



HISTORIC  
**BRADENTON  
BEACH**



CITY TOUR



*Walk, bike or ride  
and learn about the rich history  
of Bradenton Beach*

**Presented by the  
Anna Maria Island Historical Society**

402 Pine Avenue

Anna Maria City, Florida 34216

Trolley Stop at Crescent Drive and Pine Avenue

**(941) 778-0492** • [AMIHS.org](http://AMIHS.org)

**Historical Society Museum Hours:**

Open Monday - Friday

January through March: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

April through December: 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Closed the month of September

## General Information and Tips

We recommend that you begin the walking portion of your tour on Bridge Street. This tour does not grant entry into the historical buildings listed. Please do not trespass on private property, and be respectful when taking pictures. The walkable portion of the tour covers an area of about one mile. It will take approximately 45 minutes to complete.



The additional places of historical importance are accessible by car, bicycle or trolley and cover an area of about three miles. Time of completion will vary depending on your mode of transportation.

Come prepared with water bottles and sunscreen.

**Parking:** Available at the end of Church Street across from the Bradenton Beach Marina. Additional parking can be found off First Street North, east of the Circle K and at both county beaches.

**Public Restrooms:** Facilities and water fountains are available at the Historic Bridge Street Pier.

**Historic Sites Tour Brochures:** The Anna Maria Island Historical Society (AMIHS) offers two additional historic site tour brochures featuring the cities of Anna Maria and Holmes Beach. Brochures may be found at the AMIHS museum, the Anna Maria Island Chamber of Commerce and other locations around the Island.

**Want to see more Island sites?** Anna Maria Island has a colorful and rich history. Not all of it could be included in the walking tour booklets. You can access supplemental information on the "About Us" page of our website, [amihs.org](http://amihs.org).

### ABBREVIATION KEY

N - North   S - South  
BB - Bradenton Beach  
AMI - Anna Maria Island  
AMIHS - Anna Maria Island Historical Society



Bradenton Beach and Cortez Beach, ca. 1920s-1950s. Taken from the area of Longboat Pass looking north, this aerial reveals a different shoreline from the one we see today. Storms, erosion, and beach re-nourishment projects have shaped the geography of the Island over the years.

## History of Bradenton Beach

Early visitors in search of sandy, white shores and sparkling, blue waters headed to a town called Cortez Beach. Wanting to claim the beach as their own, the citizens of Bradenton influenced a name change in the 1920s, from Cortez Beach to Bradenton Beach. Mainlanders convinced a newspaper reporter for the *Bradenton Herald* to title all news in the area south of the City of Anna Maria as occurring in Bradenton Beach. The name became official years later.

Today's Bradenton Beach city limits begin around 27th Street North and extend south to Longboat Pass, stretching from Gulf to Bay. Ruric Cobb settled 153 acres on the northern part of this area in 1903. Cobb was a well-known musician who served as a regimental chief musician in the Spanish-American War before moving to Anna Maria Island. Though no physical structure remains, it is said that his home may have been constructed where the Sandpiper Mobile Home Park is now. He platted the Ilexhurst subdivision, named for the abundant evergreens that grew on his land. His homestead hosted the first, though unofficial, school on Anna Maria Island until 1906. The school was not officially recognized because only seven of the Island's children could attend class, but 10 students



Cortez Beach, ca. 1920s. Cortez Beach was a popular destination for day trippers and northerners looking to escape harsh winters.

were necessary according to county standards. Known as a bit of a Renaissance man, Cobb was responsible for bringing the first telephone line to Anna Maria Island. Unfortunately, he later experienced financial difficulties and moved to Tampa where he passed away in 1926.

South of Cobb's homestead lived a retired pharmacist by the name of David Roush. Roush lived a quiet life on his 163-acre homestead, which he bought in 1899. He was known as the Island doctor, treating children and adults in the village of Cortez and on the Island whenever a medical emergency occurred. By 1905, Roush had sold his land and moved to New York state.

