"At the source of a "Spanish River" between Delray and Boca Raton there are remnants of an old sour orange grove. This Spanish River is so called because its existence has been described by the Spanish. The origin of the grove as well as nearby abandoned dwelling places are said to have been either a stranded Spanish settlement or a settlement of stragglers from the New Smyrna area during the British period of Florida History. Called the Castle by early inhabitants, these dwelling places ante-date any other settlement in the county."

Lure of the Sun, A Story of Palm Beach Co.

A report to the membership of

Boca Raton Historical Society, Inc.
P. O. Box 1113, Boca Raton, Florida 33432

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Boca Raton Historical Society, Inc.

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The following articles and letters are a compilation of the earliest data available locally. It has been gathered from sources generously shared by the pioneer families of Boca Raton and from the archives of the Henry Morrison Flagler Museum, Palm Beach, and the Palm Beach Historical Society. The material clearly defines the period of early settlement in Boca Raton and the promise of its future growth.

Harley D. Gates, a pioneer in Boca Raton since 1913, took great interest in the history of this area. To encourage development in his community, he compiled and published a booklet from which the following was taken.

It is likely that the first white man to see Boca Raton was Pedro Menenez de Arvilla, appointed Governor of Florida by Charles V, King of Spain. In September 1565 Menendez’s son, Juan, left Havana aboard a sailing vessel for St. Augustine to join his father, but encountering a hurricane off the South Florida Coast he never reached his destination. With a hope that his son was washed ashore somewhere along the coast and was still alive, Menendez and a party of his soldiers journeyed south along the beach as far as Biscayne Bay. To reach that location he must have passed through Boca Raton.

The blood-thirsty pirates and buccaneers of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries were evidently struck at the peaceful beauty and glorious tropical scenery of Boca Raton. Here, sheltered from the storms and safe from pursuit in the natural harbor formed by the attractive little lake lying just back of the ocean ridge they rested between raids on the Spanish Main. There are old parchment maps in existence today showing Boca Raton Inlet as a refuge for the low-piratical craft who pursued and conquered the gold-laden galleons of Spain.

* * * * * * *

The Seminole Indians came to Florida in 1808, a branch of the Creek tribe then living in Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia. They knew Boca Raton as an alluring spot and gave it the name “Estahakee” meaning a beautiful scene. They came here each summer to hunt and fish and to enjoy the cool ocean breezes and had a camp on the Hillsboro River about two miles from the beach.

From 1875 until the railroad was completed there were two Post Offices and two mail carriers in South Florida. One Post Office was in Miami and one at Lake Worth. One mail carrier would leave Ft. Pierce once a week for Jupiter in a sailboat, then walk the beach to the north end of Lake Worth where he would take another boat to Lake Worth Post Office, located around a mile from what is now Palm Beach. There he would be met by the mail carrier from Miami, who would sail to the south end of Lake Worth, then walk the beach to the north shore of Biscayne Bay where he would take a sailboat for Miami. The Inlets were crossed in row boats. The mail carrier from Miami would frequently stop over night at the lower end of Lake Boca Raton and replenish his water supply from the spring just west of the Inlet. The mail carrier usually walked barefoot along the water edge, but on occasion he would have to put on his shoes and push
through the palmettos along the ocean ridge when he would encounter a black bear searching along the beach for turtle nests.

While no pioneer of Boca Raton has gained renown by a display of rare genius or unusual ability, this book should not fail to mention the Honorable Joshua A. Bowen and his service to the citizens of this community. Mr. Bowen lived in a palmetto shack on the north bank of the Hillsboro River in what is now known as Boca Raton Park. Mr. Bowen was seldom unduly ruffled or disturbed and usually dozed peacefully in the shade of a sea grape tree near his palmetto shack. In 1876 he was one of the few people in this vicinity who might, on rare occasions, receive mail.

