Sunday, Sept. 29, 2002

EXTRA The Sanford Herald EXTRA

A Special Publication of The Seminole Herald

SANFORD CELEBRATES 125TH

SCANDAL!

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Book Airs City's Dirty Laundry

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Residents Outraged

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Hometown Boy Turned Prodigal Son

By Christine Kinlaw-Best
Special to the Herald

A few years ago, I began to research my "Kinlaw" family genealogy. I located a third cousin, by the name of Sam Byrd and a short reference that he had written a book about Sanford. I decided to research this further ... just imagine, an "author" in the family!

I started asking around town and the only answer that I could get was a whispered "Oh, that *man* who wrote that *book* about Sanford." I spoke to a few other people who had lived here a long time and their answer was the same. I couldn't get anyone to tell me about my third cousin. It seemed no one wanted to even discuss him. I decided to go a little further and check out the local museums and I received the same answers. That did it. I decided to find out just what my relative did in the past to the town of Sanford.

What I found out was that at one time Sam was a "beloved Sanford home town boy." Matter of fact, he was the "pride" of Sanford. He was a famous Broadway actor! But, then he wrote "that book." He told the true story of Forrest Lake and his banking practices in Sanford. He exposed the politics in Sanford, at the time of the "boom bust" and the banks going under.

Hometown boy

Samuel "Sam" Armanie Byrd, Jr., was born in 1908, in Mount Olive, N.C. Sam's father was a well-known criminal attorney in North Carolina and while trying an important case out of town; he died of a massive heart attack. Sam was just 1 year old, at the time of his father's death, in 1909.

A few years later, Sam's mother, met W.A. Zachary and they were married. Sometime around 1912, W.A. Zachary and his brother, A.D. Zachary, heard about the building boom, going on in Sanford. They decided to move their families to Sanford and go into business for themselves, operating the "Zachary Veneer & Crate Mill."

Sam attended Sanford Junior High and Seminole High School and was active on the Varsity football team, playing in the backfield as the starting halfback. Sam was also very involved in the acting department at Seminole High School. Sam graduated from Seminole High School in 1925.

Even after graduation, acting held Sam's interest. In 1928, the play "East is West" was staged at the Sanford Women's Club, with Sam among the cast. In 1929, a local orchestra was formed in Sanford,

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Mind-Reading Dog Comes to Town

By Charlie Carlson
Special to the Herald

In 1932, a mind-reading dog came to town for two sensational shows at R. J. Reel's U-Drive-it Garage on Myrtle Avenue.

The uncanny canine, a mixed-breed mutt owned by Captain C. L. Lowery, was billed as "Bozo, the World's Only Mind Reading Dog." In 1930, this amazing pooch, and his alleged psychic abilities, was featured in several publications including a spot in Ripley's Believe It or Not.

With this publicity, Captain Lowery and Bozo landed a promotional deal with R. S. Evans, owner of a large Southeastern automobile dealership. Evans put Captain Lowery and his mystifying mutt on a tour promoting the new 1932 Austin automobile. They traveled throughout the South in a new Austin car that had a stage built over the hood on which Bozo mesmerized his audiences.

Newspapers, including the Sanford Herald, reported that this mind-reading dog, "without any apparent coaching from Captain Lowery, could add or subtract any small groups of numbers called to him by the audience." He would give his answers by barking a specific number of times.

Bozo could signify the exact number of coins concealed in a person's hand, or the serial numbers on a dollar bill, or numbers written on a piece of paper and hidden in someone's coat pocket.

When it came to card tricks, Bozo's talent matched any magician of the time. A spectator, selected at random, would shuffle a deck of cards, and then Bozo would locate the subject card by a certain number of barks. By counting off the number of cards according to the dog's barks, the card would always be found.

In Sanford, Bozo was well received by a standing-room-only crowd, since R. J. Reel's U-Drive-It Garage had no seats other than a couple of orange crates — probably reserved for any dignitaries. After doing two exhibitions in Sanford, Captain Lowery and Bozo headed for Tampa.

Bozo's fame faded away in 1935 and he hasn't been heard from since. However, the discovery of an old yellowed newspaper clipping is evidence that a mind-reading dog once visited Sanford.

Photo contrubuted by Christine Kinlaw-Best

Sanford's Sam Byrd, front with Margaret Wycherly, starred in the original production on "Tobacco Road."

Sanford's Past is a Treasure Chest of History

By Charlie Carlson
Special to the Herald

Sanford has packed a lot of history into the past 125 years but it is only a tidbit of our total chronology. Actually, the area that is now Sanford was the genesis for Central Florida's history and it all began many eons ago on the shores of Lake Monroe.

Our historical roots are deeper than most folks realize, probably reaching back 10,000 years ago to the end of the last Ice Age. Of course, the "Sanford neighborhood" was much different than the way we know it today. If we could travel back in time, we would find a very cold, dry savanna of grass scattered with a few low growing shrubs. Most of the ground water was frozen in huge glaciers making sea levels so low that the Florida peninsula was 100 miles wider than present. Lake Monroe was not much more than a tundra-like, grassy plain pocked with a few muddy springs.

As a warmer climate gradually melted the glaciers, small basins of fresh water began collecting in and around our present lakes and rivers. These became watering holes that attracted thirsty herds of mammoth, mastodon, bison, camels and other now extinct beasts.

It was at this point in our timeline that the first human beings arrived on the scene. They were nomadic hunters called Paleo-Indians, but unlike later aboriginal people, these prehistoric newcomers left little evidence of their existence.

However, we know they were here because of a discovery made in 1960 during the construction of the first Interstate 4 bridge over the St. John's River. A dragline uncovered the fragile remains of several mammoths, including well-preserved teeth and brittle tusk fragments, that were estimated to be 9000 to 10,000 years old. What was most remarkable about this discovery is that two

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City Marks Founding Date With Year-Long Observance

By Dan Ping
Editor

Happy Birthday Sanford!

Sunday, Sept. 29, 2002 is the 125th anniversary of the city of Sanford's incorporation. To celebrate the event, *The Seminole Herald* has published this special edition that provides an overview of Sanford's past.

This is by no means a comprehensive compilation of Sanford's history. Volumes could be written solely about the city's rich baseball history. Babe Ruth, Jackie Robinson and Willie Mays are among the legendary players who've passed through Sanford, not to mention scores of local talent.

Instead, this special publication is meant to serve as a primer for Sanford history. For those who have recently moved to Sanford, this section will provide you with a better understanding of your new hometown. Residents whose roots run much deeper are sure to discover a few things that they didn't know, too. Christine Kinlaw-Best's article about Sam Byrd is a great example.

And who says history can't be fun? Certainly not Charlie Carlson. Sprinkled throughout the "real history" are a few off beat stories Charlie has uncovered, like the mind-reading dog, the "human fly" and the disappearing orange grove. Charlie swears these nuggets of Sanford history are true. Considering some of the characters that have called Sanford home, I've got to believe him.

Taking a cue from Charlie, *The Seminole Herald* staff has joined in the fun and used our former name, *The Sanford Herald*, as part of the nameplate for this edition.

Many thanks to our advertisers who chose to participate in this endeavor. Thanks to go to Charlie and Christine for their well-researched articles. I hope you, our readers, enjoy reading this special issue as we enjoyed putting it together.

Sanford: The River City and Gateway to Central Florida

By Charlie Carlson
Special to the Herald

Prior to 1900, the St. John's River had something to do with just about every event in Sanford's history. It was a life-giving source for aboriginal tribes who fished its waters and used it for transportation. During the Second Seminole War, dugout canoes gave way to steamboats transporting troops and supplies down the river.

Among the steamers docking at Fort Mellon between 1837 and 1840, were the Camden, Charleston, Cincinnati, Essayons, Forrester, James Adams, John Stoney, McLean, and Santee. It was the Santee's cannon that drove back the 1837 Seminole attack on Fort Mellon.

The first regular commercial vessels were small independently owned riverboats that began carrying cargo and passengers in 1847 from Jacksonville and Palatka to Enterprise and Mellonville. The accommodations on these small steamers left much to be desired; one early account compared the food to "mining camp grub" and the staterooms to "poor house coffins." Dr. Algernon Speer of Mellonville began the first regular service with three such boats, the Hancock, the Sarah Spaulding and the Tom Thumb.

A decade before the Civil War, Captain Jacob Brock's St. John's River Line put the first big boats on the river. However, on his opening run from Jacksonville, he carried "only one passenger and on the return trip, a single cowhide."

Lake Monroe was the end of the line for river navigation, but for adventurous sportsmen it was an untamed frontier teaming with game and fish. Brock, originally from Vermont, put his faith in this tourist potential and in 1855, built the huge Brock House hotel at Enterprise. The big hotel advertised "Northern style accommodations" and was filled each winter with Northerners seeking warmer climes and the hyped health benefits of nearby sulphur springs.

Jacob Brock owned a dozen slaves that most likely catered to the comfort of hotel guests and worked aboard his steamboats. African-Americans served throughout the steamboat era as deck hands, stewards, engineers, and as pilots. Stories have been told about a stout, ex-slave woman, known only as "Commodore Rose," who was second-in-command on Brock's steamers. Supposedly, Rose was granted her freedom and authority, after saving Captain Brock's life in a steamboat accident. It was said that her orders were law and instantly obeyed by every crewman.

