

The History of St. George Plantation



*The Middle Years: 1985-2005
Volume 1, Issue 3*

A photograph of a wooden boardwalk leading from the foreground towards the ocean. The boardwalk is made of light-colored wooden planks and is flanked by sandy areas with sparse, dry grass. The ocean is visible in the distance under a clear sky.

Introduction to the Middle Years

This third issue of the *History of the Plantation* describes significant events in late 20th Century that changed the destiny of the community. Originally, the developers' dream was to replicate a large integrated commercial and residential South Carolina development called Sea Pine Plantation, an early project located on Hilton Head Island. After the efforts of the island developer Leisure Properties, and its subsequent iterations, failed to accomplish that goal, other entrepreneurs bought up large parcels with a similar desire to bring commercial development and multi-family structures to the Plantation.

In every instance, the barrier of resistance created by the combined efforts of the local seafood industry, county commission and Plantation owners, along with the economic realities of the sparsely populated island, was ultimately too difficult to overcome for commercial investors. Equally as destructive to the spirit of the community were the disagreements among owners over the future of the Paradise that some felt to be threatened. This issue tells about those struggles and the evolution of the Plantation community, unique in the Panhandle of Florida.

During these years, the population of owners continued to grow, with many demonstrating a deep, personal commitment to the strength and viability of the community. Home buyers of this era, and sometimes their children, have offered their recollections and early impressions of the Plantation in this issue.

We hope you enjoy these memories that make up the fabric of our common island heritage.

The Island's charm: Life is blissfully simple



This nearly 20-year-old newspaper article, reproduced below, about a visit to St. George Island is still accurate today. This piece **"The Island's Charm: Life is Blissfully Simple"** was published in the Sunday edition, August 22, 1999. Our thanks to Linda Lange, Travel Writer, and the Knoxville *News-Sentinel* for permission to reprint.

There is always a magic about arriving at the calm, blue Gulf of Mexico: the sudden unfolding of a long view to the horizon after hours spent in pine forests, the change in air from thick humidity to fresh brine. We drove through umpteen small towns in Georgia before crossing the state line. Florida's terrain deflated as we neared the coast, and eventually, more by luck than skill of map reading, we found our way to St. George Island.

At Eastpoint, we turned on the causeway to St. George Island and were greeted by royal terns hovering in the sky. Cars slow to a crawl to ensure the safety of little chicks wandering from nests along the shoulders of the road.

St. George Island lies in the Florida Panhandle about 75 miles south of Tallahassee. The lack of substantial commercial development allows the area to support many natural habitats. It is a place where the pleasures of summer are blissfully, purposely simple.

Alice Collins, a realtor and longtime resident of St. George, remembers family vacations here in the late 1950s. "It was a 45-minute ride by ferry boat. It would hold nine cars--that is, eight regular-size cars and a Volkswagen.

"There were few houses on the island and only one small store. You could get beer, soft drinks, candy and sometimes milk and bread, depending on if they had remembered to bring it over.

"People could go down the beach a bit, and they might not see anybody else the whole day," Collins recalls.

Once the bridge was built in the mid-1960s, a small, permanent population came to the 28-mile-long island. "At first, houses were primarily ground-level, concrete block, with no phone, no televisions and perhaps window air-conditioning units."

Now the island has about 1,000 permanent residents. Comfortable homes, rental cottages and low-rise condominiums are scattered among old vacation houses. One thing has not changed. "Even during our busiest time, you don't feel like it's crowded," Collins says.

The emerald water has a timeless appeal. During a visit in July, we found St. George Island to be a good place to plop down and stare at the horizon. We lingered on the beach, showing initiative only one afternoon to paddle kayaks in the gentle surf. Curious dolphins followed along, playing a game of follow-the-leader until a shrimp boat drew their attention.

The beach was sprinkled lightly with several dozen families. They toted out picnic coolers, umbrellas, towels, dogs. Within minutes they were properly positioned for a day of sunbathing and swimming. Mothers spread sunscreen on the children's faces and slipped rubber flotation rings like bandoliers across their chests. Teenagers quickly divested themselves of most of their clothing and plunged into the waves. Fathers challenged sons to Wiffleball games. People simply dozed in lawn chairs.

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We heard about St. George Island from Kim Creech of Knoxville. She and husband Chip discovered the beauty of St. George seven years ago. Every summer they rent a cottage on the beach and bring their daughters, Hannah and Haley, along with a host of other relatives.

"That week we are all together as a family. We make those special memories," says Kim. Chip likes fishing, and this year Kim tried her luck aboard the deep-sea charter boat True Lies.

"I caught the biggest fish, an amberjack," she says. "I got the \$50 pot, but the best part, I get fish-bragging rights for a year!"

The family likes riding bicycles to Aunt Ebby's Island Deli for ice cream cones. The homey snack shop displays children's artwork and vacationers' snapshots. "We've met all kinds of nice people there," Kim says. The deck area overlooks a four-mile bike path, making it ideal for watching rollerbladers, bicyclists and the surrey-style quadricycles so popular with vacationers.

At night, things get quiet in a hurry. For excitement, we returned to the mainland and made the 15-minute drive to Apalachicola, pop. 2700. Here the sweet scent of magnolia mingles with pungent sea salt. Restaurants, shops and the historic Gibson Inn cluster near the bay.

Once the town was a cotton-shipping port; now it is Florida's oyster capital. This region harvests more than 90 percent of the state's oysters and 10

percent of the nation's. Seafood docks stretch almost the entire length of the community, and mountains of sun-bleached oyster shells are everywhere. All along the waterways, solitary oystermen use huge tongs to load oysters aboard low-slung wooden boats.

The Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve Visitor Center focuses its exhibits on marine life. Kayak and cruise boat tours explore the Apalachicola River, estuaries and barrier islands, including Cape St. George. It is of particular interest because of its untamed wilderness, c. 1852 lighthouse and ghostly, tumbled-down keeper's cottage.



The John Gorrie Bridge carries US 98 and US 319 over the Apalachicola Bay. It connects Apalachicola, FL with Eastpoint, FL.

The original bridge, shown here, was built in 1935 and replaced a ferry service between the two towns. It included a rotating section to allow passage of ships with high masts. The current bridge was built in 1988.

WIKIPEDIA

"OUR LIFE AS ADULTS WAS IDYLIC,
FOR THE CHILDREN IT WAS A
'HUCKLEBERRY FINN' EXISTENCE."

DONNA BUTTERFIELD

IT WAS PARADISE

For most early home buyers, the private island paradise promoted by Leisure Properties was a reality-- abundant fishing, dark and silent skies, acres of nearly deserted beach, the bay and Bob Sikes Cut access.

"We purposely did not install cable TV nor a phone....We spent our weekends outdoors," said Donna Butterfield who, with her husband Jerry, built in 1987. "Our life as adults was idyllic, for the children it was a 'Huckleberry Finn' existence."

Elizabeth Crofton, who grew up spending summers in the 1977 beachfront home still owned by the family today, writes of spending every day outside riding bikes and swimming. "After dinner in the evenings, we'd play cards with my grandmother, and my mom would read aloud to us. We spent so much time in the Gulf during the day that when we got in bed, we could still feel the waves on our skin."

In those early days, recalls Mark Baldino, a director on the first owner-dominated association board, owners would gather every Friday for informal "TGIF" parties. Most often there was dancing or singing to tunes played on a grand piano donated by an owner.

The idyllic island life could not last forever. For a remarkable thirty years, the Plantation, for all its serene beauty, was the scene of innumerable and, inevitably, expensive disputes. Most played out publicly through newspaper reports and angry correspondence, or shouting matches that spilled over from board meetings to socials. Today such passionate discord seems unimaginable, but the lessons of our history should not be lost. Nor should we neglect the remarkable accomplishments of the owner volunteers who, through their uncompensated efforts, accomplished so much in making the Plantation a special community.



Photos from the Crofton family

REFLECTION ~ ELIZABETH CROFTON

My late father and grandfather, both avid fishermen and outdoorsmen, built a small house in the Plantation in 1977. Every summer, my parents would throw an old mattress, three kids, a dog, an occasional hamster, and a month's worth of groceries in the back of the pickup truck, and we'd make the 10-hour drive down to the island. Our grandparents would drive up from Miami to meet us, and we'd spend the next few months living our version of Swiss Family Robinson.