Early residents of Anna Maria Island had high hopes for a blossoming tourist industry, but travel to the Island was somewhat difficult because there was no bridge. A steamship named Favorite was a popular mode of transportation for those looking to come and go from the Island, with official stops at Anna Maria City and Longboat Key. Another option was use of the ferryman, who was summoned from the village of Cortez by shouting across the bay to Cortez Beach for his attention. Supplies brought by boat would often dock at Cobb's 1,100-foot pier on the bayside of his property until the hurricane of 1921 destroyed it. The completion of the Cortez Bridge in 1922 revolutionized travel to the Island. A booming business district arose on Bradenton Beach's Bridge Street.



Bridge Street looking east toward the Bay, ca. 1940. Bridge Street was the economic center of the Island until the new Manatee Avenue and Cortez bridges were constructed in 1957.

Downtown Bradenton Beach experienced somewhat of a decline in business after the new Manatee Avenue and Cortez bridges opened in 1957. Many of the buildings along Bridge Street and the older homes radiating from the city center fell into disrepair. It was not until the late 1980s that Bradenton Beach would experience large clean-up efforts to help stimulate the economy. Older homes and businesses were demolished in favor of modern structures. These efforts to revitalize Bradenton Beach were successful, but much of the rich, tangible history of the city has suffered. Most of the buildings featured on this walking tour have withstood the test of time, while some only live on in photographs.

## **Walkable Tour Stops**

### **1. Harvey Memorial Community Church 300 Church Street North**

When Reverend Joseph C. Harvey moved from Pennsylvania to the south end of Anna Maria Island in 1940, he found that there was no church. He set about establishing a non-denominational worship center to function as a community meeting space as well as a church. Known as the little Church by the Bay, the Harvey Memorial building was once an army barrack that was dismantled, moved to Bradenton Beach and reconstructed in 1948 under the supervision of Reverend Harvey.



Harvey Memorial Community Church, April 1959. Generous church members and friends from the community have helped complete the many renovations through the years.

## **2. Pines Trailer Park 103 Church Avenue**

Established in 1929, the Pines Trailer Park is the oldest mobile home park on the Island. It is reported that visitors came from as far north as Michigan, Ohio, Indiana and New York to rent spaces in the park during the winter. The Pines Trailer community hall was barged over from Egmont Key in the 1930s. It became a popular destination for Bradenton Beach community events, such as town halls and church services.



Pines Trailer Park, ca. 1940s.



Bradenton Beach City Office, ca. 1957. Former Mayor P.C. Van Rensellaer hung the sign on the Bradenton Beach City Office when it first opened.

### **3. First Bradenton Beach City Office**

#### **First Street North**

Bradenton Beach was incorporated in 1953 after two years of town meetings and discussion. The city office moved to First Street North in 1957 after meetings were held in the Pines Trailer Park Hall, Harvey Memorial Community Church and a hardware store on Bridge Street. The office moved to its current location on Gulf Drive in 1971.

### **4. Historic Bridge Street Pier 200 Bridge Street**

Construction for the first bridge from the Florida mainland to Anna Maria Island began in April of 1921 with Jack Leffingwell at the helm. Jack was a young entrepreneur and self-taught electrical engineer from Bradenton. The bridge was almost finished when disaster struck in October of that year. A strong hurricane blew in with little warning, damaging the large pilings and ripping the wood planks from the bridge, scattering them up the shore. The morning after the hurricane, Leffingwell and his team salvaged as much wood as they could find and rebuilt the bridge. It was finally completed in the spring of 1922. The bridge was wide enough for two Model-T Fords to pass side-by-side and had a bridge tender to open the draw when boats wished to pass. At the time,



Cortez Bridge, ca. 1922. Not even a hurricane could stop progress. Jack Leffingwell and his crew picked up scattered supplies and continued construction on the first bridge to Anna Maria Island.

the draw opened horizontally, or parallel to the water. The bridge became rickety with time, and towards the end of its lifespan, only one lane of traffic at a time could cross. In 1957, the new Cortez Bridge was completed with much fanfare. After long debates, it was decided that the old Cortez Bridge would be converted into a pier in its original location. In 1978, the pier's original planking from the 1922 bridge, which was disintegrating, was torn out and replaced.



