was established. The first postmaster was Levi D. Eiland. His wife, Frieda Marie (Bolling) Eiland, ran the post office. She named it for a dear uncle living in Germany whose last name was Elfers. Frieda's mother's maiden name was Maria Elfers. She later became the official postmaster herself.

Other early postmasters of Elfers were Jesse M. Mitchell, Albert A. Keith, Emma E. Sheldon, Mrs. Lou Waddy, Elmer A. Boyd, and Mrs. Ruth L. Burney.

In 1913 railroad service to Elfers was established by the Tampa and Gulf Coast Railroad to accommodate the shipment of citrus. The town began to grow rapidly. Joe Knight, a grove owner, began operations in Elfers in December 1912. Within a few years there were two citrus packing plants in operation. A 1921 newspaper article reported, "It is estimated that within three miles of the village of Elfers there are twenty-five hundred acres of young orange grove, most of it just getting into the full bearing stage. There are a half dozen large groves, consisting of from one hundred acres to two hundred acres each, and in

addition to these big acreages there are dozens and dozens of smaller groves ranging from five to forty acres.”

In 1915 the red brick Elfers school opened. The building has recently been restored and is the CARES Elfers Center.

A weekly newspaper, the *Elfers West Pasco Record*, began publication on Feb. 2, 1922. It lasted only one year, however. The museum has several of the newspapers.

Elfers was incorporated from 1925. Rev. Jesse M. Mitchell, the leading citizen of Elfers for many years, was elected mayor. He was a successful businessman and a member of the state legislature, both as a representative and a state senator. He was the town’s only mayor. The first city council consisted of E. P. Campbell, R. E. Bailey, J. W. Saunders, Porter Lamar Pierce, and Thomas J. Hill.

New Port Richey had incorporated less than a year earlier, and naturally talk of merging the two nearby cities began. George Sims appeared before New Port Richey city council and explained a proposition he had placed before the people of Elfers. He proposed that the two towns would incorporate under the name New Port Richey, that Elfers would be designated as Ward I and New Port Richey as Ward II. Each town would be represented by three councilmen, and the first mayor, who would be a mayor-commissioner, would be from Elfers. New Port Richey councilmen opposed the requirement that the first mayor be from Elfers, but representatives from Elfers insisted on it. On May 4, 1925, the plan was rejected at a public meeting of New Port Richey residents held at the Palms Theater. At the meeting, Sims said that granting Elfers the first mayor was only fair since that town was giving up its name.

In January 1926 Elfers city councilmen communicated their desire to merge the two cities, and both cities appointed committees to examine a possible merger. This second attempt also failed.



Later in 1926, Mitchell opened a large two-story building on the Dixie Highway (now Grand Boulevard) which was intended to house the First State Bank of Elfers. Plans for the bank fell through, however. The Mitchell Building still stands, with businesses on the first floor and apartments on the second floor. For many years the apartments were known as the Mainaris Apartments.

Former Pasco County Administrator John Gallagher lived in one of the apartments when he first arrived here with his parents.

In 1927 the Kissimmee Inn opened in Elfers. The town had a population of 303 persons within the city limits. ---Continued on the last page.

MEMBER PROFILE: Ann Rusaw James

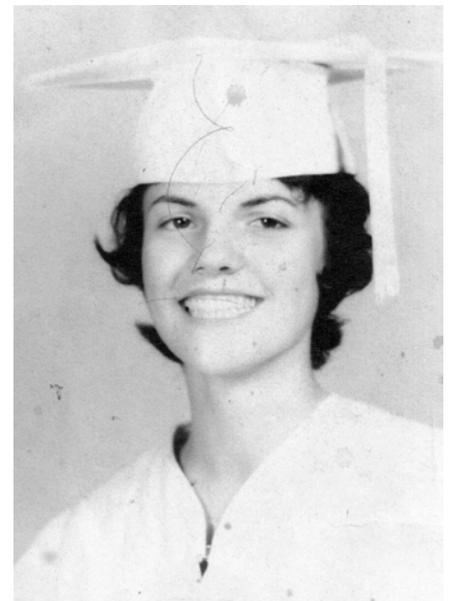


Ann was born Ann Marie Rusaw, on September 8, 1945, in Flint, Michigan, to a large French-Canadian family. She was the fourth of eight children of Leota and Willet Rusaw, Jr. Her father, Willet (Rex), had two previous sons from his first marriage, Willet (Bill), III, and Ernest (Ernie). They formed a construction company, Rusaw and Sons Builders, in the 1950s in Columbia Station, Ohio. Her father and brothers built several prefabricated homes, but before they really established themselves brother Bill packed up his family and hauled his trailer down to Buena Vista Trailer Park, in what is now Holiday, Florida. He always laughed and said by the time he got down here he had \$10 in his pocket and had to get a real job. As soon as he had enough money he built a beautiful brick cabana onto his trailer. He then was approached by several of his neighbors to build one for them, and that was the beginning of Willet Rusaw Builders.

