

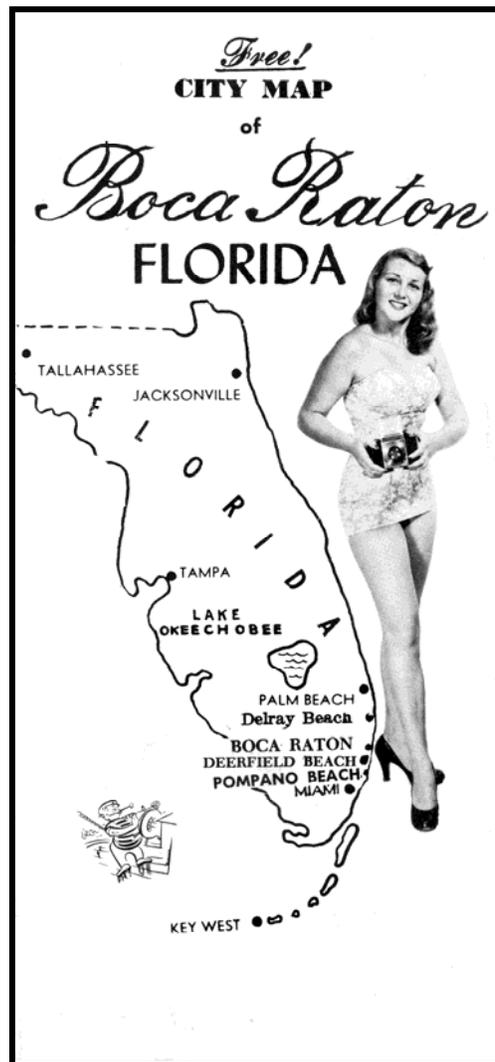
# The Spanish River Papers

March 2007

Volume XIX

## *Fifties Facts*

*Boca Raton in the 1950s*



Compiled by Patricia Eddinger Jakubek

Sources: 1956-1959 Boca Raton city directories

*Boca Raton: A Pictorial History*

1958 telephone book

*Boca Raton News* 1955-1959

*The Pelican* 1950-1953

Pioneer memories & maps, photographs, brochures, and other ephemera contributed by donors since our founding in 1973

*These ads appeared in the 1958  
Boca Raton telephone directory*



# *Fifties Facts*



## **1950s—a national timeline (credit: Kingwood College Library website)**

1950 President Harry Truman approved production of the hydrogen bomb and sent Air Force and Navy to Korea in June; the fighting ended in Korea in 1953

1954 Racial segregation was ruled unconstitutional in public schools by the U.S. Supreme Court

1955 Dr. Jonas Salk developed a vaccine for polio

1956 Under President Dwight D. Eisenhower (Ike), the Federal Highway Act was signed, marking the beginning of work on the interstate highway system

1957 With the launching of Sputnik I on 10/4/57 the “Space Race” began between the US and the USSR

1959 Alaska and Hawaii became the 49<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> states

## **1950s-Boca Raton**

### **Boca Raton Chamber of Commerce**

The Boca Raton Chamber of Commerce was organized in the fall of 1951 using the Community Church for its organizational meeting and headquarters. In 1952 Albert Edelhoff donated six months of rent free space in the Edelhoff Building (later the Haggerty Building) for the chamber’s use, and by 1953 a new building was erected on Federal Highway across from the city hall to permanently house the chamber. In the late 1950s, a swanky new headquarters was built at 2151 North Federal Highway in what is called “MiMo” style. Today the site is the home of Sonny’s Gelato Café.