Cortez Bridge, ca. 1920s. Completion of the Cortez Bridge in 1922 ushered in an era of promised economic prosperity. The tourism and real estate industries were expected to profit once travel to the Island became easier than waiting for steamships or shouting for ferrymen.

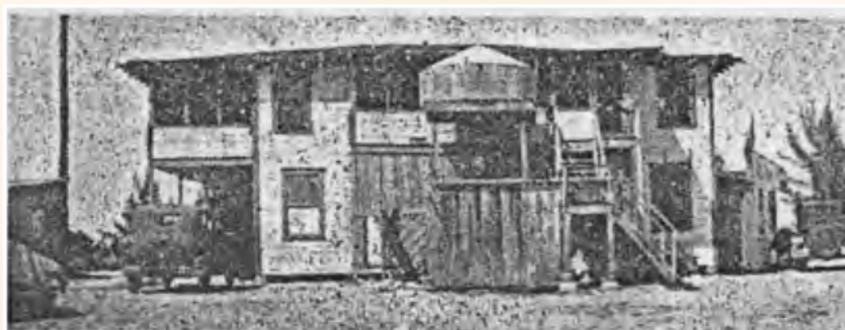


New Cortez Bridge, ca. 1957. The new Cortez Bridge opened with a great celebration. Bathing beauties riding elephants were some of the first to make the historic crossing before the ribbon cutting.

### **5. Bridge Tender Inn 135 Bridge Street**

The Bridge Tender Inn has been serving customers since 1917, originally under the name of the Bayside Inn or Old Stafford's Place (because it was built by a local affectionally called Old Man Stafford). At the time, Bradenton Beach was known as Cortez Beach and had a population of about 30. The inn was Cortez Beach's first commercial venture, catering to a clientele of fishers, early tourists, retirees and other nautical wanderers

Old Stafford's Place offered home brew, moonshine, slot machines, gambling and two rental rooms. There was also a sundry on the bottom floor offering ice, ice cream, candy, cool drinks and canned food. The building was remodeled in 1991 after undergoing many changes through the decades. The Bridge Tender Inn received its current name from the Cortez Bridge, which in the 1920s extended from what is now the Bridge Street Pier across to Cortez Village. A bridge tender opened the draw to allow boats to pass.



Old Stafford's Place, ca. 1920s. Before the bridge, Old Stafford's Place could only be reached by boat.



Bradenton Beach Post Office, ca. 1940s. Harry Ditmas, who was known as Uncle Sam, was Anna Maria Island's iconic unofficial postmaster from 1924 to 1954.

## 6. Post Office 116 Bridge Street

The first Bradenton Beach Post Office was constructed in 1941 before incorporation of the city. The original route at the time included approximately 100 mailboxes on Gulf Drive and 200 rental boxes in the post office. In 1952, the first post office was torn down, and the current post office was built in its place.

## 7. Bradenton Beach Hardware Store 117 Bridge Street

The first hardware store in Bradenton Beach was established in 1955. The building once housed early city meetings before the first city office building was constructed. The rectangular stone structure is common for the time period, although the front covered walkway is a unique and distinguishing feature that was added some years later.



Bradenton Beach hardware store, ca. 1950s.

## **8. Sinclair Service Station 101 Bridge Street, southeast corner of roundabout**

Built in 1925, the service station was one of the first on the Island offering fuel to the many Model-Ts that crossed the newly constructed bridge. After 1945, the building was converted into a restaurant and the new owners stopped selling fuel. It has remained a restaurant ever since, switching ownership and changing names many times.



Sinclair service station, ca. 1940s.

## **9. Cortez Beach Pavilion west side of Gulf Drive and Bridge Street**

Developer E.P. Green constructed the Cortez Beach Pavilion in 1922. It was also called the Casino, a term that simply meant a social hall, not associated with gambling. At the time, the Casino was the only bathhouse on Florida's west coast. Locker rooms lined the first floor near a restaurant, curio shop and cold drink stand. The second floor housed sleeping quarters and a dance floor. Next door was the only dance hall on the mid-west coast, the Pagoda Dance Hall. The Casino burned down in 1924, was rebuilt and burnt for a final time in 1929.