One morning he was delivered a letter by the mail carrier walking the beach on his weekly trip from Lake Worth to Miami, informing him that he had been nominated by the Republicans of Dade County (Boca Raton at that time being in Dade County) as an honorable member of the State Legislature. There being no Democratic aspirant in the field, Mr. Bowen could be assured of being elected.

The few settlers in Dade County at that time were mostly from the north and were Republicans. Now days a legislator is considered a person of note, but in those pioneer days a barefoot legislator might be encountered hunting turtle eggs on the beach or peddling fish.

Mr. Bowen, known to his enemies as “Hog Bowen” due to the disappearance of a hog from a neighbor’s pen, was duly elected.

To enable Mr. Bowen to appear in creditable dress among his fellow legislators his neighbors in Dade County found it necessary to supply him with clean shirts, new trousers and a pair of shoes. Arranged as never before, he left Boca Raton for the State Capitol. Sufficient to say that when he was awake he performed the duties of his office with honor and credit to himself and his constituents. He saved enough of his salary to establish himself on a sound financial basis as a raiser of hogs at this place in Boca Raton.

Boca Raton’s first developer was T. M. Rickards, a civil engineer for the Flagler interests, who came to Boca Raton aboard a schooner from Titusville, then the southern terminus of the Florida East Coast Railroad. Mr. Rickards was greatly impressed with the natural beauty of Boca Raton and returned the following year with his family and built a home on the east side of the Inland Waterway, south of the Palmetto Park Road bridge. His home was built entirely of wreckage picked up on the beach, even the doors and windows.

In 1897 Mr. Rickards surveyed several hundred acres of land and subdivided it into ten acre tracts. These tracts were sold to people in the north and about 500 acres were thus disposed of and planted to pineapples under the supervision of Mr. Rickards. For a number of years Boca Raton was a busy pineapple center and many thousand pineapples were sent annually to the northern markets. Competition from Cuba finally ruined the market for Florida pineapples and many of the potters were killed for their meat, the only fresh meat nearer than West Palm Beach. Some of the natives enjoyed baked wildcat, and alligator tails were also eaten.

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FLAGLER AND HIS WORK FOR FLORIDA

Of all living men, however, the one who has done most for Florida is a certain Bismarck of commerce and finance named Henry M. Flagler. On the east coast, especially, “Fla.” stands for Flagler rather than for Florida. So marvelous a transformation from a sandy wilderness to a five-hundred-mile streak of terrestrial paradise has nowhere else been wrought by the genius and enterprise of one man.

From the moment when he saw it first, in 1884, Florida seized upon Mr. Flagler’s imagination. He was then a work-worn millionaire, with thirty-five years of business-building behind him; but as he sat under the palm-trees he forgot it all and began a second career, fully as romantic as that of Ponce de Leon, and, happily, much more successful.

At the suggestion of a friend in Washington, he had gone to St. Augustine to escape the severity of a northern February; and he was so impressed by the restfulness and unique charm of the place that he ordered a great hotel to be built there. Another friend, Mr. Frederic Robert, lured him two hundred and sixty miles farther south, to Palm Beach, which the delighted Flagler immediately began to transform into a garden of the gods.
By this time he had bought a railway that ran south from Jacksonville—a pitiful wire-way of rush that lay forlorn and unprofitable. He remade it, and built it farther and farther south, until now it hems the entire east coast with a double thread of steel. Even to Miami, which lies near the extreme southern tip of the mainland of Florida, it is a notable line, running through a tropical region that looks much more like Algiers or Egypt than like any other section of the United States.

What with this wonderful railway, and his chain of nine great hotels, Henry M. Flagler has invested in Florida a sum approaching fifty millions of dollars. He has given the United States a new five-hundred-mile coast-line. Singlehanded he has accomplished a task so costly and difficult that in any other country it would have been a national undertaking. No one but a twentieth-century American would have dared to carry it through alone.

