

## Oviedo began as Solaria's Wharf

By DONNA NEELY Oviedo Historical Society
Oviedo's roots go back to a tiny settlement on the south shore of Lake Jessup. This little settlement, known as Solaria's Wharf, boasted two general stores and a post office in 1865. White settlers had just begun to appear, attracted by the warm climate, the promise of a long growing season, and the expectation of homesteading. The land toward the interior, away from the lake's shores, was still largely uninhabited except for Indians.

A river packet made weekly trips between Jacksonville and Solaria's Wharf to bring supplier, mail--and more settlers. Not everyone settled at Solaria's Wharf, however. A few miles further up the lake was White's Wharf (now known as Hiley's Fish Camp). Some of the people settled here. Others gradually moved inland, planting orange groves and clearing some of the rich muck land between Lake Jessup and a small village that was later to become Oviedo. The settlers tried to grow other
crops as well, including cotton and sugar. But citrus and vegetables proved to be the most successful.
Some of the settlers were attracted to a very small lake which was not far from Lake Jessup. By 1869 several houses and a hotel had been built along its shores. A New York physician, Dr. Henry Foster, opened a convalescent home there and encouraged his patients to come to the area to recuperate from illnesses. One of these visitors, belleving that the beauty and charm of the lake had helped to bring her invalid father back to health, is said to have given Lake Charm its name.

Another of the earlier settlers was Joseph Watts. He left north Florida and came to this area in an effort to keep his slaves. By 1870 he realized that he could not escape the forces of abolition even here; so he left.

A third early settler, Steen Nelson, is responsible for much of what we know of the Lake Jessup
continued on page 5

## Railroad came in 1886; celery, citrus top crops

continued from page 2 community of that period. Nelson was born here in the 1880 's. His father's homestead was not far from the southwest corner of Central Avenue and Broadway. Before he died, Steen Nelson set down some of his early recollections in a booklet called Old Time History of By Gone Days of Lake Jessup Settlement.

By 1875 mail was being brought to Solaria's Wharf twice a week by rowboat from Sanford. Efforts to secure a railroad into the teritory had not met with success. But the post office itself had been moved inland not far from Lake Charm; and in 1883 the settlement which had sprung up around it was named Oviedo by Andrew Aulin, Sr., the first postmaster.

In 1886 the long-sought railroad finally came into Oviedo. Celery had by now
taken its place with citrus as one of the area's most important crops. The new railroads--there were twomade possible the shipping of Oviedo's crops to Jacksonville and the northern markets. Within a very short time Oviedo became one of the state's largest, busiest shipping points for citrus.

Religion was an integral part of the town's life. The townspeople held religious services from the very beginning. At first the services were inter-denominational, but by the middle 1880's there were both Baptist and Methodist churches. By 1890 Oviedo had grown to four churches, a school, two drug stores, five general stores, and a number of specialized businesses, including a newspaper.

People from the north were encouraged to settle here. The Lee and Todd continued on page 6


The store that had everything: the old Jones Grocery on Broadway. J.
B. Jones, whose son was Oviedo's postmaster for many years, was the
proprietor, and is shown behind the counter...This photo was taken around 1914.

## 6B HERITAGE 77 <br> 1894: Disaster freeze hit

continued from page 5 Real Estate Company distributed a brochure which elaimed that "there is no more healthy place in the state than the plateau south of Lake Jessup.' The area was claimed to have "intelligent, hospitable, law-and-order loving people, good preaching every Sunday and plenty of young and old bearing groves.

In 1894 disaster struck. A hard freeze hit the orange groves late in December, followed by another in February of the following yar. Many grove owners were ruined. Steen Nelson. wrote that "some of them nearly lost their minds." Many of them left, never to return.

The more determined stayed. They replanted groves, cut trees back to the stump, plowed under frozen vegetables, and began to piece their lives together again. New settlers slowly replaced those who had left. But it was to be 25 years before the effects of the freeze were to be completely overcome.
In 1910 land was selling for less than ten dollars an acre. The town had grown somewhat, but had the reputation of being "sleep$y^{\prime \prime}$--that is, if you didn't live in Oviedo--and if you knew where it was, even. Often, when asked how to get to Oviedo, people would reply that they didn't know.

Freezes were not the only hardships that the people endured. In 1914 fire wiped out much of the downtown aren. Fifteen years later the only bank was bombed. To this day the bombing has remained an unsotved crime, atthough some sources offer theories. One of these includes vague references to "Chicago boys." The bank folded soon afterward in the crash of 1929.

In that same year the fruit crops were decimated by an infestation of fruit flies. At one point the situation became so bad that growers dug huge pits in which to bury the infested fruit.

In spite of their hard woris and worries, the townspeople still found time to retax. Oviedo at one time had a bowling alley and a movie theatre, where "live" piano music was featured white the reels were changed. The eircus eame to town regularly, and plenics and fishing were favorite pastimes. There was a touch of metropolitan culture, when traveling actors from New York presented plays in the long summer evenings.