Cortez Beach Pavilion, ca. 1920s.

## Points of Interest

1. Harvey Memorial Community Church
2. Pines Trailer Park
3. First Bradenton Beach City Office
4. Historic Bridge Street Pier
5. Bridge Tender Inn
6. Post Office
7. Bradenton Beach Hardware Store
8. Sinclair Service Station
9. Cortez Beach Pavilion
10. Gulf Terrace
11. Circa 1930s Beach Bungalows
12. Gulf Park Hotel and Trailer Park
13. Annie Silver Community Center
14. The Curry Mansion
15. Trader Jack's, Formerly Mira-Mar
16. Regina Underwater Archaeological Preserve
17. West View
18. Oriental City
19. Longboat Pass Bascule Bridge



**GULF OF  
MEXICO**

**Coquina Beach**

**Leffis Key  
Nature Trail**

**18  
17**

**19**

**Longboat  
Key** ▾

**12**

26th St

**13**

23rd St

Gulf Drive

11th St N

Gulf Drive

Cortez Rd

Bridge St

4th St S

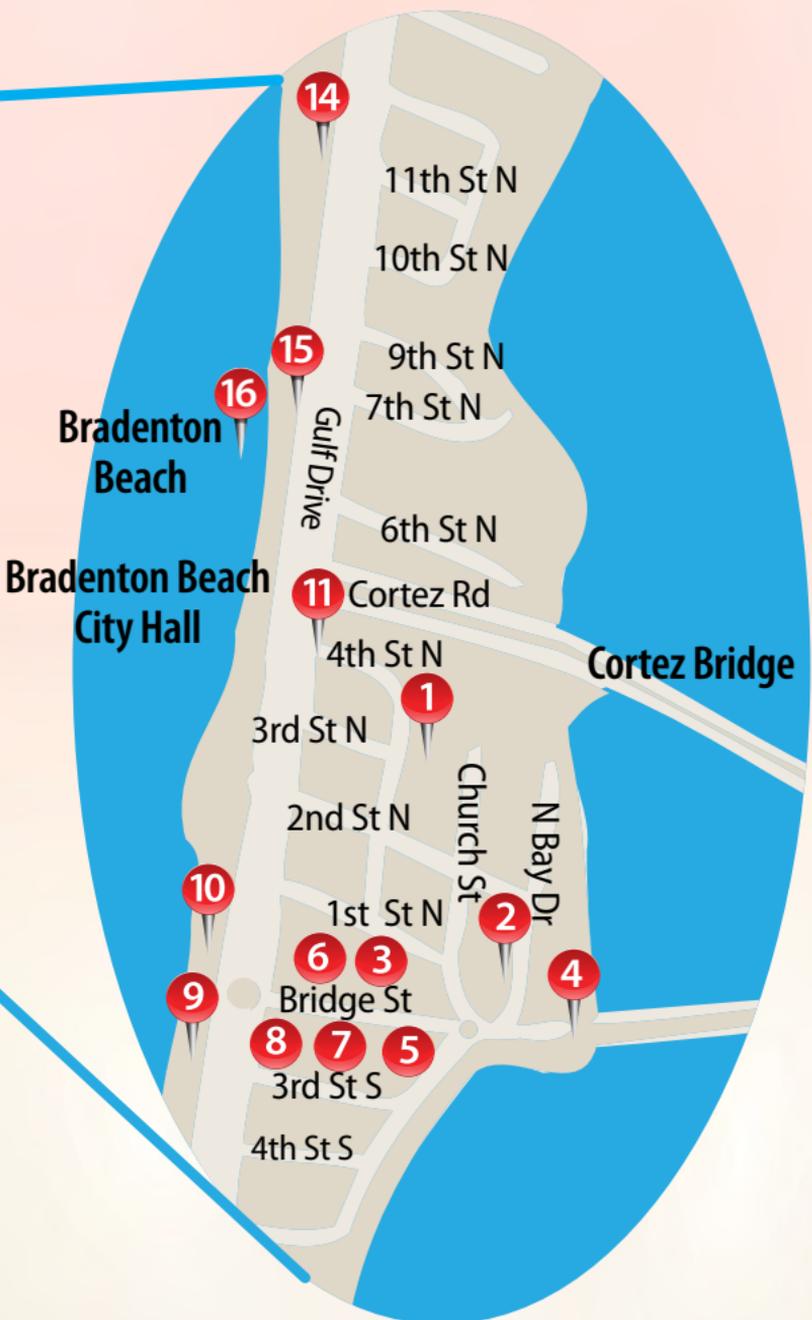
Gulf Drive

City of  
Holmes Beach

City of  
Bradenton  
Beach

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**SARASOTA  
BAY**



Thank You To  
Anna Maria Island  
SUN Newspaper



Margaret Mason Blaney in front of the Casino, ca. 1920s.  
Photo courtesy of Anna Maria Island Historical Society board member Evelyn Hoskins.

## **10. Gulf Terrace 110 Gulf Drive South**

Gulf Terrace has been feeding the Bradenton Beach community since the 1930s. From the 1930s through at least the 1950s, Gulf Terrace served as a restaurant, as well as a bathhouse (the Cortez Beach Pavilion had burned down in 1929), and offered small cottages to rent. Today, the structure houses Bradenton Beach's Moose Lodge, which boasts the largest membership in the state of Florida.



Gulf Terrace restaurant and Bradenton Beach bathhouse, ca. 1950. Photograph courtesy of the Manatee County Public Library System's Digital Collections.



