

*The History
of
St. George Plantation*



*Before the Development of the Plantation
Volume 1, Issue 1*

1967 Aerial View of Nick's Hole
Richard Parks Collection
State Archives of Florida



**INTRODUCTION TO
THIS SERIES**

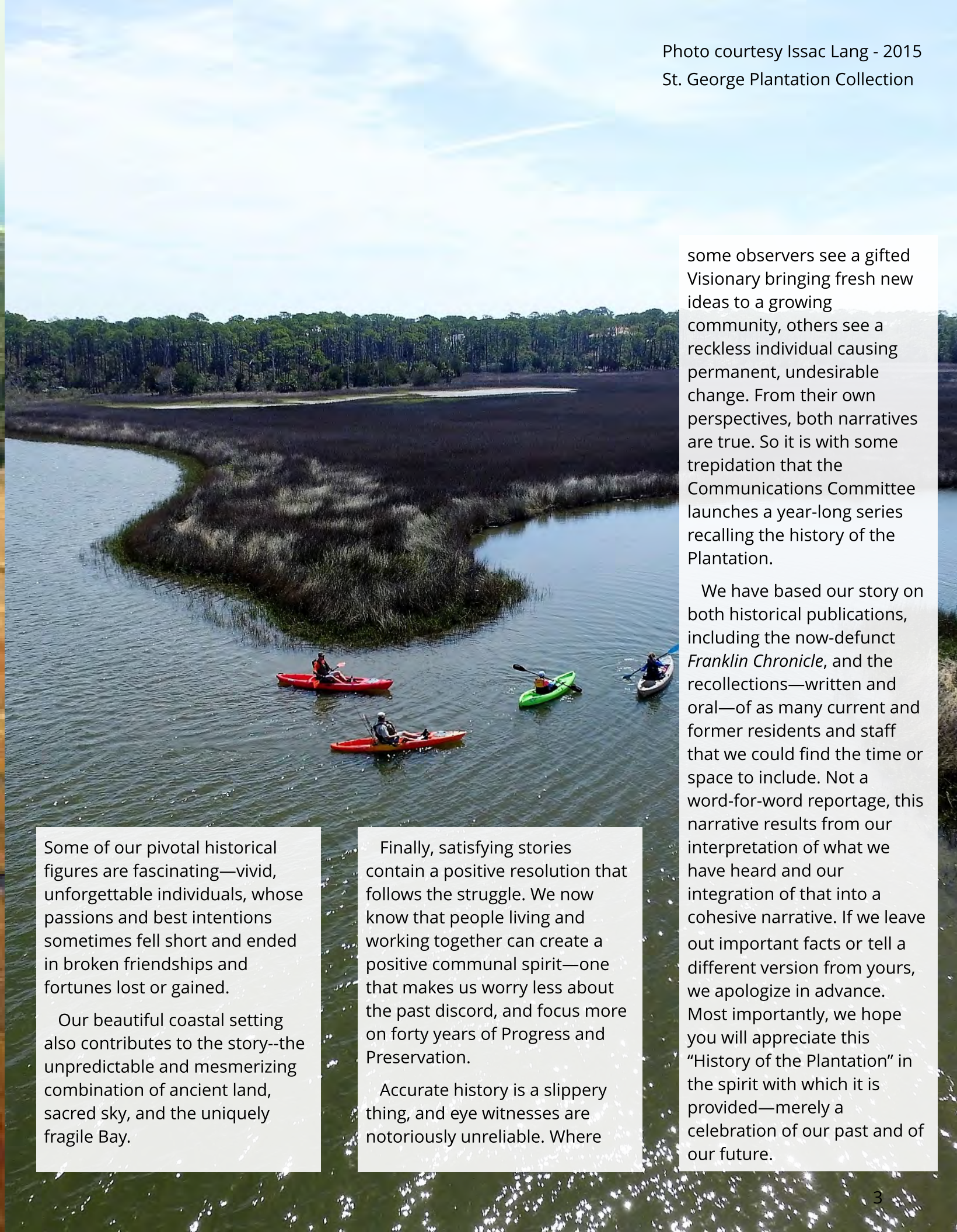
This year St. George Plantation celebrates 40 years of life. The Plantation was legally born in September 1977 when the St. George Island Development Order was approved and recorded in the Official Records of Franklin County, Florida.