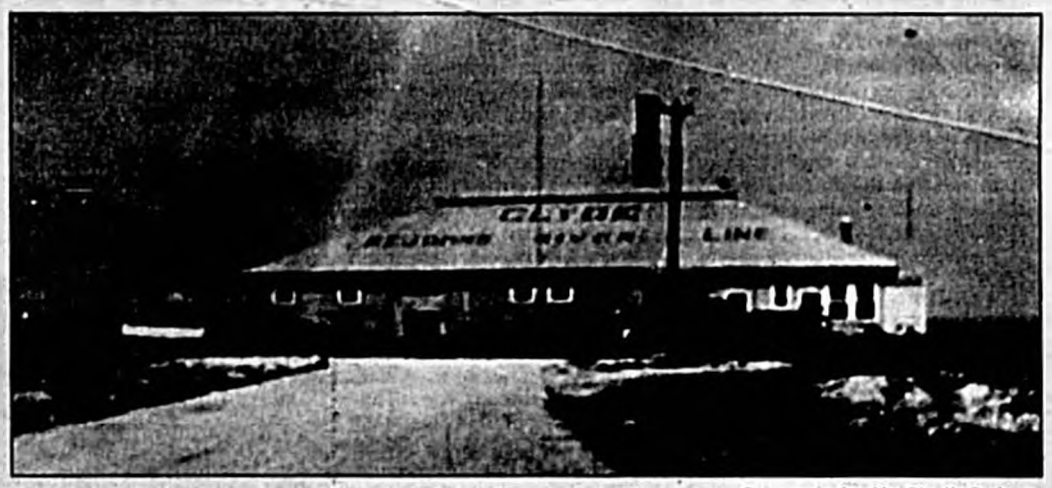

Photo submitted by Charlie Carlson
The Clyde Steamboat Line docked at the end of Palmetto Avenue during the 1920s.

If the Brock House was filled, the next lodging was a few hotels and boarding houses across the lake at Mellonville. Several small launches shuttled between Mellonville and Enterprise and offered visitors sightseeing excursions and fishing trips.

Commerce and tourism on the St. John's River was interrupted by the Civil War when many riverboats were pressed into military service as blockade-runners. In 1862, Union forces captured Jacob Brock's steamer, the Darlington. Captain Brock was sent to prison; the Darlington was sent to the Federal fleet; and the Brock House was shut down until the end of the War.

In 1871, when Henry Sanford was just starting his town, Count Frederick DeBary was starting a large plantation across the lake. In 1876, DeBary bought a small steamer called the George M. Bird and started the DeBary Merchant Line that grew into one of the leading transportation companies on the river.

Hanaro T. Baya began his line in 1875 against strong competition from the DeBary steamers and Captain Post's Fast Line.

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Sanford: The Railroad Hub of Central Florida

By Charlie Carlson
Special to the Herald

Sanford's railroad history begins in 1875 with the charter for the Lake Monroe and Orlando Railroad. But, this railroad never had any track or trains, because it was never built.

Four years later in 1879, E. W. Henck, C. C. Haskell, and Frederic Rand, acquired the incorporation for this railroad and renamed it the South Florida Railroad. Most of the financing came from bonds sold to R. H. Pulsifer and E. B. Haskell, owner and manager of the Boston Daily Herald. Thus, it became the only railroad ever built by a newspaper.

On Jan. 9, 1880, former President Ulysses S. Grant, on his first and only tour of Florida, arrived at the Brock House in Enterprise. General and Mrs. Grant, accompanied by General and Mrs. Phillip Sheridan, had arrived in time for the groundbreaking ceremony of Sanford's first railroad.

General Grant accepted an invitation, probably sent by Henry Sanford, to officiate at the historic ceremony. In an effort to attract a respectable crowd for the former president, riders were dispatched with the news to surrounding settlements. However, most of these rural folks held strong Southern sentiments and, in spite of being offered free whiskey, balked at the thought of attending an event presided over by "Yankee officials."

Nevertheless, on Saturday, Jan. 10, General Ulysses S. Grant ceremoniously turned the first shovel of dirt that began the South Florida Railroad. That shovel is now on exhibit at the Sanford Museum.

By June 1, 1880, ten miles of South Florida Railroad track had had been laid to Longwood. This was a three-foot narrow-gauge track that was later widened to standard gauge. By October, there was 23 miles of rail connecting Sanford to Orlando. On Oct. 2, in celebration of Central Florida's first railroad, prominent citizens and railroad officials, packed on a special excursion train for the inaugural run to Orlando.

The train was nothing more than a locomotive pulling four or five flatcars with wooden benches. The last car carried "a cannon and a boisterous crowd who passed a bottle or two along the way." At various intervals, this rowdy bunch would stuff the cannon with wads of Spanish moss and fire a salute. One account recalled, "The more they drank the more they'd shoot that cannon."

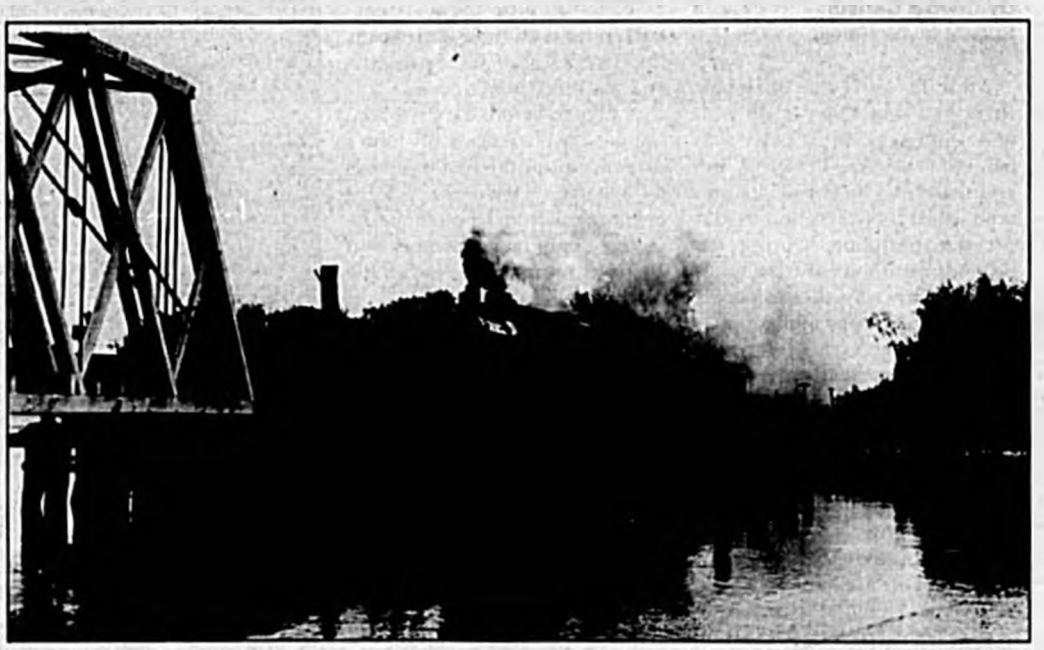

Photo submitted by Charlie Carlson

One of the first trains crossing the Monroe Railroad Bridge, circa 1887.

Several times, the engine stalled on uphill grades requiring everybody to jump off and push the train. Once the train was going again, they would pile back on, pass the bottle, and fire the cannon.

In 1883, Henry B. Plant bought three-fifth's ownership in the South Florida Railroad and made it part of the Plant System and the Plant Investment Company [PICO]. Some of the investment money in PICO came from Henry Sanford. Outside of town, near today's French Avenue and 6th Street, Plant built a railroad maintenance shop and yards.

In November 1885, the Jacksonville, Tampa, and Key West Railroad [J.T.& K.W.] started driving pilings for a 3500-foot railroad drawbridge across the St. John's River. This bridge, called the Thrasher Ferry Railroad Bridge, was in the same location as the present Monroe bridge.

Although the significance of this bridge is often overlooked in state history, it was the "golden spike" that tied Florida's Atlantic coast to the lower Gulf coast with a continuous railroad. For the first time, passengers could travel by train in nine hours from Jacksonville to Tampa. At noon, on Feb. 22, 1886, the first train to cross the St. John's River was greeted by a cheering crowd at the Sanford station.

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Sanford: When Celery was King

By Charlie Carlson
Special to the Herald

By 1890, Sanford was leading the state in citrus production. Algernon Speer is believed to have been the first to plant a grove in 1843. Today, a granite monument marks the location of the historic 4 1/2 acre Speer Grove, now a city park on Mellonville Avenue. By 1855 there were several other groves in production, among which were the Ginn, Hughey and Beck Groves. In 1871, Henry Sanford planted his first grove, the St. Gertrude Grove, and by 1872 his Belair Groves and Experimental Gardens were turning Central Florida into a citrus empire. Then, in the winter of 1894-95, severe back-to-back freezes killed almost every tree to the ground. The "Big Freeze" is still talked about in historical circles as a significant turning point in Sanford's past. Growers knew that if they replanted, it would take five years for a grove to produce fruit. Many growers moved away, unwilling to take chances with future freezes, but others simply pulled up their dead trees and turned to vegetable farming.