Beach bungalow, ca 1930s. The bungalow style of architecture was commonly constructed in the 1910s – 1930s.

## **11. Circa 1930s Beach Bungalows**

### **Fourth Street North**

Excellent examples of early 1930s bungalows can be found down Fourth Street North. The bungalow style home was popular in hot climates because the large porch and slanted roof kept the homes well shaded and cool. They were typically constructed with clapboard wood and stained a natural brown color.

## **Additional Points of Interest**

Some of these sites are still standing while others are not. They are accessible by bike, car or trolley.

## **12. Gulf Park Hotel and Trailer Park**

The Gulf Park Hotel, originally called the Club House, was built by homesteader Ruric Cobb in 1909. It was a three-story wooden building with a veranda circling the second floor. In 1915, when Cobb could no longer afford the mortgage, the property was turned over to the Zewadski family. During World War II, the building served as living quarters for the U.S. Coast Guard. After multiple sales, it became a two-story bar in the 1960s called the Oar House. It burned to the ground in 1979. Today, the Anna Maria Island Club stands in the approximate location of the Gulf Park Hotel.

Across Gulf Drive from the Anna Maria Island Club, you will see the Sandpiper Mobile Resort. This was once the

Gulf Park Trailer Park. Beginning in the mid-1930s, Ringling carnival workers spent winters camped in the lot across from the Gulf Park Hotel. But it was not until 1940 that the Gulf Park Trailer Park was officially opened for residents. The community became tight-knit, founding many social clubs, including the Beachcombers.

