

# SANFORD

EST. 1877

## EARLY CITY DEVELOPMENT

The area south of Lake Monroe was settled in 1836 when the United States Army established a camp along the lake shore during the Second Seminole War. At the "Battle of Camp Monroe" in 1837, Captain Charles Mellon lost his life. Shortly after his death the Army constructed a fort on the site of the battle, naming it Fort Mellon in his honor. The frontier town of Mellonville grew rapidly around the fort and was bustling with industry by the mid nineteenth century. Steamboats traveled south along the St. Johns River from Jacksonville, bringing goods and services to the river's southern terminus at Lake Monroe.



In 1870, Henry S. Sanford purchased 12,548 acres west of Mellonville to create a river port city and transportation hub that he dubbed "The Gate City of South Florida." He laid the city out on a grid, with east-west streets numbered and north-south streets bearing the names of trees. The rapidly growing city was incorporated in 1877.

By the 1880's steamships such as the *Starlight* and *Frederick DeBary* made frequent trips from Jacksonville. The South Florida Railroad picked up where the steamships left off,

connecting the east and west coasts of the state via steamship and rail. The trains transported travelers south to Orlando and west to Tampa, and also carried citrus and produce to northbound markets.



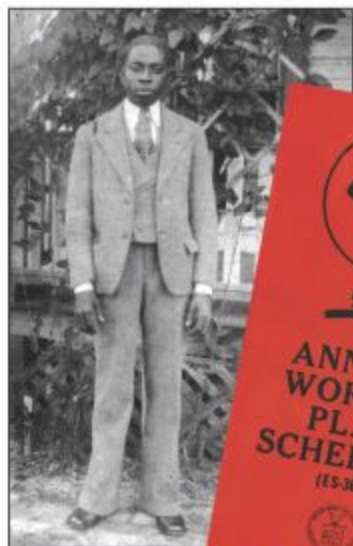
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In the early twentieth century transportation shifted from steamship to cars and trucks, which lessened the waterfront's role as an industrial port. A multi-million dollar beautification project completed in the 1920's transformed the lakefront into a beautiful boulevard. The improvements provided an opportunity for recreational activity and served to attract visitors to the city.

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Pilgrim Black, circa 1923.



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Henry S. Sanford envisioned the creation of a prosperous industrial city and focused his efforts on the development of citrus crops at Belair, his 140-acre experimental garden and grove. Planting of citrus began in 1871 and its cultivation was so successful that the crop was the backbone of the city's economy for decades. "The Great Freeze" of 1894-1895 decimated the local groves and most farmers chose instead to grow celery, a sturdy vegetable well suited to the area. Celery proved to be extremely versatile and lucrative as three to four crops could be grown in a season. By the twentieth century Sanford was known nationally as the "Celery City".



Many individuals working in Sanford's fields were residents of the Georgetown community. Some traveled to other states as migrant farm workers from June through November, to take full advantage of the economic opportunity presented by year round work. Pilgrim Black (1907-2002) was born and raised in Georgetown and began working in the fields at age 11. After years of hard work as a laborer, Pilgrim became a migrant crew leader and his service was recognized by the Florida Industrial Commission. Pilgrim drove his crew of nearly 30 workers to Wayne County, NY annually to harvest potatoes, apples, and other fruit crops. Migrant work involved long hours and hard labor, but it was a necessary means to support families and ensure a better quality of life.

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