Sanford had all the ingredients for truck farming; artesian wells, fertile soil with a good hardpan, sunshine, and long growing seasons. Sanford offered another big advantage for growers with railroads and steamboats shipping was cheaper and quicker than in other parts of the country. Among the large variety of truck crops, celery seemed to thrive like crazy in Sanford's rich soil. Originally, celery was grown in small quantities and secondary to main profit crops of beans, lettuce, peppers, cabbage, and other produce. Little did farmers know at the time, but celery would be the one to bring fame and fortune to Sanford, Florida.

It is difficult to determine who planted the first celery; however, early records show that E.S. Harold and J.N. Whitner, in 1899, shipped four railcars of celery. Nine years later, the number of rail shipments had jumped to 684 cars, all loaded with celery. Shipment increased each year until 1927 , when Sanford was averaging 6,000 carloads annually. While most of these shipments went to northeastern markets, Sanford farms also shipped celery as far as Grand Forks, North Dakota, Chicago, and even into Canada.

Northern produce buyers in 1905 were already calling Sanford the *Celery Delta* — a name later applied to Lake Jesup's Black Hammock celery fields. Sanford is first described as the *Celery City* in 1908, in a special paper published by the *Sanford Chronicle* - an ancestor newspaper in the *Seminole Herald's* lineage. In 1910, the *Sanford Herald* turned out a similar special edition for the Board of Trade, titles *"The Celery City."* These were industrial papers promoting Sanford as a great place to live; where the little man could make a fortune raising celery. Needless-to-say, these publications were filled with real estate advertisements selling farm land.

One key factor in Sanford becoming the nation's celery capital was a unique sub irrigation system. Farmers devised a grid of irrigation pipes just below the soil that was fed by an artesian well. Each line of pipes in this system was intersected with a pocket to the main water line. By using plugs in these pockets, water could be directed to where it was needed in the fields. This unique system, called the "Sanford System" or "Tile and Pocket" system, was later used in other areas of the country. According to a 1925 Chamber of Commerce paper, the U.S. Department of Agriculture "investigated the Sanford system of sub-irrigation and pronounced it the best method which has ever been devised for watering plants." Today, old irrigation tiles are occasionally unearthed during development of what used to be celery fields.

Farming caused many related businesses to spring up in Sanford, such as crate manufacturers, irrigation tile business, farm implement dealers, packing houses, ice plants, fertilizer manufacturers, feed and see stores. Local agriculture was the primary source of shipping profits for the railroad. The Atlantic Coast Line built branch lines into the fields for loading produce. Loaded cars would be formed into northbound freight trains at the busy Rand Switching yards. A Sanford Herald article once calculated that Sanford shipped a boxcar load of celery every 67 1/2 minutes. At the peak of Sanford's agriculture period, Rand Yard operated 24 hours per day, seven days a week.

Celery became so important to Sanford' economy and reputation, that the word celery was used all over town. In 1909, the Celery City Steam Laundry opened on Palmetto Avenue, followed later by the Celery City Cafe, the naming of Celery Avenue, the Celery Belt Railway, the Celery Club Restaurant, the Celery Crate teenage dance hall above the old city hall, the Celery City Lumber Company, the Celery City Printing Company, and to quench the thirst, a carbonated beverage called Cello, made from celery juice. Stalks of celery appeared in the designs of city emblems and business logos. As late as the 1950s, the Seminole High School football team was still called the "Celery Feds".

Celery growing actually began on Sanford's east side, and by 1915 had spread to the west side along

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The Human Fly & Other Bizarre Things That Came To Town

By Charlie Carlson
Special to the Herald

Between 1918 and 1950, Sanford folks were a curious lot; they liked weird things and would pay good money to see them.

Obviously this was well known to traveling showmen who brought all kinds of unusual exhibits to Sanford ranging from gangster cars to whales. For the sake of history, we'll call it Sanford's Weird Period.

In January 1918, the Human Fly (a.k.a. Jack Williams) came to town and climbed Sanford's tallest building — which at the time was the three-story Seminole County Courthouse. The Human Fly boasted to the press that he did not like climbing any building less than ten stories, so Sanford must have been a real disappointment for him.

A Sanford Herald article stated that the exhibition "will be made sufficiently thrilling by the many fool stunts that the Fly pulls off while going up." Just in case that was not enough hype, the same article added that once on top the Fly would "show the crowd something of a freaky nature." Well that was enough to draw a large crowd of thrill-seeking Sanford folks. A collection was taken up and donated to the Seminole Guards' Armory project.

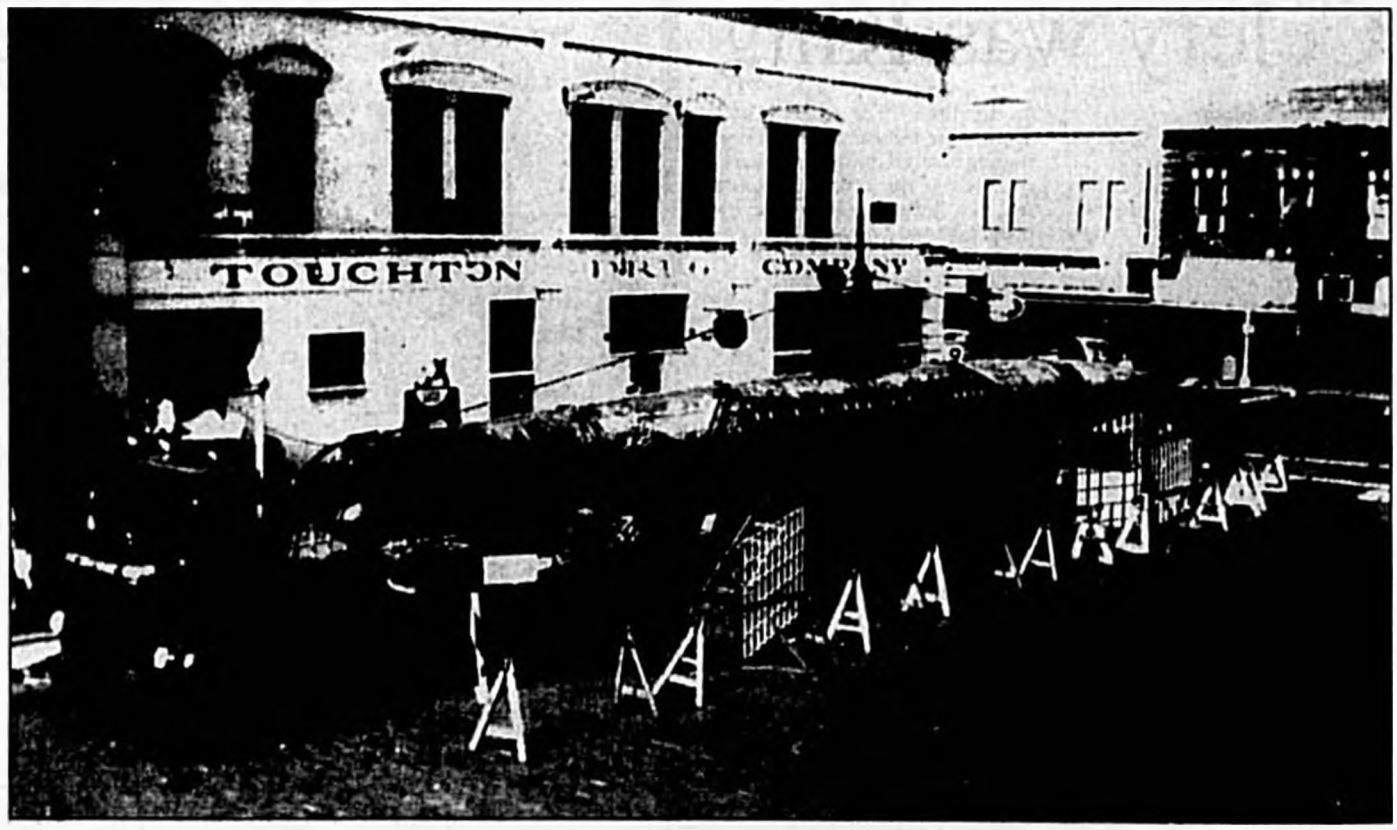

Photo submitted by Harriet Boyd
A Japanese submarine exhibit was held in the 1940s next to Touchton's Drug Store in the area that is today Magnolia Square.

In January 1930, the World's Largest Balloon Tire came to town and was exhibited at Rockey's Tire Shop. Everyone who went to see the huge 12-foot tall, 4-foot wide tire received a free booklet giving full particulars about the World's Biggest Tire.

A few years later in March 1936, a crowd turned out to see Bonnie and Clyde's bullet-riddled car, complete with its blood-stained seats, that was displayed at Strickland Motors.