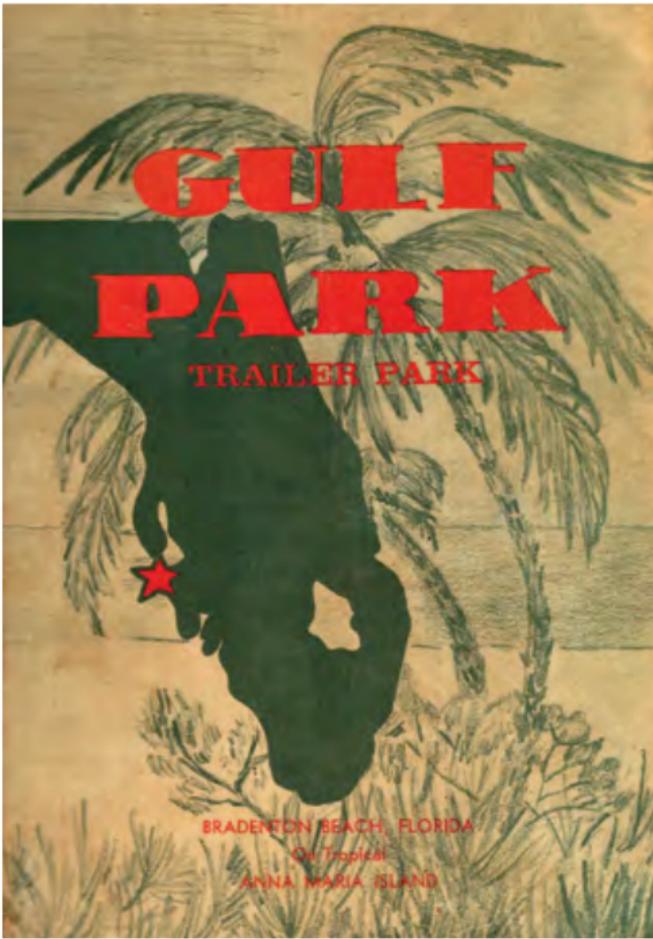
Until 2003, the Sandpiper Mobile Resort was privately owned by a single owner and the homeowners rented the land. In 2002, the owner decided to sell, but the homeowners had the first right of refusal. They were able to form a cooperative and purchased the park in 2003. As of 2004, 120 shareholders own the property. In the years since, homes have been renovated, updated and replaced, and a volunteer committee is dedicated to park beautification. The Sandpiper continues to maintain the sense of community once seen in the Gulf Park Trailer Park.



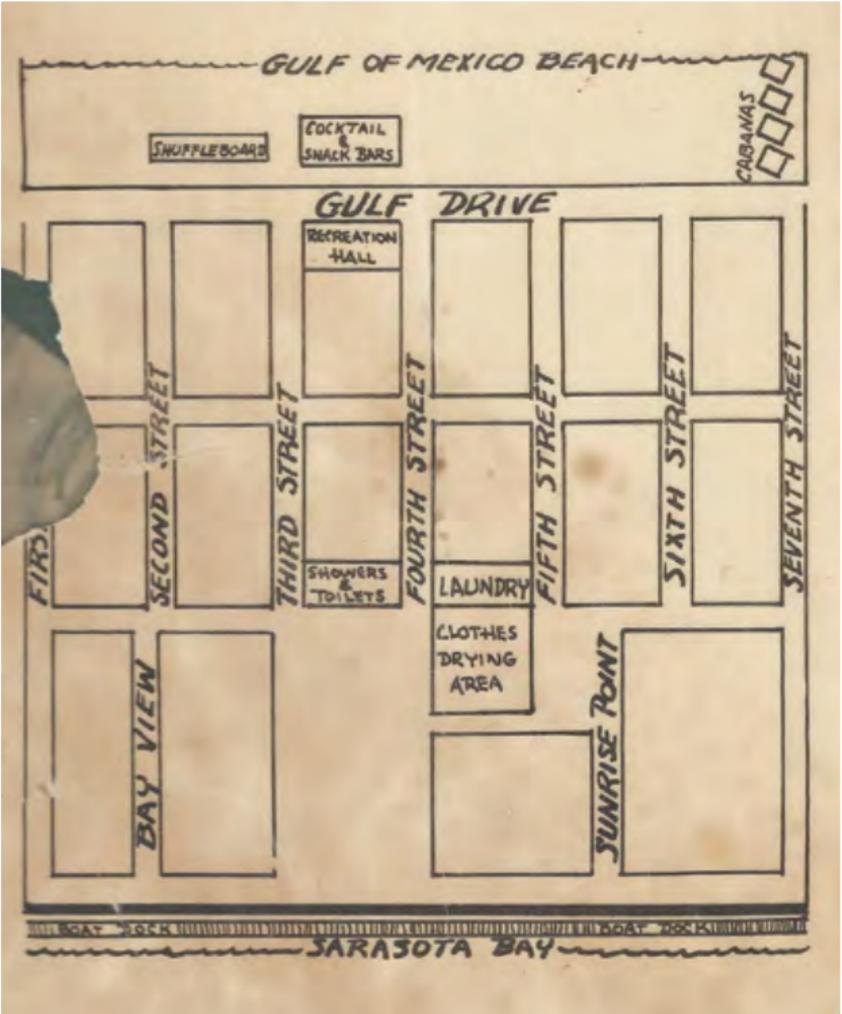
Gulf Park Hotel and Trailer Park, ca. 1930s.