There were no paved roads on the island in those days, and we didn't have a driveway, a phone, or TV reception. We kids spent just about every waking hour outside, floating in the Gulf or riding bikes up to Armistead's (later the Blue Store) or to the end of Leisure Lane, which (as I remember it) wasn't too far past our house on Sandy Lane. After dinner in the evenings, we'd play cards with my grandmother, and my mom would read aloud to us. We'd spent so much time in the Gulf during the day that when we got in bed, we could still feel the waves on our skin.

Since the bridge onto the island was a toll bridge and my parents were so frugal, we'd only go to the mainland once a month. One of the toll takers was also the butcher at the A&P in Apalachicola. He had a pompadour and reminded me of a diminutive Elvis.

About 1979, because of what must have been a bad oil spill in the Gulf, the beach was covered in viscous black blobs and we were required to clean our feet with lighter fluid and paper towels before we could enter the house. A few summers later, a water spout came up on shore and passed right between our house and our closest neighbor about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile away. Grandfather yelled, "Let's head for the dunes!" Our house lost some shingles and a few pieces of cedar siding, but the tennis court on Sea Pine was pretty wrecked.

My dad and grandparents are gone now, but they've left us the legacy of a wonderful house and a multitude of childhood memories in the Plantation. There's no place I'd rather be, cruising up and down the beautiful bike path or watching the world go by from our deck.

Island Street Addresses

In summer 1991, residents and businesses joined together in an extensive project to establish streets addresses for the entire island. Installation of street names and signs in the previous months had already made finding your way around the island easier. Specific house numbers were needed for home mail delivery and better information for emergency services. Postal officials assigned zip code 32328 to the island. At the same time, telephone prefix on the island changed from 670 to 927.

REFLECTION ~ DONNA & JERRY BUTTERFIELD



Photo from the Butterfield family.

We bought an interior acre on Sea Dune Dr. in 1987 and immediately contracted with a builder with a stipulation in writing that all work must be completed within 90 days, the time for which our bank loan interest rate was locked in. For every day over that time limit, the builder would accrue a fine of \$100 a day. We closed on the 89th day after signing the contract!

We lived and worked in Tallahassee where our five children attended school. However, over 45 weekends a year we lived here on St. George Island. The Plantation was largely undeveloped. We would set out a 100' by 10' gill net in the bay and

within 30 minutes would have six or seven mullet which we would clean, season, and smoke over hickory chips. We enjoyed watching the masses of horseshoe crabs come ashore on the bayside. And at the change of tide, you couldn't find better fishing than at the Cut, accessible only by 4-wheel drive.

We purposely did not install cable TV nor a phone. This was before cell phone service was widely available. We spent the weekends outdoors during the day exploring Little St. George, St. Vincent island, the rivers, lakes and National Forest. Evenings were spent playing board games and watching VHS tapes (we had an extensive collection of Walt Disney). Our life as adults was idyllic; for the children it was a "Huckleberry Finn" existence. After two years we knew our house and home was not an investment, it was a commitment for life. We paid off the mortgage in two years, changed our homestead exemption from Tallahassee to Franklin County,

registered to vote, bought car tags in the county and registered with St. Patrick's Catholic Parish. This was home, although work and school were in Tallahassee.

The early years for us on the island (mid-'80s) were full of discovery.... discovery of Indian pottery 500 to 1,000 years old in the bay surf, 50 caliber bullets from WWII practice landings from soldiers of Camp Gordon Johnson, and terracotta pots and shards left over from the turpentine days.

The covenants at that time were not complicated. Three choices of roof cover were limited to tile, metal or cedar shake. Exterior material was cypress or cedar wood. Exterior colors could be natural, cedar, brown, or gray--all termed "earth" colors. The intent was for houses to blend with the environment and not attract attention to themselves. Drive ways had to be either gravel or oyster shell. Dues were a flat \$300 per year, whether with a house or a lot.

Incorporation of the Island

On February 19, 1987, the SGI Civic Club hosted a panel discussion of the feasibility of incorporating St George Island as a municipality, the first of several failed efforts at incorporation over the years. The most recent attempt was in 2015.

OWNERS CLAIM THE ASSOCIATION FROM ORIGINAL DEVELOPERS

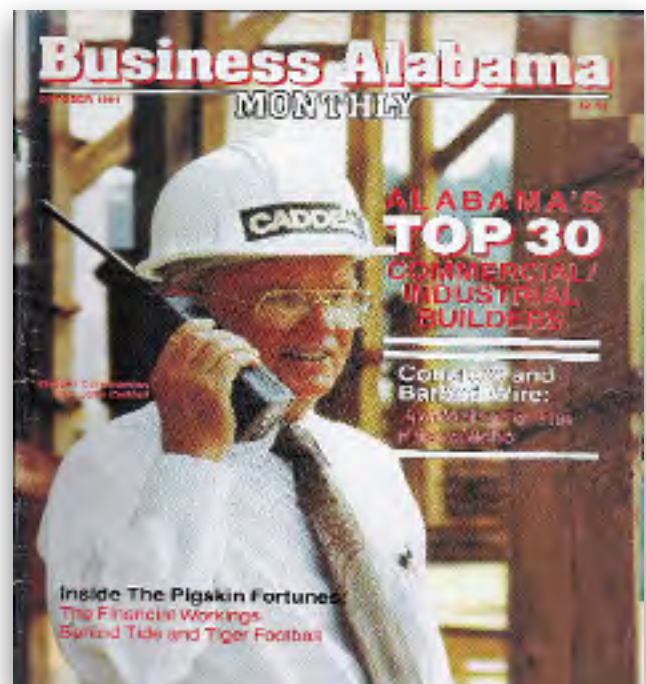
Led by John Caddell, one of Alabama's biggest commercial/industrial builders, a group of five committed owners secured the votes of the majority of owners to wrest control of the homeowners' association away from the developer in the late 1980s. With little love lost between the two sides, the fledgling board ran its operation out of Caddell's business—according to the oral history—while he and others personally floated the necessary finances and set about organizing the new community.

One of the most serious of problems was the refusal of many owners to pay annual assessments. A member of that initial board, Mark Baldino, recalls thinking he had been handed a directory of members, only to realize to his dismay that the multi-page list was an inventory of delinquent assessments. Owners of some parcels sold by the developer were under the impression that they were "exempt" from the Plantation Owners' Association rules and assessments. Even though these affiliated communities relied on the POA for security and access to their properties, some relationships took years of negotiation and litigation to resolve.

Further complicating the situation in those early days, the developer retained control of Plantation amenities. To the surprise of owners, they were asked to pay rent to use these facilities. Not only was it necessary to raise funds to purchase those amenities, but the board quickly realized that the pool did not meet state standards for public use

and had to be renovated immediately. The public portion of the clubhouse was little more than a locker room and had to be remodeled into administrative offices. The top floor was remodeled to be a gathering place for social events and business meetings.

From early on, the Plantation developed a reputation for its litigious practices. Within a short time, the developer brought suit against the fledgling board for meeting privately, alleging they were conspiring to obstruct his ability to develop his remaining holdings. The board felt the suit was an attempt to intimidate them; they fought back hard.



BATTLES DISRUPT THE PEACE WITHIN THE PLANTATION

For many years, the Plantation was plagued with litigation and a reputation for infighting. For certain individuals, the bitterness resulted in actual physical clashes. Security reports from those days include incidents of fights between owners or vendors. On more than one occasion, Director of Security Shiver had to take weapons away from combatants.

The most infamous incident involved SGPOA President John Caddell and developer Gene Brown, who shared a mutual dislike of each other. Retelling has made the actual events debatable. It is true that the Developer rode a horse over or near the beach in front of the home of the President. It is also accepted as true, by those who claim to know the story, that the President had a weapon, although it's debatable as to type and size. Yes, the President was arrested, but stories conflict over whether or not Franklin County Sheriff's Deputies showed Caddell the respect of withholding handcuffs when hauling him away. The President was released and the charges dismissed, and neither of the powerful icons of the Plantation appeared to suffer any lasting effects from the event. The retelling of all variations of this tale has entertained islanders for decades.

SEA PINE FIREHOUSE

In 1996, the Plantation signed a 50-year contract with the St. George Volunteer Fire Department, which allowed the department to operate out of a new firehouse built by the association on Sea Pine. The firehouse contained 1824 square feet of space and room for two fire trucks. These photos show the firehouse under construction and the ribbon cutting ceremony. This firehouse remains an invaluable part of the island's volunteer firefighting system.

