"The "city" is growing at the rate of one family a year - hardly that. Boca Raton has been a flag station on the R.R. for 28 years and is a flag station yet."

Frank H. Chesebro to Judge Chillingworth, 1924

A report to the membership of

Boca Raton Historical Society, Inc.

P. O. Box 1113, Boca Raton, Florida 33432

from Mrs. Russell W. Fisher, Mrs. Dorn Lee Redd, Mrs. Charles Vicinus

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One of the earliest permanent residents in Boca Raton was Frank H. Chesebro. He settled in this area, went right to work cementing new friendships and business relations, and took an active role in shaping the community that we are familiar with today. He kept a meticulous daily farm diary from the date of his arrival until close to the day of his death. His son Harry was a prodigious photographer. Combining these two rich sources we have a relatively complete portrait of one of Boca Raton’s most significant founders.

Through the good efforts of Miss Helen Howard of Boca Raton, Esther Chesebro Bell of West Palm Beach and Ethyl Chesebro of Glens Falls New York, the Boca Raton Historical Society has acquired the “Chesebro collection” from which the following profile is drawn.
Eulogy written by Mr. Chesebro's sister, Libby C. Evarts, and delivered at his funeral

Frank Howard Chesebro was born in Albany County, N.Y. Dec. 10, 1850. His ancestors came from England in 1630, settling in Stonington, Conn., where there stands today a monument erected to the memory of the first four pioneers of that town.

Mr. Chesebro's great grandfather, Elijah Chesebro I, was in the Revolutionary War. His son Elijah Chesebro II was in the War of 1812.

In 1857, Mr. Chesebro came with his family to Grand Rapids, Mich., the last part of the trip from Kalamazoo being made by Stagecoach. His father's two brothers were teachers in the Grand Rapids high school, one being principal. In that vicinity and in the district he received his early education to which he constantly added by extensive study and reading, acquiring wide knowledge of many subjects, his chief hobby being plants of all kinds.

In 1874, he went to South Haven, Mich. and worked for some time in a nursery, where he distinguished himself by his industry, honesty, and mastery of the business. He was entrusted with large responsibilities by the officials who placed all confidence in him. After the nursery business was given up, he engaged in fruit raising, peaches and apples principally, in which he built up an enviable reputation.

In 1898 and 1899, Mr. and Mrs. Chesebro with friends, first came to Florida, making the entire trip to Key West and back to New Smyrna in a small two-masted sailing vessel. In 1903, Mr. Chesebro made a second trip, in a sail boat, going as far as Miami. He then bought 100 acres of land from Capt. Rickard, and moved his family down here in Dec. 1903. The growing of pineapples was his chief occupation until competition with Cuba ruined the pineapple industry in Florida. He has engaged in truck farming from then until the present time.

Mrs. Esther C. Bell, daughter of Frank H. Chesebro, writing to provide information regarding her family

Frank H. Chesebro's home was situated a few rods from the east shore of Lake Michigan where we four children - Allen, Harry, Ruth and I were raised. It was a beautiful place, but cold and damp. So Father decided to try Florida to get away from the cold winters in their declining years.

After he sold a piece of land in Mich., and after his father had passed away, he decided to take the plunge and came down in the winter of 1902 - 03 to look around with a view to buying a home and get away from the cold Mich. winters.

He was a fruit grower and a nurseryman and he decided he would like to raise pineapples. But we had to have something coming in to live on in the meantime, so he started raising vegetables. He bought the pine scrub land that winter and he and a carpenter built the house and we moved down in Dec. 1903.
BOCA RATON THIRTY YEARS AGO

When I came to Florida over 30 years ago there was no rock road from Delray to Ft. Lauderdale all sand roads and in some places no road at all.

Within a year or two the County Commissioners began to fill the gap with rock pit at Ojus beginning at Ft. Lauderdale. This was all Dade Co. then from Florida City (then known as Detroit) to Stuart or the St. Lucie River. Everyday 8 cars would be loaded at the pit by convict labor.

After the morning train had gone north an engine would bring the 8 cars of rock to the end of the road and space the cars 150 feet apart. Then the cars would be unloaded by hand, two men to each car. One man in the car to fill a box hung on the outside of the car, and another man with a wheel-barrow to wheel the rock to the road just outside the right-of-way where other men leveled it. There was always a race to see who would get unloaded soonest. All were usually unloaded by 2 or 3 o'clock.