Carnival performers, ca. 1930s.



Early Gulf Park Trailer Park brochure and map, ca. 1940s.





Annie and Charles Silver, ca. 1920s.

### **13. Annie Silver Community Center**

#### **102 23rd Street North**

Annie Silver was a formidable woman who moved to the Island in the 1930s to construct and run her own grocery store. When she tired of the grocery business



Silver's Groceries, ca. 1930s.

in the 1940s, she sold it to begin her own real estate company. She was the first female real estate agent on the Island and was in her early 70s at the time. Silver was very involved with the community, from assisting the U.S. Coast Guard during the World War II blackouts to raising money for the Bradenton Beach Fire Department. She donated property on the corner of 23rd Street and Avenue C to the community for use as a shuffleboard court and clubhouse. It now contains a library and hosts community functions.

#### **14. The Curry Mansion**

##### **West side of Gulf Drive and 11th Street North**

When Glenn and Romaine Thomasson bought their dream home, they had no idea that it would come with ghosts. The 18-room mansion was built in 1922 and had been left vacant for many years when they bought it in 1969. The Thomassons said they would awake to realize their furniture had been rearranged and some of their possessions broken. Their dogs whined piteously to be let out of the house. The scent of a strong floral perfume would overcome the senses leading them to believe they were haunted by a woman. They soon noticed a second spirit in the house, that of a man who would announce his presence with the scent of Cuban cigar smoke.



Curry Mansion, ca. 1920s - 1970s.

Glenn contacted a local family whose ancestors were early settlers in Bradenton Beach. They told him that a young woman named Estralita had sailed from Boston to marry one of their ancestors. But on her boat ride from Bradenton to the Island, her ship sunk in a storm. Glenn believed the male ghost was Captain Curry, who had piloted the lost ship.

In 1996, the house was demolished. Glenn had passed away and Romaine's whereabouts were no longer known. The house was in poor condition. It appeared that someone had tried to remodel it and then abandoned the project mid-way. The spirits have not been heard from since the demolition.



Trader Jack's, an island sensation, was named for its owner, Jack Pearsall.

### **15. Trader Jack's, Formerly Mira-Mar**

#### **West side of Gulf Drive and Seventh Street North**

The Mira-Mar Pavilion was constructed in 1940 overlooking the Gulf of Mexico. It served as a Spanish restaurant, bar and bathhouse. A couple, who were formerly professional comedians, bought the restaurant in the 1960s, offering shows every weekend. The Monkey Bar was added and became famed for the stuffed toy monkeys that had been mailed from all over the world and covered the walls and ceiling. Once again, the property changed hands and became Trader Jack's. The nautical themed bar and restaurant was an island sensation offering a circus show and abbreviated versions of Broadway hits. The building was destroyed by arson in 1987.



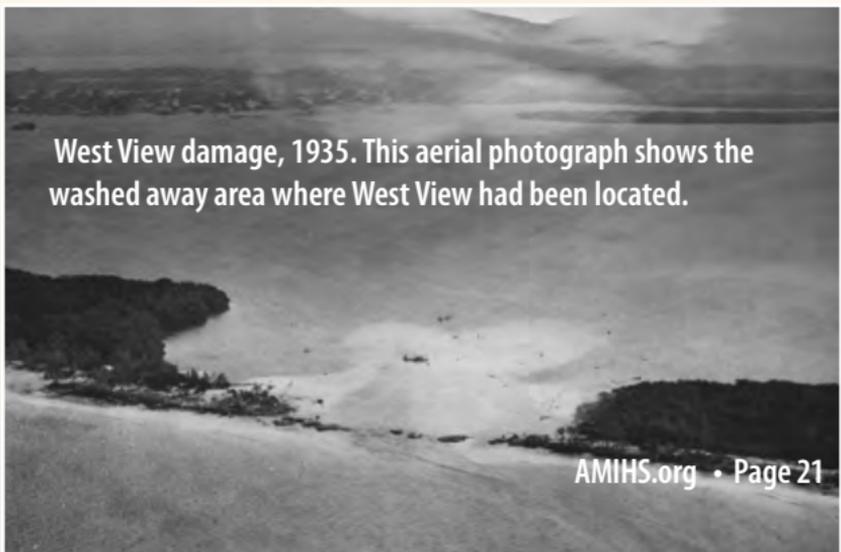
Regina, March 1940.