The events of these forty years might make for an interesting novel. The best stories require conflicts in the plot line. In the history of the Plantation, the central struggle has been between the interests of those in favor of commercial and high density development, typical of coastal Florida Panhandle, versus those supporting low density,

single family growth. Early on, the most visible advocates of limited growth were the titans of the local seafood industry, which was the economic lifeblood of the county. They were joined by Plantation property owners who took on the burden of safekeeping the pristine nature of the island.

Great stories also contain dynamic characters.

Photo courtesy Issac Lang - 2015
St. George Plantation Collection



some observers see a gifted Visionary bringing fresh new ideas to a growing community, others see a reckless individual causing permanent, undesirable change. From their own perspectives, both narratives are true. So it is with some trepidation that the Communications Committee launches a year-long series recalling the history of the Plantation.

We have based our story on both historical publications, including the now-defunct *Franklin Chronicle*, and the recollections—written and oral—of as many current and former residents and staff that we could find the time or space to include. Not a word-for-word reportage, this narrative results from our interpretation of what we have heard and our integration of that into a cohesive narrative. If we leave out important facts or tell a different version from yours, we apologize in advance. Most importantly, we hope you will appreciate this “History of the Plantation” in the spirit with which it is provided—merely a celebration of our past and of our future.

Some of our pivotal historical figures are fascinating—vivid, unforgettable individuals, whose passions and best intentions sometimes fell short and ended in broken friendships and fortunes lost or gained.

Our beautiful coastal setting also contributes to the story--the unpredictable and mesmerizing combination of ancient land, sacred sky, and the uniquely fragile Bay.

Finally, satisfying stories contain a positive resolution that follows the struggle. We now know that people living and working together can create a positive communal spirit—one that makes us worry less about the past discord, and focus more on forty years of Progress and Preservation.

Accurate history is a slippery thing, and eye witnesses are notoriously unreliable. Where



Early Island Life

The surrounding area is thought to have hosted human life ten thousand years ago. Creek Indians lived on the island, evidenced by their pottery shards and oyster shell middens found along the Bay side of the Island. During the early part of the twentieth century, the island served as a turpentine plantation. Tree slashes, known as "cat faces" for the v-shaped hacks in the pine bark used to collect resin, still mark the older trees. A concrete-edged trough, used for "plunge dipping" to treat cattle that wintered on the island, lies hidden in the natural landscape. During World War II the island was used as a practice range for B-24 bombers and supported preparation drills for the amphibious landing in France on D-Day.

The area never experienced the sweeping development of more famous Florida coastal communities. At first, interest was limited because only ferries brought tourists or home buyers to the island. Even after bridge construction, the area was still known as "The Forgotten Coast" because it so rarely showed up in state - supported tourism promotions. Many other factors contributed to the unique development - combined - with - preservation that characterizes the island. The cycle of economic vagaries, the combination of state, federal, and local development restrictions, and the vociferous opposition of residents all played key roles.

Photo Credit Unknown

The Original St. George Island Bridge

Prior to 1965, access to the island was by water craft only. This 1965 aerial shot features the newly opened Bryant Patton Bridge and Causeway that not only connected the island to the mainland but provided nesting areas for shorebirds.

After considerable usage the original St. George Island Bridge was wearing out and faced the possibility of falling down. The current bridge was started in 2002 and completed in 2004 at a cost of \$70 Million.



*Richard Parks Collection,
State Archives of Florida*

(Karl Holland Collection, State Archives of Florida)

"In their battles with Spanish Explorers, the Apalachee Tribe set the bar for resistance to out - of - town developers."

Photos courtesy Mike Kinnett, Florida Park Service Specialist, and the Orman House Collection.