The rock when dumped on the road was never rolled - that was done by wagons. No autos here then. Horses and mules of course had to be shod and blacksmiths had plenty to do. Some farmers would get a set of farmers tools and do their own shoeing. Bicycles came in handy about that time. There were always half a dozen families here then and some of them were several miles apart. Capt. Rickards was station agent and also land agent for the railroad and canal companies. He also had a store in which was the B.

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There was a road from the Depot to the canal but no bridge. Crossing the canal in a boat there was only a path through the scrub to the ocean - half a mile. About the year 1902 or 1903 the body of a young woman was found floating in the ocean east of Boca Raton. They never could find out who she was, and they buried her on top of the bank a few rods south of the present pavillion. Boca Raton has its Unknown Grave. There are or were four Indian mounds in the vicinity of Boca Raton. One is so big it has never been opened up to see what is in it. The fourth one was only discovered last year. There was an immense shell mound near Lake Wyman (through which runs the East Coast canal) from which hundreds of loads of shell have been taken for road purposes. Each load containing the remnants of thousands of meals of fish and oysters.

Tomatoes was the principal vegetable crop in those days and tomatoes were always planted with a handful of compost to each plant. Consequently compost was in demand and was shipped by the carload from livery stables as far north as St. Augustine and Jacksonville. Livery stables have now gone the way of the hitching posts which every merchant in those days was supposed to have in front of his store. No hitching post no trade.

One time a car of compost came to Boca Raton consigned to four individuals. The problem was how to divide it. One of the consignees suggested that all four of them get in the car together and each have all he could throw out. Capt. Rickards remarked he would like to be there and see them come in on the home stretch. Pineapple land used to be cleared by hand. Grubbed generally by the "task". A "task" was 45 foot square 21 to the acre.

In 1904 a colony of Japanese came to Boca Raton led by an educated Japanese named Joseph Saki. Dissension and dissatisfaction broke up the colony in a very few years, and only one is here now of the original twenty three.

The first school was taught in 1908 in a packing house. We had applied to the County School Board to build us a school house. They were hard up as usual same as they are now. They told us we could build the school house and they would furnish a teacher. Guess they thought that would put a quietus on us for a while. But we did and they did. A big feather in our cap and one which we will always wear with pride was getting Laurence M. Gould to come from Michigan where he had just graduated from High School and teach our school in 1914-15-16.

Now he is in one of the front ranks of "Who's Who" in America.*

Our grocery bills in those early days used to be considerably reduced by the sea turtles that used to come up out of the ocean in the night in May and June and dig a hole in the sand on the beach and lay from 100 to 150 eggs. Then the turtle would fill up the hole with sand and pack it down and mess things up in the vicinity so as to divert attention from the real nest and then go back in the ocean and pay no more attention to her progeny. When the little turtles hatched they had to dig their way out through two feet of packed sand, find their way into the ocean and seek their own living. Whether they ever find "Ma" is extremely doubtful. The eggs are round not quite as large as a hen's egg and no shell just tough skin. They won't boil hard so are generally made into omelets. A chalky white spot appears on one side of the egg after a few days, and the bigger the spot the more ancient the egg. The freshest eggs I ever found were over 100 that I pulled out from under a turtle one night fast as she laid them. That operation finished, she filled the hole, beat down the sand and went back into the ocean in blissful ignorance of my presence.

* The house still stand at 139 W. Palmetto Park Road.

** Where entrance to Camino Gardens now stands.

* Gould, Lawrence McKinley, educator; born Lacota, Michigan, August 22, 1896; son of Herbert and Anna (Updike) G.; B.S. magna cum laude, U. Michigan, 1921, M.A., 1923, Sc. D., 1925.


.. In ambulance service, U.S. Army, 1917-19, with Italian Army, summer, 1918.

.. Author: Cold - the Record of an Antarctic Sledge Journey, 1931, also papers on geology Baffin Island and Antartica, and pleistocene geology of upper Mississippi Valley.


Map of a portion of Boca Raton locating some of the original sites important to the Chesebro family.

1904, clearing the land for pineapples.

Chesebro homestead, 1905, with first planting of pineapples.
Monday, Dec. 07: Packed three barrels canned fruit and shipped with box of potatoes, onions and oats. Nearly 50 qts in a barrel.

Tuesday, Dec. 08: Wrote letters and packed commode and books, etc. Took organ to Fowlers to be packed.

Thursday, Dec. 10: Snowy. Packed washing machine etc. Shipped 4 boxes.

