

# Preservation News

A Publication of the Lee Trust for Historic Preservation • Spring, 2004

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## The Flint Home - A REVOLVING FUND *Project Update*

For years, the Lee Trust has been slowly building its Revolving Fund, and now the group's first-ever revolving fund project is well on its way to a successful completion.

The Flint Home is an early 20th century two-story wood frame house that sits at the corner of Buckingham and Bird roads in east Lee County. The house sat vacant for decades, a victim of time, weather and termites. In 2001, it was barely visible behind the weeds and overgrowth, and was in danger of demolition. Fortunately for this rare sample of vernacular farmhouse architecture, Bonita Bay and Lee Trust were able to work together, ultimately putting the Trust's Revolving Fund to use for the first time. (See Preservation News, Issue Spring 2003 at [www.leetrust.org](http://www.leetrust.org))

"Most communities with a viable historic preservation program have a non-profit revolving fund as a key component. This enables regulatory agencies, owners of historic resources and future buyers of those resources to work together," said Gloria Sajgo, principal planner with Lee County Government's historic preservation program.

When Bonita Bay Corporation found out that the Flint Home was a historic resource within the boundaries of the proposed Verandah development, the corporation was presented with a dilemma. The house needed substantial rehabilitation, but Bonita Bay had no expertise in the area of historic preservation. In addition, it seemed that finding a suitable buyer who would rehabilitate the house



**With fresh paint and a new roof, in March 2004 the Flint Home is undergoing window restoration.**

while preserving its historic integrity could be accomplished only as a long-term project, and Bonita Bay could not commit to such an extensive marketing plan. While the Lee County Historic Preservation Board wanted the Flint Home preserved, it was sensitive to Bonita Bay's problem and clearly saw that something more than just a regulatory solution was needed.

Luckily, the problem was solved when the Lee Trust agreed to take possession of the property until it could

be sold to a suitable buyer. (This is exactly what revolving funds do: they take possession of endangered historic resources and then implement a long term marketing strategy to find a suitable buyer, who will be a steward of the property.) Bonita Bay Corporation immediately saw the value of the service provided by the Lee Trust and supported it whole heartedly by donating the Flint House and 3/4 acre land. This generous gesture enabled the Lee Trust to sell the Flint House to a sym-

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**The mission of Lee Trust is to preserve the sites and buildings of historical, archaeological and architectural significance to Lee County through both advocacy and acquisition.**

## Lee Trust for Historic Preservation

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

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Preservation News is published quarterly in March, June, September, and December.

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## The Boomer House in Estero



**The Boomer House is an example of "shingle" style architecture.**

Recent action taken by the state of Florida will not only protect the environment, it will also help preserve an important historic property in Estero.

The Florida Acquisition and Restoration Council voted unanimously on February 6, 2004 to buy the 100-acre Boomer property, which is south of Broadway and west of U.S. 41 in the unincorporated community of Estero. Funds to buy the land came from the Florida Forever land conservation program. Lee county officials have also pledged to help as needed in the acquisition of this tract.

Purchasing the 100-acre parcel will preserve the historic Boomer house, a two-story home built by Lucius Boomer, who was associated with the famous Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York City. He built the house for his mother Berthaldine Boomer, one of the first Koreshan Unity members to move to Estero.

Berthaldine initially lived in the women's residence hall, the Planetary Court, at the Koreshan State Historic Site. Later she moved outside the Koreshan community into the house that her son built right next to the Koreshan grounds. Berthaldine's niece, Bertie Boomer, later joined her aunt and stayed with her at the house. Bertie is most known for her paintings of various Estero landscapes.

The Boomer house is an early 20th century house built in the "Shingle" style that first became popular at New England summer resort areas. It is a two-story house featuring a large hip metal roof with an assortment of dormers and first story porch roofs. Its signature feature is that the walls are clad in continuous wood shingles.