These shards of pottery, found on St. George Island and Apalachicola, give evidence to the history of early inhabitants of the area. The Apalachee Tribe, later known as Creek Indians, historically lived in the Florida Panhandle, engaged in agriculture, hunting, and fishing and participated in an expansive trade network that extended from the Gulf Coast to the Great Lakes, and westward to what is now Oklahoma. A favorite entertainment was the "Apalachee Ball Game," akin to modern day soccer, in which village teams of 40 to 50 men challenged other villages. The best players were highly coveted by opposing villages. In order to keep them loyal, villages would provide compensation in the form of housing, labor for their fields, and grace in the face of their misdemeanors.

In their battles with Spanish Explorers, the Tribe set the bar for resistance to out-of-town

developers. According to historians, the Apalachee scalped opponents whom they had killed. During the 16th century, the Apalachee fought against Spanish expeditions with quick raiding parties and ambushes, targeting particularly the Spaniards' horses. Panfilo de Narvaez attempted to escape their violent opposition by sailing to Mexico from the Apalachicola Bay but only five men survived the trip. Hernando de Soto, whose chain mail garments were no protection against the flint and chert arrows of the Apalachee, gave up on the Panhandle in the spring of 1540 and moved to more developer-friendly areas of what is now Georgia.

To learn the rest of the story, visit the Orman House museum in Apalachicola or search "Apalachee Tribe" on line.

Nothing has been more important to the pace of development on the island than the seafood industry.



"The Apalachicola River, Floodplain, and Bay comprise one of the most biodiverse and productive riverine and estuarine systems in the Northern Hemisphere. The historic natural function and cultural heritage of the surrounding communities remain intact much of the way it has been for generations of commercial fishermen on one of Florida's last working waterfronts. This ecosystem and its people are truly an American Treasure."