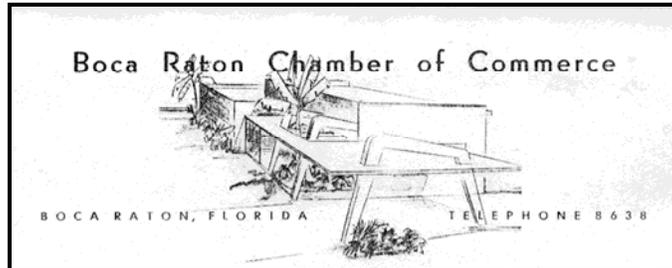
In the early 50s, chamber of commerce members used Old Betsy, the town’s 1926 American LaFrance fire engine, to recruit new members. They would climb aboard, drive to a business, ring the fire engine’s bell, and go inside to solicit membership.

In December, 1952, the chamber of commerce directors started the move to decorate Boca Raton with festoons of lights for the holidays, with progressive lighting of our town for many years to come.

Chamber activities in 1953 included approval for “STOP” signs to be placed at the 13<sup>th</sup> Street railroad crossing at Old Dixie Highway.

The directors of the chamber of commerce went on record in 1954 as favoring a super highway (now the Sunshine State Parkway) with an interchange at Boca Raton.

A “Florida Products Festival”, which consisted of exhibits of products manufactured or produced in this area, was organized by the chamber of commerce in 1955.



### Businesses Come to Town

In 1950 Boca’s first department store, Roadman’s, opened on Boca Raton Road between the post office and Morris’ Grocery Store. Dave’s Grocery replaced Morris’ store in 1952.

In August, 1950, Mr. & Mrs. Melvin Schmitt opened the first dude ranch in Boca Raton (and probably southern Florida) at their place in west Boca Raton Hills. The *Boca Raton News* wished good luck to “Smitty.”

In August, 1950, Louis Zimmerman built four stores south of Zim’s on Federal Highway, which he expected to be occupied by November. The Brass Knocker Gift Shop and Boca Raton Fashions opened soon after.

A 30 year old time-worn cottage perched upon a 20 foot high ridge just north of the public beach at Palmetto Park Road opened as the Driftwood Beach Club (Smitty’s Driftwood) on December 29, 1951.

Africa USA, the newest “only” attraction, made up of zoological gardens and natural habitat for rare birds and animals from Africa, opened in 1952. By the next year there were rumors of another tourist attraction to come: Ancient America Indian Village & Museum to be built just north of our city limits.



Selleck Watercycle Corporation, building boats that operated similar to bicycles, opened in one of the old Boca Raton Army Air Field buildings in 1952.

The 1956 Boca Raton directory lists these retail grocers: Dave's Grocery on Boca Raton Road, Pen Jenkins and Willie White on N. Dixie Highway, and Kwik Chek located at SE 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue.

Restaurants along Federal Highway in 1956 included Bob's, Brown's & Zim's Bars & Restaurants, the Garden Restaurant, and The Waffle Shop. Hermansen's Restaurant and Smitty's Driftwood were located on A1A; the Harlem Inn and Mrs. Lila Mae Goddard's on N. Dixie Highway; on East Palmetto Park Road was Boca Italian and The Griddle, now at 40<sup>th</sup> Street and still a gathering place for the Boca crowd.

Businesses which remain today (2007) that were established in Boca Raton during the "Nifty Fifties" or before are the Boca Raton Resort & Club, Boca Raton Community Church/Bibletown, *Boca Raton News*, William J. Day Agency, Inc., First Methodist Church/The Community Church, Kraer Funeral Parlor, Leturmy Lawn Service, Petruzzelli Real Estate, Inc., and Smith & DeShields.

On a night at the Boca Raton Hotel in 1956 there was great excitement among the guests as they celebrated the biggest real estate deal in Florida history: J. Myer Schine and his wife, Hildegard, who owned numerous hotels and theaters around the country, had sold the Boca Raton Hotel & Club to Alcoa chairman of the board Arthur Vining Davis, for \$22.5 million. A story on this sale later appeared in *Time* magazine.



### City Government

From 1946 – 1954 Fire Chief John Loughery staffed the fire department in the municipal building (now Town Hall) with volunteers who earned \$3 per fire and \$2 per weekly drill. In 1954 Daniel Andrews joined the force, bringing the total full time paid firefighters to two.