He is now a remarkably young old man of seventy-nine, this empire-builder of the new Southeast. Seventy years have passed since he was a country boy in New York State, accepting as a matter of necessity the hardships of the Northern winters; to-day, he lives in a marble castle at Palm Beach, while thousands of tourists are enjoying a semitropical winter in the wonderland he has opened to them.

Personally, Flagler cares little for luxury. He is neither a hunter nor a fisherman. He is a business man, pure, and simple. He loves to do big things. He has no fear of incidental difficulties. All he asks is that the proposed work shall be possible for human energy and brains to do.

It is said that when the plans for the seagoing railway were placed before him, he studied them for some time. Finally he turned to J. R. Parrott, his railway manager, and asked:

"Can you do this?"
"Yes," replied Parrott.
"Then do it," said Flagler.

The next day the building of the most unique railway in the world began.

F. H. Chesebro, came to Boca Raton Dec. 20, 1903, with his parents. The Chesebro family became one of the first pineapple growers in the area. The following is an excerpt from Mr. Chesebro's "Reminiscences of Boca Raton Thirty Years Ago."

Captain T. M. Rickards and son James came from Candler, Fla. by boat in 1895 in the interests of the experimental grove planted at Boca Raton by Henry Flagler, Pres. and Ingraham, vice-pres., of the East Coast R.R. The grove was located east of the railroad in the north end of Boca Raton.

In 1897 Capt. Rickard's family arrived, his wife, three girls and two boys. They built a home on the east side of the canal south of where the bridge now stands. Besides acting as Supt. of the R.R. groves Capt. Rickards cared for his own grove. The sons, T. M. and J. C. Rickards operated a small commissary, acted as postmaster and express agency. Supplies and mail were carried bi-weekly from Palm Beach to Miami by the tug boat, "Eleanor Hitty." A toll chain extended across the canal near Rickards and one of the Rickards boys collected toll from passing boats. Billy Sistrunk and partner, Mr. Null arrived in 1899 and started tomato growing. Capt. Rickards prospered in his endeavors in Boca Raton and in 1902 went to N. C. summers, eventually building a home and moving to that place.
Florida Coast Line Canal and Transportation Co.

LANTANA, Fla.
April 16, 1896

J. E. Ingraham Esq.,
Land Commissioner, Fla. East Coast Rly.
St. Augustine, Fla.

Dear Sir,

I had a talk with Mr. Sutton concerning the exploiting of Marion and Alachua Counties with a view of inducing a good class of settlers to locate along the line of your railroad. I shall be in that part of Florida part of the summer, and as our people at Boca Raton have been very successful in their experiments so far I shall use their success to advertise our part of Dade Co. and am very sure of getting some good citizens. Please give me any assistance you can think of, sending me some maps and printed matter.

I shall go to Marion Co. early in May, to be gone about two months. For the present my address will be Lantana.

Very respectfully,

(signature)
T. M. Rickards

Inspector of Lands
Boca Raton

P. O. Address, Delray, Dade Co., Fla., March 15, 1899

J. E. Ingraham Esq.,

Dear Sir,

Your favor of 12th was rcvd. this A.M. I cannot get an answer off until tomorrow morning & it will not reach you probably before you leave. I have made a thorough examination by boring and have discarded all land where the yellow subsoil isn't close to surface, also, all having tili, galberry, palmetto or rosemary. I refused all land in vicinity of the point where we bored 5 ft. for yellow soil or e/c rosemary & deep white sand. The land on Boca Raton lake, westside was sold to Nugent who sold again and is probably out of the market. As I have located 62 acres (which may be increased to 100) I can locate Graham very satisfactorily. I am not quite ready to make detailed report as I have been so hindred from my work by parties you have sent to look at land. Please do not send any more for a few days. I send diagrams with record of borings as far as I have gone. Will send Larsen report soon as possible. He has already had land reserved. The 62 acres marked comprize land that is strictly good, your Co. & Mr. Lewis (who will readily meet you in any improvement) own all the land to the canal and there is ample accommodation for the launch (with less work than would be required in the lake.) in the creek west of the island. I wish you were where I could see you. Will bring in or send report at any time. Will write Larsen - give me your address.