Dan Tonsmeire, Apalachicola Riverkeeper

Department of Commerce Collection
State Archives of Florida

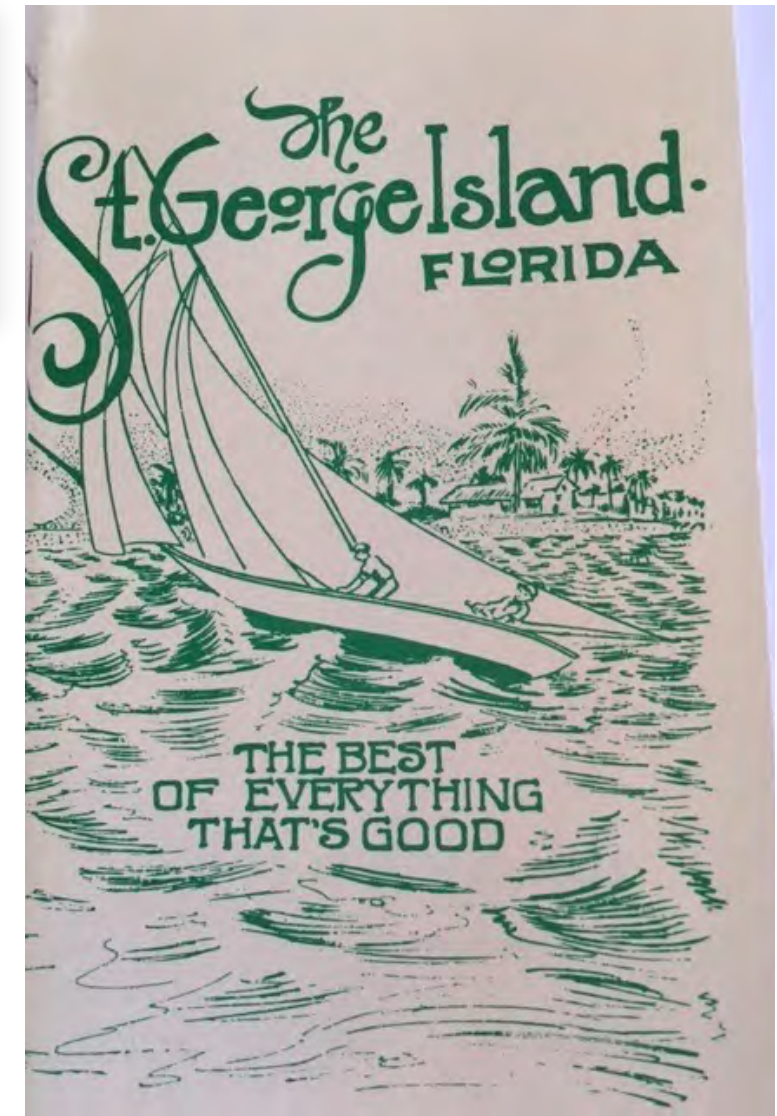
**Early Settlers
of
St. George Island**



*William Lee Popham
First Developer
of
St. George Island*

In 1918, two years after the island's first true developer, William Lee Popham, purchased the island from a Tallahassee businessman, he created a 36-page advertising booklet, "The St. George Island, Florida: The Best of Everything That's Good." Containing photos, narratives, testimonials and poems to promote his dream of a "City by the Sea," the document promised an "advertising" limited time offer. Purchasers could get a "choice lot" for \$150 and four adjoining lots absolutely free. Florida's popular railroads brought numbers of "homeseekers," speculators, and property flippers to South Florida, other areas along the Atlantic Coast, and also to the island, fueling the state's first real estate bubble (1920-1925). The state's economy would not fully recover until World War II.

A successful writer of romance novels, Popham used his poetic style to entice prospective buyers:



"St George's Island is not only the rich man's paradise, but the poor man's land—where there will be more work in the building of this city-by-the-sea than we can find workers.... Rich man, poor man, awake and rise! This is no time for sleep!"

Popham, who became known as the "Oyster King," further promoted the island by linking oyster harvesting as a form of income for land investors. That scheme ended badly after the U.S. Bureau of Internal Revenue charged Popham with mail fraud and placed a tax lien on his personal and company funds. He spent several years in federal prison. He later returned to be tried again for these crimes but was acquitted. He used his island property to pay off his legal debts.

Two of the most notable books about this fascinating era of island history are "The Oyster King" by island resident James Hargrove and William Rogers "Outposts on the Coast," available locally.



Nick's Hole House

Considered the first homestead on St George Island, the house and the outbuildings in these undated photos are said to have been built by relatives of John Witherspoon of New Jersey. The structures were said to be located in what is now Nick's Hole area.

It is interesting to note that John Witherspoon was an original supporter of and the only clergyman to sign the Declaration of Independence. By signing the document, Witherspoon and his fellow signers pledged their lives, fortunes, and sacred honor. If the efforts at independence from England had failed, the signers of the Declaration would be among the first to be hanged for treason. And this family might never have had a presence on St George Island, FL.

PHOTOS COURTESY ARMISTEAD FAMILY COLLECTION

TURPENTINE TRAIL

Evidence of our predecessors is all around us in the Plantation. This easy walking route, designed by Plantation owner Jim Mott, will provide the opportunity to view and touch at least 15 Cat-Faced Trees, the remnants of a thriving island industry that ended more than 50 years ago. There is also another longer guided walk. Visit the Plantation office to borrow a preprinted guide.



The pine tree at the Pelican Point Tennis Court still shows nails and metal imbedded in the cat-face.



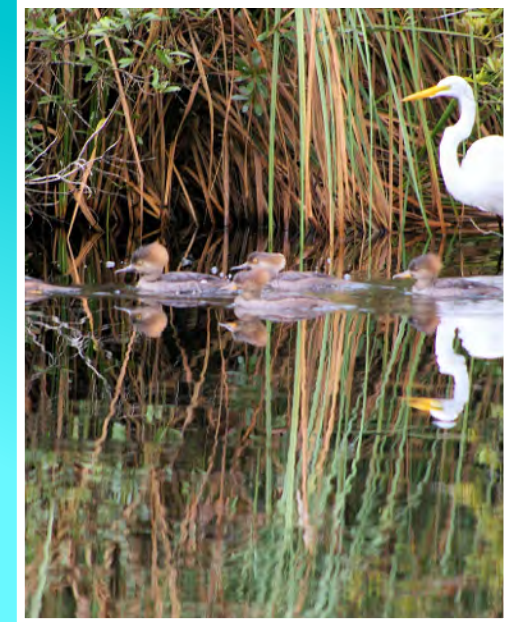
During the early twentieth century, "turpentine" was a major industry on the island. Today large Slash Pine trees bear the scars created by vertical cross-saws that peeled back the bark to collect pine resin. The sap drained from the tree into metal troughs and containers. This resin was converted to turpentine.

