

Preservation News

A PUBLICATION OF THE LEE TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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(239) 939-PAST



LEE TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION, INC.

"Preservation...the ultimate recycling."

THE MISSION OF LEE TRUST IS TO PROMOTE HISTORIC PRESERVATION THROUGH EDUCATION, ADVOCACY AND ACQUISITION.

To Revitalize, Restore

I've been reminded lately of a distressing fact: The United States has no comprehensive national urban policy. It could even be argued that the last time we saw evidence of a serious federal commitment to revitalize our cities through legislation and on-the-ground action was during the heyday of urban renewal 40 years ago-and all of us who lived through that era would agree, I'm sure: That program was hardly a model of success.

President Obama's new Office of Urban Affairs offers hope that the long period of federal neglect of our cities may be ending. If so, and if the day is approaching when significant government resources will be committed to restoring sustainable economic vitality to our cities, keep this in mind: As a tool for revitalization, historic preservation works.

Indeed, in the absence of an overall national policy, cities from coast to coast have launched their own revitalization programs. Happily, many of them have achieved impressive success-and almost without exception, those that have done so have made preservation a keystone of their efforts.

In Southern California, preservation has driven the rebirth of the once-derelict Gaslamp Quarter in San Diego, the development of loft apartments in historic buildings in downtown Los Angeles, and the rise of Palm Springs as a top destination for fans of midcentury modern architecture. The same thing has happened in Minneapolis, where preservation has been a major factor in the city's rediscovery of its long-neglected riverfront; in Miami Beach, where an unmatched collection of rehabbed Art Deco buildings now draws throngs of tourists; and in Baltimore, Denver, and numerous other cities, where preservation has turned once-dilapidated downtown areas into lively, appealing places to live and work.

The impact of preservation is on display in plenty of lesser-known places, too-including Dubuque, Iowa, which I visited recently. Dubuque is a long-time participant in the National Trust's Main Street program, which has used preservation to revitalize traditional business districts in more than 2,200 communities. Now, building on its Main Street experience, Dubuque has launched an ambi-

tious effort to revitalize its historic warehouse district-a project that will create housing and commercial space in 28 formerly vacant or underutilized old buildings. A model of sustainability, the project also aims to improve energy efficiency, reduce water usage, and avoid other harmful environmental consequences.

We need a visionary national urban policy that commits the federal government to a comprehensive effort to restore America's cities to vigorous health. Historic preservation must be a central component of this policy. We've seen it work in scores of cities already, and it can work in many others as well.



Richard Moe

*Reprinted with permission
"The National Trust for Preservation" May/June 2009*

ARTWALK

We would like to extend a very huge Thank You to the Bar Association Bistro for their continued support for Art Night. Art Night is the first Friday of every month. There is always a featured artist at The Bar Association.

In June our artist was ALIS JORDAN from ALI CAT STUDIOS. A beautiful one of a kind pair of earrings was donated to our cause. In July our artist Sandy Kavouras, an artistic Floral Designer, donated a hand made floral arrangement.

Raffle tickets are sold throughout the evening to win the art piece created that night. All raffle ticket proceeds benefit the Lee Trust For Historic Preservation.

The Bar Association is now open for Dinner. Their famous \$10.00 dinners are wonderful.

The Florida Historical Society ANNUAL AWARDS

"The Florida Life of Thomas Edison" by Michele Albion received *The Remert Patrick Award* at last month's Florida Historical Society Annual Meeting.

The award is given annually to a scholarly book on a Florida history topic. On receiving the award, Albion said, "I'm still a little stunned." "The award is generally given to strictly academic works. My book, though completely historically documented, is written for the interested lay reader. I was pleased that the selection committee was willing to extend consideration to a book outside the traditional ranks of academia."

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Lee Trust for Historic
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was founded in 1993
and is dedicated to preserving
and developing
the heritage of Lee County
and its municipalities.

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Lee Trust publishes
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The Florida Trust For Historic Preservation, Inc. 2009 PRESERVATION AWARDS PROGRAM

by Linda Stevenson

Each year the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation recognizes significant contributions to the preservation of Florida's historic resources through its Annual Preservation Awards Program.

Congratulations to Linda Stevenson of Linda Stevenson Architects for the restoration of the OLGA SCHOOL in Fort Myers for one of the 2009 Awards for Restoration/Rehabilitation - Outstanding Achievement.

The Olga School is individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Located on South Olga Road, on approximately three acres of land, its bucolic setting retains much of the character of the early community of Olga, although suburban development is quickly altering the rural surroundings.