The St. George Island Volunteer Fire Department was formed in 1974 and chartered in 1977. The first fire station was built on East Pine Avenue in 1982 and was constructed with volunteer labor and donated materials. It served as the fire station and civic hall. The first fire truck was a converted 1953 army transport vehicle with a crank start and three gear speeds. Named "Woogidy Woogidy" it was held together with sheer determination by the firemen. The old truck finally snapped a steering cable on the way to a fire sending the truck and firemen careening off the road through a marsh thicket.

The fire department was desperately in need of new equipment and in 1983 the first ever Chili Cook-off was held at the Happy Pelican restaurant (today's Beach Pit) as a fund raiser for the fire department. Fifty people were in attendance. Bowls of chili sold for \$2.50. Alice Collins won 1st Place and her prize was a case of beer. She donated it back to the auction and it was sold for \$50. The final tabulation showed that \$800 had been raised and an annual event was founded!



From the early beginnings to today, Plantation owners have been involved in the fire department raising funds and volunteering as firemen and First Responders. In the early 90's a massive brush and marsh fire started at Pelican Point. The closest fire hydrant was on Dogwood. Unfortunately, the fire hydrant did not work. Later

that week Plantation resident and Fire Department Board member, Nic Laslavic, inspected all the fire hydrants in the Plantation and to his astonishment found that none of them were hooked up to a water line. Determined Plantation owners worked hard making sure that every hydrant was hooked up and inspected every year.



In 1993 Plantation resident Woody Miley spoke of the need for a fire station on the west end of St. George island which would give better fire protection in St. George Plantation. Fire Chief Jay Abbot presented a plan to the Plantation Board of Directors and the process to build a station in the Plantation began. In 1995 the Board purchased a lot on Sea Pine near the entrance. A committee was formed to recommend plans to take the necessary steps to make the fire station a reality. In 1997 the Island community gathered for the ribbon cutting of the new west end fire station in the Plantation.

The association continues to own and maintain the land and firehouse structure, which is leased to the VFD for \$1/year for 50 years, ending in 2046. The use of the land and building, along with the ongoing support for the structure, is the largest single contribution ever made to the St. George island Volunteer Fire Department. The most rewarding result of this dream is that Plantation owners provided a much-needed fire station that benefits everyone on the island.



REFLECTION ~ DONNA & JIM DUNKIN

We discovered St. George Island in 1990 after searching Florida's Gulf & East Coasts. Our criteria was a forgotten, cozy slice of Old Florida (before it was called The Forgotten Coast.) After sharing our search criteria with fellow guests at an inn in Venice, Florida, one of them said, "Well then, you need to go to Apalachicola." We did. We bought the house right next to the Guard Gate and enjoyed our slice of heaven most weekends arriving after we got off work from our jobs near Atlanta. The house had a big parking lot that was entered before reaching the guard gate. We mostly enjoyed peace and quiet, with the occasional exception of unsolicited visitors knocking on our door or just walking in seeking information on the Plantation. When told it was a private home, the usual response was, "Oh sorry, but who can we talk to?"

We have lots of family memories there. I saw my dad in a pair of cut-offs for the first time ever. He and my mother walked the beach daily collecting shells for a display by the parking lot so dad asked me to take scissors to his jeans. I even got a picture! Jim's mom bundled up and sat on the beach in her Louisville knit cap with a big red ball on the top. We have a picture of that too! My cousin and her husband honeymooned at the house and mistakenly thought they could drive in the sand at the Cut...a story for another time.

We moved down in 1994 and here we are, 27 years later, gray hair, glasses and moving a little slower . . . island time for sure. We still get a thrill on the bridge, looking at the lighthouse where Jim was the Keeper for many years, heading to our piece of Paradise.



Dunkin house on Avocet ~ 1990's

Photo from the Dunkin family

WHAT A DIFFERENCE A SMOKING BAN CAN MAKE

The island's popular bars/restaurants are known as places where people gather as much for the drinks and the company as the food. Many Plantation owners described the pleasures of coming onto the island on a Friday night and stepping into a noisy watering hole, where friendly faces and laughter washed away the cares of the work week back in the real world. It's difficult to imagine today, but before a statewide ban on smoking in restaurants in 2003, such a restaurant would be constantly filled with a cloud of cigarette smoke. Tallahassee resident Mark Baldino, who purchased in the mid-eighties,

recalls the smoke so permeated the air, that his wife Susan insisted that after an evening of dining out, they leave their clothing outside on the deck of their home to avoid ruining the smell of the fresh coastal air inside.



The Baldino family...then and now



Photos from the Baldino family



REFLECTION ~ CLAIR PLESSINGER

My husband, Richard Plessinger, and I moved into the Plantation in October 1986.

We moved here because of the quietness and the uniqueness of the area. Richard enjoyed living here until 2006, when he passed away. He served on the Board of Directors for many years and very much enjoyed it even though it got hectic at times. A lot of disagreements!



Photo from the Plessinger family

It was quite different when we moved here. There were few houses, almost like a ghost town.

It has changed much in the 31 years that I have been here. I really like it, especially the security since I live alone.

I plan on being here a few more years. Richard called the Plantation his "Paradise."

Old Plantation pool with wooden deck. The Plessinger home is the white one in the background.



DISPUTES, LAWSUITS, AND HOSTILITIES GREW

Dissident newsletters and other publications circulated frequently. The perception of special privileges and variances based on relationships became infectious, destroying the confidence in owner-based boards, even after different directors were elected.

Meetings became increasingly contentious, attended typically by no less than 70 to 80 people (1992 saw more than 200 in attendance). Sometimes these events lasted 8 or 9 hours on Saturday and required reconvening on Sunday to complete the agenda. In 1990, when the Apalachicola *Times* covered association meetings, staff reporter Chuck Spicer advised homeowners attending the annual meeting “to bring along some snack food. It could come in handy late in the evening.”

More than once over the years, groups of owners tried to seize control from other groups who occupied leadership roles. During the 1990 annual meeting, written about by Spicer, two competing

slates of officers were provided to owners, with a battle over proxies fed by accusatory letters flying back and forth from the two groups.

As early as 1992, rumor was that the boards were dedicating nearly half of the budget to legal fees. But attempts to settle long-standing lawsuits did not resolve the infighting; disgruntled owners accused leaders of selling out the association.

The local Franklin County *Chronicle* newspaper, whose owner/editor Tom Hoffer held property in the Plantation, reported on every board meeting with verbatim coverage—often interjecting disparaging commentary. Until the Board stopped the practice, Hoffer sold gavel-to-gavel videos or audio cassettes of the notorious board meetings.

Despite the acrimony, many owners stayed committed to the association and its future. Particularly, through their committee work, volunteers kept the spirit alive by hosting welcoming social events and investing in the community.



Assorted newspaper clippings show the ever changing POA Board and the ongoing disputes taking place in the 1990's.



WHAT'S ALL THE FIGHTING ABOUT?

Disputes and litigation with the original developers and subsequent entrepreneurs dominated the association for years. With three large areas earmarked for commercial development in the original 1977 Order, new developer investors bought up parcels, most of which had been foreclosed previously, with dreams of replicating the profitable condominiums, marinas, shopping areas and tourist attractions found in the western Florida Panhandle. These are the source of the longest running and most expensive struggles. (See "Developments within the Development" on p. 16.)

When owners were not at war with developers, they found other problems to raise the blood pressure:

Delinquent Assessments: The transition from developer-dominated board to owner-led association was not simple. (See "Owners Claim the Association from Original Developers" on p. 8.) The most urgent issue was the lack of resources because dues collection had not been enforced. Certain property owners, either because of previous agreements with the original developer or because they had disagreements with the board, simply refused to pay. Aggressively, the new board began collecting delinquent dues by threatening or filing litigation, a move which launched counter suits from their own association members.

Rental Houses: Although the Development Order authorized rental properties, the matter created conflict among owners for years. Naturally, with return on investment as a goal, some purchasers wanted houses that brought in the highest income with multi-family renters. But some residents resisted the renters by urging the board to enforce the rule that owners must be present with their "guests." More affluent purchasers sometimes desired larger and more elaborate structures that seemed to blot out the sky compared to the small round cedar houses of the seventies and eighties. For those who loved their deserted beaches, the wide-open spaces of the dune lines began to disappear.