The Boomer property adjoins the Koreshan State Historic Site, which is listed as a historic district under both under the National Register of Historic Places and the Lee County Historic Preservation Ordinance.

In addition to preserving the Boomer house, purchase of the 100-acre property will create a larger protective buffer for the 10,000-acre Estero Bay Buffer Preserve. Expanding the preserve will improve water quality, conserve habitat and increase protection for threatened wildlife in the area.

## Fort Myers Beach Newton Cottage

A significant part of the history and identity for the Town of Fort Myers Beach is now protected, thanks to the recent purchase of the Newton Beach Property by the Town of Fort Myers Beach. Grants from Lee County, Florida Communities Trust and the Tourist Development Council paid for the .8-acre property, which is adjacent to the Gulf of Mexico on the west, Estero Blvd on the east, and Strandview Drive on the north. The site will serve as a natural resource and cultural park.

There are two non-historic structures on the Newton Estate. However, the Town of Fort Myers Beach is in the process of designating as a historic resource the small cottage and garage on the site known as the Newton Cottage.

This cottage is a good example of Vernacular architecture of the early- to mid-20th century. The Lee County Property Appraiser's office listed a date of 1944 for construction of the cottage. According to Barbara Murphy, personal secretary to the Newtons, this cottage

was shipped to Fort Myers Beach as a pre-assembled structure by barge from somewhere north of this area.

The single-story cottage faces the Gulf and features a main side gable roof with a central chimney and two secondary gable roofs: one at the center of the side facing the Gulf and the other off-center. The roof material is fiberglass shingle, and the foundation consists of concrete piers with horizontal wood slats as infill. The construction is wood frame, off-grade and the house is sided with cement shingles. The cottage features an enclosed fireplace constructed from coquina rocks.

The Newton Estate is an important part of the history and identity of Fort Myers Beach. A testament to the local significance of the Newtons is the creation of the Uncommon Friends Foundation in 1993 to preserve the legacy of Jim and Ellie Newton.

The Uncommon Friends Foundation, Inc. is a nonprofit educational partnership of the City of Fort Myers, Lee

County Government, the School District of Lee County and community leaders and businesses. The Foundation is dedicated to enriching society by promoting the positive values that author Jim Newton discovered in five unique men and their wives - Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, Harvey Firestone, Dr. Alexis Carrel, and Charles Lindbergh. Those values include a spirit of adventure, sense of purpose, unending personal growth, and the commitment of helping friends.

Newton dubbed the group his "Uncommon Friends" in his book by the same name, in which Newton recalls a lifetime of friendship with all of them – a friendship that began when he was only twenty years old and head of development of Edison Park in Fort Myers, Florida. A documentary film narrated by Walter Cronkite, appropriately titled "Uncommon Friends," preserves the importance and meaning of the life of Jim and Eleanor Newton and their close association with the above-mentioned friends.



The Newton Beach Cottage of Jim and Ellie Newton is believed to be a prefab structure.

# Bonita Springs Imperial Court Hotel

The City of Bonita Springs has purchased the site of the Imperial River Mobile Home Park and removed the mobile homes. The buildings that remain, the Imperial Court Hotel (also known as the Royal River Court Hotel) and the six original resort cottages, have been designated as historic resources.

The Imperial Court is a rectangular, two-story, wood frame, plain stucco building built in 1926-27 by Wallace Liles as a hotel for tourists coming to Bonita Springs for fine hunting and fishing. Later owners of the hotel bought more land to allow for campsites and trailer spaces.

Today the Imperial Court lies roughly at the center of a three-acre tract of land, which is bounded by three modes of transportation, the Imperial River to the north, Old 41 Rd (the old Tamiami Trail) on the east, and the railroad on the west. The hotel is located in the heart of Old Bonita and is a landmark structure associated with early tourists. Today, all the old hunting and fishing areas have long been developed, and it is the climate and beaches that chiefly attract tourists - not the hunting and fishing.