Yours Truly

(signature)
T. M. Rickards

On the reverse side of the above letter, written in long hand:

Miami, Mar. 17,-99

Mr. Rowley & party were with me last night & we all came down here this A.M. Mr. Long of Interlachen is authority on orange trees, also, the gentleman from Crescent City. They are very much pleased with class of land I select & will all select lots at Boca Raton. The Crescent City man says the soil is exactly the same as that in the orange region near him & is first class for the business. I will make no mistakes and will be ready for business when I hear from you. I am boring a hole every 200 ft. & it will have proper subsoil. These gentlemen are forerunners of the class I have always wanted & we must locate them.

Respectfully.

T. M. Rickards
Inspector of Lands
Boca Raton

P. O. Address, Delray, Dade Co., Fla., March 22, 1899

You are hereby authorized to begin the work of building the orange grove in Sections 20, 29 and 30 Township 47 S. Range 43E. by clearing land, purchasing the necessary tools, team, wagon etc. on lines mentioned in my letter of March 3rd, addressed to you at Candler, with such modifications of estimates, included in such letter, as may be necessary. All changes in estimates must be submitted for my approval, and this letter is simply intended to protect you in preliminary expenses until a permanent contract can be made. You will receive $50.00 per month dating from March 1st, 1899, to be paid monthly, together with such bill of expenses as may be found proper after same has been audited.
You have my consent to change items of expense - where necessary or advantageous providing that the total outlay shall not exceed the sum of $7450 for the first cash and that you will submit for approval any radical changes you deem expedient.

Initialed but not signed by J. E. Ingraham

Mr. J. E. Ingraham
St. Aug. Fla. Dear Sir
May 12 -1899

The work is progressing very well indeed. I have about 55 acres now under way and much the greater part is grubbed, about half has stumps off & holes filled & a large part is raked over & finished. I have only been paying the men enough to live on each week as if I had paid at all near what was due they might have quit the job & as it is they must finish to get their money. The clearing costs $30.00 per acre and the taking up stumps, filling holes and raking, 5.00 per acre. The men make about 1.00 per day if they put in 10 hours. I task them all. I wish you could give me a day or two of your time. I also wish the switch was here before that next bill of lumber comes. I have one force of 20 men on the 20 acres of canal land who have finished the grubbing and are now removing stumps & etc. It looks like business to see them all at work. There will be considerable money to pay out at the wind up. I think I will perhaps use $1000.00 more this month as I think I will finish the clearing. Have enough for this week however - Will make up bill for clearing in next monthly statement after all is finished. Then I will not have to use as much. Mr. Lewis will probably get Deed for the Farnham land in a few days. He advises me to meet you on all points of mutual good without further instructions. If the switch, here, was definitely located I would open a road to the eastward & put men to work on it as they wind up the clearing. I enclose map showing clearing under way, in red. Do you want any land cleared in Lot 4B in 7 & 4 & 8 in B8, or did you buy those lots. If you did not, better wait until I see you & have a talk about switch. Will plant this P.M. Grable is up & is a credit to Dade Co. I have a very good carpenter & every thing goes right without a hitch.

Yours truly,

T. M. Rickards

Since writing within I have received letter from Mr. Waite agreeing to supply the entire 5000 trees for next December planting @ 25¢ each ($250.00 per M) fob at his shipping station. He wants 20% advance. If you decide to accept him for entire lot, (& I think it may be as well to do so as he is reliable) you can send check to me for amt ($250) & I will send contract for his signature.

Have just rcvd letter from Mr. Farnham saying he will forward Deed to Mr. Lewis in a few days.

Yours truly

J. E. Ingraham Esq
Via Dear Sir -

Please send check for $500.00 by first mail. I find many of the men will clean up their contracts sooner than I thought & I will need the money sure by the time it can come.