Rules Disputes: Some topics were typical of any gated community and remain issues of debate today. As newer building materials became available and home styles changed, owners wanted variances from the strict architectural requirements or modifications to covenants. The powerful Architectural Control Committee had the authority to reject proposed home construction based on the shape of the house, flatness of the roof, or insufficient landscaping.

People Being People: Some disagreements were grounded in personalities. The Plantation has always been attractive to those individuals whom one owner refers to as PIPs, "Previously Important People." They retired from leadership roles in the military or industry, or enjoyed family wealth. Some individuals found it difficult to adjust to the absence of control and influence in an "island-time" environment and never appreciated the need for operating in a collegial fashion.

Lack of Communication or Transparency: Without the miracle of electronic communication or quick methods for alerting membership to policies under discussion, surprised owners often learned of decisions only after the board had acted. Board meetings were held without complete packets of materials made available to owners. Rank and file owners often felt decisions regarding finances, variances, personnel and policy were made without input or even knowledge of members. "Where is our money being spent?" was a common refrain.



Security vehicle ~ 1997



REFLECTION ~ GLEN SILER

It was a stormy weekend in the spring of 1988 and bay waves were spraying over the old bridge and causeway to St. George Island. My husband Manley and I had driven down from Atlanta on a whim to check out the island; we had been looking along the east coast for a couple of years for a lot or house on the beach as a getaway place. With the salt spray all over our car, we spent the night at the St. George Inn (a large black dog slept outside our door) and proceeded the following morning to explore the island with a local realtor.

We were shown the eastern end first, and although the beaches were beautiful, something was missing. When we ventured west to the Plantation, I knew what I was missing-trees and anything green. We looked at many beach lots, but when I saw the view from the one we chose on Lilac Lane, I said: "This is it! This is where I want my grandchildren to spend their summers and holidays" - we had no grandchildren at the time. From the lot, you could see one house along the beach to the east and two to the west. We bought the lot, hired a builder and selected a house plan all on that one weekend. We never regretted it.

REFLECTION ~ JOE BUZZETT

Natives of Apalachicola, my parents Harry and Cathy left as newlyweds in 1950 and spent 30 years in the US Army (moving 33 times) and then 10 years in Andover, Massachusetts, raising their kids. They decided to build their dream house in the newly opened Plantation in 1986 and rented on the island for two years while the house was being built, keeping a watchful eye every step of the way. They wanted wrap-around porches to see and feel the Gulf from the master bedroom and three upstairs bedrooms for kids and grandkids to visit. They added a brass bell from the Steamship Tarpon, which roamed the Gulf in the early 1920s captained by Harry's Uncle Bill Fry. When the bell rang, the kids on the beach were alerted that dinner was ready.



Gathering at the home became a Christmas tradition. Lifelong bonds were made between aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews and cousins. The week always ended with Harry's birthday celebration on December 29th when cousin Steve would smoke a Texas feast big enough for all 30+ family. The tradition

continues to this day with yet another generation of Buzzetts including Harry's great grandchildren enjoying the beauty and wonder of this beautiful island.



BUZZETT EXTENDED FAMILY

Photos from the Buzzett family



REFLECTION ~ MARY LOU & BILL SHORT

Shortly after purchasing our family vacation home in the Plantation in 1986, we decided to move here permanently. Leaving our busy life behind in Atlanta, we settled into the slow pace of Island life. We loved the lush natural beauty of the Plantation—the gnarled limbs of the scrub oaks and pine trees; eagles, osprey and owls; the night sky; walking a deserted beach; and the raccoons peaking in the front door at night. There were frequent power and water outages so we learned to cook meals on our gas grill and camping stove and our doors were always open to our neighbors for meals and morning coffee.

In the early years, the SGPOA's one activity was the annual homeowners' meeting. There was no social committee, bridge club or exercise group, so owners were left to their own imagination on social activities. We would meet at the Cut at sunset,

sipping margaritas and watching a spectacular sunset while the guys fished; walk the Bay collecting shards of Indian pottery and brass bullet casings; roast marshmallows on a deserted beach. The big social events on the Island were the monthly Harry A's birthday celebration and the quirky Civic Club luau. We gave up watching TV because reception on the only channel was rare, and no newspapers were delivered to the Island so conversation was never about national or world news but finding the best fishing spots and who was going "to town" to shop. Island life was simple.

Although the Plantation has grown in population, it remains a magical place for us, a place of natural beauty and tranquility. The Plantation has maintained its charm and beauty and most of all the wonderful sense of community.



Inset photo from the Short family

DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN THE DEVELOPMENT

When prospective buyers toured the Plantation property and heard of “commercial development,” they envisioned small coffee shops, neighborhood businesses, or perhaps a bayside bar to serve only the owners and their guests in this “private community.” The entrepreneurs who bought designated commercial lands recognized the reality, that such enterprises required a much larger customer base than just the limited number who owned or rented in the Plantation. For those businesses to be successful, the gate would have to be opened to the general public. This fundamental disagreement over access was the source of a thirty-year battle.

The three designated commercial areas approved by the 1977 Development Order—the Cut Property, the Nick’s Hole area, and Resort Village—were the source of major disputes. Summaries of some of the happenings surrounding those locations are provided here. The final issue of the History of the Plantation will provide a more complete summary of the complex consequences of the developers’ efforts within the Cut property.

AVAILABLE

St. George Island Property is located within the exclusive St. George Island Plantation. This spectacular 60.83± acre site includes approximately 1,100 linear feet of gulf frontage and an exclusive bay frontage.

CONTACT
CLIFTON & WAKEFIELD
111 North Orange Avenue, Suite 1100
Orlando, Florida 32801
(407) 841-0000

NICK'S HOLE

Today the State of Florida owns the acreage north of Leisure Lane surrounding Nick’s Hole Cove, the natural fishery considered vital to the health of the Bay. That acreage, from the airstrip to Tully Park, is preserved much as it looked forty years ago and is available for humans to enjoy the natural condition of the site. In the early 1990s, plans for the property were quite different.

After the original developers failed to bring commercial development and a marina to Nick’s Hole in the 1980s, Georgia investor/developer Billy Shultz, who owns a home in the Plantation today, planned a cluster development that, in a gesture to protect the Bay, would see 11 residences on the 22 lots on the bay side and three homes per acre on the less-fragile gulf side. Eventually, Shultz platted the beachside tract with 27 1-acre parcels. With support from Plantation owners who strongly favored the acquisition, the state purchased the bayside Schultz properties for \$875,000.

A separate slice of this area, where the roadway and parking area lead into the Nick’s Hole kayak launch, was once owned by George Mahr, who permitted the land’s use as a sea base for a local Boy Scout Troop led by Plantation owner Larry Hale. This land was also eventually sold to the state, permitting a contiguous maritime forest, deep water cove, and salt marsh between the airstrip and the Plantation’s Tully Park. (More about George Mahr’s history with the Plantation and the fate of the Cut Property in our next issue.)



RESORT VILLAGE AND DR. BEN JOHNSON

In 1991, Dr. Ben Johnson, a Ph.D. economist from Tallahassee who had been a Plantation owner for a decade, announced plans to develop 60+ acres of commercially-designated land located just east of Nick's Hole and the airstrip, known as Resort Village.



Dr. Ben Johnson

Johnson had previously developed the 10-acre beachside community of single-family homes called "The Bluffs." For this parcel, however, which he had obtained in a foreclosure sale for \$1.5 million, Johnson planned "one or more high quality resort hotel facilities and the appropriate amenities,

including restaurants, retail shops and recreational activities," according to the Plantation newsletter.

The St. George Plantation Owners' Association approved his Resort Village proposal in 1992, but the SGPOA later argued that its own agreement was not valid based on procedural errors and sued to have it overturned. For nearly a decade, the debate would rage. A pivotal figure in this fight is owner Tom Adams, who studied county records and often spoke on behalf of the opposition, particularly against multi-family housing. (See photo of the clubhouse on p. 29

showing drawings of plans for the RVA property adorning the walls of the board meeting room.) Johnson modified his plans several times, once requesting and later withdrawing a proposal for condominiums, in the face of this strident and organized opposition. In early 1996, the state agencies approved a waste water treatment facility to support "Phase One" of the project. After the completion of all three phases, the Resort Village was projected to include a \$4-million beach club/conference center with 469 hotel rooms, 680 parking spaces, 12,500 square feet of retail space, and numerous restaurants and bars. Although the county commission approved the Phase One plans, the homeowners' association continued to fight in court while attempting to negotiate an agreement. Meanwhile construction began on the 24 room hotel. Although the board announced that an agreement had finally been reached in 1998 allowing the Resort Village to go forward, Johnson rejected the proposal in January 1999. Later that year Johnson sold his interests to Phipps Ventures and SGI Limited Partnerships but argued that he was owed nearly half a million dollars in compensation from the association for the damages he had suffered over the years.