### **16. Regina Underwater Archaeological Preserve Off the coast on the Gulf end of Seventh Street North**

On March 8, 1940, a tanker barge pulled by tugboat passed by Anna Maria Island carrying 350,000 gallons of molasses. High winds and rough surf caused the tanker, Regina, to separate from the tug line and sink. All but one crew member survived the incident. The cook and his dog tried to swim ashore, but did not make it. The molasses leaked into the Gulf, and the ship was visible from the shore for many years until a dredging project put the entire ship underwater. The site was designated as a Florida State Underwater Archeological Preserve in 2005 and is a popular diving spot.

### **17. West View Coquina Beach, Gulf Drive South**

In 1905, a man named Frank Palmer divided 60 acres of land into a subdivision called West View, located where Coquina Beach is now. The subdivision was a known playground for wealthy Tampa citizens. In 1932, a storm bringing high winds and surf washed the community off the Island and sank it into the Gulf.



## 18. Oriental City

### Coquina Beach, Gulf Drive South

Stage and silent film actor Paul Gilmore (1873-1962) predicted that Florida was going to become the new California. Gilmore bought property in West View in 1913. The subdivision had been built in 1905 by Frank Palmer of Cortez. Palmer had bought 60 acres on the southernmost tip of the Island for \$13.43 (equivalent to about \$350 today). He created 3 blocks: Bay Street, Pinta Street and Anna Maria Avenue. He built six cottages, a bathhouse and a pavilion on the Gulf.

Gilmore acquired the entire property in 1920 and renamed it Gil-Mor Isle, with plans to turn it into Paul Gilmore's Oriental Film City. The South Seas adventure film, "The Isle of Destiny", premiered in 1920 after being both shot and produced in the Oriental City. Many more films were slated for production, but they were never completed. The lack of a bridge linking the Island to the mainland made the movies too expensive to produce. Gilmore left Anna Maria Island after experiencing some financial difficulties and selling his Oriental City. The abandoned studio was washed away, along with the Longboat Bridge, in a powerful storm in 1932.

"The Isle of Destiny"  
film poster, 1920.  
Photograph courtesy of  
Wikimedia Commons.



## 19. Longboat Pass Bascule Bridge

### Southern most tip of Anna Maria Island

The first bridge connecting Anna Maria Island to Longboat Key was built in 1926, four years after the Cortez Bridge was completed, which had connected the Island to the mainland. The Longboat Pass bridge lasted only six years, however, before it was lifted off its foundation in 1932 by a very high tide, strong winds and a swift current.

Thinking that it would be good business to rebuild, a group of men from Tampa planned an event to help raise funds for a bridge. On March 14, 1941, a free barbecue was held for the public at the north end of Longboat Key. Approximately 17,000 people were in attendance when Karl "The Great" Wallenda performed a special demonstration for the event. A tight-rope was stretched 20 feet above Longboat Pass between Anna Maria Island and Longboat Key. Wallenda made the daring crossing, stopping mid-way to complete a handstand.

Though the event was successful, the bridge connecting Anna Maria Island and Longboat Key was not built until 1958. Ceremonial concrete was poured at the celebration in 1941, but then the men who were supposed to build the bridge disappeared, taking all the money they had raised with them, leaving the project underfunded until the 50s.



Karl Wallenda crosses Longboat Pass by tightrope, 1941.

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## To Our Sponsors

Thank you to our wonderful sponsors who made this tour possible. We appreciate their support and dedication to preserving the unique history of this island.