In 1931, a promoter brought a giant whale to town in a special built railroad car and parked it on a sidetrack at Oak and First Street. The whale was ripe by the time it got to Sanford and accord-

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Happy 95th Birthday OLYVE NEWMAN ADAMS

L-R: Ada O'Neil, Olyve Newman Adams and Anne Wallace.

Olyve Newman Adams, (Mrs. W.A.), a Sanford native, celebrated her 95th birthday September 23rd. Joining her for the fun were her daughters, grandchildren, great gradchildren, neices and nephews.

The Amazing Mr. Hill had Sanford's first lakefront condo

By Charlie Carlson
Special to the Herald

Sanford is known for having a rather odd assortment of characters in its history. Among the cast was an English chap named W. J. Hill, who claimed in 1908 to have lived longer in Sanford than anyone else.

He was born in London in 1842 and had immigrated to New York in the summer of 1872 where he found a job as an interpreter for the Grant and Greely election campaign. Interpreter? Well, according to Mr. Hill in a 1908 interview, the election folks needed someone who was fluent in Cockney.

In the winter of 1873, W. J. Hill boarded a steamer in New York and headed south seeking warmer climes. He got off the boat in Savannah, bought a map, and started walking to Florida, which, according to his recollections in 1915, was a longer distance than it looked on the map. In Jacksonville he joined two Georgia men who had hired a riverboat to take them down the St. Johns River. When the boat landed at Sanford, they got off and set up camp on the shores of Lake Monroe.

Mr. Hill s first residence in Sanford was two large wooden barrels on the lakeshore, in which he lived until finding more spacious quarters. He then moved into a discarded piano crate and later built a platform in the fork of a tree overlooking Lake Monroe. It s fairly accurate to say that W. J. Hill was the first to have a condo with a view of the lake.

Oddly enough, in 1877, W. J. Hill played a part in the incorporation of Sanford. When it came time to vote on incorporation, there were only eight property owners living in town who could vote. The voting district was then extended to include the Swedes of New Upsala in hopes of rallying enough voters in favor of incorporation.

By some unknown means, Mr. Hill was appointed the voting inspector. Since the Swedes could read little English, Hill became their proxy and did all the voting himself. Obviously the votes favored incorporation since Sanford is celebrating its 125th Anniversary.

W. J. Hill was a true entrepreneur and opportunist. When former president General Ulysses S. Grant came to town in 1880 for the groundbreaking ceremony for the South Florida Railroad, Hill followed him around picking up his discarded cigar butts. He then sold the cigar stubs as souvenirs for twenty-five cents a piece. He admitted in a 1915 article, that he wasn't sure whether all the cigar butts he sold were ever really smoked by General Grant. For collectors not wanting cigar stubs, Hill offered jars of genuine dirt dug up by General Grant during the groundbreaking ceremony.

W. J. Hill later owned farms and orange groves, but in Sanford he is best remembered for establishing one of Sanford s oldest and largest businesses, Hill s Hardware and Lumbar Company with stores on Palmetto and Oak avenues. Hill's Hardware store was unusual as it offered just about anything from seeds to radios to refrigerators to well-drilling services. At one time, Hill Lumber Company was among Central Florida s largest lumber and building supply businesses.

Although the Hill industries have long since faded into our past, the amazing English chap who lived in a barrel down by the lakeshore, will always be a part of Sanford s entrepreneurial spirit.

History

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Paleolithic projectile points were found in with these ancient bones. This is the earliest known evidence of humans in our area.

By 3000 B.C., various tribes of the Timucuan and Mayacan cultures were living in the first permanent settlements along the St. John's River and around Lake Monroe. These primitive, but well-organized, societies existed for a few thousand years until Spain laid claim to Florida and introduced European diseases thateventually wiped out the indigenous population.

In the mid-1700s, newcomers called "cimmarone" by the Spanish replaced Florida's original Indians. Our county is named for these people, the Seminoles; a tribe of expatriate Creeks blended with remnants of other bands and escaped African slaves from Alabama and Georgia.

The Spanish had little influence in our timeline, but they did explore Lake Monroe, which they recorded as "Laguna Valdez." This Spanish name lingered into recent times as the name of Sanford's former "Valdez Hotel" and the "Valdez railroad siding" in North Lake Monroe.

The first Americans to visit the big lake were naturalists John and William Bartram in 1765 and in 1822 by Captain John E. LeConte's army survey expedition. Maps dated after 1824 show the lake as "Monroe," named for President James Monroe.

Beginning in December 1824, the territory of present-day Seminole County was part of Mosquito County. During the First Seminole War, the local Indian population grew as the Seminoles retreated from North Florida. Arriving with these refugees were black Seminole warriors representing the first African-Americans in Sanford's past.

In December 1836, during the Second Seminole War, soldiers under Colonel A. C. Fanning, established Camp Monroe on the south shore of Lake Monroe near the present intersection of First Street and Mellonville Avenue. This remote garrison was attacked in the early morning hours of Feb. 8, 1837, by 400 Seminoles led by Chiefs Coacoochee and King Phillip.

During this skirmish, Captain Charles Mellon was killed and the post was renamed Fort Mellon. This fairly large military post straddled the east boundary of a land grant owned by Moses Levy, a Jewish merchant, land investor, and slave owner-turned-abolitionist.

In 1834, Levy had purchased 53,000 acres of Philip Yonge's Spanish Grant. Although he never succeeded, Levy wanted to create a Jewish colony in Florida. Included in these holdings was the Levy Grant upon which now sits the City of Sanford. In 1849 this grant was sold to an Irishman named Joseph Finegan, who later gained historical fame as a Confederate general.

By 1840, the Seminoles had been forced farther south opening the area for the first white pioneers. To attract settlers, the government offered free rations for six months and up to 160 acres to anyone daring enough to set up housekeeping in Florida's interior. The hamlet of Mellonville soon sprang up around the abandoned Fort.

When Orange County was carved out of Mosquito County in 1845, Mellonville became the county seat. A newspaperman once wrote, "Mellonville is where civilization ends." Indeed, Mellonville was an end-of-the-line river village with a steam-

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The Mystery of Sanford's Disappearing Orange Grove

By Charlie Carlson
Special to the Herald

Magician David Copperfield might be famous for making the Statue of Liberty disappear on television, but that's nothing compared to Sanford's vanishing orange grove.

This case came to light while researching some old Jacksonville newspapers in which an article appeared headlined "Supernatural Occurrence, Orange Grove Vanishes." Now before you say "Nonsense," this phenomenon actually happened back in 1872, at least according to the old news article.

The subject grove was part of Henry S. Sanford's St. Gertrude Grove that once stood just west of town, in the vicinity of today's Central Florida Regional Hospital. This grove, started in 1871, was Mr. Sanford's first citrus grove and was planted in sections extending from about present day Poplar Avenue westward to Persimmon Avenue.

The strange occurrence happened right after Swedish laborers had finished setting out about one-hundred young trees The grove, planted in neat rows with each tree banked with dirt for protection, was in the area of present day Holly Avenue and Third Street.

At noon, the Swedes loaded onto a wagon and went to lunch. When they returned about an hour later, they found that the entire orange grove had vanished! There was not a trace of the trees and certainly not enough time for anyone to have stolen a hundred trees.

In place of where newly planted trees had stood just an hour before, was a level wet bog in the middle of which was a sulphur spring that had not existed before. Had one hundred trees been swallowed up by this strange spring? This was never an area prone to sinkholes or other geological anomalies; however, there are two incidents on record of springs suddenly bubbling to the surface. Both of these cases were in the 1870s and occurred across Lake Monroe in Enterprise. One of these springs mysteriously appeared on Count Frederick DeBary's plantation.

The only explanation for Sanford's disappearing orange grove is that the ground swallowed it up with the unexpected formation of the spring. It is possible that not all the trees had vanished. It is also doubtful that the writer of the newspaper article witnessed anything and most likely relied on a second-hand story.

The site of the vanished grove served for many years as a bathing spa fed by the mysterious sulphur spring. For more than two decades it was a favorite recreational spot until one day, without warning, the spring went dry. Today, this is a residential area, but there is nothing to suggest that a spring ever existed, and still no sign of Sanford's vanished orange grove.

The Legend of Sanford's Cannon

By Charlie Carlson
Special to the Herald

There's a mystery at the base of that flagpole in front of the Chamber of Commerce on the corner of First Street and Sanford Avenue. According to a long-standing Sanford legend, the flagpole is stick in the muzzle of a cannon that originally came from Fort Mellon. On close examination it is easy to see that the flagpole base is really the business end of a gun, but is it a genuine relic of Fort Mellon?

To begin with, measurements of the taper and swell of this muzzle strongly suggests that it is a 10 to 12 pound howitzer, a small stuffy gun, but still in the cannon category. The problem is that in available records of Fort Mellon's active years, 1836 to 1842, there is no mention of howitzers. The only accounts of cannons were two that were on steamboats. One of these guns, onboard the Santee, drove back the 1837 Seminole attack on Camp Monroe, (later renamed Fort Mellon). But the Santee's gun wasn't a howitzer; it was a bronze, six-pounder cannon and was not assigned to the fort.