Egret photos courtesy of
Boyd Ellison,
Plantation owner

The Egret Pond

One of our favorite vistas for bird watching is a natural water body on the north side of Leisure Lane between Forsythia and Guava, and isolated from the bay by reed marsh. We call it the "Egret Pond" because of the "congregation" that roosts in the surrounding trees late in the day. In these aerial photos, where sun reflection makes the pond appear white, the sandy beginnings of Leisure Lane can be seen in 1978, soon after the Plantation Development Order was approved.

In 2016 Facilities Manager Drew Robertson, who is also a professional hydrologist, worked with state agencies and private vendors to begin the work of pond restoration in this area. The project includes removal of undesirable plants and stabilization of the road easements.



Egret pond 1969 pre Leisure Lane



Egret pond 1978 post Leisure Lane

In 1968, before environmental restrictions were put in place to protect the dunes, modified vehicles were the favorite method of island transportation. This crowd (inset) is gathered to watch a 1.5 mile dune buggy race which was held annually on Labor Day both before and after the bridge was constructed.



Dan Stainer Collection - 1968
State Archives of Florida



During the 1950s, the Florida Department of Commerce built the tourist industry in our state by promoting our beaches. These promotional photographs were taken on St. George Island in the 1950's and early 1960's.



Department of Commerce Collection
State Archives of Florida

Beach trip brings a view of the future - and the past ...

by Mark Hinson

"The no-see-ums were so fierce and bloodthirsty we had to sleep under blankets during the stifling nights. When the breeze died, the yellow flies moved in for another blood drive."

The cottage, one of only nine or 10 on the island at the time, turned out to be a cinder-block bungalow with no air-conditioning. It probably had one of those cutesy pun names like The Sea Note or Vitamin Sea but, like other traumatic memories from my childhood, I have blocked the name out of my mind.

The shower didn't work and the sink was a holding pond for brown water because the drain was clogged with cooking grease.

The former tenants must have included Keith Moon and Amy Winehouse because the one-story bunker was littered with liquor bottles and broken glass. The cramped hellhole indeed slept seven comfortably, if you were a family of salamanders.

The sand blew through the house like Luke Skywalker's place on Tatooine. The no-see-ums were so fierce and bloodthirsty we had to sleep under blankets during the stifling nights. When the breeze died, the yellow flies moved in for another blood drive.