Mail check to Delray,

Yours truly

(signature)
T. M. Rickards

Feb. 1900 - p 3, Vol II No. 2

The Homeseeker periodical was published by the East Coast Land Development Company to promote interest in Southeast Florida and encourage use of Mr. Flagler's railroad. The articles included property advertisements, progress reports on various agricultural endeavors, and helpful hints in coping with the problems of tropical life. It should be noted that at the time of publication Dade County included what is now Dade, Broward and Palm Beach Counties.

BOCA RATONE (Dade County)

WHAT THE WIDE AWAKE EDITOR OF THE SAN MATEO ITEM SAW THERE-THE ORANGE AND PINEAPPLE INDUSTRY BOOMING-HUNDREDS OF ACRES BEING CLEARED AND PLANTED IN CITRUS TREES AND PINEAPPLES.

This little place we visited last week and were quite surprised to see the amount of work that has been done there during the summer and fall.

"So far there are, however, very few actual settlers, Mr. Rickards having the orange groves and pineapple fields started, mostly for new residents. Less than a year ago there was less than ten acres of land cleared in this settlement.

"Now we find that Mr. H. M. Flagler has fifty acres already set out in orange trees with probably twenty acres more land cleared.

"On this fifty acre grove Mr. Rickards has a very comfortable two-story house with water from a windmill and tank in both stories. This water is also used for watering the grove.

"A new freight depot about 24x50, slate roof, and a store are all recent improvements.

"Mr. Frank S. Lewis, of Philadelphia, has twenty acres of grove, and will put up at once a windmill and tank for irrigation purposes. In another place he has a seven acre grove set and will cover this and plant pineapples between the trees.

BOCA RATONE (Dade County)
Mr. Geo. Long, of Interlachen, has had a ten acre grove set out west of the depot, near the Hillsboro river. He also has a steam irrigation plant, pipe, etc., on the ground ready to set up. In another section Mr. Long has cleared three acres, two of which are set in pines, mostly of the Smooth Cayenne variety, and about one acre of these is covered. Plants are looking green and thrifty. Mr. Long has also given orders to plant one acre in guavas.

Mr. Chas. Francis, of Interlachen, has ten and three-quarters acres in pines and covered. Two acres are cleared and he expects to extend his patch. He has also given his order to set out one acre in guavas.

Across the street, T. Donnelly, of San Mateo, has ten acres, one of which is cleared, and he has about two thousand pines out.

Coming south from Mr. Donnelly's, L. B. Bailey, of San Mateo and L. T. Trull, of Lowell, Mass., have ten acres, six acres cleared, and they will put this out in oranges and grapefruit this month.

Opposite we have five acres cleared and set out in oranges and grapefruit, with a shed over one acre under which we have pines. We now expect to extend our shed over trees and plant pines between tree rows.

Lewis & Rickards have ten acres in pines, eight acres covered and under the shed are two hundred trees.

J. H. Moore has about an acre in pines, half covered.

Jim Rickards has about the same as Moore.

We now come to a star patch of pines of only half an acre belonging to T. M. Rickards. They are of the Smooth Cayenne variety. These were planted in 1897, and Mr. Rickards shipped 160 crates last summer which sold to net on the average $3 per crate f.o.b. Then for the fall crop he has shipped over 100 crates or twenty-five still on the plants. These will average net $3.90 to $4 per crate. Average size of pines, 12 to the crate, or from this half acre Mr. Rickards will net this past year over $950 from fruit alone and his suckers should be worth at least $300.

The land here is all about the same level, spruce pine, with yellow sand subsoil very near the surface.

As we go east about one-fourth mile from the county road, which by the way, has just been changed, and cut for four miles as straight as an arrow, we come to the canal and heavy garden lands along its border.