Although no canons have been found in Fort Mellon's inventory, or depicted in old sketches of the fort, the post was a staging base for artillery troops. For a short period, detachments of the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th artillery regiments were stationed here, but these soldiers carried rifles as infantrymen, nicknamed "red-leg infantry" because they wore distinctive red artillery stockings. If Fort Mellon had any cannons, it is very doubtful that the army would have simply abandoned them. Artillery pieces, like wagons and other equipment, were tightly controlled government property that in accordance with regulations, had to be accounted for at each level of command. Damaged cannons were not sold as surplus to local civilians; regulations clearly required all unserviceable artillery pieces to be turned-in to the Ordinance Department for disposition.

The next cannon in Sanford's history shows up in 1880, during the opening of the South Florida Railroad. In celebration of the new Sanford to Orlando railroad, a special excursion train made the inaugural run pilling a half dozen flat-cars loaded with dignitaries. On the last car was a rowdy group with a cannon. Newspapers described how these revelers packed wads of moss in the cannon and at certain intervals would fire a salute. So, where's this canon come from? Maybe it was a leftover from the

See Cannon, Page 9

Cannon

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Civil War.

Prior to 1913, the city had a cannon that was used for special events. The official cannoneer was "Old Shad" a local black fisherman who always dressed in an elaborate military garb during celebrations. During the Fourth of July in 1913, Old Shad overloaded the gun with powder and blew it to pieces. Stores say that the pieces landed in the lake, and years later the muzzle was dredged up and used for the flagpole base. It is very possible that the flagpole's cannon is the same one that exploded in 1913. It's a good bet that it is also the same one used in 1880 on that first Sanford to Orlando train trip.

Still, nothing connects the flagpole cannon to Fort Mellon, but there is yet another curious twist in all of this cannon fodder. Following the incident in 1913, when the cannon blew up on the Fourth of July, Congressman L'Engle submitted a request for the federal government to provide two condemned bronze or brass cannons, with cannon balls, to Sanford. It appears that this request may have been approved, so what happened to those cannons? Now we have another mystery — could there be two bronze cannons, still in shipping crates, that are store in a dark, dusty corner somewhere in Sanford?

Lake Mary Store
L to R: Robyn Vivona, Peter Vivona (baby) Nick Vivona, Enza Vivona. Back" Charles Hammock and James Raymond, Store Manager.

Sanford Store
L to R: Laszlo Wagner, Kelly Brandon, Linda Call, Bruce Eamigh (manager), Brandi Marlow, Luis Ruiz.

History

Continued from Page 7

boat dock and a cluster of clapboard structures consisting of a makeshift hotel, general store, rowdy saloon and a few cracker shacks. The county seat remained here until 1856 when it was moved south to a small, backwoods, scrub town dubbed "Jernigan," later renamed Orlando.

During the Civil War, Mellonville suffered a supply shortage caused by the military blockade around Florida. Commercial shipping had all but stopped on the river but on a few occasions, both Confederate and Union boats "wooded-up" with fuel at Enterprise and Mellonville. The only significant military presence came after the war, from May through July 1866, when sixty black soldiers under two white officers, occupied Mellonville to enforce federal law. This detachment was part of the 33rd Infantry Regiment U.S.C.T. (U. S. Colored Troops).

Contrary to some accounts, Mellonville did not evolve into Sanford. In 1870, Henry Shelton Sanford purchased 12,548 acres from General Joseph Finegan that became known as the Sanford Grant.

Originally from Connecticut, Sanford was the former U. S. Minister to Belgium and a businessman who had caught the "orange fever." Although he knew little about growing oranges, Sanford saw big profits in Florida's emerging citrus industry. He cleared and planted an eighty-acre grove, called the St. Gertrude Grove, in the vicinity of the present Central Florida Regional Hospital.

For the most part, Henry Sanford was an absentee landlord and from the beginning he was plagued with labor problems. His contempt for Southerners offended the local whites and to make matters worse, his two local supervisors drank too much and failed to manage the workers. He tried to fix his problems by bringing in sixty blacks from Madison, Florida, which only led to racial conflicts. He then turned to Sweden and imported several groups of Swedish immigrants to work in his groves.

By 1873, Sanford had established his famous 145-acre Belair Grove and Experimental Gardens on Crystal Lake featuring 140 varieties of citrus that became the main source of nursery stock that launched Central Florida's citrus industry.

Henry Sanford's visions went beyond growing oranges. In 1871, he hired surveyor E. R. Trafford to layout a town that would be the "Gate City to South Florida." In 1875, he built one of Florida's most formal hotels; the 100-room Sanford House. The hotel and available land lured both business and tourists to the area. The St. John's River, being the lifeline to Jacksonville, played a vital role in turning Sanford's dream into reality. Eight years after starting with a sawmill, slaughterhouse and wharf, Sanford's town had eight steamboats docking each day.

On Sept. 29th, 1877, the city of Sanford was incorporated. The town's growing needs required money for things like waterworks, drainage, streets and schools. To attract capital, Henry Sanford turned to London, and along with Sir William MacKinnon, a Scottish industrialist, formed the Florida Land and Colonization Company (FLCC). As president and majority shareholder, Sanford transferred all his properties (except Belair Groves), to this company. Therefore, many decisions for running the new city were made by British investors in London.

In 1886, the FLCC hatched a plan to subdivide and sell a large tract of land west of Sanford. They planned a Roman Catholic settlement, called St. Joseph's Colony, aimed at selling land to German immigrants. As an added feature, a Belgium priest, Father Felix Swemberg was called upon to oversee this colony. The colony idea fell apart when only four families bought land. To make matters worse, Father Swemberg and four of the colonists died of yellow fever. In the decade that followed, German farmers continued to drift in and buy lands in this subdivision that later became the Lake Monroe community.

In 1880, former President Ulysses S. Grant came to town and turned the first spade of dirt that started construction of the South Florida Railroad. In 1887, Florida's last narrow gauge railroad, the Orange Belt, built a station at Sanford. This line, mostly built by Black and Italian immigrant labor, was started by a Russian named Peter Demens. Sanford was booming with two railroad stations, three steamboat docks and several fine hotels. In a short time, it had truly evolved into the Gate City to South Florida.

In September 1887, half the city from Magnolia to Sanford Avenue burned to the ground. The fire started in a bakery and quickly spread through the wooden buildings before it was extinguished. Like the mythical phoenix, Sanford rose from the ashes with new brick buildings that are part of today's Historic District.

Florida Land and Colonization Company advertisements attracted a melting pot of Germans, Bulgarians, Canadians, English, French, Russians, Greeks, Scandinavians, Slavs, Italians, plus an assortment of black and white American migrants, all looking for land or livelihoods. In the 1880s, for example, there were Cuban cigar makers, Swedish grove owners, German farmers, and even the Vee Lee Chinese laundry on First Street. Many of these people settled in their own ethnic communities. Prior to 1900, foreign languages were a common sound on the streets of Sanford. It is safe to say, the world has been well represented in the making of Sanford.

Sanford's citrus fame was wiped out in the "Big Freeze" of 1894-95. Many growers left the area, but a few recognized the potential of Sanford's fertile land for vegetable crops. One particular plant put Sanford in the agricultural spotlight; this plant was celery.

By the time Seminole County was formed from Orange County in 1913, Sanford had reached fame as America's Celery City. A Chamber of Commerce promotional brochure once boasted that Sanford grew "more celery than any place in the world." This may well have been true; considering that local farms were shipping an average of 6,000 boxcar loads of celery each year. With this much railroad activity, Sanford soon had one of the Southeast's busiest railroad yards and the second largest ice plant in the nation.

In 1942, the local economy began to change with the building of the Sanford Naval Air Station. While Sanford was turning into a navy town, celery farming was moving to the larger muck farms of South Florida. Sanford continued to cling to its title as the Celery City until only a few farms remained. The old fields that once fed the world have in recent years become valuable development land. Today, the only place you will find celery growing is a few stalks in the pioneer garden behind the Seminole County Student Museum.

From the Paleo-Indian to celery farmers and navy fliers, Sanford's past is a treasure chest filled with human events and achievements mixed with ethnic diversity. During the City's 125th Anniversary, you can revisit our interesting past; it's waiting for you in the downtown Historic District and in our three historical museums.

Bizarre

Continued from Page 6

ing to some who remember it, "...you could smell the thing nearly to Park Avenue."

During the 1920s and '30s, railroad whale shows were common walk-through exhibits across the country. Promoters would show their whales until the exhibit turned into a putrid mass of blubber, then dump the carcass along side the railroad tracks. In some parts of the country this became such a sanitation problem that some states passed laws prohibiting the discarding of whale remains along railroads.

Not to be outdone by big smelly whales and gangster cars, a genuine Japanese submarine was exhibited in March 1944 next to Touchton's Drugstore. A few years later, somebody displayed Adolf Hitler's staff car in the same spot and after that, a redwood tree that was made into a house, and so on and so on.

Unfortunately, Sanford doesn't get any of these exciting and educational exhibits anymore. Maybe the Human Fly will return during Sanford's 125th Anniversary and climb up City Hall.