Friday, Dec. 11: Boys made boxes for organ and desk. I sorted letters and papers. Cold.

Saturday, Dec. 12: Snowed most all day. Packed bedstead, spring and mattresses . . . took them down in P.M.

Monday, Dec. 14: Shipped organ and bought a lot of things. Cold. Packed sewing machine, etc. in one box, and iron maul, log chain, etc. in another. Packed phonograph and records and N. (Nettie, his wife) finished the trunks.

Tuesday, Dec. 15: Still cold. I decided to go on Michigan Central. N. made some calls and so did I. Came home afoot . . . Got ready and brought rest of things down. Said goodby to everybody and we left at 4:30. To Kalamazoo at 6, and left there at 12.


Friday, Dec. 18: Left J. at 11, 1 1/2 hrs late. Dark at Rockledge. To West Palm Beach at 9:30. Depot moved to north part of town. Got a hack after walking part way to Dr. Broadwell. They were just going to bed. Took N. and the girls over to a neighbor.

Saturday, Dec. 19: Up at 6 and met Mr. Hoffman going to his work. Breakfast at Dr. Broadwell's and bought a lot of stuff at hardware, furniture and grocery stores. Hoffman back home at 10:30 and we settled up for the horse and feed and care. Had dinner there and gathered up my things and started down rock road at 2. Stayed at hotel in Boynton over night.

Sunday, Dec. 20: Up at 4, (a.m.) fed horse and loaded up. Roused up landlord and paid him. Off at 5:30, rock road to Delray. Rained some. To Boca Raton at 11. Rest of them arrived at house a few minutes before I did. House dirty and full of lumber. Trunks went on to Ft. Lauderdale . . . .

Monday, Dec. 21: Were scant on bedding and dishes. Had 1 knife, and three spoons. Got some cotton seed meal and talked with Mr. Combs about planting tomatoes etc. Up to station at 9 P.M. to get trunks.

Tuesday, Dec. 22: Plowed some near canal for garden and seed bed. New horse did not go very well . . . .
Wednesday, Dec. 23: Got a 2 horse plow from Rickards and put in Comb's horse. It went better. Planted some tomatoes, etc.


Sunday, Dec. 27: Up to station in morning. Mr. Curry and the Japanese leaving on the train. We all went over to the beach. I guess I will take 5 acres of land by canal for tomatoes. Blanton had over 1/2 an acre of tomatoes on it now. I pay Rickards $160 for the place. Combs over in evening. Tried phonograph.

October 20, 1908: . . . grubbed on schoolyard.

Oct. 27: Still on schoolhouse.

Nov. 02: Helped in schoolhouse. Laid floor.

Nov. 26: Painted schoolhouse.

Dec. 05: Done painting. 14 days on schoolhouse.

Dec. 25: Had Christmas tree at schoolhouse. Longs, Braleys, Purdons, Maguires, Raulersons and us. Took phonograph.

August 17, 1914: Lawrence Gould began the school.

August 30: Lawrence Gould came here to board.

Sept. 30: Got kids for Lawrence at Yamato in auto.

First school at Boca Raton, 1908. Prof. Rhebinder, teacher.

THE BOCA RATON SEMI-OCCASIONAL

PUBLISHED BY THE PUPILS AND TEACHER* OF BOCA RATON SCHOOL.
ENTERED AT THE POSTOFFICE AT BOCA RATON AS SECOND CLASS
MATTER NOVEMBER 6TH, 1915

. . . Boca Raton School, unlike the town itself, does not have its beginning veiled in the mists of antiquity. The first school here was opened in Mr. Long’s packing house in 1908 with Professor Rhebinder as teacher. In a short time the school was moved to the schoolhouse which had just been completed and which has since that time been the sole institution of learning. After one year of successful teaching Mr. Rhebinder was succeeded by Mrs. Tasker who also taught but one year to be succeeded by Miss Harper who after the same length of time gave the task into the hands of Miss Johnson. Miss Johnson like all of her predecessors found one year quite enough and was accordingly succeeded by Miss Esther Chesebro who was the first teacher to teach two years. Since Miss Esther dissolved her connection with said school it has been the honor of the author of this sketch to have guided the younger members of Boca Raton’s growing population in the paths of learning.

*Lawrence Gould
Well Harry I hope this card finds “you all” “anticipating” in all the pleasures coming your way... I am off to the Glades tomorrow. School begins July 19th. $100 per mo paid by county.