In the next issue, read how the proposed commercial development finally came to complete closure .

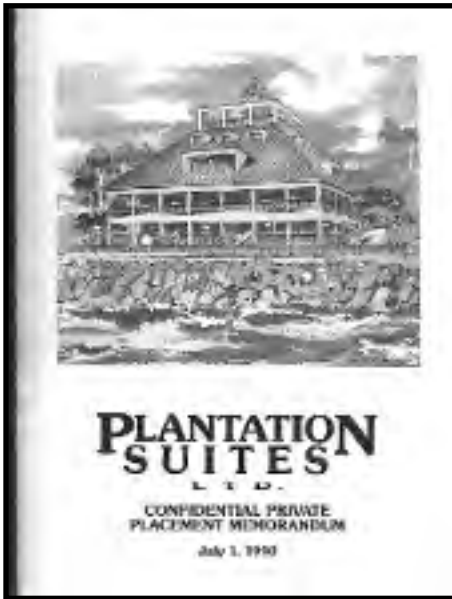
Images this page from the Franklin Chronicle



THE CUT PROPERTY

No other area of the Plantation better epitomizes the confusion and frustration among developers, government entities, and owners over commercial development inside the gate than the tortuous history of the Bob Sikes Cut property. As reported in Issue 2 of this history, the original 1977 Development Order designated as “commercial” nearly 100 acres of land, known today as Casa del Mar Phase I, Casa del Mar Phase II, Schooner Landing, and other bay front parcels. The county and state agreed conceptually that the land could be used for hotels, convention centers, restaurants and retail shops. But that agreement required developer Gene Brown to receive county approval for all planning details. That final approval never came. By 1987 Brown still had not been able to meet the officials’ demands and bring his vision successfully to fruition. *cont. next page*





Finally, Brown argued that if the county was never going to permit commercial development at the Cut, the state should buy his land for some public purpose, despite its location within a gated community. According to accounts in the *Apalachicola Times*, the three proposed possibilities for public usage, all approved by state agency programs and recommended to the Governor and Cabinet for purchase, included another active SGI State Park, a passive conservation area for the fragile environment, or the site for the state-mandated sewer treatment facility for the entire island.

Despite support from state agencies and assurances from Brown and sympathetic owners that the Plantation property owners wouldn't object to the public entering the community, after several months of discussion, the Governor and Cabinet eventually declined to purchase the land. The multi-faceted

opposition included county officials who feared losing more land from the tax rolls to ownership by the state, environmentalists and seafood workers who foresaw pollution to the Bay, and a group of Plantation owners who raised \$30,000 in private funds to fight the purchase. In an interesting twist of state level politics, Democratic Cabinet member Bill Gunter forcefully questioned how Brown's Cut property could suddenly jump to the top of the state's acquisition list, ahead of properties waiting for years. His demands for a review of the ranking process effectively chilled support from the newly elected Republican Governor Bob Martinez, for whom Brown had been a well-known fundraiser. Further consideration of Brown's property being purchased by the state was halted.

The battle for the Cut was not over; within a few years, Andrew Jackson Savings Bank and their partner financial institutions took possession of the Cut area as well as Leisure Lane to cover the debts of developer Brown. The financial firms continued to pursue acquisition of the land by the state and ordered the entrance gate be removed to permit unfettered public access.

Look for the rest of the story of the Cut property in the next issue.



INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS

The mid- to late-1990s included many improved and new features that owners appreciated. Among these was the addition of an owners' lane at the gate to facilitate owners' entrance to the Plantation in 1993. The resurfacing of Leisure Lane and T-roads the following year revealed latent problems with the original construction, including deteriorated or missing drainage pipes and poorly identified water and other utility lines, which needed to be corrected. Other investments included building of dune walkovers, resurfacing of tennis courts, and reconstruction of the termite-ridden pool deck and replacing plastic furniture with wooden. The next few pages give you a glimpse into the vast array of improvements that took place.





New stone wall at entrance gate



Entrance gate installation



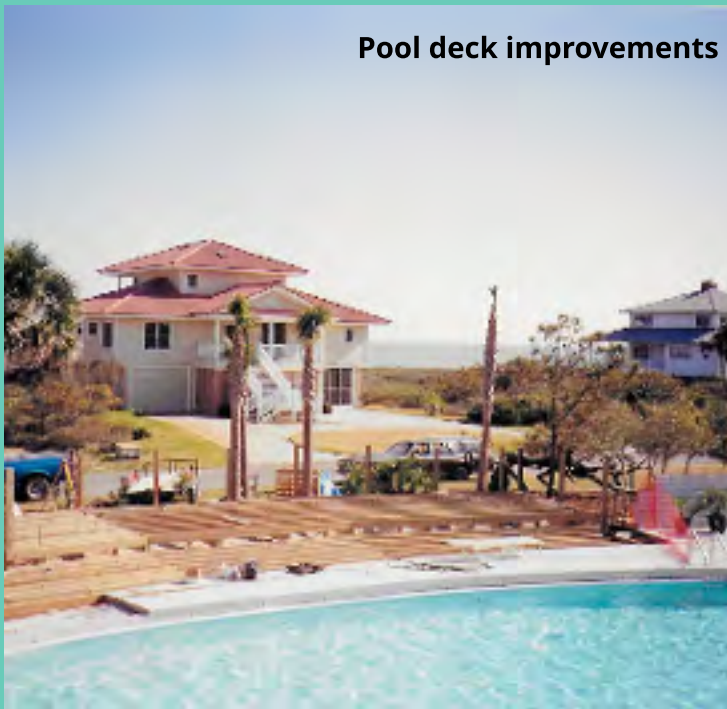
Improvements to entrance lanes



Improved walking/biking path



Gazebo concession at clubhouse



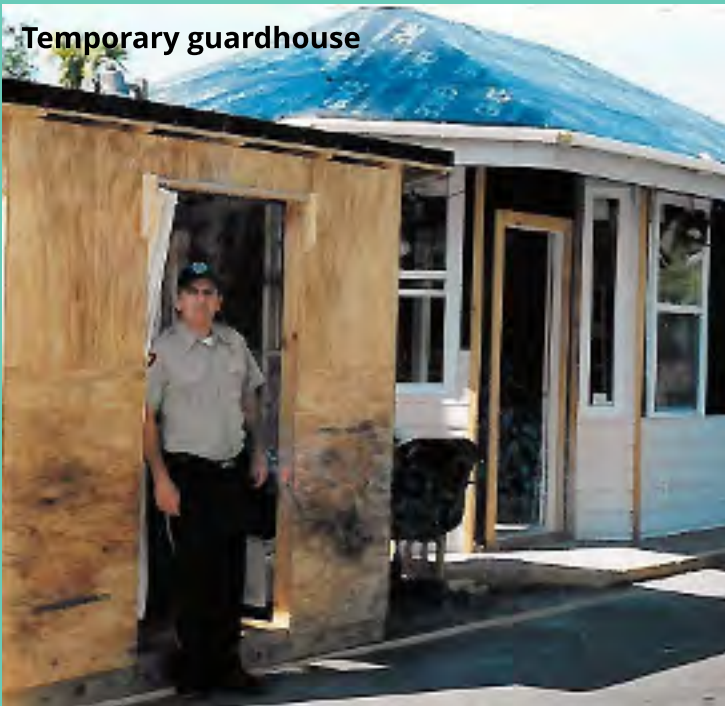
Pool deck improvements



Improved dune walkovers



New guardhouse at entry gate



Temporary guardhouse



Resurfacing of damaged roads



Tennis court makeover

THE PLANTATION GOES TO THE MOVIES

The same qualities that attracted home buyers to the Plantation in the late 1980s—seclusion, beauty, separation from the hustle and bustle of urban life—also made it the perfect location for filming “Little Sweetheart,” a BBC thriller starring the late Sir John Hurt as embezzling bank manager Robert Burger in search of a quiet place to hide out with his girlfriend Dorothea (Karen Young) to plan their next move. Many local residents got involved with the movie, serving as extras and getting to know the crew. During filming, life may have imitated art; while the renegade movie characters enjoyed the respite of “island time” in the Plantation, the British cast and crew took advantage of the area’s absence of gawking fans and paparazzi to let down their collective hair after work. A couple of hurricanes and a tropical storm had recently hit the panhandle and caused a slump in the local economy, so the sudden influx of BBC folks was a welcome sight on the island.