This plain stucco building is built

in a rectangular shape and has a flat roof, which is hidden by parapet walls featuring scuppers (cylindrical tile rainspouts placed in groups of three and projecting through the parapet walls). This type of construction was typical of commercial buildings of the period. The signature feature of this building is its simple, symmetrical and unaltered fenestration (window pattern). The front facade features a central entrance on the first floor and over it, on the second floor, a single window. On the front side, still visible near the top of the second floor, are the words "Royal River Court" painted in red letters over the stucco.

Imperial Court is located just south of six cabins that are also on the property. The six cabins along the south side of the Imperial River are known as Baird's cabins. In the early days, the area depended on a water-based transportation system, and the cottages lined along the Imperial River have a strong association with this mode of transportation. Sailing vessels would carry cargoes of fruit and other freight over the shallow waters of the river.

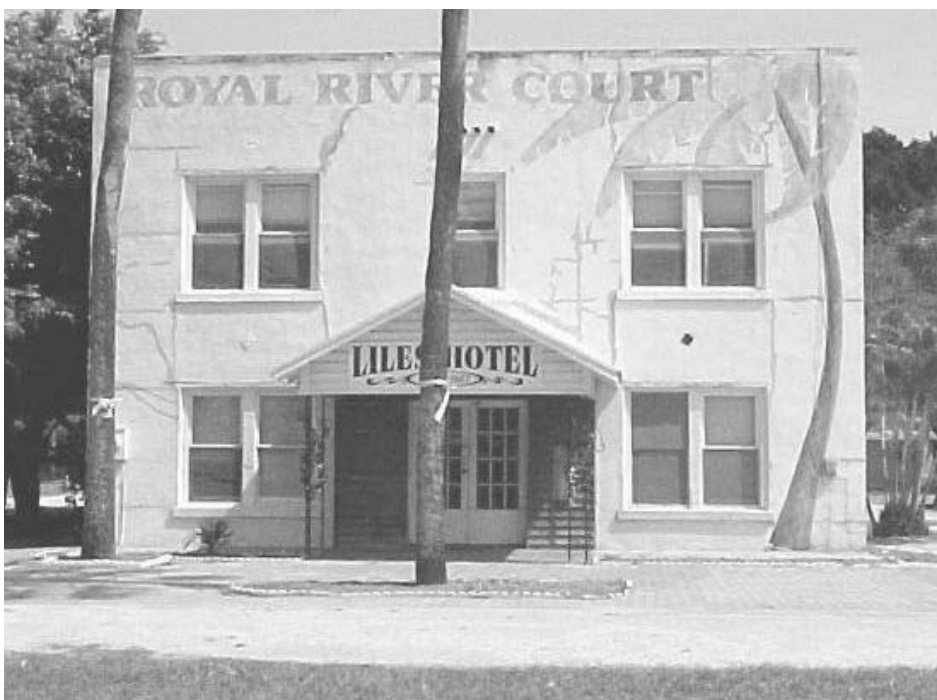
According to local historian Mildred Briggs, the area where

Baird's cottages are currently located is where the Wayside Inn was unloaded from a vessel before being moved down the Tamiami Trail to its final location. Early photographs show that cabin dwellers could dock their canoes in front of the cabins. The fact that the front side faces the river underscores the fact that these cabins are associated with a period of time when the river and not the roads were the principal means of transportation.

These cabins retain a remarkable degree of architectural integrity, as simple small, metal gable roofed structures with exposed rafter tails. Their mass and scale is unaltered so that they retain their signature diminutive size.



**Baird's Cabins lined up facing the beautiful sleepy Estero River. (above)**



**The Imperial Court (Royal River Court), ca. 1926. (left)**

## Towles Home Update

Once threatened with demolition to make way for new construction, the Towles Englehardt Home now has a solid future. On Saturday, February 14, workers moved the home from its former location on McGregor Boulevard right across the street to its new home at 2050 McGregor Blvd.