Lawrence

Oct. 25, 1914 : Had a meeting of Boca Raton Board of Trade at Post Office in morning.

Sept. 06, 1915 : Board of Trade had meeting on Road question.

HISTORY AND OUTLINE OF WORK OF THE FIRST BOCA RATON BOARD OF TRADE

Boca Raton’s first Board of Trade was organized on August 11, 1915 with 21 members. At the first meeting held August 18th, 1915, the following Officers and Directors were elected:

W. H. Sistrunk, President
F. H. Chesebro, Vice-President
H. D. Gates, Secretary & Treasurer

H. B. Fultz
B. B. Raulerson
George A. Long
W. J. Sistrunk

Directors

The Board of Trade in cooperation with the Utility Club furnished and planted Australian Pines along Palmetto Park Road in September, 1915. An effort was made in October 1915 to secure cooperation of the State Drainage Board in the improvement of Boca Raton Inlet.

In November 1915, President W. H. Sistrunk and H. B. Fultz were delegates on the trip through the Everglades taken by the Commercial Boards of the East Coast.

In December 1915, the Board of Trade and the Utility Club secured site for the Boca Raton Cemetery and was instrumental in having the Section Foreman of the F. E. C. Railroad clean up the station and grounds surrounding.

Another effort was made on February 19, 1916 through the Assistant Engineer of the State Drainage Board to secure the widening and deepening of the Boca Raton Inlet. The Engineer of the War Department was a guest of the Secretary and agreed to approve plan outlined.

An effort was made during the latter part of February to secure a new school building and an election called through the efforts of the Board of Trade resulted in the building of our present school.

An effort was also made to put up a modest building for the Board of Trade but the members failed to raise the necessary funds.

In May 1916, through the efforts of the Board of Trade, money was raised for the present drawbridge across the East Coast Canal.

In July 1916, the Secretary represented the Boca Raton Board of Trade at a meeting of the East Coast Chamber of Commerce at Orlando. During this month, the Secretary was appointed a member of the Palm Beach County Citizens Highway Commission and served as District Inspector of that body in the building of the new Dixie Highway through Palm Beach County.

July 24, 1916 : Board of Trade meeting in eve. Harmonious.
MINUTES OF A SPECIAL MEETING
OF THE BOCA RATONE BOARD OF TRADE HELD JULY 24, 1916.

A Special Meeting of the Boca Ratone Board of Trade was held Monday evening, July 24, 1916, at 7.30 p.m.

In absence of the President, Vice-President Chesebro called the meeting to order.

The minutes of previous meetings were read and approved.

The Secretary made a brief statement regarding his membership in the Palm Beach County Citizens Highway Commission and read some correspondence relative to the East Coast Canal matter.

Chairman Chesebro of the road committee gave a report regarding the expenditure of money and work done to date on lateral roads. His report showed that there was $11,760 to be expended in the Boca Ratone district. Of this sum $5587.40 had been expended and $6172.60 remains to build the bridge across the East Coast Canal and to finish the lateral roads west and rebuild the road to the canal. This sum was deemed sufficient to do the necessary work on these roads. Moved that the report be accepted and thanks given the committee for their careful work.

Mr. Gorton made a brief address urging that the bridge across the canal and completion of Palmetto Park Road be pushed forward as rapidly as possible, stating that several thousand dollars would be expended by property owners when this work was complete. He also made a plea on behalf of the winter visitor and asked that the Board work towards municipal improvements.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned.

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December 5, 1915: Raulerson and I picked out a cemetery location west of Sistrunks house. R. R. land.

TO THE
PEOPLE OF BOCA RATON
AND DEERFIELD

The Trustees of Boca Raton Cemetery have adopted the following rules and regulations:

No lots will be sold but a charge of $5.00 will be made for each burial. This is done to provide a fund for the improvement, beautifying and maintenance of the cemetery and to avoid having the grounds disfigured by neglected and uncared for lots and graves.

We intend to make a beautiful little park of the place and to care for it as long as we have friends there. The land has been deeded to us and can never be used for any other purpose. Everyone can have their choice of location for a grave or family group providing it does not interfere with our general plan. Relatives can erect headstones and plant flowers as they choose. An accurate record of all graves will be kept. The Superintendent and Trustees get no pay for their services -- only for actual labor performed.

TRUSTEES
(Helen Long
(Viola Purdom
(Esther M. Chesebro

An excerpt of the Affadavit, necessitated by the removal of bodies, at the time of the cemetery's relocation.