The original building was built as a plumbing supply house, in 1946 and 47. Construction was done in spare time and after regular business hours by the original owner and plumbing apprentice, Mr. Bill Hawkins, who went on to form his own business, Hawkins Brothers Plumbing.

All of the wood in the rafters came from an old torn down building in Holopaw, Florida. The wood was heart of pine, and hauled in by truck. It is now as hard as concrete.

In the early 1950s, the front building area was added. It became a tractor sales and supply, with dirt floors.

From the early 50s to 1958, a gas station was added and local constable Slim Galloway ran a filling station, and the late A.K. Shoemaker worked as an attendant in his younger years. In 1956, "Mac" McRoberts retired to Sanford from West Virginia, leaving the tire company he had operated for 30 years. He went into business with Hunt, Strickland, Morrison Auto Sales for two years, until opening McRoberts Tire Supply in 1958.

In 1963, John Dickey, son-in-law, took over the McRoberts Tire Company. Mr. Dickey ran the company until 1990. Hatch Dickey, who, along with family members, worked at the business after high school and for many years, became the owner in 1990.

Celery

Continued from Page 5

with what is now State Road 46. Farmers were commonly referred to as *Eastside* or *Westside* farmers. In addition there were the Oviedo celery farms that were a part of Sanford's celery fame, some of which were the last to grow celery.

In 1913, celery may have contributed a little bit to turning the northern part of Orange County into the new county of Seminole. Local farmers complained about having to go all the way to Orlando to do business at the courthouse. Some believed that Orange County favored its citrus growers over vegetable farmers. This support led to the forming of Seminole County with Sanford as the county seat. Among the many names first proposed for the new county was *Celery County*.

Celery even found its way into published works. In 1908, J.V.Weeden published a poem titled "Sanford" in which each verse ended with the word "celery". In 1937, Sanford's celery fields were the scene for a popular children's book titled "Ezekiel". In 1924, the Chamber of Commerce printed a celery recipe book followed by many other recipe books turned out by civic organizations. Celery is still showing up in local print - the 2002 *Early Days of Seminole County*, published by the Seminole County Historical Commission, has a giant stalk of celery on its cover.

In 1926, with celery selling at an average price of $2.25 a crate, Sanford farmers brought in a record eight million dollars from the harvest. Farmers were looking at 1927 as being an even better year. Unfortunately, it turned out to be one of the worst on record. The Great Depression was reaching out for Sanford farmers and the future did not look good. These were hard years for both Sanford and its farmers. When the banks closed, many growers were financially wiped out and unable to pay their farm mortgages. Others managed to suffer through the lean years even though market prices hit bottom.

In an effort to boost market prices, some farmers plowed under a third of their crops. This was called *"The Plowed Under Policy"* but, it caused bitterness between growers when some plowed under their crops and others exploited the plan by marketing their entire production.

In 1933, the state established the Celery Investigations Laboratory on Celery Avenue in Sanford. In 1946, this facility became the Central Florida Experimental Station. The next year, the City of Sanford furnished 20 acres on French Avenue for building the State Farmers' Market. This inspired a trucking industry to emerge in Sanford. From this terminal, hundreds of trucks joined freight trains in hauling Sanford's farm products to markets all over the country. In spite of a big fire in 1957, the State Farmers' Market is still in use, with many of the original buildings still standing.

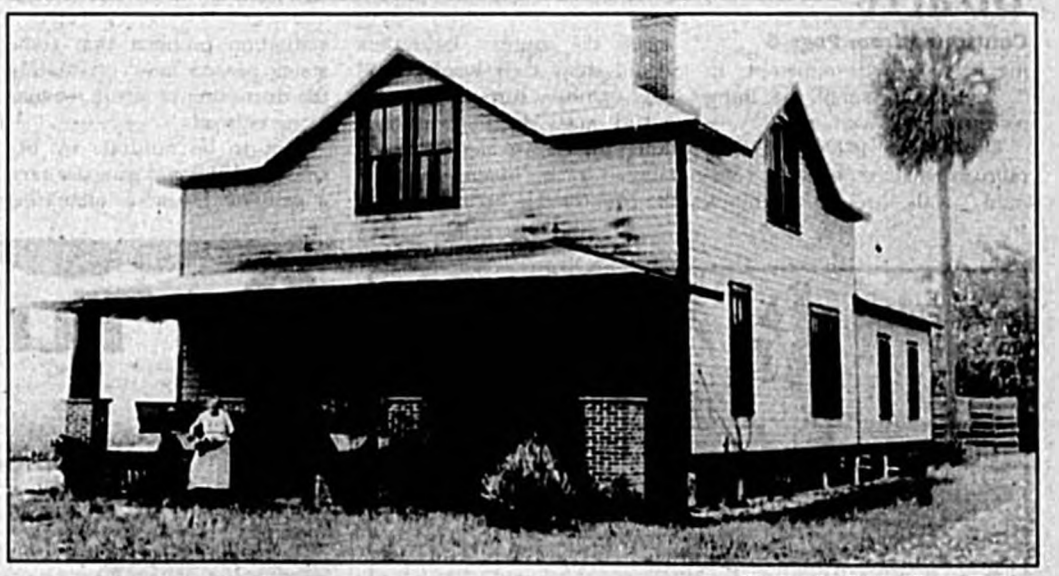

Photo submitted by Charlie Carlson

The home of celery farmer Carl Carlson, built in the summer of 1917 on St. Gertrude Avenue, now West 1st Street.

Sanford's celery days began waning in the 1940s. The economy gradually shifted away from agriculture with the coming of the Sanford Naval Air Station, which brought demands for different goods and services. Perhaps the big reason for celery's demise was mechanization. New harvesters, called "mule trains" could crawl across fields cutting and packing celery faster than any man or mule or tractor. This meant that larger fields could be planted and harvested. Sanford farms only averaged about ten acres. Celery growing began drifting to the larger muck lands in South Florida.

By the 1970s, farming in Seminole County was gone forever, except for a few small farmers selling produce at roadside stands. In 1974, Sanford's motto *"The Celery City"* was officially changed to *"The Friendly City."* But if you know what to look for, you can still see evidence of Sanford's glorious celery days. Go to the Sanford Museum, but before entering, look up at the top of each pillar at the entrance ... yep, that's stalks of celery up there, reminding us of *when celery was king*.

River

Continued from Page 3

When the H. T. Baya Line featured an Italian band on board, the Post Line countered by hiring a German band to play for their passengers. At one point the two rivals began cutting fares until both were offering free passage to Sanford. Needless to say, both companies nearly went bankrupt.

Originally, steamboats landed at Enterprise and Doyle's Dock at Mellonville. Sanford was treated as a secondary freight stop. Sanford consisted of a wharf, sawmill, slaughterhouse, and a couple of stores. In August 1871, a hurricane demolished the wharf and most of the buildings. Swedish laborers spent three days in the snake-infested waters of Lake Monroe trying to salvage the scattered lumber.

Less than a decade later, certainly by 1880, Sanford had more vessels docking at its waterfront than Enterprise or Mellonville. Henry Sanford once casually projected that his town would be "like New York harbor with ocean vessels." This never happened, but between 1880 and 1890, steamboat traffic was so thick, that at any time, from any spot on the river, you could have seen four or five big boats chugging to and from Sanford.

In 1882, as a result of competition from independent steamboats cutting rates, and the expectations of railroads being built from Sanford to points south, Frederick DeBary and H. T. Baya combined their fleets to make The DeBary and Baya Merchants Line. This was the largest steamboat line on the river. When Baya left the company in 1887, the name was changed to DeBary Merchants Line.

Sanford's 1885 waterfront had four long steamboat piers, several minor docks, and a wharf at the sawmill. The railroad was extended on one 600-foot pier so passengers could transfer from boat to train without touching the ground.

For those remaining in town, Sanford offered several first class hotels, including the elegant Sanford House, plus several less expensive hotels and boarding houses. A typical schedule shows passenger boats departing the city wharf at 4:10 p.m. in the afternoon and arriving at 7:00 a.m. the next morning in Jacksonville. A $3.25 ticket covered your travel, stateroom and meals.

Sanford was the shipping point for local products such as oranges, winter vegetables, turpentine, cotton, lumber and barrels of fish. Before the railroads, steamboats carried the mail. Research calculates that in 1885, mail traveled between Jacksonville and Sanford just as fast as it does today. The postage was cheaper too.

In 1889, the Clyde St. John's River Line bought the Debary Line and made Sanford their main port of call. In 1890 the Clyde Line fleet included three of the best-known boats in local lore; the City of Jacksonville; the Frederick DeBary and Osceola. Perhaps the greatest steamer to run the river was the Queen of the St. Johns with 52 staterooms. The 185 foot long Queen was actually a western-style steamboat built in Cincinnati.

Two boats have been named "City of Sanford." The first one was an 1880 side-wheeler that ran for two years until it burned at Point La Vista. The second "City of Sanford" was a 1930 steel-hulled, twin engine, freight boat that could carry 270 tons of cargo. While unloading in 1933, it sank at the city dock but was later re-floated.