The same company that moved the Langford Kingston home, Flint & Doyle, moved the Towles Home. Preparation took several weeks, but the move itself only took about two hours.

The Towles Home was built in 1885 by William "Wild Bill" Towles and is believed to be the oldest house in Fort Myers. Two years ago, Fifth Third Bank planned to demolish the structure to make way for a new bank building on the old site. Concerned citizens contacted the Lee Trust for Historic Preservation, which began working with the City of Fort Myers Planning Department and the State Division of Historical Resources.

Lee Trust sent letters of concern to the city, the state, the Fort Myers Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) and the president of Fifth Third Bank in Naples. The HPC requested city staff research the building, and when the report was presented last February, the HPC asked Lee Trust to submit an Application for Designation of the property as a local historic landmark. Lee Trust also began discussions with bank officials, citizens and local organizations to find a solution that would save the structure.

Everyone's hard work paid off on Valentine's Day. The bank agreed to sell the Towles Home to local attorney Mike Fink, from the law firm Fink and Boyle, P.A., for \$1. In addition, the bank contributed \$40,000 to defray part of the \$120,000 cost of moving the house and building a new foundation. Mr. Fink purchased the lot adjacent to his law office as the new site for the home, and says the home will probably serve as an office building.

In 1985, the State of Florida certified that the Towles Englehardt Home was eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, and the Fort Myers HPC has recommended that the home receive local designation as well.



View of Towles Home along McGregor Boulevard, heading toward downtown and the Five Points intersection.

## Flint Home, continued from page 1



pathetic buyer at a slight profit, which put the Lee Trust in a better position to step in and buy the next endangered historic resource.

“As a non-profit organization dedicated to administering a revolving fund for the preservation of historic resources, the Lee Trust’s role in saving the Flint Home was critical,” Sajgo said.

Lee Trust President Toni Ferrell is pleased. “After ten years of fund raising, we are proud to see the progress made on the Flint Home, our first Revolving Fund project. Our role served to benefit the developer, who was not in a position to take on a historic preservation project; the new private owner, who acquired the property at an exceptionally low price; and the community as a whole, by ensuring the preservation of an important, if humble part of our local heritage. I am pleased with the response from the community, and look forward to seeing Lee Trust’s Revolving Fund grow.”

New owner Larry Fucella loves to rehabilitate houses and appreciated the beauty and potential of both structures. He is now in the process of completing the exterior restoration. You can see his photos posted on the WebShots site: <http://community.webshots.com/album/33270645XURNmv>

The Buckingham Community has enjoyed the positive change.

**"Old Saggy", as one member of the Trust fondly calls it, is an older two-room house that sits behind the Flint Home and faces Bird Road. After the "new" home was built, the old one was subsequently used to store materials and as a barn. In spite of the current condition, it is hoped that the owner can rehabilitate the old house, preserving both eras of occupation.**

# The Mound House

Residents and visitors to Lee County will eventually be able to walk inside a Calusa Indian mound on Fort Myers Beach as a major exhibit project was ranked high for funding in the State of Florida Division of Historical Resources special category grant competition this year. A glimpse into the mound was provided in 2002 as archaeologists from Florida Gulf Coast University directed a public archaeology project with over 115 volunteers from the community. Excavations revealed mound construction began sometime before 100 B.C. and was terminated around A.D. 600-800 when the village site was abandoned. Although no longer living at the site, the Calusa Indians continued to fish and repair nets along the mound's edge into the thirteenth century. Archaeological evidence also suggests the site may have been occupied by the Spanish in the sixteenth century in association with their mission attempt on Mound Key (1567-1569).

Atop the mound sits the William H. Case home, the earliest portions of which date back to 1906. Occupied during most major periods in Florida's history, the house was expanded through time to meet the needs and interests of its diverse occupants. The

last landowners, William and Florence Long carved up the majority of their property to produce the Shell Mound Park subdivision but retained almost three acres overlooking Estero Bay for their island home. In 1958, the Longs remodeled the oldest portion of the residence into a Florida-style room and added a swimming pool to the side of the house – excavated right into the Calusa Indian mound.