Boca's mayors throughout the 50s included J. C. Mitchell, Dr. William O'Donnell, Louis A. Zimmerman, William "Pop" Day, Harold A. Turner, William O. Herbold, John "Roy" Shores, Harold Turner, and Joe DeLong.

A proposal was made in 1951 to use a sketch made by Jim Vandermale as the town seal. Although used by the chamber of commerce for many years, it was adopted officially by the city of Boca Raton on September 24, 1991. Unofficially, it was used by the city, at least since 1978.

In 1951 the town passed an act creating civil service for its employees.

The City of Boca Raton Year End 1957 Progress Report showed that in 1956 negotiations began for the transfer of the former army air field property to the State Board of Education for the construction of a state university (later known as FAU).

In March, 1957, Boca's new \$250,000 water treatment plant with a capacity of pumping 3 million gallons of water per day was dedicated.

The Town of Boca Raton became the City of Boca Raton effective September 17, 1957, which put into effect a city manager/commission form of government in place of the prior mayor/city council/town clerk form.



### **Communication**

In March, 1949 Miami Station WTVJ brought the new phenomenon of television to our area. Principal J. Ermel Denson of the Boca Raton Negro Elementary School, wrote a letter in March, 1953, which was published in *The Pelican* newspaper in thanks for a new television set for the school.

By August, 1954, the TV Station WJNO opened its Palm Beach studios at 5 Coconut Row. It was sold in 1956 changing its call letters to WPTV.

On December 2, 1955, the *Boca Raton News* issued its first edition. There were 1,200 copies of that first newspaper with editor Margaret Olsson's home serving as temporary headquarters.



Mayor John L. (Roy) Shores proclaimed June 19, 1957, as "Boca Raton Day" and appeared with other townspeople of Boca Raton to explain the merits of this city on the "Salute to Boca Raton Day" at WPTV, Channel 5.

### **Culture Comes to Boca**

In 1950 the Art Guild of Boca Raton was formed. The big kick off to draw interest in the new guild was an art exhibit held in 1950 in the council chamber and lobby of the municipal building (now Town Hall) during the opening of the new library. This was attended by more than 800 people. The first shovelful of dirt was dug at the groundbreaking ceremonies for their new building in 1962.

From 1948 – 1956 the Boca Raton library was housed in the city’s municipal building at 71 N. Federal Highway, now home to the Boca Raton Historical Society. It was then relocated to the administration building of the Garden Apartments (a.k.a. the Palmetto Park Project), before settling into a specially built library building on NW Second Avenue in 1961.

The Boca Raton Symphonic “Pops” developed from a modest band formed in the 1950s of 20 volunteer musicians in a town with a population of 300. The little group first performed at the first Christmas tree lighting in Sanborn Square in 1951 led by retired air force officer Philip J. Azzolina, under the auspices of the city’s parks & recreation department. Upon his father’s death in 1970, Retired Air Force Lt. Colonel Mark Azzolina, became the music director & conductor of the “Pops.”

### **Developing Boca**

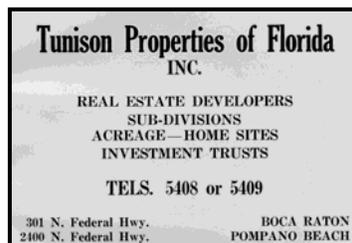
In Boca’s early years housing was sparse for newcomers to the city, but the 1950s changed all that. Developers cleared land and built larger concrete block homes, 3 or 4 at a time, creating affordable housing for young families.

The Bible Conference Grounds, founded in 1950, was located on 320 acres of land on the former Boca Raton Army Airfield. During the 1954 season, more than 2,000 guests registered at the 100 room conference hotel from almost every state and eight foreign lands. Four separate housing developments with private homes and apartments were planned.