“All the Brits came in, and they filled up the rental houses,” remembers Mason Bean, a 40-year Plantation resident who, along with his wife Marilyn, served as an extra in film. (Marilyn is featured in a birthday party scene for the 9-year-old girl whose blackmail plot eventually leads to Hurt’s character’s demise.) “We had a July 4th volleyball tournament, the Brits versus the U.S., and the U.S. won,” adds Mason. “It was a lot of fun having them here.”

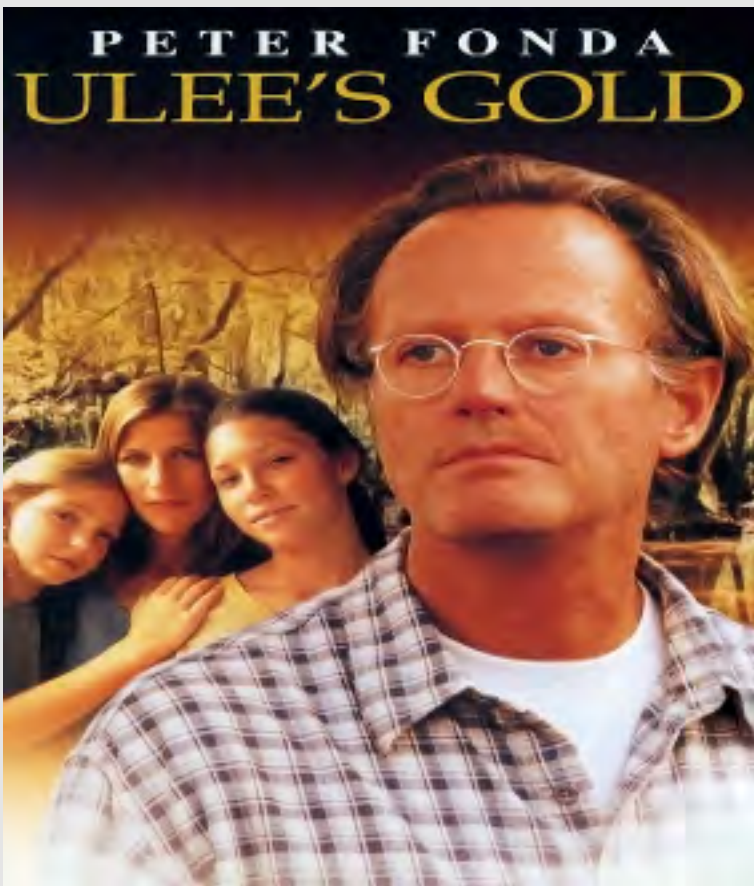
Bob Shiver, who has headed Plantation security since 1984, remembers Anthony Simmons, the film’s director, walking along the Gulf front beach almost daily to scope out movie shots. There weren’t a lot of houses in the Plantation in 1987, but several are visible in the movie, along with shots of Bob Sikes Cut and The Happy Pelican, an island restaurant now known as The Beach Pit. Some exterior images of Robert’s fictitious beach house “Sandcastle” were actually “Sand Dollar,” a house that was built on Sandy Lane in the early 80s but was later moved to a lot on Azalea Drive (where it still stands today). The Penthouse (now called Front Row), one of the first houses constructed in the Plantation and also on Sandy Lane, is visible in a couple of scenes. Some of the more dramatic scenes in the movie were filmed in downtown Apalachicola and show The Grill restaurant (now called The Apalachicola Seafood Grill) and Marie’s Laundryland, an actual business which was located in the building that now houses Apalach Outfitters.

John Hurt, who by the time “Little Sweetheart” was filmed in 1987 had earned critical acclaim for his roles in “The Elephant Man” and “Alien,” stayed in the Plantation for about a month, in a house off of Reed Court. Hurt reportedly developed a fondness for the bar at The Gibson Inn in Apalach,



while other cast and crew could often be seen partying at Harry A’s on the island. Some local extras recall having to wait around for Hurt to show up for his scenes, perhaps after his late nights out on the town. Thankfully, extras were served three solid meals a day from a BBC food wagon which was set up on Acacia Drive in the Plantation.

“We didn’t get paid, but we were fed well,” recalls Mason Bean with a smile. In 1988, about a year after filming wrapped, he and Marilyn vacationed in England. On a day trip to London, they visited the BBC studios and even had tea with one of the producers of “Little Sweetheart,” which was released in 1989. The movie is great fun to watch, not only for the amazing shots of undeveloped Plantation coastline and the suspenseful plot, but also for the now-campy images of ‘80s pop culture—Kodak cameras and film, break dancing, cassette tape players, men wearing short shorts with



"YOU KNOW, I'VE NEVER GUIDED MY LIFE. I'VE JUST BEEN WHIPPED ALONG BY THE WAVES I'M SITTING IN."

JOHN HURT

unbuttoned Hawaiian shirts. "Little Sweetheart" can be streamed on Amazon.com. **Little Sweetheart trailer.**

Any moviemaker worth his (Gulf coast) salt knows that a "panhandle trilogy" of films must include lots of scenes in Franklin County. Director Victor Nuñez, who grew up in Tallahassee and became a professor of film at Florida State University, spent plenty of time here while making "Coastlines" (released in 2006), "Ulee's Gold" (1997), and "Ruby in Paradise" (1993). "Coastlines," a crime drama about an ex-con who seeks revenge on the local crime boss and starts a love affair with the sheriff's wife, was filmed primarily in Carrabelle, Eastpoint, and Sopchoppy, but several scenes were shot on the island and in the Plantation. Actor Josh Brolin and then-fiancée Minnie Driver reportedly stayed in the Plantation for a time during filming in 2001, before Brolin decamped to the Buccaneer Inn. He rented the whole thing, according to some folks, and left Driver in the Plantation—perhaps after a lover's quarrel. People magazine reported in October 2001 that the couple had called off their engagement, less than six months after their St. George Island visit. **Coastlines trailer.**

Nuñez filmed all over Franklin and neighboring

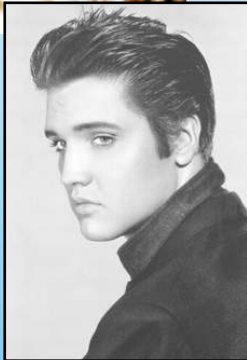
counties. "Ulee's Gold" was shot in Wewahitchka, Port St. Joe, and Apalachicola, and cast members including Peter Fonda stayed in the Buccaneer and the Plantation. Mason Bean recalls being in The Blue Store (now the Piggly Wiggly Xpress) at about 9:30 one night and seeing a man who looked familiar standing in line in pajama pants. "That's Peter Fonda," he explained to the clerk, a young woman who claimed to have never heard of the famous actor. Ashley Judd, who starred in "Ruby in Paradise," a character study of a woman employed in a coastal resort town during the winter months, also reportedly stayed in the Plantation while she was on the Forgotten Coast. Two movies in Nuñez's panhandle trilogy can be streamed on Amazon.com ("Ruby" is not available there but can be watched on YouTube). Happy viewing! **Ulee's Gold trailer.**





You never know who you might see on The Forgotten Coast.

Can you match a name to an alleged Plantation guest?



CELEBRITIES AND NOTABLES VISIT THE PLANTATION

The Plantation has a practice of not disclosing the identifies of our owners and guests. Loving our own privacy, the owners and staff typically refuse to confirm or deny the presence of any celebrity allegedly living or visiting inside the gate. But there have always been rumors and urban myths about the community. Recorded here, in this *History of the Plantation*, are some of those legends. Judge for yourself if they be truth or fiction.

Most Famous Political Figure: Nancy Reagan. Rumor is that she flew in on a helicopter and visited the beachfront home of an owner who had worked for her famous husband, the President.