Now cracked and deteriorating, the Directors of the Mound House proposed to convert the space into an educational exhibit by removing the swimming pool and capping over the area. The entrance of the exhibit will be flush with the shell mound slope and visible only from the western side of the property. Upon entering the exhibit, visitors will see approximately eight vertical feet of the shell mound along two walls. As many archaeological sites in south Florida have been dramatically altered or destroyed by development, this exhibit will provide a unique opportunity to visualize 2,000 years of history. The occupation and development of the site, such as mound building episodes and village life, and how humans exploited locally available natural resources to create a cultural landscape is a story

that will be told literally from the ground up.

The Long's three acre parcel including the historic home and shell mound was purchased by the Town of Fort Myers Beach with Florida Communities Trust grant funds in 2000 with the intent of establishing a learning center dedicated to the cultural and environmental heritage of the area. Existing site programming focuses on the continuum of occupation at the site and prehistoric and historic use of the unique estuarine environment in southwest Florida through tours of the property, a volunteer archaeological laboratory with opportunities to participate in ongoing field research, and kayak tours of the estuary and other nearby archaeological sites, such as Mound Key. Although early in its development, management goals include restoration of the structure and the design of exhibits on the interior as well.

The property is open daily to bicycle and pedestrian traffic with picnic areas available. With the installation of a kayak landing this spring with funding from the West Coast Inland Navigation District, the property will also be accessible via Lee County's Great Calusa Blueway Kayak Trail. Tours of the house will resume following an ongoing electrical upgrade. If you would like more information or would like to participate in our archaeological projects, please call us at the Mound House.

**The Mound House is located at:**

**289 Connecticut Street**

**Fort Myers Beach**

**Phone: 239-765-0865**

**E-mail: [MoundHouse@fmbeach.org](mailto:MoundHouse@fmbeach.org).**



**The Town of Fort Myers Beach recently approved the removal of these trees which threaten the historic Mound House building. The swimming pool and screened area to be excavated may be seen on the left side of this photo.**

**L**og On! Lee Trust was recently featured in "Main Street Minute", a publication of the Florida Main Street program, a program of the Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation. Our thanks to Mary Rawl for her contribution of this article.  
**[http://dhr.dos.state.fl.us/bhp/main\\_st/january2004.pdf](http://dhr.dos.state.fl.us/bhp/main_st/january2004.pdf)**



Looking to the future with an eye to the past...

P.O. Box 1035  
Fort Myers, Florida 33902-1035



### Membership Application/ Renewal Form

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Save a stamp and email my meeting notices.

I am a:  New Member  Renewing Member

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- Individual - \$20

In addition to my gift, a matching gift will be made by: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Name of Company)

Make checks payable to Lee Trust for Historic Preservation and send to:

Lee Trust for Historic Preservation - Membership Chair  
P.O. Box 1035 • Fort Myers, Florida 33902-1035

*Membership is for the calendar year. Dues are payable on January 1 and are considered delinquent after the annual meeting in February of each year.*

### 2004 Dues Are Due!

Tired of seeing our historic buildings torn down? Want to know more about historic preservation? Then join Lee Trust!

Lee Trust is a nonprofit organization formed to promote preservation and assist our community when historic resources are threatened. We 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.

Please fill out this form and send it in with your check. In addition to selecting your membership level, you may elect to be notified of meetings and events via email, saving the Trust the cost of postage. Consider an additional donation as a Contributor or Sponsor and help increase our Revolving Fund. If you have not been receiving our monthly notices or email, please contact our Database Volunteer Jeff Gerberick at (239) 694-5230. For more information about Membership contact Susan Grace at (239) 939-3579 ■