In the early 1950s, homes in Boca Villas, the first post-war development in town, sold for \$10,000 - \$13,000 while those being built in the Boca Raton Estates between the Atlantic Ocean and Intracoastal Waterway cost \$40,000 - \$200,000.

In January, 1953, four square blocks of housing known as the Palmetto Park Project during World War II were purchased from Joe L. Moore by Thomas A. Barba of New York and Miami for the sum of \$250,000. In April, 1956, the 200 apartments, an administration building, and 20 acres of land were purchased by Cornelius B. Hermann, Austin Jordan, and Alvin B. Sheller and renamed the Boca Raton Garden Apartments. In 1958 the apartments were acquired by Leon and Frieda Kammerman.

During 1957 development within the city’s corporate area continued uninterrupted. Fourteen new plats were accepted for recording: Boca Woods, Chatham Hills Section B, Conference Lakes Estates, Bel Marra, University Heights, Varsity Heights, Winfield Park Unit 2, Tunison Palms Sections 1 & 2, Country Club Village Section A, Royal Palm Civic & Shopping Center, Spanish River Land Company Unit 2, Caribbean Keys, and Boca Woods Block 16.



When Arthur Vining Davis acquired the Boca Raton Hotel in 1956 he also acquired thousand of acres of land in Boca Raton. The Arvida Corporation, a named coined from the first letters of his name, began to establish expensive landscaped subdivisions that would forever change Boca Raton's image.

In 1959 developers of Carol City in Miami moved ahead with their plans for developing Hidden Valley, which had recently been annexed by Boca Raton.

The Arvida Realty Company hosted a grand "Arvie" awards banquet in 1959 at the Boca Raton Hotel & Club, which featured the presentation of 62 gold and bronze trophies to its realtors for their selling achievements.

The Arvida development firm created the "company town" of University Park, incorporated in 1959. The town had fewer than 50 families, along with one service station, a mayor and four commissioners, and a lone police officer. By 1971 Arvida was to turn the town over to the residents for self-government. When that date arrived, the town of 241 homes and 1,000 residents chose to be annexed and join with the city of Boca Raton.

### **Education**

Throughout the 1950s the children of Boca Raton were educated at Boca Raton Elementary School, the Roadman School, and J. C. Mitchell School.

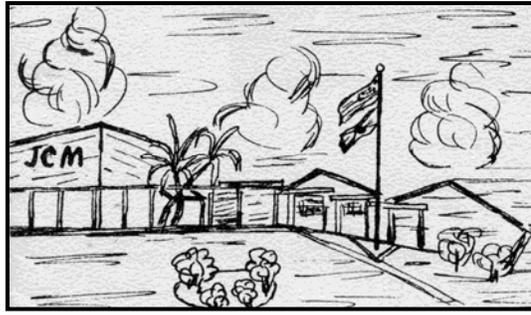
In 1953 The Boca Raton School PTA celebrated the 30th anniversary of its organization. Of eight charter members, Mrs. Clementine Brown and Mrs. Eula Raulerson still resided in Boca Raton.

By the end of the 1956-57 school year, according to Principal Paul Matwiy, there were 395 students in the old Boca Raton School.

As the population of both the town and school grew Paul Matwiy, Principal of Boca Raton Elementary School during 1953-1958, expanded classroom space by using the auditorium for three classes, set up portable classrooms on school property, and used an old wartime building at the corner of Palmetto Park Road and SW Second Avenue. This building had previously housed Stanley Memorial Hospital, which was run by Dr. Ball during the late 1940s. A number of the children who were born in that hospital were very amused to be attending school in those classrooms during the 50s.

In spring of 1955 Police Chief W. H. Brown, better known as Brownie, hosted 16 members of the Boca School Safety Patrol on a trip to West Palm Beach for lunch at Morrison's Cafeteria and a baseball game.