Longest Standing Speculations: Billy Dean; Tom T. Hall; Hank Williams, Jr. The ownership by these country music legends is not being confirmed here but is so well-accepted as fact that most owners can point out the houses they are speculated to have owned. According to Plantation newsletters, Tom T. Hall wrote "St. George Isle" while walking on the Plantation beach early in the morning. The plaintive song is featured in Hall's album "Songs from Sopchoppy" and gives gentle melody to the way the Plantation feels. [Listen HERE.](#)

Actors Who May Have Visited or Shot Movies Here: John Hurt, Josh Brolin, Minnie Driver, Peter Fonda, Timothy Oliphant, Jose Ferrer, Aaron Eckhart, Jack Nicholson, Julia Roberts, Crystal Bernard, Jennifer Lawrence.

Musical Talent Who Might Have Vacationed Here: Faith Hill & Tim McGraw, Lee Ann Womack, Kid Rock, Travis Tritt, The Judds, Bob Seger, Billy Gibbons of ZZ Top, Luke Bryan, Terry Clark, Buck Owens, Dolly Parton, Darrius Rucker, George Clinton, Jason Aldean.

Notable Journalists Who Might Have Been Sighted: Brit Hume, Larry King, Howard Stern.

Most Infamous Visitor Who May Have Generated the Most Aggressive Paparazzi: Casey Anthony. After she was acquitted of the charge of murdering her own child in Orlando, Anthony reportedly sneaked into the Plantation to avoid the press who had dogged her continually. The story goes that the paparazzi was so aggressive they had to be removed from the trees surrounding the gate.

Most Well-Known Celebrity: Someone reported seeing Elvis (?!)

REFLECTION ~ MOLLIE READ

My home is the 113th house built in the Plantation. My neighbor to the west, Lenny Davis, kept track of all the houses being built here. My lucky number is 13, the same as my granddad's. That's how I remember the number so well.



Construction began on my Forsythia Way lot on December 7, 1988, and I moved in Memorial Day weekend in 1989. At the time there were three gulf front homes on Forsythia Way.

My mom Ramona, who was 102,

was one of my first guests. With her family, who were all long-lived, she had immigrated from Spain to Tampa. She had been required to recite the preamble to the Declaration of Independence in English to earn her American citizenship. One evening we sat on my big upper deck, watching the waves and the dolphins. After our second glass of wine, she asked, "So, are you going to tell me about this gentleman who built you this beach house?" Slightly offended, I told her I had raised my two kids and had my own career. I certainly didn't need a man to get me a beach house. She settled back, sipping her wine. Finally, she said, "Ok, you don't have to tell me if you don't want to."

Looking east, all the property around the airport was undeveloped - Nick's Hole, The Bluffs, and Resort Village today. My nearest beach front neighbors to the east were Harry and Cathy

Buzzett on Dogwood Drive in Sea Palm Village, approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ mile away.

All the property between the west side of Forsythia Way and Guava Trail from Leisure Lane to the Gulf was owned by John Stocks - twenty-four acres reserved for his own private estate.

I was elected to the Board of Directors in September 1989, my first term, with John Caddell, president; Lennie Davis, vice president; Dick Plessinger, treasurer; Mark Baldino and John Spohrer, directors. Probably because I was the only woman in the room, I was appointed secretary to record the minutes. POA had no office staff. Caddell's staff in Montgomery, AL, provided all printed materials for board meetings. Our Restrictive Plantation Covenants in 1989 prohibited renting your home. This covenant was amended in the early 1990s.



Improved walkway to the clubhouse ~ circa 1990's



SOCIALS AND THE CLUBHOUSE

The Plantation's many social events have always served to support the spirit of the Plantation in a positive manner. From small gatherings to large pool parties, the volunteers of the social committee have made these events happen—spending hours of effort from planning through cleanup.

Above (and inset) is a good example, a poolside luau featuring roast pig, steamed shrimp, baked fish, fresh oysters, and a variety of side dishes and desserts.

The clubhouse, like many private homes throughout the Plantation, was a prefabricated structure by Deltec Homes, a NC company. The popular construction concept of the era used precision-engineered factory components. The pieces were assembled on site on a permanent foundation. Assembly time was estimated to be from five to seven days. Finish work was done by local builders.

The original clubhouse was designed as a locker room for tennis and swimming with private living quarters and a guest house. The following pages show the renovated clubhouse that could accommodate social events and business meetings. Note the flagstone fireplace and bar addition. The clubhouse and pool area were a gathering place for water aerobics, luaus, pot lucks, holiday parties, and Super Bowl parties. Enjoy this trip down memory lane.



*Note proposed plans for RVA property
on clubhouse walls*



Water aerobics

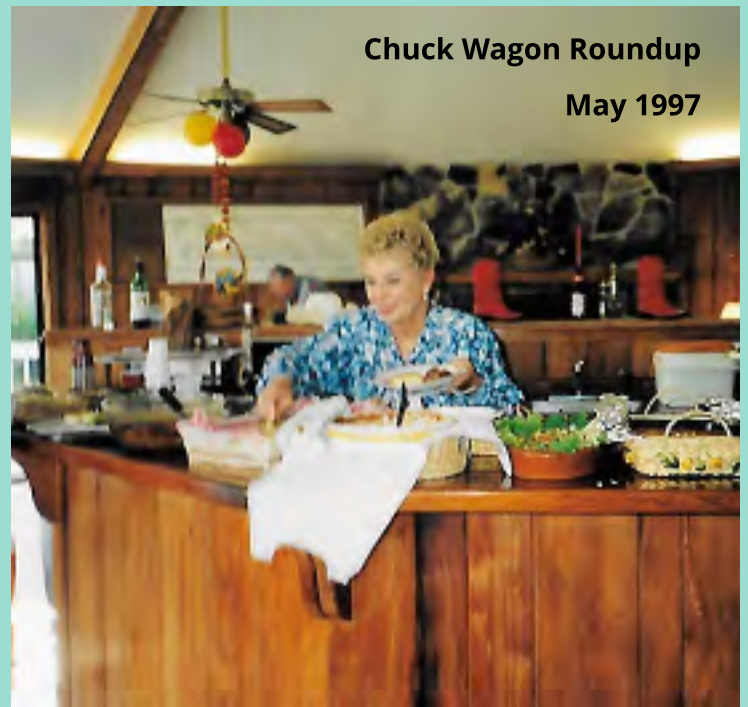




New Year's Eve
Party with the
Nelson Vines
Combo - 1997



Super Bowl -
JAN 1997



Chuck Wagon Roundup
May 1997



Hawaiian Pool Party



Poolside dancing



St. Patrick's Party March 1998



New Year's Eve
1997



Shucking oysters poolside



REFLECTION ~ ROLAND WILLOCK

For several years, my wife Mary Frances and I had talked about finding a vacation place in Florida. We wanted a place that was within a day's drive of Bowling Green, Kentucky where we lived. She wanted somewhere other than Destin or Panama City. A friend told us about St. George Island which we had never heard of.

After doing some research, we decided to visit the Island. After several days, we fell in love with St. George. We contacted a realtor and started looking at houses but didn't find what we were looking for or could afford. We did find a lot in the Plantation that we liked and decided to build. The house was completed in July 1997, and we were never disappointed in our decision. Over the years we made many friends, locals and snowbirds, people who appreciate the uniqueness of St. George, and the Plantation in particular, which gets better with each passing year.

Mary Frances passed away in 2011 and for a while I didn't know if I would keep the house, but I really didn't want to leave this magical Island and wonderful friends. In 2014, I remarried, and Mary Grey has fallen under the spell of the Island also, so we look forward to many years of being here.



Old fencing at outside entrance to Plantation



REFLECTION ~ STEVE & CECILIA HARRIS

In 1997 we came to SGI for the first time for a week's vacation at the encouragement of friends. A hurricane had severely damaged our "go-to" beach on Edisto Island, SC. Steve had grown up going to Panama City and wanted nothing to do with this area, but I rented a house for the kids and me and hoped he would relent.

We loved our week here in "Last Hurrah", a small Gulf front rental in Gulf Beaches because of the fresh seafood, uncrowded beaches and restaurants, and the authenticity of it all! We had no idea this existed anywhere in Florida! The more we learned about the area, the more we loved it. We asked one of the realtors to take us inside the gated community solely because we were nosey! We were not looking to purchase anything and did not consider ourselves to be "gated community kind of folks"!

One month later we closed on our first home here at 2112 Seahorse Lane and kept it rented as much as possible! New Years Eve 1999, we rented the house next door and filled up both houses with our Georgia friends and their families and ushered in 2000 with fantastic memories! We added another beachfront cottage in 1999.