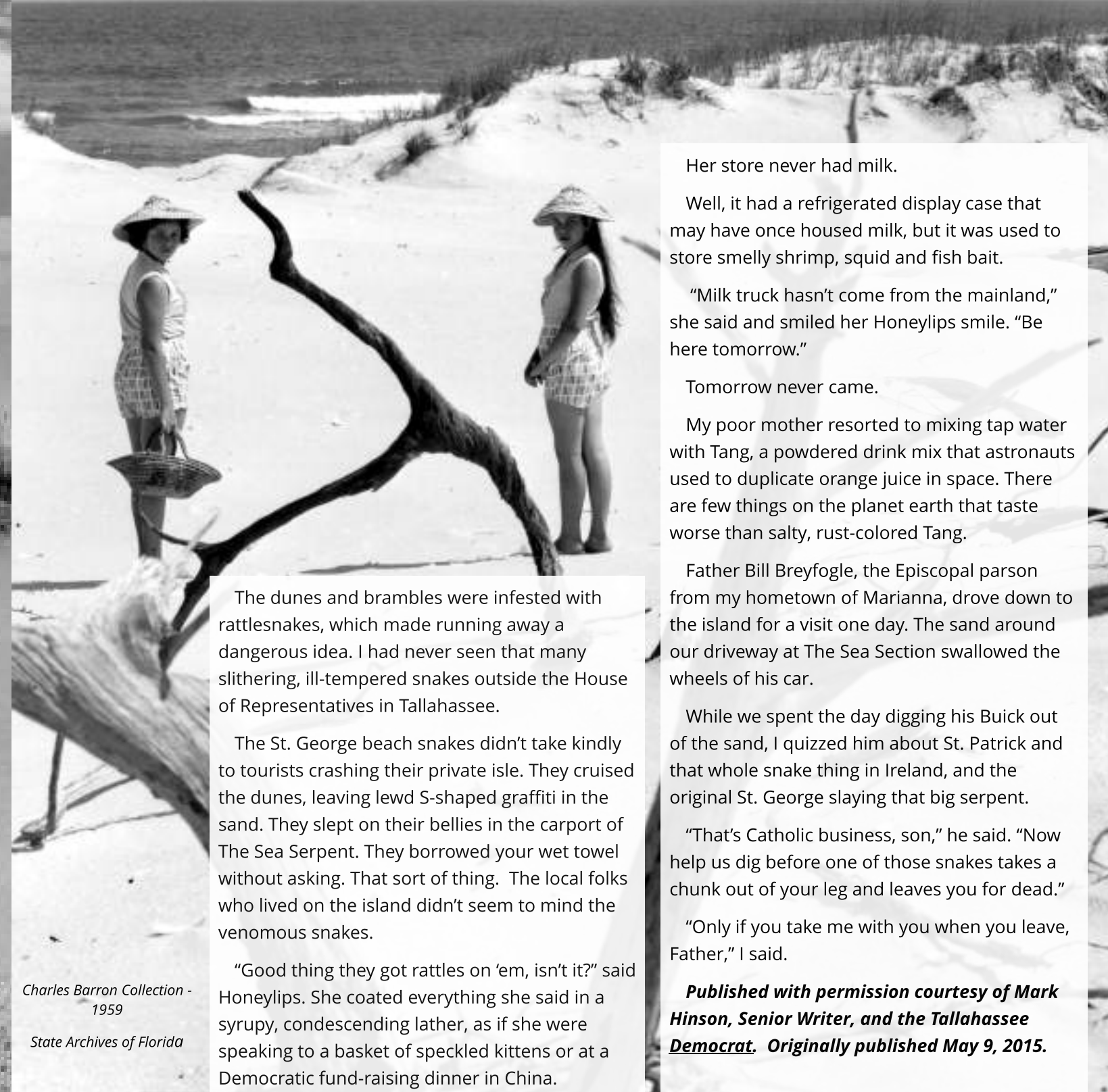
Things along the coast are changing - and not changing - in Apalachicola and St. George Island.

When the state finally built a toll bridge connecting the mainland with the island, my father was quick to rent a cottage for two weeks one summer in the late '60s.

My father, who fought the Japanese as a Navy frogman in World War II, had a habit of blindly running off to some wild, hostile terrain and calling it "vacation." He believed that fun and relaxation should always come with a side order of pain and suffering.

Complete article may be found at :

<http://www.tallahassee.com/story/entertainment/columnists/hinson/2015/05/09/beach-trip-brings-view-future-past/27005789/>



Her store never had milk.

Well, it had a refrigerated display case that may have once housed milk, but it was used to store smelly shrimp, squid and fish bait.

"Milk truck hasn't come from the mainland," she said and smiled her Honeylips smile. "Be here tomorrow."

Tomorrow never came.

My poor mother resorted to mixing tap water with Tang, a powdered drink mix that astronauts used to duplicate orange juice in space. There are few things on the planet earth that taste worse than salty, rust-colored Tang.

Father Bill Breyfogle, the Episcopal parson from my hometown of Marianna, drove down to the island for a visit one day. The sand around our driveway at The Sea Section swallowed the wheels of his car.

While we spent the day digging his Buick out of the sand, I quizzed him about St. Patrick and that whole snake thing in Ireland, and the original St. George slaying that big serpent.