We left San Mateo on the morning of the 3rd, with thermometer at 19 degrees, with indications that tops of orange trees were killed. In these gardens, we found tomatoes, snap beans, egg plants, etc., with no sign of frost on them whatever, and "gardens." Ye Gods! It did us good to see them. Tomatoes at all stages, snap beans being picked and sent North, egg plants, peas, Irish potatoes, strawberries, celery, cabbage, lettuce, onions, turnips, beets, in fact, everything, and all looking thrifty and good enough to eat.

Among the vegetable growers were:

J. P. Cromer, four acres in tomatoes.

S. C. Jones, three acres in tomatoes, egg plants, etc.

D. J. Reid has four acres in beans and potatoes.

Will Jackson, four acres in tomatoes and beans.

C. W. Blaine, six acres in tomatoes, one-half acre in beans.

Blaine is a darky and a good one. He is working on shares. Land and fertilizers are furnished him vs. his labor. He had no capital but his two hands and a little credit. He has shipped over two hundred crates of beans, selling for $3, and from his six acres of tomatoes he will clear a good thing.

"The prospects for this section of Dade county are certainly bright and we believe inside of two years this section will be full of settlers both from the North and the northern sections of our own State.

"T. M. Rickards will cheerfully give what information he can regarding lands for sale in this section."

This place is rapidly developing into an orange & pineapple section. Here is located one of the largest groves on the East Coast, containing 55 acres. The trees have made an unusually good growth during the past summer & are in a thrifty growing condition. The State Experimental Station is also located here, and it is doing much to demonstrate the adaptability of the spruce pine lands for growing oranges. It is said that Mr. Thos. M. Rickards has one of the finest young groves there in the state. Mr. Rickards who is an old orange grower said to the writer: I have a grove on the West side of the canal that can't be beat for its age in the State. I do not say this because it is my grove, but it is a fact." The Pineapple crop here the past season was phenomenal, and acres of this spruce pine land will be converted into pineapple plantations.

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The Banana as an Article of Food.

The Banana in its true home, where it becomes mature before picking, forms an important part of the diet of the inhabitants, says Mr. Rorer in the Ladies Home Journal. . . .

They are exceedingly difficult of digestion. Children should never be allowed to eat the ordinary banana unless cooked, or when the skins are black & the fruit very soft & dark - almost what one would call overripe.

Banana fritters and fried bananas are to be condemned, as are all fried fruit.

—Fruitman's Guide
COST OF BUILDING MATERIAL

In Dade County, below Palm Beach, such lumber as is usually used in building a cottage, in carloads of 6,000 or 8,000 feet, would cost about $13.50 per M. Small quantities would cost about $16 per M.

Shingles from $2 to $3 per M., depending on quality.

Lath about $2 per M.

Brick about $12 per M.

Lime about $1.35 per bbl.

Owing to the warm climate, it is not at all necessary for the comfort of the average settler to have a house lathed and plastered, at least if he has not ample means so to do.

Good carpenters can be had at from $1.50 to $2.25 per day in this vicinity. The cost of a two-room cottage, not lathed and plastered inside, but with a partition made of ceiling and a small front porch, should be about $140. If the settler should do a large amount of the work himself, of course the cost would be correspondingly less. In building these houses it is not usual to use brick piers, but the house can be set on "light-wood" blocks, which will last as long as the house. Of course, it is understood that no cellars are used under houses in Florida. Instead of using brick for a chimney, it is usual to buy terracotta flues, which can be had at a cost of about 50 cent per foot. In this manner it is not necessary to employ a bricklayer for piers or chimney.

A small, four-room cottage, with ceiling partitions, should cost about $275. In building larger houses of more than one story the cost for carpenter work in building would be about $14 per M. on the amount of lumber used for an unplastered cottage, and about $18 per M. for a plain two-story cottage plastered—this to include labor of shingling.

A neat six-room, lathed and plastered and painted one-story cottage would cost about $750.

The cost of lumber delivered in Brevard County along the line of road would be about 50 cents per M. less than the prices given above.