Railroad magnate Henry B. Plant knew that steamboats served a profitable purpose where there were no railroads. He placed two steamboats on the river in the 1880s as the People's Line while at the same time keeping his eye on future plans to extend his Plant System railroad in South Florida.

In 1884, with the building of the railroads, Plant's freighter, Chattahoochee, was the main carrier of iron rails and crossties to Sanford.

The first train engine of the South Florida Railroad was transported to Sanford by barge. In a sense, steamboats were carrying their own cross, for it was the railroads that eventually led to their demise.

Sanford continued to be a river freight terminal well after the last regular passenger boat made its run in 1934. The Lovett Grocery Company had a large distribution warehouse and wharf at the end of French Avenue. Supplies were shipped here by boat from Jacksonville for distribution by truck to Central Florida stores. New automobiles were transported to dealerships by riverboat as late as 1932.

The motorcar age created a market for gasoline and oil. Sanford's position on the river made it an ideal location for oil companies to build distribution terminals. Standard Oil established the first bulk oil facility in 1912. By 1940, almost every major oil company, Gulf, Texaco, Cities Service, Sunoco, Sinclair, Pure, Seaboard Oil, Amoco, and Phillips, all had bulk storage terminals in Sanford. There were three pipeline piers on the lakefront with lines running to 36 upright and horizontal bulk storage tanks. From Jacksonville's ocean terminals, big barges hauled oil to these facilities for distribution by truck to filling stations. The river had made Sanford the "gas station" for Central Florida.

The St. John's River has an important place in each chapter of Sanford's history. The big boats and barges are now a thing of the past, but the river continues to be one of Sanford's greatest natural assets for tourism and for recreation. As long as the St. John's River continues to flow, Sanford will always be a river city.

Scandal

Continued from Page 1

with Sam playing the saxophone. One thing that Sam could not get out of his blood was his love of acting, and he decided to leave for New York City to see if he could win a part in a Broadway show.

Bright lights

Upon arriving in New York City, he was immediately cast in the Broadway play, "Street Scene." In 1933, he caught the eye of author Erskine Caldwell, who had just written a new, controversial play by the name of "Tobacco Road." Sam was cast in the part of Dude Lester.

The play was a huge success and Sam went on to set a Broadway record of 1,151 straight appearances on Broadway in "Tobacco Road." Sam was also featured in a Ripley's Believe It or Not cartoon, for throwing a ball on stage over 25,000 times, without a miss. Sam had to eat 3 raw turnips, every night on stage. He later figured that he had eaten nearly 4,000 raw turnips on stage, while performing in "Tobacco Road."

In 1936, "Tobacco Road" was still playing on Broadway, but Sam wrote to the *Sanford Herald* that he was quitting the show, to begin appearing in another new, premiering Broadway show. This time, Sam had caught the attention of author John Steinbeck, who had just written "Of Mice and Men," and he wanted Sam to play the part of Curley, when it opened on Broadway. Sam went on to play for several years in that part.

By this time, Sam Byrd was considered Sanford's "home town boy." His name was in the *Sanford Herald* almost daily, for many years. The folks in Sanford never referred to the fact that he was born in North Carolina. He was always referred to as "Sanford raised—Sam Byrd."

That book

In 1940, after becoming a big star on Broadway, Sam decided to take a break and return to Sanford, for an extended visit. Sam spent a little more than a year in Sanford, catching up with family and old friends. Finding so many changes in Sanford, he decided to record his memories of Sanford, starting in 1920 through 1940. These memories became "Small Town South."

In March of 1942, Sam reported to Charleston, as a Navy lieutenant. One month later, his book, "Small Town South" was published. Although the book was tame by today's standards, the people of Sanford were outraged. Sam was very careful to change the name of Sanford to "Onora." He also changed all of the character's names, though people who lived in Sanford were well aware of who the characters represented. For example, Forrest Lake's name in the book was "Simon Rivers."

The story of "Small Town South" focused on Forrest Lake's business practices in town. Lake built the Mayfair Hotel (now the New Tribes Mission) and ran one of the biggest banks in Sanford.

During the 1930s the editor of the Sanford Herald wrote numerous articles about Lake's bank and demanded an audit been done to account for the money. No audit ever occurred. At one point, Sanford residents were so offended by the articles that a group snuck down to the Herald offices in the middle of the night and dug a huge grave in the front lawn. By daybreak, people saw the grave with an effigy of the editor hanging over the massive hole.

The bank eventually closed and its customers lost everything. Lake was indicted and served time in Raiford State Prison for embezzlement.

Not welcome

The townsfolk were embarrassed. They had ignored the warnings and preferred not to mention the incident. With the release of "Small Town South," Sanford residents felt Sam was airing their secrets to the entire world. Every word Sam wrote in his book was true and documented in the Sanford Herald, but the town thought that Sam was writing specifically about them.

When Sam finished his Navy Officer training in September of 1942, "Small Town South" had been out just six months. He had planned to spend his two-week leave in Sanford, but friends in Sanford advised him not to come home because local reaction to his book was so negative. In an interview and a letter to the editor,. Sam told the Sanford Herald that he would spend his leave in New York City.

"Small Town South" won the Houghton Mifflin Life-in-America series award. Sam also was awarded two different Guggenheim Fellowship Awards for creative writing in 1946 and 1948. The book was well received in the literary community, but not by the people of Sanford. The favorite son of Sanford had become the prodigal son no one wanted to claim.

Battlefield promotion

During World War II, every man who left Sanford for the war was given a big send-off. Those who returned were welcomed home as heroes. Not Sam. Few in Sanford cared to remember him, much less honor "that man" for his heroics during the war.

Sam had trained in the Navy, to be a Transportation Officer. He was sent to England, to train for the Invasion of Normandy, on Omaha Beach. On the early morning hours of D-Day, June 6th, 1944, the Navy sent ahead the 7th Beach Battalion, of which Sam was the Transportation Officer. The Beach Battalion's job would be to secure the beach, then direct the landing of all ships and amphibious landing craft, upon Omaha Beach. The original Beach Master had been training his men for this mission for months in the staging area in England.

Upon hitting the beach, there was immediate heavy enemy fire, and after a long, slow crawl to the beach, the Beach Master froze in his tracks. He could not move or speak. The men were dying all around him, but he did not move. Fearing that the Beach Master himself would be killed, the men quickly dug a foxhole and laid him down in it.

The men looked around for the next highest officer in charge, which was Lt. Sam Byrd. Sam was told that he would have to take command as the Beach Master, direct the chaos, set up the field hospital, and see that the dead and wounded were removed to safety. More importantly he was charged with directing the landing of the fleet of ships that were approaching for the Invasion of Normandy.

Sam had no official combat training, but immediately went to work, doing all of these things and more. He stayed awake for three straight days, trying to clear the beach of wreckage and the devastation of the American soldiers who were killed or lying wounded on the beach. The landing craft were coming in hourly waves and all of the wreckage from the previous landings, had to be cleared and coordinated, every hour on the hour.

It would be almost impossible today to picture the carnage and chaos that morning on Omaha Beach, but Sam accepted the challenge. He and the brave men of the 7th Naval Beach Battalion set up their sections accordingly. He commanded foxholes to be dug and weapons set up to protect the men who were still landing through the next 24 hours. He somehow located food and medical supplies for the men on the beach, even though most everything had been lost during the landing.

As the hours, then days, passed and the troops moved inland, the wrecked and beached ships were beyond belief. All of this had to be cleared and disposed. The 7th Beach Battalion, with Sam as the acting Beach Master, stayed behind on the beach for 21 days, to complete this task.

On the 10th day, a strong storm with hurricane force winds blew in, and further littered the beach. After a few days, the men were finally able to remove the original Beach Master, who had frozen upon the landing and send him back to England for treatment of shock. No one ever heard from him again, nor knew what happened to him, after that.

Sam did such a heroic job on the beach that he received the Navy's Bronze Star "for clearing his territory of casualties and debris of war, and in landing men and supplies on Omaha Beach." He also received the Army's Distinguished Unit Badge. When the 7th Beach Battalion's job was finished in Normandy, they returned to England for further training and staging. Sam would remain as the Beach Master, with the 7th Beach Battalion. He remained in that position, until the end of the war.

Photo submitted by Julius Shoulars

Lt. Sam Byrd served as the Beach Master for the 7th Naval Beach Battalion on Omaha Beach during D-Day.

Pacific action

The USS Karnes was commissioned and launched on December 3, 1944. At this time, Sam was appointed Beach Master with the USS Karnes. In January 1945, the Karnes engaged in amphibious training in the San Diego area.

Sam and about 25 men from the A-1 Platoon of the 7th Naval Beach Battalion were transferred to the USS Karnes (APA 175). The Karnes immediately left for duty against the Japanese. After heavy duty in the Pacific, the Karnes participated in the occupation of Sasebo, the third largest Japanese naval base, from September 22 to 25, 1945. The ship's beach party operated Green Beaches 1 and 2, following the fourth wave ashore. Sam accepted the surrender of the seaplane base, at Sasebo, from the Japanese commander. Following the end of the war, the Karnes sailed through the Panama Canal, to Norfolk, Virginia for decommission in April of 1946.