"That's Catholic business, son," he said. "Now help us dig before one of those snakes takes a chunk out of your leg and leaves you for dead."

"Only if you take me with you when you leave, Father," I said.

Published with permission courtesy of Mark Hinson, Senior Writer, and the Tallahassee Democrat. Originally published May 9, 2015.

The dunes and brambles were infested with rattlesnakes, which made running away a dangerous idea. I had never seen that many slithering, ill-tempered snakes outside the House of Representatives in Tallahassee.

The St. George beach snakes didn't take kindly to tourists crashing their private isle. They cruised the dunes, leaving lewd S-shaped graffiti in the sand. They slept on their bellies in the carport of The Sea Serpent. They borrowed your wet towel without asking. That sort of thing. The local folks who lived on the island didn't seem to mind the venomous snakes.

"Good thing they got rattles on 'em, isn't it?" said Honeylips. She coated everything she said in a syrupy, condescending lather, as if she were speaking to a basket of speckled kittens or at a Democratic fund-raising dinner in China.

Rare Snowy Plover Nesting Area Pre-Dates Plantation



Long before the Plantation was under development, the tiny Snowy Plover nested in the federal spoil area created by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers when constructing the Bob Sikes Cut. Because only 250 to 300 pair of the birds are known to exist in the state, Florida has designated these small and well-camouflaged birds as “threatened.” Each nest is considered critical. Their nesting season lasts from February through August. To learn how best to protect these fragile creatures go to <http://myfwc.com/Shorebirds> for tips and links to information. Brochures are also available in the

Plantation office titled “Share the Beach With Beach Nesting Birds” by FL Wildlife Commission.

Island Sands Hide 90 Year-Old "Dipping Trough"

In the early 20th Century, a widespread blood infection known as “Texas Tick Fever” threatened one of Florida’s major industries, cattle farming. Even the free-range cattle that wintered on St George Island were not safe. The danger to this prosperous industry was so great that in 1923 the Florida Legislature mandated that every cattleman in the state comply with the state’s tick eradication program that required “dipping” each cow every two weeks.

The cattle dipping process, which included rounding up the herds and forcing the animals through a liquid-filled trough, was labor intensive and expensive. The arsenic-based poison was deadly for ticks but presumably safe for the cattle, as long as their trip through the trough was fairly quick. We have no information on its effect on the people who mixed the solutions and drove the cattle through the narrow bath. But there is good reason why these chemicals are no longer used.

Some cattle farming areas were so opposed to the state’s mandated rules that they threatened—perhaps jokingly—to “dip” the State Livestock Sanitary Board itself if financial assistance or quarantine relief was not provided.

The state then contracted with private companies to build dipping vats all across the state for cattlemen to have greater access without the necessity to drive their herds great distances to the vats. By the mid-1930s, conditions had improved and quarantine was lifted in most areas.



It’s unknown whether the dipping vat visible in the Plantation (inset) was built by these private contractors. It is a unique coquina and oyster shell based concrete. Early visitors to the area report having found many small, deep blue bottles that held the poisonous solutions near the trough. Like most dipping vats from that era, the Plantation trough, which is located on a privately owned lot, is almost completely covered by sand and shrubs, with only small portions of the top of the eastern wall still visible.

Based on a blog entry by Josh, 9/15/14. State Archives of Florida. <https://www.floridamemory.com/blog/2014/09/15/somebody-give-that-cow-a-bath/>

The Armistead Family of St. George Island est.1959

In 1959 Graham & Veronica Armistead of Monticello, Florida, built the 7th house to be constructed on modern-day SGI. The house, still used by the family today, is located on West Gorrie.

Prior to the construction of the bridge in 1965, all owners ferried their supplies, equipment, and workers to the island. The house was concrete block construction with a stucco finish. With 4 bedrooms & 3 baths, the total cost of construction was \$5500. The developers gave the lot to Armistead in exchange for a commitment to build a house.

During this era, home owners and developers didn’t value the sand dunes nor the role they play in protecting the island. As can be seen in the above photo, Armistead frequently bulldozed his lot to keep the approach to the gulf waters flat.