J. C. Mitchell, an early settler of Boca Raton, came to town in 1923. He and his wife established a real estate business and built the Mitchell Arcade on Dixie Highway, which was fronted by a mammoth banyan tree. After serving this community as well as the county and state, he died in 1955. The J. C. Mitchell School was built and named in his honor in 1958.



A building fund campaign in 1959 for the city's first catholic school and convent got off to an impressive start with predictions that the \$200,000 project would be a complete success. The same year a junior high school was approved by the Palm Beach County School Board, as well as having 8 classrooms added to J. C. Mitchell School and 2 classrooms to Boca Raton Elementary School.

Boca students entering high school were transported to Delray Beach to complete their education at Delray Beach, Carver, Seacrest, and Atlantic High Schools until Boca Raton High School opened in 1963.

In 1960 a state university to be called Boca University (FAU) received approval to be built in Boca Raton.

### **Highways & Byways**

By 1950 the old Inlet Bridge was getting awfully rickety, but its overhauling made for a safer crossing without taking the charm away.

The grand opening to the Sunshine State Parkway, Florida's turnpike, took place on January 25, 1957. The first leg of roadway ran from the Golden Glades Interchange in Miami to Ft. Pierce. George Elmore, who founded Hardrives, Inc. in 1953, remembers that "there were few paved roads that even went out that far" and "to get to the turnpike in Boca, you had to go through farm fields and across ditches."

In 1957 the new railroad crossing at NW 20<sup>th</sup> Street was completed.

### **In Service**

On Thursday, September 25, 1952, a series of letters which had been sent to our local soldiers serving in Korea from the Boca Raton Chamber of Commerce by Dr. William G. O'Donnell, Charles W. Greene, minister of the Community Church, and an assortment of citizens of Boca Raton were published in the *Delray Beach News*. The soldiers who received them were PFC Victor Faith, Pvt. Robert Pinchuk, A-2C Fred Massey, A-2C James A. Rutherford, A-3C Virginia L. Kendig, and PFC Douglas Everage (Bully).

A war memorial to our service men was designed and built by Harry Chesebro and dedicated at the Boca Raton Cemetery on November 11, 1953.

## **Organizations, Clubs, & Churches**

The Boca Raton Lion's Club was chartered in September, 1950, and a former air field building was renovated and dedicated the same month for their use. The new Lion's Club building was used for years by many other organizations and by adults and youth of the town for a variety of purposes.

The Boca Raton Garden Club was organized in June, 1953, with 34 women, growing to 119 members by the end of the year.

By 1956, Boca welcomed a number of new churches to serve the growing population. Listed in the 1956 City Directory were Ebenezer Baptist, First Baptist, St. Gregory's Episcopal, Community Methodist, Macedonia Methodist-Episcopal, and Church of the Open Door.

Catholic residents of Boca traveled to Delray Beach to St. Vincent Ferrer for worship or to the Boca Raton Hotel & Club during the winter months until late 1956 when Fr. David Heffernan arrived here to start a new parish, St. Joan of Arc Catholic Church.

Jewish families were welcomed to Temple Emanu-El on South Andrews Avenue in Ft. Lauderdale as early as 1937. Boca Raton's first congregation was organized in 1967, now Temple Beth El.

For service to their community the Boca Jaycees won nine state awards for the year 1956-1957.

The Jaycees organized a midget league football team in 1957 which they named the Jaycee Jets, now known as the Boca Raton Jets.

In 1958 the Boca Jaycees, won the "First Year Milestone Award" at the National Jaycee Convention in Los Angeles.

In 1953, Mrs. Joseph Shapiro established a local chapter of the Toy Clinics of America, an organization devoted to making therapy toys for children in hospitals, clinics, and orphanages throughout the country.



## **Parks & Recreation**

During the summer of 1950 J. Myer Schine opened the Cabana Club and pool as well as the golf course at the Boca Raton Hotel & Club to the local public with fees low enough for all to afford.