We had never considered leaving our beautiful home in Georgia, but each time we left SGI and drove back home, the depression got more severe! We envied the permanent residents with whom we had become friends and loved everything about the area.

In 2003 we massively remodeled the beachfront house "Morning Glory," had two kids' beautiful beach weddings, and lived there until 2010 at which time we decided to downsize and move to the Bay. Now we are on Harbor Light in the original house we really liked when we first toured the Plantation. Our "Mullet Farm" is perfect for us and has one of the best porches/views on the island!

We chose the Plantation because of the vegetation, the security, the uncrowded beaches, and the people!



Above: Morning Glory 2000 (Before)

Below: Morning Glory 2003 (After)

Photos from the Harris family



MAILBOXES

Before the mail room was added as part of the new Clubhouse complex in 2010, the Eastpoint branch of the U.S. Postal Service delivered mail to boxes located on Longpoint Road near the entrance to the airport. The area is now used for recycling.



LANDSCAPING

The late 1990s represented a stepped-up effort to improve the appearance of the Plantation. An active beautification committee, led by Board President Rick Watson, worked with the landscape architecture school of Florida A&M University to develop a landscape plan for key common areas of the Plantation. An important step was the planting of sabal palm trees along Leisure Lane and Magnolia. To make the project affordable, the association combined cash donations solicited from local businesses and owners with association funds set aside for the purpose. The association then negotiated a bulk-rate contract for trees so that owners could take advantage of these rates for their own property or neighborhood medians. The vendor planted more than 150 trees. The association also purchased a 300 gallon tank to water the new palms in remote areas where no irrigation existed.



GAZEBO CONCESSION FACILITY AT THE POOL

In 1999 the Board authorized the creation of a Gazebo Concession facility to provide lunch, beverages, and ice cream poolside. Plantation logo items were also available. Later the little building became the office of the Architectural Control Committee.

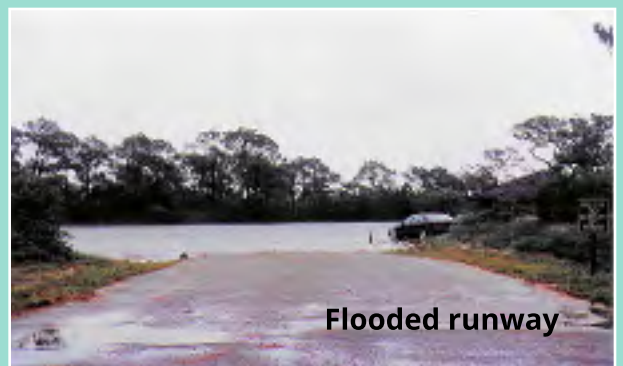
INTERESTING AERIAL STORIES

Not only hurricanes but minor storms can put the airstrip under water. In 2000, the SGPOA expanded the tie-down space to accommodate 5 planes, and by 2003, an estimated fifty owners were using the airstrip. In 2004 the association entered into an agreement with Tallahassee developer SGI Properties, Ltd, for the development of a "fly-in community," with homes adjacent to the strip. In exchange, SGI Properties agreed to repave the airstrip, which was badly needed. The airstrip development fell victim to a downturn in the economy, and last year the SGPOA bought the undeveloped land to be common property for our owners.

Over the years, the Security department has reported no less than 5 plane crashes in the Plantation. During the era when the Panhandle was rumored to be a location for marijuana smuggling, a non-owner crashed a small plane into the trees on the corner of Forsythia and Leisure Lane, obviously missing the landing strip by some distance. The Franklin County Sheriff's office quickly took away the passengers and their cargo. The most famous crash was an unoccupied Air Force jet that buried itself completely in the marsh off Evodia after the trainee-pilot accidentally ejected himself over the gulf waters. Ironically, it was an automobile crash that resulted in the air strip's only fatality. One night a visitor took a Corvette for a high speed ride on the runway and lost control.



Storm damage



Flooded runway



Damaged runway



PRESERVING PARADISE

Despite the internal disputes and dissident voices, most Plantation owners remained committed to the community, investing in their homes, paying their dues and often providing service to committees or acting as volunteers. Over the years, the Plantation has had many board members and managers, far too many to list here. Each board had its own personality and vision for the Plantation. Reflective of the constituency of members who elected them, some board members promoted the growth of rental homes and supported more development. Others opposed anything—even investing in repairing of roads or landscaping—for fear the area would become so popular that it would lose its identity.

When gathering this history through written documents and interviews, we often heard various board members lauded for critical steps of progress in the operation and sustainability of the Plantation

throughout the years. We at first thought of listing their names but after months of this research, the editors have determined that it would be too difficult to recognize all the individuals and their accomplishments here. Certainly, such an attempt is bound to fail with the omission of someone important. More notably, however, we have realized with great confidence that there is no single person or group of individuals who made this community into the distinctive residential area it is today. It has been all of us, each contributing in some way, whether putting the association on sound financial footing, leading the negotiations to settle lawsuits, creating order and transparency for board actions, or simple reminding board members to be frugal with our money. There is no question that all current owners owe those who came before a debt of gratitude. They persevered through the difficult times and never gave up hope of a better future for this special place.

SOURCES FOR THIS ISSUE OF *HISTORY OF THE PLANTATION*

Franklin County Chronicle: First published in August 1992, this popular but now defunct, locally-owned newspaper covered island and county happenings, including extensive coverage of St. George Plantation Board Meetings. Electronic copies of the newspaper are available from the University of Florida Digital Newspaper Library- [http://ufdc.ufl.edu/fdnl1/results/?t=franklin chronicle](http://ufdc.ufl.edu/fdnl1/results/?t=franklin%20chronicle)

Apalachicola Times: This newspaper reported on the many controversies involving the Plantation dealing with commercial or dense development that impacted not only the area inside the gate but also the island and in some instances the county. Some locals believed commercial development would bring economic improvements to the area in the way of more jobs while others feared threats to a way of life. The early editions of the *Times* are available only in hard-bound copy stored in the Carriage Cottage of the Raney House in Apalachicola. Some are available on microfilm at the Apalachicola Library. Issues from 2008 to present are digitized and can be found at the University of Florida Digital Newspaper Library- [http://ufdc.ufl.edu/fdnl1/results/?t=apalachicola times](http://ufdc.ufl.edu/fdnl1/results/?t=apalachicola%20times)

The SGPOA archives, containing the Plantation *Soundings*, assorted publications, and photo albums, provided much of this information. Visit the SGPOA website www.stgeorgeplantation.com for copies of some of this information.

Other sources include recollections and memorabilia, photos, and tall tales of Plantation owners and staff. Special thanks to Donna Butterfield who provided the basic outline for this issue along with much information. Thanks also to Mary Lou Short for the article "Sea Pine Firehouse" and to Elizabeth Crofton for the "Plantation Goes to the Movies."

Please note: The writers and editors of this magazine, who have no professional experience in this type of work, attempted to provide this history in a positive manner and with a sense of gratitude for the work done by all owners over the past forty years in helping to make this community special. If we have made mistakes in the facts, we appreciate your bringing those to our attention so that we may correct this document. Email us at sgpoa.communications@gmail.com.




ISSUE 4 : *THE HISTORY OF ST. GEORGE PLANTATION*

How did the Plantation grow into the award-winning community that it is? Owner George Mahr says that removing the toll from the bridge to the island created a positive attitude about the island that grew as locals could finally return to the area for free. Bob Shiver, Director of Security, says a big change began in 2005, when Hurricane Dennis roared through. The storm and its aftermath brought owners together and reminded them of what is important in life. Many owners perceive a change dating from the opening of the new clubhouse in 2010, which afforded a new era of socializing and owner desire to maintain and add improvements. Look for the next and final issue coming before the Annual Owners' Meeting in October.

Correction to Issue 2:

The Parkers, who provided gate security and roving patrols to the Plantation during early development, lived in the second house on Avocet. The 2nd issue of *History of the Plantation* incorrectly indicated they lived in the first house on Avocet. The editors thank the readers for this correction.

**Join the 40th Anniversary
Celebration of
St. George Plantation
Homeowners' Weekend
October 20 - 21, 2017**



Before they were full members of the SGPOA, the beachside residential properties at Nick's Hole had their own distinctive look, with this structure at the entrance and similar designs at each end of their street, connecting a foot path to neighboring communities. Only the sign identifying the neighborhood remains as a part of our living history.

Old gate entry to Nick's Hole