Sometime after that, Ernie moved his family down and then Ann's father moved them down on December 7, 1957. Ann's father was a big dreamer and was hoping to make a lot of money in the wide-open territory of groves of people retiring and moving to Florida. There were five kids left at home at that time and Ann was the oldest, in seventh grade. Times were really tough for them because Ann's father was not part of the business and only worked for his sons, Ernie and Bill, at a very small wage. They were all struggling to build up the business. Ann's father worked at a gas station to supplement his income and her mother went to work in a shoelace factory, and later Tropicana. They struggled financially to keep them all fed, clothed, and in school. They rented a little cabin in Anclote and the children went to Tarpon Springs School. Ann attended seventh and eighth grades and began ninth grade in Tarpon Springs. Her parents separated in 1960 and her mother and the five kids moved to downtown Tarpon Springs.

By this time, Ernie and Bill were building homes in Pasco County and formed Rusaw Homes. They bought land from the Pappases and built Dodge City, Crestridge Gardens, and several other subdivisions, which is all Holiday, Florida, now. Ann can remember bulldozers pushing down acres of orange groves to build houses. They were selling like hotcakes at less than \$6000 apiece.

Ann's mom remarried and built a little wood frame house in Dodge City and Ann changed to Gulf High School in the ninth grade. She changed from a shy little girl, feeling very out of place in Tarpon Springs, to becoming a cheerleader, drama club, and had several class officer positions. She really came into her own at Gulf High. She had lots of friends and formed some beautiful friendships that have endured over 50 years. Her love for the Hacienda stems from one of her best friends, BJ Semple. BJ's parents owned the Hacienda at that time and Ann has fond memories of visiting BJ and her family there. She even spent the night with BJ a few times. The Semple family lived in the upstairs section with the large veranda facing Main Street.



After graduating from Gulf High in 1963, with honors, she went to business college in Jacksonville, Florida, and obtained an associate's degree in accounting. Her tuition was paid for by her brother Ernie and sister-in-law Doris. She then got married and went to the Panama Canal Zone, to work for Civil Service during the Viet Nam war. When she came home from Panama in 1965 her mother and stepfather had moved to Ohio and her mother was very ill. So, she packed up and went to Ohio for what she thought to be a temporary stay, but ended up spending most of her adult life there. She raised a daughter, Tracy, and a son, Corey. She now has four grandchildren and two great grandchildren, all of whom are in Ohio.

Over the years Ann came back to Florida on vacations to visit relatives and always felt New Port Richey to be her home. After losing her husband to cancer in 2010 she came down to her fiftieth class reunion in 2013. She reconnected with so many of her friends from Gulf High and decided to come down for the winters. She has a house in Hudson. Now, even though she still has her house in Ohio, she hasn't gone back to Ohio for two summers, except for short visits. In 2013 she joined the DIVAS, which is a group of gals who graduated from Gulf High School from 1927 to 1967. It's a great organization which does charity drives for scholarships and gifts to Gulf High School.

She is now getting involved in the beautiful city of New Port Richey as a board member of The Friends of the Hacienda and Historical New Port Richey. She recently joined the board of the West Pasco Historical Society and Rao Musunuru, MD, Museum and Library as their Treasurer. It looks like Ann has come home to stay.

Some history of Elfers - continued

Photo: In 2015 Tammy Keough, whose business is in the Mitchell Building, shows off the original bank vault.



During the depression years, many residents were on the verge of losing their property and they felt that taxes were too high. They persuaded State Senator Samuel W. Getzen of Bushnell to introduce a bill in the legislature to dissolve the incorporation of the city in 1933.

In 1966 the two-story red brick Elfers school, which had been an important part of the community since it was built in 1914-15, was replaced with a new school, also known as Elfers Elementary School. The school board had planned to name the new school Stevenson Elementary, but long-time Elfers residents objected to the new name, concerned that the name "Elfers" was being forgotten. The Stevenson family withdrew its request for the new name, and the school board decided to keep the name Elfers Elementary School. But in 1983 the school was renamed Mittye P. Locke Elementary School, in honor of the long-time principal of the school, who had retired in 1979.