July 4, 1951, passed “very sanely” in our town according to *The Pelican* newspaper. The Boca Raton Bomberettes played softball against West Palm Beach; there was an afternoon fish fry with proceeds benefiting the Sports Association; the Bombers played a double header in the evening, and the young folks gave a nice display of fireworks between games.

In November, 1955, Sanborn Square, a tract of land worth \$85,000, was donated to the town by Mrs. Eleanor Sanborn in remembrance of her husband. The sandspur laden lot was turned into a lovely park for use by the town’s citizens, and particularly for the Fire Department’s children’s Christmas party.

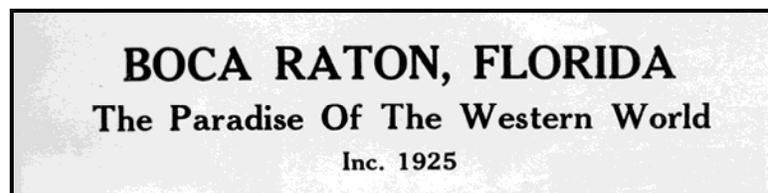
The 1957 St. Patrick’s Eve revelers jammed Sanborn Square, overflowing into the streets as they celebrated to the music of Philip Azzolina and the Boca municipal band. One of the community’s favorite vocalists, Dr. William O’Donnell, sang Irish tunes and was rewarded with thunderous applause. A procession was led by the American Legion Honor Guard and followed by the Seacrest High School Band, a “shamrock” float by the Teenage Center, marchers wearing green hats, officials and dignitaries. Old Betsy, the beloved antique fire engine, added to the gala celebration.

The first spectacular city fireworks display in Boca Raton was held July 4, 1958, at Memorial Park at the corner of Palmetto Park Road and Crawford Avenue.

By 1958, Arthur Vining Davis had polo fields built south of Camino Real on the grounds of the Boca Raton Hotel’s former south golf course. After two seasons the Royal Palm Polo Club was moved to a site west of the airport on Glades Road and the old fields were replaced by the Royal Palm Yacht and Country Club development. The new development offered luxury homes selling for \$65,000.

A photo of the sign advertising the new Arthur Vining Davis polo field on Glades Road “on the way to completion” appeared in the October, 1958 *Boca Raton News*. The first practice game was open to the public free of charge in May, 1959. The first public match, sponsored by the chamber of commerce and named “Boca Raton Day”, was played at the new Royal Palm Polo Club on January 3, 1960, with the first national telecast later that month. It was not until 1977 that the club moved to a new location on Clint Moore Road.

Because of the practice of segregation throughout the 1950s and into the mid-1960s African-Americans used the beach north of the pavilion at Palmetto Park Road. There were paths up through the palmettos and over the bank at several places along A1A between Boca and Delray where they went swimming and held picnics.



## Town Growth

In 1950 Boca Raton's official census showed a population of 992.

In 1951 the town's population fluctuated between 1,000 – 1,500 depending on the time of the year.

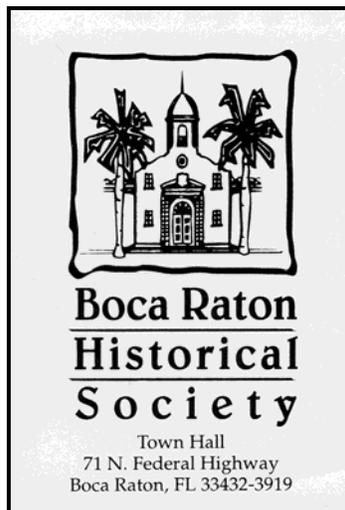
In 1955 Boca Raton had a population of 2,872 persons.

By 1956 the small town's population had grown to 4,000.

In 1960 the population swelled to 6,961.



*This publication has been financed in part with Historical Museum Grants-in-Aid Program assistance provided by the Division of Historical Resources, Florida Department of State, Secretary of State.*



*Fifties Facts*

Spanish River Papers Vol. XIX March 2007