The community of Olga was settled by the 1880's. As the population experienced the rapid growth that characterized the "boom" period of the early to mid 1920s, Lee County undertook a major expansion of its educational facilities. The new schools were all designed in the "Spanish style", incorporating large, well-lit classrooms, auditoriums and modern educational equipment. The Olga School served as the community's educational facility from 1927 until 1938.

The building has been an important part of Olga for the last eight decades and community sentiment ran high for its successful restoration and continued use.

We were fortunate to have had the memories of a few former students at the school, as well as younger members of the community who either attended church functions or community parties, events and meetings at the building. These memories became oral histories and were invaluable to our research. By comparing this information with the physical evidence discovered as we examined the layers of the architectural features, the story of the building's evolution came to life.

By successfully restoring this facility, Lee County has ensured the building's continued contribution to the life of the community of Olga.



Pictured giving the award to Linda Stevenson, of Linda Stevenson Architects, is Chris Pendelton of the Edison-Ford Winter Estates. Also pictured is Howard Wheeler, and Commissioner Tammy Hall and Barbara Manzo.

Historic Preservation & the City of Fort Myers

by Jared Beck, Historic Preservation Planner, City of Fort Myers

Originally established as a Seminole War Post in 1841 known as Fort Harvie, Fort Myers began transformation into a farming and cattle community in the late 1860's and 1870's. By the mid 1880's Fort Myers began developing a commercial core, and gaining national notoriety for local recreational fishing.

In 1885, Fort Myers incorporated and in 1887 Lee County was carved from Monroe County. Following the opening of a rail line connecting Fort Myers to Punta Gorda in 1904, a series of building booms fostered several new residential subdivisions beyond Downtown, including Dean Park, Edison Park, and Seminole Park. Over time the original wooden buildings of downtown were replaced with masonry and brick buildings, many of which still exist today. Fort Myers even saw its first sky scraper Downtown in 1924 with the seven-story addition to the Franklin Arms Hotel. 1924 also marked the construction of a wooden bridge spanning the Caloosahatchee, aptly named the Edison Bridge, after our most famous winter resident. Although the boom times came and went throughout the years, Fort Myers grew to become the governmental, commercial, and social center of Southwest Florida.

Today the landscape of Southwest Florida has changed dramatically, however our history and dedication to our colorful past continues. To help celebrate, promote, and preserve that past, the City of Fort Myers has an established Historic Preservation program to better serve our historic neighborhoods and landmarks.

There are many components within the Historic Preservation program, among them are the significant benefits to those who own property within historic districts or historic landmarks. Currently the City has four designated historic districts; Edison Park, Dean Park, Downtown, and Seminole Park, along with nearly 20 designated historic landmarks that have the benefit of being a part of our Historic Preservation program.

Among the benefits of being a designated district or landmark include: access to staff as a resource, increased sense of community, tax exemptions, recycling of community resources, stabilization and improvement of property values, promotes heritage tourism, attracts additional funding sources for community based projects, preserves historic resources through a review process, allows an opportunity for adaptive reuse, stimulates economic revitalization in older commercial areas, preservation of the City's past, provides jobs for skilled trades, ensures historic character of the neighborhood is maintained, and more...

The City is actively speaking to individuals or neighborhoods that may be interested in learning more about Historic Preservation, or potentially achieving a district or landmark designation. If you would like to learn more about Historic Preservation within the City, or if you would like someone to speak to your neighborhood, please contact: Gina Taylor, Executive Director, 239-939-PAST, leepreservation@embarqmail.com or Jared Beck, Historic Preservation Planner, 239-321-7977, jbeck@cityftmyers.com, at Lee Trust for Historic Preservation, City of Fort Myers, FL.



Edison Park

by Jared Beck, *Historic Preservation Planner, City of Fort Myers*

By 1866 the former Union army fort known as Fort Myers (previously known as Fort Harvie) on the southern bank of the Caloosahatchee received its first non-army settlers, led by Captain Manuel A. Gonzalez.

In 1872, under provisions of the Homestead Act, Captain Gonzalez moved his family from the fort and claimed a homestead one mile south along the river, making Gonzalez Fort Myers' first permanent settler. Running through the middle of his tract was a winding tree-lined creek, which he aptly named "Gonzalez Creek", today known as "Manuel's Branch" which represents the southern boundary of what would become Edison Park as we know today.

During the next fifty years, many bought and sold the Gonzalez properties, including a particularly notable three year period when the property was purchased in 1909 by New York Senator Charles A. Stadler, a nationally known millionaire who built one of Florida's finest homes south of Edison Park along the river, then again in 1911 by John M. Dean, a Rhode Island furniture maker and developer of the exclusive Dean Park subdivision just east of downtown, and again in 1912 when purchased by the Fort Myers Development Company, comprised of prominent local businessmen.