When the country suffered in the depression of the thirties, Oviedo suffered too. Proud but needy citizens tried to avoid resorting to welfare. The government sponsored the construction of a swimming pool and employed local labor to build it. But this was only a partial solution. Food stamps became a well-known medium of exchange in the stores.
But the community survived. It was incorporated in 1925. By 1927 there were 10 miles of-paved streets. Four years later 24 street lights were installed at an operating cost of $\$ 80.00$ a month.
Oviedo had another rather famous resident during those years. Theodore Meade, an internationaliy famous botanist, apurned several huge offers of money if he would reveal his botanical secrets. He devoted many years to the development of new strains of orchids and gladioli. He is credited with producing the first white orchid, but was tess successful in developing a black amaryllis.
Eighty-two young men served in the armed forces during World War II. Four of them gave their lives. Gas rationing was taken seriously in Oviedo. One man drove his car to church on Sunday, and later discovered that someone had painted a yellow streak along the continued on page 7


[^0]Church life in early Oviedo centered largely around the Baptist and Methodist Churches [right and bottom ]. The earliest church was an interdenominationat one, but by the mid 1880's, the Baptists and Methodists had extablished separate congregations. The wooden structures have long since been replaced, and the First Baptist Church of Oviedo and the First United Methotist Church of Outedo are still by far the largest in town.


1990's. If you look close, you may recognize some of the town's leading eftivens of the day.

## Fire destroyed

Thursday, June so, 1977
HERITAGE '77 7B fertilizer plant
continued from page 6 middle of the car on either side.

With the close of the war, the economy improved but the population remained relatively stable. In 1946 the original Wheeler Fertilizer plant was destroyed by fire. It was replaced by a new, modern plant. A year later the roads to Geneva and Chuluota were paved. In 1948 the Citizens Bank first opened its doors. Until that time, if you wanted to buy a meal, you had to go to a hotel. Now there were cafes.

Gwynn's Cafe was located on the southeast corner of Broadway and Central. It gained statewide fame for its mince and banana cream pies. Truckers coming from Jacksonville would time their meal stops so they could enjoy. some of Mrs. Gwynn's pie.

By 1949 Oviedo had once-a-day Greyhound bus
continued on page 8

R.W. Estes graphically demonstrates the size of cypress trees that can still
nix

Hammock area, although many of the trees were cleared over the years.

## sinairaor $\pi$ Daily buses

continued from poge 7 service to Orlando. That year, construction totaled more than iFis,00. This Included the clusens Bank building. Spencer's store. and an 58,000 canning kitchen. By 1000 Oviedo wab the necend largest town in Seminele County. with a population of 1.800 . Nearty a mitilion crites of celery and a third of a million crates of eitrus were being shipped from here each year. And the town now had a new fire truck, although the inuitding to house it was not builit for some time.
Medical treatmient was still a problem. Doctors charged upwartir of tis to come from Ortando, and there was no local physbetan here. Few Orlande doctions would make the trip: few had the time to apare from their practices. In the black sections of Oviede the litant mortatfty rate was high. Drugs and medicines were difticull to obtain, and prescriptlons were out of the question, So the townspeople built a clinte; and Oviedo got its first doctor. A city hatt was butt tm 1060 at a cost of $\mathrm{t} 1 \mathrm{t}, \mathrm{mot}$. The town was begianing to feel the pangs of growth. Zoning problems arose. An increased etty buidget required more time, and more carefut plaminge With the selection of the FTU nite in ivel came the promise of greater growthand more growing pains. But despite its growth the elly tried to keep its small-town atmosphere. Fer the meet part, the townspeopte were pleased with the growth ind welcomed newcomeraprovided they wrere prepared to stip into the easy style of country living.
During the sixtien, how ever, the rite of rrewth accelerated. New houitny developments appeared, a new hugh welhool was huyt. tithentrr enter तretted roads leading into Oviedo were widened and re. peved, and Florlida Techmotortent **trertit broupht new'realdents to the area.
The city't budret Jump et trofit tts.800 in 1050 to $\$ 250,000$ in 1972 . It was expected at that time that the population (then 2,200) would double by livis. But thit was not lo be
The slugriah econcmy of the past fre years has stomedithe louthing of Bre himes. Tuatives has teft the pinch tes. But the towil has aeen the addition of a new bank butlding. a savinge and loan assoct. ation, a new poat office, a restaurant, and the facetirting of some of the cilder bulldings. The growth is slower, but it is still present. The face of the city changes with the times. The people change very lithe.


The Oviedo Railroad De pot. Until the 1960's. Oriefo wes served by two
raifroads, the seaboand Alrline Railroad, and the Atiantic Coastline Rall.
rosed. This photo wesa taken in the ecrily part of the century. The deppot is now
beling waed as a barn on the Jomnie Conley property.

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In Oviedo, a community rich in character and heritage. Oviedo offers fine schools, beautiful churches, convenient downtown shopping and the peaceful atmosphere and leisurely pace of country living, but is just a short drive to Florida Tech University and the Naval Training Center.

We have a variety of custom built homes and homesites available. Please call us.


[^0]:    Typical community gath-
    Typical community gath
    ering, probably a July Fourth barbeque, held in Sweetwater Park in the