For many years shoreline fishing was more accessible because local ordinances permitted beach goers to drive their vehicles to the water’s edge.



Reflection ...

We met on St. George Island as teenagers and there began our love story. We moved to the island permanently in 1974 and raised our three daughters there: Nikki Armistead Cash, Jennifer Armistead Robinson and Jessica Armistead Gilbert. We have treasured island life and all it had to offer.

Among the most treasured parts of living on St. George Island are the friendships we have made over the years. We feel so lucky and blessed to be able to enjoy the daily beauty of St. George Island and live the “Island Dream.”

Jolene and Walter Armistead

Photos courtesy of the Armistead family

Reflection ...

I first became familiar with St. George Island in 1967 when I started hunting dove here each fall and winter. It was a wild and beautiful place with only a few houses in the "Old Subdivision" between 12th St. West and 11th St. East. There was no water system, which prevented any substantial development. My attraction to the island was its natural beauty and, what became in the 70s, the challenge of planning and developing the island in a way that did not destroy that natural beauty. I also thought it was a great investment.

In the late 60s and early 70s, I lived in Tallahassee. But in the mid 70s, I built the first house in the Plantation in Sea Dune Village and spent a substantial amount of time there with my family.

Gene Brown, one of the investors who purchased St. George Island in 1971 for \$6.5M

The schooner was part of the original Plantation logo and was used on advertising, letterhead, newspapers and logo wear. Originally called St. George's Plantation, the "s" was later dropped to simplify the name.



Looking ahead...

We hope every one of you will take the time to celebrate and enjoy your home and your unique community this year.

While we plan to include many before and after photos, more will be available on the SGPOA website along with digitized historical records.

Our Annual Owners' Dinner in October will serve as the finale of our celebration, when we will gather at the Clubhouse to welcome both current and former invited owners. Commemorative "favors," lively music, and displays of collected memorabilia—not to mention good and plentiful food - are all being planned.

In the next issue:

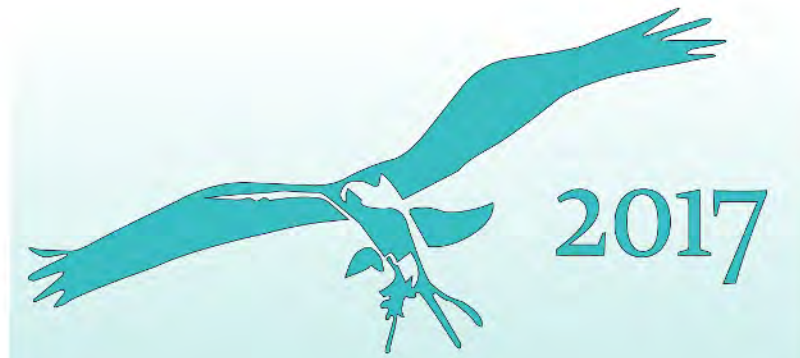
The History of the Plantation

Volume 1, Issue 2

The Original Development

The story of the early development: two young developers buy an island and begin to fulfill a vision of a gated coastal community with 770 single family homesites, underground utilities and leisure amenities. Many buyers never noticed that the plan also included three large commercial zones that would feature a fully equipped air strip, a marina, hotels, retail shops, bars and restaurants, horse stables, and spas. Both these conflicting concepts came with the promise of a "Private Florida," secure behind a restricted access, 24-hour security gate. What could possibly go wrong?

We welcome your comments, suggestions, corrections, and photos.
sgpoa.communications@gmail.com



St. George
PLANTATION

*40 years of
Progress
and
Preservation*

1977





Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur
s adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy

"An unforgettable sea-scope greets the visitors to St. George Island near Apalachicola, Florida. The sands are unbelievably (sic) white and the sea-shades of the Gulf of Mexico, are ever variant (sic). Car ferries make a number of trips each day."

Archive Narrative

This photo (Charles Barron -1957) and cover photo (Dan Stainer -1968) from Department of Commerce Collection, State of Florida Archives