Julius Shoulars of Norfolk, VA, served with Sam during the entire period, from the staging in England for the D-Day landing, continuing with the service upon the USS Karnes in the Pacific Theater. Mr. Shoulars has served as the advisor for the military information in this story from his personal collection and provided the photograph of Sam on Omaha Beach following the D-Day landing.

Newspaper editor

Following his discharge from the Navy, Sam entered the Naval Reserve, for several more years. This allowed him time to finish his second book, "Hurry Home To My Heart," which was published in 1946. Sam has said in interviews that he began writing this book, while still on the Karnes. Sam returned to New York, pursuing once again his career on Broadway, except this time, acting as a producer of Broadway shows.

In early 1954, Sam was offered the job of editor of the Weekly Gazette in La Grange, N.C. He jumped at the chance the edit the newspaper. In September 1954, Sam injured his leg in the printing plant of the newspaper. The injury grew progressively worse, after the accident. In October he entered Lenoir Memorial Hospital and was later transferred to Duke Hospital, where leukemia was diagnosed.

His health did improve slightly, allowing him to return to home for a short while. He was forced to return to Duke Hospital though, shortly after that, where he remained until his death on Nov. 15, 1955. Sam was 47 years old, at the time of his death. He was survived by his wife, Patricia Bolam-Byrd.

Sam always felt that Sanford was his home. He had many accomplishments in his life: football star at Seminole High School, starring roles on Broadway, heroics on D-Day at Normandy and the battle against the Japanese on the USS Karnes. Sam was a Sanford "home town boy," though few remember him that way today. For most, Sam Byrd remains "that man who wrote that book."

The complete story and photo history of Sam Byrd, written by Christine Kinlaw-Best, will be published soon. It will be available at the Sanford Museum.

Railroad

Continued from Page 4

While the J.T.& K.W. was putting the final touches on its track to Sanford, the Orange Belt Railway was completing its line from Oakland to Monroe Station. A year later, the OBRR ran four miles of track, parallel to the J.T. & K.W. track, from Monroe Station to Sanford. Near Sanford the OBRR tracks left the J.T. & K.W. line and followed a course that is presently west Commercial Avenue.

In 1887, the Orange Belt built its own depot making Sanford a two-station city. One reason for this depot may have been because the Orange Belt's narrow-gauge cars being incompatible with the standard-gauge rails at the Sanford station. There was another problem too, since the Orange Belt's turntable was at Monroe Station, all of its trains had to back all the way to Sanford. The Orange Belt eventually had 118 miles of track from Sanford to St. Petersburg making it the nation's longest narrow-gauge line.

In 1887, The J.T.& K.W. opened the Sanford and Lake Eustis Railway that ran through New Upsala, Paola, Markham, and crossed the Wekiva to serve depots at Sorrento, Mount Dora and Tavares. In the 1940s and '50s, the Atlantic Coast Line ran a short train on this track that locals dubbed "the Pea Vine Short." The recently completed GreeneWay Expressway is built along a stretch of the old S. & L.E. rail bed.

In 1887, the Plant Investment Company built the PICO Hotel across from Sanford's Union Station on Railroad Avenue [North Oak Avenue]. This fancy brick hotel with a Turkish design, served as Sanford's terminal hotel for steamboat and train passengers. Adjacent to the hotel was a rectangular building housing the PICO headquarters, a restaurant and stores. These structures can still be seen at 209 North Oak and 200 North Park avenues.

In 1899, the Plant System built a hospital on West 9th Street that cared for railroad employees until 1904, when it was moved to Waycross, Georgia. The original downtown Union Passenger Station was closed in 1913 and in recent times was torn down to make room for a new bank building.

One block west, facing First Street is Sanford's early freight depot with a railroad historical marker that has a good map of the area's early rail system.

By 1900, Henry B. Plant had gained controlled of all railroads servicing Sanford. In 1902, Plant's railroad empire was merged into the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad Company. The ACL expanded the Plant System repair shops that were located at French Avenue and Sixth Street. This place had a locomotive roundhouse, turntable, telegraph office, coal bins, water towers, and the largest switching yard south of Jacksonville.

In 1908, five big celery growers organized the Sanford and Everglades Railroad, [the S & E], nicknamed the "Slow and Easy." This was to be a 250-mile line to Lake Okeechobee, but was really a ploy to make the A.C.L. officials think they were facing competition.

For years the ACL had refused to build sidetracks into celery fields for the shipping convenience of growers. To keep ahead of any would-be competitor, the A.C.L. soon extended branch lines into the farming areas. In 1913, the Sanford and Everglades line, also called the Celery Belt Line, was bought out by the Atlantic Coast Line.

Sanford also had a streetcar line, called The Sanford Traction Company that began operating in April 1909. The streetcar was two gasoline-powered trolley cars, coupled together, that made eight daily roundtrips. The line ran from Oak Avenue, down the middle of First Street to Sanford Avenue, then out past Moore's Station to Cameron City.

In 1913, the Atlantic Coast Line opened a new passenger station on West 9th Street, complete with a restaurant and Railway Express agency. This site is now Coast Line Park.

By 1920, most of Sanford's railroad activity was on the west side of town. The Atlantic Coast Line for many years had their main car shops across from the present Amtrak station. Slightly north of the shops was Rand Yards, so named for Frederic Rand, one of the South Florida Railroad's founding fathers. This was one of the Southeast's largest switching yards. At the peak of Sanford's agricultural days daily, northbound, freight trains left these yards pulling hundreds of freight cars loaded with local produce.

Sanford served as a base for railroad crews for many years and was home to every kind of railroad employee from engineers to wrecking crews to conductors. Many old Sanford families have a railroad heritage, some with several generations of railroad men. An old Sanford Herald editorial once noted, "In Sanford you're either a farmer, fisherman, railroad man, or you make your living off the first three."

In addition to carrying freight and passengers, trains brought entertainment to Sanford. Between 1912 and 1930, several circuses, minstrel shows, and one Wild West show, came to town on trains.

Among the big shows were Sig Sautelle's Circus and Menagerie that paraded from its train on the Oak Avenue siding, to the show grounds at 3rd Street and Palmetto Ave. From New Orleans came The Silas Green Show, America's only black-owned railroad minstrel show that entertained several times between 1925 and 1935. The last railroad show was the 101 Ranch & Wild West Show that, in February 1949, played the Seminole High School football field on French Avenue.

Sanford continued to make railroad history in 1971 when it became the southern terminal for the Auto-train. The first train carrying passengers and their autos arrived from Lorton, Virginia on Dec. 6, 1971.

The days of long freight trains hauling celery have been replaced by sleek passenger trains hauling tourists. The tracks may be new, but the route is the same used over a century ago by old "cabbage head" locomotives chugging their way to Sanford. To some extent, Sanford is still a railroad hub, but its grand days of railroading have faded into the past. Still, there is one fact that cannot be ignored — Central Florida's railroad history began in Sanford.

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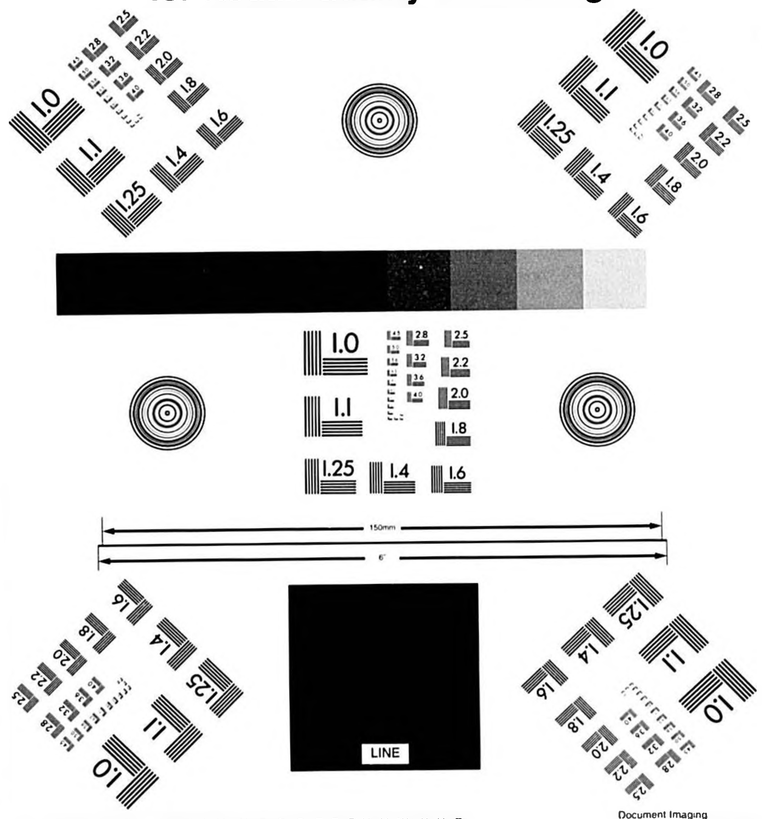

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