The face of Edison Park changed in March of 1925, when the Fort Myers Development Company sold the property to St. Petersburg developer C. Perry Snell, and his brother, local attorney G.E. Snell. The Snells, already developing property along the river, offered a portion of the plat for sale, and on April 7, 1925, the northern third of the property was sold to New Homes Development Company, which was soon headed by James D. Newton. Although Newton was only 20 at the time, he had already completed the nearby subdivision, Lovejoy Park.



Together the Snells and Newton drew up a plat of lots and curved roads, naming the subdivision "Edison Park" in honor of their famous neighbor. The plat was recorded within Lee County in January of 1926, with Newton owning the 55 acres to the north, and the Snells owning the southern two-thirds.

Although the Snells portion of the development remained relatively vacant and incomplete, Newton proceeded with his share of the property. In early 1926, Newton's vision began defining the influence and character of the rest of Edison Park. He included deed restrictions that stated all architecture was to be of Moorish, Spanish, Italian or American modifications. In addition, every homeowner was given a unique guarantee for the time that ensured property owners of asphalt streets with curbing, sidewalks, landscaping, and ornamental street lighting and street signs. By the end of 1926, Newton's amenities were in place, including telephone service.

On April 7, 1926, one year after purchasing

Edison Park, Newton held the grand opening ceremony dedicating its main entrance on McGregor Boulevard. The backdrop to the entrance was a sculpture of Aphrodite, goddess of water, which was unveiled by Mrs. Edison and served as a part of the impressive fountain flanked by ornate columns and arched walkways.

Toward the end of 1926, the economic bust was felt and Newton was forced to trade lots in Edison Park for labor and equipment. Over the next few years, the Edison Park School opened, lot sales increased slightly, and four new homes were constructed.

Unfortunately, the onset of the Depression forced both Snell and Newton to sell the majority of the remaining Edison Park lots through public auction to pay off delinquent taxes. Nearly all those who purchased the lots were investors looking to acquire large tracts for future development. From 1929 through 1936, the only structure built within Edison Park was the Community Congregational Church, on land paid for by the Edison's.



A "pre-war" boom in the late 1930's helped spur construction of 27 additional homes and just before the war, a 39-acre tract along Cleveland Avenue and Manuel's Branch were acquired by Lee County which significantly altered the

original Edison Park plat by eliminating ten additional streets. During the war construction slowed nationwide, and from 1942 through 1945 only six more homes were built. The post war boom spawned growth in Edison Park, particularly on the Snell property, and by the late 1940's, 27 more

homes were constructed. During the 1950's, 69 more homes were built and during the 1960's & 1970's the remaining lots were developed with primarily single family homes constructed in the style of the time.

Edison Park was designated as the first Historic District in Fort Myers in November, 1995. Today, it remains one of our most historic and loved neighborhoods in Fort Myers, and has retained the charm and character that make it such a special place to live.

New Board Member — Steve Stage

The Lee Trust For Historical Preservation is pleased to announce that Steve Stage has joined the board of directors. Steve was the former President of the board of the Edison Festival of Light. He has also agreed to be involved with the tours and transportation committee for the upcoming Florida Trust For Historical Preservation Conference in 2010.



Steve has an extensive knowledge in the Construction Industry and became respectful of Historic Restoration while working on the re-hab of the Miami River Inn, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Steve is a State Certified Building Contractor, the former President of the local chapter of Construction Specification Institute, a State of Florida Wind Mitigation Specialist, and an Independent Contractor for FEMA for the Mitigation of Perils as well as a Construction Document Technologist. The LTFHP will use Steve's local knowledge and his ability to garner sponsorships to promote historic preservation in Lee County through education, advocacy and acquisition.

Florida Trust for Historic Preservation 2009 CONFERENCE at Mar-a-Lago

The Florida Trust For Historic Preservation conference in May 2009 was held in Palm Beach County. Over 460 people attended.

Lee County will be the host site for the next conference in 2010. The planning committees are working diligently, securing venues, arranging special events and securing speakers for the workshops to make our upcoming conference a huge success.

The closing event in Palm Beach was at Donald Trump's historic Mar-a-Lago club built in 1924 by Marjorie Post. The photo is of Mrs Eunice Bremner and her daughter Alexandra Bremner at the closing reception outside at Mar-a-Lago.



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Lee Trust is a nonprofit organiza-
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and assist our community when his-
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have a Revolving Fund Program to buy
threatened historic structures. We also
provide assistance and seek to educate
the public about our community
heritage. Our primary sources of
funding are membership dues, gifts
and fundraising events organized by
volunteers.

Membership donations are tax
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at LeePreservation@embarqmail.com
or (239) 939-PAST.

**You Can Join At
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