I, Harry M. Chesebro of Boca Raton, in the County of Palm Beach and State of Florida, being duly sworn, deposes and states, that,

Frank H. Chesebro, my father, donated the lands named in the cation hereof for cemetery purposes in the year 1916 and had active charge thereof until the year 1928, at which time the Boca Raton Cemetery Association was chartered by the State and the said Frank H. Chesebro was then elected President of said association and acted continuously as such until his death January 19, 1936.

Deponent further states, that accurate records were kept of all burials and removals of bodies on and from said lands, together with a personal daily diary by Frank H. Chesebro, and that, all of these records intact are now in my possession.

Nov. 17: Tried to open inlet, 6 men. Too rough.

Nov. 18: Opened inlet in morn. with 4 men. Closed in 2 hours.

Boca Raton Inlet and the Pavilion, Oct. 4, 1923.

1924, April 29: Meeting at schoolhouse in evening to incorporate.

A statement of F. H. Chesebro:
the incorporation of the town of Boca Raton,
sworn and subscribed the 23rd day of May, A.D. 1924.

"When B. B. Raulerson came to me to sign the petition for a meeting to incorporate the town, the main and about the only reason he gave for doing so was so that they could bond the city to raise money to pay for the waterworks. The little stock company that was to finance the system had fallen down on the job and had got to the end of their rope financially. I asked Mr. Raulerson why they took in so much territory, and about the only reason he gave for doing so was so that they could bond the city to raise money to pay for the waterworks. He said it was of no use to him either but it had to be paid for and said that some of them went into it without understanding it very well and it was going to cost a lot more than they expected."

MAXWELL BAXTER
ATTORNEY AT LAW
FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA

July 16th, 1924.

Mr. F. H. Chesebro,
Boca Raton, Florida.

Dear Sir:

Referring to your inquiry as to whether or not your land incorporated within the limits of Boca Raton can be excluded by reason of the distance being such from the Town of Boca Raton that it will derive no benefits from taxation by said town, I wish to advise that I am of the opinion you have a remedy before the Circuit Court to have your property excluded from the corporate limits of the Town of Boca Raton; that is, if you can show to the Court that your land is at such distance and location from the Town of Boca Raton that it will receive no benefits from taxes levied and collected by the town nor any benefits by reason of the Town of Boca Raton being incorporated.

The writer is leaving tomorrow morning and will be away until about August the 1st. In the meantime I would suggest that you see the other property owners owning property adjacent to you on the south and determine from them as to whether or not they would desire to join you in a suit to exclude their property from the corporate limits, and when I return to Fort Lauderdale, I will come up to see you, and if you and your friends desire to have your property excluded from the limits of the Town of Boca Raton, we will get together and institute such proceedings. From the facts you gave me as to the physical location of your property with reference to the Town of Boca Raton, I feel confident we should be successful in excluding your property. I would suggest that you not say anything about what you propose to do to people in the town of Boca Raton who were favorable to the incorporation.

Very truly,

MAXWELL BAXTER
An excerpt from notes prepared to petition Judge Chillingworth

We the undersigned property owners in the South part of the City of Boca Raton do respectfully ask you to have our lands (South of lines to be hereafter described) excluded from the limits of said city for the following reasons.

Because the scheme for incorporating the City of Boca Raton was privately planned... The most of us live in Deerfield and elsewhere and only two of us had a vote in the matter.

... There are only about 65 permanent white inhabitants in the city and only two of them live in the part we ask to be excluded, which part contains about 1000 acres and extends to the Broward Co. line or up into Deerfield “back yard”. Being less than 1000 ft. from their schoolhouse and a little over that to their Post Office. Another reason for our wanting to be set out of the city is so that we will be able to sell our land to actual settlers and developers. Now when a prospective buyer comes along and finds the land is incorporated and he will have to pay city taxes for which he will receive no benefit whatever, he will decline to buy and walk off. Some of the present winter residents who own homes in the “city” are trying to sell out and go somewhere else. The “city” is growing at the rate of one family a year - hardly that. Boca Raton has been a flag station on the R.R. for 28 years and is a flag station yet.
No. 234

DEED.

MODEL LAND COMPANY

to

Frank A. Chesbro

Date Feb 13, 1903

Recorded in Book 2

Page 300

this April 30th, 1903.

In the County Clerk's Office of

Dade County, Fla.,

the 31st day of

March 1903

E. C. Greenwood

By J. L. Davis 1 c.

Record Verified.